Contested memories: two sites in the memory landscape of Santiago de Chile

Katrien Klep

On 11 September 2013 it was forty years ago that Chilean armed forces, led by General Augusto Pinochet, moved against democratically elected President Salvador Allende and bombarded the presidential palace *La Moneda* in the heart of Santiago de Chile. The memory of the Chilean military dictatorship displays a strong division among Chileans about what happened on 11 September 1973. For some it was the day that Chile was saved by its glorious armed forces from a civil war and communist rule. For others it was the day that a democratically elected government and a project for a more equal and just society were crushed by the military followed by seventeen years of dictatorship.

Since the return to democracy in 1990, memorialisation processes in Chile have been marked by the reports of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1991) and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (2004) that have officially acknowledged individual victims of human rights violations. Over time the discourse of the military leaders changed from open denial to institutional recognition of human rights violations.[1] Today, Chileans are reminded of the violent past through commemoration plaques, monuments, memorials and reclaimed former secret detention and torture centres in public space, most of which are grassroots initiatives. Moreover, they can visit the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* [Museum of Memory and Human Rights] in Santiago de Chile.

The narrative of polarisation, of two mutually exclusive groups with irreconcilable positions about the Allende period and the military regime

[1] F. Agüero and E. Hershberg, *Memorias Militares sobre la Represión en el Cono Sur: Visiones en Disputa en Dictadura y Democracia* [Military Memories about the Repression in the Southern Cone: Disputing Visions under Dictatorship and Democracy] (Madrid 2005) and O. Bakiner, 'From Denial to Reluctant Dialogue: the Chilean Military's Confrontation with Human Rights (1990-2006)', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.1 (2010) 47-66.

that followed, is still dominant in public discourse. However behind the 'polarised' Chile, there are diverse processes of memorialisation going on in Chilean society, products of the contestation and negotiation of different narratives of the past by a wide variety of social actors. In these processes, new symbolic, discursive and physical spaces emerge allowing people to voice multiple perspectives and understandings of the military dictatorship.

In this article I will highlight two sites in the 'memory landscape' of Santiago de Chile: *Londres 38, Espacio de Memorias,* [Londres 38, Space of Memories] a grassroots memorialisation initiative and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, constructed as a governmental initiative under the *Concertación* government of former President Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010). [2] I will argue how both are expressions of processes of memorialisation ongoing in Chilean society and engage with the past and the present in different ways. I will show the contested nature of the processes of memorialisation at play and introduce the notion of memory landscape that will allow us to grasp the dynamic nature of these processes in Chilean society.

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[2] This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork (two periods of eight months between 2005 and 2008, and short visits in 2009, 2010 and 2011) which was part of the authors' PhD research on memorialisation processes of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) in the public space of Santiago de Chile through the analysis of transitional justice instruments and commemoration practices (K. Klep, *Transitional Justice and Commemorative Practices: Processes of Memorialisation in Chile* (Utrecht 2012) unpublished PhD dissertation). The research presented here is based on mapping the networks of the actors on the local and national level involved in the creation of the *Londres 38, Espacio de Memorias* and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights. The author has visited *Londres 38* regularly, attended meetings, activities and commemorations and searched in public and private archives. She also interviewed members of the grassroots organisations, family members, survivors, architects and representatives of the governmental institutions involved. The author also interviewed curators, governmental and museum authorities on the creation of the Museum of Memory of Human Rights. She would like to thank all her interviewees for generously sharing their time, knowledge and thoughts with her.

