Truth-Telling and Transitional Justice in Chile: Healing for Women Survivors of Trauma Through Testimonial Art Collectives

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Truth-Telling and Transitional Justice in Chile: Healing for Women Survivors of Trauma Through Testimonial Art Collectives

An Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Politics
Bates College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By
Olivia Snow Fried
Lewiston, Maine
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Abstract

This project focuses on transitional justice processes that utilize testimony and truth-telling to heal trauma and negative emotions after violent state conflict. Using Chile as a case study, I compare state-sponsored Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) to unofficial testimonial methods, such as women’s embroidery and tapestry groups. I find that TRCs further marginalize women by excluding their subjective experiences of suffering from official history, and by preventing cathartic reconciliation. I argue that Las Arpilleristas and Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria represent complementary transitional justice methods to TRCs as they transform emotional pain into political solutions through testimonial artwork. The collectives accomplish three objectives where TRCs fall short: First, they more effectively heal emotional wounds through feminine group solidarity and support. Second, they provide women an outlet for illustrating subjective experiences unaddressed by the state. Lastly, the collectives productively and strategically politicize mourning for the dead. Through centralizing trauma and healing as a crucial goal for transitioning states, my project challenges normative conceptions of how to establish truth and who we consider to be political actors in charge. I conclude that transitional justice should account for feminine healing strategies to provide a holistic model for how gender sensitive truth-telling forums should function.
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Introduction

On March 4th, 1991, President Patricio Aylwin, teary eyed and remorseful, delivered the findings from the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation to Chilean society. These findings, also known as the Rettig Report, would be the first time the state publicly recognized and took accountability for the gross human rights violations, disappearances, and killings conducted by the state during the military regime led by Augusto Pinochet. In his televised reading of the report, Alywin stated, “The rule of truth is the foundation of all coexistence...in the issue of human rights violations in our country, the truth was concealed for a very long time...The report I hereby present for public knowledge of the truth.”¹ Truth for Alywin, and for other societies transitioning out of violence, is of the utmost importance in order for nations to reconcile past abuses that resulted in emotional, psychological and physical harm of survivors.

Truth seeking and truth-telling in recent decades has become interchangeable with transitional justice politics. Scholarship has firmly established that a nation cannot establish sustainable peace without an acknowledgment of the past through truth-telling and testimonial forums. From the fall of Latin American military dictatorships in the 1980s, families of the dead and survivors have demanded for the discovery of truth about the nature of clandestine repression, and consequently states have oriented transitional justice politics toward these demands. Therefore, truth is imperative for the consolidation of democracy and has become a focal point in transitional justice studies.

Truth and Transitional Justice

Transitional justice scholars agree that truth is a fundamental prerequisite to sustainable peace for post-conflict countries. Robert Rotberg clearly expresses this sentiment:

If societies are to prevent recurrence of past atrocities and to cleanse themselves of the corrosive enduring effects of massive injuries to individuals and whole groups, societies must understand-- at the deepest level possible-- what occurred and why. In order to come fully to terms with their brutal pasts, they must uncover, in precise detail...the truth-- in so far as this aim is humanly and situationally possible after the fact.2

In Latin America, the importance of truth-seeking and truth-telling cannot be understated. The authoritarian regime model in the Southern Cone was marked with clandestine and covert repression. This took form in the literal disappearances of persons, and the denial by state officials to recognize the existence of those kidnapped. Consequently, the dissolution of the regime left society with debilitating questions about the whereabouts of their relatives. Families did not know if their loved ones were alive, and if they were not (which was usually the case), where their bodies remained. This type of repression is what leads Tristan Borer to note that families in Latin America need to know the truth about the atrocities committed by the state more so than in other regions. The dissolution of military regimes in Latin America has made it particularly necessary that states must deal with their past via truth-telling to “ensure a peaceful future.”3 As Roht-Arriaza points out, “in both Argentina and Chile, families and survivors want more than to know who was killed—they want to know who killed them, why, and where the

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body is buried. They want to recover the body and be able to bury their loved ones with
dignity.”

What Juan Méndez calls a right to truth was established on behalf of international
human rights organizations in the wake of Latin American democracy formation. This precedent
was promulgated by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in their statement,
“The duty to investigate facts...continues as long as there is uncertainty about the fate of the
person who disappeared...the state is obligated to use the means at its disposal” to uncover the
truths around the lives of those who disappeared. Truth then became recognized internationally
as an important facet of transitional justice. Diane Otenlincher discusses the impacts of a seminar
organized by the Aspen Institute in 1988 where human rights professionals met to discuss the
next steps for the newly forming democratic regimes. Early in the timeline of transitional justice,
scholars agreed that central to transitional justice was “establishing and acknowledging the truth
about past violations. Thus...human rights and other professional experts saw disclosure of the
truth about past abuses as a non-negotiable moral obligation of governments.”

Truth-telling in South America maintains a very different connotation than it does in the
United States. The word testimonio literally translates in Spanish to testimony, but it is
embedded within a history and context that delineates the word from the more legal

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4 Naomi Roht-Arriaza, "Truth Commissions and Amnesties in Latin America: The Second
5 Juan Méndez, Telling the truths: truth telling and peace building in post-conflict societies, ed.
Tristan Anne Borer, The Human Right to Truth, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame
Press, 2006), 119.
6 Méndez, Telling the truths: truth telling and peace building in post-conflict societies, 119.
7 Diane F. Orentlicher, "'Settling Accounts' Revisited: Reconciling Global Norms with Local
Agency," The International Journal of Transitional Justice 1, no. 1 (2007): 11,
https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijm010.
understandings of the word in the United States. According to Unnold, *testimonio* in the Southern Cone is an alternative representation of history, rooted in subjectivity of experience that “official” representations of history have silenced or denied.8 Testimonio provides trauma survivors with an alternative weapon of power during and in post-dictatorship settings: a claim to truth.9 Skladowska finds that by way of an:

explicit interplay between the factual and fictional, between aesthetic aspirations to literariness and scientific claims to objectivity...testimonio has consistently defied the critics by departing from a traditional system of assumptions about truth and falsity, history and fiction, science and literature.10

We can see testimonio in memoirs such as Tejas Verdes, in theater productions such as *Death and the Maiden*, and as it pertains to my project, artwork in women’s collectives such as embroideries and tapestries. Testimony is not just concerned with the aesthetic, it is concerned with the sincerity of lived experience while simultaneously recognizing the political potency of these experiences. Examining the narration of trauma via *testimonio* enhances an understanding of truth-telling models in Latin America because *testimonio* honors the sincerity of experience and suffering, and positions emotions as political by nature of the fact that *testimonio* challenges and redresses dominant history

**Truth and Trauma**

While the precedent of truth for nations transitioning away from violence was established decades ago, an analysis of the different types of mechanisms to reach truth continues to be lacking. Little research examines the operations and distinct goals that truth-telling mechanisms may have on overall reconciliation and peace efforts. The acknowledgement of truth can be

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8 Yvonne S. Unnold, *Representing the unrepresentable: literature of trauma under Pinochet in Chile*, vol. 3. (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).
9 Unnold, *Representing the unrepresentable: literature of trauma under Pinochet in Chile*, 3., 47.
10 As quoted in Unnold, 41.
useful to generate forgiveness, make appropriate reparations, and/or prosecute perpetrators with substantial evidence. However, I am interested in a very specific goal that does not often receive attention in scholarship as a pivotal objective in redressive politics. I look at the ways in which truth-telling mechanisms provide survivors a forum to heal emotional wounds and psychological trauma induced by the dictatorship. Therefore, my project examines truth-telling and testimonial processes implemented for transitioning countries that provides survivors a way to heal emotional pain.

Trauma is fundamentally related to truth-telling for post-conflict states. When violent regimes dissolve and sustainable peace is pursued, the state is left with an emotionally traumatized society. Moon argues that since the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), two truisms have gained credit in reshaping political solutions to violence. Firstly, post-conflict societies are left traumatized and require “therapeutic management if the conflict is to be ameliorated.”\(^{11}\) Secondly, states are responsible for attending to the psychiatric well-being of their citizens and nation as a whole.\(^{12}\) In this sense, the basis of the ability for states to govern by some transitioning states, “lies in their ability to lay national trauma at rest.”\(^{13}\) In fact, some authors cite traumatization as a source for stimulating a resurgence of violence if left unaddressed. Lumsden argues this point explicitly: in order to break “cycles” of violence, postwar social rehabilitation must attempt to reintegrate “the outer social world” with the “inner

\(^{12}\) Moon, "Healing Past Violence: Traumatic Assumptions and Therapeutic Interventions in War and Reconciliation," 72.
\(^{13}\) Moon, "Healing Past Violence: Traumatic Assumptions and Therapeutic Interventions in War and Reconciliation," 72.
psychological world” to overcome “the impact of trauma” that is in itself a cause of violence.\textsuperscript{14}

By citing resurgent violence in Rwanda and Burundi, he claims that psychosocial consequences of war, when left unaddressed, are transmitted intergenerationally, leading second generation groups to act upon emotional and psychological grievances. In order to prevent this resurgence, transitional justice periods must attempt to reconcile the material outside world and the intrapsychic world of individuals.\textsuperscript{15}

For Mendeloff, denied or non-existent access to testimonial forums for affected populations of violence prevents survivors from truly working through trauma.\textsuperscript{16} These findings are confirmed by more psychological approaches to trauma. Judith Herman, renowned psychologist, writes that the ultimate goal for survivors of trauma is putting the story, including imagery, emotionality, and intensity, into words. Remembering and recreating a trauma narrative about terrible events is a prerequisite to (re)establishing a “social order and for healing the individual victim.”\textsuperscript{17} In fact, testimony is inherently defined as both therapeutic and political, so that healing through testimony in transitional justice may still maintain overall political goals.

As Agger and Jensen note, testimony has a double connotation of containing “objective, judicial, public and political aspects as well as subjective, spiritual, cathartic and private aspects.”\textsuperscript{18} They conclude that testimony universally operates on both a private and political

\textsuperscript{15} Lumsden, "Breaking the Cycle of Violence," 382.
\textsuperscript{17} Judith Lewis Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}, Revis ed. (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 1.
level. This is particularly true in Chile where psychologists would use testimonial strategies with their traumatized clients both to heal therapeutically, as well as to denounce the regime.19 Healing through testimony is not merely cathartic and emotional; rather, testimony is inherently implicated within political redress because survivors’ testimonies are utilized toward political ends like denouncing the regime. We can conceptualize narrating trauma to heal as a political process with high stakes in transitional justice.

For trauma to be political rather than just psychological, scholars must recognize different approaches to the concept. When scholars talk about trauma as an individual pathological disorder, such as PTSD, they limit the possibility of using trauma as a source of transitional justice politics to reconcile suffering and loss on a national level. Thus, Zolkos calls for an understanding of trauma that moves away from an individual disorder to a collective and cultural condition.20 Erikson provides a definition of trauma that facilitates a compelling relationship to transitional justice. When states perform gross violations of human rights against its citizens, it serves as a “the blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community.”21 As a result, communal trauma has distinctive cultural effects and is not merely the sum of traumatic symptoms of affected individuals. This results in a sense of communal trauma, which is based on the assumption that “one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from

assemblies of traumatized persons.” Butler finds that we are all constituted politically by our shared capacity to be traumatized and experience loss. Therefore, when states transition out of conflict, traumatization occurs on a collective level. While trauma exists internally and subjectively, nationwide conflict results in a culture of negative emotions.

**TRCs and Trauma**

One way in which scholars have examined the potential for truth-telling potential to heal psychological wounds and emotional pain is through Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). The changing victim-centered approach within transitional justice has positioned TRCs as the most effective state-sponsored way to heal for trauma survivors. Argentina and Chile are recognized as the first countries to implement TRCs, and South Africa is often cited as an effective model for replication in other countries. TRCs represent one official way by which states use truth-telling and testimony to heal trauma and negative emotions.

Commissions are generally state-formed bodies set up to investigate the crimes of the past, acknowledge wrongdoings, promulgate information, and formulate a plan to prevent the recurrence of violence. On behalf of the commission, Hayner provides us with a holistic set of overarching goals of TRCs:

First, a truth commission is focused on the past. Second, it does not focus on just one event, but on the record of abuses over a period of time (often highlighting a few cases to demonstrate and describe patterns or large numbers of abuses). Third, a truth commission is a temporary body, generally concluding with the submission of a report. And finally, a truth commission is somehow officially sanctioned by the government (or by the opposition, where relevant) to investigate the past. This official sanction allows the commission more power, access to information and protection to undertake

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investigations, and increases the likelihood that its conclusions and recommendations will be given serious consideration.\textsuperscript{24}

Hayner later emphasizes public acknowledgment as part of this process. Unlike courts where their findings may be public but perhaps inaccessible, the reports from TRCs are often widely distributed. The report is meant for the public because human rights should not be private issues. Also, unlike courts, TRCs implement policy recommendations and reforms as a final element of the report, implementing reparation programs as essential in ‘moving forward.’\textsuperscript{25} Seguro notes that these bodies are very distinct from human rights commissions, which are set up to deal with current abuses, and also from domestic, foreign trials, and international trials where the goal is to collect specific evidence to name and prosecute perpetrators.\textsuperscript{26} As such, Seguro writes: “Although truth commissions are sanctioned by the government...they are not allowed to carry out criminal prosecutions because they are not a court of law. The goal is not to condemn the perpetrators of a crime...”\textsuperscript{27} Vallee further characterizes TRCs, stating that they do in fact maintain a “quasi-legal” status, not because they hold legal authority, but because the information they produce can later be used in other more affirmative legal settings such as trials or judicial courts.\textsuperscript{28} Because TRCs have strict limitations to not encroach on other forms of transitional justice and to appease conflicting parties in fragile transitioning states, the scope and

\textsuperscript{27} Chavez-Segura, "Can Truth Reconcile a Nation? Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Argentina and Chile: Lessons for Mexico: Can Truth Reconcile a Nation?," 229.
authority of TRCs and their specific procedures depend heavily on the political context of each state that deploys them.

TRCs in scholarship are often discussed as the most legitimate redress political initiative to confront trauma caused by violence. Debra Delaet notes that TRCs ideally serve three purposes in an effort to foster sustainable peace: (1) they create an authoritative record of the past to prevent recurrence, (2) they foster reconciliation among groups in conflict, and (3) they contribute to healing for victims who have endured violence at the hands of the state.\(^{29}\) Moon also finds that truth commissions, as one official transitional justice method, are the most visible enactment of a “therapeutic claim to political legitimacy.”\(^{30}\) Likewise, Martha Minow connects truth-telling and trauma to commissions by placing trauma alleviation as the main goal for transitioning societies. She argues that “If the goals of repairing human dignity, healing individuals, and mending societies after the trauma of mass atrocity are central, truth commissions offer features that are often more promising than prosecutions.”\(^{31}\) Consequently, TRCs cast the impacts of violence “in terms of trauma.”\(^{32}\) Hayner describes TRCs as an entirely victim-centered approach that takes testimony from a variety of people, reporting on a wide array of suffering.\(^{33}\) Survivors of trauma can express their feelings and talk about their traumatic


\(^{30}\) Moon, "Healing Past Violence: Traumatic Assumptions and Therapeutic Interventions in War and Reconciliation," 72.


experiences to the perpetrators, in an official setting. For many, this process of testifying in a hearing is the first sign of “acknowledgment by any state body that their claims are credible and that the atrocities were wrong.”\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, some scholars make compelling arguments to suggest that this transitional justice mechanism effectively works through trauma.

**Transitional Justice Politics Struggle with Trauma Redress**

Conversely, other authors doubt the viability of truth-telling mechanisms based in trauma alleviation as legitimate transitional justice solutions. This is because redress politics do not have the ability to work through emotional trauma and because truth-telling is not cathartic and can even retraumatize survivors.

According to Zolkos, the general discourse on transitional justice points to a logic of “all good things go together.”\textsuperscript{35} As such, the field constitutes mutually reinforcing aims such as accountability for crimes, reparations, commemoration, truth, forgiveness, policy change, and alleviation of trauma. For Leebaw, positioning healing from traumatization as an objective for transitioning societies can conflict with, and ultimately weaken, the benefits of other redressive goals.\textsuperscript{36} Mendeloff argues that conventional redress initiatives do not have the means to simultaneously reconcile survivor’s personal pain and suffering within national reconciliation on the whole. Thus, while states may set out to address the psychological wounds of their people,

\textsuperscript{34} Hayner, *Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity*, 16.
\textsuperscript{35} Zolkos, *Redressive politics and the nexus of trauma, transitional justice and reconciliation*, 164.
Mendeloff calls it “excessively optimistic” to believe the transitional justice can accomplish this responsibly. 37

For Hayner, transitional justice typically involves some sort of political compromise. As in the cases of El Salvador, South Africa and Chile, compromise resulted in forms of immunity from prosecution and a limited reach of the courts for trials. Consequently, survivors of trauma cannot, within the institutional limitations, achieve real catharsis. 38 Lazzara finds that the discourse surrounding transitional justice demonstrates that TRCs are “a convenient escape mechanism to avoid confronting traumatic and incendiary issues.” 39 He writes that legal justice is always partial, selective and insufficient in and of itself. To assign justice to the commissions closes off the possibilities of asking deeper questions about what constitutes justice in transitional periods. Lastly, according to Felman, a disjunction exists between corporeality and subjectivity of human suffering which means that experiences of grief, loss, mourning and trauma is “unintegratable” and “cannot be translated into legal [and political] consciousness and into legal [and political] idiom.” 40

Scholarship confirms these inadequacies within transitional justice specifically to TRCs. Edkins write that survivors of trauma do not have access to the resource of language that could effectively narrate their trauma because traumatic events are often incomprehensible and

37 Mendeloff, "Trauma and Vengeance: Assessing the Psychological and Emotional Effects of Post-Conflict Justice," 621.  
38 Hayner, Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity, 12-14.  
indescribable.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, Herman finds that even though narrating trauma is vital for healing, an active and empathic listener must be prepared to work through the trauma with the survivor, and a lack of one may result in retraumatization.\textsuperscript{42} Hayner argues that the commission is not an adequate listener due the lack of workers equipped in trauma resolution.\textsuperscript{43} Wilson also writes that TRCs prefer a forensic truth, one that is evidential and factual, rather than narrative truth, which is full of subjectivity and emotionality.\textsuperscript{44} For healing to occur, Herman tells us testimony should be more narrative based. According to some authors, trauma is a condition that is un-redressive and un-reconciliatory within the legal framework of TRCs.\textsuperscript{45}

Perhaps embodying the idea of political constraints within redress politics is the Chilean National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, also known as the Rettig Report. This was the first of two commissions deployed in Chile and was implemented in May of 1990, sixteen days after the inauguration of President Patricio Aylwin. The Rettig Report was created to investigate maximal cases-- disappearances and torture that resulted in death either by agents of the state or private actors killing for political motives. One reason for this limited mandate was the strained political context from which the commission was born. Alywin won the presidency by slightly above 50 percent of the vote. This narrow margin demonstrated how many still supported Pinochet and thus, would not support the findings of a commission that challenged his

\textsuperscript{41} Jenny Edkins, \textit{Trauma and the memory of politics} (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{42} Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}.
\textsuperscript{43} Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}.
\textsuperscript{44} Richard Wilson, \textit{The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa: legitimizing the post-apartheid state} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{45} Zolkos, \textit{Redressive politics and the nexus of trauma, transitional justice and reconciliation}, 179.
credibility and that of the army. This meant that transitioning to democracy needed to be done cautiously so as to appease the conflicting parties involved and prevent backsliding.

Importantly, the supreme court was still operated largely by Pinochet supporters. Therefore, Alywin decided to keep the courts and trials out of the commission (even with cases that held substantial incriminating evidence toward particular perpetrators). Alywin faced other structural constraints resulting from Pinochet’s maintained power after the plebiscite. For starters, Pinochet was still commander in chief of the army until 1998 and would later serve as senator for life. This meant that the army was protected for their participation in violence. Moreover, the amnesty law of 1978 implemented by Pinochet was upheld in the constitution and meant that those working for Pinochet who still remained in judicial and governmental positions after the plebiscite, had legal precedent for protection and impunity. These facts, coupled with the commission’s lack of subpoena power, meant that perpetrators could not be called out for their crimes.

Many authors suggest that the short term goals of the TRC were more geared towards political stability and consolidation; objectives that favored the normalization of civil-military relationships over the demands for truth and justice.\textsuperscript{46} Other scholars support this claim by emphasizing Alywin’s call for truth and justice \textit{en la medida de lo posible} (insofar as they were possible).\textsuperscript{47} The limited nature of the TRC have implications on its truth-telling and testimonial capabilities to reflect subjective pain and on its ability to heal survivors of trauma.

\textsuperscript{46} Anita Ferrara, \textit{Assessing the long-term impact of truth commissions: the Chilean truth and reconciliation commission in historical perspective} (London;New York:: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 88.
\textsuperscript{47} Lazzara, \textit{Justice and Its Remainders: Diamela Eltit's Puño y letra}, 89.
The Chilean state created a second commission entitled The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, also known as the Valech Report, in 2004. The intent of the report was to identify persons who suffered imprisonment and torture for political reasons, and to form recommendations for social repair. The report excluded temporary raids in poblaciones (allanamientos), torture cases that resulted in death (which was reserved for the Rettig’s mandate), and cases of torture that lacked proof of imprisonment. 27,255 people qualified under the mandate, and 94 percent of the people who testified were confirmed as victims of political imprisonment. 48 12.5 percent of prisoners were women, and 1 in 10 reported instances of rape. All women mentioned experiencing or witnessing sexual violation in some capacity. 49 Women came forward in the Valech Report as direct victims of the regime, which they were only allowed to do in the Rettig report as testifiers on behalf of their dead family members. First-person testimony had a strong emotional impact on Chilean society. 50 Like the Rettig Report, the Valech Report could not name perpetrators and could not turn over material to the courts. The archives within the report were given confidential status for 50 years. While some authors consider the report a huge step forward in transitional justice by firmly proving the systematic use of torture as state policy, many authors, including Anita Ferrara, agree that the prohibition of the report for the public represents a major setback. 51

My Project

49 Stern, Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006, 327.
50 Ferrara, Assessing the long-term impact of truth commissions: the Chilean truth and reconciliation commission in historical perspective, 176.
51 Ferrara, Assessing the long-term impact of truth commissions: the Chilean truth and reconciliation commission in historical perspective, 176.
People exit dictatorships traumatized and transitional justice politics should work to heal trauma. Yet, official transitional justice models that utilize truth-telling have mixed results of effectively addressing this goal. This logic leads to the larger question of my research project: How might trauma and healing serve as a focal point for transitional justice politics and how might different forms of truth-telling be used to reach this goal specifically for women survivors of trauma? My objective is to demonstrate that considering trauma within transitional justice should be essential and can promote healing, while still accomplishing greater reconciliatory and political goals. However, different truth-telling mechanisms are more effective at achieving healing for women survivors of trauma than others. Therefore, divergent understandings of testimonial processes must be considered and brought more centrally into post-conflict politics.

My project focuses on Chile as a case example and women as legitimate political actors. I examine Chile because of the extremely violent and repressive nature of the dictatorship. Augusto Pinochet’s authoritarian and highly militarized state is internationally recognized as one of the most brutal regimes in the world, making Chile’s transition to democracy a useful site to study the uses and consequences of different methods of truth that accomplish healing. I also study Chile as a lens for women’s role in politics because of the narrowly defined conceptions of femininity mandated by the state that resulted in systematic violence toward women. More importantly, I focus on the vibrant and prolific forms of resistance and memory work against the dictatorship that was led mostly by women. Lastly, I use Chile as my case example because of its utilization of testimony as vital to the healing process. TRCs, as they compare to the unique conception of testimonio, is vital to understanding other practices of truth-telling exercised in Chile that work to redefine our conceptions of what marks official political truth-telling mechanisms.
My project focuses on trauma and truth-telling through women. I wanted this project to center around women because women’s experiences of repression during dictatorships are distinct. In Chile, this was largely due to the fact that the state mandated rigid conceptions of femininity that placed women at the center of the family in apolitical positions implemented under a national security doctrine. Ideally, political responses to state violence in the post-atrocity period would distinguish between and redress the subjective experiences of women. Yet, often in the status quo women’s narratives are excluded in state understandings of what happened, and consequently, are excluded from official state narratives of violence or seen as second-hand to men’s victimhood. As scholarship suggests, women disproportionately felt the effects of Pinochet’s policies, yet the TRC’s strict definitions of victimhood prevented women from narrating their personal experiences within the official mechanism of transitional justice. For example, Zolkos observes that official redressive politics often exclude gendered forms of violence such as “socio-material hardships.” When it comes to torture and sexual violence, scholars also observe that women find it difficult to talk about sexual violence in front of commissions. Particularly in South Africa women “felt uncomfortable about exposing experiences of violence, particularly sexual violation, in public forums.”

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54 Zolkos, *Redressive politics and the nexus of trauma, transitional justice and reconciliation*, 177.
Moreover, I am interested in transitional justice rooted in women’s negative emotions and trauma because of the way in which women’s healing strategies reflect and translate into methods for cathartic truth-telling projects. As I demonstrate throughout the project, women’s interpretations of what it means to truly mourn the past while keeping alive memories of emotional pain reap huge political consequences. Women during the regime deployed unique strategies to resist and survive violence. For example, women utilized group solidarity and maternity during torture to provide empathetic support for those suffering and sold bordadoras (embroideries) from the detention camps and arpilleras (tapestries) from poblaciones to earn an income for their families suffering from disappearances, inequality and poverty. Psychological research supports that women often fare better in concentration camps as they invest emotional energy into the care of others through familial and reproductive ties. This translates into healing strategies later on as research tells us women heal best from all-women spaces of emotional support, empathy and solidarity. By modeling transitional justice solutions on modes of survival enacted by women, and informed by psychology about how women heal best, we can better envision gender sensitive truth-telling projects.

I examine three different truth-telling mechanisms that exemplify models for nations in transition. I examine TRCs because they represent a state-sponsored official testimonial forum. While there are some benefits to TRCs, I argue that, particularly when it comes to women and trauma, they are an adequate source of redress for survivors of the regime to narrate trauma and heal. I compare TRCs to two complementary truth-telling forums, Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria and Las Arpilleristas to argue that these groups accomplish what TRCs lack. Colectiva Bordadoras was created in 2016 by women political imprisonment survivors and ex-members of the communist party or the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR). The group works in
Valparaiso, Chile in the ex-cárcel, now a national site of memory. The group of women created these embroideries while they were political prisoners in Tres Álamos, a detention center in the outskirts of Santiago. Embroidering was originally an activity completed in the labor workshop as a way to make money for their families, yet quickly transformed into a site of communication, empathy, solidarity and organization against the regime. Years later, survivors gathered to continue the embroidering, this time, for greater political purposes. The art collective is a memory project dedicated to their disappeared compañeros/as. The artists weave images dedicated to the resistance, their pregnant compañeras who died in detention, and folkloric singers such as Victor Jara and Violeta Parra. I argue that this group provides women a space to interpret and heal their emotional pain through embroidering. The outcome of this healing process is a highly political piece of testimony that sheds light on the regime through subjectivity of their experiences. Conceptualizing testimony in this way demonstrates the potential for complementary truth-telling forums that prioritize healing, yet still maintain the political objectives of testimony.

