



Semillas de la rebelión: Revolutionary postmemory, hip-hop, and Chilean exile

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Abstract

This article uses interviews and cultural analysis to examine how hip-hop is a site for the reproduction of the second-generation Chilean exile hip-hop group Rebel Diaz's revolutionary postmemory of Allende-era politics in Chile. Revolutionary postmemory posits that Rebel Diaz, and second-generation Chilean exiles more generally, inherit not only the trauma and pain of the Pinochet regime but also the radical politics and hope of the Allende era.

Keywords Chilean Exile · Hip-hop · Memory · Chilean dictatorship · Neoliberalism · Revolutionary politics

Semillas de la rebelión: Posmemoria revolucionaria, hip-hop y exilio chileno

Resumen

Este artículo utiliza entrevistas y análisis culturales para examinar cómo el hip-hop sirve como medio para reproducir la posmemoria revolucionaria de los exiliados chilenos de segunda generación respecto a la política de la era de Allende. La posmemoria revolucionaria presupone que los exiliados chilenos de segunda generación no solo heredan el trauma y el dolor del régimen de Pinochet sino también la política radical y la esperanza de la época de Allende.

Palabras clave Exilio chileno · Hip-hop · Memoria · Dictadura chilena · Neoliberalismo · Política revolucionaria

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Introduction

“Das vuelta una piedra y encuentras a un chileno,” is one way of saying that everywhere you look, you’ll find a Chilean.¹ This is what the compa Franky said as we (a group of mostly second-generation Chileans) stood in a music studio in Los Angeles, California.² This hangout session in downtown LA is also a testament to Franky’s words. The second-generation Chilean hip-hop brother duo Rebel Diaz have traveled from Chicago and New York to perform. Pablo and Franky are visiting from Australia. I’m a second-generation Chilean born and raised in California. This night we found ourselves together bonding over being second-generation Chileans and sharing what that means in the specific places we live. We joked about our Chilean Spanish because it’s stuck in time—it’s the Spanish that our parents brought with them in the 1970s and 1980s in the first large-scale emigration from Chile. This exodus of people from Chile is a product of the US-backed Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) that orchestrated a counterrevolutionary coup against leftist president Salvador Allende, which produced political exiles and economic emigrants, setting in motion large migratory networks that continue to exist today.

In this article I focus on the second-generation Chilean hip-hop brother duo, Rebel Diaz, whose revolutionary postmemory connects them to the Allende era and other racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups in the United States. Revolutionary postmemory draws from Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory (1992, 1996), which describes how second-generation refugees have a firsthand relationship to war despite not having experienced it directly. Revolutionary postmemory describes how second-generation Chilean exiles inherit not only memories of trauma under the Pinochet regime, but also the lessons of and hope for revolution—or, more specifically, Allende-era politics. Two components are central to the construction of revolutionary postmemory for Rebel Diaz: the activism of first-generation exiles and Allende-era culture, particularly the Chilean *nueva canción*. For Rebel Diaz, hip-hop serves an important site for the reproduction of their revolutionary postmemory, where they maintain a relationship to the Allende era by rapping about Chile’s history and imbricating hip-hop beats with *nueva canción* music.

The literature on second-generation Chileans has started to examine their politics in relation to the Allende era (Gómez-Barris 2009; Jedlicki 2014; Page 2019), but there remains the need to explore this more, and I provide the concept of revolutionary postmemory as a framework in which to do so. Moreover, while the literature on Chilean exile focuses largely on the first generation who left Chile and their transnational organizing against the Pinochet regime in the 1970s and 1980s (Camacho Padilla 2006; Melillo 2015; Shayne 2010; Tinsman 2014), I illustrate these exiles’ continued political work beyond the Pinochet era in the contemporary moment and how their activism lives on through Rebel Diaz, who together carry the Allende-era legacy forward. Studying Chilean exile in the US is particularly important, given the role of the United States in the coup whose goal was squashing Allende-era politics

¹ You turn over a rock and you find a Chilean.

² “Compa,” short for *compañero*, here referring to a “friend”.



out of existence. While the US government has made it safe for the protagonists of the Pinochet regime to seek refuge here, refuge has been more difficult to find for its victims, but Allende-era politics and culture continue to thrive, even here.

