

RESISTING RECONCILIATION: CRITICAL MELANCHOLIA AND COLLECTIVE *RESENTIMIENTO* IN PEDRO LEMEBEL'S *DE PERLAS Y CICATRICES*

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During the nineteenth century, the *crónica urbana* emerged as a way to describe city life and urban planning, becoming “una instancia ordenadora que narrativiza un entorno en proceso de profunda transformación” (De los Ríos 129). Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel appropriates the *crónica urbana* to destabilize its normativizing and hegemonizing scheme as he speaks from Santiago’s periphery as a subject of multiple marginalized identities: communist, homosexual, indigenous, and lower class.¹ Appropriating a genre that served as a tool of colonial invasion, establishment, and power written from the city center, Lemebel represents the city’s margins as contested spaces where various memories—individual and collective, official and nonofficial—converge and detour. As a result, Lemebel’s *crónicas* reflect on the lingering effects of the Chilean dictatorship from a variety of perspectives that remembers and recognizes gaps in official history.² The collection *De perlas y cicatrices*, published in 1998, reproduces *crónicas radiales* in print that Lemebel originally read with selected music, often *boleros*, playing in the background on the radio program “Cancionero,” broadcast by the feminist station Radio Tierra.³ Replete with references to Chilean popular music and culture, the compilation focuses on practices and processes of loss and violence under the dictatorship and their traces into transitional and post-transitional Chile. In these *crónicas*, Lemebel condemns the possible ruination of memory as purported by official government and media discourses. Beyond politically motivated violence, he protests other types of aggression towards women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities and other marginalized subjects by rescuing their otherwise

¹Lemebel passed away in January 2015, after I wrote a preliminary version of this essay. Lemebel’s experience of cancer adds another facet to his list of marginalized identities.

²Lemebel has published the following books of *crónicas*: *La esquina es mi corazón* (1995), *Loco afán* (1996), *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998), *Zanjón de la Aguada* (2003), *Adiós mariquita linda* (2004), *Serenata Cafiola* (2008), *Háblame de amores* (2012), and the anthology *Poco hombre* (2013).

³For a selection of *crónicas* from this program, visit <http://www.radiotierra.info/?q=taxonomy/term/89>. For more on Radio Tierra, see Juan Poblete’s monograph “Cultura, neoliberalismo y comunicación ciudadana: el caso de Radio Tierra en Chile” in *Cultura y neoliberalismo*. Although the original format of these *crónicas* is oral, I refer to them throughout the essay as written work since I analyze individual pieces from the written compilation and reorganization of the *crónicas*. Furthermore, at times I refer to Lemebel as both author and first-person narrator since he assumes the speaking position of the narrative voice on radio.

silenced voices. Specifically, melancholia and resentment become critical lenses with which to contemplate and remember the struggle of marginalized subjects in Chile's dictatorial past and post-dictatorial present. This essay will look at how two *crónicas* from *De perlas y cicatrices* employ the moral emotion of resentment to resist the closure and amnesia that official versions of history and discourses of reconciliation might desire. In particular, drawing on Jean Améry's essay "Resentments," I argue that collective resentment, or *resentimiento*, emerges in Lemebel's *crónicas* as a tool of memory.⁴ In this way, the *crónicas* work much like counter-monuments—such as Londres 38 or the Memorial de Paine—to stubbornly interrupt the present and reinstall disturbing memories in the country's current landscape, keeping the past open and joining the fight for justice in the face of human rights abuses. The collective resentment in *De perlas* thus captures the collection's two registers, "la denuncia y el testimonio," which serve "para saldar las cuentas pendientes, para rendir homenajes o para simplemente recordar" (Poblete 293). As part of the *crónicas*' testimonial register, then, resentment may seek to accuse while it also may only want to remember.

Articles on *De perlas y cicatrices* have highlighted the collection's relationship with music and memory as well as its portrayal of Chile's marginalized sectors that works against the nationalist intentions of traditional *crónicas* from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ángeles Mateo del Pino addresses all these factors when she writes,

Por tanto, el itinerario que nos marca Pedro Lemebel es más bien un recorrido por el dolor, una incursión por las lastimaduras, con el único objetivo de renovar las llagas de ese pasado-presente que abarca las tres últimas décadas, a costa de que con ello se levanten las costras que algunos se han empeñado en ocultar. Sin duda es una forma diferente de aludir a las señas de identidad chilena [sic]; esa otra chilenidad que no pasa por hacer del cronista un amable "contador de patria." (133)

