Preserving Memory

Llamas, Nerea A.

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6. Preserving the Memory of Chilean Exile, 1973–1989

Ana María Cobos
Ana Lya Sater

Introduction

The objective of this presentation is to emphasize the importance of the Chilean exile experience of 1973–1989 and the urgent need to collect, organize, store, and provide access to the vast array of resources dispersed throughout the world in their many formats, themes, and languages. Most of these materials are held by the exiles themselves whether they live in Chile or in the countries that gave them asylum. As expressed so eloquently on the website Memoria y Justicia, by a group of human rights law professionals: “The past is connected to the present. Only by confronting the events that mark us as a nation and as individuals—keeping memory alive and demanding justice—will it be possible to heal the wounds of the past.”

The Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile opened its doors in January 2010. The museum’s mission according to its website is dar a conocer las violaciones sistemáticas de los derechos humanos por parte del Estado de Chile entre los años 1973 y 1990, para que a través de
Preserving the Memory of Chilean Exile, 1973–1989

Because exile is a violation of human rights, we feel that the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile is the logical site for information about the Chilean exile experience and the role exile played in contributing to the restoration of democracy. While Chileans who remained in the country suffered corporal and psychological abuses including death, Chileans in exile organized their efforts to keep international interest in Chile alive by involving the citizens and governments of the countries that received them. Protected by freedom of expression in the host countries, the exiles created organizations to fight for the restoration of Chilean democracy. As we will demonstrate, Chilean exile includes a wide range of experiences and manifestations. We believe that the task of gathering this valuable cultural patrimony should be undertaken by the Museo to provide a comprehensive memory of Chilean history during this time period. James Green and Luis Roniger reflect our concern that “the impact of exile upon Chile as well as the countries where the exiles lived for over seventeen years is still understudied.”

Background and Chronology

Exile is a violation of human rights. According to the Merriam Webster’s dictionary, “exile” is “the state or a period of forced absence from one’s country or home.” Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.” The Chilean Constitution of 1925 establishes, in its Article 10, the nonrestricted right to leave or enter freely the national territory.

Background and Chronology of Human Rights Violations in Chile

- On November 6, 1973, two months after General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the Allende government, Decreto Ley 81 was enforced upon many Chileans. Article 2 authorized the Pinochet government to expel foreigners and Chileans from the country while Article 3 forbade the return of those who were already abroad. The passports of exiled Chileans were stamped with the letter “L” for Limitado, meaning that they could not return to Chilean territory.
- In 1974 some prisoners from government concentration camps were expelled from the country.
- In 1975 those condemned to prison by military tribunals were allowed to commute their sentences to perpetual exile, and others left the country because they could not live under the dictatorship.
- In 1976 political and union leaders opposed to the military regime were expelled.
• The total number of Chileans who left their country, either by force or voluntarily, has been estimated to be between two hundred thousand and four hundred thousand. However, some believe the figure to be closer to one million.9

• In 1980 the 1925 constitution was replaced by a plebiscite legitimizing the military dictatorship.10

• Between 1986 and 1988, the government published official lists of Chileans authorized to return.11

• Finally, beginning September 1, 1988, the military government stopped enforcing the exile laws and rescinded all previous exile laws with Decreto Ley 203, “la ley del retorno.”12

Our Interest in Exile

We presented papers at the SALALM conferences in 1986 and 2009. Researchers contacted us in 2008 to inquire if we had updated the 1986 presentation that describes sources available about Chilean Nueva Canción musicians in exile. Our 2009 presentation was in response to these requests. In accordance with the theme of this conference, we decided to explore resources about Chilean exile in general and if this information is being preserved and made accessible.13 While doing research for this paper, we discovered an abundance of sources that reflect the wide-ranging experiences of Chileans in exile. These sources raise several interesting questions, some of which still need to be answered, such as the following:

• Which countries have the most information about the Chilean exile experience?

• Which languages are represented in the resources available?

• Is anyone collecting these resources?

• Are there accurate demographic figures about Chilean exiles?

• Which countries received them?14

• Which professions did the exiles practice before and after leaving Chile?

As we continued our investigation, we discovered that Chilean and other scholars continue to be active in researching this topic.15

Memory

Recent interest in preserving the memory of Latin American political events and scholarly research about the exile experience has prompted international efforts to preserve this information such as the UNESCO Memory of
The World project and the International Network of Sites of Conscience and its Latin American portal.

