

Rethinking Post-Authoritarian Chile through Its Popular Music

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Abstract

This article is a study of Chilean popular music produced during the 1990s, the first decade following the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. The return of democracy and a period of strong economic growth contributed to a boom in the Chilean music industry. A wealth of music was recorded and the opportunities for listening to live music multiplied. The article's main objectives are to illuminate the ways in which Chilean popular music addressed democracy's inspiring promises and frustrating limits and to consider how Chileans used popular music to foster new post-authoritarian identities. First, it argues that music was used to reclaim national symbols that had been coopted by the dictatorship. Second, it considers the music of two generations of musicians who returned to the country after living in exile. Finally, it focuses on punk and hip-hop, the styles that produced the most significant examples of protest music in the post-authoritarian period.

Introduction

¿What are your thoughts on how Chile is doing?

I think it's doing much better than in the 1980s.

Álvaro Henríquez (Los Tres)¹

The first decade after the Pinochet dictatorship (1990–2000) in Chile was full of contradictions. The return to democracy was peaceful and decided in a plebiscite by popular vote. Yet the new democratic government proved biased towards the country's elites and enacted few meaningful institutional changes. The economy grew surprisingly rapidly, consolidating a neoliberal market economy. This growth led to a notable reduction in poverty, yet very little progress was made to address the persistent inequality that plagued the country. There were more civil liberties and people could meet freely and in large numbers, yet Chilean society splintered into special-interest tribes, leading many to mourn a sense of lost community. These paradoxes created a perfect environment for a boom in the production and consumption of Chilean popular music. A wealth of music was commercially recorded, representing a

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1 Quoted in Tito Escárate, *Canción telepática: rock en Chile* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 1999), 340. All translations are mine.

wide range of styles, and the opportunities for listening to live music, in venues small and large, multiplied.

Studies of culture in the post-dictatorship period have observed that the arts, like most other realms of Chilean life, were ruled by market forces. Larraín, writing about the 1990s, argued that ‘contemporary culture is a hybrid mass culture controlled by the media’.² Subercaseaux, writing about the same period, noted that ‘most of the country’s cultural life and activity is channeled by audiovisual cultural industries that operate strictly within a market logic and the people meter’.³ This market-orientation resulted in ‘products that do not necessarily have artistic merit, but guaranteed sales’.⁴

Such grandiose statements are difficult to sustain when looking more closely at the specifics of any one cultural industry. The 1990s music recording industry, for example, was not a monolithic behemoth. It certainly encompassed multinational companies such as EMI and BMG, but there were also indie labels with distribution agreements with major labels, such as Krater and Culebra, and small independent labels such as Liberación. The economic might and cultural influence of each may have been unequal, but the fact remains that the period allowed an unprecedented spectrum of musicians, expressing an unprecedented spectrum of viewpoints, to record and distribute their music to eager listeners.

Sweeping observations like Larraín’s and Subercaseaux’s do not help us understand, for instance, the fact that the best-selling Chilean album of the 1990s was Illapu’s *En estos días* (1993), an Andean fusion record with a critical stance towards both the market economy and the quality of Chilean democracy.⁵ Or that the second best-selling Chilean album of the decade was Los Tres’ *MTV Unplugged* (1995), sales of which were driven by its most popular track, an old foxtrot performed in the idiosyncratic ‘jazz huachaca’ style of Roberto Parra, the brother of *Nueva Canción* leading light Violeta Parra.⁶

Studies of Chilean popular music of this period have been, for the most part, more nuanced than these broad cultural analyses. This scholarship focuses largely on the nuances of specific genres, such as rock, hip-hop, punk, cueca, or on the viewpoints driving creative expression, as in the protest music of the period.⁷ My goal here is to contribute a more holistic and panoramic perspective of Chilean popular music of the 1990s.⁸ To illuminate the ways in which a wide range of Chilean popular music addressed democracy’s inspiring promises and frustrating limits, I consider trendy blockbusters, recorded in Miami for multinational

2 Jorge Larraín, *Identidad chilena* (Santiago de Chile: Lom Ediciones, 2001), 165.

3 Bernardo Subercaseaux, ‘La cultura en los gobiernos de la concertación’, *Universum* 21/1 (2006).

4 Subercaseaux, ‘La cultura en los gobiernos de la concertación’.

5 Reliable music sales numbers for the 1990s in Chile are difficult if not impossible to obtain. The best source to date is Jorge Leiva, ‘El dominio de la industria discográfica multinacional en la música chilena (1927–2006)’ (MA diss., Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2021).

6 See Juan Pablo González and Claudio Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile, 1890–1950* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2005).

7 I rely on these and refer to them throughout the article.

8 In a recent article, historian César Albornoz takes a similar approach to the one I develop here, but he does not discuss specific musical aspects, such as lyrics and arrangements. See César Albornoz, ‘Cultura en transición, música en continuación (1989–2005)’, *Sur y Tiempo: Revista de Historia de América* 1/2 (2020).

companies, alongside marginal styles such as punk and hip-hop. At the time, leftist critics were frustrated by how popular musicians of the 1990s seemingly abandoned the cultural values of the period right before the *coup d'état*, embodied by the *Nueva Canción* movement. Rather than view the move away from *Nueva Canción* as a sign of a depoliticized and disaffected youth, I consider how popular music and musicians, by mining unexpected sources such as punk and hip-hop, created space for the reconstruction of individual identities as well as of the social fabric.