The most recent work published on *De perlas y cicatrices* approaches the role of media and popular culture in the *crónicas*. The last chapter of Leonidas Morales' *Crítica de la vida cotidiana chilena* (2012) looks at two *crónicas* in particular—"El cura de la tele" and "Don Francisco"—and highlights how the dictatorship's manipulation of television and mass media promoted passive spectatorship and economic and ideological consumption that continue today. In a similar vein, Marta Sierra's monograph "'Tu voz existe': percepción mediática, cultura nacional y transiciones democráticas en Pedro Lemebel" in *Desdén al infortunio: sujeto, comunicación y público en la narrativa de Pedro Lemebel* approaches the tension between memory and media in *De perlas y cicatrices* as one of the paradoxes that the post-dictatorial intellectual has to confront. She describes the *crónicas* as hybrid spaces, since as a genre they are both literary and medial, and as such, are capable of producing language that is critical of modernity (Sierra 130). To conclude, she explains that the *crónicas* alternate between a hopeful message of constructing community and the limits of language to express pain and violence (Sierra 132). Whereas sexuality and gender tend to be the focus of academic analyses of Lemebel's writing and performances, the critical work on *De perlas* does not take up these issues to the same extent because, as Juan Poblete points out, these *crónicas* avoid engaging with the *loca* and homosexuality prevalent in Lemebel's other work (293).

This essay builds on the critical work on *De perlas y cicatrices* by reflecting on the roles of melancholia and resentment in relationship to memory politics in the *crónicas* "Los cinco minutos te hacen florecer" and "El informe Rettig." Although traditionally viewed as a backward-looking, individual emotion, resentment is a potentially collective form of activism

⁴While Améry's essay has inspired philosophical and anthropological revisions of resentment within the fields of Holocaust studies and human rights, it is largely absent from debates on Latin American post-dictatorial societies.

rooted in both melancholia and mourning. Specifically, the two selected *crónicas* provide examples of how resentment may work to keep the past open within the present, as a stubborn stance that opposes moving on and forgetting. In an interview, Lemebel even states “Ponle resentimiento, no me asustan los recuerdos” (“El desliz” 154). As his quote attests, his unabashed resentment hinges on embracing and facing memories. After Lemebel’s death in early 2015, Carlos Peña wrote that the deceased author’s resentment was not “un sentimiento maligno o ilegítimo, sino la fuente de una rebelión intelectual que mostraba, mediante la palabra y a fuerza de imaginación, que la realidad que se tiene ante los ojos a veces no merece ser respetada” (n.p.). He continues to describe how Lemebel’s *crónicas* transformed the marginal neighborhood of Zanjón de la Aguada from “un resumen de miseria” into “una fuente de resentimiento productivo, en un espejo del revés de la modernización” (Peña n.p.).⁵ Similar to Peña’s words, this essay rereads and revalorizes Lemebel’s resentment, which at times may be angry and vengeful, but may also push for recognition of on-going injustice emanating from historical social and class struggles within Chile.

The *crónicas*’s collective resentment is productive, similar to the notion of productive melancholia, which Jonathan Flatley proposes in his work on Baudelaire. According to Flatley, melancholizing is “a practice that might, in fact, produce its own kind of knowledge” (11). In other words, melancholia is potentially a productive and active mode through which to perceive the world and form memories and knowledge, instead of a depressive force that hinders action. Such a melancholic tone, as found in Lemebel’s writing, comes from “a state in which one is exceedingly aware of, angry about, and interested in the losses one has suffered,” leaving the reader “not relieved of grief but aggrieved” (Flatley 15). Under this perspective, then, loss is simultaneously individual and collective. Because of this, melancholia needs to be understood as “a consideration of the vulnerability of others” instead of as a narcissistic or privatizing state of being (Butler 30). Along these lines, I would add that resentment is concerned about loss and recognizes vulnerability.

Flatley’s reconceptualization of melancholia as “the very mechanism through which one may be interested in the world” (10) together with Christian Gundermann’s “melancholic praxis” [*trabajo melancólico*] rethink melancholia’s political value.⁶ Citing Butler, Gundermann critiques the privileging of mourning in memory studies on Argentina’s post-dictatorial society. Examining in particular the melancholic protests of the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and the organization HIJOS, he insists instead on “melancholic praxis” because it involves “una incorporación cruda y física del objeto muerto en vez de una simbolización des-materializada como le corresponde al duelo” (Gundermann 17). Because of this, mourning—specifically in the Southern Cone context—becomes a process that places the past in the museum and leaves it there, whereas melancholia brings up the unresolved past. For Gundermann, mourning accepts loss and as such, may give way to forgiving and forgetting. In Lemebel’s *crónicas*, melancholia, as a collective state, challenges reconciliatory politics that hinge on mourning, similar to how collective resentment stubbornly remembers the past to accuse perpetrators of violence.⁷

⁵Other articles also highlight the resentment in Lemebel’s work, for instance, the article entitled “Un resentido a toda honra” or the gloss on “provocación y resentimiento” on Lemebel’s title page in *memoriachilena.cl*, “Pro-vocación y resentimiento.” These examples, however, seem to allude to the traditional definition of individual resentment, which is present in Lemebel’s writing. Nevertheless, I set out to show that a reconceptualized notion of collective resentment is also present.

⁶I am using Luís Martín-Cabrera’s translation of Gundermann’s term in his book *Radical Justice: Spain and the Southern Cone Beyond Market and State*.

