

Talking about Legacies and Ruptures: Generational Narratives in Times of Youth Activism in Argentina and Chile

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This article explores how generational narratives have emerged in the process of democratization in two post-authoritarian countries. Recent youth activism in Argentina and Chile provides fertile ground for the exploration of different generational narratives circulating amongst those born in the aftermath of transitions to democracy. In both countries, youths' generational sites are characterized by strong political mobilization and by dynamics of collectively remembering right-wing dictatorships (in Argentina, from 1976 to 1983; in Chile, from 1973 to 1989). The linkage of difficult pasts with cycles of youth mobilization particularly deserves attention. While youth activism in Argentina is narrated from an intergenerational standpoint, Chilean student protests have been framed around a generational breakpoint. The article aims to answer why these different narratives of legacy and rupture emerged in these two contexts. Based on the literature about generations within memory studies and cultural sociology, a narrative approach for examining generational memories is proposed, and then applied to understand Argentinean and Chilean youths' generational sites.

1. Towards a concept of generational narratives

The concept of generation is etymologically related to being in time with others. As such, it is connected both to a temporal sequence of family relationships, i.e. a genealogy or lineage (*generatio*), and to contemporaneity. The latter (*genus*) signifies a group of people who share some an attribute, in this case all those who have lived at the same time.² In this sense, generation is related to 'era' and became a figurative way of indicating a period of time (e.g., "from generation to generation").

That said, the concept has changed fundamentally since the 18th century. As Reinhart Koselleck has stated,³ modernity brought about news semantic of

¹ I sincerely thank Bernhard Forchtner and Katherine Bischooping for their insightful comments and lucid suggestions. All mistakes remain my own.

² Ohad Parnes, Ulrike Vedder and Stefan Willer, *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 10-11.

³ Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 360-369.

time. In traditional peasant societies, the conception of time was based on the cycles of nature. Practical knowledge was handed down from generation to generation, reinforcing family and communal bonding. The experiences of ancestors were guidelines for what their descendants should expect. The modern idea of 'progress' increasingly weakened this connection between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. New experiences, including those made possible by new commercial routes, scientific discoveries, and technological innovations, opened up different and allegedly better futures. Every generation could break away from the past and change its received heritage. As Nora pointed out: "The past is no longer the law: this is the very essence of the phenomenon."⁴

After the First World War, the concept of generation became central to understandings of the course of history: people who grew up during the same period, and shared critical events during their youth, might become agents of social change. Hence generations, like social classes, were becoming constituted as social formations.

Mannheim's essay 'Das Problem der Generationen'

It was primarily via Karl Mannheim's essay, *The problem of generations*, that this phenomenon became of sociological concern. For Mannheim, being born at the same time constrains and enables opportunities, just as sharing a class position does. Those "who share the year of birth", Mannheim writes, "are endowed with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process."⁵ This generational location opens up a positive 'inherent' tendency to develop similar modes of behaviour, feeling and thought.

Yet, the key assumption of Mannheim's framework is that the generational location encloses only a slumbering potential to foster a real generational connection (*Generationszusammenhang*).⁶ The creation of such a bond, requires participation in a 'common destiny', that is, in the sharing of a generational frame of interpretation, and an entanglement in the 'complex of problems' posed by social change.⁷ For Mannheim, concrete and different answers might emerge as generational units "develop similar ways of (re)acting in

⁴ Pierre Nora, Generation, in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Volume I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996 [1992]), 449–551.

⁵ Karl Mannheim, The Problem of Generations, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge, 1952 [1928]), 290.

⁶ Karl Mannheim, *The Problem of Generations*, 303.

⁷ Beate Fietze, *Historische Generationen. Über einen sozialen Mechanismus kulturellen Wandels und kollektiver Kreativität* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), 41.

response to their generational problems”.⁸ Although all generational units share a “horizon of time perspectives, a dramatic coherence of past, present, and future,”⁹ each one will come to terms with its past in a different way.

Generational connections are therefore based on the ‘tempo of social change’.¹⁰ That is, some ‘defining collective events’ have to occur in order to create a generational location – or better, a generational *site* – in which new stories circulate and social relations may develop. As such, common participation occurs only through a process of historical variation, i.e. generational connections are contingent on historical change. What this suggests is that historical events unleash social change, thereby bringing about new social relations. Post-Mannheim, the discussion of generations as able to break with the past and set historical precedents emerged within a wider *progressive narrative*. For example, to Heinz Bude, generations are always symbols of conflict, thereby creating a novel temporal sense of we-attachment.¹¹

Mannheim goes a step further when indicating that these historical events “impinge upon a similarly ‘stratified’ consciousness.”¹² Based on Wilhelm Dilthey’s idea of formative years, Mannheim claims that events experienced during youth leave the greatest impression, shaping the meanings of all subsequent experiences. Mannheim saw this point occurring at around the age of 17, when individuals start to distance themselves from their primary socialization. Later, Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott¹³ confirmed Mannheim’s ‘generational hypothesis’ of the formative or critical years. Asking for the two most important national or world events remembered in the last 50 years – individuals recalled mainly those events which occurred during their adolescence and early adulthood (16–27 years old). Also, cognitive studies coined the term ‘reminiscence bump’ in order to describe the fact that the main events recalled came from adolescence and early adulthood.¹⁴

⁸ Michael Corsten, *The Time of Generations*, *Time & Society* 8 (1999): 254.

⁹ Michael Corsten, *Biographical Revisions and the Coherence of a Generation*, In *Childhood in Generational Perspective*, edited by Berry Mayall and Helga Zeiher (London: Bedford Way Papers, 2003), 49.

¹⁰ Beate Fietze, *Historische Generationen*, 137-165.

¹¹ Heinz Bude, *Qualitative Generationsforschung*, In *Qualitative Forschung. Ein Handbuch*, eds. Uwe Flick et al. (Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 2000), 187–94.

¹² Karl Mannheim, *The Problem of Generations*, 297.

¹³ Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, *Generations and Collective Memories*, *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989): 359–81. See also, Howard Schuman, Robert Belli and Katherine Bischooping, *The Generational Basis of Historical Knowledge in Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, edited by James Pennebaker et al (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997), 44-77.