Processes of Memorialisation

In societies memory-making is a relational process and the resulting memories are, by definition, always plural: 'Different groups contribute different memories to society whose confrontation continuously produces new memory configurations.'[3] Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have pointed out that war memory and commemoration have been looked at either from a political perspective 'as a practice bound up with rituals of national identification' shaped by the state or as an expression of mourning performed by civil society. They have argued, however, that war memory and commemoration are inter-related and constitutive of each other.[4] Political elites may use memorialisation efforts as part of a nation-building project and attempt to silence contesting narratives. In contrast, grassroots memorialisation efforts often arise spontaneously from local concerns and needs such as mourning and resistance. They engage with or contest other projects of memorialisation, thus turning the process of memorialisation into a means of civic activism and political critique.[5]

As spatial and material expressions of processes of memorialisation, monuments and memorials are being shaped by the various networks which run through the local, national and international level at a particular point in time. They are dynamic and relational; their meaning and use change over time. Therefore we need analytical instruments that allow us to grasp dynamics, movements, advances, retreats and conflicts. Consequently, a monument or memorial must be understood in relation to its place, its 'time' (the historical moment), the actors that embody it and are involved in it, as well as in relation to other expressions of memory.[6]

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[3] A.C.G.M. Robben, 'How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of Argentina's Dirty War', *Cultural Critique* 59 (2005) 120-164: 153.

[4] T.G. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London 2000) 7-9.

[5] R. Ibreck, 'The Politics of Mourning: Survivor Contributions to Memorials in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *Memory Studies* 3.4 (2010) 330-343: 332.

[6] This view draws on a research workshop given by anthropologist Ludmila da Silva Catela on 6 April 2009 at social science faculty of the University of Chile. See also: L. Da Silva Catela, 'Exponer lo Invisible: Una Etnografia sobre la Transformación

In order to make visible the 'activity of memory' in monuments, historian James Young has argued that it is crucial to study the emergence of a monument. A study of the 'monument's inner life – the tempestuous social, political and aesthetic forces – normally hidden by a monument's taciturn exterior',[7] broadens our understanding of memory as relational, dynamic and related to the present.[8] At the same time we must understand how memories become attached to sites. Graham Dawson has argued that:

> Our understanding of conflicts over the remembered past may be deepened by integrating theories and methods developed by social anthropologists and cultural geographers to investigate the subjective identities, meanings and memories that become attached to, and invested in, the objective, physical spaces of the social world. (…) The "identifiable sites" formed in this way are shaped by the emotional investments made in them, but also by "wider issues of power, group dynamics, conflicting ideologies and institutions," that

de Centros Clandestinos de Detención en Sitios de Memoria en Córdoba-Argentina' [To Expose the Invisible: an Ethnography about the Transformation of Clandestine Centres of Detention in Memory Sites in Córdoba-Argentina] in: T. Medalla et al, *Recordar Para Pensar: Memoria para la Democracia: la Elaboración del pasado Reciente en el Cono Sur de América Latina* [To remember in order to Think: Memory for Democracy: the Elaboration of the Recent Past in the Southern Cone of Latin America]. (Santiago de Chile 2010) 44-56.

[7] J.E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven 1993) 14.

[8] During fieldwork for her PhD dissertation the author closely followed the 'paper trails' of the monuments, memorials, former secret detention and torture centres and museums under study. This search led to municipal archives, the archive of the Council of National Monuments, the National Archive and private archives with photos, press clippings, notes of meetings, letters, copies of public declarations and so forth. This revealed which social groups and governmental institutions had been involved in the creation of that particular memory site. Together with the interviews on the creation and the use of those sites, this in turn revealed debates and contestations surrounding the sites under study.

> affect "both the physical appearance of places (…) and the way they are conceptualized".[9]

I propose to use the analytical tool of the memory landscape which grasps the notions of change, use and relations (both physical and social). Sites can become more inscribed in the landscape as more people visit and use the site, while other sites may be forgotten. Some sites, especially former detention and torture centres, marked by the death of the detained-disappeared and by the profoundly unsettling experiences and memories of the survivors, have generated a constant engagement of people with these places. This memory landscape must be understood as something 'lived' (as opposed to 'directed' or 'top-down installed') because it is created by the people that use it. This is a crucial point: the memory landscape is produced through use, through human action, through the people that give meaning to it.