My analysis is based on a series of unstructured casual in-person interviews conducted on two occasions, once in Los Angeles in May of 2019 and once in November 2020 in San Diego, followed by exchanges over text message and WhatsApp, and an analysis of Rebel Diaz's song "Broken Hands Play Guitar." I chose Rebel Diaz because their music and community-based activism illustrates well revolutionary postmemory, but they are not the only example, with Ana Tijoux, born in France to parents in exile, being the most notable additional example. I use a relational methodology that traces structural processes, people, and politics between Chile and the United States (Espiritu 2014). I begin by considering Chilean exile in the US, then I move to consider first-generation Chilean exile activism and Allende-era culture. Then I get to the heart of my analysis, in which I consider Allende-era politics in the Bronx in New York City at La Peña del Bronx and the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective BX as places where Allende-era politics and hip-hop come together to reproduce Rebel Diaz's revolutionary postmemory. Finally, I do a cultural analysis of Rebel Diaz's song "Broken Hands Play Guitar," about *nueva canción* musician Victor Jara. The song illustrates how Rebel Diaz uses hip-hop to reproduce their Allende-era politics, position themselves alongside Jara, and share this history with other racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups in the United States.

El exilio Chileno

Rodrigo and Gonzalo Venegas, the brothers who make up Rebel Diaz, also known by their stage names RodStarz and G1, inherited their exile from their parents, who were forced to leave Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. The Pinochet dictatorship is a product of US Cold War intervention that led to the overthrow of President Salvador Allende and his replacement with Augusto Pinochet, who would rule the country for seventeen years (1973–1990). During this time, members of Allende's government, leftists, trade unionists, artists, and anyone deemed a subversive was imprisoned, tortured, murdered, disappeared, or forced into exile. RodStarz and G1's mother and father had been members of the organization Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR).

The MIR developed in 1965 in Concepción, Chile. It began as a guerilla organization influenced by the Cuban Revolution; however, when Allende won the election, the MIR began organizing at the grassroots level, particularly among rural populations and communities living on the outskirts of urban areas, where high levels of political participation developed as a result (Movement of the Revolutionary Left 2014). While the MIR supported Allende's government, they never joined the Popular Unity Coalition. The MIR believed in revolution from the ground up, rather than through the established political mechanisms. Allende-era politics included urban and rural land takeovers, factory and university occupations, a reorganization of reproductive labor such as free childcare and low-cost mass-produced meals, neighborhood and workers' councils, universal access to "high" art, and more (Shayne



2010; Tinsman 2002; Wynn 2016). A big critique from the MIR was that the Allende government believed it could work with the country's middle and upper classes, whereas the MIR believed that was a failed strategy (Movement of the Revolutionary Left 2014). In Chile, both political projects existed simultaneously, sometimes in tension. Under Allende, and as a result of their own autonomous organizing, people began to see a change in their living conditions and power dynamics shift in their favor. Pinochet's dictatorship not only reversed these gains but also implemented neoliberalism in the country on a drastic scale, making Chile the "laboratory" for neoliberalism (Harvey 2005). The goal of this concerted attack was to restore the class, race, and gender relations that existed prior to Allende's presidency.

When the dictatorship hit, Rebel Diaz's father was detained by the regime for two years, along with their oldest brother, who, detained as a one-year-old, is among one of the regime's youngest political prisoners; their mother escaped the country. It is estimated that approximately four hundred thousand political exiles left Chile during the Pinochet regime (Doña Reveco 2020). The Pinochet regime passed Decree Laws 81 and 604, in 1973 and 1974, respectively, giving itself permission to exile those it perceived as opponents. Decree 504, passed in 1975, terminated political prisoners' sentences if arrangements were made for them to go into exile (Doña Reveco 2020). The irony of an illegitimate regime passing laws does not escape me, but nonetheless this legal definition of exile applies to only a portion of those who left Chile during this time. Many others left because of fear of persecution or because Pinochet had generally made life unlivable. Many others left because of the neoliberal economic model that Pinochet imposed, with a total of up to one million Chileans leaving the country between 1973 and 1990 (Doña Reveco 2012). Among so much variation, it's important to clarify that I define "exiles" as those who left Chile because they were persecuted or in danger of persecution for their politics. These people's political commitment during the Allende era is a key component of revolutionary postmemory among Rebel Diaz and second-generation Chileans more generally.

Eventually Rebel Diaz's parents reunited in England, where RodStarz was born. However, US immigration policy and US reluctance to open its door to Chilean refugees meant that the family was able to travel to the United States only later, when their father came on a work visa and settled in Chicago, where G1 was born and the brothers were raised.

