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SUMMARY

Opening Cracks in the Darkness: Memory, Affection, and Resistance to Denialism in Chile through the Feminist Activism of the Cueca Sola Collective¹

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Abstract

This article addresses the role of cultural activist practices of memory and human rights in Chile, especially in the context of the *coup d'état*'s 50th anniversary commemorations. Within this context, it highlights the practice of the Cueca Sola Collective, of which both authors are part of, and its most recent actions, *Calles caminadas* (Streets that have been walked) and *50 años, 50 cuecas solas* (50 years, 50 cuecas solas).

The article reflects on the complexity of resisting in the face of denialist narratives and the deepening of neoliberalism in the region, especially after the defeat of the Constitutional Project of 2022, the pandemic, the rise of Javier Milei in Argentina, among other milestones that reveal a deep socio-political crisis. The governing political scene in Chile has installed a narrative about memory prolonging that of the concertación's first governments, marked by a fearful and faint will for justice, which is not only insufficient, but also complicit with impunity. This emphasizes the need to persevere in collective organization and in denouncing state violence, as well as to build new images and possibilities for life, in a dialogue that includes concepts such as patience and urgency from the feminist struggle, as well as the importance of "imágenes-esperanzas" (images-hopes) from the cultural resistance.

Keywords: Chile • cultural memory • negationism • human rights movements • Cueca Sola.

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This paper addresses the phenomenon of denialism in Chile, which is defined as a denial, justification, minimization or exaltation of human rights violations, which is manifested through the ideologically motivated rejection of historical or scientific evidence. In Chile, this matter gained relevance in the public sphere during the Ethics Commission of the Constitutional Convention in 2021, where denialism was sanctioned as an expression of cruelty and hatred towards victims of crimes against humanity. Although it is not criminalized in Chilean law, there have been legal debates about its regulation, including legislative proposals that link denialism with incitement to violence and hatred. It also discusses the relationship between denialism and the lack of justice and the insufficient comprehensive reparation policies in Chile, aggravated by the electoral rise of the extreme right. The text points out that about 46% of the human rights violations that occurred in 2019 are yet to receive justice, generating a process of social retraumatization.

Against this background, the Cueca Sola Collective, created in 2013, has consolidated a political and aesthetic-cultural action that challenges the historical and patriarchal denialism rooted in Chilean society. Their proposal focuses on the *cueca sola*, a dance created in 1978 by the Conjunto Folclórico de la Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (Folkloric Ensemble of the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared), which was used as a tool to denounce political disappearance during the Pinochet dictatorship. This expression is retrieved and resignified in the Collective's practice, with the goal of deprivatizing memories and exploring other affective and gestural possibilities for remembering, shifting a symbolic and political transition from mourning to hoping.

In its activist practice, the Cueca Sola Collective articulates a proposal that is critically posed against the hegemonic narratives of memory in Chile, from an intersectional approach which seeks to make them visible not only memories of the victims of the dictatorship, but also the struggles of other oppressed groups, such as sexual diversity, indigenous and migrant communities. The Cueca Sola Collective's critical perspective of the dominant narratives around memory is revealed in its activist practice through the movement of bodies, gestures, affections, images and objects used in the action of remembering, which are analyzed in this article based on two recent performative interventions *Calles Caminadas* (Streets that have been walked), 2022, and *50 años, 50 cuecas solas* (50 years, 50 cueca solas), 2023.



Fig. 1. Demonstrations at Plaza Baquedano, 25 November 2019, Santiago de Chile. Photo: Karla Riveros, 2019. Wikimedia commons. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Fig. 2. Plaza Baquedano, Santiago de Chile. Photo: Carlos Figueroa Rojas, 2023. Wikimedia commons. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Fig. 3. The Cueca Sola, Luis Navarro, 1978. Photo: courtesy of the author.



Fig. 4. Photographic record of Cueca Sola intervention, September 2015, National Stadium. Photo: Cueca Sola Collective archive. Courtesy of Paula Godoy.

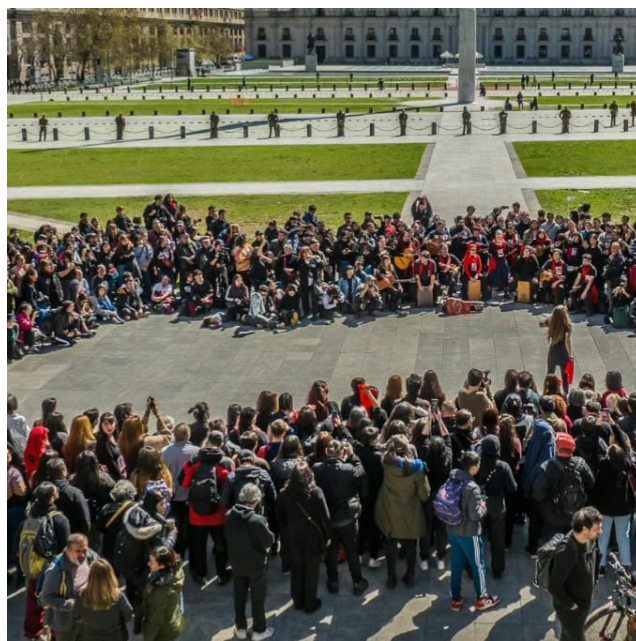


Fig. 5. Intervention 50 years, 50 cuecas solas, 2023. Protestors form a circular space while the action of Colectivo Cueca takes place in front of the Palacio de La Moneda. Photo: Cueca Sola Collective archive, courtesy of Bruno Torres Meschi.



Fig. 6. Intervention *Calles caminadas*, 2022. The Guerrilla Marika Collective performs an action for the memories of sex-gender dissidence on the corners of Irene Morales and Merced streets, in Santiago, at the Memorial to Mónica Briones, murdered for being a visible lesbian on July 9, 1984. Photo: Cueva Sola Collective archive, courtesy of José Aguilera.



Fig. 7. Intervention *50 years, 50 cuecas solas*, 2023. A member of Colectivo Sequía dances the Cueca Sola in memory of Mónica Briones. Photo: Cueva Sola Collective archive, courtesy of Francia Soto.



Fig. 8. Intervention *Calles caminadas*, 2022. Action by the Red de Actrices Chilenas (RACH), who recover the memories of women's struggles for the defense of human rights, on the steps of the National Library, using green and purple handkerchiefs, which are representative of feminist struggles in Latin America. Cueva Sola Collective archive, courtesy of José Aguilera.



Figs. 9 and 10. Intervention *Calles caminadas*, 2022, Plaza de Armas, Santiago. A member of the Coordinadora Nacional Migrante dances the *cueca solo* carrying the Mexican flag. In the following photograph, members of the National Migrant Coordinating Committee carry a sign that reads “We are the same people and we make the same history”. On the canvas are images portraying migrants who were detained, disappeared and politically executed by the Pinochet dictatorship. Cueca Sola Collective archive, courtesy of José Aguilera.

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