Our Findings

As far as we have been able to determine, there is no systematic attempt to identify, collect, and access resources about the Chilean exile experience. Instead there are isolated efforts that could be consolidated. Over a year ago, we established contact with those working with the Fondo Quilapayún in the music department of the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago, Chile. These colleagues were creating a database that captures information about the experiences and activities of the musical group Quilapayún while exiled in France. Unfortunately, recent attempts to request news about the project have gone unanswered. The excellent website Exilio Chileno is only one of many potentially useful sources that result from a google.com search. We also contacted Romy Schmidt, former director of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile, to inquire about systematic efforts to collect information about the Chilean exile experience. The Museo’s Biblioteca Digital reveals only sixty-seven entries for the search term “exilio” or as few as twenty-nine items for the term “exiliados.” As a result of contacts made...
through this conference, we are now in touch with the Museo’s María Luisa Ortiz Rojas, a librarian, and Daniela Fuentealba Rubio, a sociologist.

**In the Beginning**

As Chileans adapted to their new environments and began their long exile experiences in more than fifty countries, their goal was to keep the Chilean political situation alive to bring the world’s attention to their cause. From the arrival in their new homelands, Chilean exiles created institutions and organizations whose goal was to restore democracy in Chile usually through cultural expressions. They organized festivals, conferences, cooperatives, clubs, food banks, and musical ensembles. They performed theater, produced films, and wrote fiction, plays, poetry, and nonfiction. These activities allowed the exiles to share the nostalgia for their country, keep the plight of Chile in people’s minds, and stay in touch with one another while working to restore democracy in Chile.\(^{19}\)

In every country where Chileans took refuge, we found numerous manifestations of their activities to promote the Chilean cause. In our effort to understand the magnitude and importance of these activities, we organized them into groups. The groupings might serve as one possible approach to arrange and preserve this information.

**Productions of Exile**

**Music and Arts**

Music was the most effective cultural activity amongst exiles, attracting large crowds to the Chilean cause. The rhythms, languages, dances, lyrics, styles, and use of instruments were gradually influenced by the music of their adoptive countries. At the same time that the exiled musicians and interpreters disseminated their music, styles, and instruments, they helped to revive interest in local folk music. Through performances all over the world, Chilean performers such as Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani, Patricio Manns, Angel, and Isabel Parra, to name a few, popularized the Chilean cause. The musicians sang in many languages and at times were joined by renowned, non-Chilean musicians such as Joan Baez, Holly Near, and Georges Moustaki, among others. Chilean folklore groups began to incorporate classical instruments as well as those from Africa and the Middle East into their music.\(^{20}\)

In fine arts, the paintings, murals, etchings, sculptures, posters, *arpilleras*, installations, and photographs expressed the Chilean political situation and portrayed their adoptive surroundings. Exiled Chilean artists could freely express through their art everything that was forbidden in Chile. Because the arts had been officially sponsored, supported, and encouraged by the Allende government, exiled Chilean artists, aided by the governments and artists of the host countries, utilized their knowledge and experience to keep the Chilean
cause alive. Through their organizations, Chilean exiles promoted their artistic works to attract a greater number of viewers, thus maximizing exposure of the Chilean situation. Chilean exiles and artists from the countries that received them painted murals in their adoptive homes. While these will remain where they were created, information about this form of artistic expression, reflecting the exile experience, should be included and preserved in the memory of exile.

The Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende was created in France soon after the exiles arrived as a continuation of the Museo de la Solidaridad Artística founded in 1972 in Chile. The collection of this itinerant museum was created with works donated by exiled artists. Exhibits from this museum have toured all over the world. Finally, in 1991, the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende was reestablished in Chile where it resides today.21

Graphic design was one of the most prominent forms of the arts. Utilizing the many advanced technical means available abroad, Chilean artists and designers created book covers, T-shirt slogans, concert and meeting posters and brochures, etc. These artistic works were sophisticated, they used vivid colors, and they integrated politics and art masterfully. Some posters have found homes in several museums throughout the world.

Photography also played an important role in exile by capturing the life of Chileans abroad, depicting international solidarity in rallies, meetings, protests, and demonstrations. Some of these photographs have been published in books and magazines of exile.