¹⁴ See Martin Conway, *The Inventory of Experience: Memory and Identity*, in *Collective*

Generations and memories

While acknowledging the significance of Mannheim's work, it can nevertheless be said that his notion of 'participation in the same destiny' might hinder a more dynamic understanding of generation-building. Indeed, Gabrielle Rosenthal notes the risk of focusing merely on the formative or critical years. Supporting Mannheim's complex understanding of generations, she emphasizes the weight of family memory and the relationships between generations as bedrocks of generational building.¹⁵

For Rosenthal, generational connections depend heavily on both the location (i.e. historical events experienced) and the relationship between older and newer generations, as well as on the intergenerational dialogue developed within families. As documented by a large extent of the existing literature, and my posterior analysis of Argentinean and Chilean narratives support, the genealogical dimension of generations affects emergent generational connections.¹⁶

Furthermore, Rosenthal stresses that the role of future interpretations over past formative years including the significance of childhood experiences. In other words, youth experiences go through new interpretations in adult periods. The opposite would mean to freeze a state of being which emerged during one's youth. The generational problem turns out to concern not only how events occurring during youth impact on the life course of their participants, but also the question of how individuals continuously elaborate the past. The idea of continuous processes of reinterpretation allows us to understand that generations mobilize different stories about the past.¹⁷ I would thus suggest understanding generations via their generational narratives.

Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives, edited by James Pennebaker et al (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997), 21–45.

¹⁵ Gabriele Rosenthal, Historische und familiale Generationenabfolge. In *Generationen in Familie und Gesellschaft*, edited by Martin Kohli and Marc Szydluck (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000), 162–78.

¹⁶ See, amongst others, Daniela Jara, *Children and the Afterlife of State Violence. Memories of Dictatorship* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Diana Taylor, 'You Are Here': The DNA of Performance, *The Drama Review* 46 (2002):149-169, Carmen Leccardi and Carles Feixa, El Concepto de Generación en las Teorías sobre la Juventud, *Última Década 19* (2011): 11-32.

¹⁷ See, in line with this, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002).

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The ‘weight’ of past narrativization and processes of elaboration have become part and parcel on memory studies.¹⁸ Due to the increasing public and academic significance attached to ‘difficult pasts’,¹⁹ including the Holocaust, other genocides, modern wars, and dictatorships, various scholars have claimed that by the end of the twentieth century the modern narrative had evolved into a tragic one,²⁰ i.e. a shift “from present futures to present pasts.”²¹ Since these difficult pasts are difficult to leave behind, they remain as ‘traumatic’ trans-generational connections. Consequently, by researching how a traumatic collective experiences impacts on generations of victims and perpetrators’ families born after such events, some scholars situate their studies within the frame of ‘post-memory’.²² They analyse a traumatic event such as the Holocaust in terms of the subtle transmission (for example, via silences and images) of traumatic knowledge.²³ The space of transmission and heredity is “the language of family, the language of the body in the forms of nonverbal and non-cognitive symptoms.”²⁴

If modernist approaches relied on narratives of breaking generational cycles, the increasing significance of tragic narratives in contemporary regimes of temporality might create different generational connections. Pierre Nora – one of the founders of modern memory studies – understood generations as both a “product of memory, an effect of remembering (and) fabricators of *lieux de mémoire*.”²⁵ This double meaning (product of/fabricator of) encompasses the entire generational phenomenon: “no rupture without a hypothesis of continuity, no selection of memory without resurrection of another memory.”²⁶ Nora emphasizes how generations relate to each other (‘hypothesis of continuity’) and how each generation creates mnemonic devices, such as public spaces or icons, to

¹⁸ Bernhard Forchtner, *Lessons from the past? Memory, Narrativity, and Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁹ Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past, *The American Journal of Sociology* 97 (1991): 376–420.

²⁰ Jeffrey Alexander, On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama, *European Journal of Philosophy* 5 (2002): 5–85.

²¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11.

²² Marianne Hirsch, The Generation of Postmemory, *Poetics Today* 29 (2008): 103–28.

²³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 106.

²⁴ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 115.

²⁵ Nora, *Generation*, 522-526

²⁶ Nora, *Generation*, 515

‘immemorialize’ its own past and promote generational rupture. Hence it is said that generations are models of continuity as well as conflict.²⁷

Finally, June Edmunds, Ron Eyerman and Brian Turner bring to the fore the role of social movements when examining generations and collective memories.²⁸ Generations are understood here as collective responses to traumatic events (wars, civil conflicts, economic crisis and so forth) that bring a particular age group together. In particular, Eyerman pursues the role that social movements play in reformulating the past according to present needs. Social movements facilitate “the interweaving of individual stories and biographies into a collective, unified frame, a collective narrative”.²⁹ Here, the process of collective remembering involves sharing a collective bond through a narrative understanding of a common past and a common future. As I will show below, student movements do also play a key role in Argentinean and Chilean contexts.

Narratives and generations

Based on recent literature about generations and memories, it can be stated that instead of a ‘frozen’ youth-oriented generational frame, generational connections are seen as dynamics sites of ‘story’ (re)construction, wherein people narrate, remember, the ‘defining’ experiences of ‘their’ times (what is ‘defining’ is precisely part of this reconstruction). Crucially, the generational process of narrativity intersects and contends with other stories – whether these be family, social class, previous generations’, or national stories. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what are narratives all about.

Narratives are classically understood as temporal sequences of events including a beginning, a middle and an end. Since the events are linked to one other as a whole, this structure entails causal emplotment.³⁰ The very assumption of narrative theory is that the stream of events is not naturally structured as narrative per se. Rather, narrators make an effort to create a narrative structure.

²⁷ See, Ohad et al. *Das Konzept der Generation*, 218-235.

²⁸ Ron Eyerman and Brian Turner, Outline of a Theory of Generations, *European Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1998): 91–106, and, June Edmunds and Brian Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Philadelphia: Open University, 2002).

²⁹ Ron Eyerman, Intellectuals and the Construction of an African American Identity: Outline of a Generational Approach, In *Generational Consciousness, Narrative and Politics*, edited by June Edmunds and Brian Turner (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 52.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative. Volume I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66.

Hayden White asserted that every narrative “points to a moral”³¹ or a “desire to moralize”³² events.

Narratives are also central in creating identities. Margaret Somers describes this feature as the process of narrative practice: by telling stories or locating themselves “within a repertoire of emplotted stories”³³ people develop a shared understanding of themselves. Narrative identity thus manifests itself when a story circulates within a social group, thereby aiding in the imposition of social boundaries. The emergence of such boundaries speaks to the regularity of conflicts over the control of group identities, i.e. to attempts by different groups to impose their narrative as canonical.³⁴

Hence, I suggest, that by sharing stories of their common past and emplotting their biographies into collective repertoires of interpretation, people develop *generational narratives*.³⁵ These narratives embed life-course sequences of defining events in which past-present-future times are differentiated. These events are emotion-laden and remembered collectively by coevals. In other terms, those stories circulate around the generation’s ‘own’ defining events, thereby creating connections (i.e. narrative networks) and symbolic boundaries. That is, these stories generate *generational boundaries*. These narratives are developed in multiple spaces: family table, peer conversations, street mobilizations, social media, and political speeches, amongst others.

