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Social Movements as Triggers of Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma and Memory in Chile

Karla Henríquez
Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Nicolás Alberto Pinochet Mendoza
Université Paris 8, Vincennes Saint-Denis, France
Geoffrey Pleyers
Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique/Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Fedra Sonia Cuestas
Universidad de Los Lagos, Chile

Abstract

This article explores the role of social movements in transmitting collective memory and trauma produced by the dictatorship across generations in Chile. It argues that, beyond civil society organisations focused on human rights, broader social movements, such as student, feminist, and anti-neoliberal protests, play a crucial role in uncovering and processing the trauma of past state violence. Using qualitative research and combining insights from social movement studies, social psychology, and psychoanalysis, we show how these movements produce spaces and situations where conscious and unconscious trauma originating in state political violence is unveiled, transmitted to the next generation, and in some cases, re-elaborated. The article also highlights the gendered dimension of memory, mainly through the experiences of women survivors of sexual political violence, who fought for official recognition of these crimes as distinct from torture. Social movements facilitate the articulation of these silenced histories, fostering intergenerational dialogue. Ultimately, the study underscores how Chilean society remains shaped by dictatorship-era violence, with social movements playing a vital role in confronting historical silences and shaping collective memory.

Keywords: Activism; gender; memory; social movements; trauma.

Introduction

The Chilean dictatorship, led by Pinochet from 1973 to 1990, was among the most violent regimes in Latin America. It claimed 40,000 direct victims, including tortured, executed or disappeared political prisoners (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura, 2011). Fifty years after the coup and the start of the violent repression, demands for justice and memory continue. Since the end of the dictatorship in 1990, public policies, civil society organisations, and social movements have sought justice for victims of political violence and the recognition of the crimes that have been committed. Civil society organisations have played a leading role in the visibilisation and public recognition of the systematic human rights violation, torture, and state violence by the dictatorial regime. They have also implemented multiple initiatives to transmit the memory of state violence and human rights abuses to the next generations. Their impacts and the challenges they face have been the focus of scholarly literature in Chile (Jara et al., 2018; Lira, 2020), South America (Espinoza et al., 2024; Jelin, 2021; Tamayo, 2022), and worldwide (e.g., Hepworth, 2019; Hirschberger, 2018; Maystorovich Chulio, 2022).

In Chile, most research has focused on the progress and limitations of institutional efforts to acknowledge the state's responsibility for human rights abuses, disappearance, torture, and murders of opponents to the dictatorship (for a synthesis, see Cubillos-Vega, 2023). In this article, we argue that the transgenerational transmission of memory and the re-elaboration of traumas resulting from state violence are not solely carried out by civil society organisations in countries that experienced a dictatorship several decades ago. Using Chile as a case study, we illustrate that social movements, whose claims and demands do not focus on human rights abuses or the memory of the dictatorship, also play a crucial role in this process. Our approach integrates individual, social, and collective dimensions of the intergenerational transmission of memory by combining insights from social psychology, psychoanalysis, and social movement studies. We show how these movements produce spaces and situations where conscious and unconscious trauma originating in state political violence are unveiled, transmitted to the next generation, and, in some cases, re-elaborated. Street protests and mass mobilisations on different issues (education, feminism, opposition to the social and economic model) have stirred up individual and family histories. By doing so, these movements have shown how deeply the lives and subjectivities of many Chileans and the whole of Chilean society remained deeply marked by the dictatorship, including those who grew up after it ended.

Materials and Methodology

Our research drew on qualitative methodologies, combining different sources of data for an inductive analysis (Taylor et al., 2015). To elaborate on the results, we selected sources of information compiled by the Memory and Resistance research project. First, we selected seven qualitative interviews with political party militants and activists who participated in the student movements (2006 and 2011) or the feminist movement (2018), and a focus group with six young activists who participated in the 2019 social uprising. These sources were selected because the informants spontaneously related personal experiences that went beyond their motivations for participating in the social uprising. Based on content analysis, we isolated three ways of dealing with this unveiled memory and activists' recent experiences in social protests: the transgenerational transmission of trauma, clashes between different socialisations, and processes of subjectivation.

