

# How Transitional Justice Processes and Official Apologies Influence Reconciliation: The Case of the Chilean ‘Truth and Reconciliation’ and ‘Political Imprisonment and Torture’ Commissions

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## ABSTRACT

Perceptions of the ‘Truth and Reconciliation’ and ‘Political Imprisonment and Torture’ commissions and related beliefs, emotions and socio-emotional climate were analysed in people affected and unaffected by past political violence in Chile ( $N = 1278$ ). People directly affected regard institutional apologies as less sincere and effective, and they were more critical of the commissions. Those who have a positive appraisal of the commissions, compared with people who disagree with the commissions activities, are less prone to forget past collective violence; report higher levels of negative emotions, such as shame, and positive ones, such as pride and hope, about the collective past; and consider that the commissions contributed to knowing the truth about what happened to victims and helped bring human rights violators to justice. Those appraising the commissions in a positive fashion also perceive a more positive emotional climate and inter-group trust, have more confidence in institutions and report more universalistic values. A multiple-regression analysis suggests that commissions play a relatively successful role as transitional justice rituals, reinforcing reconciliation. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

*Key words:* Truth and Reconciliation Commission; political attitudes; social sharing; emotional climate; reconciliation

## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th century, several Latin American countries were governed by military dictatorships. These dictatorships were responsible for crimes against humanity and

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endless atrocities committed against civilian populations. In Chile, the military coup of Augusto Pinochet violently overthrew the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende. During its 17 years in power, the dictatorship closed down the representative democratic institutions of the Republic, violated the population's constitutional guarantees and the human rights of thousands of civilian victims, contributed to the destruction of social ties and installed fear as the dominant emotion (Lira, 1991).

Traumatic events, and in particular collective violence, have long-term effects on political attitudes (Laufer & Solomon, 2011), personal emotions (Punamaki, 2011), social beliefs (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and the orientation of collective emotional or emotional climate (Bar-Tal, Halperin & de Rivera, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007). Thus, a powerful emotional climate of sadness, fear and anxiety persisted in Chile for many years after general Augusto Pinochet seized power in 1973 (De Rivera, 1992). People were afraid because everyone knew it would be dangerous to express certain things in public. Even people with right-wing 'politically acceptable' attitudes knew they had to be cautious because the police sometimes made 'mistakes'. This atmosphere strongly affected emotional relationships in the country. People could not speak about their relatives who had disappeared or publicly state their political opinions. The ubiquitous fear resulted in social isolation. It prevented people from knowing the state of mind of those around them and precluded organizing political opposition against the regime. This negative emotional climate prevailed until the end of the dictatorship (De Rivera & Páez, 2007), and the negative effects are still apparent today, as people affected by the repression still perceive a less positive emotional climate more than 20 years after the fall of Pinochet (Cárdenas M., Páez, Rimé, Bilbao and Asún, 2014). The aim of truth commissions (TCs) and official apologies is to overcome the negative impact of past collective violence, promoting inter-group empathy, trust and forgiveness, and reinforcing instrumental and socio-emotional reconciliation (Blatz, Schuman & Ross, 2012; Cehajic, Brown & Castano, 2008; Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008). The present study sets out to examine associations between social beliefs, attitudes and emotions and people's attitudes toward reparative transitional justice activities related to the repression inflicted by the 1973–1989 military dictatorship in Chile.

Truth commissions have been set up in many countries in order to address human rights violations by dictatorship regimes or those resulting from internal armed conflict. Since the 1970s, more than 50 official commissions have been organized worldwide (Avruch, 2010; Hayner, 2001). Common functions of TCs are (i) to attempt to discover the truth about the period of collective violence; (ii) to recognize and validate victims' suffering; (iii) to provide compensation for those affected, both materially and symbolically; (iv) to contribute to the creation of an inclusive collective memory oriented toward the future; (v) to prevent new acts of violence; and (vi) to seek justice. These functions may contribute to avoiding revenge cycles and further war crimes, keeping collective violence from arising again (Sikkink & Booth-Walling, 2007).

