

# **‘It Was Like a Space of Resistance’: Functions of Music for Female Political Prisoners During the Pinochet Dictatorship**

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## Abstract

This article examines the function of music for female political prisoners during the Pinochet Dictatorship in Chile. The discussion draws on a thematic analysis of testimonies about music by female prisoners from the platform *Cantos Cautivos* (“Captive Songs”). The article discusses musical happenings, genres of music being performed (e.g., *Nueva Canción*), and the ways in which music-making was organised. In particular, the article highlights the importance of communal singing. This article also addresses cultural and collective memory and the role that they play in these recollections.

# 'It Was Like a Space of Resistance': Functions of Music for Female Political Prisoners During the Pinochet Dictatorship

"Music was always present: we were always walking around with a song in our voice. I think it was the only way to cope a little with prison life."

**María Cecilia Marchant Rubilar<sup>[1]</sup>**

On September 11, 1973, Salvador Allende's socialist government was ousted in a military coup, Augusto Pinochet became president of Chile, and the country was forever changed. Within the first week of the coup, the country was declared an 'emergency zone,' which meant the military had power to control civilian activities.<sup>[2]</sup> Internment camps were set up immediately<sup>[3]</sup> A 'cultural blackout' was established, whereby any art that might be considered political or subversive was banned.<sup>[4]</sup> The dictatorship would last seventeen years, until 1990. According to the Valech Report, a commission created by the Chilean government in 2004 (updated in 2010) to document the human rights abuses during the Pinochet dictatorship, during those years there were 1,132 detention centres and 38,254 people were considered to have been detained or tortured.<sup>[5]</sup> Over 3,000 people were killed by the regime, including many who have been classified as *detanidos desaparecidos* ('detained-disappeared').<sup>[6]</sup> In recent years, the Chilean government and various researchers and organisa-

[1] María Cecilia Marchant Rubilar, "We Shall Prevail (Venceremos)," Cantos Cautivos, January 2, 2016, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10776>.

[2] Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1991), 19.

[3] Zachary Daniel McKiernan, "The Public History of a Concentration Camp: Historical Tales of Tragedy and Hope at the National Stadium of Chile," (PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014), 1.

tions have gathered testimonies of internment camp survivors in order to provide reparations and understand more about the human rights violations which occurred during the dictatorship. These testimonies can help us to understand the personal and collective experiences of political prisoners, as well as what these experiences signify for the cultural memory of Chile.

*Cantos Cautivos* ('Captive Songs') is a database, developed by scholar Katia Chornik in collaboration with the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Chile, where survivors from Chilean camps can submit testimonies specifically regarding their musical experiences there.<sup>[7]</sup> The database is bilingual (Spanish/English) and includes a musical example for each testimony. As of July 2020, there have been over 150 testimonies submitted to the *Cantos Cautivos* database. They include memories of singing, playing instruments, music creation/composition, listening to music, instances of music being used as torture or humiliation (e.g., forced singing),<sup>[8]</sup> and music being used during torture (e.g., guards allegedly blasting music to drown out screams). However, the function of music in internment camps is not limited to these uses. In particular, uses of music by guards as part of torture have layered meanings. For example, while victims may perceive guards playing music during torture as a way to cover screams, the perpetrator may have an entirely different purpose in mind for their use of music.<sup>[9]</sup> Thus, when considering the testimonies, it is important to remember that they are the subjective memory and interpretation of events according to the specific survivor. However, this subjectivity does not invalidate the memory.

Of the testimonies submitted to the *Cantos Cautivos* database, thirty-one (approximately 20%) have been submitted by women. This is a higher percentage than the 12.5% of political prisoners during the dictatorship who were women.<sup>[10]</sup> The experiences of women are often neglected in literature surrounding prisoners in the internment camps, wherein they are either included in the general prisoner population or disregarded entirely.<sup>[11]</sup> While in recent years there has been

[4] Paula Thorrington Cronovich, "Out of the Blackout and into the Light: How the Arts Survived Pinochet's Dictatorship," *Iberoamericana* 13, no. 51 (September 2013), 120.

[5] "Chile: 40 years on from Pinochet's coup, impunity must end," Amnesty International, September 10, 2013. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/09/chile-years-pinochet-s-coup-impunity-must-end/>.