⁷Christian Gundermann’s “trabajo melancólico” is applicable to Lemebel’s writing in that melancholia resists capitalism’s privatization and individualization of memory: “mientras que

Just as melancholia can be rethought in terms of women's collective activism in Gundermann's work, resentment may be reconsidered as a collective emotion. To date there is little work on the notion of collective resentment; Jeffrey Olick discusses "social *ressentiment*," whereas recently in 2013 Katie Stockdale made a case for "collective resentment" in the context of Canadian indigenous politics. She argues that individualistic conceptions of resentment may fail to completely comprehend it in reaction to perceived social and political injustices. While considerable attention has been devoted to theories of mourning and melancholia in trauma and memory studies, resentment is often missing from these debates. However, Olick considers *ressentiment* as the complimentary social and political process of cultural history's trauma. Whereas trauma is inner-directed, *ressentiment* is "an outer-directed manifestation of the same basic condition" (Olick 155). Again, this view highlights the social aspect of *ressentiment*, complementary to my proposal of collective resentment. Given the relationship that Olick delineates between *ressentiment* and cultural trauma, collective resentment may simultaneously act out and work through trauma, as to be seen in examples from Lemebel's *crónicas*. In Chile, then, collective resentment attempts to process national trauma that implicates and affects various subjects. This present essay confirms the need to rethink, rather than dismiss, melancholia and resentment as critically active and collective forces in post-dictatorial Chile that take an ethical stance in the face of potential oblivion. This move, in the end, works to undo the privileging of future-oriented narratives that may close off memory work, and reveals the underlying politics of naturalized associations of immobility with melancholia and of revenge with resentment.

In the case of Chile, class, political, racial and sexual struggles have dotted the social landscape since before the dictatorship and continue today. Because of the social nature of these struggles that Lemebel hones in on, I turn to *resentimiento*, instead of resentment, given the social connotations of the Spanish term. Whereas *resentimiento* includes negative implications related to an individual's hostile response, as resentment in English, it also conjures up associations of deep feelings beyond rage or vengeance. The difference between the verbs *resentir* and *resentir* illustrates this point more clearly since to *resentir* in English has only one common usage whereas *resentir* includes a range of emotions.⁸ According to the *RAE*, 14th ed., *resentir* has three definitions: "1) empezar a flaquear (debilitarse); 2) tener sentimiento, pesar o enojo por algo; 3) sentir dolor o molestia en alguna parte del cuerpo, a causas de alguna enfermedad o dolencia pasada." The first—to weaken—implies a state of vulnerability, yet it is precisely the lack of recognition of vulnerability that leads to other types of *resentimiento*: of pain and of anger. The body, too, is a repository of these emotions and traumas. Finally, all three meanings—weakness, pain, and anger—are related to vulnerability and as such, create empathic connections and communities.⁹ Because of this, collective *resentimiento* is a more convincing concept than collective resentment.

This reconsideration of resentment as a collective emotion leads to a pluralization of resentment, as evoked in Jean Améry's essay "Resentments." As a Holocaust survivor, Améry sets out to explain, understand, and justify his resentment—his "retrospective grudge"—towards former Nazis who imprisoned and tortured him in concentration camps (63).¹⁰ Similar to

con el híbrido 'trabajo melancólico' trato de demostrar [...] las transformaciones que se dan en la reconfiguración del imaginario cultural, sin que éstas sean fácilmente asimilables a la demanda neoliberal" (22).

⁸Although the English and Spanish terms have common etymological origins—from the French *ressentir*—their modern usages have diverged.

⁹This essay's use of the term "resentment" follows the Spanish *resentimiento*'s definitions.

¹⁰Interestingly, Améry's essays in *At the Mind's Limits* were originally presented over the

Améry's defense of his own resentments, Lemebel's *crónicas* employ resentment to resist both reconciliation and the naturalized association of healing with the linear progression of time. Lemebel's writing summons this notion of resentment to articulate a collective response originating from a politically active state of melancholia and furthers the defense of memory in the face of calls to either oblivion and/or to "moving on." Parallel to Gundermann's notion of melancholia, the argument against reconciliation and forgiveness claims that the past has not been dealt with, that criminals remain unpunished, and that the act of "moving on" officially closes the past. Resentment contains a moral component that requires more consideration than simply claiming it is a hindrance to the traditionally "healthier" action of forgiveness.¹¹ In some instances, resentment has been overcome prematurely because of the cultural, moral, and social privileging of forgiveness and amnesty. Améry acknowledges and accepts the medical and moral negative interpretations of resentment and defends instead the call for justice behind his resentment. It becomes more than a political move of "nunca más": "But my resentments are there in order that the crime become a moral reality for the criminal, in order that he be swept into the truth of his atrocity" (Améry 70). By forcing the criminal to go back in time and wish for the reversal of time, for the undoing of the atrocity, he/she recognizes the crime, recovers humanity, and becomes a fellow human with the victim.¹² Améry's vindication of resentment rejects the naturalized progression of linear time that privileges the future of the past in the healing process.¹³ Staunchly opposed to reconciliation because this would imply complicity, Améry insists instead that both victim and perpetrator demand time be undone so as to reencounter a prior moment in which both morally recognize their humanity. Here, non-linearity and empathy are essential components of his resentments, which ultimately lead to a notion of community. Similar to Butler's work on vulnerability in *Precarious Life*, the victim and the perpetrator are united by their mutual vulnerability, in their exposure (through the body) to loss. As a result of this recognition, some bodies are no longer categorized as more vulnerable, grievable, or loss-worthy than others. Paradoxically, although capitalist logic scorns loss and privileges accumulation, the ability to lose and to express loss determines a subject's value.¹⁴

radio, similar to the radio origins of Lemebel's *crónicas*.

