Article

MEMORY STUDIES

Memory Studies
2020, Vol. 13(4) 601–616

DOI: 10.1177/1750698018761170
journals.sagepub.com/home/mss
SAGE

Tell me your story about the Chilean dictatorship: When doing memory is taking positions

Marcela Cornejo
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Carolina Rocha
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Nicolás Villarroel
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Enzo Cáceres
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Anastassia Vivanco
Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile

Abstract

The current memory struggles about the Chilean dictatorship makes it increasingly relevant to hear a diverse range of voices on the subject. One way of addressing this is to study autobiographical narratives, in which people construct a character to present themselves as the protagonists of a story by taking multiple positions regarding what is remembered. This article presents a study that analyzed the life stories of Chilean people (diverse in their generations, cities, experiences of political repression, political orientations and socio-economic levels) and that distinguished between the positions that they take when presenting themselves as the protagonists of an autobiographical story about the Chilean dictatorship. The results point to salient and recurrent positions that allow people to earn the right to be considered part of the social history of the dictatorship, that involve different definitions regarding those responsible and the victims of what happened, and that unveil a strong family and filial logic of remembering.

Keywords

autobiographical character, Chilean dictatorship, collective memory, life stories, taking positions

Corresponding author:
Marcela Cornejo, Psychology Department, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Avenida Vicuña Mackenna 4860, Macul, Santiago, Chile.
Email: marcela@uc.cl

Memories and silences in post-dictatorial Chile

On 11 September 1973, a democratic socialist project (led by President Allende) was interrupted by a *coup d'état* that installed 17 years of dictatorship. Nowadays, more than 40 years after the coup, there are several positions, versions and memories of the events that took place during the dictatorship and their consequences. This diversity of versions is similar to what has been observed in other countries in the southern cone as a result of dictatorial regimes during the 1970s (Jelin, 2002; Winn, 2014).

In Chile, during the post-dictatorial years, the State memory policies and the persistence of the economic and political legacies of the dictatorship show that, while memory about what happened is created, silences are also produced (Stern, 2009). Diverse State actors and civil society have mobilized to promote a common understanding of the dictatorship as a period of systematic and unjustified violations of human rights, posing in the public debate issues related to human rights, truth and justice (Lira, 2016; Stern, 2016; Stern and Winn, 2014).

This public process of memorialization about the dictatorship has been deeply connected to political processes and episodes that have shaped memory struggles (Stern, 2009) in post-dictatorial Chile.

Since 1990, with the first democratically chosen government after the 1988 plebiscite that rejected the continuity of Pinochet in power, different post-dictatorial policies of reparation have been made. Among these, the reports of the National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) in 1991 and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (NCPIT) in 2003 have been especially relevant. The NCTR was created to clarify the truth about what happened to Chileans who were murdered and who disappeared during the dictatorship, and its report stated that more than 3200 Chileans were executed and/or disappeared as a result of the State's terrorism (today approximately 1200 people are still missing). The NCPIT acknowledged the systematic practice of political imprisonment and torture by the Chilean State, acknowledging more than 29,000 victims and 1100 centers of torture and detention (in 2011 another Commission identified 9000 new cases). These reports have played a key role in acknowledging the victims of State violence, but have not put an end to the memory struggles; rather, they have produced new fields of struggle, because they were interpreted very differently by diverse actors of society, such as the armed forces, families of the victims, right-wing and left-wing groups. Moreover, both reports left many stories untold (Hiner, 2009; Klep, 2012; Winn, 2014), excluding certain ways of political participation that preceded repression (e.g. women's) and important practices of State terrorism (such as raids in poor neighborhoods). Moreover, until today, despite different demands, the names of those who tortured and murdered remain a secret, because by law these names remain classified information for 50 years.

Other important events were the arrest of Pinochet in London in 1998 and the inauguration of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in 2010. Pinochet's arrest made the division between Chileans salient once again, and had the effect that, publicly, he was held responsible for the violation of human rights during the dictatorship. The Museum promotes the State's official version of what happened during the dictatorship, which implied the silencing of alternative versions (Stern and Winn, 2014); these versions have been rescued by different organizations that have created multiple sites of memory with the aim of not forgetting and producing shared versions of what happened, collective local identities and symbolic reparations.

More than 40 years after the *coup d'état*, and more than 20 years of post-dictatorship, historically excluded actors, such as impoverished groups and indigenous people, are seeking to be heard within the field of memory struggles, making new demands for truth and justice and trying to make visible the current violations of human rights (Stern and Winn, 2014; Winn, 2014). In this complex scenario, questions about what (and how it) is remembered and about those who are involved in memory-making processes have been paramount in shaping the field of memory studies in Chile.

The study of memories about the Chilean dictatorship

Different studies have tried to understand a landscape of memory (Andermann, 2012), or a memoryscape (Reavey, 2017), that is, complex and changeable. These studies share the concerns of memory studies in Latin America motivated by the generalized violation of human rights in different dictatorships during the 1970s (Jelin, 2002; Schindel, 2009; Winn, 2014). According to Frei (2015), academic concerns in the southern cone have focused on the experience of political violence and its effects on survivors and their families, the authoritarian regimes and transitional justice, and the way that different generations remember the past.

In Chile, the work of Stern (2009) has shown that the testimonies and experiences of different actors in civil society are related to different emblematic memories, frames that give meaning to the experiences and memories of the dictatorship and that allow individual experiences to be connected with public and collective meanings that struggle and challenge one another to become the hegemonic interpretation. This allows for acknowledgment of the fact that memory in Chile configures a complex and polemic field of struggle.