[6] *Detanidos desaparecidos* refer to the many people who went missing during the dictatorship, many of whom were murdered and many of whose whereabouts are still not known.

[7] "About the Project," *Cantos Cautivos*, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/about.php>. Most of the work to date on music in Chilean Internment camps has been written by Katia Chornik. Her articles on the subject include: Katia Chornik, "Memories of Music in Political Detention in Chile Under Pinochet," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018) and Katia Chornik, "Music and Torture in Chilean Detention Centers: Conversations with an Ex-Agent of Pinochet's Secret Police," *the world of music* 2, no.1 (2013).

[8] Forced singing refers to the practice of guards forcing prisoners to sing. This can be humiliating, exhausting, or even physically painful (e.g., if they must sing for a prolonged period of time without stopping). The repertoire choice (when chosen by guards) may further intensify the humiliation that prisoners may feel.

more scholarship concerning the female experience of being imprisoned, there is nevertheless a gap in the literature. This essay aims to gain further insight into the female perspective on musical life in the Chilean internment camps by addressing the following questions: What was the function of music for women who were political prisoners during Pinochet's dictatorship? How was music being made by women (i.e., organised or spontaneously, in a group or solo)? To do this, I conducted a thematic analysis and looked for patterns and themes which emerge throughout the testimonies, analysing the testimonies submitted by women to the Cantos Cautivos database about their own personal experiences of imprisonment.<sup>[12]</sup>

While many of the Cantos Cautivos testimonies focus on aspects of imprisonment that were more positive, this is not necessarily representative of the overall experience in the camps. Therefore, when analysing the testimonies, it is important to acknowledge that the circumstances the women faced and know that while music may have provided some relief, the reality of what they lived through was traumatic. Additionally, traumatic memories, and particularly those from a long time ago, may not always be complete or may include errors. In his research on memories of Holocaust survivors, Lawrence L. Langer states that 'factual errors do occur from time to time, as do simple lapses; but they seem trivial in comparison to the complex layers of memory'.

<sup>[13]</sup> Thus, the memories that survivors do share, even if they include small discrepancies, should be accepted as their truth. The analyses of the Cantos Cautivos testimonies were done with this in mind. Many survivors have not had the opportunity, may not want to, or do not feel comfortable submitting testimonies, or may simply not be aware of the Cantos Cautivos database. Some survivors may not associate music with their experiences at the camps. There are also thousands of prisoners who are detained-disappeared and those who are officially acknowledged as murdered, whose stories are left untold. In addition, each individual's experience and even the collective experience of a particular group may differ greatly.

When researching and analysing these testimonies, it was im-

[9] M.J. Grant, "Understanding Perpetrators' Use of Music," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, ed. Susanne C. Knittel and Zachary J. Goldberg (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2020), 206.

[10] Roberta Bacic and Elizabeth Stanley, "Dealing with Torture in Chile Achievements and Shortcomings of the 'Valech Report'," *The Nuremberg Human Rights Center*, June 3, 2005, <https://www.menschenrechte.org/en/2005/06/03/dealing-with-torture-in-chile-achievements-and-shortcomings-of-the-valech-report/>.

[11] Hillary Hiner, "'Fue bonita la solidaridad entre mujeres': género, resistencia, y prisión política en Chile durante la dictadura," *Estudios Feministas* 23, no. 3 (September 2015), 872.

[12] There are a few testimonies submitted by women who were not imprisoned, but who have submitted them on behalf of a deceased relative or are sharing their experience of visiting a relative in the camps. Testimonies of this nature have not been included in the analysis.

[13] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), xiii.

portant to take into account potential biases and ethics. The testimonies used in this project had been voluntarily submitted to the Cantos Cautivos platform prior to the start of this project. The platform itself adheres to the ethics statements for both the Society for Ethnomusicology and the British Forum for Ethnomusicology.<sup>[14]</sup> In any research project it is important to account for one's personal biases, thus when conducting the analysis and research I looked at a wide variety of sources and tried to be as objective as possible. Since I am coming from a different cultural background, I also researched Chilean history, politics, and culture more generally, to better understand the contexts of the material.