The aftermath of the Chilean dictatorship: official truth telling

Around 1990, after years of searching for people who had disappeared under the dictatorship, the human rights and family member organisations turned to the newly elected democratic president Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) demanding truth and justice. The issue of human rights violations was central to the presidential campaign of the government of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* [Concert of Parties for Democracy], a coalition of centre and left-wing political parties that had narrowly defeated the military dictatorship at the ballot-box. Once installed on 11 March 1990, however, the new government found the political and legal situation in the country still dominated by civil and military actors and legal structures established by the dictatorship, making a thorough investigation of crimes difficult. Balancing political pressure to leave the past alone and the legitimate demands from families and others for truth and justice, President Patricio

[9] P. Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge 1996) 2, cited in: G. Dawson, 'Trauma, Place and the Politics of Memory: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972-2004', *History Workshop Journal* 59.1 (2005) 151-178: 155.

Aylwin created the Chilean National Truth and Reconciliation Commission in April 1990, also known as the Rettig Commission after its president lawyer Raúl Rettig.[10] Its mandate was to establish the most complete picture possible of the grave human rights violations committed between 11 September 1973 and 11 March 1990 taking into account individual victims on 'both sides': those who were executed, had died under torture or disappeared at the hands of the dictatorship (2,025 persons), and those who were kidnapped by and/or had suffered attempts on their life by 'individuals acting under political pretexts' (90 persons).[11]

The government's strategy was to focus on the recognition of the victims as well as on reparations, while at the same time emphasising the need for national reconciliation. The Rettig Report can be understood as an attempt to generate some level of consensus on the past, however it was highly contested. Even though the Report formed the official acknowledgement of the predicament of the detained-disappeared and executed – which had been denied during the military dictatorship – the family member organisations found the Report lacking as there was still no answer to their main questions: what happened to the detained-disappeared, and where were they now? They also wanted criminal justice for those responsible. Moreover, the Rettig Report did not individually recognize the thousands of Chileans who had suffered political imprisonment, torture, exile and dismissal on political grounds.

In the years after the dictatorship, family members, survivors, human rights organisations and others kept the memory of the detained-disappeared alive in countless ceremonies, meetings, commemorations and court cases. In the context of the detention of Pinochet in London in 1998, their demands for truth and justice gained new momentum, finding expression on the streets and in the courts. The accusations against Pinochet included several cases of torture, a practice of the repressive regime that was mentioned by the Rettig Report but had otherwise received

[10] The *Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* [National Truth and Reconciliation Commission] (hereafter CNVR) was created on 25 April 1990 (DS 335). The Rettig Report was published in March 1991.

[11] CNVR, *Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* (Santiago de Chile: La Nación 1991) viii and 883.

little attention in terms of either official recognition or reparations. Organisations of family members, organisations of former prisoners, Chilean human rights non-governmental organisations and others managed to forge (international) alliances and demanded justice and reparation from the Chilean state. In 2003, only weeks before the symbolically important thirtieth commemoration of the 1973 coup, President Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) announced the creation of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture with a view to reparation of the victims.[12] Of the almost 35,000 persons who went to the Commission, 27,255 were recognised as having been imprisoned and tortured for political reasons and had their names included in the Report (CNPPT 2004). The Chilean Army had not recognised the 1991 Rettig Report, however this time the leaders of the army acknowledged the Valech Report.[13] The Valech Report broadened the official narrative of the military dictatorship in that it now included those who had suffered political imprisonment and torture. Moreover, it delved deeper into the victims' political and social engagement, making it explicit that they were persecuted for their political and social ideas.