Post-authoritarian Chile: the first decade

In a 1988 plebiscite, the people of Chile voted to put an end to the Pinochet dictatorship. The fact that the conclusion of a 16-year-long military regime was decided by popular vote is symptomatic of Chile's transition to democracy. The transition occurred within the legal framework established by the regime, and it developed through pacts between authoritarian forces and democratically elected officials. Hence, the reconstruction of democracy was protracted, to the point that political scientists prefer to describe it as a process of political democratization, rather than an enclosed transition to democracy.⁹ Authoritarian enclaves remained in place given the continued use of the 1980 Constitution and an electoral system that created an over-representation of right-wing parties. Pinochet remained a looming presence, first as commander-in-chief of the army (until 1998) and later as 'designated' senator (until 2002). Only in the mid-2000s were the Constitution's most authoritarian features removed through a series of reforms.¹⁰ A full rewrite of the 1980 Constitution began only in 2020.

The post-authoritarian moment coincided with a decade of steady growth in the Chilean economy. Between 1990 and 1999, the average GDP growth rate was 6.5%, considerably higher than the 3.7% average of the dictatorship's last decade. Explaining this so-called Chilean miracle has been a source of much debate by economists. Jadresic and Zahler test three hypotheses, namely 'good policies', 'political change' (i.e., the return to democracy), and 'good luck'.¹¹ They find evidence in favour of the first two, and against the third one.

The 'good policies hypothesis' refers to market-oriented reforms put in place by the dictatorship in the mid-1970s. For various internal and external reasons, these policies only began to have an effect after 1984. The continuation of the dictatorship's economic policies by the democratic government is another sign of the pacted quality of the Chilean transition to democracy, in this case pacted between the new political elite and major economic groups.¹² The new government agreed to protect private property and to maintain in place the economic model established by the dictatorship, actions that lead Michael Albertus and

9 Manuel Antonio Garretón, *Incomplete Democracy: Political Democratization in Chile and Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2003).

10 Claudio Fuentes, 'Democratizing Chile through Constitutional Reforms', in *Democratic Chile*, ed. Kirsten Sehnbruch and Peter Siavelis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2014).

11 Esteban Jadresic and Roberto Zahler, 'Chile's Rapid Growth in the 1990s: Good Policies, Good Luck, or Political Change', *IMF Working Paper* 153 (2000).

12 Marcus Taylor, 'Success for Whom? An Historical-Materialist Critique of Neoliberalism in Chile', *Historical Materialism* 10/2 (2002).

Victor Menaldo to consider post-dictatorship Chile as an example of an elite-biased democracy.¹³ Patricio Navia observes that the democratic administration ‘favoured economic development and poverty reduction rather than institutional change’.¹⁴ This entailed some of the key shortcomings of developmentalism, such as inequality, which as Navia notes ‘remained stubbornly high [during the 1990s] and began to decrease only after 2000’.¹⁵

Based on all this, one may reasonably assert that the Chilean post-authoritarian period was as much a continuation of the late dictatorship as it was a change from it, and that where there was change, it was gradual.¹⁶ Civil liberties, for example, improved, but not radically. Comparing the 1980s with the 1990s, the Freedom House Index went from 5 to 2, but stubbornly resisted falling to the lowest levels (representing least restriction on individual freedoms).¹⁷ This limited improvement is due to two factors. First, several civil liberties had been eased in the late years of the Pinochet dictatorship. As historians Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto note with regards to liberties in the mid- to late 1980s, ‘now one could scream one’s feelings, in the face of whoever wanted to listen, without concerns or subterfuges’.¹⁸ Second, and most importantly, the authoritarian enclaves that persisted during the 1990s served as a buffer to limit truly disruptive actions. Compared with the transition to democracy in Spain, which included the transgressiveness of *la movida madrileña* (the ‘Madrid Scene’), in Chile disruptions were much more subdued. This was by design. As Daniel Palma, theatre designer and producer of underground parties, observes, the first democratic administration ‘did not want the screw-up that Spain experienced after Franco: liberalization was a problem the administration wanted to avoid, and it was better if each group was kept in a ghetto so that they could be dealt with separately’.¹⁹

The music industry boom

During the post-authoritarian period, the Chilean music industry experienced unprecedented growth. While the economic policies that contributed to GDP growth were not developed with the music industry in mind, it is undeniable that it benefited from them. Open-market policies and incentives for foreign investment were advantageous for music conglomerates just as they were for British mining and Spanish infrastructure giants. Multinational record companies identified the potential for growth given the country’s

13 Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo, *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

14 Patricio Navia, ‘Living in Actually Existing Democracies: Democracy to the Extent Possible in Chile’, *Latin American Research Review* 45 (2010), 303.

15 Navia, ‘Living in Actually Existing Democracies’, 305.

16 This position has become more widespread since the social uprising that began in October 2019. One example applied to music studies is Albornoz, ‘Cultura en transición, música en continuación’.

17 Navia, ‘Living in Actually Existing Democracies’, 311.

18 Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V: niñez y juventud* (Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2002), 281.

19 Quoted in Cristián Opazo, ‘Pánico a la discoteca: teatro, transición y *underground* (Chile, época 1990)’, *Cuadernos de Literatura* 21/42 (2017), 60.

macroeconomic numbers as well as the Chilean recording industry's underdeveloped status in the late 1980s.

By 1993, five majors had offices in Chile (BMG, EMI, PolyGram, Sony, and Warner), with seasoned executives in charge, several of them foreign. Their task was two-pronged: increase local sales of foreign music (Mariah Carey, Luis Miguel), and develop a market for local talent. While the boom's main drivers were the multinationals, independent labels also flourished. Some established distribution partnerships with majors and some operated independently, but even these benefitted from a much-improved framework for promotion, distribution, and live performance.

By the mid-1990s the production of Chilean music had grown considerably. Chacón et al. estimate that in the decade's second half the number of albums produced doubled compared with the first half.²⁰ Equally striking was the marked increase in the industry's willingness to invest in albums by new artists from a wide range of genres, including up-and-coming ones such as hip-hop, technocumbia, and reggae.²¹ As a result, there was considerably more Chilean music available, and a large proportion of it by new artists.