*Arpilleras*, meaning burlap, were tapestries created out of grain sacks and different fabrics. They were made by women in poblaciones, or poor sectors, during the dictatorship through La Vicaría de Solidaridad as a way to mourn the losses of their male loved ones, earn an income for their family, and denounce the regime. While *arpilleras* on the surface often appear joyful and happy, they are highly political pieces of testimony that either implicitly or explicitly denounce the repression that detrimentally affected their everyday lives. *Arpilleras* were snuck out of the country and sold on the international market, which illustrated to the rest of the world the brutal living conditions under Pinochet’s regime. Now, *arpilleras* are still made by women in poor sectors of Chile as a way to continue the tradition of the craft while also continuing to
denounce state action. The arpilleras are still made by women who lived through the violence, and these members often create tapestries on behalf of the disappeared. Young women from the greater community participate in the workshops as well. They often use arpilleras as a platform to give testimony to their daily lives and contemporary political issues they feel are important.

Both of these art collectives demonstrate different truth-telling models that prioritize narrating subjectivity and emotions through a political process of healing. I argue that they represent gender sensitive complementary processes to work alongside state sponsored practices. While their products appear very similar, the groups operation, dynamics and objectives differ in essential ways that sheds light on the specific differences of truth-telling mechanisms for post-conflict politics that reconcile specific traumas and emotions.

**Methodology**

I conducted research for this project through a ten-day research trip in Valparaíso and Santiago, Chile. I conducted seven interviews in total: five with survivors of political imprisonment who had actively participated in some form of public testimony about their experiences and two with historians who work at national memory sites. I was put in contact with the five women through an academic advisor in Chile because they are active participants in memory work projects rooted in testimony. Three women I interviewed are members of Las Bordadoras and one was a member of Las Arpilleristas de la ex-clínica Santa Lucia. I asked the women around four to five questions to understand their experiences during the dictatorship, the ways they have practiced testimony in different forms after the dissolution of the regime, why they chose to do so, and what they viewed as the benefits. After engaging in a brief conversation about their current profession, I began each interview asking the women to explain the nature of the violence they experienced in the dictatorship. Without much prompting, each woman
commented a length about their connection with other women, through solidarity and empathy, as a means to survive and resist violence. Many also spoke about working in labor camps and creating *bordadoras* for their families on the outside. This site, for them, was a space of love and support as well as a space to continue organizing against the regime. I then asked them to speak about the ways that they have practiced truth-telling and testimony about their experiences. Importantly, my project was not originally oriented toward these two art collectives; I was originally interested in keeping the types of testimony open to anything (music, theater, memoirs etc.). Therefore, I asked openly about testimony, which prompted all of the women to speak about their respective involvement in the art collectives. For the women who were members of the collectives, I asked why they chose to participate in the group which usually opened up a greater conversation about healing and about a need for greater justice on behalf of their disappeared *compañeros/as*.

I also spent time analyzing different national sites of memory. While I did not have time to address memorialization of women’s experiences during the dictatorship, this had been an original goal of the project. In Santiago I visited the general cemetery, the Memorial to the Women Victims of Political Repression, the Museum of Human Rights and Memory, Londres 38 and Villa Grimaldi, which are ex-clandestine torture centers. In Valparaíso, I visited the ex-cárcel which was a prison and has now been transformed into a national site of memory, referred to as *Parque Cultural* or Cultural Park. The *Bordadoras* collective works in the ex-cárcel, therefore, I will be mentioning this site throughout the project. When I visited these sites, I was looking for ways in which women’s testimony informed how the site narrated women’s experiences during the dictatorship, as well as how women’s testimony shaped the physical design of the site.
Coupled with field research, I also examined short documentaries published on YouTube that discuss and highlight the work of the collectives. In Chapter 4, which discusses Las Bordadoras, I used two documentary videos. The first video is titled Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria Exposición Grávidas Mariposas Yo Soy, published on March 9th, 2018 by Parque Cultural de Valparaíso. This documentary highlights the inauguration of one particular exhibition dedicated to disappeared compañeras who died while pregnant. The documentary depicts each woman discussing a bit about their work, information about the women they chose to weave, and why they chose to weave their particular compañera. It also depicts women presenting their embroideries at the event, as well as the process of making their pieces prior at their weekly meetings. Much of my analysis in Chapter 4 that discusses the significance of the event is extracted from this video and the testimony given by each artist. Moreover, I use a short documentary titled Bordadoras por la Memoria de las Mujeres Luchadoras, published on March 9th, 2018 by Uplatetelevion. This video also highlights the same inauguration, though the interviews with the members focus less on the women they wove and more on the origins and purpose of the collective. The women speak to their incentive for joining the collective and their personal significance behind the work. It primarily features Walkiria Jorquera, whom I personally interviewed while in Chile.

For Chapter 5, which discusses Las Arpilleristas, I relied more heavily on media analysis. While María Alicia, who works in Santa Lucía, spoke profoundly about her personal experience with arpilleras, I explored media from different groups within the country to understand more about the unique functions nationally. I focused on primarily four videos. The first is a short documentary titled Arpilleristas de Lo Hermida Tesoros Humanos Vivos 2012, published on June 26, 2016 and created by Patrimonio Cultura. This video exhibits and interviews two original
arpilleristas from the población Lo Hermida, Patricia Hidalgo and María Madariaga. They discuss the history of the craft and their personal involvement. The next video I use is titled Retazos de Memoria, published on October 17, 2017 by Casa Cultural Kimun Mapu. This documentary focuses on a workshop led by Patricia Hidalgo and María Madariaga in Puerto Montt, a town in the south of Chile. This video was vital to my research because it shows community engagement by women who were not direct survivors of the regime’s violence. These women speak to the arpilleras diverse and complex functions. The video highlights women from Puerto Montt speaking about the significance behind their first pieces. Next, I focus on the Arpilleristas de la Pincoya which is a group that takes place in Huechuraba, a población outside of Santiago. I utilize two videos both published by La Municipalidad de Huechuraba in March of 2018. One video, titled Documental Arpilleras de la Pincoya depicts 4 women who are original arpilleristas in a family room working on their pieces. They take turns speaking to their reasons for making arpilleras, while discussing their work and the meaning behind it. Lastly, I use a documentary titled Patrimonio Vivo a las Arpilleristas de La Pincoya that depicts a community event to exhibit and sell the work of the arpilleristas. The event begins with speakers presenting the history and significance of the craft within the población, and proceeds by interviewing the women participants about their work. Therefore, my research primarily focuses on three arpillerista groups through field research and media analysis: Arpilleristas de la ex-clínica Santa Lucía, de la Pincoya and de lo Hermida.

Chapters

My project is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 explores the ways that women experienced violence and were traumatized by the dictatorship. Augusto Pinochet sought to re-establish a state order that was contaminated during the first ever democratically elected socialist
president, Salvador Allende’s, government. To enforce an order antithetical to Allende’s leftist deviancy, Pinochet enforced drastic social, moral, and economic reform that manifested in different violences affecting women. Chapter 1 breaks down three ways in which Pinochet’s policies and imposition of conservative and Catholic ideology within a national security doctrine generated rigid ideas about femininity that attacked women in the form of repression. I argue this in three forms: torture/sexual violence, economic neoliberal reform/ unemployment, and disappearances/indeterminate mourning. Chapter 1 establishes that women experienced multifaceted violence from the state that is largely rooted in ascribed roles of femininity, and consequently, left the dictatorship as survivors of trauma rooted in subjective experiences.

Chapter 2 focuses on the ways that women enact healing strategies to survive during acts of repression and violence. This sheds light on how these strategies do or do not manifest into official transitional justice methods. I turn to my field research to demonstrate the emotional support, maternity, and empathy deployed by women as ways to heal (or more productively, to survive) in detention centers and in poblaciones. After, I explore literature that points to trauma and negative emotions as the foundations of political solutions so as to envision ways that trauma can be central in transitional justice. Lastly, I end the chapter by examining the implications of mourning as a woman’s job. Women as productive mourners of the dead positions them as central actors in transitional justice that seeks to recognize the truths of the dead. Therefore, mourning can be reconceptualized as a political act carried out by women. Examining how women heal best during violence is useful because these strategies would reinvent themselves in the women-led art collectives to more effectively deal with negative emotions and subjective experiences.
Chapter 3 focuses on the TRCs, both generally and specifically to Chile, as they represent a state sponsored and official mechanism of truth-telling for nations in transition. This chapter works through a debate of whether TRCs can provide catharsis for survivors of trauma by narrating their experiences to the state, while also maintaining other political and reconciliatory goals. I explore authors that position TRCs as effective forums for healing and compare that to a strong scholarship that argues TRCs may actually worsen trauma. The chapter ends by examining whether TRCs can specifically heal women’s negative emotions and trauma. Scholarship tends to agree that women’s personal experiences are perceived as less important in this forum, and thus, TRCs do not adequately provide emotional redress. This chapter demonstrates a need for complementary truth processes within transitioning countries.

Chapter 4 and 5 propose complementary models of cathartic truth-telling for women who are survivors of trauma. Chapter 4 focuses of the Colectiva Bordadoras por La Memoria, an all-women’s art and memory collective formed by political imprisonment survivors in Valparaíso, Chile. Chapter 5 focuses on Las Arpilleristas, also an all-women’s art and memory collective in different poor sectors of Chile. The chapter largely focuses on three groups: Las Arpilleristas de lo Hermida, de la Pincoya and de la ex-clínica Santa Lucia. These groups demonstrate the continuity of women’s healing strategies because the same activities to resist and survive violence during the regime presented in Chapter 2 transform into political projects later on. Through interviews conducted during my field research and through an analysis of media published about these groups, I locate three benefits these models provide that accomplish what I argue state sponsored truth-telling mechanisms struggle to accomplish themselves. The projects provide emotional healing for women survivors of violence, they provide a physical platform (the tapestry or embroidery) to narrate subjective experiences often not addressed by official
forums, and they define mourning as political acts. This last benefit is key to the project because while these groups operate like all-women’s support groups, their processes of creating the craft and the physical craft itself, is a highly political process of investigation that results in denunciation of the past regime and current state policies. I argue that these models serve as complementary truth-telling practices for countries struggling to work through a violent past.

My conclusion examines these two models to delineate how each could be utilized within transitional justice politics for different contexts and settings. There are important distinctions between each group. For example, the *arpilleras* were made by women in *poblaciones* experiencing the hardship of poverty, hunger, unemployment etc., while *bordadoras* were made by women in political detention centers who were all tortured and sexually violated. These distinct foundations result in distinct operations and goals which means that these projects address trauma, violence and redress politics differently. Therefore, my conclusion breaks apart the collectives’ role in transitional justice politics to provide suggestions for what models of complementary truth-telling practices are more effective and appropriate given different circumstances.
Chapter 1: Repressive State Apparatus in Chile

My project positions trauma and healing as the basis for transitional justice methods through truth-telling. This concept rests on the idea that people leave dictatorships traumatized and that transitional justice methods should attempt to heal and reconcile trauma. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the ways in which Chilean women experienced violence and repression during the dictatorship that caused emotional pain, suffering, loss, and consequently trauma after the dissolution of the regime. I break down the repression tactics that impacted women into three main forms: torture/sexual violence, economic reform/poverty, and disappearances/indeterminate mourning for the dead. Delineating these forms of violence is important for my overall project because particular types of violence result in particular types of traumas; ultimately, this necessitates different methods of redress within transitional justice.

Gender and State-Imposed Social Order

The transition from Salvador Allende’s democratically elected socialist regime to Augusto Pinochet’s authoritarian right-wing regime resulted in an extreme shift in attitudes toward conceptions of gender. The goal of Pinochet’s regime was to reclaim order and stability after the scare of socialism had threatened Chile. The reclamation of order was multifaceted: it included political, economic and moral elements that worked together to define rigid notions of masculinity and femininity.

The coup of 1973 overthrew a legally constituted government and entailed the suspension of civil liberties and the systematic violation of human rights. Politically, the regime sought to eliminate all dissidence and popular political participation. To accomplish this aim, the state depoliticized and fragmented civil society so as to eliminate any organizing from oppositional groups. Pinochet declared other political parties illegal which closed off any possible avenue
between the regime and society. For those who still identified with or participated in parties or organizations for the left, the state deemed them subversive, and justified curtailing liberties via kidnapping, imprisonment, torture and sometimes murder on the basis of maintaining national security.

The regime also sought to remove all social activity, and so placed organizations and leadership positions in the hands of actors who would ideologically serve the regime’s best interests. This placement meant that people who were proponents of “modernization” through a neoliberal model dominated the state. By closing off other outlets of popular participation, the state eliminated groups that “articulate social identities” and sought to replace a culture of solidarity and community with “fear, conformism, and consumerism.” Becker finds that “one of the primary psychosocial and political effects of [the regime] was the establishment of a climate of terror . . . changes in social relations occurred that were absolutely alien to the individual and collective experience of the Chilean people.” Fear and paranoia, normally a defensive act, became a component of everyday life, as a frequent inhibitor in psychological processes and social interaction. Importantly, in the beginning of the regime, the state’s repressive apparatus was rampant, public, and unchecked. To consolidate tactics, the regime created the Nacional Intelligence Directorate or DINA in March of 1975. The DINA operated as secret police and was directly involved in the kidnapping of dissidents and torture in clandestine camps such as Londres 38 and Villa Grimaldi.

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56 Dandavati, The women's movement and the transition to democracy in Chile, 172., 40.
59 Dandavati, The women's movement and the transition to democracy in Chile, 172.
Socially, the state enforced rigid conceptions of gender to maintain a patriarchal order of domination. Despite the *Unidad Popular* (UP) frequently being critiqued for conflating gender with class and for not acknowledging that women need specific policy attention, the fact that women participated in leftism at all-- through communist student groups, within the UP itself, and through the militant Revolutionary Leftist Movement or MIR-- was enough for Pinochet to instate a new security doctrine that put women “back in their place.” Catholic and religious rhetoric was paramount in the discourse enforced by the Pinochet regime to restore order. Under the conservative and Catholic state the nuclear family re-emerged as the basis of society, returning women to more traditional and domestic roles. The family, because of its structure and strict roles, was a functional model to foster authoritarianism. Women were strategic allies to the state so long as they upheld moral purification of the family, and consequently, the country, referred to as the “Fatherland” or *La Patria.*\(^{60}\) By remaining obedient to the patriarch of the family, so too were women obedient to Pinochet, the father of the nation.

Women in Catholicism, modeled after the Virgin Mary, were assigned traits associated with “moral feminism:” submission, passivity and obedience. Conversely, men were regarded as “strong, independent and dominant… [and were] responsible for functioning in the public sphere, thus, participating actively in the political life of the country.”\(^{61}\) The regime strategically reinforced the placement of women at the center of the family, rendering them apolitical to maintain masculine order. By centering life on the heteronormative and highly binary Catholic family, the state was able to enforce national security from a micro to a macro scale.\(^{62}\) According

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\(^{60}\) Annie G. Dandavati, *Engendering democracy in Chile*, vol. 201. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 29.


\(^{62}\) Dandavati, *Engendering democracy in Chile*, 201., 28.
to Pinochet, Allende and Marxism promoted a queer egalitarianism that normalized sexual deviancy and impurity. Pinochet’s reconceptualization of masculinity and femininity in the dictatorship meant “eradicating traces in the country of any official sanction of non-reproductive sexuality—which under the UP had often came in the form of feminism and other gender politics...to make Chile a model of gender binaries and normative, reproductive sexualities.”

Giving birth was a mechanism by which Chilean women would seek veneration and reward within the dictatorship. Transforming into the “mother of god,” or Marianismo, women were charged with devoting themselves to the service of their family and home. This concept relates to the restoration and purification of the state, both within the family unit and within women themselves, as female sexual impulses could be transformed into Catholic values such as self-sacrifice, dedication to the home, and upholding morality by reproduction. This transformation assisted in eradicating ‘impure’ or non-binary conceptions of gender that threatened the security of Chile during Allende’s government. In other words, the military state used women’s reproductive capabilities as means of domination. The consequence of moral feminism and state purification on the lives of women was that it kept women in their homes as caretakers of their families rather than in positions of political power.

Alongside using “guardian of the fatherland” rhetoric to ensure women stay in the domestic sphere, the state also created all-women workshops to encourage women to improve their domestic performance as well as to work on charity and social services. Referred to as

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64 Dandavati, Engendering democracy in Chile, 201., 27.
*Centros de Madre* (Mothers’ centers), Dandavati notes that these organizations may have been dedicated to women and femininity, but “they were neither autonomous nor democratic. Instead they sought to reinforce a patriarchal order” by further ingraining dichotomies where women belong in apolitical spheres.⁶⁷ This represents another way in which the self-sacrificing, virtuous and patriarchal notions of womanhood were enforced by the state. As Pinochet once stated, “the more the woman is feminine, the more she is admirable.”⁶⁸

**Systematic Sexual Violence through Torture**

The first way in which women experienced loss and trauma in the dictatorship was through torture and sexual violence. The highly binary and patriarchal conception of gender, supported by rhetoric in Catholicism and manipulated by the regime, is important in the discussion of loss and trauma that women faced in the dictatorship as the conception shaped mechanisms of torture. As Elizabeth Jelin notes, the binary of gender is highly present in torture because torture is a physical extension of the military’s highly masculine power. As such, the masculinity of the torturers “reaffirmed itself in its absolute power to produce pain and suffering.”⁶⁹ Jean Franco, who writes about torture in the Southern Cone, notes accounts of “exaltation” and “god complexes” that form from male torturers exerting absolute dominance over the detained, even assigning names to male victims such as ‘tiger’ or ‘jaguar’ to make the occasion ceremonial.⁷⁰ Men in torture were made to ‘feel like women,’ through becoming aware of their bodies, and eventually submissive to the domination of their bodies, and consequently, of their agency and identity. Men in Chile were often ridiculed about their bodies, beaten and raped,

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⁶⁷ Dandavati, *Engendering democracy in Chile*, 201., 30.
which as Kaplan concludes, provoked the feelings of shame and humiliation that often led men to fail at resistance and fall to the dominant authority of the military.\textsuperscript{71}

While torture was used to “feminize” men, conversely, it was used as a way to “de-feminize” and overly sexualize women. As established above, women were considered pure, virtuous, and consequently “feminine” so long as they stayed within their domestic, apolitical sphere. This is why women who left their homes for the public and political sphere were particularly threatening to the order and national security of the regime. According to Mary Treacy, transgressive women were “inevitably condemned as ‘whores;’ who do not respect imposed social and physical boundaries [and are] seen as having an almost mythic impurity.”\textsuperscript{72} Agger notes that the “whore” deviant becomes an even greater threat to the state as she works to “defile” the purity (order) of the entire nation.\textsuperscript{73} Consequently, when torturers inflict violence upon women, they do so under conceptions that their victim is not a maternal women; rather, she is an overly sexualized, impure body working to also contaminate the state. Often, women were tortured in front of images of the Virgin Mary to serve as a symbolic reminder of their contamination.\textsuperscript{74} A dissident woman, through the perspective of the state and torturers, could never simultaneously “be conceptualized as a valued mother/nurturer...thus the military strips women of their most...valued social role and reduces them to the condition of what

\textsuperscript{73} Inger Agger, \textit{The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women : a psychosocial exploration} (London;New Jersey:: Zed Books, 1994), 71.
has been socially inscribed as monstrous: daughters who endanger parents, mothers who abandon their young, pregnant women who expel their fetuses.”

Women are uniquely susceptible to sexual violence because of what Agger calls the technology of the female body. Through a psychological exploration of prisoner refugees exiled in Denmark, Agger writes that while the goal of torture is to make the person “productive and submissive” these bodies have a gender and “in the political technology of torture gender differences are exploited...the political technology of the female body is different.” Because women’s bodies are inherently on display and objectified in patriarchal culture, this reality is magnified and exploited through torture as a way to remind women that after all, they are just sexual bodies. Agger finds that women dissidents “who dare enter male territory [to] become ‘public women’” are deprived of their political visibility by the system of making their sexuality and bodies their entire visibility. In torture, this takes the form of violence focused on female reproductive organs and ‘sexualized’ body parts. According to Diana Taylor in a discussion of repression in the Southern Cone, the “annihilation” of the public woman took form in the “systematic assault on the reproductive organs of all female prisoners held in captivity. Women were annihilated through a metonymic reduction to their sexual ‘parts’: wombs, vaginas, breasts.” Because ‘sexual’ body parts are so innately linked to intimacy and privacy, assault in this form can result in shame and humiliation, dishonoring a woman morally. Submission, therefore, comes about when a victim feels as though their body, the only thing that inherently

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75 Treacy, ”Double Binds: Latin American Women's Prison Memories,” 138.
76 Agger, The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women : a psychosocial exploration, 70.
77 Agger, The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women : a psychosocial exploration, 71.
belongs solely to them, is ‘owned’ and violated by someone else. This degradation of identity is confirmed by Agger who states:

> When aggression and sexuality are intertwined, it is especially difficult to maintain a psychological defence, particularly to defend yourself against the shame at being an accomplice to the forbidden deed; this can threaten the innermost, most central part of your identity. The widespread use of sexual assault against political prisoners can, therefore, be seen as an effective strategy if the aim is to break down a political opponent’s personal identity-- and thereby also her political identity.\(^\text{79}\)

Sexual violence was rampant during the dictatorship. Of the almost four thousand female ex-prisoners who gave testimony to The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report (also known as the Valech Report), every woman reported being raped, suffering sexual violence or otherwise witnessing sexual violence in some capacity.\(^\text{80}\) Moreover, the type of violence against women was particularly heinous and was applied arbitrarily regardless of age, physical state, or pregnancy status. It is widely reported that sexual violence against women included being raped while pregnant, beaten until a miscarriage occurred, gang raped, forced to have intercourse with family members, raped with objects, sexually abused with dogs and rats, and the application of electrodes applied to their genitals. These inhumane acts of sexual violence were obviously far beyond what was needed to extract information and breakdown prisoners; illustrating the vicious rage that torturers had toward politically active women who were defiant to state order.

**Torture, Sexual Violence, and Trauma**

Becker affirms that perpetrators do not only use torture against “subversives” only to extract information. Torturers also aim to destroy the individual as an opponent of the regime

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\(^\text{79}\) Agger, *The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women: a psychosocial exploration*, 8. 8

“by undermining the victim's will, affective ties, loyalties, beliefs, and physical and psychological integrity.”

The torturer embodies an extension of the repressive system which imposes onto the victim an impossible dilemma: “to let themselves be mistreated and exposed to intolerable pain with unforeseeable physical and psychological consequences, even death—or to "betray," to transform themselves into executioners of their own political beliefs and companions, delivering the latter to torture and perhaps death.”

In other words, being tortured places an impossible power into the victims’ hands. The victim must make the decision to endure abuse or to resist it; while enduring the abuse may save the person from more physical suffering or even death, it also destroys the fundamental aspects of identity, of the self and collectively, that gives meaning to life.

Ultimately, Becker et al. concludes that torture may place survivors in a “living dead” status where death becomes a part of their daily psychic life. Survivors may feel like they aren’t worthy of living, and thus, maintain continuous self-destruction.

Moreover, the shame and humiliation felt by women who have experienced sexual violence wreaks extreme psychological consequences. Agger and Jensen provide two useful concepts to understand the impacts of sexual violence on female survivor’s psyches: dissociation and victimization. Dissociation refers to the survivor’s relationship to herself while victimization refers to the survivor’s relationship to others. McCann and Pearlman define dissociation as a “cognitive disturbance that is characterized by an alteration of consciousness in which experiences and effects are not integrated into memory and awareness.”

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83 Becker et al., "Therapy with Victims of Political Repression in Chile: The Challenge of Social Reparation."
84 McCann and Pearlmen (1987) quoted in Agger, 12.
emphasize that the process of dissociation is a means of survival both during and after torture by establishing a partial disintegration, a splitting of oneself, in order to avoid anxiety that could lead to a total disintegration.\textsuperscript{85} Judith Herman further notes that the split within one’s identity is a result of attempting to reconcile the breach of emotional and bodily integrity. This ‘split’ refers to the inability to distinguish reality from unreality, the person the survivor was before and after the traumatic experience, emotional and physical states during and after torture, and a general confusion of reality and sense of self.\textsuperscript{86} Consequently, many survivors of sexual violence express feelings of self-hatred and disgust that prevent them from truly recovering or returning to who they were before the violations.

Conversely, victimization results in the alteration of relationships a survivor has with other people, particularly within intimate or personal spheres such as family members or significant others. Victimization profoundly alters survivors’ ideological perspectives and relationship to the world. Agger notes that victimization is a “moral death” that results when survivors are forced to betray personal beliefs or family members in order to escape pain.\textsuperscript{87} Moreover, Judith Herman helps outline the impacts of sexual trauma on relationships as she states, “[The violation] breaches the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. [It] shatters the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. [It] undermines the belief systems that give meaning to human experience.”\textsuperscript{88} As a result, women who experience sexual violence are more likely to experience intense obstacles in the

\textsuperscript{85} Weinstein and Lira (1990) quoted in Agger, 12.
\textsuperscript{86} Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}, 73.
\textsuperscript{87} Agger, \textit{The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women: a psychosocial exploration}, 12.
\textsuperscript{88} Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}, 51.
reconstruction of interpersonal relationships. Sexual violence through torture was perhaps the most explicit and intimate source of loss and trauma felt by women in the dictatorship.

**Economic Reform, Poblaciones, and the Feminization of Poverty**

While sexual violence through torture resulted in part from the state’s attempts to rebuild social/moral order, women also disproportionately experienced loss and trauma from the state’s attempts to rebuild economic order. During the first seven years of the dictatorship, the regime mostly focused on limiting opposition and promoting free market economic transformation which manifested in a drastic shift toward neoliberalism. This economic transformation was enforced by the regime to undo the harms of socialist policy imposed during the Allende era. Known as the “Chicago Boys,” Pinochet’s economic strategists wanted to change the import-substituting, nationalized, and highly regulated statist economy into an export-oriented, free market and highly privatized neoliberal economy. In theory, these reforms would make Chile seem enticing to international investment by stimulating growth; in practice, these reforms did augment growth but only by benefitting the middle and upper class and exacerbating inequality and distribution of wealth for the lower class.

The debt crisis of 1981-1982 heightened the marginalization of the poor as a result of the Chicago economic model. The reform’s call to open markets for trading export commodities and the borrowing of international loans made the state more vulnerable to international market fluctuations. While Chilean exports increased substantially, the prices for commodities, particularly minerals, simultaneously fell as international demand decreased. The state was not able to pay back loans and consequently, nearly all banks declared bankruptcy by 1983. The debt crisis drastically changed the quality of life for lower class poblaciones (shantytowns).
As Jo Fisher states, economic policies enforced by the state created unemployment, income inequality, poverty and “unprecedented misery” for a wide sector of Chilean society.\(^89\) Baldez quantifies that by 1983 unemployment had risen to 30% of the workforce at the national level, and 80% in the poorer sectors of Santiago (\emph{poblaciones}).\(^90\) This major recession had drastic consequences on the distribution of income. According to a study by Francisco Javier Labbé, the share of total income earned by the poorest Chileans (40 percent of the population) decreased from 12 percent in 1970-73 period to 9.3 percent in 1984. Meanwhile, the richest people of Chilean society (20 percent of the population), who held 50.5 percent of the total income, increased their share to 60.9 percent in 1984.\(^91\) \emph{Poblaciones}, the wide sector of society Fisher positions as the victims of economic reform, surrounded the capital and consisted of about 2 million people. Most of these people were living in \emph{allegados}, or shared rooms in houses. They often took the form of half-built concrete structures patched with iron or wooden planks that lacked piped water, street lights or sewage facilities and often contained poor health care (if existent at all) and minimal educational opportunities.\(^92\) Insufficient or non-existent social and health services offered to the \emph{poblaciones} were also exacerbated due to privatization of healthcare and cutting expenditures of social welfare projects. During the early years of the coup, the military enforced systematic kidnapping, imprisonment, and execution in these areas as they searched for leftists.\(^93\) Unlike middle class dissidents, the working class had nowhere to flee in exile and no means of protection.