The key ingredient of the official dealing with the aftermath of the Chilean dictatorship during the 1990s was truth-telling about the human rights violations committed under the military dictatorship. This truth-telling was considered to be a measure of justice for the victims, and was to ensure 'never again', to forge social and political reconciliation and to strengthen democracy. Although given the political power relations in the 1990s, criminal prosecution of individual perpetrators was not a priority, prosecutions increased after the detention of Pinochet in 1998 and continue until today.[14] Under the presidency of Michelle Bachelet other aspects of the legacy of the dictatorship were privileged especially those related to

[12] *The Comisión Nacional sobre Prisón Politica y Tortura* [National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture] (hereafter: CNPPT), also known as the Valech Commission after its president Monsignor Sergio Valech, was created on 11 November 2003 (DS 1.040). The Valech Report was published in November 2004.
[13] Bakiner, 'From Denial to Reluctant Dialogue', 47-66.
[14] C. Collins, 'Human Rights Trials in Chile During and After the "Pinochet Years"', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.1 (2010) 67-86.

memory; she inaugurated several grassroots initiated and (partially) state funded memorials and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights.[15]

This short overview shows the deeply contested nature of processes of memorialisation. Social actors striving for truth and justice have tirelessly engaged and challenged the official discourse on the past. This process of contestation and negotiation continuously restructures the Chilean memory landscape, opening new spaces for people to voice their memories.

The memory landscape of Santiago de Chile: contested memories

Londres 38, Espacio de Memorias

Grassroots memorialisation initiatives were and are profoundly related to the disappearance and death of the victims: they have emerged at cemeteries and anonymous graves where bodies of the detained-disappeared and executed have been found and at former secret detention and torture centres where the victims were last seen. Commemorative plaques, memorials with names and other tokens have also appeared at universities, schools, hospitals, on plazas and along streets. Some (secret) sites of detention, torture, disappearance and death have become marked in the memory landscape; others have been all but forgotten.[16] Among the most notorious in Santiago were *Villa Grimaldi*,[17] *Londres 38* and *José Domingo*

[15] C. Collins, 'Human Rights Trials in Chile', 85 and K. Hite and C. Collins, 'Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st-Century Chile', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38.2 (2009) 379-401.

[16] For a detailed analysis of the 'disappearance' and 're-appearance' of detention and torture sites, see M.F. Rojas Vallejos and M.P. Silva Bustón, *Sufrimiento y Desapariciones. El Manejo Urbano-Arquitectónico de la Memoria Urbana Traumatizada* [Suffering and Disappearances. The Urban-Architectural Handling of the Traumatized Urban Memory] (Santiago de Chile 2005) Foundation Documentation and Archive of the Vicariate of Solidarity.

[17] *Villa Grimaldi* was used by the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA), the secret service of the military dictatorship, from the end of 1973 until 1978. Estimated numbers are that around 5000 political prisoners passed through the gates and torture rooms of Villa Grimaldi; 229 of them disappeared. *Parque por la Paz – Villa*

Cañas 1367.[18] All three sites have been saved from oblivion by grassroots organisations and other social actors who have created memorials with the names of those who disappeared or died, and worked to reclaim the sites to use them for commemoration, (human rights) education, cultural activities, debate and protest.

The efforts related to Londres 38, a house on the street called Londres in the centre of Santiago which operated as a secret detention, torture, disappearance and execution centre between 11 September 1973 and September 1974, gained strength in 2005. In July 2005 a grassroots organisation named *Colectivo 119* – a group of family members, comrades and friends – together with other grassroots' organisations commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the so-called list of 119 detained-disappeared.[19] In the same month grassroots organisation *Colectivo Londres 38*, consisting of family members, survivors and others, filed a petition to the Chilean

Grimaldi was opened in 1997. It was declared a National Monument on 27 April 2004. Today it is one of the leading sites with guided tours, a public oral archive and a human rights education programme, http://www.villagrimaldi.cl.

[18] The house at *José Domingo Cañas 1367* was used by the DINA from August 1974 until November 1974. An estimated 54 persons disappeared or died at this site. In 2001 a memorial was inaugurated in front of the house with their names. The house was destroyed by a fire, however on 21 January 2002 the empty site was declared a National Monument. In 2009 the *Casa de la Memoria* administered by grassroots organisations was inaugurated.