Facing these struggles, different researchers have chosen to study the memory of the coup and the dictatorship considering alternative voices that have traditionally not been heard in the post-dictatorial process of memorialization. These include the voices of ex-conscripts who mandatorily joined the military service during the dictatorship (Passmore, 2015), victims of political prison and torture from regions of Chile different to Santiago (Lira, 2016), those who were exiled and their children (Cornejo, 2015; Serpente, 2015), and women from the reports of the commissions (Hiner, 2009).

Other works have focused on diverse phenomena related to memory in relation to the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship, such as the effects of truth and reconciliation commissions (Cárdenas et al., 2015), children's discourses concerning the past (Haye et al., 2013; Jara, 2016), the ways in which different generations remember (Frei, 2015; Guichard and Henríquez, 2011), and how dictatorship-related events are taught in school contexts (Oteíza et al., 2015; Toledo and Magendzo, 2013).

A prolific area of research has focused on memory sites, addressing the relation between memory, space and materiality (Andermann, 2012). This kind of work has studied versions of the past transmitted and constructed in memory sites (Klep, 2012; Piper et al., 2017; Violi, 2012), the ideological segregation of memorials in the city (Aguilera, 2015) and the empathic experiences that take place when visiting memorials (Hite, 2016).

Listening to other voices about what happened in the dictatorship has also been evident in recent studies on psychosocial trauma (Martín-Baró, 1988) resulting from violations of human rights. Research has been conducted on the transmission of trauma to victims' descendants (Faúndez et al., 2014); the impact of torture on other actors, such as the neighbors of a torture center (Mendoza et al., 2016); professionals of truth and reconciliation commissions (Cornejo et al., 2013); and clinician professionals that work with the trauma generated by political repression (Hidalgo, 2015; Morales and Cornejo, 2013), among others.

Memory through autobiographical narratives

The present work shares this interest in studying how conflicted and violent pasts are remembered by alternative voices. Memory, while implying a social reconstruction of the past that is made in the present (Halbwachs, 1925; Welzer, 2010) and which depends on, and is influenced by, the contingent conditions of its production (Vázquez, 2002), can effectively define what is possible, thinkable and desirable in the present and the future (Vázquez, 2001). Hence, memory not only configures what is memorable later but also contributes to shaping the social order in which the act of remembering takes place.

However, the way in which the past is remembered is always involved in memory struggles (Stern, 2009) and is used with divergent aims: whether, for example, to define a group as the unique victims of history, or to develop useful learning for other scenarios (Todorov, 1995). There are different ideological versions of the past (Tileagă, 2010), and therefore remembering involves defending, arguing, explaining, justifying or silencing the past from a version that makes sense to its holder (Vázquez, 2002). Thus, there are different versions that dispute the present and future promoted by memory.

One privileged way to study different versions of the past corresponds to narratives. This is the main way in which people organize their experiences and memories, contributing to the creation of a sense of self over time. Narratives about the past, while able to describe and assess bygone experiences and the intentions behind them, contribute to the organization of later experiences (Bruner, 1991, 2004) having an effect on the present and the future by promoting and discouraging specific kinds of action.

Among this kind of storytelling about the past, a paramount way of doing memory is through the use of autobiographical narratives. Following Bakhtin (1990), when people remember the past from an autobiographical point of view, they produce a story in which they have to create an autobiographical character in order to present themselves as protagonists. Among a cast of other characters who describe and assess that protagonist, the person who tells the story situates himself/herself spatially, temporally and ethically within it. Thereby, across the story that is told, an autobiographical character is gradually built and takes several positions among different scenarios and temporalities, among different roles and among different valuations and opinions about the events and people involved in the story.

Therefore, autobiographical characters, and specifically the positions they take, constitute a key way to envision how different interpretations and ideological versions of the past are vindicated, ignored or resisted. These versions can coexist in the same story, because each autobiographical character, as part of a discursive construction that involves different voices (Haye and Larraín, 2011), takes multiple and diverse positions within and along the development of the story, and these positions can even be contradictory to one another within the same story and in the way that its protagonist is presented.

This becomes very important in a historical moment, such as the post-dictatorial one in Chile, because the living memory of the dictatorship shapes political and social aims in the present that cannot be achieved without the involvement of actors, which makes it relevant to addressing the diverse positions that people take regarding the dictatorship.

For this reason, this article focuses on the autobiographical narratives of individuals with very different experiences, distinguishing between *the positions that people take when presenting themselves as the protagonists of an autobiographical story about the Chilean dictatorship*. This involves attending to the many ways in which the main character is presented in the autobiographical narratives about the dictatorship, examining the positions from which people state a version about that past, which diverse roles they assign to themselves in their stories, how they allocate responsibilities about past events, and how people vindicate and argue when presenting an autobiographical character to tell a story about the dictatorship.

Hence, among diverse autobiographical narratives about the dictatorship, we will present the main and most recurrent positions that are taken when remembering that recent past. We thereby hope to contribute to comprehension of the current struggles over the memory of the dictatorship, by addressing questions about not only *what* and *how* it is remembered, but also those *who are involved* in the disputes about its memory.

Researching stories about the Chilean dictatorship: Diverse voices and memories

In order to distinguish between the positions that people take when presenting themselves as the protagonists of an autobiographical story about the Chilean dictatorship, we used life stories (Cornejo et al., 2008; Legrand, 1993) that were conducted as part of an initial study in this research project. This method of data production was chosen because it allows the development of a narrative in which the participant organizes both plot and content. It promotes the displaying of a story that is told in the first person (Bruner, 1991, 2004) giving access to personal, familial and social stories that are articulated in a narrative (De Gaulejac, 1987; Ricœur, 2000), involving a cast of characters among which an autobiographical character, the protagonist, takes positions (Bakhtin, 1990).