A second set of information sources included official documents, NGO reports, press releases, and interviews with victims of sexual political violence published in the media. We aimed to reconstruct some sections of our informants' life stories to avoid opening up memories of traumatic experiences that could cause secondary damage. These secondary sources of information allowed us to examine the ways activists experienced processes of subjectivation. Subjectivation is understood as the way individuals seek to produce themselves as the subjects and authors of their personal lives (Bajoit, 2013; Pleyers, 2016).

Social Movements and Traces of the Dictatorship

Social movements challenge the interpretation of core values in a society and seek to transform it (Touraine, 1985). They also transform the actors who take part in them (Melucci, 2003), both during the phases of intense protest and when activists enter an individual and reflexive phase where they process their experiences. While most research in social movement studies focuses on political processes and outcomes, strategic interactions, and the way claims are framed, we have paid particular attention to the actors' subjectivity (Melucci, 2003; Pleyers, 2025; Scribano, 2011) and subjectivation processes. In the field of social movement studies, the relationship with memory studies has focused on highlighting an urban memory that is expressed through social interactions, collective actions, and the identity of social movements (Badilla, 2020).

Social movements, collective memory, and activism are related (López et al., 2024). According to Kubal and Becerra (2014), social movements play a crucial role in forming collective memory. They are often fraught with political and moral importance, they sustain collective challenges to political and cultural authority, and they rely on memory to provide the legitimacy and identity that comes from continuity with the past.

Unveiling Traces of the Dictatorship

Since the start of the century, Chile has witnessed a series of major mass protests. These have included the 2001 and 2006 protests by secondary school students (*los pingüinos*) and the 2011 mass student mobilisation for fair higher education and the end of profits in the sector. The country saw a mass movement against private pension funds, peaking in 2017 (Miranda, 2021); a feminist outbreak in 2018; and the "Chilean uprising" (Henríquez & Pleyers, 2023), bringing millions of citizens in the street between 18 October 2019 and the COVID-19 lockdown. The 2011, 2017, and 2019 movements successively broke the records for the largest national protests since the fall of the dictatorship.

None of these movements focused on the dictatorship, memory, or human rights abuses. However, the dictatorship remained present in the background and, as we will show, these movements have played a significant role in the intergenerational transmission of the memory of this violence. They did so in a collective and visible way; for example, by painting social opponents to the dictatorship on the walls of the cities during the uprising. They also transmitted memory by interpreting the state repression and police violence they suffered as an echo or a resonance of the state violence during the dictatorship. A less visible, but crucial, mechanism was also at play in a more intimate space. The new generation's political activism and the risk they faced when confronted with police violence echoed violences faced by living or disappeared members of their families, opening spaces for unveiling personal and family stories that had remained untold for decades. While their main claims did not focus on the dictatorship, human rights abuses, or memory, these movements created spaces and social devices where the trauma could be unveiled, articulated, and processed.

When young activists recounted their experiences as activists in social movements, they also mentioned experiences in their intimate lives, their family relationships, and how tensions arose with some family members when they participated in protests. A university student and militant in a political party recalled the conversations with his mother when she learned he was going out at night to paint the movement claims on the walls of the city:

> My mum wasn't as drawn to politics as my dad and my dad's side of the family. So for example, what I saw in my mum was more from a stance of fear, you know? Like, 'What are you getting yourself into? At what time are you getting back?' When I'd come back from painting, for example, you go out to do it at night, so you'd come back all painted up, and they'd be like, 'Hey, this and this could happen to you. They could take you to prison!'. I remember the first time I was arrested my mum scolded me hard. But I think it's always a fear that my mum might have from a logic that always gets you the same thing: the people of the dictatorship and blah, blah, blah, blah. (Young man involved in the student movement, interviewed in 2015)

Even though the social movements in which the activists and militants interviewed participated took place years after the end of the dictatorship, the experiences of repression suffered by opponents of the dictatorship remained encapsulated in their collective memory. The relationship between the police, who repressed and tortured, and the opponents remained in the memory of the parents and grandparents of young people who grew up in democracy and who participated in the protests. Faced with the possibility of young people being detained, adults reacted by reliving the fear that their loved ones would suffer the same experience as opponents during the dictatorship.