\(^91\) Francisco Javier Labbé (1986: Santiago) quoted by María Elena Valenzuela, 168.  
Unemployment brought about by economic transformation altered gender relations of labor. Because unemployment largely displaced the male heads of households, many women were forced to enter into domestic labor or low-wage jobs. Between 1970 and 1982, the proportion of women heads of households increased by 4 percent overall, and the 1982 consensus demonstrates that in poor sectors, the percentage of women as heads of households, was about 40 percent. Dandavati describes this reversal of traditional gender roles and division of labor resulting from the hidden consequences of neo-liberal policy as the imposition of the double burden: women were still expected to run the home and the family, as well as partake in the labor force and support the family financially. According to Lucía Pardo, women who worked full time outside the home spent an additional thirty three hours a week on domestic tasks, working eighty-one hours a week total, or 69 percent above the legal level. This double burden of the female role resulted in a “considerable loss of self-confidence on the part of men stemmed from their perceived inability to provide for their wives and children.” This oftentimes led to increased rates of alcoholism, men abandoning the home, drug abuse, and domestic violence. Jo Fisher affirms these losses and hardships experienced by women in poverty.

In conditions of severe economic hardship, issues which had typically been the responsibility of the women—education, children’s health and feeding the family, suddenly took on vital importance in the community. Survival had become the main issue for millions of families and it was women, often burdened by demoralized, chronically unemployed husbands, who looked for ways to bridge the gap between basic needs of their families and their limited resources.

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95 Dandavati, Engendering democracy in Chile, 201., 40.
97 Dandavati, Engendering democracy in Chile, 201., 40.
98 Fisher, Out of the shadows: women, resistance and politics in South America, 28.
The absence of male presence was only exacerbated by the literal robbery of men from their homes to jails and camps. Lower class women experienced loss and grief by facing extreme poverty, disappearances of their loved ones, and general poor quality of life, bearing the intense responsibility of survival. Women were disproportionately affected by poverty because of the way in which the repressive apparatus attacked the private sphere of the home. This supports feminization of poverty theories which demonstrate that women face the weighty consequences of extreme poverty. Dandavati supports this idea because the authoritarian model of ascribed femininity resulted in Pinochet’s policies affecting women more than men.99

Importantly, poblaciones and general poverty was not formed as a result of the dictatorship. Poverty as a structural violence includes a long history of exploitation of the working class. Like for many Latin American countries, the beginning of the 20th century brought about economic expansion from foreign investment that increased capital accumulation in the domestic market. In Chile, the state consequently expanded in size and diversified production and functions. Urban society then demanded an increased workforce for manufacturing services, and consequently, a mass migration to urban centers occurred. Because of deficits in urban infrastructure and inadequacies in public housing policy, migrants experienced difficulty settling into their new lives.100 This meant that poverty took hold in the peripheries of cities, with settlers illegally occupying land. Poblaciones were prominent in the 1950s and the popularization of socialism in the 60s gave the peasants political power. The urban worker was Allende’s main group of support as he was focused on land distribution and worker’s

99 Dandavati, *The women's movement and the transition to democracy in Chile*, 172., 47.
100 Igor Goicovic Donoso and Evandro Lisboa Freire, ”The development of the popular movement and rise of the revolutionary left in Chile (1953-1978),” *Tempo e Argumento 7*, no. 16 (2015), https://doi.org/10.5965/2175180307162015329.
rights; yet, the socioeconomic policy of the military dictatorship “accentuated the social contradictions and annulled almost all of the accomplishments and gains achieved by the working class in the past.”

While the regime did exacerbate poverty in poor sectors that worsened the quality of life for pobladoras, the violence itself was largely structural. This distinction is important to my project because the resulting trauma was both specific to the regime’s repressive apparatus as well as a form of structural violence. Becker, a psychologist working in Chile during the dictatorship for survivors of trauma, writes that in psychological terms, “This implies that people's mental structures are marked by the historical experience of exploitation and insecurity dealing with the problems of basic subsistence, injustice and fear.” This results in a social pathology in the individual and the family marked by historical deprivation. Becker et al. finds that people living in poblaciones “have been doubly affected” by the dictatorship as they faced the brunt consequences of drastic neoliberal reform (such as unemployment, inequality, and disappearances), as well as a continuation of intensified poverty in their already poor neighborhoods. Distinguishing between structural violence and violence that results directly from repression will require different forms of redress and marks a significant distinction between the testimonial art collectives that I propose later in the project.

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102 Becker et al., "SUBJECTIVITY AND POLITICS: THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF EXTREME TRAUMATIZATION IN CHILE," 84.
Disappearances

Another means of repression that affected women during the dictatorship was the kidnapping of loved ones to prisons and clandestine torture centers. Later coined in protest and resistance movements as “Los Desaparecidos,” the disappeared became a symbol of the unique repressive apparatus Southern Cone dictatorships employed to inflict psychological harm. The disappearances occurred in Chile mostly in the early years of the regime, between 1973 and 1977. They largely targeted political and social leaders of the left, yet the regime often attacked anyone who was not in direct support of the junta, breeding a culture of fear. When envisioning the repression in the Southern Cone during the military dictatorships, often times the first symbolic image that comes to mind is the ubiquitous black and white photographs of lost loved ones. The photos were usually of young men and women, with captions begging questions such as donde están? or “where are they?” These images would later be used as symbolic resistance, demanding that the state take accountability for its atrocities and denying the state the ability to remove Los Desaparecidos from personal memory and national narrative. The plight of women activists, particularly mothers, attempting to uphold the memory and lives of their disappeared loved ones using motherly symbolism to deploy femininity as political resistance, is discussed directly in Chapter 2. Here, I briefly discuss the ways in which the concept of disappearances was a strategy enforced by the state to inflict psychological trauma and mourning on women, particularly mothers.

Jenny Edkins writes that disappearances are so profoundly hard to recover from due to the unfathomability of a missing person. She notes:

It is impossible to specify what it is that makes a person irreplaceable— it is not this or that characteristic that is missed, this or that function that is no longer performed, but something singular, something unfathomable: maybe even the person’s unfathomability
in relation to our own. The person cannot be pinned down: the person is missing. It is in a sense that very “missingness” that makes the person irreplaceable.103

Los Desaparecidos represented a corporeal loss experienced by families and communities in the dictatorship because of their inability to be replaced. The inconceivability of someone gone missing, Edkins notes, may result in a denial of the existence of that life in the first place: “People don’t just disappear, do they, so maybe they didn’t exist in the first place.”104 She concludes that the “terrible task” left to the family or community of preserving that person’s existence symbolically may consume their lives.105

Diana Taylor provides an interesting framework to examine the role of disappearances on trauma in the Southern Cone. She suggests that disappearances were used theatrically to terrorize the population—as such, the symbols of missing bodies were used as a public spectacle to inflict fear, paranoia and mourning on the rest of civil society. Missing bodies were then symbolic of the disintegration of society. Just as people started disappearing without explanation, fear and trauma so too “disappeared,” disintegrated, or broke down the fabric of society: “discursive absence led to empty streets and missing people, just as missing people and empty streets led to more discursive absence.”106 The disappeared were inherently objects of representation because they left no trace or evidence (their blood and flesh bodies); thus, conceptualizing the victims could only be done through representation such as images and icons. This almost fictitious conceptualization of absent people transformed disappearances into a particular type of trauma because it is more challenging for people to process and mourn their losses when they have no

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104 Edkins, Missing: persons and politics, 159.
105 Edkins, Missing: persons and politics, 159.
106 Taylor, Disappearing acts: spectacles of gender and nationalism in Argentina's "dirty war", x.
hard evidence to know if they have actually experienced loss. This, as Edkins suggests, has the potential to result in indeterminate mourning.

As Helen Leslie points out, the psychological attack of disappearances directly attacked women because, firstly, they discredited women from their role within the family and, secondly, presented women with obstacles to processing and healing their emotional pain. As established above, ascribed gender roles placed the Chilean mother at the center of the family as she was valued and venerated for her ability to protect and preserve her family. When a loved one goes missing from the family, it directly attacked a woman’s role as being a good wife and mother. Because the military invaded the private sphere that women had invested labor into nourishing and protecting, they became disempowered and delegitimized since they could do nothing to prevent the robberies of their loved ones.

Leslie further notes that disappearances also robbed women of the ability to truly mourn and process their traumas in the long term because disappearances inherently left behind too many unknowns to recover. As Leslie asserts, “By pursuing a form of ‘censorship of memory’ through the tactic of disappearance, the military also prevented the mourning that is necessary to remember and to valorize the actions of the disappeared.”

Therefore, while disappearances were a systematic mechanism to inflict psychological trauma on civil society, the trauma that resulted disproportionately affected the lives of women within the context of the dictatorship.

Becker was a psychologist during the dictatorship and provided services to mostly women who had lost loved ones and were experiencing immense psychological suffering. Becker et al. notes that the disappearances were a repressive tactics that specifically attacked the

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private sphere so as for victims to psychologically internalize terror. As we know, women largely operated within the private sphere. Consequently, Becker et al. finds that one way in which women interpreted the robbery and killing of their loved ones was by identifying themselves with death. Because of the “unanswerability” of the loss, identification with death for many was observed “in an explicit desire to die, development of…self-destructive behavior, the appearance of severe diseases such as cancer, and fantasies about death and about how the loved one died.”\textsuperscript{108} Moreover, Becker et al. affirms Leslie’s findings about the traumatic nature of indeterminate mourning. Because the mother did not know whether their loved one was really dead, they found themselves stuck in a dilemma: either to assume their death or more likely to “maintain hope of finding the loved one alive, imagining him or her in conditions of pain and torture, in a deplorable state, mentally disturbed, or having lost all memory.”\textsuperscript{109} Becker notes that mothers are stuck in a double bind: “If [they] choose to accept the death of the loved one, they "kill" him or her. If they choose to maintain hope, they deny their everyday experience of the loved one's absence.”\textsuperscript{110} Either outcome results in a “profoundly altered” grieving process and related “depressive symptomatologies,” further emphasizing the trauma intentionally enforced by the state as a repression tactic.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Becker et al., "SUBJECTIVITY AND POLITICS: THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF EXTREME TRAUMATIZATION IN CHILE," 89.
\textsuperscript{109} Becker et al., "Therapy with Victims of Political Repression in Chile: The Challenge of Social Reparation," 140.
\textsuperscript{110} Becker et al., "Therapy with Victims of Political Repression in Chile: The Challenge of Social Reparation," 140.
\textsuperscript{111} Becker et al., "Therapy with Victims of Political Repression in Chile: The Challenge of Social Reparation," 140.
Conclusion

This chapter provides important context for understanding the nature of loss and trauma experienced by women in the dictatorship. As demonstrated, women experienced loss and trauma through a repressive apparatus that violently infiltrated the private life. By exploiting gender in the highly militarized and masculine state, women experienced loss and trauma through sexual violence within torture. Moreover, women disproportionately experienced violence through directed and discriminate neoliberal reform which detrimentally altered their psychological well-being and quality of life. Lastly, women’s identities as mothers were harmed through the strategic use of disappearance as a way to cause indefinite psychological pain and mourning. Becker et al. concludes that the trauma women endured from the dictatorship was not a pathological illness in the way we conventionally conceive of trauma, but rather “they are suffering the consequences of terrible life experiences, which were not accidental but part of systematic governmental policy.”

This chapter has outlined the ways in which women left the dictatorship with debilitating emotional pain. As a result, states in transition are left with an emotionally wounded population that need adequate redress for healing to occur because, as I argue, healing from trauma is an essential element of post-atrocity politics. Understanding the multi-faceted ways in which women faced violence by the state is essential for the rest of my project because different types of violence result in subjective traumas and negative experiences that require different forms of redress. For example, women who are survivors of rape and torture may be looking for different redress than women in poblaciones who survived immense poverty and disappearances. The

question then becomes which forms of redress that utilize truth-telling and testimony most adequately deal with subjective negative emotions to productively allow for psychological healing?

Ultimately, different women experienced the dictatorship in deeply subjective and personal ways. This understanding is vital for my project because the subjectivity of experience and emotional pain lies at the root of testimony and truth-telling in post-atrocity politics. For many survivors, practicing truth-telling is a way to place their subjective experiences into a narrative form with political ends because testimony has cathartic and political implications. Understanding the nature of the wide array of experiences in the dictatorship heightens the correspondent responsibility states have to address the experiences. When I examine my proposed complimentary models of truth-telling, these distinctions will help shed light on why some groups’ goals and functions work better to address certain types of experiences and trauma.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the concept of healing more directly. Because healing implies working through intense negative emotions, healing within a political framework of transitional justice must require conceiving of emotions as a legitimate source of political action. This conception challenges the dominant and traditional discourse that emotions, seen as feminine and irrational, have no place in political solutions. Thus, Chapter 2 engages in scholarship and my field research to explore the ways in which both negative emotions and working through them have powerful political potential. I look to how women survivors heal best from emotional pain and trauma through strategies they deployed both within detention centers and in the immediate transition to democracy. I argue that the ways women heal from trauma may best inform gender sensitive truth-telling mechanisms.

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113 See Introduction.
Chapter 2: Healing from Violence

During the dictatorship, women lost their husbands, brothers and sons. They lost their bodily integrity and sense of self. They lost their health and quality of life, their dreams of leftist egalitarianism, and their ability to protect their families. These losses need to be worked through in a process of healing to truly reconcile emotionally injured nation.

My project focuses on healing as a basis for transitional justice methods that deploy truth-telling and testimony. In this chapter, I first focus on the ways that women enact healing strategies to survive during acts of repression and violence. This sheds light on how these strategies manifest (or not) into official transitional justice methods in the future. I turn to my field research to demonstrate the emotional support, maternity, and empathy deployed by women as ways to heal (or more productively, to survive) in detention centers and in poblaciones. After, I explore literature that places trauma and negative emotions as the foundation of political solutions to talk about the ways to lead transitional justice with emotions to more effectively heal trauma. Lastly, I end the chapter by examining the implications of mourning as a woman’s job. We can think of mourning as an extension of healing because it is a way to work through the pain that results when a loved one dies. Women as productive mourners of the dead positions them as central actors in transitional justice that seeks to recognize the truth about the dead. Therefore, mourning can be reconceptualized as a political act carried out by women.

Feminine Survival Strategies

a. Scholarship

Many authors find that women in trauma-invoking circumstances benefit from group emotional investment in support for survival. Jelin observes the reconstruction of maternal relationships to better endure traumatic situations. She writes that operating under normative
gender roles, women are more likely to process their experiences linked to reproductive events and familial ties as their identity is centered around being nurturers and caregivers, as opposed to men, who process experiences more factually.114 As such, normative conceptions of femininity often reinvent themselves in torture centers as women work to re-create social and familial bonds. She points out that women often ‘fare better’ in concentration camps as their emotional labor is often invested in other people rather than themselves, providing support and encouragement and using motherhood as a mechanism for survival. This is further evidenced by Mary Treacy who highlights female communal healing during torture. Women recreate a sense of community and solidarity within the centers, which Treacy notes: “[defies] the guards’ attempts to isolate and deceive individual prisoners, caring for others also allows prisoners to maintain their humanity and therefore to triumph, no matter how harsh their circumstance...”115

Inger Agger interviewed women political exiles in Denmark. One anonymous woman spoke to this theme of healing as survival in all women’s detention centers. She states:

We were...women who had all been subjected to...the same things. So we talked a lot about what we had experienced, because we all shared it…. We talked a lot, and we laughed a lot, even though that might sound a bit strange. It was as if we could make all the horrible things we had experienced meaningless, because we could see them from above...we talked a lot about sexuality, because they mostly used sexual violence ....I believe what helped most of us best was the ‘gossip therapy’ we had in the concentration camp...we could speak openly with each other...that was the best therapy I received.116

This anonymous testimony speaks profoundly to the emotional resiliency of women. It demonstrates the tendency women have to empathize, support, and communicate with one another in unimaginably cruel circumstances. Not only is this a method of survival, to make

114 Jelin, Rein, and Godoy-Anativia, State repression and the labors of memory, 135.
inhumane conditions a bit more livable, but these interactions also prove to be immensely cathartic, even referring to these gossip sessions as ‘the best’ therapy.

Importantly, these findings are consistent with more psychological approaches to healing for women. In a study on trauma and healing strategies for women, Vanja Stenius and Bonita Veysey examine which strategies are effective for alleviating trauma and which do not for women survivors of interpersonal, physical, and sexual violence. According to their findings, “women only support groups” and “shared experience and empathy” were the two most effective ways to work through trauma. In fact, 90% of their participants highlighted this importance.\textsuperscript{117} According to the study: “Mutual sharing is central to these interactions. Just as women find it helpful when someone listens to them, listening to others talk about their experiences aids in healing.”\textsuperscript{118} The study argues that women healing from trauma is not so much what people do but how they do it. In other ways, spaces and group dynamics yield better results than do direct service therapeutic intervention. The study concludes:

> Relationships are key to women’s recovery and healing. Women value individuals who listen without judging or blaming and who validate their experiences...women feel that peers are crucial because of the empathy between them and ability to share stories, problems, and solutions with each other.\textsuperscript{119}

Psychological findings confirm that women, when working through emotional pain and trauma, do so by employing communication (and listening), empathy, and solidarity to create spaces of support.

\textsuperscript{118} Stenius and Veysey, ""Its the Little Things": Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing," 1170.
\textsuperscript{119} Stenius and Veysey, ""Its the Little Things": Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing," 1171.
Recognizing that women tend to heal from trauma in particular ways is important to my project because these methods should ideally be replicated in transitional justice models if they are to effectively place alleviation of women’s psychological wounds as a tenet goal. These findings should inform truth-telling mechanisms to be gender sensitive for women who leave dictatorships with grief, loss, and overwhelming negative emotions.

b. Field Research

My field research validates political and psychological approaches to understanding women and healing. During my field research in Chile, every woman I interviewed commented on solidarity, emotional fluency, and maternal support in prisons and detention centers as a way to heal and survive. Carena Perez, a university student at the time of the coup, was detained in Villa Grimaldi in 1975 for her leftist ideals. She recounted that her first contact with any other person during her time in the detention center was when she shared one large cell with many women. She, like many others, was placed in Villa Grimaldi originally in solitary confinement, but moved to a cell that fit 28-30 other women. Even now, the script provided at Villa Grimaldi (now a national site of memory) emphasizes that this drastically shaped their experiences. Despite torture, sexual violence, and interrogation each woman I interviewed held in Villa Grimaldi mentioned, she marks this experience as being full of “love and solidarity.” She talked in great detail about the experience of being placed in the presence of other women after being tortured, explaining to me that despite difference in background and politics, the collective suffering resulted in a love that encouraged survival. She stated, “every time someone arrived from being tortured, the others immediately tried to embrace them, to make them feel better, to provide care, to cure the wounds, [there was] a lot of emotional and physical support.” Carena also noted gendered differences within the camps. She described how when she and her
Compañeras were sexually violated by DINA officials, they “had to” recount the details of what happened to them as a way to heal and support one another. There was an imperative to do so, it was necessary for many of the women to continue surviving. Conversely, she knows of men who were also raped by the DINA who never talked about it. “Women are fortunate with our ability to be more extroverted than most men, to be able to talk in this way.” Communication, particularly of subjects such as sexual violence, as suggested by Carena, is an undeniably “feminine” characteristic that in this case, helped women in a collective fight for survival.

Walkiria Jorquera now works as a social worker for women and children in poor sectors. During the dictatorship, she was a MIRista and active fighter against the dictatorship. She was sent to Villa Grimaldi for two months and later transferred to Tres Álamos. Walkiria also experienced torture in Villa Grimaldi. She told me that she felt very strongly about the issue of women and solidarity, particularly during times of torture. She states: “after the torture they took us to a room where they left us lying and the guards left. Immediately... the other women approached, the other compañeras, to say hello, to hug us, to see how we were and that was tremendously comforting.” Thus, group solidarity, empathy and emotional support was clearly vital for survival and utilized frequently among women. Villa Grimaldi is an interesting site of inquiry because women shared cells with one another and directly witnessed the torturing and emotional suffering of their compañeras.

Maternity played an important role for women experiencing violence and repression. Alicia Zuniga was the daughter of a leftist family and union worker father. She entered into university to study law and eventually became part of the communist youth militants. After the coup, she began denouncing the regime, and like many of her compañeras, was taken to Cuartel Silva Palma, a prison in Valparaíso. Unlike Villa Grimaldi, the prisons held women for a variety
of reasons ranging from leftist activity to prostitution, theft, or “family drama.” Despite these differences, she noted at length the capacity for these women to relate to each other because of their shared experiences of violence and repression. Empathy and communication were key to perseverance. According to Alicia, “we listened, we empathized from the perspective of women with their own dramas, from women very marginalized from society.” Interestingly, Zuniga noted a literal reconstruction of familial bonds within the prison. She talked fondly about one woman who shared her cell, a brothel owner, who was much older than her and became a mother figure to her during her time in the prison. She recounted how the older women helped the younger ones “avoid difficult situations because the identity of women is one of solidarity.” She described that when older women arrived at the prisons, “they taught us to sew to create a new type of space, it was something positive in the stressful situation.”

Additionally, for Carena Perez, collective motherhood created positivity amidst unimaginably inhumane treatment. After Villa Grimaldi, Perez was held in Tres Álamos where she experienced torture. While she emphasized that the place had an utter lack of respect for humanity, she found positivity in the situation through collective motherhood. She remarked that she felt fortunate to help raise the children that were born in the centers as she was partaking in a “collective maternity” (maternidad colectiva). She described to me the ways in which the women all supported the mothers: “We took turns taking care of the babies, cleaning the diapers, so that the mothers could participate in the activities of the camp because there were many activities inside.” While Perez also experienced despicable acts of human violence in the centers, she beamed talking about what she remembered fondly from the experience: maternal connection.
As my field research suggests, often times when women are placed in violent circumstances, empathy, communication and solidary aid survival and preempt a long process of healing ahead.

**C. Field Research: Surviving Turned Political**

More than just a way to survive and begin healing, every woman I interviewed mentioned the political aspect of their acts. Carena Perez described singing as part of the daily routine in Tres Álamos. This was in part to bond with other women in the center, but also a way to resist the authority of the guards. For Carena, singing in front of the guards demonstrated that “we are intact, that we are alive, that we are full of life, that we have the capacity to laugh and sing.” Agger also talks about how presenting yourself as human to those who try to dehumanize you is a small yet powerful mode of resistance. Moreover, the songs the women decided to sing were chosen with intention and meaning. They would often sing a Mexican love song titled “I will not return” (no volveré) but reassigned meaning to the song to signify that they would not return to the prison and to a place that has caused them so much pain. This is politically significant for the women detainees because they were not permitted to sing songs of protest in the centers; thus, the act was an implicit but powerful way to resist. She also personally wrote poetry during her time in Tres Álamos to maintain dignity by resisting the degrading nature of prison life. More explicitly, Walkiria Jorquera expressed that during her time in Tres Álamos, her political party continued organizing against the dictatorship by narrating their experiences of repression to one another as a way to collect data against the dictatorship.

This data collection most notably occurred in Villa Grimaldi, importantly, led by women. Cinthia Vargas is a historian who works at different national sites of memory and focuses her research on women’s testimonies. We walked together through Villa Grimaldi and took a long
pause in front of the replica of the women’s cell. The curated board next to the cell briefly used testimony to highlight women’s resistance. For example, it does mention solidarity in the cell and the ability for women to see the kidnapped men marching in the camp through a tiny window. This is important for organizing because in Villa Grimaldi detainees were always blindfolded so long as you were outside of the cells. Yet, the script of the memory site would not begin to cover the full extent to which women were organizing against the regime in the camp. As such, Cinthia provided important details to demonstrate the reality of women’s work. As Cinthia relayed to me in the memory site, the women’s cell was right next to the torture room. This was important because women were able to hear the sounds of torture of their compañeros and compañeras. While this was originally meant to serve as psychological torture against women by being forced to listen to the screams, women took this as an opportunity to strategize against the DINA. According to Vargas, they would take turns listening while their compañeros/as were being tortured to know the details of what had happened: how long it lasted for, what type of tactics they used against the person, etc. In doing so, according to Cinthia, “they invented the story that was coherent with what they were listening to.” Thus, the women’s abilities to listen, verbalize and continue organizing had important political implications for organizing resistance on behalf of their disappeared compañeros/as later on.

Moreover, the women’s cell contained a small window that the DINA had neglected to paint over. Cinthia talked at length about how this minute detail became immensely important in organizational efforts in the camp by women. According to Cinthia, women would take turns peering through the small window to gain information about the center, which at the time, was clandestine and unknown to the general public. For example, from the view the women had through the window, they could see their male compañeros lined up to enter the bathroom. This
was useful because they could note which *compañeros* were also at the center and memorize their names as a way to collect data for more official data collection later. According to Cinthia, women in Villa Grimaldi, because of the small window in their cell, were able to tell names of the disappeared to organizations and judicial hearings after the dissolution of the regime.

Even outside of Villa Grimaldi, Steven Stern outlines women healing strategies turned political acts of resistance in a greater Chilean context. Erika Henning was a member of the Young Communists and later joined the MIR. Erika and her partner were captured and tortured in Londres 38, a clandestine torture house in the center of Santiago. Later, she was exiled to France and returned to Chile in 1989. When she returned, Erika and other women prisoners would meet in an informal setting to talk and be together. They were described by Stern as a “space for sociability and affection among those who shared an extreme experience incomprehensible to others.”

At first, the chats were affective and informal, drinking tea, chatting about their experiences in exile and the places they had been detained together. After some time, they realized that these memories were important politically. “Then we remembered this prisoner. So, suddenly it occurs to us that...why don’t we give meaning to these memories?” This is how the *Grupo de Testigos Sobrevivientes* (Group of Survivor-Witness) began. Implicated with a new found political agenda, the group “set up witness work groups, torture house by torture house, to develop a precise record of information: specific dates, prisoner names, names of nicknames of torturers, and events.” This group became most politically salient during the Rettig commission as the commission was able to cross check testimonies with the group’s well-established database. Therefore, healing and survival strategies deployed by

women in the centers and camps transferred into the political sphere as a source of truth-telling against the regime. Evidently, feminine healing spaces contain a certain political viability that is useful in transitional justice politics. This is the basis for my analysis of two complementary transitional justice groups in Chapter 4 and 5: Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria and Las Arpilleristas.