[19] The case of the 119, came to light in 1975 when a Brazilian and an Argentinean newspaper, and later Chilean newspapers, published articles and lists of names about the death of 119 Chilean men and women. According to the articles they were killed in a fight amongst themselves. The articles were defrauded as a misinformation scheme of the DINA, secret service of the dictatorship, known as '*Operación Colombo'* [Operation Colombo], in an attempt to cover up the disappearance of these 119 persons, many of whom were last seen in either *Londres 38* or *José Domingo Cañas*. For the press clippings of 1975 and related documents, enter '*caso 119'* in the search engine under '*archivo digital'* on: http://www.londres38.cl.

Council of National Monuments to have the house at the address Londres 38 declared a national historical monument.[20]

The projects of the Colectivo 119 and the Colectivo Londres 38 began to converge as the idea evolved to turn the street in front of Londres 38 into a memorial to the detained-disappeared, and at the same time to attempt to appropriate the house itself in order to actively use it as a place of memory. Their efforts were successful. The inauguration of the *Memorial Londres 38* in the street outside the house took place on 14 October 2008. It consists of black and white tiles – signifying the black and white tiled floor inside Londres 38 that the prisoners could see just below their blindfolds – alternating with 96 cast iron tiles carrying the names of the individuals who were detained-disappeared, executed or died as a consequence of torture in Londres 38, their age and their political militancy. For the Colectivo Londres 38, it was of fundamental importance to include political militancy in the memorial as it underlined that disappearances by the military dictatorship were not only about the physical disappearance of the body of an individual person, but also – if not especially – about the erasure of both individual and collective social and political identities that threatened the dictatorships' interests.[21] The names commemorate the individuals but the militancy shows that these names are related both to each other and to a social and political project. To display their names, ages, and political militancy in the street served to recover the identities which had been silenced for so long.

On 4 October 2005, Londres 38 was recognised as a National Monument by decree 1413 of the Council of National Monuments.[22] By

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[20] *Presentación al Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales para la Declaratoria como monumento histórico del inmueble ubicado en calle Londres 40 (ex 38), en la Comuna de Santiago* [Presentation to the Council of National Monuments for the declaration as a historical monument of the property at the street Londres 40 (former 38) in the municipality of Santiago] July 2005, 5, 7-8. http://www.londres38.cl/1934/w3-article-81592.html, accessed on 6 Nov. 2013.

[21] Proyecto Memorial Londres 38, 'Documento Final', March 2007 3. http://www.londres38.cl/1934/w3-article-93493.html, accessed on 6 November 2013.

[22] Decree 1413 *Declarase monumento histórico inmueble ubicado en calle Londres* no. 40 *(ex Londres no. 38), comuna y provincia de Santiago, Región Metropolitana.* [Declare as

that decree, the building was protected against changes to its structure or demolition. The grassroots organisations continued their efforts to reclaim the house at Londres 38 itself. In October 2008 the government accepted the proposal by grassroots organisations to organize round table meetings to determine the future use of the house.[23] The overall position of the government representatives was that use of the house should connect to the officially established narrative of the dictatorship, framed in terms of individual human rights violations during the period of the dictatorship contained in the Rettig Report, the Valech Report and the National Monument Decree which referred explicitly to Londres 38 as a secret detention and torture centre in the first year of the military dictatorship.

The members of the grassroots organisations endorsed a broader view on 'memory,' expressing the need to use the memory of the dictatorship as a starting point to open up broader debate on the politics of past and present. Their goal was to ask questions about why, how and what circumstances had made the events of the dictatorship possible, about the responsibilities of society as a whole, and to grasp the associated processes of the social and political struggles against the repression. Moreover, instead of understanding the period of dictatorship as a closed period belonging to the past, they proposed to look at its relations with the social and political struggles in present time. After months of negotiation, this broad vision held by the grassroots organisations was eventually laid down in the final document of the round table meetings.[24]

Today Londres 38 is a thriving public space administered by the *Corporación Londres 38, Espacio de Memorias* [Corporation Londres 38, Space

historical monument the property at the street *Londres* no. 40 (former no. 38), municipality and province of Santiago, Metropolitan Region] Archive Council of National Monuments.