The US refusal to grant Chileans the status of refugee is a result of its role in the coup (Doña Reveco 2020) and its desire to keep leftists out of the country. However, Chileans found their way into the country using work visas, student visas, and tourist visas, or they came undocumented. Eventually, the US government agreed to grant entry to five thousand Chileans as "humanitarian parolees," but only four hundred to five hundred families were actually granted admission under this category.³ As humanitarian parolees, Chileans did not receive financial support from

³ For more on how US-based supporters challenged the Pinochet regime, see Margaret Power's essay, "The U.S. Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s," and Tamara Lea Spira's "Intimate Internationalisms: 1970s 'Third World' Queer Feminist Solidarity with Chile." The US government uses the category of parolee "to bring someone who is otherwise inadmissible into the United States for a temporary period of time due to a compelling emergency" (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website, cited in Doña Reveco 2012, p. 204).



the government and therefore depended on nonprofit and grassroots organizations or friends and family for support. As Gómez-Barris notes, “An obvious, though often understated, point is that the United States was not an unproblematic destination for Chilean political exiles” (2009, p. 136). Despite the US government’s efforts to keep them out, and neglect them once here, Chileans made their way into the country and created networks and infrastructure where Allende-era politics could exist and where they could wage a fight against the dictatorship from here. The vast majority did not go back to Chile when the dictatorship ended, because after nearly two decades, they had constructed lives in the places they settled (Doña Reveco 2020), but many continued their political work, becoming lifelong dedicated leftists; many passed these values on to the second generation.

Revolutionary postmemory

Revolutionary postmemory is a term that I developed to discuss how Rebel Diaz, and the children of Chilean exiles more generally, relate to the Allende era and how that shapes their contemporary politics. This term is based on the concept of postmemory developed by Marianne Hirsch (1992, 1996) to describe how children of Holocaust survivors relate to that history. Hirsch explains that postmemory is “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (1992, p. 8). According to Hirsch, postmemory is not only mediated but created and imagined, meaning that postmemory is a process (1996). While postmemory has often been used to describe how the second generation remembers war and the events that unfolded, for many Chileans their postmemory includes not only memories of the Pinochet regime but the lessons, inspiration, and hope of the Allende era, which is why I have termed it a revolutionary postmemory. My focus is not on the traumatic events that the parents of second-generation Chileans faced, but rather the defiant persistence of Allende-era culture and politics that couldn’t be squashed out by the Pinochet regime’s repression.

There are a few studies that consider second-generation Chilean exiles and politics. Ramírez (2014) focuses on how they organized to seek justice for the crimes Pinochet committed when the possibility that he could face trial arose in the late 1990s. Page (2019) and Gómez-Barris (2009) focus on second-generation Chileans at La Peña cultural center in Berkeley, California. Jedlicki (2014) develops the term “memory of exile” to describe second-generation identity formation in relation to the Allende era, the coup, and the Pinochet regime. However, Jedlicki’s focus is not on politics as much as it is on the experiences of the second-generation upon returning to Chile. My contribution is the concept of revolutionary postmemory, which could be applied to some of these studies, and can be a tool in future interpretations. I argue that two aspects are central to construction of revolutionary postmemory: the activism of first-generation exiles and Allende-era culture. RodStarz and G1’s revolutionary postmemory was constructed by witnessing the activism of their family and friends and those who shared with them the Chilean *nueva canción*.



Activism of first-generation exiles

When I asked Rodrigo about politics during his upbringing, he replied, “We grew up under the table of political meetings. To us, revolution was like church on Sundays” (Rodrigo Venegas, 27 August 2021, text message). Early on, Rebel Diaz’s parents taught them about politics and revolution as “core values in life” (Rodrigo Venegas, 27 August 2021, text message). Growing up, they were always at various political meetings and protests, where they learned about Allende-era culture, politics, and internationalism, not only from their parents but from other Chilean exiles too. The Venegas brothers inherited not only exile from their parents, but also a rich history of resistance that is central to second-generation revolutionary postmemory. Shaping the revolutionary postmemory of second-generation Chileans creates an afterlife for the activism of first-generation Chilean exiles, meaning that its significance has transcended the end of the Pinochet regime and continues to have influence today.

When Rebel Diaz’s parents arrived in Chicago, they joined Casa Chile, an organization composed primarily of MIR members who opposed the Pinochet regime from abroad. In addition to being a member of Casa Chile, their mother was also a member of Movimiento de la Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena (MEMCH), a transnational anti-Pinochet feminist organization that was central to ending the regime (Illanes 2012; Kaplan 2004). According to Rodrigo, this group was particularly powerful or, as he comedically describes its members, “mad *feminista* 5-foot assassins that raised me” (Rodrigo Venegas, 27 August 2021, text message). The literature on Chilean exiles’ activism brilliantly captures the work they did to fight the dictatorship from abroad (Camacho Padilla 2006; Melillo 2015; Shayne 2010; Tinsman 2014). Their transnational activism’s main goal was to put an end to the dictatorship and to bring persecuted people out of Chile. Chilean exiles created elaborate networks to coordinate with each other and with people fighting the dictatorship from the interior. I suggest that this powerful organizing did not end when the Pinochet dictatorship ended—but rather, has an afterlife, meaning that this activism, though still rooted in Allende-era politics, was transformed and molded to the contemporary moment and continues to influence second-generation Chileans today.