Crucially, generational narratives emerge not only from particular circumstances, but also respond to previous, sedimentary cultural codes – or new ones – reflecting upon traumatic or triumphant historical experiences.³⁶ Then generational boundaries might both *demarcate* our ‘own times’ as well as *cohere* around older canonical narratives.³⁷ Canonical narratives of older generations can circulate amongst family stories, or political speeches, thereby imposing

³¹ Hayden White, The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 17.

³² White, *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality*, 18.

³³ Margaret Somers, The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach, *Theory and Society* 23 (1994). 605–49.

³⁴ For the concept of ‘canonical narrative’, see Jerome Bruner, The Narrative Construction of Reality, *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991).

³⁵ See a similar narrative approach in Björn Bohnenkamp, Till Manning and Eva-Marai Silies, *Generation als Erzählung. Neue Perspektiven auf ein kulturelles Deutungsmuster* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), and, Andreas Kraft and Mark Weißhaupt, *Generationen: Erfahrung - Erzählung - Identität* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2009).

³⁶ Bernhard Giesen, Noncontemporaneity, Asynchronicity and Divided Memories, *Time & Society* 13 (2004): 27-40.

³⁷ Efrat Ben-Ze’ev and Edna Lomsky-Feder, The Canonical Generation: Trapped between Personal and National Memories, *Sociology* 43 (2009): 1047–65.

(canonizing) repertoires of interpretation and creating ‘trans-generational’ connections.

2. Methodology

Between October 2012 and January 2013, I conducted 36 interviews with young people in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, all of them born between 1985 and 1994. At the time of the interviews, the participants were in the middle of their ‘formative years’ (ca. 17–25 years). The sample includes an equal number of men and women, and cut across social strata and political positions. A mixture of contacts, including friends of friends and members of civil society organizations, and application of snowball sampling allowed me to obtain a diverse sample of participants.

Every interviewee was invited to recreate a ‘future setting’ in which a descendant – whether a son, a daughter, a nephew, niece, or grandchild – asks him or her to recount the past. Thereby people were encouraged to recall biographical, genealogical, and historical events. The imagined family setting was used in an attempt to reconstruct Halbwachs’ image of the ‘living bond of generations’ in which stories are usually handed down from grandparents to grandchildren.³⁸

In analytic terms, I initially matched genealogical and life-course sequences with collective events. I focused on how it was that some events were more salient in terms of achieving generational connectivity and narrative coherence. Afterwards, I analyzed ‘how’ and ‘why’ these events were narrated. Here, a more specific structural narrative analysis began.³⁹ I concentrated on a) settings, b) characters, and c) evaluative clauses. A close reading of these main features ran in parallel to the examination of the ‘linguistic apparatus’ participants used when reporting events.⁴⁰

The final procedure involved examining forms of macro narrative structures such as narrative templates and modes of emplotment. The

³⁸ See, Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 63. The entire sample comprises 60 interviews with two age-cohorts (the second cohort encompasses people born between 1965-1974). Here, I only draw on the younger cohort. For the full project, see Raimundo Frei, ‘*The Living Bond of Generations*’. *The Narrative Construction of Post-dictatorial Memories in Argentina and Chile*. Dissertation at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/frei-raimundo-2015-02-17/PDF/frei.pdf>

³⁹ Michael Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴⁰ See diverse discourse and narratives strategies in, Bernhard Forchtner and Christoffer Kølvrå, Narrating a ‘New Europe’: From ‘Bitter Past’ to Self-Righteousness? *Discourse & Society* 23 (2012): 377–400.

identification of modes of emplotment is based on the literature of plot lines (progressive, regressive, rise-and-fall narratives)⁴¹ and narrative genres (comedy, tragedy, amongst others).⁴²

3. The cyclical sense of time among the young Argentine generation

Multiple and conflictive pasts

From the 1930's onwards, Argentina underwent five authoritarian regimes and several economic crises. This turbulent past was filled with multiple tensions between military, economic, political and social forces. This is partly rooted in the successive waves of European migrants arriving since the middle of the 19th century, diversifying urban cultural life, radically changing social structure, and funnelling political tensions within working-middle class conflicts. As a result, multiple cultural life worlds and struggles have characterised 20th century Argentina. Indeed, it is in this social space – and in particular, in the capital Buenos Aires – that a superb literary, musical and theatre culture has flourished, a massive football culture has grown, and a dreadful right-wing dictatorship has taken place. All of them have left visible marks on the city.

The last dictatorship stemmed from the sixties Cold-War polarization, in which manifold acts of violence were carried out by extremist groups, to both the left and right. Military forces attempted to end this in 1976 through a politics of extermination of their (left) 'enemies', leaving behind thousands of victims. The loss in the Falklands War, which has become one of the most important *lieux de mémoire* of Argentine culture, was what brought about the end of the dictatorship. Afterwards, President Raúl Alfonsín's new democratic government famously pursued a politics of human rights, putting the main military authorities on trial as well as instituting a human right commission. Nonetheless, Alfonsín's government is also remembered for the dramatic hyperinflation of 1989.

Victor, born in the northeast zone of the Great Buenos Aires, began precisely by localizing his story within the context of this hyperinflation: *I was born in Moreno (...) I was born there in '88 (...) I was born in April '88, and throughout '89 we had hyperinflation here. So, I guess, it must have been pretty rough.* Dramatic economic events were part and parcel of the experience of those born after dictatorship. Even if this young cohort did not personally experience

⁴¹ Mary Gergen, Narrative Structures in Social Explanation, in *Analyzing Everyday Explanation. A Casebook of Methods*, edited by Charles Antaki (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 94-112.

⁴² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

the hyperinflation of 89, it was a common event narrated in family stories about the time of their birth.

After hyperinflation, a new government promised a renewal of the economy through the privatization of public firms and (neo)liberalization of markets. The ‘neoliberal nineties’, as Victor remembers, ended abruptly with the crisis of 2001, in which almost half of the population fell into poverty. For young people, the crisis interrupted their memories, causing a shift in their narratives’ settings from private milieu of family or school to the public sphere. Even if they were ‘too young’ to join the public mobilization out in the streets, the spectacle of this mobilization, of looting, and of President De la Rúa escaping the surrounded government palace, Casa Rosada, by helicopter on December 20, 2001, left a memorable ‘timemark’ in all their stories. Yet, whereas the young participants were watching these events on television, their elders were already blockading streets and protesting.