This resonates with the experiences of other activists and underlines the importance of social movements as spaces for the re-articulation of trauma and the construction of collective memory. This phenomenon can be understood as a contextual precipitant of some repetitions, such as involuntary memories, which tend to manifest themselves in new generations.

The transgenerational transmission of trauma may manifest through behavioural and unconscious transmission. This highlights the role of maternal and paternal experiences in the upbringing and education of their offspring. This affects their predisposition to the content of traumatic histories, as illustrated in the case cited on fear. Although these movements did not prioritise demands related to memory, they revealed how the lives of Chileans continue to be marked by the legacy of the dictatorship. In Chile, the 2011 student movement contributed to an alternative memory of Pinochet's dictatorship (Badilla, 2019) and claimed in its slogans that the protesters defined themselves as a "generation without fear". The young activists articulated the movement's identity based on the memory of the past and defined themselves as heirs of a system in conflict that the return to democracy failed to resolve (Sandoval & Carvallo, 2019). They left behind the fear of demonstrating that paralysed previous generations who lived through the dictatorship. Moreover, they grounded their identity in the resignification of a memory that confronted the fears that prevented their parents and grandparents from protesting and from relating to institutional political issues, even after democracy was reinstated.

Collective Memory and Trauma

A Collective and Historical Approach to Trauma

Psychologists and psychiatrists have played a crucial role in accompanying victims of state violence and torture, as well as families of disappeared and murdered opponents, to deal with their grief and trauma (Instituto Latinoamericano de Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos, 2025). In the past decade, practices and research have increasingly pointed to the psychosocial effects of state violence on individuals of a generation raised after the dictatorship (Cabrera, 2023; Faúndez, Cornejo & Brackelaire, 2014). Psychoanalysts have studied symptomatology resulting from the transmission of trauma between generations (Lira, 2013) and the effects of political violence on the construction of the identity of children of direct victims of the dictatorship.

We refer to memory as a method of political articulation of the limits of state violence, and the exercise of understanding the causes that provoked the trauma with which the victims are burdened (Smelser, 2004). Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event that deeply shapes individual subjectivity and personality (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004; LaCapra, 2014; Tisseron et al., 2012). Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. Research on memory and trauma allows us to overcome approaches that consider this experience as pathological and blame the victims for being unable to overcome their suffering.

Strongly influenced by studies in psychoanalysis, "trauma studies" have developed an approach to understanding trauma with a collective and historical perspective. This contributes to avoiding the repetition of mass violence, as wounded and diseased memory leads society to replace memory with repetition. Scholars such as Feldman (2006; 2023), LaCapra (2014), and Friedländer (1992) developed this perspective, asserting that some psychological and psychoanalytical mechanisms, including trauma, operate similarly at individual and societal levels regarding repressed history. Indeed, as Salazar (2006) showed, a significant part of Chile's political history is built on cycles and scenarios of socio-political violence and bloody repression.

This emerged as a crucial element of the way activists lived their participation in recent social movements in Chile as a personal experience, and why they unveiled unexpected resonance with individual, familial, and societal trauma. The participants in the 2019 social uprising in Chile who we interviewed recalled it in different ways. An English teacher who took part in the protests after his work justified the confrontation with the police to "protect peaceful protesters". He directly connected the police repression of the 2019 protest and state violence in the history of Chile:

> Four days later, I participated in another demonstration, without violence. There I suffered a severe aggression ... I looked to my left and I saw people running. Some were running to the left, others to the right, and the carabineros [military police] were in the middle. The carabineros shot us in the face. I have scars here [He shows the vertex of his left eye]. By a hair's breadth, I didn't lose my eye. This changed me. At that moment, I realised that violence was needed in this revolution. ... It again showed that nothing could be achieved peacefully. I tried the peaceful way, and I was attacked again. What was at matter was defending the others, which were me before. ... Finally, after 40 years on this earth, I found my purpose. (Individual Interview, activist of the Front-line, 2020)

Taking a collective and historical approach to understanding trauma allows for the identification of more complex social and political experiences, which often stem from historical conflicts and traumas (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004). Paul Ricoeur (2000) explored the relationship between individual memory and collective history, as well as the possibility of reconciling memory with forgetting in the construction of both personal and collective identity. LaCapra (2014) focused on understanding trauma and historical violence through a combination of analytical approaches that allowed consideration of the broader social and political dynamics as well as individual and subjective experiences. Both Ricoeur and LaCapra noted that narrating and writing about trauma allowed exploration of the complex relationships between the experiences of the subjective and social dimensions of a community's memory, to heal the traumatic wounds of the past.