¹¹Thomas Brudholm acknowledges the dangers of resentment but explains the importance of re-reading of Améry's resentments when he writes, "I do not deny the possibility that the refusal to forgive and reconcile and the preservation of anger and outrage *can* be pathological and morally unjustifiable. People sometimes are consumed by anger, and anger sometimes leads to dehumanizing and heinous acts of excessive revenge. Equally real is the dwelling on or wallowing in litanies of suffering [...]. The point is simply that the negative aspects of anger and resentment are already much referred to and already well known. Similarly, the rhetorical attention to excess and pathology has overshadowed the fact that negative emotions are not only understandable in the aftermath of mass atrocity but they also possess a moral component that is often ignored by the boosters of reconciliation" (3).

¹²Allison Landsberg's definition of empathy rejects such an appropriation of another's experience when she writes that "empathy recognizes the alterity of identification. Empathy, then, is about the lack of identity between subjects, about negotiating distances. Empathy, especially as it is constructed out of mimesis, is not emotional self-pitying identification with victims, but a way of both feeling for, while feeling different from, the subject of inquiry" (82).

¹³In a way, he urges for a queer sense of time when he states that "Man has the right and privilege to declare himself to be in disagreement with every natural occurrence, including the biological healing that time brings about" (Améry 72).

¹⁴Butler's work resonates in Antonio Viego's proposal in *Dead Subjects*. Through Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, Viego suggests that Latino subjects are seen as "dead subjects" because they are presented as fully contained within language. As such, they are denied

Stubborn memory interruptions: “Los cinco minutos te hacen florecer”

The epigraph to the section entitled “‘Sufro al pensar’” of *De perlas y cicatrices* comes from the poem “Cadáveres” by Argentine writer Néstor Perlongher. Each *crónica* in this section uncovers bodies that were discarded by the Chilean dictatorship, confirming and extending Perlongher’s haunting repetition that there are corpses beneath anything and everything. This section’s second *crónica*, “Los cinco minutos te hacen florecer,” unburies bodies through the act of remembering as the narrator recalls September 12, 1973, the day after the Chilean military coup.¹⁵ The *crónica*’s play with time—by looking back at September 12, 1973 from the transitional 1990s, and within the *crónica* by referring to a singer who died 3 days later—reflects the non-linear processes of memory and resentment that undo logical and naturalized progressions of time, as put forth by Améry. The melancholic use of popular culture opens up alternative trajectories of memory as well; by not directly naming the singer, Víctor Jara’s ghostly presence haunts the text and the reader. Moreover, the song’s title itself evokes the act of remembering through the verb “recuerdo” and through a fragment of the song that remains in the minds of those who lived through 1973.

In the same way that Lemebel rescues the human body’s vulnerability, he also makes the city of Santiago vulnerable by giving it a body and humanizing it. The *crónica* begins with a personification of the city, “ese Santiago despertando de un mal sueño, una pesadilla sonámbula,” which consequently makes it as vulnerable to the military attacks as its inhabitants (Lemebel 86). The city’s nightmare also suggests that the city is equally affected as the inhabitants, making it emotionally capable of resentment as well. At the same time, “ese” emphasizes both physical and temporal distance, further designating it as “other.” This phrase equates the dictatorship with a bad dream, ironically commenting on the fact that the dictatorship was indeed real while also recognizing the same language that describes that period as an “exception” in Chilean history. In both details—the use of “ese” and “mal sueño”—the city becomes an other, either to be eradicated or recognized as such. Similarly, resentment can spark revenge or hatred, but it can also engender empathy.

Shortly thereafter in this *crónica*, the narrator maps a different vision of the city as he sheds light on a marginal sector of Santiago near the *Panamericana* highway, effectively highlighting persisting socio-economic inequalities and injustices in post-dictatorial Chile and thereby disproving the theory of exception. At the same time, this distance between today and then allows for irony: “Allí, justo donde hoy se levanta una bomba de bencina y una joven Villa para empleados públicos, entonces hediondeaba a perro podrido la mañana del basural llamado El Hoyo, una cantera profunda donde sacaban ripio y arena, el botadero en que los camiones municipales descargaban la podredumbre de la ciudad” (Lemebel 86). What is today a gas station was yesterday a trash dump, a putrid pit in the ground full of the city’s waste, similar to a toilet. Furthermore, the dump is called “El Hoyo,” which in Chilean slang refers to the anus, yet serves to don the city with body parts. This visual and verbal image of the hole equates rotting rubbish and toxic excrement with a marginalized sector of Santiago and its inhabitants. Revealed later in the *crónica*, this hole is also the dumping ground for dictatorial remains, the bodies of victims killed by the authoritarian regime. Although the cadavers are equated with trash, this same discarded excess contributes to construct an identity. Paradoxically, waste—tossed aside

the loss experienced through language as an inadequate expression of desire. This same “loss of loss” echoes Butler’s contemplations on the public disavowal of grief, loss, and death.