The life stories were developed through two meetings with each participant, who were told that the research was oriented to build stories about the dictatorship, with the assurance that participation was voluntary. In the first meeting, the prompt was an open one, "*Tell me your story about the dictatorship.*" Questions were avoided in order to ensure that the participants organized their own narratives. Between the first and the second meeting, the transcription of the first meeting was sent to the participants for review. This had two purposes: on the one hand, to give the story back to the participants, and, on the other hand, to elicit more memories about their story based on the opportunity to reflect on certain passages. Many participants arrived at the second meeting having carefully read the transcription, mentioning the novelty of telling their own story about the dictatorship, something that most of them had not experienced before. The second meeting explored in greater depth any topics that emerged in the first one that the researchers or participants considered relevant.

The life stories were produced between 2011 and 2012. This coincided with the second major student movement that took place in post-dictatorial Chile (the first was in 2006), which, during a right-wing government, involved an outbreak of collective actions in which thousands of people took to the streets again to demand social rights, criticizing the political and social neo-liberal models inherited from Pinochet's dictatorship (Del Campo, 2016). Moreover, the life stories were compiled just before the commemoration of 40 years since the *coup d'état*, which, as with every commemoration in "round dates" (Piper, 2013), produced an effervescent scenario with the organization of multiple events (from academic, State and human rights' organizations).

The participants of the research were 25 Chilean individuals. They were invited based on criteria considered relevant by the previously described memory studies in Chile, namely: *generation*, participating people that have and have not lived in the time of the dictatorship; *experience of political repression*, people with and without direct or family experiences of repression; *political orientation*, considering a diversity that included right-wing, center and left-wing individuals; *city*, participants from Santiago, cities of the north and the south of the country; and *socio-economic level*, considering different levels of income. Using these criteria, we accessed diverse participants with different stories about the dictatorship, which are not necessarily acknowledged in the public and academic fields.

For the current work, we selected 12 from the 25 life stories. These stories were selected by considering four *generational* voices identified in the initial study (Cornejo et al., 2013), which differed based on the content, characters and positions that were taken regarding the dictatorship. With this selection, we maintained heterogeneity within each generational voice, and the diversity given by the sample's characteristics of each age group according to the aforementioned criteria.

From the participants who were 18 years old around 1973, we selected stories that demonstrate diverse responses to the *coup d'état* (support, resistance and distancing). From those who

experienced the plebiscite of 1988 when they were approximately 18 years old, we selected stories that display the different types of childhood mentioned: being protected (by their parents' efforts to hide what was happening), being idealized (in left-wing families with experience of political repression), or being ambivalent (whose familial stories are connected to the armed forces). Those who were 18 years old when 10 years had passed from the 1988 plebiscite commonly supported their stories with others that were not their own (the stories of detained and disappeared parents or those transmitted by the media), and therefore, we selected stories that show each of these possibilities. Finally, those who were 18 years old during the student movement of 2006 built stories based on socialization scenarios that are different to the familial and the use of diverse technological tools, which differ depending on the political orientation and sex of their narrators, these being the criteria for selection of their stories.

With the aim of distinguishing between the positions that people take when presenting themselves as the protagonists of an autobiographical story about the Chilean dictatorship, we conducted the analysis of life stories in two analytical moments. In the first, dedicated to the narratives of each age group, we focused on every life story separately, analyzing the transcripts of the two meetings with each participant. For each life story, the unit of analysis was the multiple positions that its autobiographical character took. This meant distinguishing between the spatial scenarios, temporalities, social relationships and roles in which this autobiographical character was situated, and which valuations, vindications or interpretations about the past were communicated from those positions. The diverse positions taken by each autobiographical character were multiple in each participant's story, and they could even appear to be contradictory, for example, someone could present himself or herself in the story as both a mother and a daughter, as an adult and a child, as a militant committed to a commendable cause and as the one responsible for the unnecessary suffering of others.

Second, we conducted a transversal analysis of the stories of all the participants, distinguishing between the main and most recurrent positions that people take when telling their own story about the dictatorship and when presenting themselves as the protagonists. These recurrent and dominant positions are the focus of this article.

From autobiographical stories to a social history about the dictatorship

When people told their own stories about the dictatorship, they developed narratives and built unique and unrepeatable autobiographical characters to present themselves as the protagonists of their story. Each autobiographical character took diverse positions regarding the dictatorship, and some of these positions were recurrent and salient across different stories. We found commonalities in the roles they gave to themselves, in the kinds of social relation in which they situated themselves, in what they said they would have known or not, in the ways they allocated responsibilities and in their vindications about this dictatorial past in the present and the future connected to it.

Therefore, we do not present a categorization of different kinds or types of autobiographical story or character, but rather we describe the main positions that people take when presenting themselves as the protagonists of an autobiographical story about the Chilean dictatorship.

Our diverse group of participants had different experiences and some of them did not even grow up during the dictatorship. However, all the participants ultimately told autobiographical stories in which their experiences were described as part of broader social processes situated in a social history of the dictatorship, by means of taking different positions that were manifested through the autobiographical characters.

Some participants claimed having witnessed the events of the dictatorship, presenting themselves as the protagonists of history, legitimizing their memories and assuming the voice of experience (this was salient among those who were adults around 1973):

> So then the country was in chaos, I mean there was a […] black market, […] so I had to get up at four, I had to stay up all night to get, for example, if they said that they were selling milk somewhere […] I'm serious, I experienced all these things, I did. (Guillermo, 54 years old, mid–low SES, no repression, apolitical)[1]

Other participants that were children at the beginning of the dictatorship, or during it, initially presented themselves as not having witnessed or participated in the events of this period. However, later on they stated that constructing a narrative about the dictatorship within this study allowed them to discover themselves as subjects influenced by history:

> [Referring to the first meeting] I thought it was very interesting from the perspective of, of how events that seemed so distant to me, because I narrated them like that, I mean […] Generally one says: "Well, what am I like?," but, when you do it like the other way round [laughs weakly], from the outside, seeing how you dealt with social processes, how you experienced them, that makes you discover things about yourself in more depth. (Mauricio, 30 years old, mid to high SES, left-leaning apolitical)