Transgenerational Consequences

Trauma caused by political violence has a psychosocial impact that affects both individuals and groups and their relationships with one another (Faúndez et al., 2014). Trauma means injury and psychic trauma refers to a particular injury that a difficult experience inflicts on a particular person. Psychosocial trauma goes beyond this, defined as the non-uniform effects produced by the injury or damage across people. The degree and nature of the damage depends on each individual's experience. It is conditioned by their social background, individual personality characteristics, experience, and degree of participation in the event that caused the injury (Martín-Baró, 1989). Transgenerational transmission of psychosocial trauma refers to the process by which the psychic effects of a trauma experienced by a previous generation are transmitted to the next generations (Cabrera, 2023). According to this perspective, when trauma is not worked through in one generation, it is "encrypted" and transmitted to the next generation through an unconscious process in which traumatic elements are internalised, commonly in the form of a symptom (Abraham & Torok, 1989). Hence, the transgenerational transmission of psychosocial trauma raises complex questions of pathological propagation about the relationship between the individual and the collective and about what is considered normal and pathological in institutional regulations. More importantly, it is itself a product of the state political violence, as an indirect consequence.

The transgenerational transmission of psychosocial trauma is an emerging area of research. Faúndez, Cornejo and Brackelaire (2013, 2014) conducted research with children and grandchildren of tortured and political prisoners. They showed how young people with no experience of the dictatorship took their parents' and grandparents' traumatic experiences of torture as a part of their own individual identity, even though some had limited knowledge of their relatives' suffering. They analysed the crucial role of the preservation of memory in the elaboration of familial and personal trauma. These studies shed light on a long-

neglected issue: the consequences of politically motivated violence experienced during the dictatorship on children and grandchildren of the victims. Young people we interviewed recurrently connected their parents' or grandparents' experience of the dictatorship to their motivation to participate in movements and protests, even if the protest's main claim was not connected to state violence during the dictatorship. This was made clear by a 25-year-old, who considered the story of his grandfather as part of his own claim during the 2019 social uprising:

> It happened to me that my mother, who was the daughter of a person who was detained [during the dictatorship], had a lot of respect for the armed wing of society. She always tried to instil in me that you must be respectful and that not all police officers are bad. To a certain extent, until before the 18th [of October 2019, the beginning of the uprising], I shared that idea. But I feel that, since the 18th onwards, there was such a big social catharsis. All the social groups urged us to take a stand and say that we don't agree with injustice, and we want to do something about it. At that time, all the armed institutions remained silent. (Focus group, 2020, 25-year-old who participated in the social uprising)

Ximena Faúndez and Ximena Goecke (2015) showed gender differences in the way families of people who were detained and tortured during the dictatorship spoke about the experiences of torture. They identified that when grandchildren spoke about their grandparents who suffered political violence, they tended to focus on the story of the men. Even though both grandparents were detained, male grandchildren spoke almost exclusively about the experience of the grandfather, which is consistent with the lack of visibility of women in literature about this period. Despite this, children of surviving political detainees are committed to the transmission of memory, based on the experience of their parents. These children and grandchildren of victims of the dictatorship transmit the memory of state violence during the dictatorship among their peers and to their own children when they are adults, fostering an openness in Chilean society (Palma et al., 2021).

Faúndez et al. (2013) found that grandchildren of political detainees positioned themselves as heirs of a traumatic family legacy when they reconstructed their family history. They took this trauma as their own, to the point that it often became a defining part of their identity. They were confronted with feelings of injustice and suffering experienced by their relatives. In many cases, they had heard only partial stories from their relatives, which corresponded to traces on which they reconstructed a painful past. They felt personally committed to this painful past, which required them to take a stance in present days and to project themselves into the future as heirs of that history (Faúndez et al., 2014).