**Literature, Poetry, Nonfiction, Film, and Theater**

Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction works allowed exiles to tell their stories. Initially, the main themes of Chilean literature in exile were outrage and pain. Later works dealt with the persistent nostalgia for Chile. Eventually, local characters from the host countries began to appear in the literature representing many languages.22 Short stories and poetry appeared in Chilean exile magazines published in most countries where they settled. One of the most prominent Chilean exile authors is Carlos Cerda, who published his famous *Morir en Berlín* and *Escrito con L*, written shortly before his death. The title of this last book is based on a poem with the same title by Gonzalo Rojas. “L” for *Limitedo* in both titles refers to the stamp that appeared on the passports of exiled Chileans. Both books are powerful testaments of life in exile. In 1994 the Ministry of Foreign Relations submitted approximately seventeen hundred books and magazines produced by Chilean exiles in France between 1973 and 1990 to the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.23

Film and theater were powerful venues for Chilean exiles to express what was occurring back home. Chilean popular theater was a cathartic medium that depicted the suffering of the exiled actors, directors, and playwrights who had been political prisoners. Some of these plays were bilingual, and some used
humor to cope with tragedy. A large number of plays were written during the period 1973–1989. In 1978, for example, eighteen plays by exiled Chilean playwrights were submitted to the Casa de las Américas contest.

Similarly, between 1973 and 1989, the total number of films produced abroad was the highest ever in Chilean cinema. More than 178 were produced, 39 of which were filmed in France.24 Raúl Ruiz, exiled in France, was one of the most famous Chilean film directors. In 1974 he directed Diálogos de exiliados, a documentary in which he depicts the alienation experienced by the exiles in their host countries. This was the first film to focus on the exile theme.

Some exiled filmmakers managed to enter Chile during the dictatorship and recorded events that were occurring at the time. Miguel Littín is one example.25 Others who were imprisoned and miraculously set free managed to take with them reels of film recording their experiences. Most of these documentaries are not well known in Chile. In February 2011, the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos offered a series of documentary films about exile. Raúl Ruiz received a special invitation to open the series with one of his films.26

Patricio Guzmán, renowned Chilean director, filmed La batalla de Chile, a trilogy of documentaries that take place in Chile during the dictatorship. After the restoration of democracy, Guzmán showed films to young Chileans in Chile, who knew little or nothing about the Pinochet dictatorship. While screening the documentaries, Guzmán captured the reactions of those in the audience and later interviewed them. This experience became the film Chile, Obstinate Memory.

In addition to the categories described above, exiled Chileans produced magazines, newspapers, books, theses, websites, pamphlets, brochures, programs, leaflets, and radio and television shows. There was at least one magazine published in every country where Chileans settled. In some countries there were two or three regular publications, depending on the number of Chileans residing there.27 Regrettably, there is no complete inventory of these magazines, and there are complete collections only of the most important ones. Carlos Orellana summarizes this tragic situation: “The disinterest and even the neglect for the conservancy of documents, often a failure that not even the creators of the publications can escape, results that only some of these magazines are accounted for today.”28 Further research is required to determine what was published and the location of holdings.

These diverse expressions of the Chilean exile experience make the task of identifying them even more challenging. Some publications by Chilean exile groups continue to publish today and some websites are updated regularly. One valuable example of an exile group that remains active is Chilenos en Suecia. The group is currently collaborating with the Museo to submit information sources about Chilean exiles in Sweden.29
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Valuable Secondary Sources

While the 1973–1989 period of Chilean history continues to be a focus of scholarly research adding to the extensive number of sources available, studies that focus on the massive Chilean exodus are relatively few. We would like to present some useful examples.

In his “La culture chilienne en exil en France: Une forme de resistence a la junte (1973–1994),” Nicolas Prognon studies Chilean experiences in France. His study provides an extensive list of examples of works produced by Chilean refugees. Prognon depicts Chilean exile as an organized movement and cites a staggering number of publications. For example, from 1973 to 1983, more than two hundred magazines were published by Chilean exiles in France. Prognon’s bibliography is lengthy, informative, and useful for further research on the subject. His article provides a valuable model of works produced by Chilean exiles in their host countries.