Is Trauma Political?

I argue that transitional justice solutions must account for trauma and healing as they are essential to addressing and reconciling the impacts of state violence. People experience immense emotional and physical pain in dictatorships and are ultimately left in the transitional period as traumatized. While some authors struggle to imagine political solutions grounded in negative emotions, my project demonstrates that negative emotions maintain vital stakes in transitional justice. This section explores literature that places trauma at the center of political solutions to examine its efficacy as the basis for redress solutions. But first, I will define trauma, because as some authors suggest, the definition inherently positions trauma as political.

Scholars define trauma as something incomprehensible that cannot easily be located within frameworks that define ordinary social order. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge…”122 She notes that, unlike loss, trauma is not experienced as it occurs, it is only realized later in connection to other people, places and times. Because “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology or simple illness of a wounded psyche…” she notes that trauma is a story… “of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in attempt to tell us of a

reality or truth that is not otherwise available.”123 Caruth concludes that because trauma is something seemingly incomprehensible, working through trauma is a process of history formation to try to make sense of the events, that history is grasped in the “inaccessibility of its occurrence.”124 For Jenny Edkins, trauma results from the betrayal of trust and “takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors…”125 Like Caruth, Edkins describes trauma as an inability to fit one’s experiences within the existing social order (family, friends, political community and beliefs) that gives existence meaning and dignity.

While loss and trauma, and the inability to make sense of these experiences seem grievous, we can conceive of them as hopeful when we realize that the incomprehensibility of trauma means that to make sense of it, we must work through it. History-making, as a means to work through, leaves open the ability to induce a relationship between the past and present, between the dead and living, to keep alive the future as a product of pain and loss. According to Walter Benjamin, “to mourn the remains of the past hopefully is to establish an active and open relationship with history.”126 In order to understand that trauma and loss can be politicized, we must first understand that trauma is not an end in and of itself; rather, it is just the beginning of a process of transformation. When these intense feelings are kept alive, Eng and Kazanjian write: “This engagement generates new sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future...” that while the twentieth century “resounds with catastrophic losses of bodies, spaces, and ideals, psychic and material practices of loss and its

125 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*, 4.
remains are productive for history and for politics.”

This allows us to orient our thinking of trauma and loss as transformation from solely private and internal to something potentially public and political.

Judith Butler affirms Jedkin’s argument that trauma inherently implicates other people. She further contends that because everyone experiences loss, we are all constituted politically by virtue of our loss and vulnerability. She claims that we think of loss as collective and communal because our identities form in relationship to other people; thus, when we lose people we simultaneously lose bits of ourselves: Butler asks, “Who am I, without you?...what I have lost in you...is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related.”

Because we are constituted by our relationships to others, while many think trauma is privatizing and apolitical, Butler argues that trauma furnishes a “political community of complex order...by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.”

Erikson provides a definition of trauma that further facilitates a compelling relationship to political solutions. When states perform gross violations of human rights against its citizens, it serves as a “the blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community.”

As a result, communal trauma has distinctive cultural effects and is exclusive to the sum of traumatic symptoms of affected individuals. This results in a sense of communal trauma, which is based on the assumption that “one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from

assemblies of traumatized persons.”¹³¹ According to Butler and Erikson, we can read trauma as an inevitable source of politics by nature of the fact that people, who all go through loss and are members of interdependent communities, affirm their relationality through their political and social lives. Survivors identifying their sufferings as a collective experience is a necessary impetus to social transformation after periods of violence because, as Butler so aptly puts it, “Let’s face it. We are undone by each other. And if we’re not, we are missing something.”¹³²

To be “undone” by others’ stories of trauma and loss is to practice empathy and to be vulnerable. Judith Butler writes that vulnerability perhaps lies at the root of political solutions to personal loss and traumas. Because we all have bodies that are both exposed to violence and can also be used as instruments to promote violence, we are all implicated in bodies and lives that are not entirely our own, that are contingent on the gaze, touch, and decisions of others. She notes: “To the extent that we commit violence, we are... putting the other at risk, causing the other damage... In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of the bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere we cannot preempt.”¹³³ Consequently, she writes that mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as a denial of this vulnerability...can fuel the instruments of war...we must attend to it, even abide by it [to think about] what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself.¹³⁴

Butler invites us to imagine political spaces centered around vulnerability as a procedural way to deal with and work through trauma, loss, and the negative emotions that result.

¹³¹ Erikson, Notes on Trauma and Community, 183.
¹³² Butler, Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence, 12.
¹³³ Butler, Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence, 29.
¹³⁴ Butler, Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence, 29.
LaCapra and Moglen’s work provide interesting conditions for talking about trauma and healing within a political framework. Because trauma is a misplaced experience, LaCapra contributes to parsing out the logistics of working through trauma via politics. LaCapra writes that we tend to think of resolving anger, loss, and grief in uniform relationships between self and order, the individual and the community, citizens and the state, consequently, we ignore greater cultural and political influences. He breaks apart the terms “loss” and “trauma” to further call for greater historical specificity when analyzing psychic agency on political responses. He notes that when we think of loss, we understand it as something that we can replace. However, sometimes events cause grief and mourning that did not result in a direct loss. He calls this “absence” which unlike loss, was something we never had and thus cannot be replaced. This leads Lacapra to a second distinction: “historical trauma” which results in loss and “transhistorical trauma” which results in absence. Transhistorical trauma, a form of structural trauma, leads to absence because it is constitutive of one’s existence. Conversely, historical trauma is related to specific events that result in a loss. It is important to make these distinctions, according to LaCapra, because if we equate structural trauma to historical trauma and consequently, absence to loss, we misinterpret the ways in which political responses can work through the emotional pain. For example, not everyone experiences historical trauma whereas everyone is subject to structural trauma. Political responses need specificity and context.

LaCapra’s contributions are relevant to understanding the losses and trauma faced by Chilean women during the dictatorship because survivors of the dictatorship faced unique losses as a result of Pinochet’s regime. Though importantly, they also faced absence as a result of

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structural violence present before the regime. Women who experienced sexual violence during the dictatorship needed to reconcile with the actual violation (historical trauma) as well as reconcile continuing to live in a world dominated by patriarchal notions of gender and misogyny (structural trauma) that results in the perpetuation of sexual violence. Moreover, people in Chile who experienced unemployment from the drastic neoliberal model experienced loss from the historical trauma of the dictatorship. Yet, people in poblaciones experienced poverty and inequality before the dictatorship, therefore, suffering in this regard is also an absence resulting from structural violence of poverty. Psychologists Becker et al. explains in their study of extreme traumatization in Chile that they define the psychopathology of their patients within two categories: structural violence and political repression. This is because they attempt to conceptualize psychic damage as consequence of “sociopolitical phenomena of repression” that is articulated between the “microsocial and the macrosocial levels.”

This distinction will be useful in my evaluation of how different forms of transitional justice through truth-telling address historical versus structural violence because holistic healing should ideally to address both forms of violence.

Seth Moglen demonstrates that LaCapra’s findings can be used as a source of collective political action. Moglen argues that we need to interpret trauma and the mourning that results as a triadic model rather than dyadic to understand how people come together to understand and formulate their emotional pain. A dyadic model defines the process of mourning as a relationship between the mourner and the lost object; the triadic model opens up the process of mourning to include the mourner, the lost object and the social forces that have destroyed the object or made

\[136\] Becker et al., "SUBJECTIVITY AND POLITICS: THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF EXTREME TRAUMATIZATION IN CHILE," 81.
it unavailable. By demanding that we identify the social forces that have produced grief, “it holds open the possibility that the bereaved may indeed—and, in some cases, should—feel rage at those social processes or formations.” According to Moglen, this recognition is vital in mourning processes because if survivors of violence do not recognize that there are social forces to blame for their grievances they are at risk of directing intense emotions resulting from loss (self-hatred, guilt, rage etc.) inward. If we analyze social traumas within the larger triadic framework, we can better understand what it might mean to remediate them. Victims of collective violence must isolate the causes of their suffering so as to make them “cognitively intelligible;” thus, developing narratives that productively direct their rage.

This is relevant to my project because transitional justice methods that aim to heal trauma and negative emotions are direct ways for survivors to recognize the social forces at fault. For example, TRCs would ideally allow survivors to see themselves as victims to the state’s abuses as opposed to seeing themselves as the cause of their own pain. For survivors to heal, transitional justice methods should demonstrate to survivors the social forces at play that caused their pain. Moglen and LaCapra help us understand healing potential in TRCs for the survivors of trauma in Chapter 3.

The reorientation of politics toward creating spaces where emotionality is not only important, but essential for working through trauma, is undoubtedly related to femininity and healing. As I have demonstrated above, women have a unique position to enter into these spaces because emotionality, communication, and vulnerability are often practiced by women in violent or repressive circumstances to survive, resist and heal. Moreover, psychological research tells us

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these qualities aid women in a healing process after the traumatic experience ends. Dovile Budryte describes dealing with trauma through politics as a sort of ‘politics of emotion,’ or even sometimes called ‘irrational politics,’ which sounds antithetical to the way we normally conceive of politics.\footnote{Dovilė Budrytė, "Experiences of Collective Trauma and Political Activism: A Study of Women 'Agents of Memory' in Post-Soviet Lithuania," \textit{Journal of Baltic Studies} 41, no. 3 (2010): 335, https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2010.498191.} Grief, rage, shame and regret (emotional reactions to trauma and loss) are often thought of as negative qualities, and are perceived of as apolitical and counterproductive. When we orient politics to productively engage with trauma through emotionality and vulnerability we transform our understanding of intense emotions “as productive rather than pathological, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.”\footnote{Eng and Kazanjian, \textit{Loss: the politics of mourning}, ix.} Women are in a unique position to contribute to these sorts of spaces through collectives such as \textit{Colectiva Bordadoras} and \textit{Las Arpilleristas}.

**Women as Productive Mourners of the Dead**

One way we can conceptualize healing pain and trauma is by a process of mourning. Women experienced suffering, loss, and were traumatized during the dictatorship. This could have taken internal forms: a loss of identity and dignity that may follow sexual violence. Yet, losses were also physical and corporeal. Women lost the lives of their husbands, fathers, and sons (and given the nature of \textit{los desaparecidos}, their bodily remains). While women absolutely mourn psychological losses in different ways, to mourn the dead tends to be anticipated and public on behalf of women.\footnote{See Chapter 1.} Women have a close relationship to mourning the dead that maintains important stakes in in transitional justice because for many women in the Southern Cone, avenging the dead is a principal reason to participate in transitional justice in the first
place. This relationship to the disappeared further positions women as central to political solutions that work through negative emotions.

Selina Makana provides interesting contributions through her work about gender and armed anti-colonial resistance in Angola. She notes that the image of the grieving woman is often associated with the aftermath of violent state conflict, particularly in African anti-colonial resistance movements. While mothers, as Makana notes, are often dealt the labor of mourning, she writes that this also puts women in a unique political position to utilize collective emotions as a mobilizing strategy in national politics. As she emphasizes: “it is important that we do not analyze grieving mothers as women only driven by maternal emotions and familial love. Such an analysis presents a lopsided view that considers women as exclusively sentimental—and therefore apolitical.”

She argues that women, assigned as protectors and nurturers of the family, may conceive of themselves as protectors and nurturers of the nation, calling them the ‘patriotic mother.’ Consequently, women are compelled to use their losses and grief, disproportionately felt by mothers, as subversive acts. According to Makana, the desire to protect their loved ones and the losses they face when they fail to do so places women in a position to avenge their lives. This, coupled with the oppression women faced directly under colonial rule, means that women’s existence in Angola has been marked by suffering and mourning. For Angolan women who had experienced multiple levels of oppression during colonial rule, “their pain was not an end in itself because it fueled their activism. Their grief and anger were as personal as it was political…. Women tapped into their rage and grief as useful anti-colonial tools, using their collective emotions and vulnerabilities as a call to action.”

demonstrates that mourning as a way to work through emotional pain, planted on the shoulders of women, has real political consequences. This challenges a binary between feminine/masculine and emotional/political that place women as important and unique political actors within transitional justice processes.

Closer to Chile is the case of *Las Madres Del Plaza de Mayo*. Taking place in Buenos Aires, a group of inexperienced housewives gathered outside the Plaza de Mayo in 1977, marching arm-in-arm, demanding the state to acknowledge the disappearances of their missing relatives. What began as fourteen mothers, transformed into a political and social movement of thousands of women, utilizing their status as grieving mothers for political and strategic ends. Similar to Makana’s “patriotic mother,” Temma Kaplan refers to *Las Madres* as representing the “socialization of motherhood” by which motherhood is not an individual act, but a collective mission for justice. Protestors recognized that they were not just searching for their own children, but every disappeared child because solidarity is what gives way to collective political action that calls for justice. This is very similar to sentiments expressed by the women in my field research. Motherhood can serve as basis for survival as well as a way to resist and challenge oppressors.

While women were brought to the streets originally because they felt responsible for their own losses (by being ‘bad’ mothers), they reoriented their mourning strategically harnessing their identity as mothers to their aid. Moreover, Kaplan notes the use of feminine symbolism to advantageously serve the plight toward justice. *Las Madres* famously wore white handkerchiefs around their heads, sometimes using diapers, to promulgate their position as mothers in the

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public sphere, performing religious and almost ritualistic marches while holding photos of their missing loved ones in hand. Symbolism and performance resulted in the most visible human rights campaign to date. Kaplan writes that *Las Madres* represented an “alternative political option:” they used motherhood as a mechanism to hold the state accountable for their violations, not only for the sake of their children, but for civil society as a whole. Often deemed *Las Locas* (The Crazies) by authorities and the general public, *Las Madres* demonstrate, in practice, the ways in which emotionality and ‘the irrational’ are compelling in political spaces.

**Conclusion**

Underlying both of these examples, and pertinent to Chile, is the close and devoted relationship women have with the dead. Whether it is socialization and motherhood or the literal political and social contexts that place women in positions as representatives of death and suffering, women, death, and mourning are closely related across a variety of historical cases. This is particularly relevant in Chile where disappearances were frequent, perpetuating indeterminate mourning, and men were disproportionately killed, heightening the responsibility for women to act out of necessity. In Chapter 3, I explore the ways in which women interact with truth and testimony in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. I discuss how women testify on behalf of the dead, mostly for men, which result in a limitation to speak on behalf of their own subjective experiences and pain. In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss two complementary methods of truth-telling that allow women to represent their own suffering in their work. Importantly, all the women I interviewed still mentioned that they partly do this work because they are alive and still can speak for those who no longer can. In fact, the literal model of the groups today that continue to make *arpilleras* and *bordadoras* are based on what the dead and those suffering did

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144 Kaplan, *Taking back the streets: women, youth, and direct democracy*, 127.
to survive and resist during the dictatorship. As such, even these women-created and women-led collectives rooted in narrating subjectivity and personal pain still embody the closeness women feel to the disappeared and dead. This may suggest that healing for women is a recognition of and honoring of the dead.

In this chapter, I analyzed the ways in which women deployed healing and survival strategies that had political ramifications. By acknowledging that women heal and work through trauma more productively in spaces that emphasize emotional support, solidarity, communication, and empathy, this information allows us to assess the effectiveness of transitional justice methods that aid women’s healing processes. It also informs what complementary processes should look like if they are to be gender sensitive. Moreover, as my research and scholarship show, healing processes are equally emotional as they are political, demonstrating the viability for healing as a basis for post-conflict solutions. Additionally, I have explored literature that places trauma, emotions, and vulnerability at the center of politics to understand how official and complementary methods of truth-telling understand and utilize trauma in the solutions they offer. Lastly, women’s relationship to the deceased and mourning directly position women within transitional justice politics. As different historical cases demonstrate, women, as emotional ‘mourners,’ are also productive and militating fighters for justice. Women often strategically harness their status as mothers to their political advantage. As Chapter 4 and 5 argue, the art collectives give mourning mothers a testimonial outlet while also maintaining impactful political objectives.
Chapter 3: Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

When violent regimes end and transition begins, states must decide how to reconcile with a traumatized, resentful and emotionally damaged society. Truth-telling and testimony is often how states reach emotional reconciliation. This chapter focuses on TRCs because they represent a state-sponsored and official truth-telling mechanism that, due to its victim-centered approach, may alleviate trauma. This chapter invokes a debate as to whether TRCs, rooted in legal and restrictive mandates, can truly be cathartic for survivors. At the end of the chapter, I position women at the center of the debate to explore whether TRCs adequately provide women emotional redress. This chapter works with epistemological literature of truth and narration, specific evidences from TRCs, and an application of literature to the Chilean TRCs. My intent is not to say that states should stop implementing TRCs as they do provide benefits. Yet, research casts significant doubt around their abilities to redress emotional wounds for women, which ultimately, I argue is enough to necessitate complementary processes of truth-telling.

TRCs Heal Emotional Wounds

Scholarship focuses on two ways to conceive of TRCs as cathartic for trauma survivors: Firstly, because they encourage people to speak their pain to active listeners, and secondly, because the listener is the state, survivors receive official acknowledgement of their pain.

A. The Power of Narrating

The power to speak heals traumas; thus, some argue that TRCs offer a forum for voice to heal emotional wounds. Mickey Vallee notes that “the voice is at once the final destination for the truth sought in a truth commission...it is its site of discoverability. Truth commissions are taken generally as an opportunity for a voice silenced by an oppressive and violent history to
vocalize truth.” As such, narration holds power for those forced to remain silenced during state conflict. Moreover, Vallee argues that because the voice exists outside the body (as people are around to hear and receive it), those who testify to violence are connected to the community of other bodies, and “what this suggests is that an audience is obliged to listen, especially out of respect to the testifier who [might] not want a witness.” Similarly, Blackman tells us that while the voice starts from within, when it becomes externalized, the transmission of voice is inevitable so that such a position requires that we hear voices, to be a voice-hearing political community. Finally, Driver, through an analysis of women’s experiences in the South African TRC also finds that specifically in TRCs, the logic is “based on the sharing of words, or what may be called the incorporation into oneself of the other’s words.”

Listeners prove vital when survivors choose to voice their experiences. Dori Laub points out the parallels between the listening that takes place in psychoanalytic practice and listening in testimonial interviews. He writes that testimonies are not monologues as “they do not take place in solitude;” therefore, a listener is always connected to the speaker. In fact, Laub also connects trauma to speaking, writing that because trauma is belated and not made cognizant right away, narrating trauma to an active listener is perhaps the first attempt at creating knowledge of the traumatic event. Emphasizing the importance of a relationship between the listener and speaker, Laub writes that “the listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge de novo.

The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.”\textsuperscript{150} This leads Laub to conclude that for testimonies to occur, there must be an intimate and bonding presence of another person.\textsuperscript{151} Of course, not everyone speaking in TRCs are narrating their traumas for the first time. Yet, many authors tell us that testifying in commissions is often the first time survivors speak in detail about the trauma they endured.\textsuperscript{152} Seemingly, survivors narrating their experiences for the first time is more than cathartic, it is \textit{necessary} to for creating knowledge of events so as to begin the process of healing.

Testimony is inherently defined as both therapeutic and political. As Agger and Jensen note, testimony by definition has a double connotation of containing “objective, judicial, public and political aspects as well as subjective, spiritual, cathartic and private aspects.”\textsuperscript{153} They conclude that testimony universally operates on both a private and political level. This is particularly true in Chile where psychologists would use testimonial strategies with their traumatized clients both to heal therapeutically as well as to denounce the regime. Judith Herman confirms that psychologists during the 70s and 80s would record the survivors’ stories of torture and mock executions, transcribe them and have them literally signed by the patient as if they were a plaintiff to construct a fully detailed trauma narrative.\textsuperscript{154} Later, they were sent out to

\textsuperscript{150} Felman and Laub, \textit{Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history}, 57.
\textsuperscript{151} Felman and Laub, \textit{Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history}, 70.
\textsuperscript{152} Ferrara, \textit{Assessing the long-term impact of truth commissions: the Chilean truth and reconciliation commission in historical perspective}, 169.
\textsuperscript{154} Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}, 182.
human rights organizations as evidence against dominant lies produced by the dictatorship.\textsuperscript{155} Psychologists practicing testimony and truth-telling methods during the dictatorship observed that testimony alleviated symptoms in 39 cases, in part, because it transformed painful events into something that held the state accountable.\textsuperscript{156} For this reason, Agger adapted strategies of truth-telling in testimonial form with political refugee women participating in her research. In other words, Agger treated her participants as if the women were giving testimony in a commission or court. She did so because in testimony, “the traumatic story can thus be integrated and... also given new meaning…” to become a source of knowledge about the dictatorship.\textsuperscript{157}

Meanwhile, Mollica focuses on using testimony tactics with trauma survivors solely because it alleviates symptoms of trauma and heals psychological wounds. Mollica, like Agger, adopted strategies of testimony and truth-telling with Southeast Asian refugee patients. He describes how testimony transformed trauma into a story which is “no longer about shame and humiliation” but rather about “dignity and virtue.” Through narrating pain, his refugee patients “regain the world they have lost.”\textsuperscript{158} Thus, the political and deeply personal impacts of storytelling are clear.

Judith Herman confirms that narrating trauma has healing potential, yet, she offers qualifications that heightens the stakes for analyzing the efficacy for truth-telling and testimony in TRCs. While she writes that a narrative of trauma that does not include traumatic imagery and bodily sensation is barren and incomplete, “the ultimate goal, however, is to put the story,  

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\textsuperscript{155} Agger, \textit{The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women: a psychosocial exploration}, 6. \\
\textsuperscript{156} Becker et al., "Therapy with Victims of Political Repression in Chile: The Challenge of Social Reparation." \\
\textsuperscript{157} Agger, \textit{The blue room: trauma and testimony among refugee women: a psychosocial exploration}, 10. \\
\end{flushright}
including its imagery, into words.”¹⁵⁹ She notes that remembering and truth-telling about terrible events are in fact prerequisites for “social order and for healing the individual victim.”¹⁶⁰ She illustrates conditions by which narration is healing. Firstly, testimony of facts without affectivity is ineffectively therapeutic. Thus, testifiers must re-experience the feelings in all their intensity, this time however, in a safe environment. Second, testifiers need to include a systematic review of the meaning of the event, both personally and broadly. They must address two questions that spark outrage and bewilderment in any survivor but ultimately are vital in processes of recovery: Why did this happen and why to me? Herman points out these important qualifications to healing testimonial strategies because if survivors of trauma do not consider the social forces outside of their control that inflicted upon them unimaginable violence, they risk pointing blame inward. As Herman points out, testimony must address greater questions that tackle explaining injustice more broadly in order for truth-telling and testimony practices to truly be cathartic.

Moreover, Herman tells us that the “hearer” of testimony cannot be neutral or non-judgemental for healing to occur. The hearer must struggle with these “immense philosophical questions” of injustice and not provide “ready-made answers” or explanations. Rather, they must affirm a “position of moral solidarity with the survivors.”¹⁶¹ The hearer, like what Laub suggests, takes an active role in the testimonial process, they do not simply hear. Herman notes that those who testify to trauma do not always remember the events clearly as they often tell their stories in a “highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner.”¹⁶² Therefore, the listener and the speaker must accept that ambiguity is inherent in the narrative and learn to live as such. Herman

¹⁵⁹ Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, 177.
¹⁶⁰ Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, 1.
¹⁶¹ Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, 178.
¹⁶² Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, 1.
advocates for the healing impacts of testimony and truth-telling and provides conditions by which to deploy these strategies effectively. This is important because truth-telling, testimony and listening within commissions does narrate trauma, but insofar as I am examining their efficacy to heal trauma, they should attempt to meet these conditions for actual catharsis to occur.

Steven Stern writes about the intense cathartic responses evoked by narrating trauma in the first Chilean TRC (Rettig Report). He writes that the commission tried to construct a convivencia, or a space of cohabitation and mediation, to create a space symbolic of affective social repair. To enforce convivencia, they placed at least one social worker in every hearing in order sensitize lawyers and commissioners to the intense feelings relayed by testifiers. One result was that hearings would begin by prompting testifiers with open ended questions such as “Can you tell me about…?” to legitimate a full range of experiences within the dictatorship, rather than inquiring solely on the facts of repression. Symbolism was hugely important in the hearings. Stern writes that commissioners offered tea and cookies to testifiers to as a “modest act of cultural hospitality to treat people with dignity after years of stigma and cruelty.” After interviewing lawyers and commissioners present in the hearings, Stern reports that verbalizing trauma in the hearings produced powerful impacts on the speaker as well as the listeners. Many commission workers found that the most powerful moments were when testifiers would relay the deception and regret they felt when they were forced to make choices in impossible contexts. He emphasizes the intimate moments of group weeping within the hearing room between commission workers, lawyers, and speakers.

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163 Stern, Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006, 70.
164 Stern, Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006, 72.
165 Stern, Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006, 73.
Procedures to encourage speaking in a safe environment were not unique to Chile. In fact, Hayner notes that the South African TRC went further than any other commission in incorporating “psychological support into its operational structures.”\textsuperscript{166} For example, the commission provided some basic training for statement-takers on how to respond to signs of trauma. Moreover, the commission hired “briefers,” whose job was to provide “constant support” to survivors speaking at public hearings.\textsuperscript{167} In some cases, TRC hearing rooms appear to bring about some conditions of which Herman characterizes as cathartic truth-telling. Martha Minow notes that even though “a commission cannot create the bond of commitment that exists between therapist and client, it can enable public acknowledgement of the horrors…” This acknowledgement “is a basic precondition before individual survivors can establish the capacity to trust other people and to trust the government.”\textsuperscript{168} Thus, despite commissions’ lack of therapeutic tools, there are still some real benefits TRCs offer that can act as a prerequisite to healing.

\textit{B. State Recognition}

The second way scholarship addresses how testimony and truth-telling heal emotional wounds is through stories being recognized and validated officially by the state. Herman tells us that a response from the greater community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of trauma.\textsuperscript{169} She states that the restoration of the breach between traumatized persons and the community depends on two conditions: first, upon public acknowledgement of the event that caused trauma, and second, upon some form of community action to work through trauma.

\textsuperscript{166} Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 145.
\textsuperscript{167} Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 145.
\textsuperscript{168} Minow, \textit{The Hope for Healing: What Can Commissions Do?}, 246.
\textsuperscript{169} Herman, \textit{Trauma and recovery}, 70.
Therefore, once recognition has occurred that people have been harmed, “the community must take action to assign responsibility…to repair the injury.” ¹⁷⁰ These two responses are “necessary to rebuild the survivors sense of order and justice.” ¹⁷¹ When we apply Herman’s concept of community action to the political community, or the state, TRCs represent an official community action.

Anita Ferrara focuses on the importance of official state recognition for healing. Because commissions are bodies constructed on behalf of the state, they inherently represent some form of officiality. This is vital for survivors who had to endure tormenting silence and denial also on behalf of the state. Ferrara notes that when the state does not officially recognize victims, this hinders their process of recovering. Thus, the commission allow for victims to view themselves as survivors in a process of recovery. She concludes that when the state does recognize the stories of trauma and pain of those who testified, a sense of dignity is restored. ¹⁷² Official recognition on behalf of the state might represent a possible cathartic healing mechanism for those whose who suffered and endured trauma during the dictatorship.