Likewise, young people who did not grow up during the dictatorship presented themselves as earning the right to be considered legitimate parts of its social history through a gesture of empathy and identification with the victims of the dictatorship. That identification with the victims allows them to explain why they are moved by the past and politically committed in the present to aims of social change that are oriented toward the future. This gesture could enable and legitimize them with respect to older people who question their narratives and positions regarding events that they did not witness:

> After that umm, that specific event, seeing those 60 pregnant women dead, detained and disappeared, umm I said, hell, that can't be, it's like we must separate [the participant's university] from the time of the military government, and it has to start ruling itself, you know? And that's when we decided to run for election [in her students' union]. (Dominga, 26 years old, high SES, no repression, right)

While the narrators of the stories took the described positions to present themselves as subjects inscribed in the social history of the dictatorship, they also moved between other recurrent positions in the process of building the plot of their stories. These positions related to the definition of who was responsible or who was a victim of the atrocities committed in the dictatorship, and to a family logic of remembering. These ways of taking a position regarding the dictatorship were not only the most salient within and across the stories, but also the ones that most clearly shed light on the struggles in which these individual memories could be involved.

(a) Taking a position regarding who was responsible and who was a victim of the dictatorship

Some participants positioned themselves deploying apparently opposing versions of the dictatorship, as a result of the different ways in which they answered the question about who was responsible or who was a victim of what happened (a recurrent social question that was not asked by the researchers). We are referring to people who positioned themselves as left-wing activists, on the one hand, and as members of the armed forces, on the other.

From the position of left-wing activists, participants related trajectories of political commitment in which they vindicated that every choice made, regardless of its associated difficulties, was experienced as necessary and unavoidable (e.g. turning themselves in to the police to avoid putting their families at risk, and returning from exile to defeat the dictatorship, among others).

Even though these trajectories reveal experiences of political repression, the main vindication of their protagonists is the rejection of being regarded as victims of the dictatorship. As the quotations below show, this is argued by noting that the victim label hides their active commitment and their full awareness of the consequences of their political affiliations, that other people suffered worse experiences or that the true victims of these events are their children:

> I never felt like a victim, I had made the commitment to accompany a guerrilla fighter […] and that entailed costs, and when I was thrown in jail I never felt I was a victim of the enemy […] but there was no reason for my child to experience what he experienced. (Mariela, 44 years old, low SES, left, experience of political repression)

> I don't feel like a victim, but, I mean, if one made a list of the horrors, I'm not in first place, not in second place either, no … (Bernardo, 66 years old, high SES, outraged, experience of political repression)

It seems that presenting themselves as activists who should not be considered victims constitutes a reply to positions that reduce their political experience to victimization. It is possible that they are contesting official narratives promoted by the State in which people who were politically repressed have been exclusively conceived of as victims, thus demanding another kind of acknowledgment.

From the position of members of the armed forces, as if they were responding to critical discourses about the role of these institutions during the dictatorship, participants dignified their choice by stressing the value inherent in protecting one's country. Thus, they presented themselves as subjects who were not responsible for the events that took place during the dictatorship: they note that it was *the people*—as a diffuse group—who wanted what happened, that others were responsible for everything, and that they did not have full knowledge of the repressive actions being carried out.

The central claim made by those who positioned themselves as members of the armed forces is that they are the unrecognized victims of the dictatorship, whose suffering would have been eclipsed by the usual acknowledgment of systematic human rights' violations (were even relativized by them). In this way, the claim of victimhood is accompanied by the vindication of a version of the dictatorship that they regard as having been silenced:

> Then [at the beginning of his military service] my suffering started, because of wishing to be great, loving my homeland, wanting to defend my country in case of conflict […] The torture that they made us go through, since they wanted to create war machines. (Hugo, 42 years old, low SES, centre–right, suffered repression in one branch of the armed forces)

> Normally, umm … nobody listens to you. I mean, those of us who lived the process on the other side, we're not heard. I mean no … like "Noo, this guy has a chip on his shoulder," right? So, someone, shouldn't another version be heard for a change? Not the usual one that there were murders that people disappeared … I mean, how it affected, how it affected a person, in his life, I mean, the military coup […] when you're wearing your uniform people no longer see the person, they don't see the sacrifices that person made to earn that uniform. (Guillermo, 54 years old, mid–low SES, no repression, apolitical)

If we consider the claims made from these positions between left-wing activists and the armed forces, we see that, although they shape versions that can be at odds (in the ways they allocate sufferings and responsibilities during the dictatorship), they do not contest each other as much as they reply to a third (the State or society more generally), sharing the demand and struggle for an accurate acknowledgment of their experiences.

(b) Filial and parental positions in stories about the dictatorship

Another two positions frequently adopted when the dictatorship was remembered through an autobiographical story were those of children and parents. Both positions appear in several stories and tended to be taken within the same stories, since participants presented themselves as children in certain moments and as parents in others (this was salient in participants who lived their childhoods and adolescences during the dictatorship).

From the position of children, facts and silences linked to events of the dictatorship were explained as having been determined by their parents' trajectories and by what they thought to transmit to their children. Therefore, from this position, a constant dialogue is held between the person who tells the story and their parents and their mandates. In this way, those who position themselves as children present their parents as being responsible for their experiences during the dictatorship.