The growth in quantity was accompanied with an increase in the standards for production and sound quality. Multinationals' investments allowed artists to hire renowned international producers such as Gustavo Santaolalla and Colin Wolfe, and a sizable group of artists were given funds to record or master their albums abroad. For example, EMI invested \$50,000 on the production of Los Prisioneros' 1990 album *Corazones*, allowing them to record in Los Angeles and create the best-sounding album of their career up to that point.²²

The growth of the industry was also accompanied by an impressive increase in support industries. Newspapers grew their coverage of popular music; at one point in the 1990s, *El Mercurio* newspaper had an unprecedented number of five music journalists on staff.²³ New music-oriented magazines and fanzines were created, as well as new radio stations that, while not focused exclusively on Chilean music, did feature it in important ways; *Radio Rock & Pop*, founded in 1992, is the best example.²⁴ MTV Latin America arrived in Chile in 1993 and a local version, *Vía Ekis*, followed the next year.²⁵

As the restrictions to civil liberties decreased in the late 1980s, the opportunities for experiencing live music multiplied. Most spectacular is the fact that starting in 1989, Chile became part of the international touring circuit for arena shows. In that year alone, Rod Stewart, Cyndi Lauper, and UB40 played in Santiago. The following year, the number of large concerts

20 Gabriel Chacón, Felipe Godoy, Cristofer Rodríguez, and César Tudela, *200 discos de rock chileno: una historia del vinilo al streaming, 1962–2012* (Santiago de Chile: Ocholibros, 2020).

21 David Ponce, '30 años de la industria fonográfica en Chile (1988–2018),' in *30 años de la industria musical chilena (1988–2018)* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Hueders, 2019).

22 Macarena Lavín, 'Corazones de los prisioneros: un disco fundacional,' paper presented at *I Congreso Internacional do Estudos do Rock*, Cascavel, Paraná (Brazil), September 2013.

23 Javiera Tapia and Daniel Hernández, *Es difícil hacer cosas fáciles: los diez años que cambiaron la música en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Los libros de la mujer rota, 2017).

24 Radio executives observe that the improvement in sound quality was a key factor in their willingness to include Chilean music in their programming.

25 Chacón et al., *200 Discos de rock chileno*.

roughly doubled, and among them were presentations by singer-songwriters Silvio Rodríguez and Joan Manuel Serrat, two outspoken critics of the Pinochet dictatorship whose concerts would have been inconceivable under the regime.

Most impactful for local artists was the mushrooming of smaller venues for live music (La Batuta, Sala SCD, Taller Sol, Tom Pub) and a university circuit that had been cancelled during the dictatorship. Music journalist Sergio Lagos remembers fondly that ‘in the early 1990s the [live music] scene was wonderful’.²⁶ He highlights that there was an explosion in the number of bands and that these bands shared performance spaces: ‘there were thousands of bands, and hip-hoppers ran into trashers or up-and-coming reggae and pop musicians’.²⁷ A member of rock band Lucybell recalls the zeitgeist with elation: ‘there was a feeling of post-dictatorship, that one should go into the street and do things; there were concerts, festivals, you could feel it in the air’.²⁸

The increase in opportunities for live performance led to a professionalization of the live show. David Ponce, a music critic who covered this period, remembers the impression it made on him to witness pop-rock band La Ley’s first public performance: ‘this was a different standard; it was better produced, much more sophisticated’.²⁹ Other 1990s bands, such as Los Tres, also put on more compelling live shows than bands of the 1980s such as Aparato Raro or Cinema ever did.

In their study of Chilean youth cultures, historians Salazar and Pinto argue that live music in the 1990s entailed much more than a passive communal experience.³⁰ The authors observe that 1990s music fans sought new ways of interacting with artists and bands in live contexts. In the period 1975–85 there had been a marked distance between musicians and audiences. Artists were expected to be ‘virtuosic and professional’³¹ and ‘silence and stillness was expected from the audience’.³² In the 1990s, however, fans wished to be on stage, to be social actors, active participants. They note that this was strongest in styles that favoured a DIY aesthetic, such as punk and hip-hop.

Reclaiming national symbols and dictatorial pop culture

In the post-authoritarian period, Chileans who were born during the dictatorship attempted to recuperate for themselves cultural expressions that had been coopted by the dictatorship. Perhaps the most paradigmatic example of this process is the urban cueca revival that began in the 1990s. A style of music and dance tracing back to the nineteenth century, cueca became strongly associated with the dictatorship when the regime declared it Chile’s national dance in 1979.³³ Although cueca has several variants, the dictatorship favoured the promotion of one

26 Tapia and Hernández, *Es difícil hacer las cosas fáciles*, 49.

27 Tapia and Hernández, *Es difícil hacer las cosas fáciles*, 49.

28 Tapia and Hernández, *Es difícil hacer las cosas fáciles*, 51.

29 Tapia and Hernández, *Es difícil hacer las cosas fáciles*, 54.

30 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*.

31 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*, 279–80.

32 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*, 280.

33 Carlos León Heredia, ‘Los campeonatos de cueca huasa, 1965–1992: el movimiento cuequero y su vinculación a las políticas culturales de la dictadura cívico-militar’, *Neuma* 14/1 (2021).

that is elegant and competitive in nature, and whose main figure is a landowner cowboy ('huaso'). The 1979 decree also established that each September, the month in which Chilean independence is celebrated, a cueca tournament would take place for middle and high school students ('Campeonato nacional de cueca').³⁴ This style of cueca was consequently taught in schools and promoted in official events and national holidays, resulting in a normalization of particular musical structures (48 bars) and choreography.

The nationalization of cueca was part of a broader dictatorial strategy to adopt national symbols and rituals as its own. Since 1915, independence celebrations spanned two days in September: the 18th (to commemorate independence) and the 19th (to celebrate the glories of the Chilean armed forces). The main ritual of the second day was a military parade, and during the dictatorship the parade became a showcase for an oversized armed force, with particular emphasis on the display of military equipment. In all, the dictatorship managed to mark the rituals of the national holidays, from the performance of cueca to the participation in 'fondas' (places that serve food and drink, especially set up for the holidays) as celebrations of the regime itself.