The youth’s passive participation in the crisis contrasts with the narrative position they took in the following years, when a new political conjuncture opened up new sets of stories. Crucially, young interviewees narrated the end of the crisis of 2001 as the beginning of Néstor Kirchner’s government (2003-2007). Although a previous president – Eduardo Duhalde – probably shared responsibility for Argentina’s economic recovery,⁴³ Duhalde was primarily recalled for being responsible for the deaths of two young activists, Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán. More important here is that Kirchner’s government coincides with the middle of these participants’ formative years, i.e., secondary school, university and the beginning of their working lives. This time, they could be ‘out there’, in contrast with their memories of the previous crisis when their elder siblings were participating.

The dictatorship as indisputable tragedy

The life stories of Argentine young people were particularly impinged upon by two symbolic recuperations made by the Kirchner’s government: the revival of the last dictatorship as an indisputable tragedy, as well as the revitalization of classical Peronism – the dominant political constellation in Argentina – as a triumphal memory.

Regarding the memory of the last military regime, the upheaval provoked by Kirchner’s government can be understood as consolidating the dictatorship as a national tragedy, and thus an increasingly indisputable memory. Kirchner transformed the memory frame both by canonizing the tragedy of the victims as a

⁴³ Marcos Novaro, *Historia de la Argentina. 1955-2010* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2011), 288-292.

universal trauma and simultaneously canonizing the generation of the seventies as a heroic-victim group.⁴⁴ The ‘recovery’ of these memories have impacts on school and family discussions about the past. Most families have been obligated to deal with new questions that arose. Susana, who is from an upper class and anti-Kirchner family context, remembers one teacher neglecting the interpretation proposed by Kirchner’s government. Given her teacher’s impetus to reject Kirchner’s script, Susana began discussing it with her family. She recounted the episode as follows:

How? How is that possible? And I mean [...] How is it possible for someone (the teacher) to say that the only mistake of the dictatorship was not to have handed over the bodies? [...] And I remember arriving at home with that thought, right? Saying, ‘Hey, they said that, what is that?’ And generating a discussion, right? Because in the end [...] Yes, that is something that I never forgot, that dinner [...] Starting to generate the first discussions [...] with the limited understanding I had when I was 17.

Some interviewees explained that their parents declared that they had been too young to remember the dictatorship. Other parents drew on a widespread macro explanation, such as ‘we never knew anything about the crimes’. Another group of parents represented themselves as victims of the country’s polarization and, most importantly, this impinged on their fearful emotions about those times. There were other stories stemming from upper-class parents or grandparents who had supported the dictatorship. That none of the young people interviewed approved of what happened under the dictatorship illustrates the canonical role of this now indisputable memory.

Now, Kirchner’s narrative turn had ample precedents in earlier decades, drawing primarily on a strong human rights movement, constituted especially by victims’ relatives. Argentina also experienced a prompt process of settling accounts with the dictatorship, marked by the truth commission, which made its report during Alfonsín’s government (1983-1989). Moreover, by 1996, the time of the twentieth commemoration of the putsch, an important interpretative turn had been prompted by the emergence of a second generation of human rights activists. They were the sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* (the ‘disappeared’),

⁴⁴ When a memory is positioned as indisputable, this does not forestall conflicts about the past (Antonious Robben, *How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of Argentina’s Dirty War* (2005) *Cultural Critique* 59: 120–64). The violent seventies and guerrilla memories are still contentious, as is the construction of memorials (Hugo Vezzetti, *Sobre la Violencia Revolucionaria. Memorias y Olvidos* (2009) Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI). Symbolic canonization implies that victims acquire a more sacral stance, a position from which human rights crimes can never be mitigated.

some of them recovered by their grandmothers from military or civilian families who had clandestinely adopted them.

Kirchner's memory agenda-setting also took a step forward. He appropriated the voice of human rights organizations and positioned himself in generational terms ('the seventies generation'), attributing to this generation both a sacrificial character as well as heroic traits. Kirchner fostered an image of generational continuity between mythical forebears, such as founding fathers and immigrant grandparents, and his generation.⁴⁵ According to his image, the stories of the seventies generation must not only be handed down as a tragedy, but also serve as a model for future political action, in particular, among youth organizations. The stories do so by invigorating a generational discourse that provides cultural models of continuity and transmission instead of generational disruption. Not surprisingly, young political activism was labelled as the "return of militancy".⁴⁶

It was thus that Martina, born in La Plata in 1986, became interested in politics. As part of this 'awakening' she enrolled in a school theatre group with whom she visited a 'home of memory'. When I asked about her age at that time, she astonishingly realized the intersection of that period with Kirchner's coming into office:

I was 16 [...] we are talking about 2002, 2003 [...] it must have been 2003 because I was 17, 18 [...] 2003, 2004 [...] what a coincidence!

RF: What is a coincidence?

The change of government. I mean, all of that. Néstor Kirchner took office [...] at that time that didn't mean much but now, to us, to the young people, to my dad, to all of those who are committed somehow to politics, this was a very important government change, irrespective of the criticisms one may have [...] In 2003, 2004, especially 2004, emerges a [...] a hope for change, right, in the country. That was also the year [...] I had never thought about it, the fact that that was the year I became interested in politics, there must be some connection.

All of my interviewees reported a wave of public discussions about the dictatorship during these years. The debate sprang up in schools, families, the media and the street. The latter is the site of popular and massive

⁴⁵ See his speech during the inaugural ceremony of his government in <http://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-asuncion-del-presidente-nestor-kirchner-a-la-asamblea-legislativa-el-25-de-mayo-del-2003/>

⁴⁶ José Natanson, *¿Por qué los Jóvenes están volviendo a la Política? De los Indignados a la Cámpora* (Buenos Aires: Random House, 2012).

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commemorations of the coup d'état. In particular, at the 2006 commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the coup d'état, interviewees were adult enough to participate and be 'there', i.e. 'outside'. Kirchner had already promulgated this day as national holiday for remembering together. Alongside the crisis of 2001, the commemoration left a second special 'timemark' on many respondents' stories.

Peronism as triumphal memory

The interviewees' life courses had turned during those years, when they started to enrol at university and technical training establishments or began their first job (often both simultaneously). Crucially, the majority became members of or created a civil society organization, such as a student council, a solidarity association or a youth political association. This strong activism in civil society groups is highly visible in their life course. As many respondents suggested, this new engagement started with Kirchnerism. This political context is not only framed by the memory of the dictatorship, but also hinges on the *revival* of Peronism.