Some participants presented and positioned themselves as the children of left-wing activists who had to answer to the ethics promoted by their parents, either by continuing their political involvement or by distancing themselves from it. This became a critical decision involving addressing a whole legacy in the case of children whose parents were made to disappear or were forced to go into hiding. The stories display different ways in which the autobiographical characters position themselves regarding this issue: the disappearance of their father entails suffering but also fills their life with meaning, resuming his interrupted mission, and a desire to get away from a position of "heirs" that upsets them and in which they cannot find meaning:

> His death, as I was telling you, it wasn't in vain for me […] I was a young combatant indeed, and I spent my whole life in the barricades, and if I cut the power or… everything I did, I did it with the impotence and the rage I felt because of my father. (El Flaco, 41 years old, low SES, left, son of a detained/disappeared person)

> The whole thing was like this idea that one was like a kind of child who symbolised this, this thing […] I never felt part of, of that world, that because my father had disappeared I had to be almost, I don't know, a communist or a socialist. (David, 34 years old, high SES, centre, son of a detained/disappeared person)

Some participants remembered the dictatorship by positioning themselves as children sheltered from the political and social conflicts that took place during the government of Allende and the dictatorship, noting that their ignorance about what was happening was the result of a parental decision. This allows them to justify, for example, why they did not participate in certain actions of protest. Thus, they acknowledge their delayed attempts to find out what was occurring during the dictatorship, which eventually materialized at the behest of others (couples, children or social movements) who provided them with new perspectives and challenged them to take a position:

> The memories one can have mostly deal with games, myths or things one's classmates said, the things discussed at home, and things one's parents may have said. (Andrea, 37 years old, high SES, no repression, right-leaning apolitical)

> I lived in an ideal world, the world in which the things others saw weren't, weren't happening. And I've talked about this with my son, and he still says: "Mom, you're very… I don't know how you can be the way you are." Umm, from, around me, some people experienced the world the way I did, but they're still resistant to some things. And, and they don't acknowledge some things. No, not me. I think that, that… today there's a, there's a national referendum. A referendum to support these kids who are fighting today. Um … I hope that works out. (Sonia, 48 years old, low SES, no repression, apolitical)

All the stories in which the participants presented themselves as children are strongly marked by the voice of silence, given their lack of information about the events that took place during the dictatorship. This applies to all ideological positions and experiences of political repression, because even in the presence of repression it is possible to leave some relevant aspects concealed. Thus, autobiographical characters who positioned themselves as children acknowledge an active silencing effort by their parents, who sought to hide certain events by imposing a norm that gave them a threatening connotation. What was concealed might somehow result in sickness, fragility, or harm, both for the person who *says* or reveals something about it, usually adults, and for the person who *listens*, with children being the main parties to be prevented from learning about certain events.

In this context, silence is understood as protection, which causes these children to legitimate and repeat this silence-based course of action. Thus, by seeking to protect their parents or their own children, they also conceal aspects of their political participation or their experiences of repression:

> I mean, um, I would sit at the table as a child and nobody spoke about my dad, or about anything, and if someone spoke about my dad my mom interrupted them right away […] I didn't know anything about that because nobody would tell me.

> [After narrating an episode of police violence] *So I left, I mean, I went out and I asked everyone not to tell my mom because my mom was sick.* (Both quotations are from El Flaco's life story, 41 years old, low SES, left, son of a detained/disappeared person)

This voice of silence also appears in the stories of young people who did not grow up during the dictatorship. However, they allude to a non-threatening silence, thus contesting the previous generations' decision to silence the past and investigate this period on their own, showing a generational transformation in the relation with silence.

Likewise, participants presented themselves from the position of parents and mothers who, when recalling the past, included their own children, the children they might have in the future, or the new generations, as relevant characters.

This parental position is recurrent in the same participants who tended to remember the dictatorship as sons and daughters. When remembering this period, some participants presented themselves as parents whose children questioned their role during the dictatorship by stressing their omissions or doubting their supposed lack of information. In another way, some presented themselves as parents wishing to safeguard their children's freedom of thought, which stands in contrast to their personal experience during the dictatorship and which could be interpreted as an effort to make a positive contribution to make up for their omissions or lack of agency in the past:

> That's what I wanted, that he [his son] would have his own way of thinking, that he'd have his own ideals, and I have mine; if I impose my ideals on him, he'll never […] have an identity of his own. (Guillermo, 54 years old, mid–low SES, no repression, apolitical)

> I raised my son with the idea of the, what's it called? The fan. I always said to them, children, do not keep your fan closed, I grew up with my fan closed. I saw one thing. Nobody opened my fan. I didn't learn to see, to look in all directions. I learned to do that later. (Sonia, 48 years old, low SES, no repression, apolitical)

Otherwise, participants who experienced political repression also presented themselves as parents, assuming responsibility for the undesired effects that their political choices had on their children, whom they regard as the true victims of the events:

> I have been an absent father, totally absent. I owe a huge debt to my children. (Vicente, 69 years old, mid–high SES, left, experience of political repression)

Overall, the positions of children and parents, which coexist in the same stories, reveal a familial and filial logic that leads to autobiographical stories and characters whose construction is oriented by a familial genealogical line. What is told is presented as something understandable by considering family experiences (especially those of the participants' predecessors), and it is children and parents who are the main interlocutors of what is uttered.

Taking positions in an ongoing memory struggle about the Chilean dictatorship

Even though inviting people to tell their own stories about the Chilean dictatorship could be challenging (because not everybody was present at the time of the events or knew very much about what happened), our results show that all the participants were able to tell a story and present it as part of the history of the dictatorship. This not only demonstrates their interest in getting involved in the study, but also reveals the fact that they took diverse positions to be considered part of a social history, a key process of becoming an actor, crossed by contradictions, the product of a family, and social history (Bonetti and De Gaulejac, 1988). They took diverse positions and drew on different resources to build a story, because their experiences of the dictatorship were also diverse, because of their different ages, genders, cities of origin, socio-economic levels, political orientations and experiences of political repression.