As Christian Spencer Espinosa has documented, after the return to democracy there was a concerted effort by various groups to reclaim, reconfigure, and resignify cueca.³⁵ Key in this process was the removal of the competitive nature of cueca and the centrality of the huaso character. Instead of the competitive 'cueca huasa', musicians and dancers promoted a different variant, known as 'urban cueca'. This is a twentieth-century development characterized by working-class elements, such as the use of bawdy humour ('picaresca') and a rough singing style, inspired by street and market cries.

Most important in the 1990s cueca scene, Spencer observes, is its participatory quality. The new cueca spaces did not require a dress code and were open to inexperienced dancers. As one organizer explains, their goal was to make the experience 'integrative', in the sense that there should be no separation between 'what happens on stage and what goes on among the audience ["público"]'.³⁶ Urban cueca allowed people to 'connect, recuperate or create lost links, and offers a way out of Chilean society's identity crisis, particularly in Santiago'.³⁷ This participatory emphasis is similar to the one Salazar and Pinto observed in the 1990s punk and hip-hop scenes.³⁸ Spencer interprets the urban cueca revival as 'a nostalgic quest for a working-class culture negated by the dictatorship', and as an antidote to the consumerist mode of socialization developed during the post-dictatorship.³⁹ Instead, it provided 'a model of socialization at a human scale that is not mediated by the market or by institutions'.

A key contributor to the mass popularization of the urban cueca revival was rock group Los Tres. Its leader and main songwriter, Álvaro Henríquez, was introduced to urban cueca

34 León Heredia, 'Los campeonatos de cueca huasa, 1965–1992'.

35 Christian Spencer Espinosa, *¡Pego el grito en cualquier parte! Historia, tradición y performance de la cueca urbana en Santiago en Chile (1990–2010)* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Mayor, 2021).

36 Quoted in Spencer Espinosa, *¡Pego el grito en cualquier parte!*

37 Quoted in Spencer Espinosa, *¡Pego el grito en cualquier parte!*

38 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*.

39 Spencer Espinosa, *¡Pego el grito en cualquier parte!*

directly by Roberto Parra, a major exponent of the style. The two met in 1991, when Henríquez worked as a musician for 'La Negra Ester', a musical play based on Parra's life. Los Tres were the best-selling Chilean band of the 1990s, and in 1995 they recorded an unplugged show in Miami for MTV Latin America. Most of the show consisted of the band's own tunes, but as a surprise, they included a three-song tribute to Parra, performing two urban cuecas and a foxtrot. One of these tunes became the album's most-played track, and the album itself went on to be the second best-selling album of the decade.⁴⁰ According to the old guard of urban cueca musicians, Los Tres managed to renew urban cueca audiences by attracting younger crowds.⁴¹

The following year, Los Tres continued their tribute to Roberto Parra by organizing a fonda for the Chilean national holidays – an unprecedented initiative for a rock group. Henríquez recalls that the idea for the fonda came from Parra himself, who suggested it to him during their 'Negra Ester' collaboration. Typically, fondas have funny names, be they a clever play on words or bawdy references that underscore Chilean slang. Los Tres named their fonda 'La Yein Fonda', a Chileanized spelling of famed actress Jane Fonda. In follow-up editions, they extended the joke by calling their show 'Piter Fonda' and 'Jenri Fonda'. In a tongue-in-cheek way, these names acknowledged the ubiquitous presence of United States popular culture in Chile. This presence was strong throughout the twentieth century, but never more so than during the 1990s as the Chilean markets opened up to global commerce. The name also speaks to Los Tres' musical and artistic project more broadly, which could be described as a Chileanization of US rockabilly and rock.

Although 'La Yein Fonda' presented itself as promoting traditional performance styles, it is important to note the ways in which it was innovative and transformative. First, Los Tres spectacularized an annual ritual. Before 'La Yein Fonda', fondas featured a range of amateur and professional folkloric shows, but did not include performances by contemporary pop and rock star figures. By expanding the performers involved, Los Tres made fondas appealing to a younger audience. More broadly, through this initiative Los Tres helped recuperate the national celebrations for people on the Left who had felt alienated from the fonda-as-dictatorship.

Second, while the fonda's main event was focused on the performance of cuecas, 'La Yein Fonda' also featured Argentine tango, Peruvian vals, and Mexican boleros. The transgressiveness of this broadening of the repertoire was felt first by Pepe Fuentes, the musician invited to open the show playing these foreign styles. According to Álvaro Henríquez, when he invited Fuentes to do so, Fuentes responded by saying, 'how am I supposed to open a fonda with tangos? This has never been done; they're going to kill me; they're going to cover me with stones, boos and hisses.'⁴² The inclusion of these international genres challenges the tendency, heightened during the dictatorship, to turn fondas into jingoistic events. Like the name

40 Inti-Illimani also participated in the urban cueca revival. Their 1996 album *Arriesgaré la piel* includes a version of 'Cueca del Barón', a song originally recorded by the influential urban cueca group Los Chileneros. In that same album, the band paid tribute to Roberto Parra by musicalizing one of his texts also as a cueca.

41 Spencer Espinosa, *¡Pego el grito en cualquier parte!*

42 Álvaro Henríquez, 'La Yein Fonda: cuecas, cumbias y rock and roll', *La Tercera*, 29 August 2017.

'Yein Fonda' itself, this reflects the undeniable presence of foreign popular culture in Chile, and the deep affection Chileans have for it. By including these styles in the context of national celebrations, 'La Yein Fonda' proposed an alternative notion of a national identity to the one promoted by the dictatorship.