¹⁵The title borrows lyrics from Víctor Jara’s song “Te recuerdo Amanda,” an appropriation of a singer who has become a symbol of the military regime’s violence against its citizens. A public supporter of Salvador Allende, Jara was detained and taken to the Estadio Nacional where he was tortured and then killed on September 15.

because it is no longer needed—defines what one has and who one is, as a literal and metaphorical component of capitalist logic. The *crónica* occupies the pejorative label of debris to simultaneously demonstrate the dictatorship's justification of violence and to reclaim discarded human remains. Due to this rhetorical move, the disappeared, discarded citizens become essential to Chilean identity and memory.

Likewise, this description could be read as a celebration of Chile's progress, along official accounts of transformation and advancement. Yet the *crónica* undoes Chile's (self-)promotion as an economic model by literally and figuratively pointing to debris and trash to highlight a different version of the city that lies beneath. "Podredumbre," then, describes both the decaying bodies and the officials' corruption that covered them up literally and metaphorically. The neo-liberal economic model of Latin America is built at the expense of certain subjects, literally, on top of bodies that have been rendered invisible by modernization; they are not recognized nor are they publicly grievable, and as such, they are denied the capacity to be considered a loss. Notably, the symbol used in the *crónica* to represent economic order and progress is a gas station, a "non-place" according to Marc Augé's work, where individuals pass through without creating community or memory. However, by remembering what is beneath the gas station, the *crónica* rescues the social aspect of the place along with its history as expressed in Augé's claim that "[t]he possibility of non-place is never absent from any place" (107). The place (trash dump) and non-place (gas station) are thus intertwined as the city regards the dictatorship as another bad dream, leaving the cityscape in a stupor and threatening to erase memories tied to places. The comparison of the city to a drowsy dreamer ironically highlights the denial of the dictatorship's violence. In other words, the dictatorship doesn't seem *real* in this metaphor, yet the narrator's vivid memory materializes the violence that underlies the city's shiny surface. The *crónica* performs the same gesture that it describes as it searches for something of value among the waste of the coup and ultimately finds corpses in the dump. Ironically, the writing simultaneously brings the bodies back to life and reburies them under layers of detail. The *crónica*'s visual animation of corpses juxtaposed with the harsh immobility of death exacerbates the loss that the narrator recalls and confronts the reader with tragedy, visibly and affectively interrupting the present. This stubborn melancholia, akin to resentment, thus becomes a source of collective political resistance, as the narrator grieves and is aggrieved by what he recalls.

As the narrator recalls playing with other neighborhood children in the piles of trash, the body's vulnerability (present in both the children and the corpses) creates a possible collective politics by unsettling audience members to recognize injustice. The children's bodies, representing the beginning of life and curiosity, are juxtaposed with the inanimate bodies murdered by the dictatorship. Innocence is violated, as marginalized children (growing up in a lower class neighborhood) are exposed to violence from the start. This violence, however, does not stop: it will follow them into adulthood as part of class struggles at the root of the coup. Following Butler's premise, the cadavers are deemed "less worthy" of grief because their deaths were justified by state discourse that labeled them as delinquents. The narrator resists this, however, when he says, "Para mí, algo de esa sospecha no correspondía, no encajaba el adjetivo delictual... Tal vez, abuelos, tíos, padres, mecánicos, electricistas, panaderos, jardineros, obreros sindicales" (Lemebel 87). Official labels do not correspond with reality and the narrator feels out-of-place. He proceeds to imagine who these men would have been and how their deaths would have affected their families. He does not buy the official explanations for murder and resists the corpses' classification as "less worthy" by humanizing them through their social vulnerability as working class men identified as threats and subsequently eradicated. Because of this, the *crónica* remembers Chile's history of class struggles that continue in the post-dictatorial era, using collective resentment to highlight similar social abuses that have traversed history.