The continued political commitments of Chilean exiles beyond the Pinochet era have resulted, in part, because many belonged to leftist political traditions that valued internationalism. As Rodrigo explains, his parents “were clear that an attack on Palestinians was an attack on the *chilenos*, on the Puerto Ricans, etc. We grew up understanding solidarity as a concept of community support for the oppressed, no matter what” (Rodrigo Venegas, 27 August 2021, text message). These internationalist politics led to the continued activism of the first generation in exile. By examining this afterlife, we are able to see beyond conceptual silos, which posit that movements and their time frames can be neatly contained.⁴ Additionally, we are able to view exile in a more expansive way, beyond trauma and rupture, and see it as a “possibility for political engagement and social imagination” (Gómez-Barris 2009, p. 136). RodStarz and G1’s revolutionary postmemory was constructed by witnessing

⁴ A central contribution of the edited volume *Chicana Movidas* (2018).



the activism of their family and friends, and central to this activism was the Chilean *nueva canción*.

Allende-era culture

RodStarz and G1 grew up with the *nueva canción chilena*, which taught them to view music as a medium for social change. The Chilean *nueva canción* was a musical movement whose origin dates to the 1950s, when there was a renewed interest in the recuperation and conservation of Chilean folklore perceived to be on the cusp of disappearing at the hands of industrialization and global capitalism (Verba 2013). This embrace of folklore was viewed as a form of anti-imperialism, and many of the musicians heeding this call were leftists, such as Violeta Parra, who is often considered the mother of the Chilean *nueva canción* movement that developed in the 1960s (Verba 2013). Parra traveled across Chile, especially to rural areas, to record and document this folklore and was concerned with the musical and artistic forms of *el pueblo* rather than those of the elite (Doña Revenco 2012; Verba 2013).

These folkloric musical forms contain elements of indigenous, African, and Spanish influence. They rely heavily on instruments of the Andean region such as panflute and the charango. A watershed moment was the First Festival of the Chilean *nueva canción*, in July of 1969, which Rodríguez Aedo argues marks the beginning of a movement whose “principal objective is the revitalization of the protest song in Chile” (2017, p.). Using Chilean and Latin American folklore, perceived to be an affront to Western imperialism, these musicians began to use this music as a political weapon. In this context, the *nueva canción* plays a central role in Allende’s presidential campaign. One of the most important *nueva canción* groups, Inti Illimani, turned Allende’s Popular Unity Coalition Program, detailing what Allende vowed to do as president, into an album, condensing its main points and making it more accessible. During Allende’s presidency, *nueva canción* musicians toured Chile and the world in Operación Verdad (Operation Truth), crafted by the Popular Unity Coalition to educate people on the “Chilean path to socialism,” as Allende called it (Rodríguez Aedo 2017), and countering Cold War anticommunism. Notably, *nueva canción* lyrics are very explicitly political.⁵

Rodrigo and Gonzalo grew up with the *nueva canción* constantly among family and friends at political events, but also at home. *Nueva canción* musicians in exile continued to tour the world to denounce the Pinochet regime and call for solidarity. Casa Chile, Rebel Díaz’s parents’ organization in Chicago, brought *nueva canción* musicians Inti Illimani, Illapu, and Quilapayún to the city to perform (Rodrigo Venegas, 2021, text message). Chilean exiles organized *peñas*, which Verba describes as “folk music club[s]” (2013, p. 297), where *nueva canción* was played live. For the Rebel Díaz brothers, the *nueva canción* was their gateway to hip-hop, a genre that they consider has a similar political ethos. As RodStarz explains, “For me, the *nueva canción* comes from the same class as hip-hop, the marginalized, the forgotten, etc.

⁵ After the coup, the punishment for being caught with a *nueva canción* album was imprisonment and torture, and the military regularly raided people’s home in search of such paraphernalia.





Fig. 1 RodStarz and G1 as Bboys (1991); photo courtesy of RodStarz

So, when we have culture or art that comes from these communities, the message is often of revolutionary ideas, ideas of social change” (Rodrigo Venegas, 27 August 2021, text message).⁶

While construction of Rebel Diaz’s revolutionary postmemory stems from first-generation exiles and the *nueva canción*, the reproduction of revolutionary postmemory, within the context of the United States, occurs largely through hip-hop. The Rebel Diaz brothers got into hip-hop at an early age, when their older brother introduced them to it. Rodrigo got into hip-hop culture through breakdancing, and G1 got into music production and making beats. G1’s music production was influenced by the *nueva canción*, and he borrowed his parents *nueva canción* albums to sample (Rodrigo and Gonzalo Venegas, 2019, interview). The lessons of the Chilean *nueva canción* led Rebel Diaz to hip-hop that reproduces their revolutionary postmemory of the Allende era, which reinscribes the lessons of the Allende era, reinforcing their connection to hip-hop in a continuous cycle. In many ways, Rebel Diaz’s hip-hop is a legacy of the Chilean *nueva canción*. Importantly, however, hip-hop has a history of its own among Black and brown communities based in deindustrialized New York City, a history that has attracted the Rebel Diaz brothers to hip-hop culture (Fig. 1).