The diverse ways of inscribing their stories in social history (as protagonists of the events, as people who discover themselves as affected by history and as young persons that can say and do something about the consequences of the dictatorship) have specific generational-related traits, because through different means they dealt with the fact that not all of them witnessed what happened in the dictatorship. Likewise, the ways in which they brought into their stories what was happening at the time of the study was differentiated in a similar manner. While nobody mentioned the forthcoming commemoration of 40 years from the coup, the ongoing student movement of 2011 was mentioned with different connotations: those who were children around the time of the coup mentioned it to point to their omissions when they were young; while those who were 18 during this movement mentioned it to communicate their commitment to fighting the dictatorship's legacies. Following Mannheim (1952), these generational similarities are understandable because living together certain historical events can structure similar patterns of responding to them.

However, the central finding of our study is that even though people told an autobiographical story about the dictatorship, building unique autobiographical characters to represent themselves in it, these characters manifest recurrent positions taken from a family logic of remembering and regarding the question of who was responsible and who were the victims in the dictatorship.

When people recurrently, and even simultaneously, position themselves in their stories as parents and children, they show a familial logic of remembering the dictatorship in which the meaning of what is remembered is determined by familial experiences and decisions about what to transmit. One way to understand this is to consider that traumatic pasts define a hegemony in which the familial sphere is the privileged space for uttering alternative discourses, because contradicting official ones in the public sphere is sanctioned (Molden, 2016). These filial positions disclose struggles that are characteristic of the dictatorship that took place within the private sphere of families, which appears as a scenario of mandates, loyalties and intergenerational dialogues and contestations. These mandates are salient in the dilemma presented by the sons of former left-wing activists, who must decide to continue or discontinue their father's fight. In those cases, we distinguished both kinds of answer to what seems to be a family demand for loyalty (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1983), whereby following a similar trajectory to that of the father could be an affirmative answer to what is expected, and a rupture with it could represent a refusal to consent to a demand that can be perceived as excessive or discomforting, something that has been recounted when children have to take an active part in their parents' conflict.

Family is also presented in the stories as the space where a voice of silence is produced, at first due to parents' decisions to protect their sons and daughters from threatening events, and later by the very repetition made by their children. How could it be so? The history of the dictatorship is that of a violent past and for some it is traumatic, because of the unimaginable cruelties that took place. There, the fear and daily threats encouraged silence within the familial sphere, a protective gesture against danger (Lira and Castillo, 1991). Hence, the social conditions of the dictatorship imposed a social mandate of silence and secrecy that prevented elaboration processes (Cornejo et al., 2009). In that context, children learnt not to ask and not to speak (Hidalgo, 2015), reinforcing and actualizing the social mandate of silence. Thus, the dictatorship configured filial bonds that fostered obedience to parental mandates and withdrawal to the private familial space, as a result of the threats of the public space.

It is worth noting that within this family logic of remembering, it is very easy for participants to structure their narratives from the perspective of the children they were during the dictatorship, despite their current age. This could be understood through the findings of different works suggesting that the memory of critical events of the dictatorship shapes the later experiences of those who were children at the time (Jara, 2016), thereby determining the construction of their identities (Castillo and González, 2013).

Positioning oneself regarding the question of who were the victims and who was responsible for what happened in the dictatorship is also salient. It can be interpreted that taking these positions when remembering this recent past is enabled by the narratives produced from the truth commissions. These promoted acknowledgment of the victims of the dictatorship (Hiner, 2009; Klep, 2012; Winn, 2014) through a search for truth that implied looking at crimes involving people who were responsible. This may have shaped the autobiographical stories that people tell about the dictatorship, encouraging a tendency to make a statement about the responsibilities they have or do not have. Some participants justified their omissions by presenting themselves as children sheltered by their parents; left-wing activists presented their life choices as necessary given the historical context, while also presenting themselves as responsible for the unwanted consequences of their political engagement on their children; those who belonged to the armed forces claimed that they were guilty of no misdeeds during the dictatorship; and young people assumed responsibility for challenging the dictatorship's legacies.

Different positions in terms of being a victim of the dictatorship were also taken. On the one hand, former left-wing activists rejected being considered as victims. This position has also been

reported by Piper-Shafir and Montenegro (2017), and could be interpreted as an attempt to restore their citizenship, recognizing their active commitment, which tends to be hidden behind the category of victim (Lira, 2013). On the other hand, former members of the armed forces positioned themselves as victims to ask for recognition of their suffering and to disavow responsibility for past crimes, which is consistent with the results reported by Passmore (2015). Otherwise, younger participants empathized, and some identified, with victims, aiming to be recognized as touched by the consequences of a period that they did not experience directly, but which motivated their political commitments. In this sense, the diverse uses of the position of victim, rather than being antagonist to one another, seem to reply to a third one, perhaps a moral third (Benjamin, 2006), to earn the acknowledgment of their experiences in the social field, where there might be no narratives that recognize them faithfully.

The positions we distinguished through the autobiographical characters of the narratives about the dictatorship are very relevant to envisaging the memory struggles (Stern, 2009) and social processes that the dictatorship has shaped. These positions do not just inform about how the past is remembered and valued, but also offer a unique opportunity to envision how people would insert themselves in current and future processes of social history. Bruner (2004) pointed out that "we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives*"* (p. 694), as a result of narratives' power to structure later experiences. If that is so, the role that people usually assign themselves in narratives about conflictive pasts and social life could be related to the roles and actions they actually assume in that arena. These actions and roles outline future possibilities (Reavey, 2017), and these become recognizable by listening to autobiographical narratives produced via life stories.