In his study, José Cabrera (2023) showed that grandchildren generated narratives of memory about the traumatic experiences of their grandparents. Recognising the loss of those lives allowed them to elaborate on trauma, despite uncertainty due to information gaps, silences, and untold stories about their grandparents' experiences.

Social movements offering a setting that fosters a reflexive reconstruction of memory play a crucial role in easing these processes. A young woman we interviewed came from a family that supported Pinochet's military coup. In her interview, she explained how she was confronted with the discrepancy between the story she was told by her family and the one she heard from friends about political crimes under the dictatorship. She became a leader of the student federation at the time of the 2011 mass protests that called for change in the higher education system that was very profitable for private sector universities. During one of the seminars she organised during the protests, she shared one of these eye-opening experiences:

> I went to Carmela Carvajal, a secondary school with pupils from all over Santiago. There, I became aware of other realities that I didn't know about before. In fact, one of the things they [my parents] told me was that the Communist Party didn't exist anymore, that it had ended during the Pinochet era, that Pinochet had closed the Communist Party, and that we were all right-wing. And I realised that no, it was not the case. I came to know other realities. One of my friends' father had been arrested and detained in Villa Grimaldi [a torture centre during the dictatorship]. Another friend had the same with his mother, who was in the Valech Report [on human rights abuses during the dictatorship] and things like that. I started to realise everything that had happened. When I told my mum, she would tell me: 'No, that's a lie, that's stuff that people made up but Pinochet never did that'. I had that dilemma until I was 15 years old. (Individual interview, 2015)

Transgenerational Transmission of Psychosocial Trauma

Research and recent theories about the transgenerational transmission of trauma have highlighted how traumatic events encoded in family history profoundly influence the lives, identities, and subjectivities of descendants of direct victims. The damages done by torture, disappearance, and illegal detention of political prisoners do not stop with their generation. A legacy of suffering and trauma is inherited in multiple ways across generations as these events trigger psychic responses of future generations. Social activism can trigger the generation of an intergenerational narrative, which allows to elaborate on a traumatic memory that was repressed and created damages for successive generations.

In a 2015 interview, a student activist shared the problems he faced in his family when he attended the 2011 student movement protests. It triggered a conflict with his grandparents, who strongly opposed his participation in the protests. This did not make sense to him until, following an escalation of the tensions, his grandparents told him a family story that had been silenced: one of their sons had suffered torture during the dictatorship. The student immediately associated the revelation of this suffering and trauma with his experience in the ongoing movement:

> In 2011 [during the student movement protests], I started to find out about my family's history. I realised that it really comes from a left-wing tradition since 1910. I had no idea that my great-great-grandfather had been a socialist party militant. It raised a kind of personal awareness, but also a family awareness. ... It made me feel a million things. I started to dig into my family history. I discovered that I had uncles who had been arrested. One of my uncles was in the national stadium [where the military regime gathered and tortured supporters of the Allende government during the coup d'état] and was tortured ... . The thing is that after the coup and up to the 1990s, this was suspended. It was 'sterilised'. And also my grandparents, who were the ones who raised me, didn't give me that political training either. They remained always very neutral, perhaps as a protective measure. So, when I started to get involved in politics, my grandfather got upset. Afterwards, he accepted it and recognised it, as they were also mobilised in this re-politicisation. (Individual interview 2015)

This quote points to the persistence of untold memories and their involuntary irruption in the context of social protests. It invites analysis of contemporary social protests as spaces where memories of repressive periods arise in personal, family, and collective stories. Historical trauma emerges as a psychic mark of tragic events, revealing a historicity that underlies the present.