In practical terms, the political constellation called Peronism had never disappeared. Since 1940, when Peron became Minister of Labour and later assumed the presidency, the thinking that bears his name and that became encapsulated in the Justicialist Party has dominated the Argentine political spectrum.⁴⁷ Peronism has spanned from a historical working-class party with strong influence on trade unions to what nowadays are clientelistic networks entangled in poor districts.⁴⁸ One key effect of Peronism has been to divide Argentine society antagonistically into Peronist/anti-Peronist groups. This divide works by means of a double opposition containing highly emotional evaluative structures: to be Peronist means being part of 'the people', thereby claiming a desire for social justice. The others – the enemy – are then depicted as those opposed to the people's will, e.g., as the elite, an oligarchy, the upper class, amongst others. Conversely, to be anti-Peronist invokes an inverted primordial code in which it is true democrats who strive to uncover the deeply clientelistic, authoritarian character of Peronism.

Although it has been relentlessly present in the political arena, Peronism, has had its ups and downs. That is, the emotional intensity about dividing society into two polar constellations has not been consistently present. In my respondents'

⁴⁷ See, especially, Pierre Ostiguy, *Argentina's Double Political Spectrum: Party System, Political Identities, and Strategies, 1944-2007* (Working Paper 361. Kellogg Institute, Washington, 2009).

⁴⁸ Steven Levitsky and Maria Victoria Murillo, Argentina: From Kirchner to Kirchner, *Journal of Democracy* 19 (2008): 16–30.

stories, there are two visible experiences of such emotional renewal. First, there is the re-emergence of (left) Peronist youth organizations within school councils or university political organizations. Martina remembered when people from the 'Evita' movement arrived at her university in 2006. For Jaime, my youngest respondent, who had been born in 1991, it was surprising that an organization named for leftist Arturo Jauretche had been elected to lead the student council at his secondary school. For Carlos, the emblematic organization 'La C mpora' – the most powerful youth organization during Kirchner's rule – dominated the songs of every public commemoration. With a group of friends and former schoolmates, Victor and Luna, both born in 1988, set up a youth organization named 'John William Cooke', after one of the most important leaders of leftist Peronism.

For the non-Argentinean reader, these names will hardly resonate. Yet, they are a key feature of the stories told. Evita, Campora, Jauretche and William Cooke were all near-mythic figures in leftist Peronism. To the best of my knowledge, there is no other case in Latin American history where dozens of youth organizations adopted such old figures' names. Occasionally there appears a 'new left', a 'new socialist youth' or 'Catholic youth', but youth organizations usually attempt to mark a certain distance from past configurations or to cause some disruption. Argentina's 'new generational units' barely caused a generational rupture and, rather, mobilized a desire to recover iconic figures. What underlies these forms of recovery are also instances of political socialization in which older activists hand down their experiences to new generations. Trans-generational networks are developed, thereby fostering cross-cutting narratives.

The second defining circumstance was the 'farm crisis'. Occurring under Cristina Fern ndez's government, this was a nation-wide conflict between government and the agro-export sector over taxes. The agro-industry had grown astonishingly since 2003 due to earlier modifications to crops (especially the cultivation of soybeans) as well as to the boost in food prices on the global market. When the government therefore attempted to raise the sector's taxes, it gave rise to an enormous mobilization of the agro sector that lasted for several months.⁴⁹ Beyond the technical details of the political and economic conflict, the dispute was framed as a division between 'us' (the people, the government) and 'them' (oligarchic landowners).⁵⁰ Such a division not only reproduced the classic

⁴⁹ Osvaldo Barsky and Mabel D vila, *La Rebeli n del Campo. Historia del Conflicto Agrario Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2008).

⁵⁰ Sebasti n Mauro and Federico Rossi, Entre la Plaza y la Casa Rosada: Di logo y Confrontaci n entre los Movimientos Sociales y el Gobierno Nacional, In *La Pol tica en Tiempos de los Kirchner*, edited by Andr s Malamud and Miguel De Luca (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2011), 172-174.

emotional structure of Peronism, but also stimulated young people to locate themselves within this historical polarization. Consider Paula's account of such a 'turning point':

With regard to my political identifications, there was a turning point in 2008, which was the conflict [...] symbolically it remained in our memory as the "farm conflict" [...] I mean, there it began, a sort of dichotomization of the social and political space between the government – Kirchnerism – and the 'other', which was (...) it was integrated by this agro-export-oligarchy – which comes from olden times, since the establishment of the Argentinean state – together with Clarín's media monopoly. It was then that this dichotomy started, which nowadays is increasingly intensified

The point is not only about pro-Kirchnerism's adherents. It is rather about a polarisation that reproduces transgenerational memories. For instance, Juan José mentioned that when his grandparents and he held regular dinner-table conversations about politics, they reflected on 'political times' when talking about Perón's governments or the 'violent seventies'. Juan José remarked on how family and national memories were enmeshed in each other in such conversations: *these conversations were a great lesson, of history, society, economy, of the daily life as well as our family and others. It was really [...] really fruitful.* Depending on the code employed, Perón's first government was either narrated as a time of great triumphs in social rights or, conversely, as an era of authoritarianism. When Leandro started studying early Peronism and discovered the first implementation of labour rights by the government, his grandfather encouraged him to compare Peronist media strategies with those of Nazism and fascism. Later, Leandro's father called on him to participate in a demonstration (pot-banging) against the government. Leandro commented on that occasion as follows: *It is something quite unthinkable to share a political activity with a father (...) but given that many young people have become involved in politics supporting Kirchnerism, you also see many other people calling to get out on the streets and protest.*

The 'revival' of (anti)-Peronism as a collective memory appears throughout the public space and in family round-table discussions. In particular, those actively committed to Peronist youth associations increasingly related their biographies to the story of their organizations. The political triumphs or defeats of the Justicialist Party were their joys and sorrows. In this context, the death of ex-president Néstor Kirchner was narrated by those engaged politically as an especially difficult experience of loss.

A cyclical sense of time

To sum up, the re-emergence of political Peronist organizations in schools and universities and the acrimonious farm crisis were at least two defining events in which triumphal and polarizing memories of old decades evolved. The ‘critical and formative’ years of my respondents were thus framed by Kirchner’s heroic narrative in which Argentina surmounted critical economic obstacles, thus recovering (or, rather, canonizing) the spirit of the 1970s generation as a symbol of political commitment to social justice. Around that time, my interviewees started becoming involved in different civil organizations and remembering together the dictatorship in schools and family-table discussions. Later, Argentinean political discussion was polarized by ‘the farm war’, revitalizing the emotive dichotomy of Peronist discourse. The number of youth ‘Peronist’ organizations (or the numbers of their members) grew, as did feelings of opposition.