[23] *Proyecto: Un espacio de memoria en construcción Londres 38, casa de la memoria* [Project: a space for memory under construction *Londres 38* house of memory] June 2009, 7. Between 15 October 2008 and 24 June 2009 the round table meetings took place almost weekly. http://www.londres38.cl/1934/w3-article-91296.html, accessed on 6 Nov. 2013.

[24] *Proyecto: Un espacio de memoria en construcción Londres 38*, 3. http://www.londres38.cl/1934/w3-article-91296.html, accessed on 6 November 2013.

of Memories] composed of the grassroots organisations. The site engages many persons, groups and organisations, and offers debates, performances, and guided visits through its rooms. The visitor is considered a participant and explicitly asked to give his or her opinion and to share personal stories during the 'guided dialogue'. The social and political engagement can also be read from the first lines of the public declaration on the upcoming forty years commemoration called '40 years of struggles and resistance':

> In September 2013 40 years will have passed since the civil-military coup that overthrew the constitutional government of Salvador Allende. In difference of previous commemorations, this commemoration will take place in a situation marked by the massive mobilisations of the last two years and the wearing out of the model imposed by the dictatorship. (…) In all these struggles a massive refusal of domination of the market in education, health, work and social provisions is expressed (…).[25]

The forty years commemoration of the coup thus is placed in the mark of present and urgent social struggles and resistance. The focus is on the social and political agency of the Chileans both in the past and the present.

The push to commemorate at the local level is directly related to the nature of disappearance: people were taken prisoner and literally disappeared, not only in the physical sense but including the erasure of their personal, social and political identity as their detention and their very existence was denied by the military dictatorship and their whereabouts remained unknown. The reclaimed detention and torture centres have become part of the memory landscape; they can be understood as a sort of crossroads of people's ritual and social action which has inscribed them further and more profoundly into the memory landscape of Santiago de Chile.

[25] *Manifiesto 40 años de luchas y resistencia* [Manifesto 40 years of struggles and resistance] January 2013 http://www.londres38.cl/1934/w3-article-93499.html, accessed on 6 November 2013.

Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos

In January 2010, former President Michelle Bachelet inaugurated the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago de Chile.[26] The brand-new building boasts a large permanent exhibition about the 1973-1990 dictatorship, and has a library and an extensive archive. The museum's master narrative is based on the reports of the 1991 Rettig Commission and the 2004 Valech Commission, which are exhibited at the entrance of the museum. The permanent exhibition starts out with 11 September 1973, and then relates the repression, the search for truth and justice, the road back to democracy and ends with the presidency of Patricio Aylwin, on 11 March 1990. The English visitor guide concludes: 'Never again. This space is an invitation to continue constructing our collective memory so that the shared foundation of our country is the commitment to the dignity of all human beings.'

In the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, the narrative of the human rights violations under the dictatorship is combined with the narrative of the return to democracy, in which the Concertación played a central role. Some commentators have criticized the narrative that the museum presents, especially the linearity of the permanent exhibition which, in the words of Nelly Richard a leading cultural critique scholar, goes from the desperate times of the dictatorship to the hopeful times of the return of democracy and from hiding the truth to returning the truth about the past: the visitor progresses by a historical route, documented by the Rettig and Valech Commission with the Museum of Memory and Human Rights itself as the culmination of this process.[27] She especially takes issue with *the attempt* to canonize memory, to resign memory to the passivity of what is archived in museums of memory and to hegemonize the presented coherent story about the recuperation of the past. Richard argues that social

[26] Although the museum was created with public money, it is run by a private foundation, with public financing. *El Mercurio*, 25 October 2010, 'Bachelet y Piñera con los ojos puestos en el Museo de la Memoria' [Bachelet and Piñera with a view to the Museum of Memory].
[27] N. Richard, *Crítica De La Memoria (1990-2010)* (Santiago de Chile 2010) 269.

and political action today shows that this is in fact impossible: the political and social contestation in the present breaks open both the linearity and the official display of the past in the permanent exhibition,[28] revealing the dynamic and contested nature of processes of memorialisation.