Considering the transgenerational transmission of told and untold memories and trauma through an analytical framework unveils a crucial dimension of social movements, their history, and their connections to previous waves of movements. The connection between today's movements and the events that took place before and during the dictatorship goes beyond ideological continuity and the conscious transnational identities forged by the interviewees. Other forms of continuity are revealed in the untold stories and the conscious or unconscious transmission of trauma in families. Ideological continuity acts as a signifier of the unsaid between generations. In this context, the signifier presents a double characteristic. On one hand, it is configured syntagmatically. It acquires weight and importance from other signifiers explicitly present in current discourse. On the other hand, it operates in an associative manner, establishing horizontal connections with elements from the past, which, although not present in the immediate discourse, are invoked through associations based on similarities and differences. This dual character of the signifier manifests itself in discourses which, by contrasting and opposing each other, allow for the emergence of new nominations. This process influences the construction of meanings at the intersection of family memory and an activist's contemporary experience. A concrete example of such was offered by an woman activist who took part in the frontline of the protest that confronted the police forces during the 2019 social uprising:

> There was also a change in my mind. I grew up with my father who is a sailor. He had a different idea of the dictatorship. Hence, I knew what it was and everything. I was aware of the deaths but I never felt empathy. But then, when it all started [the 2019 uprising], I listened to the songs by Grupo Congreso that they played in the streets. I listened to the lyrics and I said, 'This [the violence and repression of protesters by the police] is what happened before but louder!' Then I felt guilty for having ignored all those people who had lost their members of their family. When the curfew was instated, I would go out to the streets and hide. We would go and be in the shadows with other people so that nothing would happen to us. The police were violent. So, you imagine we were hiding well because if they caught you, they would have shot at you. (Individual interview, 2020)

Addressing the transmission of encrypted and silenced content between generations reveals an unconscious dimension in the dynamics of activism. The analytical framework we propose enriches the understanding of transgenerational transmission of trauma and its relationship to activism. Combining insights from psychoanalysis and sociology unveils the link between the representation of institutions and affects, which is crucial in understanding how signifiers emerge in the political narratives of descendants of direct victims of state violence and dictatorships. Acknowledging this dimension implies understanding that affect plays a crucial role in the process of activism and social movements. In this sense, a rhetorical figure such as "catacresis" (Laclau, 2005), which establishes a figurative reference to name something essentially unnameable, provides the support that gives rise to political signification. It allows for a linguistic referent that replaces the figure of a political representative or leadership, thus facilitating the articulation of political claims and the creation of meanings during a social protest (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2021).

A Gendered Dimension of Trauma

Memory Transmission in Exile

Recent exploratory studies investigating the Chilean diaspora observed the transmission of trauma in generations born in exile. They also noted tensions between daughters and mothers caused by silences during conversations on topics related to the dictatorship period, or the will to avoid talking about "some topics" (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2024; Espinoza, 2024). Over 400,000 Chileans had to leave the country between 1973 and 1990 (Bolzman, 1993). A gendered study by De los Reyes and Mulinari (2024) focused on the daughters of Chileans in exile in Sweden. Findings showed some had constructed their memory on a positive perspective of the political history of exile and a negative memory grounded in the silences of the exiled mothers about their experiences of torture or political violence during the dictatorship (De los Reyes & Mulinari, 2024).

Some of these mothers in exile had opted for silence. They avoided talking about their most painful experiences to protect the next generation and shield them from a memory that would expose them to experiences of torture, trauma, repression, and pain (De los Reyes & Mulinari, 2024). Another study with exiled women living in Spain, France, Norway, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, and the United Kingdom (Espinoza, 2024) showed traces of psychological violence in daughters. They inherited their mothers' struggles and ideologies, on which they grounded their social activism in social movements and claims for social justice. Other cases showed a more conflictive relationship between generations. Some daughters grew up almost alone due to their mothers' political commitment in exile. Some of them blamed their mothers for their feelings of abandonment and for giving priority to militancy over raising their children.

Transgenerational Transmission of Sexual Violence by the State

The Collective of Surviving Women Always Resisting (Colectivo Mujeres Sobrevivientes Siempre Resistentes, CMSSR) gathers women who suffered political and sexual violence during the dictatorship in the torture centre Venda Sexy, in the city of Santiago. Over time, other women have joined them to support their demands and initiatives. The Collective focuses on activism as a way to process personal and collective grief by highlighting the sexual dimension of torture and the gendered dimension of the abuses they suffered.