Two TCs were created in Chile for the purpose of documenting facts related to the collective violence perpetrated during the Pinochet dictatorship. In 1991, the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) was established to provide as complete a picture as possible of the most severe human rights violations committed by agents of the state. Its purpose was to collect information in order to identify individual victims (people detained or disappeared, political prisoners executed and people tortured to death), discover their fate, propose compensation measures for their families, and recommend legal and administrative measures to prevent future human rights violations (Comisión Nacional

de Verdad y Reconciliación, 1991). The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (NCPIT) was created to identify people who had not been killed, but were imprisoned and tortured by state agents for political reasons (Comisión Nacional de Prisión Política y Tortura, 2004), and propose compensation measures for them. The reports of these two commissions were published by the President of the Republic in 1991 and 2004, respectively. The President headed the petition for institutional apologies for the abuse perpetrated. The NCTR and NCPIT jointly established that more than 3000 deaths had occurred for political reasons in Chile, almost all at the hands of the armed forces or the police (detained–disappeared or executed without trial). In addition, the NCPIT accounts for at least 35 000 confirmed cases of political imprisonment and/or torture. Regarding social responses to the reports by these commissions, opinion studies (CEP, Centro de Estudios Públicos, 1991, 2004) showed that citizens regarded them as both necessary and truthful. However, a majority also believed that they might contribute to re-opening old wounds. Most citizens already knew at least some of the facts reported, and they were in favour of compensation measures for victims (CEP, 2004). Most of them felt emotionally affected by the gravity and cruelty of the events reported. A large majority believed that, even after 30 years, the socio-political conflict had not been overcome, and reconciliation had not been achieved (CERC, 2003).

Following these commissions, there were material and symbolic reparatory actions, and official apologies were expressed by two Chilean Presidents, Patricio Aylwin (1990–1995) and Ricardo Lagos (2000–2005). For restorative actions, such as official apologies, to be effective, they must be perceived as expressing regret and assuming responsibility, sincere and not merely justifications or excuses (Staub, 2005). Those who express apologies must be representative and have the support of most of the national group (Kadima & Mullet, 2007). Finally, some studies suggest that following apologies for past collective violence and injustice, members of the victimized group report more positive attitudes toward out-groups and institutions (Blatz & Ross, 2012). Similarly, it has been suggested that TCs are more strongly related to reconciliation than to healing personal emotions (Beristain, Páez, Rimé & Kanyangara, 2010; Cárdenas et al., 2013b).

From a psychosocial perspective, reconciliation, which is a broader concept than forgiveness, implies the following: (i) the construction of a common integrative narrative of past collective violence; (ii) overcoming revenge and negative emotions, such as anger, fear and sadness, and changing the out-group image, increasing inter-group trust and forgiveness as well as positive collective emotions such as hope; (iii) increasing confidence in institutions; and (iv) increasing values of tolerance and universal justice (Bar-Tal, 2011; Gibson, 2004; Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008). In fact, people who agreed with the past narrative constructed by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) showed a more favourable attitude toward reconciliation, thus confirming that a common collective memory of the past that integrates different views strengthens social cohesion (Gibson, 2004). Supporting the notion that transitional justice has a positive influence on reconciliation, a longitudinal study showed that Rwanda's *Gacaca* has had positive inter-group effects, such as more positive out-group stereotypes and a less homogeneous ('they are all similar') or more differentiated and individualized view of the ethnic out-group (Kanyangara et al., 2007; Rimé et al., 2011).

The experience of collective violence moderates the attitude and response toward TCs and official apologies. Some studies, including work carried out in Chile, suggest that perpetrator group members were in favour of apologies and forgetting-based forgiveness,

whereas victimized group members were more critical of TCs and apologies, more reluctant to forgive and more in favour of remembering the past and demanding reparations (Manzi et al., 2004; Manzi & González, 2007; Kadima and Mullet, 2007; Rimé et al., 2011). These observations suggest that victims or affected people will be more critical of TCs' activities and, particularly, of apologies and forgiveness. One Chilean study found that direct victims, compared with the non-affected, reported greater emotional impact on remembering the past, as well as greater social sharing, rumination and reappraisal of the past, but also greater inhibition. Finally, victims of collective violence reported a more negative appraisal of the current emotional and social climate (Cárdenas et al., 2013a; Páez, Basabe & González, 1997). Because social sharing amplifies emotions, and also helps to reconstruct social beliefs (Rimé, et al., 2009), we would expect people exposed to collective violence, and whose feelings are influenced by the commissions' activities, to share more, and this increased sharing will reinforce the influence of those activities.