## Singing Together

Singing together was a popular musical activity for the political prisoners of Pinochet's dictatorship. In the Cantos Cautivos female testimonies, the first-person plural 'we' was frequently used in regard to prisoner-initiated singing and music-making in the camps. While there were mentions of times when a fellow prisoner or the survivor giving their testimony sang solo, there were no mentions of explicitly singing when no one else would be able to hear. This is not to say that prisoners never did sing when they were completely alone – there may have been many instances when they did, perhaps during times of solitary confinement. However, the moments of singing that female survivors decided to share focus on the communal aspect of music-making. In many of the testimonies, female prisoners describe how singing together united them and could sometimes help them cope with the traumatic day-to-day experience of being in the camps. Some women saw it as a way to support their fellow comrades during particularly difficult times. Prisoners were also able to use singing and music as a way to connect and communicate with the detainees in their barracks and others across the camps. This meant that prisoners who were further away, including those in solitary confinement, were able to be a part of the community when hearing their fellow comrades sing. In speaking about her experience at the camps, Rosalía Martínez, who was held at Cuatro Álamos and Tres Álamos in Novem-

[14] See: Position Statement of Ethics (Society for Ethnomusicology): [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/ethics/ethics\\_statement\\_2018.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/ethics/ethics_statement_2018.pdf) (Accessed August 8, 2021) and Ethics Statement (British Forum for Ethnomusicology): <https://bfe.org.uk/bfe-ethics-statement> (Accessed August 8, 2021).

ber-December 1974, said:

...the musical activities were very intensive and embodied a way for us to feel united among the other female comrades, to share hope, emotions and create a collective body that went beyond each individual.<sup>[15]</sup>

For her, and perhaps for the other women at Tres Álamos, singing together was a way to feel a greater connection with one another. Her testimony articulates the importance of music and its effects on companionship and mood of the prisoners. Trapped in difficult circumstances with few material goods available, the prisoners often used music to support and comfort each other. In two of the Cantos Cautivos testimonies by María Cecilia Marchant Rubilar, she mentions singing occurring when prisoners were taken for torture or when they came back from being tortured:

'We always sang this song ["La rejita" ("The Little Fence")] when we were taken to Regimiento Arica. That was a torture centre. On our departure and return, the female prisoners who remained behind also sang the song'.<sup>[16]</sup>

In another testimony, she mentions singing 'Qué dirá el Santo Padre' ('What Will the Holy Father Say') by Violeta Parra when prisoners were taken away.<sup>[17]</sup> According to her testimonies, these songs would be the last thing heard by prisoners before being taken offsite to be tortured and the first thing they would hear upon arrival back at the camp. This could have helped the women feel supported immediately before and after dealing with trauma. However, it is important to remember that one prisoner's response to a musical experience (including music that is incorporated into torture), may differ from another's, as prior experiences and emotions can inform each survivor's perception of it and reaction to it.

Another instance of demonstrating support for fellow prisoners through singing occurred for survivor Ana María Jiménez at

[15] Rosalía Martínez, "Prayer So You Don't Forget Me," Cantos Cautivos, November 8, 2015, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10759>.

[16] María Cecilia Marchant Rubilar, "The Little Fence (La rejita)," Cantos Cautivos, January 2, 2016, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10773>.

[17] María Cecilia Marchant Rubilar, "What Will the Holy Father Say (Qué dirá el Santo Padre)," Cantos Cautivos, January 2, 2016, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10774>.

Villa Grimaldi in April 1975. Jiménez was forced by guards to sing a song as she stood out in the rain with her fellow comrades. She wanted to resist, but another detainee told her to sing not for the guards, but for a prisoner who was being held in a tower and dying. Jiménez remembers singing 'Zamba para no morir' ('Zamba so as Not to Die') as performed by Argentinian Nueva Canción singer Mercedes Sosa.<sup>[18]</sup> Jiménez was reprimanded for this because it was political music. While the prisoner in the tower was later found out to have passed away that night, Jiménez hoped that 'the singing, the music with all its wonderful power, conveyed to him our strength and he was able to leave with some inner calm.'<sup>[19]</sup> Jiménez was able to change the underlying meaning of forced singing for herself. Instead of it being a humiliation, she reclaimed the moment in order to comfort a fellow prisoner and show political resistance.