While cueca is the musical genre most indelibly associated with the dictatorship, it is not the only one. During the most repressive years of the dictatorship, up until the mid-1980s, the artists who managed to secure mass media exposure were assumed to be Pinochet supporters or sympathizers.⁴³ At the time, TV was the most coveted media in Chile, even for musicians. As a producer explains, 'during that period, TV occupied radio's role. Music manufacturing companies closed down, and labels thought twice before producing a Chilean artist.'⁴⁴ Consequently, TV show hosts such as Don Francisco and Enrique Maluenda, and musicians who were regulars on TV, were indelibly marked as audiovisual reminders of the dictatorship. The musical genre most ubiquitous on TV at the time was balada, a mainstream romantic music popular throughout Latin America and Spain. Some balada musicians who appeared regularly on Chilean TV were local, such as Roberto Viking Valdés and Myriam Hernández, and some international, such as Spanish Camilo Sesto and Julio Iglesias, and Venezuelan José Luis Rodríguez.

Chileans who were children during the dictatorship and who grew up with these TV shows and balada musicians later came to think of them as guilty pleasures.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1990s, these 'children of the dictatorship' attempted to make peace with the mass culture of their youth and to enjoy it without conflict. Several radio shows were created that featured and celebrated balada. Chilean bands recorded songs directly inspired by these dictatorial repertoires, such as Los Prisioneros' 'Estrechez de corazón' (1990), a major hit inspired by Camilo Sesto's 1978 song 'El amor de mi vida'. Other bands recorded covers, such as Javiera y Los Imposibles' 2000 version of Jeanette's 1973 single 'El muchacho de los ojos tristes'. As this band's lead singer acknowledged, 'there was a time when one somehow rejected that music'.⁴⁶

Another example of these efforts to resignify dictatorial pop culture can be heard in the debut album of funk-rock group Chanco en Piedra.⁴⁷ *Peor es mascar lauchas* (1995) opens with a brief intro track in which they name-call a dozen Chileans, all men, who were famous in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The list includes the names of musicians (Peter Rock, Pedro Messone, Roberto Viking Valdés, Wildo), TV personalities (Tío Memo, Enrique Maluenda, El Mago Oli, Pepe Tapia, Yeruba), and an athlete (Martín Vargas). The list and track conclude with the call of the band's own name; thus, presenting themselves as torchbearers of a genealogy of Chilean (male) entertainers. The list celebrates a middle-brow aesthetic, one focused especially on personalities with important TV presence during

43 Daniel Party, 'Placer Culpable: Shame and Nostalgia in the Chilean 1990s Balada Revival', *Latin American Music Review* 30/1 (2009).

44 Quoted in Party, 'Placer Culpable', 74.

45 Party, 'Placer Culpable'.

46 Quoted in Party, 'Placer Culpable', 90.

47 Nicolás Masquiarán, '¿Y quién es Juanito? Chanco en Piedra, la cultura de masas y la identidad nacional', paper presented at *X Congreso IASPM-LA*, Córdoba (Argentina), April 2012.

the dictatorship. Over a funk groove, these names are called with a mix of Spanish and English accents. Chanco en Piedra's anglicization of Chilean names may be understood as the reverse side to Los Tres' Chileanization of the name Jane Fonda.

In these songs, artists such as Los Prisioneros, Javiera y Los Imposibles, and Chanco en Piedra sought to resignify their private memories. Their nostalgia was not for the militant repertoire of early 1970s *Nueva Canción*, the musical movement that accompanied socialist Salvador Allende's presidential campaign and administration. Rather, they referred to and celebrated the pop music and culture of their childhood, which was lived under the dictatorship.

Post-exile identities: the cases of Inti-Illimani and Illapu

The need to construct new post-authoritarian identities was not limited to Chileans born during the dictatorship. In fact, this process was particularly onerous for older artists who were forced to live in exile under Pinochet. By decree, the end of exile was announced in September 1988, and several artists and bands managed to be present for the campaign leading up to the plebiscite. Most emblematic was the return of bands associated with the *Nueva Canción* movement, such as Inti-Illimani (from Italy) and Illapu (from Mexico).

In a recent study, Rodríguez shows that these bands' re-acquaintance with their Chilean audiences was more difficult than it seemed at the time.⁴⁸ During their exile, the members of these bands experienced important changes in terms of their political thinking and allegiances. Most notable is the fact that their relationship with the Chilean Communist Party fell through. Rodríguez explains that this break was the result of a disenchantment with the party's authoritarian internal structure and with what they perceived to be the role of the arts within the party's cultural policy. These political changes were reflected both in the music they created during the 1980s and in their live shows. In the case of Quilapayún, the latter included complex illumination, absurd humour, and theatrical elements such as miming. By the late 1980s, these artists were uninterested in playing a supportive role in political campaigns; they argued that their place was on the stage, and their commitment was above all to artistic exploration.⁴⁹ As Rodríguez documents, many Chileans who had followed Quilapayún during the Allende years (1970–3) were disappointed with these artistic explorations, which they read as a softening of the band's earlier political commitments. Adjusting to the new context was not easy. As the members of Illapu phrased it, 'we want to relearn how to live in Chile and to be a part of democracy, which is hard, but not impossible'.⁵⁰ For other *Nueva Canción* artists, such as Ángel Parra and 'Gitano' Rodríguez, this adjustment was unfeasible. They chose to return to the lives they had built in exile.

The challenges of finding an artistic identity after exile and in a democratic context are evident in the first albums Inti-Illimani and Illapu recorded after their return. Inti-Illimani's

48 Javier Rodríguez, "No venimos para hacer canción política": el retorno de la nueva canción chilena y el plebiscito de 1988", *Resonancias* 23/45 (2021).