The general purpose of the present study was to compare the social beliefs, attitudes and emotions of people who agreed and disagreed with the activities of the NCTR and NCPIT, and those of people affected and unaffected by past political violence in Chile. The first set of hypotheses is related to the previous experience of violence, and we expect the emotional impact of TCs to be greater for victims, so that we will find higher levels of emotion among them. Differences will be found in appraisals of official apologies, with victims being more critical of them. The second set of hypotheses concerns the association between positive appraisals of the commissions and reconciliation. We expect a favourable perception of the TCs' work to be associated with greater positive emotional impact, higher levels of belief in the sincerity and effectiveness of apologies, more favourable attitudes toward social remembering as a strategy for coping with past collective violence and a more positive appraisal of the emotional and social climate: low levels of anger, sadness and fear, and high levels of hope, security, inter-group trust, confidence in institutions and agreement with values of universalism, like tolerance and justice. Social sharing should reinforce these tendencies.

## METHOD

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample consisted of 1278 participants, 629 men (49.2%) and 649 women (50.8%), with ages ranging from 18 to 90 years ( $M=39.66$  years and  $SD=17.36$ ). Data were collected in the country's most populous urban areas: Santiago (26.1%), Valparaíso (30.8%), Concepción (14.4%) and Antofagasta (28.7%). Participants were unskilled blue-collar workers (8.1%), skilled blue-collar and white-collar workers (14.9%), executives or self-employed people (22.7), retired people (4.3), housewives (7.8), students (24.6%) and others (17.6). Interviewers were volunteer university students trained in the application of the scale. A random-route and stratified sample was used to establish appropriate population ratios for sex and different age groups in each city. To be included, participants had to sign an 'informed consent' letter that explained the study objectives and guaranteed response anonymity and confidentiality. We thought it was important to be open and honest with the participants about the nature of the study and the expected use of the data, but guaranteeing that their names would not appear in any way in the article. They were able to separate the questionnaire from the signed consent form

(which they kept a copy of, with the address and telephone number of the researcher in charge of the project and the president of the ethics committee that approved the study), returning their responses in a sealed envelope. The surveyors also had to sign a confidentiality commitment form, and, if necessary, they offered the participants the possibility of contacting specialists from the University to talk about the contents of the questionnaire. Participants were selected by team members trained in data collection who followed a guideline for the features that participants were required to report (city, sex and age group). The participants were selected from people who said they knew about the commissions. Once they had agreed to participate in the study, respondents filled out a paper-and-pencil questionnaire individually.

### *Instrument*

The questionnaire comprised five sets of variables. Preliminary questions asked about respondents' *socio-demographic variables* (age, gender and city of residence) and about their level of *exposure to past collective violence*. There were questions aimed at differentiating between 'direct victims', 'indirect victims' and persons 'unaffected' by political violence. These categories were derived from respondents' answers to the following two questions: 'Do you consider yourself a victim of the violence perpetrated by the state or its agents between 1973 and 1989?' (yes/no) and 'Are there any victims of state violence or its agents between 1973 and 1989 among your family members or close friends?' (yes/no). Participants who responded affirmatively to the first question or to both questions were categorized as direct victims, those who responded affirmatively only to the second question were considered indirect victims and those who responded negatively to both questions were considered 'unaffected'.

A second set of questions examined participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward the National Commissions (NCTR and NCPIT), dealing specifically with respondents' *level of information about the activities of each of the two National Commissions* ['Do you know about the activities of the NCTR?' (yes/no) and 'Do you know about the activities of the NCPIT?' (yes/no)].