**“Singing together was a way to feel a greater connection with one another.”**

In the Cantos Cautivos testimonies, female survivors also note how they would use music to communicate with one another in their cells, as well as with prisoners who were in cells close by. In one of her testimonies, Scarlett Mathieu, who was imprisoned at Campamento de Prisoneros, Tres Álamos and Campamento de Prisoneros, Cuatro Álamos in 1974, notes the pertinence of knowing one another's voices:

It was important to recognize voices because we were blindfolded and our communication happened in the dark... Through the windows, I heard Juan. He must not have been in good physical condition, but he was in a mood to sing.<sup>[20]</sup>

From simply hearing his voice, she was able to recognize who it was and the state that he was in. It was a way in which to know how fellow comrades, being held in other cells, were doing and where they were. This sentiment is echoed by Beatriz Bataszew

[18] Nueva Canción (translated as “New Song”) is a genre of music, which was highly influential in the years before the coup d'état. It is associated with the left-wing movements happening in Chile (and across various countries in South America) during the 1960s and early 1970s and was very much intertwined with Salvador Allende's socialist government. Both political prisoners and guards would have likely been very aware of the significance of a song from this tradition.

[19] Ana María Jiménez, “Zamba so as Not to Die (Zamba para no morir),” Cantos Cautivos, December 15, 2014, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10653>.

[20] Scarlett Mathieu, “How We Resemble Each Other (En qué nos parecemos),” Cantos Cautivos, June 2, 2019, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10824>.

[21] Beatriz Bataszew Conteras, “Lucía,” Cantos Cautivos, November 8, 2016, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10700>.



Conteras, who explains that 'We would communicate with our companions who were one pavilion away. A kind of song-based dialogue was created'.<sup>[21]</sup>

In many testimonies, in addition to helping comrades form bonds with one another, singing is mentioned as a means to help reduce stress, cope with emotional and physical hardships, and even to bring joy into trying circumstances. While singing may not be able to change the situation or the horrors the prisoners were living through, it seems to have provided some of the women with a mechanism to escape from their present, if only temporarily. In one of her testimonies, Beatrix Bataszew Conteras, who was a prisoner at Campamento de Prisioneros, Tres Álamos from December 1974 to May 1976, describes her experience with singing at the camp as 'a space for encounters, dialogue and de-stressing, as a chance to say something that would be heard'.<sup>[22]</sup> While it is impossible to know exactly how often communal singing occurred, it seems to have been commonplace for many prisoners. For Bataszew Conteras, collaborative singing may have been a way to relax, build relationships, and engage with the other prisoners. In several testimonies, the frequent and routine aspect of singing is noted.<sup>[23]</sup> For instance, Carolina Videla, who was a prisoner at Cárcel Pública de Arica from 1989-1990, noted: "'Todo cambia'" ("Everything Changes") was the anthem of the afternoons and was always sung'.<sup>[24]</sup> Could singing on a regular basis have helped the prisoners feel a sense of normalcy? According to Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa, self- or group-initiated music was an important part of maintaining routine for prisoners who had a previous musical background during the Holocaust.<sup>[25]</sup> By engaging in music on a regular basis, prisoners allowed themselves a distraction from their reality. It also helped them to maintain their sense of identity, which for the participants in this study included music. Scholar Guido Fackler also argues this point, emphasising that in early Nazi concentration camps (where the detainees were often political prisoners), 'music reminded prisoners that there were ethical, humane, artistic and aesthetic values beyond the life-threatening and terrifying camp environment'.<sup>[26]</sup> In extreme situations, survivors have spoken positively about their experi-

[22] Beatrix Bataszew Conteras, "Lucía," *Cantos Cautivos*, November 8, 2016, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10701>.

[23] See: <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10812>, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10700>; <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10773>; <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10776>; <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10759>.

[24] Carolina Videla, "Everything Changes (Todo cambia)," *Cantos Cautivos*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10812>.

[25] Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa, "The Roles of Music Amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors Before, During, and After the Holocaust," *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 6 (2016): 1228.