The *crónica* concludes with a reflection 25 years after the date, underlining the traumatic memory that haunts the writer, reappearing in vivid flashbacks similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. The nightmare of the dictatorship continues to haunt the narrator at the end of the *crónica* as it haunts the city at the beginning. However, these traumatic images have become familiar to the narrator after their incessant repetition, and he begins to live with the ghostly remainders of the bodies. In this way, the stubborn, resentful tone of the *crónica* mirrors the stubborn memories that won't disappear. The *crónica* thus ends with an oxymoronic "amargo florecer":

Han pasado veinticinco años desde aquella mañana, y aún el mismo escalofrío estremece la evocación de esas bocas torcidas, llenas de moscas, de esos pies sin zapatos, con los calcetines zurcidos, rotos, por donde asomaban sus dedos fríos, hinchados, tumefactos. La imagen vuelve a repetirse a través del tiempo, me acompaña desde entonces como «perro que no me deja ni se calla». A la larga se me ha hecho familiar recordar el tacto visual de la felpa helada de su mortaja basurera. Casi podría decir que desde aquel fétido eriazó de mi niñez, sus manos crispadas me saludan con el puño en alto, bajo la luna de negro nácar donde porfiadamente brota su amargo florecer. (Lemebel 87)

This passage's sensorial juxtapositions and oxymoronic images highlight the contradictions of violence, echoing the compilation's title, *De perlas y cicatrices*. References juxtaposing emptiness and excess challenge the traditional association of life with abundance and death with lack, as swarming flies fill the mouths of corpses and the cold swollen toes of the dead bodies burst through torn socks. These fragmentary images and sensations of touch (el escalofrío, los dedos fríos, la felpa helada) along with smells of trash and death (fétido eriazó) compose what the passage calls the "tacto visual" of memory. This embodied, haptic memory becomes a site of resentment as the bodies are remembered with "el puño en alto," a symbol of solidarity and resistance used in Allende's Unidad Popular propaganda.¹⁶ The corpses lie beneath superficial adornments of official discourse that attempt to hide them, and instead emerge *porfiadamente*, stubbornly, in the darkness, reminding the reader of Perlongher's refrain, "hay cadáveres." Again, repetition of details, much like Perlongher's haunting repetition "hay cadáveres," serve as a reminder of the traumatic effects of the dictatorial nightmare that continues to resurface time and again. This repetition, part of acting out trauma, serves as a witness and reenactment of the dead's resentment.

Marta Sierra writes, "Lemebel resacraliza los espacios desacralizados por el capitalismo neoliberal al tiempo que toma los actores y lugares de estos espacios e intenta introducirlos en una economía de valor al recuperarlos como valores estéticos y literarios" (110). In this sense, the *crónica* re-signifies the discards of dictatorial society by reconfiguring them into a piece of literary and popular art. A pearl is formed in a similar way: when a grain of sand, for instance, enters an oyster's shell, layers of nacre cover the intruder in order to protect the oyster and a pearl is formed. Within the oyster, then, debris becomes a thing of beauty. When a potential threat is identified, it can be banished (leaving a scar) but it can also be incorporated into the body (creating a pearl). Metaphorically, this *crónica* repeats the same action in its construction and description. Moreover, one could equate the two figures – pearls and scars – with both mourning and melancholia, the first of which replaces the lost object and keeps it at a distance while the second incorporates the lost object. Effectively, Lemebel blurs the division between these two terms by connecting them with *and* instead of *or*.

¹⁶The raised fist has been used as a symbol, logo, or salute by various collective moments and groups to represent similar ideas. Most notably, perhaps, from the 21st century, is the Black Power fist.

Lemebel writes from and of the trash, converting the “tres cadáveres en el rastrojo de los desperdicios” into bodies of valuable vulnerability (87). This *crónica* is peppered with adjectives of jewels: “peinetas de esmeraldas sin dientes” (Lemebel 86), “carne azulada, perlada de garúa con la gasa húmeda del amanecer,” “su cráneo abierto, como un manojo de rubíes coagulados por el sol,” and “bajo la luna de negro nácar” (Lemebel 87). These images emphasize the inseparable juxtaposition of debris and death with treasure. The bodies in the *crónicas* also extend their metonymic presence to political and social relations, as overly-adorned bodies, reminiscent of the baroque, which remind readers of the neo-liberal market’s oversaturation of goods and commodities, while the Chilean political, social, and cultural landscape is simultaneously constructed atop those bodies mutilated by political and social violence (Sierra 132). Here, too, the metaphor of the city of Santiago likened to a body in Lemebel’s *crónicas* resounds in the relationship between pearls and scars. The narrator gazes at and presents Santiago like a body, shedding light on that which is invisible to the body, both above and beneath its surface. As Marta Sierra explains, the title expresses the collection’s aesthetics: “Lemebel se acerca al discurso de las ‘perlas’ con un lenguaje atiborrado que busca saturar los referentes y que es interrumpido por la lógica del duelo, las cicatrices abiertas en la memoria que interrumpen el continuo estético y vuelven compleja la escritura de la crónica” (110). Lemebel’s resentful tone thus disrupts and opens up the accumulation of symbolic accessories through the body’s exposed nakedness and vulnerability.