Brandon Hamber, a South African psychologist and social policy theorist, writes that the South African TRC offered victims a safe environment to relay their experiences officially to the state. While he is very critical to some aspects of the commission, a year into the project, he wrote: “providing...a public forum [for victims to tell their stories] …has been of use to many. It is indisputable that many survivors and relatives of victims have found the public hearing

¹⁷⁰ Herman, Trauma and recovery, 70.
¹⁷¹ Herman, Trauma and recovery, 70.
¹⁷² Ferrara, Assessing the long-term impact of truth commissions: the Chilean truth and reconciliation commission in historical perspective, 166.
process psychologically beneficial.”173 This was also true in Chile in some cases. Elizabeth Lira, one of the Chilean psychologists cited above who used testimony with political survivors of violence during the dictatorship, writes that recognition of a person's traumatic experience in the commissions is extremely important for healing emotional wounds. She observes: “In Chile, going to the truth commission was like entering into a family: there was a sense of security, a national flag standing on the table, a mandate from the president, and there was a commission saying, ‘We want to hear what you have to say.’”174 For Lira, state recognition of trauma was important in Chile because of the denial and lies spread by the regime for almost two decades. Importantly, symbolism within commissions mattered. While in many cases, loved ones already knew some truths about their disappeared, the symbolic aspect of recording testimony from survivors and those affected showed that the state cared about their citizens after years of mistreatment and abuse.

Steven Stern also observed state symbolism as a means to cathartic ends. He notes that despite legal limitations to the commission, the hearings were healing for some because for the first time in 17 years, the state had to respectfully listen to and acknowledge pain and trauma that had been silenced or denied, and consequently tormented testifiers, for years. In each commission hearing, the Chilean flag was placed at each desk to underscore the fact that the listening process was official. Moreover, the presence of a commission member and not simply staff members during the testimonial process signified that the experiences of the survivors was

173 Hamber as quoted in Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*, 137.
174 Lira as quoted in Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*, 137.
important to the state.\textsuperscript{175} Despite fear that comes along with denouncing the state in front of the state, Stern observed that the space welcomed speakers to as to dignify their speakers officially.

One consequence of truth-telling in commissions is that it places trauma and negative emotions into political context. Returning to Chapter 2, Moglen and LaCapra discuss the importance of addressing structural violence and social forces that are responsible for atrocities that caused suffering for survivors to truly heal emotional wounds. As such, commissions that publish and promulgate a record of the violence systematically enforced by the state demonstrates to testifiers that their suffering was a product of state violence and not a product of anything that they did. This recognition helps survivors heal when they realize torture, imprisonment, or the death of their loved ones could not have been prevented had they done something different. The state was working against its people, and the officiality of the report which addresses state violence directly tells survivors the reality as such. Even when victims of dictatorships chose not to testify, Martha Minow finds that seeing the published report of the commission helps them locate their experiences within a larger setting of political violence.\textsuperscript{176}

\textbf{TRCS Do Not Heal Emotional Wounds}

For testimony and truth-telling to be healing for survivors of trauma, certain conditions must be met. This section outlines the ways in TRCs limit the ability to heal or worsen trauma by falling short of these conditions. Firstly, scholars find that language is an inaccessible tool for trauma survivors and consequently, listeners cannot comprehend others’ narratives of trauma. Secondly, the structural and procedural limitations to TRCs prevent conditions that foster real healing. At worst, this may result in a retraumatization or reliving of the traumatic event.

\textsuperscript{175} Stern, \textit{Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006}, 72.
\textsuperscript{176} Minow, \textit{The Hope for Healing: What Can Commissions Do?}, 244.
Elizabeth Jelin, like Herman, tells us that listening to testifiers of trauma requires empathetic and active listening. She states: “What is needed are others with the ability to ask, to express curiosity for a painful past, as well as to have compassion and empathy.” Unlike Herman, Jelin notes the consequences when people testify in spaces that do not provide these conditions. She writes that when there is no empathy towards testifiers of trauma, “the act of telling may turn into a reactualization or repetition of the event narrated.” Retraumatization is a potential consequence of poor listening, particularly in TRCs where the listeners are not qualified social workers. Laub discusses active participation of a listener in the testimonial process and notes the harms of poor listening. He states, “the absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an ‘other’ who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm...their realness, annihilates the story.” Thus, speakers in commissions are inherently at risk that their stories are not appropriately heard; which in turn could result in their traumas not being dealt with effectively. Laub affirms Jelin’s apprehension: the act of telling, particularly for those whose story is not heard or truly listened to, might itself be lived as a return of the trauma-- “a re-experiencing of the event itself.”

Primo Levi, author and Holocaust survivor, has expressed in his writing experiences of retraumatization resulting from a deep-seeded fear that his story is unlistened to. In *Surviving Auschwitz*, Levi narrates a recurring nightmare that takes place in Auschwitz:

They are all listening to me and it is this very long story that I am telling...but I cannot help but notice that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not

there…A desolating grief is now born in me...it is pain in its pure state, not tempered by a sense of reality...a pain like that which makes children cry...my dreams stand in front of me, still warm, and although I awake I am still full of anguish.  

For Levi, even the thought of the absence of an addressable listener, someone to hear the anguish of a story and affirm the realness, completely annihilates his narrative, and traumatizes him further.

Jelin is more skeptical of the testimonial process through the angle of discursivity. She notes that “traumatic suffering may deprive the victim of the recourse to language, and so prevent testimonial enunciation, or it may allow for narrations that are devoid of subjectivity.”

Because trauma survivors may lack the rhetorical tools to narrate their traumas, listeners may also experience limitations in their abilities to comprehend the experience of the sufferers. This is important when we consider this argument in relation to Herman’s conditions for cathartic testimony. If language is insufficient in narrating trauma, and consequently, the hearer cannot make sense of the suffering, then the intimate bond between speaker and hearer is not present. Consequently, the truth-telling exchange cannot truly be healing.

Ernst Van Alphen further underscores this point. He writes that traumatic events imply an inherent “semiotic incapacity” when working through the event, and this incapacity forestalls the possibility of representing their suffering in symbolic order (language). Edkins is also doubtful of the discursive potential for trauma as a mechanism for healing. Edkins defines trauma as the inability to place an event in an existing social order that we build our lives around (our family, friends, beliefs and ideologies). Again, she argues that politics is a reflection of this

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social order, or the things that make sense in our lives, and trauma exists outside of this social order. The traumatic “real” is often excluded within political societies. This is inherently related to narrating trauma because language is created by social order so that the words survivors have access to are the words created by the political community that caused their suffering. Because trauma exists outside of social order, survivors of trauma face the difficulty of using language to make sense of their experiences. Forcing trauma into a linear narrative and into a symbolic order incapable of describing what happened, depoliticizes and neutralizes trauma. The wound is even more exacerbated by the fact that listeners of the traumatic narratives cannot fully understand or process the information being recounted to them because of the inaccessibility of placing the experience within social order. Moreover, she notes that because of the inherently political nature of testimony, this fact alone may pressure survivors to stay silent or change their story.

When applying this discussion to the actual procedures of TRCs, there is some need to question the potential of TRCs to effectively heal negative emotions and trauma. Many scholars argue there is a lack of psychological understanding of trauma in the conceptualization of TRCs. Hayner writes that TRCs should consider psychological understandings of trauma in their procedures because of the intimacy that trauma and state reconciliation share. While she is sympathetic to some benefits TRCs may possess for symbolic healing, she is generally skeptical of genuine healing outcomes of TRCs. She writes that for most cases in TRCs (with minimal exception to South Africa and less so in Chile and Argentina), commission workers have little to

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184 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*, 8.
185 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*, 188.
186 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*, 39.
187 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*, 190.
no training in responding to levels of trauma. Moreover, she writes that given the large number
of survivors that come forward in the short period of the lifespan of a commission, commissions
to date have not been able to provide psychological support services nor provide any referral
programs or follow-ups for those who testified.\textsuperscript{188} She observes that TRCs are not therapy
exchanges as their goal is to collect factual and detailed information in an extremely short
amount of time. If we treat TRCs as sufficient therapeutic mechanism, the speakers may
experience grave psychological and emotional consequences.

One of these consequences may be the reliving of the trauma or perpetuating suffering.
Hamber, for example, notes that “it is far more likely that truth commissions will lead to feelings
of revenge, bitterness, and anger if people do not receive appropriate counselling afterwards.”\textsuperscript{189}
Importantly, even after the South African TRC formatted a referral program for emotional
services and (minimally) trained their staff in trauma work, the Trauma Centre for Victims of
Violence and Torture in Cape Town estimated that 50 to 60 percent of those who gave testimony
to the commission suffered difficulties after testifying or expressed regret for having taken part
in the TRC.\textsuperscript{190} Michael Lapsley, an activist priest in South Africa, made clear that he did support
the work of the TRC but stressed the danger of approaching healing too simplistically: “If you
have a physical wound, you take off the bandage, clean the wound, and rebandage it. But people
take their clothes off in front of the truth commission and don’t get an adequate opportunity to
put their clothes back on...it is naive to think it takes 5 minutes [of testifying] to heal.”\textsuperscript{191} While
many scholars do not deny some benefits of TRCs (for reconciliation more broadly) and

\textsuperscript{188} Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 140.
\textsuperscript{189} Hamber as quoted in Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 145.
\textsuperscript{190} Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 144.
\textsuperscript{191} Michael Lapsey as quoted in Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable truths: confronting state terror and atrocity}, 142.
typically do not denounce them as a whole, cases are strongly made that they fall short in offering real catharsis for survivors because the structure limits psychological support that directly heals negative emotions.  

Operational and structural limitations to TRCs are of particular importance in Chile when analyzing the efficacy of truth-telling and testimony as a method for healing trauma. Chile’s first TRC is one of the most limited models to date and many scholars often deem the TRC ultimately ineffective at reaching truth or justice. The Rettig report only called for cases of human rights violations that resulted in death. This is obviously problematic for those seeking to heal from trauma because the survivors cannot testify on behalf of themselves, they could only testify for the dead. This is important for truth seeking goals because survivors are the only ones who have seen what the dead can no longer express; however, this means that the report highlights a partial truth. Testifying on behalf of the dead does not narrate personal and subjective experiences and may not heal subjective psychological wounds. The Valech report does provide some redress on this issue because it relied on personal testimony from survivors of torture. Perhaps the Valech report was more therapeutic for some, yet research analysis from the report tells us that the actual number of testifiers was a gross underrepresentation of those who actually experienced human rights violations, signifying that thousands of people still did not come forward. Steven Stern notes that many people did not speak in the hearings because of their difficulty verbalizing trauma. Moreover, the report only considered those who suffered torture from political imprisonment as victims of the dictatorship. This excludes those who experienced traumatizing

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192 See Martha Minow who agrees that TRCs cannot offer what therapy can but do provide survivors with resources to get the ball rolling for healing.
193 Ferrara 6
violence in other ways. I address this issue more directly in my application of TRCs to women survivors of trauma.

The very nature of a commission also means that they prioritize factual truths over personal narratives. This could be unsettling for those trying to narrate trauma. In South Africa, Richard Wilson wrote about two types of truths that reconstruct “truth paradigms” in TRCs. Forensic truth is a legal and scientific notion of uncovering facts about repression while narrative truth emphasizes subjectivity and the experiential dimensions of truth. Wilson notes that forensic truth is an end itself while narrative truth is part of a process of affirming and healing the dignity of survivors. Wilson argues that TRCs disproportionately value forensic truth as a way to report the methods and explanations for violence because the model demands for a more quantitative analysis. Privileging one truth over another has significant impacts on the ability for TRCs to effectively capture truths. First, by not placing forensic truths into personal contexts, the truth officially recorded is incomplete and insufficient. Second, because survivor’s narratives needed to be reduced down to “essential characteristics,” most of what they wanted to say they could not, leaving them feeling unsatisfied. While even a limited truth is valid and better than none at all, speaking through the lens of this project, TRCs prioritizing factual truth present problems for survivors seeking personal healing through subjective truth-telling and testimony. This is heightened by the fact that the officiality of the TRC as providing “the national truth” of the conflict renders forensic truth as “official” truth, which may consequently further ignore or silence narrative truth.

196 Wilson, *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa: legitimizing the post-apartheid state*.
Women in TRCs

Men and women in Chile experienced the repressive apparatus very distinctly. This means that processes of truth-telling should reflect these differences. Yet, as it stands, scholars tend to agree that TRCs are often treated as gender neutral practices. Truths that are accurate do not inherently make them complete or sufficiently representative. The stakes for this argument are heightened when interwoven with gender because of the ways in which TRCs typically enforce rigid understandings of gender in their structural and procedural operations, and thus, draw incomplete conclusions about truths for women. Debra Delaet writes that truth-telling mechanisms produce an authoritative account of the truth as it is understood broadly. To this end, she argues that a gender-sensitive analysis suggests that the truth will always be incomplete unless it reflects the individual experiences of women and men.198 Accordingly, this section analyses the ways in which TRCs, as an official truth-telling mechanism, fall short in aiding women in the healing process.

I argue three ways in which they prevent women from healing emotional trauma after violent conflicts. First, they do not address specific violence affecting women, and second, they often discourage women from testifying on behalf of themselves, indicating that the reports do not encapsulate the real subjective and painful experiences women went through. Third, because they often do not challenge structural violence and normative conceptions of gender that may have led to specific violence in the first place, they may perpetuate emotional suffering and trauma because they do not solve issues at hand.

Most TRCs do not officially recognize the victimization of women. While commissions may provide the space for women to speak, many still do not participate. Beth Goldblatt has

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noted in regard to the South African TRC that many women “felt uncomfortable about exposing experiences of violence, particularly sexual violation, in public forums.” This was the case according to Goldblatt, because some did not want to open up the wounds again in this official setting, and others did not because they felt that submitting an official testimony of the violations, especially at the hands of their own “comrades,” would feel like a political violation. The argument that TRCs heal emotional wounds because of the officiality of the hearings may conversely be a reason why women do not speak. Generally, other scholars find similar conclusions that women in the South Africa felt hesitant to discuss sexual violence in front of the TRC. Susana Barrientos, an ex-MIRista and torture survivor, told me during our interview that many of her friends who were in detention centers with her were too afraid to give testimony to the Valech Commission at the time. She noted that after years had passed, some of them wanted to testify but because the commission is now closed for 50 years, there was no way to do so. Susana did not testify in either TRC but did for the Vicaría de Solidaridad, a human rights commission. In our interview she told me that she had many compañeros “who had relieved themselves. They told everything…what happened in the camps, in the centers of torture…” but she could not do the same. Rather, she was brief: “I gave my name, my family, what parts I had been in but that was all I said…” concluding that “I struggled with testimonials a lot at the beginning.” If women are disincentivized to participate in TRCs then its effectiveness at healing is questionable both because women are excluded from healing all together or because women feel forced to speak despite discomfort.

199 Sideris, Problems of Identity, Solidarity, and Reconciliation, 57.
This is important because it shows that TRCs can only capture partial truths since not everyone comes forward, and also demonstrates that the structural limitations (such as the temporal nature of the commission) further problematize this concern.

This concept is related to my second point. Women are often not conceived of as direct victims in TRCs because they usually testify on behalf on their relatives rather than themselves. Consequently, their subjective experiences are not represented in the official truth. In South Africa, while the majority of individuals who testified were women, they testified almost exclusively about their family members and loved ones as victims. Women generally did not testify to their own victimization and commonly viewed themselves as lesser victims than the men in their lives. In fact, in the first five weeks of the commission, Fiona Ross analyzed the testimonies heard and found that 60 percent of deponents were women, and 75 percent of their testimonies and 88 percent of the men’s testimonies dealt with abuses against men. Only 4 percent of the testimonies involved men talking about their sons, and no male testimonies involved men speaking about either sisters or spouses.

Dorothy Driver defines feminine identity constructed by the TRC within two binaries: women-in-community and women-in-themselves. The former woman “identified with their family and community and were reticent about their own activism and the violence perpetrated on them. In the latter, women were invited to identify with their own bodies and were implicitly constructed through a certain notion of the individual as distinct from the family and

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community.” She argues that the TRC enforced feminine identity as women-in-community because men were not directly called on as perpetrators of sexual violence and men were not required to listen to the hearings of women speaking on behalf on themselves, even though women did most of the testifying on behalf of men. By positioning women as useful only as women-in-community, Driver argues that the TRC enforced fixed notions of gender identity that ultimately hampered reconciliation and solidarity. Driver finds:

Where women testified to brutalities enacted upon their own bodies, the Commission did not and could not, within the terms under which it had constituted the concept of 'political' crime compel the attendance of the perpetrators of such violence, and therefore could not initiate the potential performance of forgiveness and reconciliation through the public exchange of stories. In more abstract terms... when they testified as...women-in-community to the abuses against the men close to them in order to elicit perpetrators’ truths, and possibly to elicit also their apologies or at least their visible self-recognition, women were figured as participants in the complex processes of exchange produced through the TRC process. However, when they testified to abuses against ‘themselves’, as women-in-themselves, women were not able to participate in the complex staging. In South Africa, women were included in the process of reconciliation as it was enforced in the TRC. In speaking for themselves, women were excluded, but in speaking for others, women were welcomed.

The Chilean TRC experience on this front was mixed and complicated. The Rettig Report only included violations that resulted in death, which in Chile, were usually men. Thus, women were inherently excluded from the label of victim in the first commission and were useful strictly on behalf of speaking for the dead.

In the Valech Report, women were finally able to testify on behalf of themselves as victims of torture. Consequently, the commission added a section dedicated to the horrific

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204 Driver 224- also mention ubuntu as a framework for analyzing trcs specific to her research
practices women were subjected to so that now we know of 3,399 female victim testifiers, almost all of them declared that they were subjected to sexual violence in some way.²⁰⁵ Stern finds that while every women did mention they experienced some sort of sexual violence, 1 in 10 explicitly said they were raped.²⁰⁶ To some extent, we can view this as beneficial toward better representing gendered truths of the dictatorships. However, the benefits are disputable for a few reasons. First, the amount of people who came forward to testify is a gross underestimation of those who were tortured. Coupled with the fact that many women choose not to come forward in TRCs already (especially given the sensitive nature of sexual violence), we can safely assume that the section is minimally representative. Moreover, even for those who did testify, the type of truth-telling was forensically oriented. The consequences of this type of truth-telling, as opposed to narrative truth-telling, are heightened for women because of what scholarship and my field research in Chapter 2 says about how women heal best. For example, women are often likely to utilize emotionally and verbal fluency to communicate trauma to an empathetic and supportive group. Relaying subjectivity and emotionality strongly resemble narrative truths, which TRC’s do not encourage.

Moreover, the actual stories women recounted in the Valech Report cannot be acknowledged publicly for 50 years. The state’s continued lack of recognition, particularly after testifying, may wreak even more trauma for women. Also, the commission was not created until 15 years after the dissolution of the regime. This means that women survivors of torture were living with the trauma for years without state action or recognition. Lastly, because the Valech Report only opened its mandate to cases of torture, this excluded many women from recounting

narratives of trauma that were not directly caused by torture. This is problematic because while
12.5% of the cases of torture in the commission were women,\textsuperscript{207} most women experienced
hardships and emotional suffering through other forms of repression. For example, women
experienced trauma and emotional suffering via neoliberal reform that exacerbated structural
inequality and poverty. As Zolkos finds, redressive politics privileges particular types of traumas
and excludes that which is not directly associated with images of extreme traumatization, such as
“socio-material stressors.” According to Zolkos, women and children as victims of “socio-
material hardship remain absent from redressive politics.”\textsuperscript{208} Likewise, the Valech report would
not even come close to addressing victimization as such.

This fact leads into my third point. The commissions often fall short in contextualizing
violence and do not challenge structural realities that perpetuate suffering and trauma for women
in the first place. The Rettig Report in Chile presented a narrative of repression and violence that
offered a more factually truthful account to oppose a \textit{Pinochetista} salvation narrative. For
example, the report affirmed the nature of clandestine violence that was denied by the regime,
and placed the leftist rising and right-wing militarist reaction into political context. Yet, there
was immense structural problems that manifested into specific types of violence impacting
women during and even before the dictatorship. For example, rigid conceptions of femininity
that positioned women as apolitical and domestic resulted in imprisonment when they defied
their gender boundaries to challenge the state. Moreover, women as care-takers of the home
meant that unemployment within \textit{poblaciones} disproportionately impacted the quality of life for
women as they faced the double burden of maintaining the family and economic survival.

\textsuperscript{207} Stern, \textit{Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006}.
\textsuperscript{208} Zolkos, \textit{Redressive politics and the nexus of trauma, transitional justice and reconciliation},
177.
Because the report is an official truth discourse and because it creates recommendations based off of its findings, if they do not address deep-rooted structural problems that created violence and caused trauma, they may fail at ultimately healing present wounds and preventing future ones. TRCs further enforce strict conceptions of femininity by excluding women from being victims according to the mandate, and consequently, are misinformed about gendered lived experience in greater national context. This idea echoes similar sentiments that Driver observed in the South African TRC. She argues that the TRC perpetuated misconceptions of femininity and gender generally within its procedural operations, placing women as vulnerable subjects rather than political activists. Ultimately, truth-telling processes that address structural violence more directly are necessary in sustainable peace efforts because gender and sexual equality is a normative goal.

**Conclusion**

The ability for TRCs to heal emotional wounds and trauma is called into question when we compare its procedures and mandate to the ways in which women heal best from trauma presented in Chapter 2. Women tend to recreate familial and social bonds in circumstances of repression and torture to form groups of emotional support and solidarity. This is further evidenced by the experiences of every women I interviewed, all of whom mentioned feminine solidarity and group healing extensively within poblaciones and detention centers. From psychological research, women tend heal best from trauma in all women’s support groups which foster spaces of empathy and communication. According to my research and broad literature presented in Chapter 2, it appears as though gender sensitive practices are more likely to

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210 Stenius and Veysey, "'It's the Little Things': Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing."
facilitate a form of truth-telling that will promote healing. Because TRCs are still beneficial for other reconciliatory goals, I argue that complementary processes are required to promote healing for women through truth-telling more directly.

This chapter has placed trauma and healing as a framework to analyze the effectiveness of TRCs as an official and state-sponsored truth-telling mechanism. While TRCs demonstrate some potential to heal through narration and state recognition; conversely, narrating trauma can lead to retraumatization. When women are placed at the center of the conversation there is significant reason to believe that the work is incomplete and complementary processes are necessary. I show in Chapters 4 and 5 two distinct all-women collectives that transform healing strategies during violence into political projects as a way to heal. Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria and Las Arpilleristas offer two complementary testimonial models in conjunction with TRCs for countries in transition.
Chapter 4: Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) represent a state-sponsored and official transitional justice method that uses testimony to allow survivors of the dictatorship to recount their experiences and heal their emotional wounds. Despite various scholarship that demonstrates the capacity for real personal catharsis to occur from participating in TRCs, the benefits appear to be limited at best. I argue that TRCs are counterproductive and problematic when centering healing women’s trauma as the main goal. This means that countries transitioning out of violent conflict and into stable democracies need to enact additional strategies to address what TRCs cannot accomplish.

This chapter focuses on a complementary strategy to truth-telling and testimony, enacted by women, that demonstrates another method to recount subjective experiences as a way to work through trauma and emotional wounds. In doing so, I position narrating subjective experiences of emotional pain and trauma as a means to healing. Healing then becomes the legitimate end goal for post-atrocity politics and women as the legitimate political actors in charge. I have divided two strategies into two connected chapters: Chapter 4 focuses on Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria (Collective Embroideries for Memory) and Chapter 5 focuses on Las Arpilleristas. In this chapter, I concentrate on the ways in which bordadoras, or embroideries, provide women a different testimonio strategy to heal their unrecognized pain while still maintaining a political project. Transitional justice must then reconceptualize embroidery as testimony that contests and challenges official truths extracted from testimony in TRCs. I argue that bordadoras uniquely provide three main benefits to the survivors that make up for TRCs inadequacies.

Firstly, Bordadoras provide women with a place to heal collectively from trauma. The women who participate in the collective are survivors of political imprisonment, sexual violence
and torture. Women who endure these types of violence often demonstrate signs of extreme traumatization such as dissociation, victimization, self-hatred and self-harm. TRCs may not represent the most effective way to heal trauma. This is due to the likely possibility of retraumatization within the setting of a hearing as they are not constructed with psychological understandings of trauma in mind. *Bordadoras* creates a complementary truth-telling forum for women to continue interpreting violence with other empathetic women who have gone through similar experiences. As psychological research explains, spaces of listening and solidarity is how women heal most effectively from trauma.\(^{211}\) Therefore, this model is gender sensitive and informed by women’s healing strategies.

Secondly, the actual embroideries provide women with a unique truth-telling canvas to narrate subjective experiences that might not have been sufficiently acknowledged or addressed in official and national truths. Women choose what they want to stitch, the meaning behind their art, and how they represent it as a form of public testimony. Thus, *bordadoras* are a physical testimony that illustrates a subjective experience of emotional pain personally important to each artist. TRCs tend to prioritize the experiences of men or the dead as victims of regimes, placing women’s experiences as secondary or non-important. Moreover, the strict definitions of who qualifies as a victim and the utilization of forensic truth (as opposed to narrative truth) also position women as disadvantaged for their capacity to narrate their subjective experiences. Conversely, I argue that the collective provides a more effective forum for addressing subjective themes.

Lastly, I argue that *bordadoras* emphasize the political potential of mourning loss.

Because this project is focused on healing and trauma as a basis for transitioning countries to

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\(^{211}\) Stenius and Veysey, ""It's the Little Things": Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing."
work through a violent past, I position emotions and mourning as highly political. The collective embodies this sentiment because the embroideries, while cathartic, also produce a political truth about the dictatorship. Their works, particularly of the pregnant and disappeared compañeras, are accompanied by a process of investigation about their lives and death. Therefore, while their work stems from emotional pain of their losses, this results in a physical testimony that places the nature of the violence during the military regime into public discourse. I previously discussed how women and the dead share a profound relationship through mourning. This chapter contextualizes that sentiment to argue that mourning actually serves to the women’s advantage because the result is an alternative testimonio that tells stories disregarded or absent in official discourse and history.

**History of Bordadoras**

*Bordadoras* translates to embroideries. During the dictatorship, bordadoras took on a specific meaning because embroidering was one of the few activities women were allowed to do in the detention centers. In part, this was due to rigid conceptions of femininity that positioned women in domestic spheres performing remedial tasks. Women in camps would begin by embroidering practical goods such as tablecloths, blouses and skirts to sell to local and international communities. As many women whom I met during my field research noted, this embroidery workshop quickly transformed into a source of strength, healing, solidarity and a political activity.

Beside the economic benefits to the workshops, Walkiria Jorquera, a current member of the Bordadoras collective, mentioned that they were often places where the women would organize for their political parties. “It wasn’t as if the DINA arrived and we said, ‘we don’t want to know anything more.’ No, we kept thinking about the dictatorship that needed to end, and that
there needed to be resistance.” The workshops, according to Walkiria, were sites of such organization. While the bordadora workshops were technically allowed to further enforce that women remain in domestic and apolitical spheres, they were transformed into sites of survival and resistance. Walkiria spoke with pride on this topic: “Yes, the workshop was a way to resist the dictatorship so that is did not bring depression, so that we would be okay in the end, but it was a way to resist for the parties to organize from the inside.” Importantly, working through the violence and repression was just cathartic and personal as it was political and collective.