In June 2012, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights became the centre of a heated discussion in the *El Mercurio* newspaper, which started out with a letter stating that it was necessary to create a *Museo de la Memoria II* [Museum of Memory II] in order to correct the omissions of the museum created by the Concertación government which only 'shows situations in detriment to the military government.' The author of the letter argued that 'a complete vision of our historical narrative' was needed to combat the disinformation.[29] This led to a responding letter in the same newspaper of the director of the museum, in which he stated that the museum was dedicated to making known the human rights violations committed by state agents during the dictatorship laid down principally in the truth commissions reports. He continued that it was the Chilean State that had decided to build the museum 'as an educative and memory project for the new generations, with the goal of strengthening democratic values and 'Never Again' to which the political parties and the defence institutions have pledged themselves.'[30]

The polarisation on the military regime and how to understand its coming into being and legacy, as well as the struggle between the different narratives on the military regime, continues. This incident shows that polarization is still very much an issue. However, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights has emerged in the ongoing processes of

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[28] Richard, *Crítica De La Memoria*, 270-271.

[29] *El Mercurio*, 20 June 2012, 'Cartas: Museo de la Memoria II' S. Rillon [Letters: Museum of Memory 2] Several letters followed in *El Mercurio* on 21, 22, 23 and 26 June 2012. See also: *El Mostrador*, 28 June 2012, 'Museo de la Memoria ¿Incomprensible?' P. Olivarría [Museum of Memory Incomprehensible?], www.elmostrador.cl, accessed on 6 November 2013.

[30] *El Mercurio*, 21 June 2012, 'Cartas: Museo de la Memoria.' R. Brodsky. [Letters: Museum of Memory] See also: 'Declaración Pública del Directorio del Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos'[Public Declaration of the Board of Directors of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights], 27 June 2012, under the heading '*noticias*' on http://www.museodelamemoria.cl, accessed on 6 November 2013.

memorialisation in Chilean society and affirms in public space that violations of human rights took place under the dictatorship.

The Museum of Memory and Human Rights can be understood as an attempt to create a nation-building narrative or 'collective memory', and in that sense it is a foundational project based on values of human rights and democracy, invoking the 'imagined community' of all Chileans. However, at the same time I argue that the museum can never be just an expression of merely political strategy. It emerges in the processes of memorialisation in Chile and at the same time shapes these processes.

The question then is: what will people do with this museum? The narrative of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights was, in a way, a 'director's cut,' but the collection of the museum is a potentially dynamic source for many other narratives. The museum is more than the narrative of the permanent collection. It is quickly becoming a very active site in the memory landscape of Santiago and is engaging a wide array of national and international, social and political actors. The museum has opened its doors, its conference rooms and exhibition spaces to a variety of themes related to human rights in the past and present, with debates and performers.[31] The permanent exhibition of the museum is visited both by Chileans and foreigners, its archive is used by schoolchildren, students and researchers. Moreover, those archives and documents are stored in the basement and form a primary source containing multiple narratives.

If we want to understand the Museum of Memory and Human Rights as an expression of processes of memorialisation in Chilean society and as an active site in the memory landscape of Santiago, we must focus on how it will relate to the other sites of memory in that landscape, how it will be used by organisations and visitors and how its narrative will be contested by other actors and alternative narratives.

[31] *El Museo de la Memoria and los Derechos Humanos*: http://www.museodelamemoria.cl.