⁶ “Para mi, la nueva canción viene de la misma clase del hip hop, los marginados, los olvidados, etc. Entonces cuando uno tiene cultura o arte que viene de esas comunidades, el mensaje muchas veces va ser de ideas revolucionarias, de ideas de cambio social.”



Allende-era politics and neoliberalism in the Bronx

“There would be no Rebel Diaz without Victor Toro, we learned from that *compañero*.”⁷ This is what G1 said to me when I interviewed him and RodStarz in the greenroom of an LA nightclub.⁸ As I began writing this article, I was faced more and more with the inability to write about Rebel Diaz without writing about Toro and Nieves Ayress who, together with other first-generation Chilean exiles, cofounded La Peña del Bronx. Toro is a cofounder of the MIR, the same organization that Rebel Diaz’s parents belonged to. Toro and their father met in a concentration camp when they were political prisoners under Pinochet (along with Ana Tijoux’s father). Toro and Ayress, who are married, reconnected with the Venegas family in exile. Here I focus on La Peña del Bronx and the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective BX to illustrate how Chilean exiles’ activism extends beyond anti-Pinochet work to include other issues, and how they influenced second-generation Chileans—both manifestations of this activism’s afterlife. Both cultural centers ceased to exist as physical spaces because of persistent state repression. While the United States has made it safe for perpetrators of the crimes committed under the Pinochet regime to live here, it has made it difficult for its victims. However, despite the US-backed coup’s goal of crushing Allende-era politics out of existence, they continue to survive in the United States, including in the South Bronx.

La Peña del Bronx and the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective BX

On his arrival to the United States in 1983, Victor Toro notes, “I saw here the Third World that I had come from” (RadioTV Liberación 2018). Toro made the connection between the way that neoliberalism affected communities of color in the United States and those in the Global South. Neoliberalism can be defined as a form of capitalism in which government intervention is eschewed, resulting in privatization, lack of governmental regulations, and state-provided social services being slashed (Harvey 2005). The Bronx faced deindustrialization, austerity, and predatory landlords who burned housing for insurance money. According to Chang, by the 1970s the Bronx “was reimagined as ... a global south just a subway ride away” (2005, p. 17). Between 1973 and 1977, the South Bronx suffered thirty thousand cases of arson. Instead of fixing and investing in housing, landlords waited until the units were empty to commit arson for insurance money. Moreover, by the mid-1970s, six hundred thousand manufacturing jobs had left the Bronx, 40% of the entire sector (Chang 2005, p. 14). This housing crisis and deindustrialization led to overcrowding, unemployment, and poverty, often making the Bronx look like a literal warzone, much like the one Toro had fled.

Though Toro intended for La Peña del Bronx to be a conventional Chilean *peña*, over the years it “began to transform into a multiethnic, multicultural, multiracial

⁷ “Comrade” in Spanish.

⁸ Rodrigo Venegas and Gonzalo Venegas, in discussion with the author, May 2019.



Fig. 2 Victor Toro and DJ Kool Herc at Chilean coup commemoration event (2013); photo courtesy of RodStarz



movement until it disappeared as a *peña* and transformed into La Peña del Bronx Movement, that confronts all social, political, and economic issues with everything that is class struggle here in the interior, in the belly of the beast” (RadioTV Liberación 2018).⁹ Scholars have explored how La Peña in Berkeley has become a significant site for US communities of color and the Left (Gómez-Barris 2009; Page 2019), and I argue that La Peña del Bronx is similarly important. La Peña del Bronx retained its Allende-era revolutionary politics through its transition, and Toro continues to take his experiences during the Allende era and fold them into his organizing here.