49 Rodríguez, "No Venimos para hacer canción política".

50 Quoted in Rodríguez, 'No venimos para hacer canción política', 185.

1992 album, *Andadas*, is a particularly heterogeneous affair. Horacio Salinas, the band's artistic director, describes it as perhaps the most varied of the band's career and explains that 'its extreme diversity was born in part of the urgency to land strongly in Latin America'.⁵¹ Illapu's album *Vuelvo amor, vuelvo vida* (1991) also shoots in multiple directions, as if it were trying to find a path. As Illapu scholar Nelson Niño observes, the album 'is characterized by its large contrasts'.⁵² The one consistent element across this album, and which continues in subsequent ones, Niño notes, is the reliance on simpler lyrics and arrangements.

In their follow-up albums, both bands managed not only to find their footing, but also to considerably broaden their audiences. These albums were, indeed, the most popular of their respective careers. These records show a coherence with each band's history of musical interests and an openness to the influence of contemporary pop trends and to the marketing strategies of a multinational label – both bands worked with EMI's Chilean subsidiary. Following a pop music strategy, these albums are front-loaded, meaning that their most radio-friendly songs appear at the beginning. Among the songs at the top of each album are romantic love songs, an innovation for both bands.

Inti-Illimani's *Arriegaré la piel* (*I Will Risk My Neck*) (EMI, 1996) opens with 'Medianoche', one of the album's two *boleros* co-authored by Salinas with Patricio Manns. Boleros had been part of Salinas's and Manns's upbringings, but they had not previously been included in Inti-Illimani's repertoire, probably because of their commercial, cosmopolitan, and apolitical quality. The fact that the band finally embraced the bolero tradition in the 1990s is likely to be related to the fact that the genre experienced a revival in the 1990s, fuelled by the massive popularity of Mexican Luis Miguel's bolero albums. Luis Miguel's first bolero album, *Romance* (1990), was by far the best-selling record of the decade in Chile – it sold roughly three times as many as the next best-selling Chilean recording of the decade.

The final track in *Arriegaré la piel* is the only one that presents an explicit bridge to the band's pre-dictatorship history. The song 'Canto de las estrellas' is a moving ode to the memory of their friend and collaborator Víctor Jara.⁵³ The song celebrates Jara and simultaneously calls attention to the lack of transitional justice regarding his detention, torture, and killing, and through him, to the fate of hundreds of others as well.⁵⁴ Overall, *Arriegaré la piel* is a testament to Inti-Illimani's post-authoritarian incarnation: it channels some of the fashionable trends of the 1990s without losing sight of the need to keep alive the memory of the dictatorship's atrocities. For this album the band allowed the label to suggest a marketing strategy. While Salinas originally intended to call the album *Medianoche*, for the titular bolero that

51 Horacio Salinas Álvarez, *La canción en el sombrero: historia de la música de Inti-Illimani* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Catalonia, 2017).

52 Nelson Niño Vásquez, *¿Qué hacen aquí? La música de los hermanos Márquez Bugueño (1971–2021)* (Santiago de Chile: RiL editores, 2020), 104.

53 For a chronicle of the genesis of this song, see Moisés Chaparro Ibarra, José Seves, and David Spener, *Canto de las estrellas: un homenaje a Víctor Jara* (Santiago de Chile: Ceibo Ediciones, 2013).

54 It also includes 'El hacha', a song that places original lyrics to the harmonic progression of Compay Segundo's 'Chan chan'. It is likely Inti-Illimani discovered this song through Pablo Milanés' album *Años III* (1992). 'Chan chan' became a world music hit in the late 1990s thanks to the recording by Buena Vista Social Club.

opens the record, the label suggested the bolder *Arriegaré la piel*. The album soon became Inti-Illimani's best-selling record.

Illapu's second album post-return, *En estos días* (EMI, 1993), was even more commercially successful. By some accounts it is the best-selling Chilean album of the decade and perhaps of all time.⁵⁵ As a band, Illapu had had the experience of mainstream exposure once before, in 1976 with their hit song 'El candombe de José'.⁵⁶ Still, the level of success of *En estos días* was unprecedented. The album's commercial success was led by its hit single 'Lejos del amor'. The track's lyrics present a story of displacement that grows bleaker as the song progresses. Seagulls far away from the ocean, flying over a brownish Mapocho river in Santiago; kids away from home, playing in the dirt; lovers in the park, behaving unreasonably: singer Roberto Márquez wonders why all this is happening, and describes the seagulls, kids, and lovers as lost souls and as a lifeless sun. The music video contributes to the sense of displacement; it shows an Andean couple in traditional dress, dancing huayno in the urban and unpropitious bed of the Mapocho. The song may alternately be interpreted as a reflection on return after living in exile, as a critique of life under 1990s neoliberalism or, as casual listeners who only remember the lyrics to the first part do, as a love song. This ambiguity is part of the key to its success as a pop song.

The music, in any case, is sunny, and the production radio friendly. It features many Andean markers – a charango, an introductory melody on quena, a 2–3 rhythmic pattern – but the overall effect is of Andean fusion. As Jordán argues, in their early recordings Illapu utilized complex vocal arrangements inspired by the traditional performance of Andean sikus.⁵⁷ Here, however, a solo vocal line is clearly identifiable, and additional voices complement it in a style more reminiscent of Western choral music. In the words of a contemporary critic, in the 1990s Illapu's music showed 'a distillation and a renewed refinement'.⁵⁸

Niño observes that this album includes the first love song in Illapu's career, the bachata 'El pozo de mis sueños'. He notes that the presence of bachata is a response to the popularity of Dominican Juan Luis Guerra's album *Bachata rosa* (1990), the second-most popular album of the decade in Chile. Another romantic song in the album is 'No te salves', a musicalization of a poem by Uruguayan Mario Benedetti. The poem was published in 1974, yet it was popularized by the Argentine film *El lado oscuro del corazón* from 1992. The inclusion of these songs, and the fact that they appear early on in the album show a concerted strategy to reach a wider audience, and, according to Niño, were likely suggested by the label.⁵⁹

The second half of the album, though, includes songs with explicit political messages and critical takes on life in Chile during the 1990s. 'Palabras de nuestro tiempo' sings about

55 Leiva, 'El dominio'.

56 Juan Pablo González, *Des/encuentros de la música popular chilena 1970–1990* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2017).