*Overall attitude with respect to these activities.* This scale was adapted from Gibson (2004) and aimed to assess respondents' global attitude toward and appraisal of the commissions' activity through the following item: 'Would you say that you: Strongly approve of what the NCTR has done/Somewhat approve/Somewhat disapprove/Strongly disapprove'. A similar item was then proposed with regard to the NCPIT ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Appraisal of these commissions' outcomes.* 'The NCTR is often said to have several important jobs. Would you say that it has done an excellent job/pretty good job/pretty bad job/poor job, with regard to: (a) providing truth about victims, (b) creating a comprehensive history, (c) punishing the guilty, and (d) creating a comprehensive history?' Response options ranged from 1 (*poor job*) to 4 (*excellent job*). A global appraisal index was computed from responses to these seven items ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Appraisal of the State's apologies.* Three questions adopted from Echeberría, Páez, Valencia, Bilbao and Zubieta (2010) were used to record respondents' views about (i) the sincerity of the apology: 'Do you consider the President's apology and message about the NCTR to be sincere?' (ii) its effectiveness for improving empathy: 'Do you think the President's apology and message about the NCTR strengthened inter-group empathy,

helping people to understand others' suffering?' and (iii) its effectiveness for promoting inter-group trust: 'Do you think the President's apology and message about the NCTR reinforced trust between groups?' The response options ranged in each case from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*). A general index was created for apology sincerity and effectiveness. Reliability was satisfactory ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

*Belief in social forgiveness.* A question was constructed to assess social forgiveness (Kadima and Mullet, 2007): 'With respect to the period of past national collective violence, do you think people who were affected by past violence can forgive those who inflicted this violence on them?' Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).

A third set of scales, using two different tools, assessed respondents' perceptions of the country's socio-emotional climate.

*Positive–Negative Emotional Climate.* Four items taken from the Positive–Negative Emotional Climate (PNEC) scale (Páez et al., 1997b) were used to evaluate the positive ('I think that in general people trust their institutions' and 'People show solidarity and help one another; they feel solidarity in general') and negative ('I think that in general people feel anger, hostility' and 'I think that people feel sadness, apathy') emotional climate. A Likert-type response scale was used, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Reliabilities were satisfactory for Negative Emotional Climate ( $\alpha = .71$ ) and acceptable for Positive Emotional Climate ( $\alpha = .61$ ).

*Climate Dimension Scale.* Eight items from the *Climate Dimension Scale* (CD24; de Rivera, 2010) were also used to assess the perception of emotional climate. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (i) 'People in the country feel secure that there is enough food, water, medicine, and shelter for them and their families, and that they will continue to have these goods'; (ii) 'People feel unsafe due to a level of violence that keeps them from living peacefully'; (iii) 'People feel that the various political groups in this country trust each other and will work together for the progress of the country'; (iv) 'People from different political, ethnic and religious groups trust each other in this country'; (v) 'People are afraid of organizing peaceful public protest meetings'; (vi) 'People are afraid of saying what they really think because it could be dangerous'; (vii) 'People have hope because things in this country are improving'; and (viii) 'There is so much lack of hope in this country that many people want to leave'. A Likert-type response scale was used, ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

A fourth set more directly addressed participants' personal experience in relation to re-examining the past and the commissions' activities by assessing their emotions in this regard, their propensity to express themselves and talk about them, and the extent to which they refrain from talking. Finally, in a fifth set of measurements, participants' values were examined using Schwartz's items on universalism values, which are values related to a democratic culture of peace. Later, we describe all of these instruments in more detail.

The fourth set of scales refers to the emotions associated with the past violence and social sharing of emotions associated with NCTR/NCPIT activities.

*Emotions.* Participants rated their emotional reactions when thinking about the past events and the commissions' activities: 'To what extent do you feel the following emotions about the collective violence period and the NCTR?' They were then given a list that included three positive emotions (hope, happiness and pride) and four negative emotions

(sadness, guilt, anger, fear and shame). Response scales anchored as 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*a great deal were used*). Reliabilities were satisfactory for both positive ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and negative emotions ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

*Social sharing.* Six questions adapted from studies on the social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2005) asked about the extent to which respondents talk about past events and the commissions' activities. The first six questions were 'Have you ever spoken to people around you' (i) 'about the NCTR since the publication of its report?'; (ii) 'about past violence since the publication of the NCTR report?'; (iii) 'about the NCTR report in the past month?'; (iv) 'about the NCPIT since the publication of its report?'; (v) about past violence since the publication of the NCPIT report?; and (vi) 'about the NCPIT report in the past month?'; and the seventh is 'Have you felt the need to speak about past violence?' The response scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*). Reliability was satisfactory ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Finally, a fifth set of variables relates agreement with values of universalism, like tolerance and justice.