As we chatted over tea, Susana Barrientos told me about her youth in the university. She had been very motivated toward “all social issues” and worked with literacy in Playa Ancha, a poor neighborhood in Valparaíso. She became involved in militancy at the university and was detained in Villa Grimaldi after the coup for a brief period and transferred to Tres Álamos. Susana too spoke of the embroidery workshops in Tres Álamos. At first, she described how the women were incentivized to participate in the workshops because they “sold quite well” in the market, and thus, aided their families economically. Yet, later she mentioned that this type of workshop also helped to lift the spirits of the women in the centers. This, she noted, also contributed to their survival. Similarly, Carena Perez, commented on the workshops in Tres Álamos. She laughed when she told me she “suffered” because she had always been bad at manual work, and she did not participate in the embroidering. Yet, she noted that the workshops were a way to support the people that were struggling on the outside economically. “They weaved vests, scarfs, clothes for winter, and through their family members they sent the clothes to the poor camps...outside of Santiago...the family members said that they were donations from the political prisoners.” Even though the women were undoubtedly suffering within the prisons, showing solidarity for those suffering on the outside was still of paramount concern. “This was
also a way to support the people that were doing very poorly on the outside...they were showing solidarity with those who were suffering the economic attacks (embates) of the dictatorship, which brought about unemployment and a lack of work.” As Carena illustrates, demonstrating empathy and solidarity even for those suffering in different circumstances, such as imprisonment and poverty, was something that women took action toward mitigating.

Constructing bordadoras in the dictatorship was a way for women to survive abuse and imprisonment through support, while providing for their families financially on the outside. However, embroidering also had greater political objectives such as continuing to organize against the regime. The collective transformed survival strategies in detention centers into a way to continue healing while achieving greater political objectives of truth and justice.

**Analysis of Bordadoras Today**

*Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria* is an all-women’s collective which began in 2016. All of the members of the collective were detained as political prisoners and often held in Tres Álamos, having personally participated in the labor workshops. They were part of the resistance during the dictatorship in distinct forms. Some worked directly for Salvador Allende or his political party *La Unidad Popular* (UP), some were communist party members or members of the MIR, but most of them participated in leftist organizations and political parties of some kind. Therefore, the group’s identity and collective experience is very specific. The collective is a way to continue fighting for human rights, social justice and memory (contra el olvido or against forgetting). Their work is in part dedicated to their disappeared compañeros/as.

With this common base, the women’s first ever activity was dedicated to embroidering themes of their political ideologies and acts of resistance they did not want to forget. During our conversation, Walkiria broke down the different workshops and exhibitions the group was
dedicated to. Their first action was to make a large embroidery, comprised of 20 or so squares, that depicted themes of the Unidad Popular, resistance, and the disappeared. Their second trabajo or work was dedicated to the folkloric singer Violeta Parra for her 100th birthday. They each found lyrics of her songs they identified with to weave. According to Walkiria, “her songs had to do with the earth, with the birds, with love. I wove a picture that had to do with el pueblo Mapuche, the song is called ‘Arauco Tiene una Pena.’” Each member found particular meaning and imagery within the songs they wanted to reflect in their embroideries. Their third trabajo was to weave pictures of ten disappeared compañeras who were detained, tortured, and killed while pregnant. For Walkiria, this was their most significant work because the women who died did not just die pregnant. They died fighting and resisting the regime while being pregnant. This exhibition was titled Grávidas de Mariposas...Yo Soy which means Pregnant of Butterflies...I am. It has been displayed in other expositions since its inauguration. I will remark on the meaning and importance of this event extensively later on.

Their most recent workshop and inaugural exposition took place on December 17th, 2018, which I had the opportunity to attend during my field research in Chile. The exposition was paid in homage to Victor Jara. Jara was a socialist singer and revolutionary who was politically active in the communist movement and worked directly for Salvador Allende. He was tortured in the National Stadium after the coup. His hands were broken so that he could never play guitar again, and he was eventually murdered. His body was later hung outside the stadium to intimidate other dissidents. Therefore, this event was labeled Justicia Para Victor Jara or Justice for Victor Jara. The women wove lyrics from Jara’s songs they felt close to accompanied by symbolic images, often assigning their own personal significance. This exposition was held in
the ex-cárcel, now El Parque Cultural de Valparaíso, which is where the women meet once every week to chat, weave and organize.

In this chapter, I have located three ways in which the bordadoras collective exemplifies a complementary trauma centered truth-telling approach: they provide catharsis to survivors, a forum for narrating subjective experiences, and they utilize mourning as political acts.

A. Healing

This project is not analyzing the overall effectiveness of truth-telling for post-conflict states generally. Rather, this project analyzes different truth-telling practices that position healing trauma and negative emotions at the center of the discussion. TRCs create a truth-telling forum, that for many reasons, cannot allow survivors emotional redress and catharsis. In fact, women in the collective are survivors of sexual violence through torture. Scholarship tells us that exposing sexual violations to public commissions is difficult and possibly even more traumatic.212

Conversely, Las Bordadoras provides a space for which women can interpret the violence they endured to heal emotional wounds in ways that state-sponsored truth-telling mechanisms may fail to accomplish or worsen. The women of the collective meet once a week in the cultural park to weave and socialize. Walkiria introduces the objectives of the group in a video published by Up Late Television.213 Wearing a red bandana around her neck with white stitching that reads the name and date of her disappeared compañera, with a woven “MIR” stamp at the bottom, she states that the collective “has a characteristic of therapy, that it can relax and calm us.” I observed that the space where they work, both in person and via videos and photos of their workshop and exhibitions, contains distinguishable support group characteristics. They sit

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212 Sideris, "Rape in war and peace: some thoughts on social context and gender roles."
together around a large table covered with different yarn colors and weaving supplies, often sipping tea and eating sweets, laughing and chatting. More than a space to make crafts, this resembles a support group for women with common traumatic experiences and also common political goals. Walkiria sheds some light on this theme as she reflects on the early days of the group in our interview:

The truth is that in the workshops we are compañeras, women. We had different political thinking, we came from different places, but the fact is that we had all fought against the dictatorship, that we had all been detained, that we were relatives of detainees and detained disappeared. It gave us a common base to feel the affection, care and a warmth among us. It was a workshop where there was a lot of healing and companionship.

While this is not an official support group, the benefits of the space relate to the benefits received in more formal settings. Moreover, because the collective has political goals that revolve around justice, human rights and memory, survivors of trauma channel their pain into community action and outreach, which can also be cathartic. As Herman explains, this is vital for survivors of trauma to regain trust in their community and breach the open wounds from a community that turned their back on them.214

Susana Barrientos, an original member of Las Bordadoras, also commented in our interview about the qualities of the space and the group dynamic. She spoke to me about how difficult it was for her to testify in front of La Vicaría de Solidaridad and for further criminal investigations because it was exhausting to recount events that caused so much pain. Yet, she remarks that she has become stronger since then and more able to talk about the topics that were previously too hard. “How did I become stronger and braver?” [Because] “I had this group of women, of embroiderers. After talking, analyzing, laughing, crying, hugging, our creative buttons come out through embroidery. We got to vent all these feelings…” This resonates with

214 Herman, Trauma and recovery.
Judith Butler’s call to reimagine the politics of trauma through creating spaces of vulnerability.\textsuperscript{215} *Las Bordadoras* seemingly embodies this sentiment.

Moreover, the dynamics of the space of *Las Bordadoras* is undoubtedly similar to the dynamics present in the labor workshops within Tres Álamos during the dictatorship. Multiple women commented on the ways in which the workshops “lifted the spirits” of the political prisoners so that they would not “suffer depression” and “would be okay in the end.” Importantly, the healing paradigm of the labor workshop (then, as a way to survive) is still present in the manifestation of the memory project today.

As such, *Las Bordadoras* transform embroidering to survive into a forward-looking political project. The space of the workshop is not just to weave, in fact, that barely begins to cover the dynamics at play. Women talk and analyze events, their ideas, and the ways in which they want to illustrate or represent their experiences and memories. For example, a tree used in one woman’s piece can serve a completely different purpose in another. It could symbolize regrowth and starting over, or it could represent the tree outside of prison window observed every day in detainment. All images require purpose and personal significance. Importantly, the workshops and exhibitions all have very specific themes resulting from emotional pain, loss and suffering. They require planning and organization, such as for their disappeared *compañeros/as*, Victor Jara and Violeta Para. Therefore, the conversations around planning, researching and organizing are part of the healing process. This work of interpreting hard-to-confront memories for some is a way to alleviate suffering. According to one member: “This project was part of the pain. This was a way to free us from our own pains.” In distinct ways, the *bordadoras* labor

\textsuperscript{215} Butler, *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence*. 
workshops and the current collective exemplify the double-sided healing potential: dedication to working through emotional pain can serve as the basis to political action.

B. Subjective Experiences Addressed

The second way *Las Bordadoras* address shortcomings of official truth-telling forums is by placing subjective experiences of emotional pain into the forefront of the project. The women in the collective have the opportunity to pick what they want to project as their official truth via narration (full of emotion and intensity); whereas TRCs utilize forensic evidentiary truth that fits into the model of the procedures and mandate. Additionally, in TRCs, many authors find that women are left out from the process of narration due to priorities of victimhood status enforced under the mandate of the commission. Inappropriate or inadequate truth-telling forums that force survivors to put their traumas into language may bring about retraumatization of a neutralization of the story.216

Conversely, in a project like *Las Bordadoras*, the group of women are self-selected individuals who feel like the official truth did not do their experiences and memories justice. Walkiria remarked on this topic: “After a while we realized that the dictatorship had an official history, and in that official story [there were] stories and a lot of history that had not been told.” As such, they became participants in a truth-telling project that highlights the memories and subjective painful moments they feel they want to make dominant. Walkiria notes that *Bordadoras* allow for women to weave “fragments that are important to maintain in memory” (*retazos para nosotros es importante como mantener en la memoria*). There are no limitations to what they chose to narrate and how they chose to do so; they can present their work and use their voice as they see fit. This starkly contrasts experiences in TRCs, where the structures and

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216 Edkins, *Trauma and the memory of politics*. 
procedures often enforce what gets narrated and how. Moreover, the space of the workshop allows for the women to continue working through their pain together because healing is an ongoing process, which is denied by the temporal body of a TRC.

One particularly painful memory the women decided was important to narrate is that of pregnant women who were detained and disappeared. In the exposition Pregnant of Butterflies...I am, each woman wove one of these compañera, which was noted by many members as their most significant project. While the commissions would report if a woman was pregnant while she died, it was devoid of the details of her life that made her existence whole and meaningful. Rather, they reported the death as forensic and evidential. Therefore, the goal of the exhibition was to give meaning back to their lives, because as Walkiria stated, the women were pregnant, but they were also strong luchadoras (fighters) against the state.

In the inauguration of this particular exhibition, each member stood in front of the microphone and read a bit about the woman they decided to weave.217 They reported the facts of their abduction and detainment, but more importantly, they reported more narrative-based truths such as their character, occupation, passions and aspirations. Verónica Bravo commented on her disappeared compañera in a documentary by Parque Cultural, stating: “She came from a simple and humble home, she was a hard worker, she was very caring...I do this so that you will know a little about who was [compañera].” Details the women recounted were pieces that constructed a larger picture of the disappeared compañeras to understand their stories not just as facts of the dictatorship, but of lives that had value and meaning disrupted by the dictatorship.

Margarita Ortiz dedicated her embroidery to a disappeared compañera who was three months pregnant. She remarks that she feels sadness and sorrow (*pena*) when imagining the suffering she went through, yet, reminisces fondly of her friend’s life: “When I weave the beautiful face that [name] had, I view her as delicate, intelligent…and committed. She was 24 years old when she was detained which is the same age as my daughter right now who is also young, beautiful and committed.” These women weave to make the stories of their compañeras known but known in a different light. As such, they practice a narrative truth that allows the women to publicize what they think is important to recognize from their subjective perspectives and lived experiences. Truths like these have a hard time fitting into the model of official truth-telling mechanisms (see Figure 1 for examples of bordadoras presented at the exhibition).

Evidently, the fact that Las Bordadoras decided to dedicate one of their first exhibitions to this theme speaks to the vigor of motherhood. The members were undoubtedly invested emotionally to this theme. This is the case, in part, because a lot of the women are currently mothers and have emotional attachments to maternity, the creation of new life, and feel sorrow when thinking about their compañeras inability to do the same. As suggested by Cecilia Martinez, thinking of the pregnant women reminded her of her daughter. Moreover, Walkiria explains: “We struggled through it a lot, it was difficult because we were all mothers…”

Motherhood is a way for the survivors to feel empathy and connect with their disappeared compañeras, even if they did not know each other personally well. Women’s bodies, as a site of reproduction, were venerated by the state through converting sexual impulses into a devotion to serving the family. Sexual reproduction was a means of domination as women who challenged these roles were seen as impure and infertile. Pregnant women’s bodies then further transgressed these boundaries by simultaneously reproducing and militating. Despite systematic sexual
violence directed at women dissidents, as discussed in Chapter 2, all of my interviewees mentioned the reformation of maternal bonds within detention centers as a mechanism for survival as well as a tool of resistance. Motherhood, then, found a way to transform itself again within this political project as a source for illuminating subjective pain (in this case, the painful memories of their deceased, pregnant compañeras).

More than stitching the faces of pregnant disappeared compañeras, many women deploy motherly symbolic imagery in other works that are less directly relate to the theme. For example, one woman in the exhibition I attended for Victor Jara wove a tree sprouting simple leaves and flowers, with roots extending down beneath the earth to surround and protect an infant (Figure 2). The flowers and roots surrounding the baby recreate a womb for the baby to develop and grow. Woven below this image are lyrics from one of Jara’s songs titled “El Alma Llena de Banderas” or “The Soul Full of Flags.” The lyrics read: “...and the flower of the new day was born.” This song is about the fight for justice and how it may kill compañeros/as, but their cause does not die with them. Their soul, which rests below the earth, still advances, carrying flags. During the exhibition, I was drawn to this embroidery because of the way in which the artist extracted a lyric she found meaningful and attached to it symbolism that reflected her feelings and perhaps subjective experiences. As the symbolism deployed in her picture may suggest, children are the source of a new life, the turning of a new leaf so to speak, that demonstrate the hope and beauty of a new day (nuevo día) or more broadly, a better world. The profound simplicity yet complex nature of her images struck me. Motherly connection is prevalent and permeates throughout many of the art pieces.

Susana Barrientos also presented at the inauguration of the Victor Jara event. Her bordadora was dedicated to a song by Jara titled “Luchín.” The song tells the story of Luchín,
young boy who plays in the mud with the cats and dogs and his “ball of rags” as a horse watch
them nearby. Luchín is poor and was born in a población called Barrancas, which according to
Susana, is a well-known site of political resistance during the dictatorship particularly because of
women’s participation and leadership in the soup kitchens to feed the poor. In her embroidery,
Susana stitched a scene described in the song. The lyric she used for inspiration was: “Si hay
niños como Luchín que comen tierra y gusanos abramos todas las jaulas pa’ que vuelen como
pájaros,” which reads in English, “If there are children like Luchín who eat dirt and worms let us
open the cages so that they can fly like birds.” The lyric is accompanied with an image of the
población (Figure 3). In the foreground, there are women working at the soup kitchen as they
carry a large container of food with a ladle. Above the houses is a carriage full of children being
flown away from the población by the horse in the song. All of the children are brightly colored
and all wear happy expressions on their faces. One child in the front of the carriage is holding the
dog, and the cat is clinging onto the little girl riding on the horse.

In my interview with the artist, she spoke about the meaning behind her bordadora and
her process of creating it. “One learns a phrase or a word that can reconstruct your social
reality.” For her, the story of Luchín was a starting point to work through her feelings that
revolve around her witnessing and sympathizing with children in poverty during the dictatorship.
“You looked, you saw poverty, they went barefoot, they did not eat well, they were poorly fed,
poorly dressed, but if you compare that to the poverty of now, to that invisibility of childhood as
full of suffering...it's super strong.” She used the song to envision a world where children, like
Luchín, could fly away (estos niños tienen que volar) and start a better life. She also talked about
children and the future within the contexts of human rights. “No one should remove the rights of
children...children, more than the future of Chile and the future of the world, are people, the
same as you, who have the same rights and more, because they are vulnerable, because they are tiny (pequeñitos).” The children who suffered during the dictatorship, according to the artist, still face structural violence and poverty that resemble circumstances from the dictatorship. By depicting this scene, it signifies a place where she feels truth was not addressed appropriately was that of poverty and human rights abuses that impact children. This relates to earlier points that institutional forms of political redress fail to acknowledge invisible violence, that does not directly appear to be violent such as socio-material hardship. Therefore, her embroidery resembles a tool to narrate a truth she feels is important and unrecognized officially.

Another theme projected through the bordadoras was the role of the laborer (campesino/a) within social justice causes. Many of Jara’s songs focus on the imagery of the land: the mountains, earth and water as a source of life and reason to fight exploitation and domination. One song that represents this sentiment explicitly is titled “Plegaria a un Labrador,” translated as “Prayer to the Farmer.” The song begins: “Rise up and look at the mountain from whence come wind, sun, and water/ you who drives the course of the river/ you who planted the flight of your soul.” The song illustrates how the farmer and the earth coexist. It recognizes the intense labor the farmer invests into the earth as his work drives the farmer’s life and soul, serving as a reason to defend the earth when attacked. One member of Las Bordadoras chose to use this song for her work (Figure 4). She wove an image of snow-capped mountains, hands open, reaching below the earth, with a white stream flowing through the hands. Stitched below the image are Jara’s lyrics which read: “Together we will go united in blood/ today is the time that can be tomorrow/ Free us from the one/ who rules us/ in poverty.” The hands are red

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218 Zolkos, Redressive politics and the nexus of trauma, transitional justice and reconciliation, 177.
symbolic of the blood, perhaps that farmers bleed from their labor invested in the earth. Yet, the blood also resonates with Jara’s sentiments that the laborer is ready to fight, bleed, and defend the earth for freedom. The laborer (represented through the hands) and the earth maintain an intimate relationship of respect and coexistence that the Chicago model neoliberalism dismantled and disrupted. Many of the women deploy earthly images in their works which resonate to this theme. Most of the bordadoras (even outside of the Victor Jara event) use birds, mountains, flowers, sun, wind, and rain to illustrate a larger meaning or story, yet all are grounded to earthly imagery. Violeta Para was a folkloric artist dedicated to fighting inequality and often sang about the importance of the land and centuries of oppression that the Mapuche have endured by colonization and the Chilean state. This is most evident in her song “Arauco Has Sorrow” with lyrics such as “entonces corre la sangre/ No sabe el indio qué hacer/Le van a quitar su tierra/ La tiene que defender/ El indio se cae muerto” or “then the blood runs/ the indian does not know what to do/ they are going to take their land/ he has to defend it/ the indian falls dead.” By choosing to use the work of Jara and Parra, it shows that the women want to continue fighting for and defending the beliefs fought for during and leading up to the rise of socialism.

Structural inequality, then, is a normative goal for these women to remedy and challenge. This further demonstrates that this collective is not just a memory project, but an active political project that utilizes subjective images, songs, meaning, histories, etc., for larger social justice causes. This is further exemplified by the fact that each member of Las Bordadoras I spoke with is, or at some point, was, a social worker for women and children in poor sectors. Thus, they access a current fight for human rights via continual structural oppression and poverty. Of course, the women are choosing to narrate structural inequalities through the work of Jara and Parra. This is important because these singers were folkloric artists directly associated with the
left, and for Jara, executed as a result. Therefore, illustrating these artists’ work further aligns the women in the project with ideas they fought for during their days in communist groups and the MIR before and during the military regime. This idea is important for my comparison between bordadoras and arpilleras in the following section because the women who make bordadoras maintain a closeness to the ideas fought for that in the past led to their torture, sexual violation and imprisonment. The nature of these traumas, I argue, uniquely shape the work and goals of the group, particularly in comparison to arpilleras, which are now typically made by women in poverty.

C. Political Nature of Mourning

Invoked throughout my entire project is the idea that mourning, as a way to work through loss, can be effectively directed toward political ends. As previously mentioned, women have a relationship to the dead in post-atrocity politics. Perhaps it’s because the socialization of motherhood places women as responsible for the deaths of their loved ones, and thus, obligated to mourn their losses. In Chile, the state’s ascribed gender roles that positioned women at the center of the family made it so that women more directly felt the losses of disappeared family members. Moreover, TRCs often further enforce these definitions and responsibilities of gender because they utilize women as testifiers for the dead or men, but consequently, exclude women from testifying to their own pain.

In the first section, I argue that speaking for the dead is personally cathartic because remembering their loved compañeras encourages a healing process that state-sponsored mechanisms do not provide. In the section above, I demonstrate that women address the inability

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219 See Annie Dandavati in Chapter 1
220 Driver, "Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History."
to narrate their own pain in TRCs by illustrating personally significant themes. Conversely, this section analyzes the ways in which women speaking or dedicating their truth-telling capabilities to the dead is politically valuable and strategic.

Importantly, the actual design of the collective is a reconstruction of what the detainees did during the dictatorship to survive and resist. Therefore, the physical act of embroidering is a dedication to the dead or the suffering. The group has then transformed the craft, an activity for survival from those close to death, into a political project dedicated to their memory.

These women view themselves as speakers on behalf of the dead. Yet, for many, this uniquely allowed them to enter into political spaces and action. Walkiria commented in our interview that immediately after the dissolution of the regime, “our principle fight to put forth testimonio that we were with them, that what the dictatorship is saying is not the truth, that they existed and we are witnesses that we were once with them, that is what we were fighting for with our life.” Moreover, Carena Perez also notes women became political, in part, out of necessity by an emptiness of men in their lives. Yet, for Carena, this allowed women to enter into political spaces that they were not involved in before because they needed to fight to find their loved ones: “To look for husband, brother, father, and after some time, we developed a sense of consciousness, a new form of leadership.” Thus, there is a certain political potential for women as speakers and representatives for the dead, even if it is founded out of necessity. This is consistent with findings from Makana and Kaplan who investigated Angolan anti-colonial resistance and Argentine Madres fight respectively.221 While institutional truth-telling mechanisms recognize political use of women as mourners (as more women testify), Las

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221 See Chapter 2.
Bordadoras recognizes women who mourn the dead as political agents for their own sake and for a greater political goal.

Working through the pain of loved ones dying through a process of mourning lies at the foundation of this project. Cecilia Martinez is the president of the collective. Speaking on behalf of the group, she remarks that they feel as though they have a debt to pay to their disappeared compañeras. For the woman Cecilia chose to weave, she recounted details as precise as the day and street name of where she was abducted. The process of mourning their compañeras is accompanied by extensive research, speaking to their families and collecting evidence to uncover details about their clandestine robbery and death.

Tegualda Tapia described that she chose this compañera to weave even though they were not that close. She was still dedicated to investigating her life and discovered that they shared a mutual friend whom they were both very close with. “She had a well-known face,” remarks Tegualda, “I got along well with her.” After research, she confronted uncertainties around her pregnancy and death. She reports that the compañera was 8 months pregnant when she was detained. Some information says that the baby was born in a military hospital and is still alive, while other testimony suggests that the baby was killed after it was born, along with the mother. Working through uncertain retazos (fragments) of memories is part of the process of creating testimony on behalf of the dead.

Tegualda Tapia recounted how the process of mourning is a painful one. “It is a profound process, difficult, painful...it is a theme, through a human point of view, very hard to understand and comprehend, the wickedness, the brutality that a human being can

222 Valparaíso, "Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria Exposición Grávidas mariposas yo soy."
223 Valparaíso, "Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria Exposición Grávidas mariposas yo soy."
bring...Because we are mothers, this [reality] is difficult to confront.” This member, despite the pain of thinking about the circumstances her compañera had faced, also participated in a larger political process to discover the truths of her kidnapping, torture and murder.

Ultimately when we started investigating our disappeared compañeras that we wanted to weave, it was a difficult job because we needed to understand many details of their life, of their kidnapping of their torture, each day was anguishing, painful. This project was part of the pain, this was a way to free us from our own pains.

For this member, the pain she felt was an ongoing process. Mourning, as a way to work through emotional pain of loss, is channeled through bordadoras as a way to productively direct that pain toward political ends. The political end is an extensive investigation of her compañera’s life to construct a history that brings about justice and truth to her life. When we understand trauma as something seemingly incomprehensible to prior knowledge, then mourning (by engaging in memory work on behalf of the dead) is the process by which to make sense of the trauma. For members of Las Bordadoras, completing a narrative or piece of testimony that works through the incomprehensible nature of what happened, is a political process of mourning their traumas.

Ultimately, the work of Las Bordadoras is political by nature due to the fact that they create a record of data that recounts the details of lives perhaps not recognized by institutional truth-telling mechanisms. Informational pamphlets were presented at the exhibition alongside the works, also distributed on social media and outreach for the group (Figure 5). It shows pictures of the disappeared women, their names, occupation, their relationship to resistance, how many months they were pregnant, and the date that they were kidnapped. By creating a accessible piece of memory for those who attend the events to view, the group places at the forefront of the project a discourse of no olvido (to not forget) to shed light, for those perhaps detached from the

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224 See Cathy Caruth in Chapter 2.
dictatorship, on a particular category of victim that has not received proper justice officially and nationally: pregnant women. Therefore, women mourners become extremely valuable agents in the redress for post-conflict politics.

**Conclusion**

*Colectiva Bordadoras por la Memoria* represents a complementary method of truth-telling that positions healing through embroidery as its main objective. Moreover, it represents one method in which women are leaders of post-conflict politics. Through interview analysis and an examination of the group through various media, I demonstrate that collective *Bordadoras* have provided a way for women affected by the dictatorship to place their painful memories and traumas at the forefront of their work. In doing so, the collective allows for women to work through their trauma within a project that is politically oriented. Mourning, then, is a political act of working through seemingly incomprehensible emotions. Both because the space imitates dynamics of a support group where empathetic conversation, support and solidarity can occur, and because publicizing and politicizing memories that are painful and personal allows for catharsis that still maintains greater political goals implicated in testimony. Ultimately, *Las Bordadoras* demonstrates the potential for healing trauma and negative emotions to serve as the basis for legitimate truth-telling work within transitional justice.

In the next chapter, I illustrate another example of an alternative *testimonio* project in Chile that also places healing from subjective experiences via truth-telling at the center of their in a different art collective. Like embroidering, *arpilleras* were also made during the dictatorship in different contexts. *Arpilleras* were made by poor women in *poblaciones* whereas *bordadoras* were made by women in detention centers. Both strategies were ways to survive, led by women during immediate acts of violence, yet transformed into transitional justice projects later on.
Slightly different with their foundation and forward-looking objectives, *Las Arpilleras* provide another physical artwork of testimony to examine other options for countries in transition.
Chapter 5: Arpilleristas de…

History of Arpilleras

_Arpilleras_ have a long history within the Chilean context of denunciation and resistance, which already differentiates them from _Las Bordadoras_. _Arpilleras_ in Spanish means burlap, and the women who make them are referred to as _arpilleristas_. As such, the _arpilleras_ are small, wall-hanging tapestries originating during the dictatorship by women in poor sectors or poblaciones of the greater metropolitan Santiago area. In their early days, the tapestries were created out of grain bags, often burlap material, with layered/ artistic figures stitched onto them made from whatever material one could find. Some would use clay, wooden objects, and even an array of fabric materials such as wool to bring a three-dimensional element to the pieces. The finished products are colorful, and at a distance, often appear cheerful. This vivid appearance is why people often misperceive these works as nothing more than simple crafts. In reality, the themes stitched into the _arpilleras_ are what separates tapestry work in Chile from other Latin American contexts. Chilean _arpillera_ images uniquely illustrate political themes resulting from national suffering and are rooted in political resistance from poor sectors within the dictatorship context. Thus, the the work and legacy of _arpilleras_ have placed women as key human rights actors within international human rights studies, due to their utilization of narration through tapestry to testify the subjective suffering that resulted from state abuse.