Toro and Ayress both have tremendous political knowledge and experience, and that influenced RodStarz and G1. Toro explains that, at La Peña del Bronx, “We spent years spreading and creating propaganda, explaining the experiences of popular power in Chile and in other Latin American countries” (RadioTV Liberación 2018). Having arrived in the 1980s, Toro was unable to witness the movements of the two decades prior, during the movement era, but his experiences in Chile gave him a particular insight that he wanted to share in the construction of a multiracial, class-based movement. Ayress also continues to use her experiences in Chile to inform her political work in the Bronx, not only those of the Allende era but of the Pinochet regime too. Ayress comes from a family of radicals: her grandparents were socialists, and her parents met through union organizing (Kaplan 2004, p. 17). Ayress is a revolutionary who, in the late 1960s, wanted to learn more about the region’s struggles, so she traveled throughout Latin America, eventually joining Ché Guevara’s Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia (Kaplan 2004, p. 18). Ayress returned to Chile in 1970, the year of Allende’s election, excited about the possibility of a socialist future. Illanes explains well what Allende’s victory meant for many

⁹ “Pero posteriormente se fue transformando en un movimiento multiétnico, multicultural, multirracial hasta llegar a desaparecer como *peña* y transformarse ya en el Movimiento La Peña del Bronx que consiste en que trata con todos los problemas sociales, políticos, económicos y esta imbuido con todo lo que es la lucha de clases aquí en el interior de las entrañas de monstruo.”



like Ayress: “For the majority of working-class women, the hand of Chicho [how people lovingly referred to Allende] waving on the balcony of La Moneda, with the presidential sash across his heart, wasn’t only a motive for joy and hope, but also relief” (2012, p. 91).¹⁰ Ayress later left for Cuba for one year and returned in 1972; after the 1973 coup, she was detained and tortured (Kaplan 2004, p. 18). Ayress believes that when she tells her story, explicitly naming the patriarchal aspects of torture, she is engaging in a form of direct action (Kaplan 2004, p. 16).¹¹ Ayress made La Peña del Bronx a shelter and safe place for survivors of domestic violence and, as such, brings domestic violence out of the private sphere and connects it to the state violence she experienced, making domestic violence explicitly political. This is one way that Ayress’s experiences in Chile shape her political work here, which she has done in addition to the plethora of political work that she and Toro have done at La Peña del Bronx, such as fighting for immigrants’ rights, justice for street vendors, the right to housing, and more. This type of activism shapes and continues to shape the revolutionary postmemory of the Venegas brothers.

La Peña del Bronx, and the presence of Chilean exiles there, exposed many people to Allende-era politics, and Chileans also learned from other racial and immigrant groups. Chileans and other racial and immigrant groups are often brought together through music or other forms of culture, facilitating the identification of shared structural conditions and experiences. The Bronx is a multiracial multiethnic site for politics and culture, which makes the history and resistance struggle of Chile just one more part of the larger story of the people there. The photo in Fig. 2 was taken by RodStarz in 2013 at El Maestro, a Puerto Rican boxing gym that championed the Puerto Rican independence struggle, where La Peña del Bronx hosted a show for the fortieth anniversary of the coup in Chile, which coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the birth of hip-hop, just one month earlier. Hip-hop’s origin is often dated to 11 August 1973, in the Bronx, when DJ Kool Herc, pictured here with Toro, developed the Merry-Go-Round technique at a party. In response to the crowd’s enthusiasm over the instrumental break, he used two copies of the same record, restarting the instrumental break on one record as the break finished on the other. Herc, like Toro, is an immigrant, having arrived in the Bronx from Jamaica in 1967, when he was just twelve years old. Herc’s Jamaican roots are significant because of the sound system. Sound system culture became popular in Jamaica when the island was forced to accept structural adjustment loans from the International Monetary Fund. This led to a wave of emigration out of Jamaica as living conditions worsened, and many musicians left. This was compounded by the development of the tourist industry on the north side of the island where many musicians congregated to work (Chang 2005). Within this context, the sound system became popular, and Herc’s Dad owned a good one, which he borrowed for

¹⁰ “Para la mayoría de las mujeres del pueblo, la mano del Chicho flameado en el balcón de La Moneda, con la banda presidencial cruzándole el corazón, no solo fue motivo de alegría y esperanza, sino también de alivio”.

¹¹ I have chosen not to reproduce Ayress’s story of torture here, but if you are unaware of the brutal sexual violence that Chilean women suffered in Pinochet’s concentration camps, then I encourage you to check out Kaplan (2004).



the party. This photo brings together two giants: Toro, who helped found one of the most historic political organizations in Chile, and Kool Herc, a central figure in the development of hip-hop. On hip-hop, Herc notes, “Even if you didn’t grow up in the Bronx in the ’70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together” (cited in Chang 2005, p. xii). This event, which brought together hip-hop and the Chilean *nueva canción*, is a testament to the two genre’s similarity, which center the struggles of everyday people and is the reason hip-hop is such an important site for the reproduction of Rebel Diaz’s revolutionary postmemory.