57 Laura Jordán González, 'Truenan y brillan: el "sonido propio" de Illapu', in *Vientos del pueblo: representaciones, recepciones e interpretaciones sobre la nueva canción chilena*, ed. Simón Palominos and Ignacio Ramos Rodillo (Santiago de Chile: LOM Editores, 2018).

58 Quoted in Rodríguez, 'No venimos para hacer canción política', 186.

59 Niño Vásquez, *¿Qué hacen aquí?*, 121.

individualism, selfishness, and poor street kids taking drugs. 'Un poco de mi vida' deals with children who grew up during the dictatorship and who had limited opportunities for success. 'Me habita la confianza' refers to the need to find justice after the human rights abuses of the dictatorship. In all, Illapu found an identity between the mass appeal of Andean fusion and the conveying of sociopolitical messages.

Foreign sounds, local problems

In this final section I wish to address a fascinating paradigm of Chilean popular music of the post-authoritarian period; namely, that some of the most provocative critiques of the post-dictatorship were made through song reliant on musical styles that first emerged in the United States and England. As sociologist Jorge Larraín observed in his study of Chilean identity, in the 1990s Chilean youth were obsessed with imitating foreign trends.⁶⁰ Among several realms, Larraín notices this in popular music: 'among young Chileans there is a surge, growing stronger, of rock, rap and punk groups that imitate not only the music, but also the clothing, styles of movement and performance of its European originals'.⁶¹ Indeed, many 1990s artists and bands show their anglophone influences in quite transparent ways. Chanco en Piedra's funk-rock is modelled after the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Tatiana Bustos's mix of feminist lyrics and alternative rock energy follows Alanis Morissette, hip-hop troupe Panteras Negras borrows from Public Enemy, Los Miserables' political punk owes much to The Clash, and Los Tres have recognized their indebtedness to the Stray Cats' rockabilly.

The reliance on anglophone references was particularly frustrating for observers from the Left who were born in the 1940s and 1950s. To them, the model for socially and politically committed music was *Nueva Canción*, a style that sounded pan-Latin American and that explicitly rejected anglophone popular music as imperialistic. Hence, many left-wing intellectuals who wrote about the post-authoritarian period assumed that these foreign-sounding trends were orchestrated by the recording industry and read them as symptoms of a disaffected society.⁶² More importantly, they failed to notice that these Anglo-sounding styles carried critical and contestatory lyrics. These lyrics show how young musicians were deeply engaged with the social and political context of the post-dictatorship.

An important exception among left-wing monographs on the post-authoritarian period is Salazar and Pinto's study of 1990s youth.⁶³ What distinguishes these historians' approach is that they listened to the voices of actual youngsters. These historians' insights are not based on removed observations from the ivory tower, but from focus groups with young Chileans, many of them from impoverished marginal neighbourhoods. Salazar and Pinto note that

60 Larraín, *Identidad chilena*.

61 Larraín, *Identidad chilena*, 270.

62 José Bengoa, *La comunidad perdida* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Catalonia, 1996); Tomás Moulian, *Chile actual: anatomía de un mito* (Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, 1997); Nelly Richard, *Residuos y metáforas: ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la transición* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1998); Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, *El Chile perplejo: del avanzar sin transar al transar sin parar* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta, 1998).

63 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*.

in the post-dictatorship period, contestatory and critical music emerged at the margins. In their words:

it's as if popular music has undergone a democratization. Not only because it's no longer monopolized by a handful of 'professional artists' and is now spread to an extended mass of 'organic artists' (embedded in the social base), but also in the sense that its poetry and lyrics reflect the contemporary reality of the 'lower class' ['bajo pueblo'] in a more honest, descriptive and sensible way.⁶⁴

Their dialogue with the communities they studied allowed Salazar and Pinto to realize that foreign musical styles served as vessels to express local concerns. Youth 'may take, as source material or pretext, foreign rhythms (hip-hop, rock, new wave, jazz, reggae or others), but their fusion, adaptation, and, above all, the messages they express are completely local.'⁶⁵ We already saw an example of this in Chanco en Piedra, a band that resignified dictatorial TV culture through a funk-rock beat. Even more striking are the cases of punk and hip-hop. These two styles, as they developed in the Chilean post-dictatorship, share several features: socially marginal origins; a commitment to politically charged lyrics; and the fact that children of Chilean exiles were crucial in their development. In short, Chilean punk and hip-hop were the most significant examples of protest music in the post-authoritarian period.

The first explorations into punk in Chile took place in the 1980s. Regrettably, but unsurprisingly given the status of the Chilean music industry under dictatorship, these experiments did not end up in commercial recordings.⁶⁶ A special case is worth mentioning, however. In the early 1980s in Paris, the three children of a Chilean exile formed the punk band Corazón Rebelde. They sang, in Spanish, about the exile experience, the dictatorship, and the disappeared. In 1985, Corazón Rebelde's first album was recorded in France and released in Chile by the independent label Alerce. The cassette illustrates well the impact of second-generation exiles upon Chilean popular music; they contributed to internationalizing the sound and visuals of Chilean music, and they provided a fresh perspective on the exile experience, one that is distinct from that of their parents.

In the post-dictatorship period, punk bands benefitted from the increase in civil liberties and the boom in the music industry. Although punk bands did not reach the top of the charts, many were able to record with independent labels and to express their ideas more freely. Los Miserables, for example, could make explicit their frustration with the lack of transitional justice and their dissatisfaction with the elite-biased transition to democracy with the title of their first album, *¿Democracia?* (1990). As they announced in a 1993 cassette, 'we dedicate this cassette to the victims of the coup, of the dictatorship and of this pseudodemocracy'.⁶⁷

64 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*, 278.