The initial production of _las arpilleras_ coincides with the political hardships that poblaciones confronted in the early days of the regime. As Chapter 1 describes, Pinochet’s reforms disproportionately affected those already living within Chile’s poorest sectors. For example, unemployment was exacerbated by neoliberal austerity measures, natural resources were privatized, and men were displaced as breadwinners as well as often kidnapped by the
secret police for leftist or unionist associations. Because many men were either displaced from work or kidnapped to jails and detention centers, similarly large numbers of previously unemployed women began to fill the low-paying workforce to compensate for the male absences. Housewives who had never worked before found themselves stuck with a double burden: they were responsible for maintaining not only the family unit, but also their literal survival through providing food and income. It was through these changed circumstances that women, now heads of households and investigators of their male loved ones’ whereabouts, came to know other women in the same position. Thus, collective trauma resulted in women developing new political sensibilities and an increasingly political consciousness of working-class struggles.

The first *arpillera* workshop formed in 1974, with support provided by La Vicaría de Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) in order to provide psychological and economic assistance to those upended by unemployment and the disappearances of their loved ones. As Agosín writes, these women came together as they did not know “what to do to placate the grief, to remedy the economic crisis, and to feed the children who were without fathers.” The Vicaría de Solidaridad was a prevalent human rights organization permitted to be active in Chile because of its relationship to the Catholic Church. Consequently, the Vicaría “enjoyed relative immunity from direct and violent attacks by the military.” This protective guard provided by the Vicaría made it more likely for women to feel safe joining the *arpillera* groups, more so than if women

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226 See *Engendering Democracy in Chile* by Annie Dandavati in Chapter 1.
were to form these groups independently in their homes. The Vicaría offered support to the arpillera workshops, which allowed the group to proliferate. For example, La Vicaría provided a space to work and materials, and facilitated the selling of the arpilleras so that the artists could generate an income. While arpillera groups functioned to help women in poor sectors outside of Santiago share their griefs and earn money, it was the support of the Vicaría that allowed for workshops to spring up in a variety of zones across Chile. The Vicaría sold the works domestically and abroad to earn money for the artists as well as to buy more materials.

Due to censorship from the repressive state apparatus, arpilleras were banned within the dictatorship. They were still sold in Chile cautiously in hidden venues which were designated as safe or unsafe by the Vicaría. When the venue was unsafe, the Vicaría kept the “sharply denunciatory ones hidden” and only brought them out if they felt sure the potential buyer was not a DINA agent. More frequently, the Vicaría would send the arpilleras abroad in small groups to avoid detection. This was made possible due to Vicaría’s strong connection with international human rights and humanitarian organizations that took interest in the women’s work as a way to expose Pinochet’s crimes. Distributing the tapestries to a wider audience provided arpillistás a platform to highlight everyday brutalities to a larger community, one which might have been unaware of the extent of blatant and unimaginable human rights abuses. Adams refers to

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230 Adams, Art against dictatorship: making and exporting arpilleras under Pinochet, Book Twenty-Nine., 51.
231 Adams, Art against dictatorship: making and exporting arpilleras under Pinochet, Book Twenty-Nine., 213.
arpilleras as “keeping a record of history” about the violations that were clandestine and denied by the state; therefore, the tapestries illustrated officially concealed truths.233

Given the content and themes depicted, the arpilleras are unique forms of political denunciation via tapestry work. Agosín observes that each arpilla could be classified as a piece of evidence that details the crimes of the dictatorship: “The arpilleras show the stuff of daily life for many people: hunger, sorrow, death, unemployment, repression, hope. The arpilleras are neither escapism nor political tract: they depict life in its complexity and contrasts.”234 For example, it is not uncommon to see arpilleras that depict pleasant expressions on the faces of both children playing and women working in soup kitchens. Yet, upon closer examination, they almost always deploy implicit symbols or images that denounce the regime. For example, children may be playing in a field with a river flowing through it, a scene that appears vibrant and cheerful, but faucets that should provide access to public water have red X’s through them to demonstrate the fatal impacts of water privatization.235 In another, a family all wearing brightly colored dresses, may sit around a table to eat dinner. Yet, there is an empty chair with a question mark stitched into the chair to represent the unanswered question of “where are they?” that was continuously ignored or denied by the state.

Other arpilleras chronicled more explicitly the extent of human rights violations. For example, I have come across many arpilleras that depict scenes of torture, solitary confinement, and brutality within detention centers and prisons. Often, women are shown protesting outside, demanding to know if their loved ones are held there. Interestingly, women almost always place

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233 Adams, Art against dictatorship: making and exporting arpilleras under Pinochet, Book Twenty-Nine., 244.
234 Agosín, Scraps of life: Chilean arpilleras : Chilean women and the Pinochet dictatorship, 83.
235 Agosín, Scraps of life: Chilean arpilleras : Chilean women and the Pinochet dictatorship.
themselves in the *arpilleras*, since their very first iterations. This visual and physical presence in the tapestries emphasizes the necessary denunciation of national actions that resulted in women’s development of a new political consciousness. I have also seen many *arpilleras* that feature solely women, pictured as collectively participating in some form of survival, resistance, or denunciation. One common example is the *arpilleras* that depict groups of women gathered in circles, cooking in large soup pots to feed unemployed community members. Moreover, I’ve encountered a number of *arpilleras* showing women marching in the streets, carrying signs emblazoned with photos of their loved ones, and captioned with “where are they?” surrounded by question marks. This moving combination of emotional context and national trauma is also an image commonly deployed within other Latin American dictatorship contexts. These tapestries demonstrate, yet again, a collective and distinctly feminine political consciousness fueled by collective trauma, employing a transformation of “personal sorrows to embrace...the agony of the country as a whole.”236

Many highlight the folkloric roots of the *arpilleras* as also important to understanding their content, imagery and significance. While the origin of *arpilleras* is disputed, many cite Violeta Para as the first to use burlap in this style as a canvas to superimpose other figures and images. Violeta’s *arpilleras* were made in the 1950s and depicted scenes of everyday life, with a focus on Chilean folklore, to preserve tradition and identity.237 Violeta was a representative for the poor and oppressed, and even though she had died before the coup, her family was immediately exiled and so her life and work maintained its political salience. The adaptation of Violeta’s *arpillera* technique by lower class Chilean women during the dictatorship shows a

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236 Agosín, *Scraps of life: Chilean arpilleras : Chilean women and the Pinochet dictatorship*, 86.
nexus between *arpilleras* as a high art craft and traditional Chilean popular art. Asogin notes that the grand majority of *arpilleras* typically include the backdrop of the Andes, noting that “sometimes they are very dark as though the mountains were in mourning…” and other times “the peaks are [vivid] and covered with flowers giving a hopeful air to the scene.” 238 By focusing on elements of the earth, such as the sun, river, and mountains, the *arpilleras* demonstrate the close relationship between indigenous roots, lived experience, and political resistance. Even the fact that women used recycled and repurposed materials emphasizes this point. As Lucy Lippard notes:

...by confronting [resistance] in a familiar medium that does not separate art and life they are producing the most cohesive political art around. The arpilleras are...a valid indigenous Chilean art [especially] now that the murals have been painted over, the poets and the singers murdered and imprisoned. 239

Ultimately, *arpilleras* demonstrated agency and political action on behalf of the women who made them. At its core, the practice of *arpilleras* provided a way for women to earn an income for their families struggling to survive, whose difficulties were heightened by displaced work or disappeared husbands. The tapestries were associated with the phrase “parar la olla” or “to put food in the pot.” 240 Importantly, women gained a new political awareness, as many had been largely unaware of social problems, widespread inequality, and tactics of repression before matters were taken in their own hands. Thus, women who were largely limited to the home and domestic sphere acquired a new sense of political agency, often beginning to view themselves as leftist, an identification few of them called their own before their work. 241

238 Agosin, *Scraps of life: Chilean arpilleras : Chilean women and the Pinochet dictatorship*, 86.
239 As quoted in Adams, 221.
“to be an arpillerista became a source of pride, since arpilleras were highly valued in the resistance community; the woman acquired recognition and status in that community through their work.”242

Analysis of Arpilleras Today

Arpilleras today are still created by women, both those who were affected by the dictatorship directly, as well as by the greater community through outreach workshops and initiatives. Some women work on arpilleras in small collectives labeled by the area they are from or where they work. Some specific groups that I have come across in my research are those such as Las Arpilleristas del Programa PRAIS Valparaíso (PRAIS is a local program that provides space for the women to work in), Arpilleristas de lo Hermida, Arpilleristas de La Pincoya, and the group that I went to visit, called Arpilleristas de Ex-Clínica Santa Lucía. La Vicaría still plays a significant role within these groups, though it has been transformed since the dissolution of the regime in 1990 to Fundacion Solidaridad once the group left its church sponsorship. Today the group focuses on offering support to women’s organizations, small businesses, and indigenous and artisan groups. Like in its earlier days, the foundation still facilitates workshops for arpilleras and facilitates sales domestically and internationally. Therefore, the foundation helps preserves the tradition while also providing economic incentive and development. Because the Fundación is in Santiago, the contemporary workshops did begin in the metropolitan area of Santiago but have since extended to communities hours away from Santiago, for example, in Melipilla and Talagante. Even today, the contemporary workshops are present as far as Puerto Montt in the southern end of the country. While many of the women who

are current participants also made *arpilleras* during the regime, there are many other participants who come to the workshops as new artisans because they live in poor sectors and have limited resources-- the same reasons that women began this project in the first place. Importantly, the *arpillerista* groups meet regularly, at community centers or the houses of *compañeras* to work and chat, as well as host community outreach workshops to teach children and younger community members about the *arpillera* technique, history and work. This element of continued narration is unique to the *arpillera* groups. I now examine the ways in which *arpilleras* provide a complementary truth telling process through the same three facets presented in the preceding chapter: healing, narrating subjective experiences, and politicizing mourning.

A. Healing

Important to this project is an understanding that testimony is political and cathartic, which positions healing from trauma through a process of testimony as political. Moreover, creating spaces that resemble how women tend to heal best includes women within transitional justice solutions, and consequently, as political actors. I argue that the small, community-based *arpillera* workshops provide a way for women to heal with one another from painful experiences within the dictatorship because they encourage a feminine sort of healing. I have observed throughout my interviews and media analysis that as a whole these workshops create spaces of support and solidarity, similar to the early days of the project while working in the *Vicaría*.

In a community event entitled “Woman: Living Heritage,” the Municipalidad de Huechuraba hosted a community event to present *arpilleras* made by the Arpilleristas de la Pincoya group in an exhibition of their work. The documentary captures the event and interviews
the *arpilleristas* who presented their pieces. Margarita Rivas noted that one incentive to participate in the group is to meet and engage with other women who also want to integrate themselves within the “beautiful artwork.” Rosa Saldaña, another member of the Arpilleristas de la Pincoya, remarks that the work is a way for women to express themselves “through sharing with one another, through getting to know other people, and forming friendships.” The particular dynamics present in the workspace define the women’s experiences of the project. This, for some, is the reason they participate in the groups. Another member of Las Arpillerista de la Pincoya laughs as she explains why this work is enjoyable for her. “I have ten good compañeras, they are quiet...I am the one that talks more than everyone else.” The vitality of the group dynamic is embedded in the process of making *arpilleras*.

Through my analysis of documentaries which focus on current *arpillera* groups, the workspaces often resemble those of support groups. For example, the Arpilleristas de la Pincoya meet in what appears to be a living room, where they come together weekly to create their pieces. They greet each other, catch up on their days, and take their respective seats around a small table covered in craft materials. Just like the *Bordadoras*, the *Arpilleristas* talk about their designs with one another, but also more generally about their lives. Las Arpilleristas Lo Hermida likewise meets regularly to create their *arpilleras*. While this group appears to work in a community center, they nonetheless function within the same dynamic of group support. The women chat about their work and share a connection that resembles the friendship and solidarity

243 Municipalidad de Huechuraba, “‘Patrimonio Vivo’ a las Arpilleristas de La Pincoya,” (YouTube, 2018).
244 Municipalidad de Huechuraba, "DOCUMENTAL ARPILLERAS DE LA PINCOYA," (YouTube, 2018).
245 Huechuraba, "DOCUMENTAL ARPILLERAS DE LA PINCOYA."
gained by having gone through similar dire conditions during the military regime. These all-
women spaces support findings used throughout my project to best explain how women heal
from intense negative emotions. Importantly, I argue that in these groups the type of healing is
more focused on friendship and bonding and less on an urgency to work through trauma. I
address this distinction more directly in the conclusion.

This healing quality is notable within my personal experience spending time with Las
Arpilleristas de la ex-Clínica Santa Lucía. The women in this group meet regularly to construct
their tapestries, as well as chat and enjoy each others’ company. The space is small, much
smaller than that of Las Bordadoras. Within the small room where the arpilleristas work, there
is one small table in the center that contains all of the bright fabrics, cloth and string. The women
sit around the table with their tea and sweets, laughing and joking with one another as they create
their pieces. María Alicia appeared to be the leader of the group (Figure 6).

María Alicia works in La Ex-Clínica, a former hospital and torture center operated by the
DINA during the dictatorship, and now a national site of memory. It is located in Cerro Santa
Lucia in the center of Santiago. María and a small group of women meet at the memory site
every Friday afternoon to create arpilleras. María was detained during the dictatorship, and like
other women I interviewed, María embroidered in the labor workshops in Tres Álamos. She
recounted to me that she had always been an artist, though a frustrated one, because she was
never able to claim that title as her profession. Her parents were both unionists and leftists, as
well as gifted weavers and artisans. When the dictatorship ended, María saw arpilleras as an
effective outlet for working through her painful memories and politicizing them as a way to
continue militating.
When talking to María about *arpilleras* and healing, she did not focus on the cathartic dynamic of the space as much as the cathartic physical process of creating the *arpillera* itself. As she relayed to me in our interview, many of the women initially found it difficult to talk about the things that had happened to them. Yet over time they found that through using vibrant colors and threads, the formation of the *arpillera* allows for them to “soften their pain.” By presenting their stories through their work, the women can portray their lives as meaningful and dignified, despite their suffering and emotional pain: “[Our work] is healing in the sense that one needs to be proud of their life.” María demonstrates that just as important as the space and group dynamic, is the product itself that alleviates pain through the narration of their story. For *arpilleristas* who directly survived violence throughout the regime, like María, the physical creation of the tapestry provides a way to interpret the violence they endured in a safe and supportive space. Therefore, the physical *arpillera*, constructed from vibrant fabrics and rooted in a rich history, holds significant meaning for women continuing to work through their experiences. The groups’ dynamic, space, and the physical act of creation encourage healing through the testimonial craft.

**B. Subjective Experiences Addressed**

*Arpilleristas* today focus their individual work within a wide range of themes which demonstrate the flexibility and accessibility of the testimonial platform. The wide breadth of topics exists in part because any woman living in the poor sector can become a member, encouraging young participants to join even though they did not live through the dictatorship’s violence first hand. This fact means that *arpilleras* give a canvas to narrate meaningful personal stories to many different women with a wide range of perspectives. Commonly, *arpilleristas* employ earthly imagery to emphasis the closeness of their community to the land. A short
documentary entitled *Retazos de Memoria* (Pieces of Memory) made by Piaf Producciones, records and presents a large community workshop in Puerto Montt led by the Arpilleristas de lo Hermida. The workshop was led by two original *arpilleristas* who lived in lo Hermida, a *población* in the Santiago region, who teach women artists in the South the history and process of their craft.

One new participant, Claudia Barría, described how she chose to weave an image of the first place she ever lived. She remembers from her childhood that there were a lot of forests, indicating to her that the earth “has restored life that grows cinnamon trees.” Occupying almost half of her tapestry is a flowing river, with the words “salvemos nosotros ríos” or “save our rivers” stitched into it. She remarks that she is personally “motivated by the theme of water,” and this connection is clear in her work. The *arpilleras* that sprang from this community outreach workshop portray a call for justice in many facets of life. The persistent consequences of Pinochet’s policies are still felt today, disproportionately affecting those living in poor sectors, and as such are critiqued frequently in *arpilleras*. This pattern is not surprising, seeing as *arpilleras* are popular amongst people in *poblaciones*, and are rooted in resistance and denunciation. As such, justice scenes in contemporary *arpilleras* often focus on the earth, as well as the devastating neoliberal reform that continues to attack the land and consequently, quality of life.

Beatriz Asenjo decided to reconstruct a scene that takes place in Chiloé for the subject of her piece. Chiloé is the largest island in Chile, located on the southern end of the country. She explains that her *arpillera* is about more than just Chiloé, it is about the resistance that takes

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place on the island. Her *arpillera* depicts a fishing hut on the edge of the sea with women standing under a sign that reads “Chiloé: Without Contamination.” She explains in the documentary that people must know that you “cannot kill our resources,” further illustrating the continuation of rising political awareness, as well as the continuation of social justice action in other facets of life personally important to the women (Figure 7). Therefore, while many of the *arpillera* are made by women who were not direct witnesses to the dictatorship, the platform still provides a testimony for conditions of everyday life. In this way, the tapestry’s function as a forum for women and denunciation is maintained throughout changing times and contexts.

It is important to note that other participants in this workshop choose to use the *arpilleras* to tell stories in less politically-oriented ways. Abilia Lazcano explained that she makes *arpilleras* in the hopes that someone may see it and understand what she is trying to express. For her, the población where she currently lives is her source of inspiration. In her work she recreated the plaza in the center of her población, with children holding colorful balloons and sliding down slides. The sun is out, and the apples are vibrant in the trees. She chose to depict this scene to remind the viewer that while the plaza requires “a lot of effort to maintain,” it provides a space for the children to play. Carolina Flores is a participant who moved to Puerto Montt but is originally from the northern zone of Arica. She explains that the *arpillera* is a way to reflect the history and the beauty of her home environment. Her tapestry focuses on a train because her father sold products far away and frequently used the train as a mode of transportation, which made it a frequent presence in her family life. Now the train only transports cargo, and no longer exists for passenger use. Placing a train at the center of her *arpillera* was a way to capture (*plasmar*) her childhood via the reconstruction of the train her father used to take (Figure 8). Laura Contreras was born and raised in Puerto Montt. Her objective for the *arpillera*
was to re-create something typical of Puerto Montt, in order to capture her sense of home. She chose to depict the *palafitos*, which are raised fishing dwellings, to represent the sea and the fisherman who labor over it. This, for the artist, is most representative of her home. Lastly, Gloria Torres chose to capture a piece of her family history within her tapestry. Like other participants in the workshop, her ancestors were originally from Chiloé but emigrated to Puerto Montt to sell their produce. Her work tells the story of her family history by visually re-creating her family arriving by boat and selling their products in the local market on the shores. Their expressions are happy as they stand next to their barrels of food, which Gloria made from scrap burlap pieces.

Despite the variety in topics, the *arpilleras* made in the community workshops still carry out political themes relevant to conceptions of contemporary justice. For example, many explicitly critique and denounce neoliberalist policy that attacks land and the way of life for *pobladoras*. For others, the *arpilleras* are simply a testimonial canvas to illustrate fond memories, images from childhood, and scenes that remind them of home and happiness. Subjectivity is still addressed in these works, but in a way that is less directly related to violence and trauma induced by the dictatorship. Nonetheless, the *arpilleras* provide a way for women to illustrate their lived experience of everyday life in the *población*, which is an act of resistance of its own. *Arpilleras* then represent a more normative truth-telling practice than we have seen in TRCs and embroideries.

C. Political Nature of Mourning

This project positions healing from negative emotions as a central goal for transitioning states. Importantly, healing is not seen as merely emotional or psychological, but as a process of political work. Mourning, as I have demonstrated, is the process of interpreting and working
through loss, often corporeal loss that resulted in emotional pain. *Arpillera* work was originally rooted in the continuous search for lost loved ones as a way to fight for justice. In the aftermath of state conflict, it is often women who maintain a close and complex relationship to the dead, and consequently are assigned with the responsibility of mourning.\(^{248}\) During the original days of the *arpilleras*, this was certainly the case for those involved. As Asogín writes:

> In the hands of the women who make the arpilleras are stories of loss, denial of a future, lives robbed of happiness, grandchildren, and family love. The women are united by their grief, by the absence of their loved ones, as well as by the incessant and always fruitful search for their missing relatives.\(^{249}\)

*Arpilleras* in their original form were created by women, joined together through mourning the dead, or more broadly those who suffered. The fact that *arpilleras* today are revitalized in small workshops, as Asogín points out, conjoins the new workshops with a continuous “bearing witness to life” as a way to maintain “dialogue with their dead” that reflects a “tenacious demand for life to be respected.”\(^{250}\)

Some women who lived through the violence of the regime, like María Alicia, still make *arpilleras* today as a personal way to preserve the memory of the dead. As María mentioned to me in our interview, replicating her own history is important to her, but more important is replicating the history “of those who have not been able to tell it.” Her work, like the work of other survivors, will always in part be dedicated to disappeared *compañeros/as*. María’s *arpilleras*, unlike those of new and young participants, tend to depict scenes that are hard to imagine such as torture or solitary confinement (Figure 9). María often illustrates gruesome scenes because the inherently palatable nature of *arpilleras* makes the truths they capture much

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\(^{248}\) See Chapter 2.

\(^{249}\) Agosín, *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: the arpillera movement in Chile*, 45.

\(^{250}\) Agosín, *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: the arpillera movement in Chile*, 33.
more digestible for their viewers. In her own words, “Our pain can be shown in this way that is more digestible. The young people...are capable of receiving that...and that is what matters. That our stories are not forgotten.” There is something unique about the almost childlike structure of the *arpilleras* that helps viewers to more easily interpret the violence they represent. This is a way to invite the contemporary community into the world of pain experienced by those who lived through the dictatorship. Politically, *arpilleras* then become unique testimonial crafts because they re-introduce real stories of violence into dominant discourse for the wider community, who may not understand or recognize this grievous part of history.

Her work also depicts the many strategies women were using in *poblaciones* as ways to survive and continue their roles as mothers and heads of households (Figure 10). “I want to depict the story of women, for example, which has to do with the committees for the unemployed, it has to do with the soup kitchens, it has to do with collective shopping (*comprando juntos*), it has to do with taking care of children.” For Maria, illustrating these realities is part of depicting stories that are uniquely related to women’s work, and consequently, women’s lived experiences. A theme discussed throughout my project is the idea that women experienced emotional suffering in ways that the state could not effectively narrate as an official truth, excluding women from truth telling mechanisms. More specifically, redressive politics struggle with including “socio-material” hardship faced by women within the mandate that defines victimhood.251 According to Maria, through depicting women engaged in these distinct activities during the dictatorship, “one can understand their history. This is what we try to do or replicate in our workshops.” Through illustrating hardships unrecognized by state sponsored and

251 See Magdalena Zolkos in Chapter 3, 177.
official truths, *Las Arpilleristas* serves as an effective complementary model for transitional justice politics by promulgating narrative-based truths rooted in subjectivity.

María also commented at length on the political importance of testimony via *arpilleras* for national sites of memory; further positioning *arpilleras* as vital political contributions to transitional justice. She spoke of how even the minute details she recalled from her memory of imprisonment necessitated intense discussion and fact checking amongst other women. This process resembles that of *Las Bordadoras* in their process of investigation for their disappeared pregnant *compañeras*. For example, María remarked that everyone perceives events differently, and when talking about Tres Álamos, some women remember the trees as dry while others remember them as lush. When María recreates the trees outside the prison, she personally represents them as dry and brown, while her artist *compañeras* depict them as green with colorful fruits. She says that these differences amongst survivors require an outlet of expression to relay to outsiders the distinct experiences of political imprisonment, down to the precise details of the foliage. This is a narrative truth that would not be useful in TRCs, but their recognition is necessary for women to work through and interpret their experiences. The final outcome is a physical testimony that sheds light on experiences of imprisonment—implicating the craft as highly political.

Moreover, María recounted in our interview that many witnesses disputed if there were stairs that led to the bathroom in Villa Grimaldi, a clandestine torture center. Some survivors recall stumbling into chairs and feeling metal doors within a corridor, while others do not. While María finds the process of recalling these details emotionally exhaustive, recreating these complicated stories that are difficult to process and don’t always piece together nicely is important to the political project. “If two or three people tell the same thing, it's impressive.
That's why I say, you have to do it, you have to make [arpilleras].” Through this examination and manifestation of details, the arpillera depicts a narrative that sheds light on the physical space and activity within prisons and detention centers. This is a vital goal in the transitional justice process of truth-seeking and is reached by women working through interpretation of painful memories via tapestries.

In addition to her own story, María also works with other survivors to help them narrate their experiences and recreate them visually in arpilleras. María worked with one of her compañeros, an 86-year-old man who was detained in Cerro Chena, located in the larger Santiago metropolitan area. The man walked María through his whole testimony: the dates he was detained, what it was like and how they tortured him. María began the sketching process to try to generate a scene that captured his experiences. She smirked as she told me he did not like her drawings, in fact, she had to redraw the scene numerous times before he liked it. As María remarked, the activity allowed him to maintain his dignity, to visualize his story, and “be proud.” As her work demonstrates, narrating painful experiences through this partnership produced a political product that tells the story of a survivor whose truth needed further redress.

The fact that arpilleras depict detailed scenes of lived experience means that the craft itself is a physical testimony that holds the state accountable. In this way, women who create arpilleras are contributing to their own sense of justice with their own hands. This is most evident through the work of Las Arpilleristas de la Pincoya. A short documentary created in 2018 by the Municipalidad de Huechuraba features the Pincoya group, based in Huechuraba outside of Santiago. It shows four women working in a small kitchen on arpilleras. La Pincoya is a reference to the water spirit mythical creature, first originating in Chiloé, often represented as a sensual, cheerful and beautiful woman who lives at the bottom of the sea. The women shown on
screen greet each other, catch up on their days, and begin their tapestry work. They work
together to create a small book of arpilleras comprised of different tapestries that show the
history of Huechuraba during the dictatorship.252

The book starts with a simple arpillera of a house scene to position the family unit as the
symbolic marker for the beginning of the story. The next few arpilleras show the community
working together. Some show children playing soccer in the fields, and others show men
performing manual labor while women clean and complete more domestic tasks alongside them.
They then depict the kindergarten classrooms full of excited students, and vendors selling their
products at the market. The mood of the compilation shifts when the arpilleras begin to show the
devastating impacts of the dictatorship. They illustrate men on the floor with their hands behind
their backs, forced into vans by military agents with guns. The proceeding pieces show a woman
in the graveyard amongst tombstones labeled with question marks. One arpillera presenting
the book in the documentary explains that they are creating the book as a way to continue the
practice while keeping alive the history of their community and the persistent demand for justice.
As she concludes: “The [arpiller] technique has a double function: to bring us closer to the art
as well as capture our emotions inside of it.” The creation of this book is similar to how the
bordadoras use their weavings to capture their emotions into their products, but in doing so
create a political product that recounts truths in subjective narrative form. The book created by
Las Arpilleristas de la Pincoya is also a physical piece of testimony that sheds light on how the
women experienced repression. The book is comprised of overwhelming negative emotions and
trauma yet redirected toward a functional and meaningful political product.