RodStarz and G1 spent time at and were active members of La Peña del Bronx, and it was Toro who bought them their first sound system for the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective BX (RDAC-BX), a cultural center that existed between 2008 and 2017. RodStarz explains, “Victor saw potential in me and G and pushed for us to do our own thing” (Rodrigo Venegas 2020, interview). The RDAC-BX was a hip-hop community center with a performance space, studio, arts gallery, and community library. Within the context of neoliberalism, where public space and goods are privatized, hip-hop culture creates access to community spaces and culture (Rose 1994). For example, graffiti artists tag trains, trucks, and playgrounds; breakdancers’ stage is the street, creating “makeshift youth centers;” and deejays host parties on the streets, setting up their equipment to any available electrical source (Rose 1994, p. 2). The RDAC-BX follows in this hip-hop tradition because it provided much-needed services to the community. The community center was also located inside one of the many abandoned factories in the South Bronx, and community members collectively wielded their skills to do things like set up plumbing and electricity. The significance of the RDAC-BX is that it was a physical space where Rebel Diaz reproduced their revolutionary postmemory, because hip-hop culture and Allende-era politics and culture came together there.

State repression

Both cultural centers, La Peña del Bronx and the RDAC-BX, were eventually evicted. The RDAC-BX was raided by the police and violently evicted by Austin Property Corp., who cited their political murals as the reason for the eviction. Toro, Ayress, and other primary members of the La Peña del Bronx had been targeted and harassed by the police throughout its existence as a cultural center, from 1987 to 2002. The cultural center ceased to exist in 2002, when they were evicted despite various legal battles and protests, but continues today as an organization. Both cultural center evictions were within a larger context of housing injustice, landlord impunity, racism, and neoliberalism in the Bronx. Despite discourses that equate a free market with freedom for people, neoliberalism relies heavily on the policing sectors of the state (Harvey 2005). In both of these instances, the racist hyper-policing in a disinvested place such as the South Bronx was the precondition for political repression and the destruction of community spaces.

Moreover, these evictions should be viewed within a larger context in which the United States has been a safe haven for the protagonists of the Pinochet regime while Chilean exiles have had a more difficult time. Chileans were refused the status



of refugee, allowed entry only conditionally and without government support, and others like Toro have faced deportation. Toro's immigration story illustrates how he was politically persecuted more than a decade after Chile's supposed return to democracy, but this time he was targeted by the US state directly. Toro was stopped by immigration officers in 2007 on an Amtrak train in Buffalo, New York. This event would initiate a long campaign on the part of the US state to deport Toro back to Chile. The US government tried to deport Toro for being undocumented, claiming that since democracy had been restored in Chile it would be safe for Toro to return (Gonzalez 2011). The US state labeled Toro a terrorist for his involvement with the MIR and tried to use this as further evidence that he needed to be deported. Another example of the US being a problematic destination for Chilean exiles is that of Allende's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Orlando Letelier, who was murdered in a car bomb with his assistant, Ronni Moffitt, in Washington, DC (Doña Reveco 2012, p. 221). In contrast, *nueva canción* musician Victor Jara's murderer sought refuge in Florida in 1989, became a US citizen, and faced persecution in 2016 only after Jara's wife, Joan Jara, worked to find justice (Luscombe 2016). Given all of this repression, first in Chile and then in the United States, it is significant that Allende-era politics and culture continue to exist here. In the discussion that follows, I analyze Rebel Diaz's dedication song to Jara, to illustrate the resiliency of Allende-era politics and how hip-hop is the vehicle through which the Rebel Diaz brothers reproduce their revolutionary postmemory.

Los Hijos de La Rebeldia

In their song "Historias Verdaderas" Rebel Diaz refer to themselves as "[los hijos de la rebeldia](#)" or children of the rebellion, proclaiming their connection to the Allende era. Rebel Diaz's music keeps their revolutionary postmemory alive because they recite the history of the Allende era and imbue hip-hop with the sounds and messages of the Chilean *nueva canción*. RodStarz and G1 continue the legacy of the Allende era by using music as a means for social change, keeping this history alive despite US efforts to stamp out this political legacy. In the song "Broken Hands Play Guitar," Rebel Diaz's revolutionary postmemory is clear, as they position themselves alongside *nueva canción* musician Victor Jara, stating that his legacy persists and lives on through them. Significantly, this song is mostly in English, which means it can be understood by a larger US audience.

Rebel Diaz has two full-lengths albums; the first, *Radical Dilemma*, was released in 2013. This album covers topics such as revolution and police brutality, and contains their most well-known song, a remix of "Which Side Are You On," originally written by Florence Reece and popularized by Pete Seeger. The introduction to the album is a forty-second song that mixes hip-hop beats with clips from a speech by Salvador Allende and Chilean *nueva canción* group Quilapayun's "El Pueblo Unido." Their second album, *América-vs-Amerikkka* (2018), unlike their first album, is nearly entirely in Spanish and includes one *cumbia*, evidence of their evolving style. The title of the album is a critique of US exceptionalism and highlights the long history of white supremacy in the United States by referencing the Ku Klux



Klan. Before these albums were released, Rebel Diaz had already produced various singles, one of which is “Broken Hands Play Guitar” (Rebel Diaz 2012).