Rethinking reconciliation, resentment and resistance: “El informe Rettig”

Reconciliation has been ethically and psychologically privileged, yet often attempts to reconcile the nation through publications of testimonies prove insufficient. Related to this, Didier Fassin challenges the privileging of empathy in truth and reconciliation commissions in post-atrocity societies. He explains, for instance, that Améry’s use of *ressentiment* is “a counterpoint to the consensual valuation of empathy and pardon as personal virtues” as well as “an antithesis to the contemporary politics of amnesty and atonement as universal paradigms” (Fassin 251). Both Fassin’s claim and Gundermann’s previously-mentioned critique of mourning offer a more nuanced view of resentment and melancholia to break down the Manichean tendency that characterizes them as negative forces in complete opposition to forgiveness. By working out alternative interpretations of melancholia and resentment, Fassin and Gunderrman also open up the terms to gray areas that are not fundamentally separate from mourning or empathy.

In Chile, The National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report, otherwise known as *El informe Rettig*, fails to account for many of the dictatorship’s atrocities.¹⁷ Lemebel’s *crónica* “El informe Rettig (o ‘recado de amor al oído insobornable de la memoria’),” concluding the section “‘Sufro al pensar,’” criticizes the gaps in official accounts and the lack of answers from authorities. The *crónica*’s use of the testimonial genre resists attempts at reconciliation and instead employs collective resentment and melancholia to remember the systemic abuses of the dictatorship and the disappeared family members of the women who survive and continue to search for their loved ones. Assuming the position of “estas viejas” and narrating from the collective “nosotras,” the narrative voice attacks authorities through irony and imagination from the beginning of the *crónica* through the “as if” clause: “como si no supieran el

¹⁷For more, Walescka Pino-Ojeda presents an excellent summary of the issues surrounding the *Informe Rettig* and the *Informe Valech* during the Chilean transition to democracy in her book *Noche y niebla: neoliberalismo, memoria y trauma en el Chile postautoritario*.

sitio exacto donde los hicieron desaparecer” (Lemebel 102).¹⁸ With the officials’ constant refusal to give information, “nunca revelarían el secreto. Nunca dirían en qué lugar de la pampa, en qué pliegue de la cordillera, en qué oleaje verde extraviaron sus pálidos huesos,” the women respond with equally repetitive reenactments of the disappeared (Lemebel 102). Although the bodies are not recovered, the *crónica* assures that the women’s search continues. In this way, the women who search for the disappeared simultaneously resist their own disappearance from history and the public sphere as marginalized subjects. This *crónica* also rewrites the national landscape through geography of death, disappearance, and violence. Instead of being hallmarks of national unity, the desert, mountains and sea conjure up pain and division within the country. At the same time, however, the trauma of dictatorship forms collective and national memory, and potentially, collective resentment.

As previously proposed, resentment can be a collective moral emotion because it originates from relationships and reactions to other human beings. Even the traditional, individualistic interpretation of resentment indicates a relationship with others. As Brudholm explains, “resentment is not simply about injuries to oneself; the resentful person is not necessarily self-preoccupied. Resentment is an accruing anger that responds to threats or perceived violations of norms. A person showing resentment not only expresses an inner turmoil but also invites a response” (10). Resentment is a reaction that demands action; it is dialogic, in Bakhtinian fashion. Following this, if a loss affects a community as a collective entity, the group can feel resentment and be aggrieved. For Stockdale, “in collective resentment the resentment belongs to the *group*, not merely the individuals that constitute it [...]. In collective resentment, the reasons for resentment are reasons for a *collective*, not an individual victim of mistreatment” (507). In Chile, the trauma of dictatorship affected individuals but it also targeted specific groups and marked national history and memory indelibly. As a result, victims included individuals, groups and society, provoking collective resentments.

In this sense, the collective “nosotras” that narrates “El informe Rettig” reflects the gendered, political impetus behind resentment and melancholia. By using the same title as the official, public male-authored document, the oral *crónica* challenges language’s naming capabilities and the government’s sense of justice by pointing out the commission’s discrepancies. Subsequently, melancholia, which continually obsesses over loss, becomes a political tool and an esthetic lens for conceiving justice. An analogous type of resentment further allows Lemebel to inhabit dictatorial ruins in his claim for recognition of persisting wounds. Resentment is both political and affective; it is stubbornly sustained to reformulate memory and to redefine places and histories.

Similar to the previous *crónica* discussed, “El informe Rettig” repetitively reconstructs the bodies of the disappeared as a way to act out trauma. The women’s grief creates a politics of empathy and the cadavers become a site of vulnerability. The collective voice describes the bodies of the disappeared as the reason for the women’s search: “Tuvimos que cogerlos de sus *manos crispadas* y apachugar con su *frágil carga* [...]. No podíamos dejarlos *descalzos*, con ese frío, a toda intemperie bajo la lluvia *tiritando*. No podíamos dejarlos *solos*, tan *muertos* en esa tierra de nadie, en ese pedral baldío, *destrozados* bajo la tierra de esa ninguna parte. No podíamos dejarlos *detenidos, amarrados*” (Lemebel 102, my emphasis). The bodies reappear, fragile, vulnerable, and unprotected, because the women carry them. Paradoxically, the bodies lose their presence due to their unknown location yet this very loss grants the families’ rights to justice and grief. Despite this, the women in this *crónica* have lost their right to loss, which is the