252 Huechuraba, ““Patrimonio Vivo” a las Arpilleristas de La Pincoya.”
It is important to remember that the physical act of making the *arpillera* is in and of itself a dedication to the dead, or less directly, those who personally suffered during the dictatorship. *Arpilleras* are made among collectives of women in distinctly poor sectors. Not every woman who makes *arpilleras* lived through dictatorship repression directly. Because of new members’ distance from direct violence of the dictatorship and the disappeared, I argue that the physical process of crafting an *arpillera* is paying homage to women who made them in the past as well as those who died as result of repression, connecting new members to the history. Mourning is then not limited to direct survivors, but instead permeates through poor sectors as a communal process of history formation. For example, in the *Pieces of Memory (Retazos de Memoria)* documentary about the Arpilleristas de lo Hermida teaching women in Puerto Montt, Beatriz Asenjo affirmed this notion, stating that she wanted to valorize the work that women were doing during the dictatorship so that their stories and work can continue to be “woven into the national history.” To accomplish this, she believes it is necessary to contribute to the technique so that she can later “multiply it in the region” where she is from.

Patricia Mansilla, an original arpillera in the *población* Lo Hermida, led the workshop. As she states in the documentary, she continues to create *arpilleras* because “it is important that they do not die, that they can continue on.” Preservation is vital to the political project. María Alicia resonates with the other members. Interestingly, María was detained during the dictatorship and actually created embroideries, not tapestries. She decided in the dissolution of the regime to pick up *arpilleras* because she wanted to “resume the trade” and again, pay homage to the work of women suffering and resisting during the regime. “We were alive, and we

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253 Producciones, "Retazos de Memoria - Arpilleristas de lo Hermida en Puerto Montt.";
Producciones, "Retazos de Memoria - Arpilleristas de lo Hermida en Puerto Montt."
254 Cultural, "Arpilleristas de Lo Hermida, tesoros humanos vivos 2012."
could continue militating, we could continue recounting and being part of what was happening. So we thought it would be good for us to resume, for example, the artwork done by the women, by mothers.”

Evidently, there is something unique about the physical tradition of the arpillera that women feel drawn too. Asogín remarks at length about this quality of the arpillera, referring to the tapestry work as offering a more legitimate process of memorialization to violence and suffering in Chile. She writes:

The memorialization aspect of the arpillera holds an essential and distinct importance unique to other forms, such as monuments constructed years later to remember the disappeared. The fabric used to make an arpillera is intimate and delicate, and the experience of working with it evokes the personal function of memory. All work with fabric implies a close relationship between a person’s hands and history and the fabric itself. The memory of the arpillera and the arpillista is an intimate memory, narrating the family history of a human being violated and left destitute…. arpilleras are not static. Stitching is an active process different from memorials or monuments, which capture a specific time and place.255

Asógín’s call to view arpilleras as part of a memorialization process coincides with sentiments reflected by arpillisteras I have come across in my research. The women use the craft, including the threads, colors, fabrics and their hands that put them together, to maintain a long-standing tradition of narrating personal histories via tapestry. For Asogín, this work is memory work. Memory work that is more important than other alternatives such as monuments or memorials, because of the urgent fact that arpilleras are “alive.” Hands actively stitch them together; they are embedded with agency and personal experience that illuminate memory. The revitalization of arpilleras in workshops today demonstrates the active memorialization process, as women realize the preservation of a technique implicates them in maintaining a historical tradition within their contemporary contexts. Memorialization also inherently places the arpillera process

255 Agosin, Tapestries of hope, threads of love: the arpillera movement in Chile, 17.
as a process of mourning because memorials are physical expressions of mourning. Therefore, if the physical *arpillera* is both a testimony and a memorial, it demonstrates that the continuation of physical craft as tradition is also an expression of mourning.

Because *arpillera* members include women who have not directly lived through repression, this has resulted in the themes of many *arpilleras* as less directly related to the regime’s violence. Despite this apparent detour from an explicitly political project, for many artists the continuation of the craft is in and of itself a way to remember those who died and suffered, which heightens the importance of preserving the craft. María Madariaga finds that teaching *arpilleras* to younger generations is important as it captures the history of the people and the work of the *pobladora* so that new participants can form a connection and have something in common with the history.²⁵⁶ Mourning, in the case of the *arpillera*, is an ongoing process for people in the sector. Another leader of the workshop, Patricia Hidalgo, finds that the community workshop “is a very wonderful idea because we are still alive so we can show our technique, we can show our realities, so that it is clear what had happened here.”²⁵⁷ Preserving their history within dominant discourse is important for her because she is still alive to be a living witness to history. Her work is then an explicit political testimony. She continues, “The best part is that there are a lot of young people who participate so that they can understand what is happening to their earth and they can be proud.” Therefore, while *arpilleras* work to illuminate a marginalized history of an entire people, the preservation of the craft within younger generations is a way to keep open the history of the sectors for new women find their meaning in the work. Mourning, in this case, is an ongoing and collective process of history formation.

²⁵⁶ Cultural, "Arpilleristas de Lo Hermida, tesoros humanos vivos 2012."
²⁵⁷ Producciones, "Retazos de Memoria - Arpilleristas de lo Hermida en Puerto Montt."
Mourning through the craft is not defined by the dictatorship, but rather by the rich history of the población and the collective efforts to place pobladora narratives from all facets of life into testimonial form.

**Conclusion**

*Las Arpilleristas* represent a complementary truth telling mechanism for nations in transition from violent conflict. They provide three unique benefits that state sponsored official TRCs may not accomplish. Firstly, *Arpillera* groups work in spaces of support and solidarity that encourage healing emotional wounds that might not been adequately addressed. Secondly, the craft provides a canvas for narrating subjective histories that might not be regarded as useful or important in TRCs. *Arpilleras* perfectly embody the use of narrative truth rather than forensic truth because they rely on personal meaning, subjectivity and emotionality. Importantly, many women in the community making *arpilleras* were not original artists and were not directly impacted by the military regime. This creates an avenue for narrating subjectivity from daily life experience. Lastly, *arpilleras* allow women to transform their mourning for losses during the regime into a highly political testimonial product. This impact is seen through María Alicia’s *arpilleras* that illustrate tough-to-swallow scenes of torture, while creating visual interpretations of detention centers that manifest painful personal memory as a scathing and denunciatory product. This is also seen through the book constructed by Las Arpilleristas de la Pincoya, which narrates the poblaciones’ history and role in denunciation. By telling their story in a tangible way, the community has a physical piece of evidence to illuminate truths of the dictatorship.

Importantly, the rich history and strong focus on preserving the physical tradition has attracted women from the community who are not directly indebted to the dead and mourning. I argue that these new participants are still completing mourning work in some regard, because
preservation of the craft itself is in dedication to the work of women during the regime who did mourn losses directly. By redirecting the meaningful tradition towards contemporary contexts that illuminate life in the población, younger women are still mourning, but mourning as a collective history through preserving a craft that encourages communal healing and resistance.

In the following section I proceed by analyzing the different yet complementary processes of Las Bordadoras and Las Arpilleras to illustrate the ways in which each model contributes to transitional justice via truth telling and testimony in distinct ways. Both processes provide women with a way to use narration to redress emotional wounds and subjective experiences that official methods may have not dealt with; yet, the foundations and current operations of their projects have different ramifications for transitional justice politics. Due to these important differences, the following section sheds light on when each of these models would be more appropriate to deploy, given different contexts and circumstances.
Conclusion

This project aims to address whether trauma can serve as a legitimate basis to transitional justice solutions and which truth-telling mechanisms are more effective at healing women’s traumas. This project has outlined the ways women experienced violence during the Chilean military regime that resulted in trauma requiring redress during transition. Next, this project has outlined healing strategies deployed by women to survive immediate violence as well as healing from trauma later on. I link women and healing to mourning for the dead because women as mourners are positioned as unique political actors to engage in truth-telling projects dedicated to the dead. I proceed by analyzing TRCs as state-sponsored truth-telling mechanisms implemented, in part, to heal subjective experiences of trauma via testimony. Through a debate of scholarship, I argue that TRCs require some complementary processes to truly provide cathartic redress for women survivors of trauma. Lastly, I argue that Bordadoras and Arpilleras Collectives should be considered as effective truth-telling projects for women because they productively function as a transitional justice model in three unique ways where TRCs fall short: healing, narrating subjectivity, and politicizing mourning.

This project aims to establish important concepts about the nature of transitional justice. First, I establish that healing, as a process of working through trauma, is an emotional process as well as a political one. When we consider the unique strategies of healing deployed by women both during and after acts of violence, this can inform transitional justice strategies that include women and position them as vital political actors. My project also seeks to establish that testimony is useful for transitional justice goals in unique forms and does not need to resemble oral, forensic and official testimony encouraged by TRCs. In fact, state-sponsored TRCs are not adequate enough and even harmful for women survivors of trauma. That is why utilizing gender
sensitive healing practices can shed important insight on transitional justice processes that work through women’s experiences more appropriately. The concept of testimonio in Latin America begs survivors to lead their work with subjectivity, creativity and emotionality to challenge dominant discourse provided from official state testimony. I argue that the two art collectives embody the idea of testimonio, which is useful in conceptualizing transitional justice because it allows us to open our notions of what constitutes effective truth-telling mechanism. In this case, testimony is reconceived as a physical craft. By analyzing the benefits of complementary truth-telling practices to a state-sponsored practice, I emphasize two points. First, trauma redress should be included in post-conflict politics, and second, gender sensitive healing practices inform what truth-telling mechanisms should look like for women survivors of trauma.

As my research illustrates, gender sensitive truth-telling practices to provide three key elements. First, these projects should re-create spaces of group support. For women to heal from hard-to-speak-about violence, a space of empathy, emotionality, communication, and support tends to be most effective. We know from The Chilean Valech Report and The South African TRC that it is hard for women to come forward about intimate violence to official commissions, and forcing stories into narration can lead to re-traumatization if recounted unsafely. If healing trauma is to be considered within transitional justice, transforming feminine healing strategies within these projects is vital. Second, gender sensitive truth-telling practices should emphasize narrating subjective experiences because state-sponsored mechanisms often contribute to the marginalization of women’s experiences of violence. Lastly, these projects should conceptualize mourning as a political strategy unique to women. Viewing women mourners as productive and sentimental, as driven politically and maternally, demonstrates women’s unique capacities to

258 Something from chapter 3
keep painful memories and feelings alive as a source of political action. This feminine quality has been noted across time and context, and bordadoras and arpilleras prove to be no different. This speaks to the viability of negative emotions as a basis for transitional justice practices, particularly when women are the actors in charge.

**Delineating Truth-Telling Processes**

In this section, I delineate the complementary truth-telling projects. Due to the distinct functions of the bordadoras and arpilleras, I argue that these groups are different in key ways that provide insight into how these models represent distinct complementary transitional justice method to TRCs. One difference I observed in my research is that the arpillera groups emphasize the importance of preserving the actual technique of the tapestry far more than the bordadoras group emphasizes preserving the embroidery technique. Many women who speak in small documentaries that highlight the work of groups in poblaciones reiterate the importance of continuing the craft as a tradition. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, the rich history associated with poblaciones, women, and resistance signifies that the actual craft carries a lot of weight and significance. Asogín calls arpilleras a type of living memorial, where the persistence of the craft actively made by hands evokes a personal function of memory that is alive and urgent today.259

The heightened importance of preserving the craft, I argue, lends itself to another key difference between the arpilleristas and bordadoras. Due to the emphasis on the preservation of the technique, arpilleras inspire more community outreach to include women who are not direct survivors or direct victims of the dictatorship to contribute to the preservation. This is distinct from Bordadoras because the direct participants are all survivors of political imprisonment. The Arpilleristas de lo Hermida host community events for women to create their own tapestries.

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259 Agosín, *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: the arpillera movement in Chile.*
María Madariaga, an original arpillerista, commented on one particular event hosted by Patrimonio Cultural: “For me, [this event] is very significant to teach [the technique] I was once taught and give women the tools so that they can lay out their own life experiences.”260 The objective for many original arpilleristas is to give women the tools and teach the technique necessary to continue the craft. The following example best illustrates this key distinction: the energetic and lively workshop in Puerto Montt led by the two original arpilleristas from Lo Hermida, María Madariaga and Patricia Hidalgo. For the leaders of the community workshop, they take pride in including other women into the craft. As Patricia Hidalgo notes,

> It is a very wonderful idea because we are still alive so we can show our technique, we can show our realities, so that it is clear what had happened here. The best part is that there are a lot of young people who participate so that they can understand what is happening to their earth and they can be proud.261

The focus here on young people demonstrates the unique aspect of community outreach and participation that I argue the bordadoras group does not emulate as strongly. From my observations, Bordadoras engage with the community mostly through inaugurations and exhibitions of their work. Yet, to be a direct member is more limited to survivors of torture and imprisonment.

María Alicia and the Arpilleristas de la ex-Clínica Santa Lucía work with high school students and children to involve the younger generation in a human rights discourse via tapestry crafting. When discussing the fifty-year anniversary of the coup, María commented to me in our interview that many of the original arpilleristas will be dead. “That is why we also are in a hurry [because] this thing is necessary from an artistic perspective. Many books have been written, everyone writes books. There are other exhibitions of photos, there are documentaries, but there

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260 Cultural, "Arpilleristas de Lo Hermida, tesoros humanos vivos 2012."
261 Producciones, "Retazos de Memoria - Arpilleristas de Lo Hermida en Puerto Montt."
is very little art.” María resonates here with Asogín in that arpillera crafting is a unique memorialization process that keeps the art alive, heightening the urgency of its preservation. Evidently, that is why community workshops are so important for María. More so than carrying on the tradition to new generations, the arpilleras also allow a way for younger people to carry on the elements of resistance and denunciation that define the craft’s history. The bordadoras members seem to focus less on preserving the craft of weaving itself and focus more on their emotional and unaddressed pain into political objectives imposed in the weavings.

The restrictions for who can be members of Las Bordadoras undoubtedly limits its potential to include the outside community as direct members. The Bordadoras collective was made specifically by women detained in political detention centers, most commonly in Tres Álamos. Conversely, arpilleras were originally made by women in poblaciones. Because arpilleras were made by women in poor sectors, the tradition is maintained by women in poor sectors. This key identification is more widespread and accessible than women who were detained and tortured, as far more women suffered during the military regime in poblaciones than as political prisoners. This, in part, explains why the bordadoras only contain political imprisonment survivors as less women relate from this perspective. Conversely, poor sectors have existed throughout Chile before, during, and after the dictatorship, and the effects permeate throughout different communities. This permits people from far and wide (as far as Puerto Montt) to participate in the craft as their solidarity and identification with one another lies in a broader identification.

I argue the difference in origin of the craft also translates into differences in content captured within the craft. While there are arpilleras that are explicitly political, they are typically

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262 12.5% of the testimonies in the Valech Report were women. See Steven Stern in Chapter 3.
made by those who lived through the repression. This is evident through María’s tapestries which depict torture rooms and solitary confinement cells, or the book made by the Arpilleristas de la Pincoya which show active repression and mourning within the población Huechuraba. Conversely, other arpilleras often display themes of the land, fond memories, and children. However, this does not mean they are not political. As we have seen, they often carry on the tradition of denunciation, for example, by critiquing neoliberal reform or privatization that attacks land. Yet, the themes vary and reflect the lives and experiences of women living in poblaciones and don’t always carry the same explicit punch that bordadoras do. Bordadoras also depict earthy imagery, they focus on children, and generally appear happy. However, their weavings are still created under themes that relate to their political cause. For example, weaving to pay homage to Violeta Parra and Victor Jara, both deeply political folkloric singers with roots in social justice during or right before Allende’s rise, seriously implicates their work. Their sense of justice stems from ideologies they fought for and consequently, were detained and tortured for during the regime. They proudly defend and maintain these sensibilities in their craft.

While the political objective of current arpillerista work is less direct and specific, they still function as an effective method of storytelling and testimony from a subjective perspective which is vital to my project. Women currently living in poblaciones who work with original arpilleristas are excited by the work. This demonstrates the potency that arpilleras possess to illustrate, capture, and provide meaning to lived experience. While some tapestries simply depict a daily scene in the poblacion, the tapestry still illustrates working through and interpreting lived experiences. Importantly, often new arpilleristas commit themselves to arpilleras’ original purpose; to resist and denounce government action. By emphasizing the importance of a new
generation of arpilleristas, the tapestry provides an outlet for the next post-Pinochet generation to apply their own personal calls for justice within their craft.

I find that the bordadoras collective more so resembles a way to work through emotional pain and trauma than does the arpillera collectives. Through my interviews with members of Bordadoras, it was clear to me that the women wanted a way to heal as redress to their emotional pain and suffering. They all mentioned how the intimate solidarity of the group helped them open up about events they endured and work through interpreting their negative emotions and trauma through weaving with other empathetic women. The political consequences of doing so were great. After interviews and an analysis of the arpilleristas, the artists more often commented on the friendship and bonding element of group dynamic but the urgency for collective and supportive healing was not as strong.

I believe these differences in cathartic urgency lies in distinct experiences of trauma that result from torture and sexual violation versus poverty and unemployment. Because poverty was experienced before the dictatorship, exacerbated during the regime, and continues to exist today, poverty resembles more of a structural violence. In Chapter 2, LaCapra tells us that in discussions of trauma within a political framework, we need to distinguish from loss and historical trauma versus absence and structural trauma. He states that loss was something taken away from us resulting from a specific event or period of time; conversely, absence is something we never had because we are prevented access structurally. He concludes that delineating violence has implications for conceiving of different political responses to trauma. While the specific repressive tactics enacted by the regime in poblaciones was absolutely a historical

\footnote{See LaCapra in Chapter 2.}
violence, poverty is more normative and perceived every day. I find that this decreases the urgency for healing.

Conversely, sexual violation, torture, and imprisonment violate the body personally and more intimately. Every woman imprisoned during the regime was sexually violated in some way.\textsuperscript{264} We know from testimony that women were frequently raped by DINA agents, forced to have sex with family members, and with trained dogs and rats, and also experienced electrode shocks to their genitals. Sexual violation and torture cause extreme psychological consequences that result in isolation, victimization, dissociation of reality, and self-destruction.\textsuperscript{265} Moreover, women who experience breaches of bodily integrity often have a harder time rebuilding trust in a community that violated them directly, or permitted violations to occur.\textsuperscript{266} The bordadoras collective reflects these psychological findings more explicitly than do the arpilleristas collectives. Sexual violence is also a structural or normative violence that for some is also felt every day on a normative level. This means that sexual violence is not exclusive to women in detention centers, as women in poblaciones also face high rates of sexual violence, particularly interpersonal violence with their partners. While this point is important to honor and recognize, I argue the bordadoras collective is more cathartic because those creating them use the process more for cathartic redress. This is due to the horrific and violating nature of rape and torture as a source of trauma.

I argue that bordadoras collective is strongly associated with a particular experience (torture and imprisonment) and a particular cause (the left and political resistance). Conversely, the arpilleristas collective is much less directly associated with a time, place, and cause because

\textsuperscript{264} See Chapter 3 and Steven Stern.
\textsuperscript{265} See Chapter 2 and Becker et al.
\textsuperscript{266} See Judith Herman.
of diverse lived experience in the *población*. Due to this fact, arpilleras reflect that transitional justice is always ongoing. The impacts from the regime still affect the lives of those in *poblaciones*, and arpilleras emphasize the contemporary urgency for continuous transitional justice efforts to address the long-lasting impacts of the regime on a normative level. I find that bordadoras, in part, accomplish this. Yet, the widespread and popularized nature of arpilleras (coined by many as “art of the *pobla”*) positions the call for justice into everyday context. While it is easy to position arpilleras today as apolitical, I argue that they simply center the political normatively into the daily lives of those living in *poblaciones* through a craft that preserves their history of resistance and denunciation. According to María Alicia, many people who live in *poblaciones* wonder why the conditions they face have not changed over the years as “people still feel like they have made little progress.” The tapestries allow women to place these feelings into the burlap by depicting their normal lives so as to illustrate their lived experience in a craft imbedded with political critique. In this way, arpilleras are inherently political regardless of the scene.

Using arpilleras to challenge the status quo, I believe, urges the state to recognize the existence of people living in poverty. As we know, trauma caused by the dictatorship that impacts women is not always addressed in state-sponsored transitional justice politics because of strict definitions of victimhood that exclude women’s experiences. Zolkos confirms that socio-material hardship as it impacts women is absent from redressive politics. People living in *poblaciones* have not been recognized by the state in its official report as sufferers of the military regime and continue to live in compromised conditions today. This conclusion is evidenced by the simple fact that women feel an urge to continue making arpilleras, which demonstrates their

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267 See Magdalena Zolkos in Chapter 3.
desire to be addressed and acknowledged. This fact has major implications for long term transitional justice because redress does not have strict time constraints and is an ongoing process as the condition of life as a pobladora has been ongoing for families for years. Current arpilleristas use a traditional craft that has persisted before, during, and after the regime, as a way to comment on a condition of life that has also persisted through time; life in the población.

Conversely, the bordadora craft is much more specific to a time and place. Made exclusively in detention centers during the dictatorship by detained women is a specificity marked by particular circumstances. The women were tortured and likely raped in one another’s presence. Weaving represents the work that the women completed during their time in detention centers, which is inextricably linked to the trauma they endured together. The specificity changes the nature of the political project within a transitional justice framework because the group seeks a very particular type of redress also linked to the specificity of time, place, experience, and the people they were with when the violence occurred. That is why I find their themes appear to be tied to calls for justice that resulted from repressive violence of the regime and include only women who experienced that violence. To open up about these topics so as to heal requires personal connection and support that for many members, could only be reached through the space of the collective. More specifically, their work reflects their residual feelings of pain as their themes are almost exclusively connected to their political resistance and traumatic past—Salvador Allende, leftist groups such as the communist party or the MIR, leftist folkloric artists, and disappeared and pregnant compañeras. The limited inclusivity of the members and the specific themes tied to political ideologies from the days of militating, I argue, is a result of their collective experiences of trauma and violence.
Recommendations

Delineating between the two art and memory collectives contributes to conceptions of transitional justice politics because it tells us that differentiating between truth-telling mechanisms is imperative for working through different types of violence that result in trauma. My observation for this project was, given a strong precedent that truth is required for healing emotional wounds within transitioning states, there is very little information about what truth-telling mechanisms accomplish this best. Women’s experiences are particularly marginalized from official truths. Two seemingly similar groups, founded as a response to two very different types of violence, have resulted in political projects that are unique in their function and goals. Because arpilleras provide testimony to the lived experiences of economic inequality and poverty, the current arpillerista groups suggests that transitional justice is an ongoing process. This is because the artists place their everyday experiences into the arpillera which implicates it as a political critique due to the denunciatory history of the craft. Conversely, bordadoras demonstrates the intensity of torture, sexual violence and imprisonment on the psyche of women survivors. Decades after the dissolution of the regime, and years after the last TRC, women are still looking to outlets for their painful emotions to be expressed and put into life. Bordadoras more directly speaks to the fact that state-sponsored TRCs did not appropriately reconcile trauma and negative emotions as women turn to this complementary process as a forum for interpreting their experiences.

Bordadoras and arpilleras contribute to our understanding of transitional justice because the groups are highly political and simultaneously also encourage solidarity and healing. Healing strategies provide politically salient solutions for states transitioning out of conflict, and in this way, women are not only included in the political process, but they are also the leaders. The
contemporary Arpilleras and Bordadoras Collectives are transformations of early survival strategies deployed by women, used as a way to interpret loss together and mourn, while also continue organizing, militating, and denouncing. These contemporary collectives then invite women to become leaders of transitional justice within these gender sensitive practices. We have something to learn from the effectiveness of the collectives and the women in charge.

The impacts of my project remain largely applicable to countries in Latin America. Due to the certain conditions of violence that sparked transitional justice action after the dissolution of the regime, the benefits of the truth-telling projects could extend to countries such as Peru, Argentina, Guatemala, and El Salvador, which have experienced drastic neoliberalism and structural poverty, disappearances, and clandestine repression similar to Chile. Moreover, artisanal and folkloric crafts already have a place within these countries, specifically in Peru, where arpilleras are also made (though they are not associated with political denunciation). For those seeking to extend this project, I would recommend investigating the viability of my work within other post-conflict countries. Much of my research about ineffectiveness of state-sponsored TRCs for women was informed by South Africa; therefore, I am interested if there are other women’s art collectives that focus on healing and truth-telling post-apartheid.

Additionally, for those seeking to embark on projects that deal with questions similar to mine, I would encourage looking into memorialization through a gendered lens. One question for this project I originally had was how do women’s testimonies, be it through art or TRCs, inform and construct memorials. Because I argue that forms of political redress for transitioning countries should be gender sensitive, I am curious whether memorials or national sites of memory highlight women’s experiences and roles during the military regime. I am also curious if women’s testimonies provide memorials and memory sites key information to make the site
more gender specific and focused. I began research on this question during my trip to Chile but did not have the time to address answers within this project. There is only one memorial in Chile dedicated specifically to women desaparecidos, yet, many national sites of memory mention or focus on women’s experiences specifically. This is true for Londres 38 and Villa Grimaldi. In fact, women’s testimonies largely (re)constructed the Villa Grimaldi site. I believe that one tangible impact of truth-telling in transitional justice politics is more firm memorials and memory cites that place the truths in public spheres. Therefore, I am interested how women’s testimonies shape, inform, or are represented in memorialization in Chile and more broadly, in post-conflict countries.
Appendix: Figures

Figure 1: Embroideries presented at exhibition "Grávidas Mariposas...Yo Soy."

Figure 2: Embroidery of “El Alma Lleno de Banderas” presented Victor Jara exhibition. (Photo OF)
Figure 3: Embroidery of "Luchin" presented at Victor Jara exhibition. (Photo OF)

Figure 4: Embroidery of "Plegaria a un Labrador" presented at Victor Jara exhibition. (Photo OF)
Figure 5: Information on the lives of ten disappeared pregnant compañeras distributed at "Grávidas de Mariposas...Yo Soy."

Figure 6: María Alicia, Arpillerista, leading an exhibition of her work at la ex-clínica Santa Lucía (Photo MA).
Figure 7: "Chiloe: Without Contamination" arpillera made at Puerto Montt event (Retazos de Memoria).

Figure 8: Arpillera of train made at Puerto Montt event (Retazos de Memoria).
Figure 9: María Alicia's arpillera depicting torture (Photo MA).

Figure 10: María Alicia's arpillera depicting mothers at work (Photo MA).
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