“L”: Memoria gráfica del exilio chileno, 1973–1989 by Estela Aguirre and Sonia Chamorro is an impressive work. It presents numerous examples of works produced by Chileans in exile. In the book’s prologue, Ariel Dorfman says, “They sent us to die in foreign countries but we transformed that death wished upon us by the dictatorship into small daily victories.” The adage “A picture speaks a thousand words” is appropriate for this magnificent book that presents Chilean exile through graphic reproductions of diverse media including posters, murals, record covers, passport facsimiles, and others. The texts accompanying the illustrations describe the graphic memorabilia of Chileans.
in exile. One of the collaborators of the text suggests that there should be no
difference made between the “L” exiles who left Chile voluntarily and those
who remained abroad when the military coup occurred, because “they were all
exiles.”

Another excellent work by Aguirre and Chamorro with Carmen Correa is
*La mirada de lejos: Libros y tesis escritos por chilenos desde el exilio, 1973–
1989*. It was published as an offprint of the magazine *Ratón de Biblioteca.*
This bibliography lists more than one thousand books published in thirty-seven
countries by more than one hundred Chileans in exile. Aguirre, Chamorro, and
Correa also published, online, their *Bibliografía, acerca del exilio chileno y
la cultura*. This work contains 1,068 entries that represent books published
in thirty-seven countries. The authors indicate that this is only a partial list
of works produced in exile between September 1973 and December 1989.

The periodicals *Literatura Chilena en el Exilio* (1977–1980) and *Araucaria de
Chile* (1977–1989) are two examples of periodicals that published works by
Chilean writers in exile.

Another example was the Chilean national television program *Lo Mejor
de Mi Tierra*, dedicated to Chileans living abroad. The program frequently
featured cultural events followed by announcements (festivals, celebrations,
dances, etc.) and other segments such as one that provides legal and other infor-
mation for those who would like to return to Chile. Similarly, *Los Patiperros
and TV Chile Responde* make it possible for families who live in Chile to con-
nect with their relatives living abroad.

**Conclusion**

Exile had powerful psychological, sociological, and cultural effects on
those who were forced to leave Chile. Among the effects are the splitting
of families and partnerships; adult children left behind because they were
established in their adopted countries or they had married a native; forgot-
ten or newly acquired languages; and changing lifestyles, among others. One
noteworthy example of dissolved partnerships is the split of the two famous
folklore groups Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani, both exiled in Europe. Upon
returning to Chile, each group divided itself into two groups, each one claim-
ing the original name as their own. *El Mercurio* of Santiago, the Chilean news-
paper, has been following the legal battles over the names while one half of
each group decided to remain in Europe.

The following quote from Green and Roniger expresses the urgent task
before us:

> More attention needs to be given to the impact of exile groups…. Most of
these open-ended questions point toward research that measures the impact
of exile on people, political processes, and national memories of the years of
political repression. While scholars are looking toward the macrodynamics
of exile, continued consideration should be given to the detailed study of
migrants from different countries living abroad. At the same time, researchers should pay special attention to gathering and preserving personal and institutional archives and eliciting oral histories from those who have experienced exile. The challenge will be to connect these microhistories and testimonies in systematic studies of the macrodynamics of exile, with greater emphasis on transnational political trends within Latin America.36

In conclusion, our objective has been to emphasize the urgent need to identify, collect, and make accessible the many resources that represent the experiences of Chileans in exile. We believe that the manifestations of Chilean exile are integral components for creating a more complete historical record of Chile during the 1973–1989 period. We also believe that the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos is the ideal body to take on this responsibility, and we look forward to exploring possibilities of collaborating with our Chilean colleagues in carrying out this important task.

NOTES
1. Memoria y Justicia.
6. “Violaciones al derecho a vivir en Chile.”
8. “Violaciones al derecho a vivir en Chile.”
11. Ibid., 29.
12. “Violaciones al derecho a vivir en Chile.”
13. Cobos and Sater, “Nueva Canción Chilena”; and “Chilean Folk Music.”
16. UNESCO, Memory of the World.
25. See García Márquez, La aventura de Miguel Littín.
29. “Búsqueda de material para el Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos de Chile,” Chilekommitte (blog). Sweden is the country with the largest population of Chilean exiles in Europe; Camacho Padilla, “La diáspora chilena,” 37.
32. Ibid.
34. Del Pozo Artigas, Exiliados, emigrados y retornados, 9–11.

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