

Cantos Cautivos

Online Archive of Songs of Political Captivity in Pinochet's Chile

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ABSTRACT

Cantos Cautivos (*Captive Songs*) is a recently launched online archive of songs created, performed and listened to in the context of political detention and torture in Pinochet's Chile (1973–1990). This article contextualizes the project, provides an overview of the archive's current materials, outlines a selection of challenges, and highlights its contributions of music, accounts and documentation.

Cantos Cautivos (www.cantoscautivos.cl) is an online archive that I have conceptualized, created and managed to compile songs that were written, sung and listened to in political detention and torture centers in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990). The Chilean Museum of Memory and Human Rights and ex-prisoners were my associates in developing this project, which also includes the stories behind the songs. *Cantos Cautivos* is the first online archive of music and state violence from all contexts that uses crowdsourcing to compile its content. It is also the first online resource providing content related to music and dictatorship in Latin America.

Launched in January 2015 and now permanently hosted by the Museum of Memory, *Cantos Cautivos* is an ongoing project that is part of my broader Leverhulme-funded research project "Sounds of Memory: Music and Political Captivity in Pinochet's Chile," which investigates connections between music, human rights, testimony, cultural memory and commemoration, and involves ethnographies of both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations. In this article, I contextualize the *Cantos Cautivos* project, provide an overview of the content it currently hosts, outline a selection of challenges I have encountered, and highlight its contributions.

The main reason for developing the archive is the need to collect music and accounts of music from survivors as quickly and from as many sources as possible. The task is

vast—there were over 1,000 political detention and torture centers during Pinochet's dictatorship [1]; and the time to collect materials is very limited—it is estimated that over half of the survivors have already died [2].

Each *Cantos Cautivos* entry is linked to the museum's interactive site *Recintos* [3], which provides details of the detention centers identified by the Valech Commission [4]. Entries that refer to prisoners who disappeared and prisoners who were executed are also linked to the museum's site *Victimas* [5], containing records from the Rettig Commission [6]. *Cantos Cautivos* users are thus able to access information about the precarious conditions and repression under which the prisoners developed their musical creativity.

At the present time, approximately 20% of the archive's entries contain accounts of composing in detention, while 45% contain accounts of performing, and 35% contain prisoners' accounts of listening to music performed live by fellow prisoners, played on records or broadcast on the radio. Among the archive's most unique materials are several recordings from Chacabuco concentration camp, made while the musicians were detained.

Most of the accounts collected to date relate to activities initiated by the inmates; a small number are concerned with music used by the system as indoctrination, punishment or torture during detention. The archive contains songs from a range of countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, the former Yugoslavia, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, the Ukraine, the U.K., Uruguay, the U.S. and Venezuela), covering a range of popular genres (Nueva Canción, tango, bolero, cumbia, ranchera, romantic ballad, easy listening, rock, pop, blues, chanson, cabaret, music from films, anthems, military marches and pieces from the conservatory tradition).

We received the largest number of contributions around the project's launch date at the Museum of Memory, coinciding with wide national and international press coverage. At present, the archive holds materials relating to detention centers located in six of fifteen regions of Chile: Tarapacá, Antofagasta, Metropolitana (Santiago), Valparaíso, Bío Bío and Magallanes. Most of these contributions are from ex-

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The *Cantos Cautivos* archive is available at <www.cantoscautivos.cl>.

prisoners currently living in the capital, which suggests that information about the project has not been effectively disseminated in the provinces. The lack of contributions from the remaining nine regions may also be due to ex-prisoners living in the provinces feeling unmotivated or excluded from participating in a project hosted by an institution based in the capital.

The current status of the project highlights the need to engage with potential contributors face-to-face, particularly with those living in regions that are still unrepresented in the archive. Other factors that make crowdsourcing challenging for this project are technological gaps and limited IT access among ex-prisoners, issues associated with the institutionalization of memories, and the range of psychological barriers imposed by the archive's format, which may become substantially more significant in situations involving trauma. As ex-prisoners are encouraged to send their experiences in written form, they are solely able to employ propositional

language, as a result of which prosody and nonverbal communication cannot be conveyed, and subjectivity diminishes or disappears.

Despite these difficulties, the project has been successful in obtaining and exhibiting valuable materials that were previously unknown. The website has had a steady number of visitors from all continents (with about 20,000 hits in the first three months, and subsequently approximately 2,000 per month) and has generated wider debates on political violence—particularly through reader forums at online media outlets. I expect that *Cantos Cautivos* will be utilized in future research and other areas of educational activity. For example, it is now being promoted as a classroom resource among teachers attending the University of Chile's course in Education, Memory and Human Rights. Above all, *Cantos Cautivos* constitutes an act of retribution to the heritage of Chile and, particularly, to the community of victims of the Pinochet regime.

References and Notes

- 1 The Chilean Government has recognized 1,132 centers of political detention and torture. See Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura (also known as the Valech Commission I), *Informe* (2004) p. 301: <bibliotecadigital.indh.cl/handle/123456789/455> (accessed 29 May 2015).
- 2 This estimate is based on available statistics on prisoners' age at the time of detention, which mostly occurred in 1973–1976. At that time, 25.4% prisoners were 31–40 years old and 12% were over 41 years old. See [1] p. 562.
- 3 Recintos: <190.98.219.232/~interac/recintos/> (accessed 29 May 2015).
- 4 See Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura [1]. See also Steve J. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989–2006* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2006) chapters 6 & 7; and Katrien Klep, "Tracing Collective Memory: Chilean Truth Commissions and Memorial Sites," *Memory Studies* 5, No. 3 (2012) pp. 259–269.
- 5 Víctimas: <190.98.219.232/~interac/victimas/> (accessed 29 May 2015).
- 6 See also "Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación" (aka the Rettig Commission), *Informe* (1991): <www.ddhh.gov.cl/ddhh_rettig.html> (accessed 10 June 2015).

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Manuscript received 1 June 2015.

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