A 38-year-old member, who participated in the high school student movements in 2001 and was a founder of the *Feminist Coordination 8 of March* in 2019, explained that the women survivors of the Venda Sexy had to:

> lobby hard in the 1990s and 2000s at the commission for reparations to obtain the effective recognition of sexual political violence as a differentiated mechanism of political violence that was not being recognised at the roundtables or in the spaces of memory until then. (Individual interview, 2023)

At that time, members of CMSSR reviewed records of survivors and observed discriminatory actions in spaces established by the regime and political actors that followed the dictatorship (*la concertación*) in the 1990s and 2000s. They were told that women and men suffered similar violence during the dictatorship and that there was no reason to distinguish gender-based violence reported in survivors' testimonies. In 2016, the Collective published a statement to denounce these omissions:

> During the civil-military dictatorship, the vast majority of women who were kidnapped or detained were subjected to political sexual violence or sexual torture in a systematic way and a differentiated manner in relation to male detainees. This situation was not explicitly considered by the Commission on Torture and Political Imprisonment and its specificity has remained invisible, submerged in generalisations, and subsumed under the category of 'torture'. Its omission constitutes an additional act of discrimination against women by the Chilean state. (La Izquierda Diario, 2016, para. 8)

The statement addresses, in general terms, the impunity that has prevailed for perpetrators of crimes against humanity who have violated the physical and sexual integrity of women, according to international laws and human rights principles. It also highlights the persistent struggle of women calling for the recognition of sexual political violence as a crime against humanity separate and distinct from torture.

The institutional recognition and consignment of sexual political violence as a crime against humanity have remained a weakness in Chile's institutional transitional justice practices. Beatriz Bataszew, a member of the collective of survivors, Venda Sexy, recalled that the Rettig Commission established in 1991 focused exclusively on the cases of disappeared and executed citizens (Boche, 2023). Moreover, Bataszew noted that women survivors were only considered as witnesses able to provide information on the cases in the report. In 2011, the second report by the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and

Torture (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura, 2011) did not include sexual political violence to qualify people as victims from the cases it considered. It limited itself to register only torture and political imprisonment.

In 2020, after a decades-long struggle by the Collective of Surviving Women to bring the state to recognise sexual political violence against women, the existence of the crimes of aggravated kidnapping and torment with sexual violence was finally taken into consideration. A judicial sentence was handed down to the Supreme Court Judge Mario Carroza and subsequently ratified by the Supreme Court in 2023. This judgement implies that sexual crimes committed in a systematic and widespread way by state agents against women who resisted the dictatorship are considered crimes against humanity and are thus imprescriptible.

The actions promoted by the Collective of Surviving Women include performances of public mourning during marches of contemporary movements, among which were the 2011 student movements and the 2019 uprising. They aim to make visible the consequences of the sexual political violence suffered by the women who died. This has been achieved by erecting physical memorials through calls for participation open to the public and promoting the submission of testimonies of witnesses who knew the victims in the different truth commissions.

An activist we interviewed highlighted the importance of a feminist memory reflecting the degrees of differentiation with which crimes involving gender discrimination were carried out and the systematic use of sexual political violence during the dictatorship and in times of democracy. She insisted on the importance of "working on the issue of women's memory, dissident and feminised bodies, recognising sexual political violence as such, as a component, a use, a tool of the states aiming to weaken social processes and social movements, to exercise violence" (Individual interview, 2023).

Activists of the 2019 uprising published statements to denounce sexual violence against women who had been detained during the ongoing protests. The campaign and action to make visible and demand the institutional recognition of the sexual dimension of political violence during the dictatorship influenced the National Institute of Human Rights (2019). In its 2019 annual report, cases of sexual violence that mainly affected women and girls (53% of complaints, total sample size n=135) during the repression of the uprising were specifically reported. Cases included forced nudity, the presence of police officers of the opposite sex during stripping, sexual filming and teasing, cavity searches, touching, threats of rape, and beatings on the genitals. In an interview published in 2023 (Boche, 2023), Beatriz Bataszew, a member of the Women's Survivors Collective *Venda Sexy*, considered that:

> Sexual political violence became a strategy to discipline and silence students, women, feminised and racialised bodies during the uprising of October 2019. So far, all the cases remain unpunished. Their omission by the Judicial System is part of a repressive strategy conducted by the State. It establishes the conditions for their repetition and denial.

The visibilisation of political sexual violence by the Collective of Surviving Women provided support for the denunciations of sexual violence committed by police officers against women held in detention centres during the 2019 social uprising.