From broken lands to broken hands
 You can never ever break our spirit,
 Cuz broken hands play guitars and the music gone keep on livin’

“Te Recuerdo Amanda” still playin’ in my speakers¹²
 He was an activist, poet, and a teacher
 Forty-four shots took away his life but his voice lives forever while I’m on this mic
 La Unidad Popular was about people power
 Til the CIA came and gave money to these cowards
 The first 9/11 Santiago Chile
 Where Salvador Allende had the poor people eatin’
 We singin’ “Venceremos” in defiance’til we dyin’
 His guitar has power
 His voice made him a leader
 So when the dictator arrives
 He caught severe beatin’s
 Take him to a stadium with thousands of others
 but them thousands of others where Victor’s Jara brothers
*Desaparecio’ torturao’ en el estadio*¹³
 But the *nueva canción* still lives in every *barrio*

I don’t rap just to rap
 It ain’t about how nice I am
 My hip-hop got feelin’
 Do it for a reason
*Como Victor Jara dice*¹⁴

The little houses on the hill tops¹⁵
 They still watch while the poor ignored
 Not much different
 From The Bronx to the hood in Chile
 Where resistance still livin’

Victor Jara had that flow
 I’m just following the footsteps

¹² “Te Recuerdo Amanda” is love song by Jara about a working-class couple who works in a factory in precarious conditions.

¹³ Disappeared and tortured in the stadium.

¹⁴ Like Victor Jara says.

¹⁵ A popular song by Jara, “Las Casitas del Barrio Alto,” inspired by Little Houses, written by Malvina Reynolds in 1962 and popularized by Pete Seegar in 1968.



Of those that came befo' yo

This song brings together various themes that are relevant to revolutionary post-memory. First, it makes connections between neoliberalism in Chile and the Bronx by stating that they are “not much different.” Their words echo those of Toro who made a similar connection when he first arrived at the Bronx. Moreover, Rebel Diaz highlights the history of the Allende era by illustrating how it was a broad-based movement rooted in “people power,” and building people power is central to Rebel Diaz’s politics today. The song also names the US role in the coup by calling it the “first 9/11,” a detail that many US-based people can relate to, and uses that to situate the US role in one of the biggest atrocities in Chilean history. They make clear US hypocrisy by calling out the CIA and its support for the Chilean upper classes against the Allende government, putting the coup in its proper counterrevolutionary context. Moreover, RodStarz and G1 gesture toward the ways that people had a better quality of life or, more specifically, food, under Allende, and how the coup’s goal was to restore the previous class order. Another important theme is the defiant resilience of Allende-era culture and politics. Here Rebel Diaz references the legend of how Jara was tortured by military officers who allegedly smashed Jara’s hands and mocked him after, telling him to play guitar. According to the legend, Jara responded by singing the protest song, “Venceremos,” written for Allende’s presidential campaign by *nueva canción* group Inti Illimani. What matters is not how true or untrue this story is but rather, why it circulates. The legend is invoked by Rebel Diaz to emphasize how resilient Allende-era politics are, to argue that they cannot be easily repressed out of existence. Finally, RodStarz and G1 explicitly state how they view hip-hop and the *nueva canción* as having similar political purposes, and that through their hip-hop Rebel Diaz situates themselves as a part of Jara’s legacy and political genealogy.

Through the various themes in this song, Rebel Diaz uses hip-hop to reproduce their revolutionary postmemory on a consistent basis and share it with other racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups. In this way, Rebel Diaz’s music is not unlike Operación Verdad, when *nueva canción* musicians traveled around the world explaining Allende’s socialism in Chile in the face of political repression meant to discredit these politics. Not only do they tell the story, but they situate themselves firmly within it. Rebel Diaz’s close identification with Jara and the Allende era gestures to the ways that they were deeply influenced by the organizing of first-generation Chilean exiles who refused to allow that legacy and the lessons of the Allende era to die.

Revolutionary postmemory and its future uses

Much analysis has been dedicated to how Chileans suffered detention, torture, and exile, but not enough has been paid to how their politics survived even this most inhumane repression. In this essay I have focused on the revolutionary postmemory of second-generation Chilean exiles by looking specifically at Rebel Diaz. The concept of revolutionary postmemory can also be applied beyond Chileans to discuss any context in which US intervention or war is motivated by the desire to repress labor, social, or guerrilla movements. Revolutionary postmemory can be a way to



consider how the children of those who lived through US militarism remember liberation movements in the diaspora or even within the country itself. Finally, this article is my love letter to the resistance and resilience of *el pueblo chileno* in exile.

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