65 Salazar and Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V*, 277.

66 Marisol García, *Canción valiente, 1960–1989: tres décadas de canto social y político en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones B, 2013).

67 David Ponce, 'La espina de la transición ya está aquí', in *Se Oía Venir: Cómo La Música Advirtió La Explosión Social En Chile*, ed. David Ponce (Santiago de Chile: Cuaderno y Pauta, 2019), 27.

Like punk, in the early 1990s Chilean hip-hop produced a confrontational and critical discourse from the margins, and also had the support of independent labels. Similar to the urban cueca revival documented by Spencer, the early 1990s hip-hop scene was very much a participatory grassroots movement in which the distinction between artists and audiences was blurred.⁶⁸ Panteras Negras, a group from the poor Santiago neighborhood of Renca, recorded *Lejos del centro* (1991) with the indie label Liberación. In it they expressed a profound scepticism of the elite that controlled the transition to democracy, a political elite that asked the poor ‘not to complain, that it’s too early’ (‘1990’): ‘we listen to your lies, but we don’t believe them’ (‘Tontos ricachones’).

Even more than punk, hip-hop was able to take advantage of the post-dictatorship music industry boom. The Chilean subsidiaries of major labels, well aware of the international massification of hip-hop in the 1990s, invested in local bands with highly successful results.⁶⁹ Tiro de Gracia signed with EMI in 1996, and the following year released *Ser humano!!* (1997). Heavily promoted with videoclips and media appearances, the band considerably broadened rap’s appeal in Chile. The commercial involvement of the majors allowed a band like La Pozze Latina to have their 1999 album produced by Colin Wolfe, who had worked on NWA’s *Niggaz4Life* (1991).

Key in the development of Chilean hip-hop culture were the contributions of musicians who were the children of exiles.⁷⁰ First exposed to hip-hop while living abroad, when they returned they quickly became leaders in the scene. The pioneer was Jimmy Fernández (La Pozze Latina) who returned from Italy in 1988, but by the late 1990s Chilean hip-hop was dominated by returnees such as Ana Tijoux, Gastón Gabarró, DJ Raff, and Tea-Time. Rodríguez observes that the wider appeal of these returned rappers may be explained by the fact that they had higher cultural and economic capital than the first generation of Chilean rappers who grew up in the margins.⁷¹ The members of the returned hip-hop troupe Makiza, for example, had all attended university. In their rhymes they avoided slur words and street slang, describing their flow as ‘more intellectual, more elegant’.⁷² The experience of exile and the challenges of adjusting to Chilean society were key in their lyrics. As Makiza’s Ana Tijoux raps in “Rosa de los vientos” (1999), ‘if you knew what’s like to be divided, not know which is one’s country’. Like punk musicians, these returned rappers were frustrated with the limited reach of transitional justice. To those Chileans sceptical of youngsters who had not experienced first-hand the repressiveness of the dictatorship, Makiza rapped back, ‘They tell me I didn’t live the dictatorship, that I can’t understand the bitterness, know about torture, wounds and burns’ (‘Dicen’). The level of outspokenness in some of these songs is an unmistakable sign of the arrival of democracy, even if a pacted and elite-biased

68 Nelson Rodríguez, ‘La confluencia entre raperos chilenos y sellos discográficos multinacionales en la década de 1990: una operación con implicancias para el desarrollo del hip-hop en Chile’, *Música Popular em Revista* 8 (2021), 8.

69 Rodríguez, ‘La confluencia entre raperos chilenos y sellos discográficos multinacionales en la década de 1990’.

70 Nelson Rodríguez, ‘El aporte de los exiliados políticos al hip-hop chileno y su diferenciación en la escena’ (unpublished manuscript).

71 Rodríguez, ‘El aporte de los exiliados políticos al hip-hop chileno y su diferenciación en la escena’.

72 Quoted in Rodríguez, ‘El aporte de los exiliados políticos al hip-hop chileno y su diferenciación en la escena’, 7.

one. Simply put, it is difficult to imagine songs by Los Miserables, Panteras Negras, or Makiza circulating in commercial recordings under Pinochet. These punk and hip-hop artists were exercising core democratic values, such as freedom of expression and protest, and citizen's interest in and engagement with politics, as well as a subtle engagement with Chile's dictatorial history.

Closing remarks

The return to democracy was a hopeful but challenging moment for several generations of Chileans. Through popular music creation and consumption, Chileans attempted to reconstruct the damage done by the dictatorship, to find new ways of being. For some, this meant accepting that their warm childhood memories happened at a time of violence and repression. For others, there was a desire to reclaim national symbols as a way to reconnect with a national identity. For the ones who returned after years in exile, it meant finding their place in a much-changed country or, in the case of children of exiles, adjusting to a place they had only heard and read about. The children of the dictatorship were no less critical of their sociopolitical context than previous generations were. But they sought out ways of expressing their views that were different from those of their parents' generation. They did not pick up the musical projects that were violently broken by the 1973 coup. Instead, they relied on sounds that were new to them, or on old sounds that allowed them to resignify the dictatorial past.

Importantly, Chilean popular music of the post-authoritarian period does not convey the sense of a common understanding of what democracy means, how it may be expressed through song, or how its freedoms should be used. On the contrary, the songs surveyed here represent multiple and sometimes contradictory conceptions of democracy and democratic freedom. For some, democratic freedom meant freely choosing one's own musical references or sources, be they Andean instruments or the looks of British punk. For others, democracy meant freedom of assembly to experience live music and occupy public spaces. For some, it was the freedom to dissent and criticize the government. For others, it meant the liberty to capitalize on their success, and to seek larger audiences by collaborating with the music industry.

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