[26] Guido Fackler, "Cultural Behaviour and the Invention of Traditions: Music and Musical Practice in Early Concentration Camps, 1933-6/7," trans. Margareta Sauer, *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no.3 (July 2010): 610.

ences with self- or group-initiated singing.<sup>[27]</sup> Thus, it is likely that in the Chilean internment camps prisoners would have also found that a musical routine helped them create a semblance of normalcy during these extreme circumstances.

## Individual and Collective Memories

When examining the Cantos Cautivos testimonies, it is crucial to remember that they were not written at the time of the events taking place, but decades later. Testimonies can give survivors the opportunity to work through their trauma, come to terms with their experiences, and find new meaning in them. The recovery process can also be aided by changing perspectives from human rights organisations and governments when they consider the abuses that women faced during the Pinochet dictatorship. For instance, María Elena Acuña Moenne describes how during the 30th anniversary commemoration of the coup in 2003, 'For the first time, rape was discussed as a systematic form of torture against the civil population, carried out and organized by agents of the state, and not as the "sexual deviations" of isolated soldiers who acted out of control'.<sup>[28]</sup> There are also differences in how men and women deal with trauma and how they come to terms with these experiences. According to Jean Franco, when giving testimonies for human rights commissions, women are less likely to go into detail about their torture and will instead give short single-word or single-sentence answers when describing what they experienced.<sup>[29]</sup> She believes that this could be due to the shame that women may feel about these abuses. In terms of more general memories of the dictatorship, Elizabeth Jelin argues that there is evidence that women remember details better, highlight their relationships, and are more likely than men to express their emotions and feelings when remembering.<sup>[30]</sup> Understanding that the way women remember their experiences may be different means it is even more important that female voices and stories are heard. Although the Cantos Cautivos testimonies focus on music, it is important to acknowledge the abuse the female prisoners were experiencing on a regular basis. While the sisterly support and the comfort of music seem to have helped the women manage, the actual experiences and

[27] I specify self- or group-initiated, as forced singing also occurred in Nazi camps during the Third Reich and camps during Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. Forced singing is generally not seen as a positive music-making experience for survivors, although in his article 'Cultural Behaviour and the Invention of Traditions: Music and Musical Practice in Early Concentration Camps, 1933-6/7,' Fackler suggests that at times it could have benefits for other prisoners who were able to listen to and engage in this forced music making.

[28] María Elena Acuña Moenne, "Embodying Memory: Women and the Legacy of the Military Government in Chile," trans. Matthew Webb, *Feminist Review* 79 (March 2005): 152.

[29] Jean Franco, "Gender, Death, and Resistance: Facing the Ethical Vacuum," in *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, ed. Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen, and Manuel Antonio Garretón (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 110.

[30] Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, trans. Judy Rein and Marcial Godoy-Anatívia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 82.

torture that the women endured in the camps are not negated by it. Acknowledging this can help us contextualise and better understand the importance of music to the prisoners.

When survivors submit testimonies to the Cantos Cautivos database, they are aware that their submission should be music-based. This certainly could colour which events they decide to share as well as what music meant for them. In Anna Papaeti's article 'Music, Torture, Testimony: Reopening the Case of the Greek Junta (1967-1974),' she discusses how survivors tend to initially consider music as a positive means of resistance and survival versus a punishment or mechanism of torture.

[31] Katia Chornik believes this is also the case for the narrative surrounding music in Chilean camps, whereby music is remembered frequently as a positive form of resistance, regardless of the fact that it was often used during and as a form of torture.

[32] With many testimonies highlighting the importance of music as resistance, the cultural narrative continues to highlight the positive aspects of music in political detention, and minimise its negative uses.

**“As more survivors submit their stories to the Cantos Cautivos platform, the cultural narrative will develop, change shape, and provide more information.”**

Each testimony is a recollection of a specific experience with music. In many of the testimonies, ideas around memory and its ever-evolving nature are discussed. Survivors share their own understanding of memory, particularly regarding their experiences in the camps and their reflections on them. Carolina Videla explains: 'I see memory as an exercise to give new meanings to the past. As the years go by you give it a different meaning or understand it differently'.<sup>[33]</sup> This demonstrates an awareness that perception changes over time. What would these testimonies look like had they been written during the prisoners'

[31] Anna Papaeti, "Music, Torture, Testimony: Reopening the Case of the Greek Junta (1967-1974)," *the world of music* 2, no. 1 (2013): 79.