In summary, the presented positions contribute to distinguishing between diverse claims that coexist within the current memory landscape (Andermann, 2012), and that, going beyond antagonisms, show that the question of *who we are*, considering a conflictive past and the way we remember it, implies family tensions and new demands for acknowledgment. This coexistence of positions suggests that the memory struggles are still very much alive in our society. Furthermore, current happenings show how active the legacies of the dictatorship remain, for example, the most popular candidate for the upcoming presidential elections is supported by groups that participated in Pinochet's regime, and in his campaign acts Pinochet has been cheered by the public. Thus, we wonder about the diversity of positions regarding the dictatorial past that will be taken in the future. Who will speak about this violent past in the future? How will this changing memory landscape impact the roles that people assign to themselves regarding the dictatorship and its consequences? Considering what remains to be told about this past, we can only expect that the memory of it will continue to develop in a complex and unfinalizable process of struggle.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank everyone who accepted telling their stories about the dictatorship in the context of this research. The authors also thank the anonymous reviewers for their critical reading and valuable comments that undoubtedly contributed to improve this paper, as well as Raimundo Frei and Manuel de la Mata whose reading and comments also contributed to the improvement of this paper.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This article was developed from the FONDECYT Research Project N° 1110411 "Memories about the military dictatorship: voices and images in the intergenerational dialogicality," in charge of the researchers Marcela Cornejo, María José Reyes and María Angélica Cruz. This paper was partially supported by the Center of Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies - COES (CONICYT/FONDAP/N°15130009).

Note

1. Quotations from participants' life stories have been incorporated. They include the participant's pseudonym, age, socio-economic status (SES), self-reported political position and experience of political repression.

References

Aguilera C (2015) Memories and silences of a segregated city: Monuments and political violence in Santiago, Chile, 1970–1991. *Memory Studies* 8(1): 102–114.

Andermann J (2012) Expanded fields: postdictatorship and the landscape. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 21(2): 165–187.

Bakhtin MM (1990) Author and hero in aesthetic activity. In: Bakhtin MM (ed.) *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Austin,TX: University of Texas Press, pp. 4–256.

Benjamin J (2006) Daño mutuo y reconocimiento mutuo. Unpublished Manuscript.

Bonetti M and De Gaulejac V (1988) L'individu, produit d'une histoire dont il cherche à devenir le sujet. *Espaces Temps* 37: 55–63.

Boszormenyi-Nagy I and Spark G (1983) *Lealtades Invisibles*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Amorrortu Editores.

Bruner J (1991) The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry* 18(1): 1–21.

Bruner J (2004) Life as narrative. *Social Research* 71(3): 691–710.

Cárdenas M, Páez D, Rimé B, et al. (2015) How transitional justice processes and official apologies influence reconciliation: the case of the Chilean "truth and reconciliation" and "political imprisonment and torture" commissions. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 26: 515–530.

Castillo P and González A (2013) Niñez en dictadura: Lo filiativo como espacio de resistencia. *Revista De Geografía Espacios* 3(6): 117–131.

Cornejo M (2015) L'exil après l'exil. Histoires de vie d'exilés chiliens. In: González Monteagudo J (ed.) *Les Histoires de vie en Amérique Latine Hispanophone: Entre formation, mémoire historique et témoignage*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 153–183.

Cornejo M, Brackelaire JL and Mendoza F (2009) Des chaînes du silence à la chaîne de l'écoute. *Cahiers De Psychologie Clinique* 32: 205–231.

Cornejo M, Mendoza F and Rojas R (2008) Research with life stories: clues and options of the methodological design. *Psykhe* 17(1): 29–39.

Cornejo M, Morales G, Kovalskys J, et al. (2013) La escucha de la tortura desde el Estado: la experiencia de los profesionales de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura en Chile. *Universitas Psychologica* 12(1): 271–284.

Cornejo M, Reyes MJ, Cruz MA, et al. (2013) Histories about the Chilean military dictatorship through generational voices. *Psykhe* 22(2): 49–65.

De Gaulejac V (1987) *La Névrose De Classe*. Paris: Hommes et Groupes Éditeurs.

Del Campo A (2016) Theatricalities of dissent: human rights, memory, and the student movement in Chile. *Radical History Review* 124: 177–191.

Faúndez X, Cornejo M and Brackelaire JL (2014) Narration, silence: Transmission transgénérationnelle du trauma psychosocial chez des petits-enfants de victimes de la dictature militaire chilienne. *Cahiers De Psychologie Clinique* 43: 173–204.

Frei R (2015) *The living bond of generations: the narrative construction of post-dictatorial memories in Argentina and Chile*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany.