As a result, by the time of my fieldwork, a cyclical sense of time was predominating, either as the eternal promise of a return to social justice or as the incessant burden of old nightmares. The economic crisis of 2001 brought back parents’ stories of hyperinflation, the first years of the Kirchner government brought back the canonical heroic tragedy of the seventies generation, and with the farm crisis, the country was marked by classic Peronist divisions and their emblematic figures. Not surprisingly, the participants best understood themselves as being connected to past groups or social divisions, so that a distinct generational ‘we’ barely emerges. This situation contrasts sharply with the widespread use of ‘we, our generation’ in the Chilean youth generational site, to which I now turn.

4. Chilean student mobilizations and the ‘heroic’ rupture

The ‘difficult past’ and communicative silences

Eighty years ago, Chilean society underwent several transformations. A wave of migration from rural to urban zones, in particular to the capital, and a new political economy centered on state-inversion and social inclusion favoured the emergence of contention and collective mobilization. During the sixties, in the global Cold War context, radicalization and politization were nurtured by an agrarian reform, copper industry nationalization, student protests. These culminated in Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity party’s socialist revolution of 1970. After three years of poor economic management, US economic blockade, and failure to reach political consensus, the military overthrew Allende’s government. Augusto Pinochet’s subsequent eighteen year-long right-wing

dictatorship left behind not only thousands of the exiled, the tortured, the missing and the dead, but also an economy in revolt. Pinochet's government had neo-liberalized the economy, shrunk the state by selling public firms, and privatized the pension system as well as parts of the education and health sectors.

The end of the Chilean dictatorship was a historical threshold. Together with Allende's government and the coup d'état on 11 September 1973, the plebiscite of 1988 and the return to democracy remain milestones for contemporary Chilean collective memory.⁵¹ Young Chilean interviewees easily drew a boundary between their parents, who had experienced difficult pasts under the dictatorship, and themselves, who were without personal memories of this period. This simple exercise of demarcation is nourished by a grand narrative of the Chilean political culture: *you are* the first group coming of age in democracy and political freedom in decades. Sofia, from a middle class-left wing family, echoes such a story: *Having been born in 1990 means coming simultaneously with democracy. As a result, different changes brought joy due to the simple fact that Chilean population was able to have liberties that were neglected for years. Therefore, in my family – [which was] left-wing oriented – it was known that these were good times.*

The polarisation between the centre left and the right wing pro-military regime might until today awaken the image of Chile as a 'divided country'.⁵² Such a polarisation is, however, far from evident in narratives of young people. Most interviewees offered some tragic episode of people assassinated during the dictatorship as a means of making sense of the historical past. After different events of collective remembrance and 'irruptions of memory',⁵³ it was clear that the dictatorship was considered a tragedy by all of them.⁵⁴

However, it is relevant that all the interviews refer to some form of *communicative silence* concerning the adult cohorts' experiences. Remarkably, a recurrent circumstance is repeated in Chilean families when older cohorts neglect the possibility of historical understanding by younger generations, since they did not experience what happened in the past.⁵⁵ As Felicitas reported: *I can talk with them, they are not going to shut me up, but they will tell me: "No, you are*

⁵¹ Héctor Carvacho et al., *Consenso y Disenso en la Memoria Histórica y en las Actitudes Hacia la Reparación en Tres Generaciones de Chilenos*, *Psyche* 22 (2013): 33–47.

⁵² Carlos Huneeus, *Chile un País Dividido. La Actualidad del Pasado* (Santiago de Chile: Catalonia, 2003).

⁵³ Alexander Wilde, *Irruptions of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile's Transition to Democracy*, *Latin American Studies* 31 (1999): 473–500.

⁵⁴ See also, Marcela Cornejo et al., *Historias de la dictadura militar chilena desde voces generacionales*, *Psyche* 22 (2013): 49–65.

⁵⁵ Raimundo Frei, *The Living Bond of Generations*, 190–198

wrong.” Their stance is rigid, that is, their standpoint is fixed: “They lived it vs you did not.”

As a consequence, Chilean youth grow up conscious of a clear demarcation between dictatorship and democracy, yet they are afflicted by the sense of a communicative silence concerning their country’s difficult past. Said that, it was difficult to find some form of historical explanation for what happened. This is of course not due to a lack of historical knowledge. Rather, it is a consequence of a wider conflict over memory. In the political transition, the struggle over memory was indeed a thorny one, since the Chilean military forces retained veto powers. Furthermore, human rights movements were “not only sidelined but also decimated”,⁵⁶ resulting in a paucity of historical narratives, and symbolic supports for the remembrance of victims’ past. Eventually, the dominant narrative of the democratic transition was: leave the past behind and look towards the future.⁵⁷

The education system as a generational site

Yet, as Pierre Nora reminded us, generations are not only a product of past events, they are also fabricators of stories. One predominant setting from which young Chileans create stories is secondary schools. When recounting his first days at secondary school, Manuel, born in 1987 in a middle-class neighbourhood, remembered a feeling of disgust with regard to spending all his lifetime at his semi-private school. As a turning point, he recalled the implementation of the ‘full school day’, a public reform especially affecting public and semi-private schools.⁵⁸ This reform was announced in 1996 and gradually enacted in subsequent years. It signified a change of life course trajectories for middle- and lower-class students, as they began to spend their entire days at school. The school became a crucial site of their biographies. The prominence in interviewees’ stories of participation in school activities – from religious, artistic and sport-related to political ones (e.g. the development of student councils) – might be related to the increasing availability of time at school and the predominance of school as a life setting. Secondary school is remembered precisely as a space of creating horizontal networks of peers.

⁵⁶ Cath Collins, Katherine Hite and Alfredo Joignant, *The Politics of Memory in Chile: From Pinochet to Bachelet* (Boulder: First Forum Press 2013), 64.

⁵⁷ For the process of coming to terms with the dictatorship in the democratic period, see Steve Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006* (Duke University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ The Chilean education system is highly segmented, with regard not only to access to the system itself, but to the experience and quality of learning.

The augmenting of time within schools runs parallel to another important life-course modification. As a political goal of democratic governments, enrolment into secondary schools increased, in turn, putting greater pressure on middle-class students to enter university. This pressure is very manifest as participants remember their parents' wishes for their futures. Manuel evoked her mother's desire as follows: *My mother's dream was always that I would go to university, probably because nobody in the family had attended university before.* Many respondents voiced the identical genealogical rationale: you are the first member of the family who has the opportunity to finish secondary school and attend university. Consequently, schools and the university system have become burdened with future expectations unleashed by that public as well as private narrative.⁵⁹ It is the failure of this very promise – or consciousness of its impossibility – that would provide grounds for a critical conjuncture.