[32] Katia Chornik, "Memories of Music in Political Detention in Chile Under Pinochet," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018): 159.

[33] Carolina Videla, "Why does the afternoon cry (Por qué llora la tarde)," *Cantos Cautivos*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10807>.

time at the camps? What would they look like if they had been written immediately after their release, or even immediately after the dictatorship ended, as opposed to decades later? Experiences that have occurred since their release can greatly alter what survivors may remember, as well as how they perceive their experiences in these camps; however, it is impossible to know exactly how they may have changed. We all inherently shape the narrative of our lives into a particular story,<sup>[34]</sup> so it makes sense that survivors might choose to share memories that contribute to a personal narrative of having some level of autonomy over their lives as prisoners.

The concepts of collective and cultural memory are also important when reflecting on the testimonies. Survivors may still be in touch with one another, or even be friends, and so their present-day relationships, and the remembrances that come along with them, may influence the testimonies. Additionally, since *Cantos Cautivos* is an ongoing project with submissions being accepted on a continuous basis, earlier testimonies may influence the more recent. It would not be unreasonable to presume that before submitting a testimony, survivors browse the database. If this is the case, the person sharing their testimony could be reminded of experiences they had previously forgotten, influenced by the memories of survivors they knew, or even influenced by those of people they did not know. This is not to say that these memories are any less valid, but instead to remind us that the factors which influence memory are complex and wide-ranging. They include the larger cultural memory of the events that occurred and relationships that have been sustained in the years since the events took place, but also the recollections of fellow comrades, both known and unknown. As more survivors submit their stories to the *Cantos Cautivos* platform, the cultural narrative will develop, change shape, and provide more information on the lives of the people imprisoned. With new testimonies, new insights and understanding of the circumstances and roles of music will be enriched. Because of this, future research on the topic of music-making in the Chilean internment camps can continue to evolve.

In addition to the prisoners' memories, the overall Chilean

[34] Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

cultural and collective memory impacts the perception of these events. Questions around how the years of dictatorship are and should be remembered has continued to be an ideological struggle.<sup>[35]</sup> People who were supporters of Pinochet and those who were against him view the dictatorship in very different lights – their own personal experiences and how the governments of Allende and Pinochet affected them create two divergent narratives.<sup>[36]</sup> However, it seems that over time a more cohesive narrative is forming. This is aided by research and the gathering of testimonies in databases like *Cantos Cautivos* and official reports such as the Valech Report.

## Conclusions

The *Cantos Cautivos* testimonies by female internment camp survivors demonstrate the frequency and importance of music and how prisoners engaged with it throughout the Pinochet dictatorship. Through the memories shared by the survivors, we are able to better understand the function of music for female political prisoners. It is clear that for many women, music had the ability to comfort them and help them become part of a community within the camp setting. While the terrors they were facing were undoubtedly brutal, music could provide, at times, a small refuge. For many survivors, it seems as though the memories of music have helped them build a positive side to their own personal narrative of these events, showing that even in these extreme circumstances, they had control over certain aspects of their lives. While there were negative functions of music used by guards towards prisoners, the memories that female survivors have shared generally describe music as something which gave them resilience and hope. As Rosalía Martínez remembers:

During those hours of immobility and tension, singing allowed us to feel alive and even to laugh and make jokes. It was like a space of resistance, a collective space that belonged to us, and which they, the bringers of death, could not enter.<sup>[37]</sup>

[35] Steve J. Stern  
*Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988*  
(Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

[36] Michael J. Lazzara,  
*Chile in Transition: The Poetics and Politics of Memory* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 9-10.

[37] Martínez, "Prayer So You Don't Forget Me".

Perhaps music was an escape from reality – a way to experience something positive of the time before the dictatorship. Yet, their participation in musical activities was as real as everything else the prisoners dealt with. The memories of music in the camps help to keep the survivors' narratives of their experiences – musical and otherwise – alive in the present. For these women, it seems as though music was not just something they did or took part in, but instead was an experience that could define their time in the camp.

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