Guichard E and Henríquez G (2011) Historical memory in Chile: an intergenerational perspective from Concepción. *Revista Española De Investigaciones Sociológicas* 135: 3–26.
Halbwachs M (1925) *Les Cadres Sociaux De La Mémoire*. Paris: Albin Michel.
Haye A and Larraín A (2011) What is an utterance? In: Märtsin M, Wagoner B, Aveling E, et al. (eds) *Dialogicality in Focus: Challenges to Theory, Method and Application*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, pp. 33–52.
Haye A, Manzi J, González R, et al. (2013) Children's theories of the military coup in Chile 25 years after the events. *Psykhe* 22(2): 67–81.
Hidalgo N (2015) *Clínica De Lo Traumático En Hijos De La Dictadura*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Universidad de Chile, Chile.
Hiner H (2009) Voces soterradas, violencias ignoradas: discurso, violencia política y género en los Informes Rettig y Valech. *Latin American Research Review* 44(3): 50–74.
Hite K (2016) Teaching the politics of encounter empathic unsettlement and the outsider within spaces of memory in Chile. *Radical History Review* 124: 217–225.
Jara D (2016) *Children and the Afterlife of State Violence: Memories of Dictatorship*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Jelin E (2002) *Los Trabajos De La Memoria*. Argentina: Siglo Veintiuno.
Klep K (2012) Tracing collective memory: Chilean truth commissions and memorial sites. *Memory Studies* 5(3): 259–269.
Legrand M (1993) *L'approche Biographique*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.
Lira E (2013) De victimes à citoyens: vérité, justice, mémoire et reparation. In: Brackelaire JL, Cornejo M and Kinable J (eds) *Violence politique, traumatisme, processus d'élaboration et creation*. Louvain: Académia-L'Harmattan, pp. 259–279.
Lira E (2016) Human rights violations: memory and reparations in Magallanes. *Radical History Review* 124: 153–164.
Lira E and Castillo MI (1991) *Psicología De La Amenaza Política Y Del Miedo*. Santiago, Chile: CESOC.
Mannheim K (1952) The problems of generations. In: Mannheim K (ed.) *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, pp. 276–322.
Martín-Baró I (1988) La violencia política y la guerra como causa del trauma psicosocial. *Revista De Psicología De El Salvador* 7(28): 123–141.
Mendoza F, Cornejo M and Aceituno R (2016) Vecinos de un centro clandestino de prisión política y tortura durante la dictadura chilena: el saber sobre el horror. Unpublished Manuscript.
Molden B (2016) Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: on the power relations of collective memory. *Memory Studies* 9(2): 125–142.
Morales G and Cornejo M (2013) Ambivalencias en la escucha de la tortura en Chile: implicancias clínicas y sociales. *Terapia Psicológica* 13(2): 197–208.
Oteíza T, Henríquez R and Pinuer C (2015) History classroom interactions and the transmission of the recent memory of memory rights violations in Chile. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 7(2): 44–67.
Passmore L (2015) The apolitics of memory: remembering military service under Pinochet through and alongside transitional justice, truth, and reconciliation. *Memory Studies* 9(2): 173–186.
Piper I (2013) La memoria como moda y la conmemoración como farándula: reflexiones críticas en torno a los 40 años del Golpe de Estado en Chile. *Anuari Del Conflicte Social* 3: 1007–1024.
Piper-Shafir I and Montenegro M (2017) Ni víctimas, ni héroes, ni arrepentido/as. Reflexiones en torno a la categoría "víctima" desde el activismo político. *Revista Estudios Sociales* 59: 98–109.
Piper-Shafir I, Montenegro M, Fernández R, et al. (2017) Memory sites: visiting experiences in Santiago de Chile. *Memory Studies*. Epub ahead of print 1 February. DOI: 10.1177/1750698017693667.
Reavey P (2017) Scenic memory: experience through time–space. *Memory Studies* 10(2): 107–111.
Ricœur P (2000) *La Mémoire, L'histoire, L'oubli*. Paris: Seuil.
Schindel E (2009) Inscribir el pasado en el presente: memoria y espacio urbano. *Política Y Cultura* 31: 65–87.
Serpente A (2015) Diasporic constellations: the Chilean exile diaspora space as a multidirectional landscape of memory. *Memory Studies* 8(1): 49–61.

Stern S (2009) *Recordando El Chile De Pinochet: En Vísperas De Londres 1998*. Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales.
Stern S (2016) Memory: the curious history of a cultural code word. *Radical History Review* 124: 117–128.
Stern S and Winn P (2014) El tortuoso camino chileno a la memorialización. In: Winn P, Stern S, Lorenz F, et al. (eds) *No hay mañana sin ayer: Batallas por la memoria histórica en el Cono Sur*. Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, pp. 205–326.
Tileagă C (2010) Political accountability, public constitution of recent past and the collective memory of socio-political events: a discursive analysis. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20(5): 363–376.
Todorov T (1995) *Les Abus De La Mémoire*. Paris: Arléa.
Toledo MI and Magendzo A (2013) Coup d'état and military dictatorship: study of a single case of the teaching of a controversial issue in a private school sixth grade class at the metropolitan area—Santiago, Chile. *Psykhe* 22(2): 147–160.
Vázquez F (2001) *La Memoria Como Acción Social: Relaciones, Significados E Imaginario*. Barcelona: Paidós.
Vázquez F (2002) Construyendo el pasado: la memoria como práctica social. *Estudios Centroamericanos* 57(640–650): 1049–1065.
Violi P (2012) Trauma site museums and politics of memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica museum. *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(1): 36–75.
Welzer H (2010) Re-narrations: how pasts change in conversational remembering. *Memory Studies* 3(1): 5–17.
Winn P (2014) Las batallas por la memoria histórica en el Cono Sur: conclusiones comparativas. In: Winn P, Stern S, Lorenz F, et al. (eds) *No hay mañana sin ayer: Batallas por la memoria histórica en el Cono Sur*. Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, pp. 327–358.

Author biographies

Marcela Cornejo, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Psychology Department of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile. Her research interests focus on psychosocial trauma related to political violence, individual and collective processes of psychological elaboration of trauma, collective and autobiographical memory, collective action, the generational approach to understanding social phenomena, photography and memory, and the logics and practices of qualitative social research.

Carolina Rocha works as a Research Assistant of the Social Psychology Laboratory at the Psychology Department of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Her research involvement has focused on collective memory, historical relationships, and social conflict (especially between mapuche and non-indigenous Chilean people), participation in social movements, and the relation between education and ideology. Her current research interest is the justification of violence and harm.

Nicolás Villarroel MSc, is Assistant Professor at the Psychology Department at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His research interests focus on the relation between collective memory, ideology, and affectivity from a dialogical perspective.

Enzo Cáceres has been part of the project Londres 38, dedicated to the production of memories about the recent past and State terrorism in Chile. His domain of research has focused on the social psychology of memory and the theoretical and empirical enquiry concerning time and discourse.

Anastassia Vivanco works as a Research Assistant at the Centro de Apego y Regulación Emocional at the Faculty of Psychology of Universidad del Desarrollo. She also works as a clinical psychologist in private practice. Her research interests are related to the individual and collective consequences of social process, affectivity and psychopathology.