These cases unveiled the repetition in Chilian history of gender-based violence perpetrated by the state. Mobilisation to visibilise this gendered dimension of repression and sexual violence perpetrated by state agents also exemplified the care and sisterhood extended to the transgenerational victims of similar forms of sexual violence by the state. It opened spaces to heal a historical wound and transform it into a process of empowerment that has been part of contemporary feminist movements.

The Collective of Surviving Women has organised a symbolic thread that connects past experiences of resistance and struggles, including during the dictatorship, with the current feminist movement that advocates for gender equality and the right to make decisions about one's own body. This "red thread of memory" connects women of different generations and territories who have faced or denounce sexual violence by the state and organise for a life with dignity. This connection through history and generations supports women in their attempt to cope with the selective and fragmented oversight and invisibilisation of their role in history. By taking part in this project, they assert their social and political protagonism and their commitment to social transformation (González, 2018).

Conclusions

Combining insights from social movement studies, social psychology, and psychoanalysis, this article has shown the way social movements on different issues (education, feminism, opposition to the neoliberal social and economic model) have stirred up individual and family histories. They have opened spaces and social devices where individual, family, and collective traumas could be unveiled, articulated, and processed. By doing so, these movements have shown how deeply individual subjectivity

and identity, and the whole Chilean society, remain shaped by state violence caused by the dictatorship. This includes those who have grown up after the dictatorship ended and in cases where this suffering has been silenced. These traumatic events have left a deep imprint on the daily lives of Chileans, remaining present in 21st century social movements, even if these movements do not primarily focus on memory or human rights violations by the dictatorship.

We acknowledge the limitations of this research and the oblivion of state violence suffered by populations from different backgrounds. Further research will need to address the state violence towards Indigenous peoples, notably within the Mapuche movement, as well as Afro-descendant Chilean citizens. This must consider both the similarities with the cases we mentioned and their specificities in the context of Chile's historical and contemporary state practices.

Implementing an analytical approach to the case studies and building on interviews with activists from movements that emerged in Chile between 2011 and 2019 offers theoretical and practical insights for research in psychology and social movement studies. It also informs recommendations for the individual, collective, and institutional treatments of the trauma unleashed by state violence, notably during the dictatorship. For research in psychology, this article has insisted on the need to recognise the effects of trauma in generations that were born after the dictatorship. The indirect consequences of repeated human rights violations continue to impact the lives of young people who have grown up in the 21st century, almost 50 years after the military coup. The cases show that some psychosocial effects of political violence perpetuate suffering and shape the psychic and narrative responses of later generations.

This research aims to contribute to the literature and debate in social movement studies in two ways. First, it shows that the transgenerational transmission of trauma connected to state violence constitutes an additional dimension of the bridges between different generations of social movements. Second, it highlights the crucial role played by social movements that do not focus primarily on human rights abuse and memory in the unveiling of violence that has been invisibilised at the family or society levels. This research points to the significant role of social movements in contemporary Chile. They play a crucial role in the encounter between generations, the construction of memory, and the unveiling of untold stories and suffering from state repression during the dictatorship. Social movements open spaces to express stories of repression that have remained hidden and to recognise the effects of trauma in generations that were born after the dictatorship. These spaces of encounter allow younger generations to make conscious and process the legacy of political violence, even as their families live the trauma silently, contributing to an intergenerational narrative that challenges forgetting and repression. Young people who have grown up in a democracy and who have participated in social movements bring with them experiences of loss that have been silenced by their families regarding the horrors of the dictatorship.

In terms of political sciences and the research on political institutions, this research converges with the approaches that connect the representation of institutions and affects. This is crucial in understanding how signifiers emerge in the political narrative of descendants of direct victims of state violence and dictatorships. This study also has implications for literature on and practices of transitional justice. We hope this research will provide empirical material and a theoretical approach that strengthen the calls to update institutional procedures to generate public policies of transitional justice that acknowledge the differences of gender, class, race, and positionality inherent to political violence.

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Correspondence: Karla Henríquez, researcher at Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Democracy, Institutions and Subjectivity (Cridis), Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. karla.henriquez@uclouvain.be

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