Moral and temporal boundaries in narratives of student mobilizations

Interviewees' school stories revolved around a large wave of student mobilization. Although the series of university and secondary school protests that occurred during 2011 was considered by my respondents to be the most defining event, they always linked the 2011 protests to the secondary school protests of 2006. Those previous protests of 2006 has been dubbed the 'penguin student movement' or 'penguin revolution' due to the resemblance of students in their uniforms to seabirds. This initial student uprising had involved in particular a demand for education of better quality. In this demand was crystallised the progressive narrative in which a higher level of education (a university degree) represented the central means by which to achieve a fairer society, as well as mobility for the middle-class. Through sit-ins and street protests, secondary students opposed those who wanted to maintain a private market system and privileged access to universities.⁶⁰

Even those who had not participated in the 'penguin revolution' saw, for the first time, that their peers were marching and protesting. Laura, who was attending the first year of university in 2006, and who would be heavily engaged in the protests of 2011, stressed precisely this: *I believe that it was the first great demonstration that I saw. Because you knew through stories that there had been*

⁵⁹ See for a similar rationale, Peter Cummings, Democracy and Student Discontent: Chilean Student Protest in the Post-Pinochet Era, *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 7 (2015), 3, 49-84.

⁶⁰ For a full account, see in particular, Sofia Donoso, "Dynamics of Change in Chile: Explaining the Emergence of the 2006 Pinguino Movement", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 45 (2013): 1-29.

other periods in which people used to protest, to strike, but you had been told about this [i.e., you had not seen it].

Laura's linkage to older periods of protest and demonstration points to two phenomena. First, the narration has the meaning of recovering something, namely, the tradition of an active civil society. The participants normally relate this to parents', relatives' or even teachers' struggles against dictatorship. But, their narrations also hint at the disruption provoked by the student movement. This aspect is regularly encapsulated in the catchphrase '*We are the generation without fear*', or similar phrases, such as 'we don't have fear any longer' or the 'the fearless generation',⁶¹ which were often employed by the 2011 movement leaders. It is highly probable that the sentence was already circulating in 2006. Somma reported that "a blanket hanging from the wall of an occupied high school building in 2006 [...] claimed: 'we are the generation that was born without fear.'"⁶² The catchphrase would be repeatedly employed and become a generational marker. It functions as a temporal and moral boundary alike: 'without fear any longer' draws a double distinction between a before and an after (fear provoked by the dictatorship vs the current social protests), and between older cohorts paralyzed by fear and those unparalyzed and awakening.

The consecration of the generational hero

Between 2006 and 2011, two-thirds of interviewees entered university, or tertiary or technical institutions, where they would study for one or two years. Furthermore, a great number of them enrolled in private institutions. This choice corresponded to a new state credit (*Crédito con Aval del Estado*) through which students gained access to loans not only for public university study, as had previously been the case, but for private university studies too. The formula to augment student participation was achieved by modifying the sources of credit: instead of the state, the financial system was to provide credit resources sufficient for middle-class families. The result was that many of my interviewees not only entered private universities, but also became burdened with debt. Around 2011 – when the first cohort taking this credit left university – the process of indebtedness became visible to families and students. The progressive narrative of the first generation studying thus faltered. Indeed, what was promulgated as an innovative policy that would use the financial system to augment credit became a symbol of neoliberalism.

⁶¹ Cummings, *Democracy and Student Discontent*, 65-67.

⁶² Nicolás Somma, The Chilean Student Movement of 2011-2012: Challenging the Marketization of Education, *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 4 (2012): 299.

Raimundo Frei, "Talking about Legacies and Ruptures: Generational Narratives in Times of Youth Activism in Argentina and Chile," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 37 (2017), Special Issue on Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change.

The time between the protests of 2006 and 2011 seems to have been an intense period of civil engagement and networking.⁶³ The organizations mentioned by my interviewees are multiple. But, crucially, the actor absent from the list of organizations mentioned is political parties. Among the participants, only Mauricio joined the Communist youth, and then only to withdraw his membership after 2006 as he tired of hierarchical commands. Compared to previous generations, the absence of political parties among these participants is salient. Katherine Hite's description of the role of political parties for the Chilean generation of the sixties is revealing: "There is no greater organizational referent for Chilean political activists than their political parties. The party constitutes the central institutional network in which individual political actors are embedded".⁶⁴ Young respondents engaged in the 2011 protests evaluated their performances as a revival of politicization ('without fear any longer'), but regularly remained outside the classic party system. This contrasts not only with Chilean canonical forms of doing politics but also with the Argentine revival of the Peronist tradition under Kirchner's left-wing government.

Turning to the events of 2011, the participants spoke of street marches that conveyed a strong feeling of 'being there, doing history'. Especially among those who had not taken part in 2006, the protests of 2011 became highly emotional. As Alex recounted: *I remember the first demonstration [...] I had never taken part in anything and I really wanted to go, to feel self-fulfilled (laughing). And maybe to live this experience (was) more (important) than the actual cause behind it. At the beginning, even when I shared the ideals and everything, at the beginning it was like 'I want to live this, I want to be in a march'*. The marches were particularly remembered as being massive, thereby enhancing the idea of a powerful 'we, without fear any longer'. The nation-wide effervescence of the multitudes remained central. Participants also focused on the large number of artistic innovations at every demonstration, and on the use of Facebook to share information and report meeting points. Furthermore, the simultaneous occurrence of protests worldwide, including the Occupy movements in Spain and New York, and protests in Turkey, gave the impression of a global protest connected via those digital channels.

⁶³ It is important to remark on this networking process. Generational narratives circulate in and foster networks. Approaches drawing on elite theory overestimate the power of leaders to bind generations. Although there were indeed various university leaders, networking processes were occurring not only within major universities, but also among secondary students and diverse youth organizations.

⁶⁴ Hite, Katherine, *When the Romance Ended* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 16.

Throughout the marches, the desire for ‘public, free, and high-quality education’ gained support. The attention to ‘free and public’ is connected to the demand for the ‘end of profit’ as well as to the return of the state as guarantor of social rights. Increasingly, students’ demand would coalesce with a more collective desire for managing other previously privatized sectors, especially health and social security.