¹⁸Following Lemebel’s continual play with gender identities, another interpretation of the narrative voice as “nosotras” is not limited to just the female family members of the disappeared, but includes other victims of violence, such as *locas* or other queer and/or marginalized subjectivities.

foundation of human subjectivity. Their losses are not acknowledged and are instead explained away with vague answers such as “Deben estar fuera del país, se arrancaron con otros terroristas” (Lemebel 102). Such explanations further exclude the disappeared from national imagery. The women’s losses are doubled, as they cannot fully or publicly express the loss through language, nor can they express their loss of loss, for which they turn to resentment and melancholia as the embodied affects of stubborn memories.

After explaining how time and again they have been turned away from the government officials when inquiring about the disappeared, the women refer to their resistance to depression: “Por eso, para que la ola turbia de la depresión no nos hiciera desertar, tuvimos que sobrevivir llevando de la mano a nuestros Juanes, Marías, Anselmos, Cármenes, Luchos y Rosas” (Lemebel 102).¹⁹ The plural use of proper names equates the disappeared with other humans and grants them an “everymanness,” highlighting the fact that they are anybody and everybody. The list of names further alludes to the paradox of simultaneously knowing the specific names and identities of the disappeared and not knowing their whereabouts. The women live intimately with ghosts, here named in plural, alternating between men’s and women’s names, connecting collective and individual memories and blurring the lines between gender distinctions. The power of language to name, traditionally associated with patriarchal hegemony, is challenged here through the names of missing individuals. The vivid repetition and imagining of lost objects/subjects becomes a mode of melancholic resistance and resentment. Similar to the photos of the disappeared that become metonymic icons through repetitive display, the *crónica* also employs repetition to conjure a similar litany of both pearls and scars, as the title suggests.

Like the bodies in “Los cinco minutos te hacen florecer,” the ghosts of the disappeared are resentful in “El informe Rettig.” The women’s voices visualize the interrupted speech of the disappeared, questioning the resentful perpetrator: “Con sus bellas bocas abiertas en una pregunta sorda, en una pregunta clavada en el verdugo que apunta” (Lemebel 102). Because of this violent silencing, the perpetrators still need to be accused and named. The ghosts of the dead reappear in the houses of their families to eat, dance, and laugh, but they also “apuntan a los culpables cuando aparecen en la pantalla hablando de amnistía y reconciliación” (Lemebel 103). The verb “apuntar” thus changes meaning and subject: in the first scene the victim is unable to speak under the gun of the official and now in the second scene the ghosts are able to accuse their murderers who are complicit with the transitional push for reconciliation. The disappeared’s “pregunta sorda” is juxtaposed with the guilty assassins’ public speeches of amnesty on the TV. Furthermore, these two quotes reveal two types of resentment, first the *verdugo*’s individual vindication that kills and then the ghosts’ collective resentment that denounces complicity and violence. Like Améry, the narrative *nosotras* resists the notion of closure over time by inhabiting the unknown and demanding recognition of vulnerability by maintaining both their resentful attitudes and the disappeared’s.

In both *crónicas* analyzed in this essay, Lemebel’s voice speaks for others’ experiences. As part of the testimonial register, the narrative voice in “Los cinco minutos te hacen florecer” recalls and witnesses the class-based violence of the coup in 1973, whereas the collective voice of “El informe Rettig” denounces on-going injustice through memories of the disappeared in the transitional years following the dictatorship. Because Lemebel originally read the texts on the radio, his voice implies movement of the narrator’s position, which requires bodily imagination. Butler describes this phenomenon when she revisits the term “ec-static,” literally meaning “to be outside oneself” (24). The ec-static states of being that emanate from rage or grief recognize vulnerability, allowing one to perceive the other as other and the self as other. Lemebel’s writing further works to move the audience by aligning the narrator’s position with that of others. At the

¹⁹Another possible reading suggests that these names do not necessarily refer to strictly biological males or females.

same time, the narrators in both *crónicas*, occupying collective voices of *testimonio*, make an ec-static move to give witness to the dictatorship's violence. The *crónicas* employ resentment from individual and collective perspectives to grieve collective wounds.

Resentment, rage, and grief can work hand-in-hand to transport, move, or unsettle one to be beside oneself, a position that recognizes a relationship with others. More than resentment, the Spanish term *resentimiento* implies a connection with others, opening it up to collective political action. Lemebel draws attention to multiple resentments, as possible collective affects that keep the past open and wounds fresh. Although Lemebel's *crónicas* may disturb or unsettle readers owing to extensive details describing loss and abandonment, their resentful tone may engender recognition of others, similar to how *resentimiento* and melancholia, as collective emotions, generate empathy towards traumatic memory. *De perlas y cicatrices* thus transports readers to a place outside themselves, in an ec-static fashion, that they may recognize both individual and collective memories, traumas and vulnerabilities.

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