Concluding remarks

It is more than probable that the forty years commemoration of the coup in September 2013 will once again have drawn out images of a polarized Chile. Moreover, there is no doubt that Chileans are still divided over their contested past. However, my point is that this does not mean that nothing has changed over the last forty years. Family members, victim-survivors, and others engaged tirelessly in cultural, social, legal, and political contestation and negotiation of the official narrative, broadening the understanding of the military dictatorship and opening up other spaces for a much wider range of testimonies and memories in Chilean society.

Many places and sites in Santiago de Chile are not publicly marked as places of memory; others have become active spaces of commemoration, denunciation, memory, education, protest and debate in the memory landscape of Santiago de Chile. Former secret detention and torture centres such as Villa Grimaldi, José Domingo Cañas and Londres 38, have attracted activity of local grassroots organisations groups since people began to look for their missing loved ones. They pushed to reclaim these sites. This act of reclaiming is related to the disappearance of their loved ones. The former detention and torture centres, secret at the time of the dictatorship, also demand to become visible as a reminder of the crimes committed, and as a space for the experiences and the memories of the survivors. By reclaiming these spaces, the grassroots organisations brought those memories back into the memory landscape of Santiago.

This point helps me to underscore the fact that processes of memorialisation are not just instrumentalist processes related to political and social interests, but also profoundly emotional processes which engage people's emotions and passions. Moreover, it has an intangible dimension of deeply felt personal ties to a certain place and a spiritual dimension related to those who died or were last seen there. Some places, such as these detention and torture centres, are marked by the death of the detained-disappeared and by the profoundly unsettling experiences and memories of the survivors. People are constantly engaged by those places and cannot let go of them for different reasons, which marks them in the memory landscape of Santiago de Chile.

Both Londres 38 and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights are active sites in the memory landscape of Santiago de Chile, though their

approaches are very different. The Museum of Memory and Human Rights was newly constructed on a central location in the cultural infrastructure of Santiago de Chile, close to other museums, the Library of Santiago and Cultural Centre Matucana 100. The museum has opted for a clear chronological narrative divided into clear-cut pieces and phases. It presents ethical lessons to be drawn from the past, and focusses on (universal) human rights and 'Never Again'. Londres 38 has gone great lengths to avoid an overly fixed narrative. The house at Londres 38 is as good as empty. In one of the rooms upstairs there is a timeline highlighting important moments in the history of the house and the process of reclaiming the site. Londres 38 offers guided dialogues during which the visitor is actively engaged in conversation about the past and present. They are interested in critical questions about memory and how it is produced and consider this to be a participative effort that concerns the whole of Chilean society. Moreover, Londres 38 has developed into an active social and political space from which it engages actively in present-day social and political struggles.

A 'collective memory' created as a political tool, can never express the richness and complexities of the memories in a society. In that sense it is always an abstraction, a 'flattened out' version, in an attempt to create broad adherence to it. I have therefore suggested to look at processes of memorialisation which must be understood as processes produced by the contestation and negotiation of narratives, shifts in social networks and the creation of new spaces, while existing spaces may either fade into oblivion or gain new force. Memorialisation processes are dynamic, historical and situational and both require and deserve a 'thick description'[32] of the historical processes, actors and narratives at play.

Memorialisation processes in Chile over the last forty years have created common ground; it is now broadly acknowledged that human rights

[32] See Clifford Geertz on 'thick description' in anthropological ethnography. The concept refers to the analytical effort to make sense of the 'multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or knotted into one another' through detailed ethnographic research and writing. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays* (New York 1973) 10.

violations took place under the dictatorship. The detained-disappeared, the dead and the survivors of political imprisonment and torture can be and have been inscribed in multiple ways into Chilean memory as victims of human rights violations. The complexities of the underlying social and political conflicts that in different forms still permeate Chilean society, today are being addressed by persistent denunciations and actions of (university) students and other social groups, as well as grassroots organizations who invoke past, present and future in their struggles.