That two cycles of protests occurred bestowed upon the movement a sense of a romantic quest, marked first by the emergence of the conflict and then by the definitive struggle. Hence, a large extent of the consolidation of ‘us’ took place around the emergence and visibility of a villain. The first right-wing, democratically elected president (Sebastián Piñera) appeared to be the perfect ‘other’, given that he represented a section of society that had backed the dictatorship and that he had a past as a millionaire entrepreneur. The combat between the generational protagonist and this antagonist framed the story, “creating an ‘us-versus-them’ scenario where ‘us’ signified ‘the people’ asking for basic educational rights, and ‘them’ signified the government denying those rights”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, centre-left groups and large sections of the elite could be understood as the false heroes of the romantic quest because they opposed substantial reforms.⁶⁶

All in all, the experience of the demonstrating students fostered an image of a cross-cutting performance. It is reiterated that *our* generation awoke and left behind both *our* period of slumbering and *their* period of fear. Therefore, the event might be easily referred to as a ‘generational’ one. As Marcela expresses, *We are a generation who are less afraid to say what we think, a generation with more tools to express ourselves. A generation long put to sleep by the Internet, by technology, and I think that we were awoken again by the student revolution that we experienced in 2011.*

No doubt, some respondents did not take part in any protests. Some, particularly those from upper-class and right-wing families, viewed the student movement as raising legitimate demands but carrying them out via ‘incorrect forms’ of protests or sit-ins. This provokes some social divisions, as Magdalena, who attended a private school, explains: *I mean, for me 2011 was a turning point, a year of discussion, and of disillusionment with friends as well [...] For the first time seeing a friend in a different way, like when people talked about Pinochet in*

⁶⁵ Daniel Salinas and Pablo Fraser, Educational Opportunity and Contentious Politics: The 2011 Chilean Student Movement, *Berkeley Review of Education* 3 (2012): 32.

⁶⁶ For external observers, the role played by some leaders of the Communist Party, such as Camila Vallejo, then President of the University of Chile Student Federation, promoted the idea that the student protests were tightly linked to this party. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The movement grew amongst various leftist organizations outside of the Communist Party, and brought about the emergence of new parties.

the 1980s. Last year I lived through that. Because Pinochet's time was something from my parents' generation, we didn't live like that, you know [...] I remember 2011 as something defining, a year that was a turning point.

Magdalena's reference to the divisive atmosphere of the dictatorship that had concerned her parents' generation was a 'bridge' to connect some common aspects of the marches of 2011 with dictatorial experiences. The link emerged clearer when participants narrated the mounting repression against students. The repression and the use of other elements of protest repertoires, such as pot-banging, created an intergenerational bridge to older experiences; so too did the students' framing of their demands as explicitly against 'Pinochet's education'. Further, over the cycle of protests, a revival of the past was visible at the aesthetic level. Lyrics, melodies and catchwords evoked the atmosphere of the end of the sixties protests. Ultimately, a new generation of young musicians who supported the student movement recovered the tonality of previous decades in their new folk songs.

Although several elements of continuity existed, the student movement was performed as a generational rupture. One central aspect is the detachment from classical political actors that was visible at the level of students' networks. Further, the student movement defies the beginning of the Chilean canonical narrative of the democratic transition. That is, by claiming that all aspects of the education system, as well as other public services such as health and the security system, have followed the dictatorship's guidelines, the student narrative rejects the positioning of the democratic turn of 1989 as an absolute before and after. Crucially, by disrupting the beginning, the students' narrative could simultaneously link the dictatorship to democratic governments and its tragedy to the challenges of their present society. Whereas older generations maintain a distinction between the regimes of dictatorship and democracy, this narrative folds them together.

5. Conclusion

I have examined two youth generational sites, one in Santiago de Chile and one in Buenos Aires, both characterized by substantial mobilization. The aim was to observe how narratives circulating in these sites either foster continuity with historical repertoires or provoke inter-generational rupture. From a narrative perspective, I suggest that through these stories, past and present become connected, and repertoires of evaluation evolve. Furthermore, these stories grow and circulate in multiple settings, whether those of family and peer conversations, social media, or public speeches. Summarizing the above findings, I offer three theoretical insights which explain why youth narratives of Argentine and Chilean history so greatly differ.

First, *forms of approaching difficult pasts remain salient*. Chilean modes of dealing with traumatic pasts feature communicative silence at the family and political level. In contrast, Argentine political culture returns recurrently to the past. The indisputable tragedy fostered by Kirchner's government also made for a boom of memory-related conversation at the family and school levels. As Gabrielle Rosenthal has maintained, generational narratives depend on intergenerational dialogue, in particular, around family communication. Yet, this conversation is also sensitive to political contexts and cultural fluctuations. Moreover, I would also suggest that the salience of historical past, in general, is greater in Argentina. Political cultures and family conversation draw from old stories – family migration, economic crisis, Falklands war, football anecdotes, and so on. Thus, generational narratives depend on collective modes of remembering and on drawing temporal boundaries.

Second, *the political networks in which narratives evolve differ*. The Chilean student movement, rooted as it is in a general process of weakening traditional political parties, instead provides a fertile terrain for the emergence of new political networks. Thus, generational differences, and the sense of a rupture from earlier political traditions, are vast. To be sure, social movements, as Ron Eyerman and others have suggested, are cultivating these novel networks. Yet, the Argentinean case shows that youth political organizations have evolved within long-standing traditional networks (political parties or workers' organizations). Instead of detaching from the past, Argentine young activists attempt to recover older symbols, icons, and principles. Processes of handing down old stories and experiences support those attempts. Thus generational stories depend on how narratives evolve from different (novel or not) networks.

Finally, *modes of emplotments contribute to dissimilarities*. Romantic plots foster strong feelings of connection. The 'we-attachment' characteristic of Chilean youths' narratives is indissoluble from their collective experiences of student mobilization. Here the intimate connection of personal biography to history provides the main source of generational narratives. By contrast, the Argentine cyclical mode of emplotment does not offer such a pitting of civil society against the state. Rather, it is an emplotment in which old traditions inspiring cyclical sagas, or repeat old nightmares. The weight of Kirchner's symbolical measures and canonical narrative is undeniable here, but also his discourse is connected to previous constellations. Thus, generational narratives are consistent with the emplotment of the past in articulating present-day collective events.

Last but not least: these narratives are neither essentialist nor static. They evolve. There is nothing deterministic about them, and now or in the near future, Chilean generational narratives might connect with each other, while Argentinean generational positions may turn towards conflict. Sequential analysis concerning

different cohorts of different ages, such as my larger project illustrates, thus remains necessary in order to understand how narratives shift.