*Values.* Schwartz's Portrait Value Questionnaire 21 (Davidov, Schmidt & Schwartz, 2008). Respondents were asked to what extent they felt similar or dissimilar to the people in the following descriptions: 'He/she thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. He/she wants justice for everybody, even for people he/she doesn't know' and 'It is important to him/her to listen to people who are different from him/her. Even when he/she disagrees with them, he/she still wants to understand them'. Universalistic values involve transcendence, overcoming self-promotion and connecting to others and to the community in general. The response scale ranged from 1 (*very similar*) to 6 (*very dissimilar*). Reliability was satisfactory for the two-item scale measuring universalism ( $\alpha = .64$ ).

For all the scales used, a pilot study was carried out first in order to ensure adequate levels of reliability and validity.

### *Statistical analyses*

The statistical analyses included the calculation of the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and percentages), calculations of the reliability coefficients, contrasts of differences in means (using Student *t*-tests and analyses of variance), bivariate correlations and multiple-regression analyses. In the case of the contrasts of means, post-hoc (Tukey) tests were performed, and the effect size for each comparison was analysed. For all of the analyses, the statistical program SPSS version 20.0 was used. To calculate the effect sizes of the comparisons, the software G\*Power 3.0.1 (Faul et al, 2007, 2009) was used.

## **RESULTS**

### *Exposure to violence and knowledge/appraisal of the commissions*

Regarding exposure to violence, 24% of the sample ( $n = 304$ ) consider themselves to be direct victims of human rights violations perpetrated in Chile from 1973 to 1989; 33.4% ( $n = 424$ ) report having victims among their family or close friends (indirect victims); and 42.6% ( $n = 541$ ) were not affected by political violence. Among the direct victims,

the main violence actions perpetrated against them by agents of the state were torture (24%), execution or disappearance of a direct family member (17.1%), political imprisonment (6.8%) and exile (6.8%). The remaining percentage (46.6%) reported other violent acts by the state or its agents (job dismissal for political reasons and violent assault at home).

Regarding knowledge of the work done by commissions, 42.6% ( $n=625$ ) report knowing about the NCTR's work, and 38.9% ( $n=497$ ) are aware of the NCPIT's work. Knowledge about the commissions' work is associated with closeness to violence events, with direct victims reporting greater knowledge about the NCTR and NCPIT's work than indirect victims and those who were unaffected ( $F_{(2, 1263)}=193.76$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $f=0.27$ ).

#### *Relationship between appraisal of apologies and exposure to collective violence*

Attitude toward TCs was dichotomized into a negative appraisal (scores 1 and 2) and a positive appraisal (scores 3 and 4). Analyses of variance using exposure to violence and attitude toward the commission as independent variables were carried out to explore the interactions between exposure to violence and perceived performance of the commissions. No interaction effects were found between exposure to violence and attitude toward the commissions with regard to appraisal of the apologies.

Regarding exposure to violence, statistically significant differences ( $F_{(2, 1239)}=11.60$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d=0.09$ ) were found in the apology perception among the three groups, with direct victims ( $M=1.89$ ) attributing less sincerity and effectiveness to apologies, followed by indirect victims ( $M=1.98$ ) and people unaffected by the violent events ( $M=2.10$ ). Post-hoc analyses indicate that the latter two groups form a homogeneous subset (the true differences would be found between these two groups and the direct victims, indicating that the direct victims attribute less sincerity to the apologies than the other two groups).

#### *Relationship between social sharing and emotions related to the collective past and the attitude toward truth commissions*

Participants supporting the NCTR's work report higher social sharing and indicate a greater number of positive and negative emotions related to sadness, anger, shame, hope and pride (Table 1). On evaluating the NCPIT, participants who support it also report more positive and negative emotions. No significant effects of the interaction between exposure to violence and the attitude toward TCs were found for emotions.

#### *Relationship between appraisal of apologies and forgiveness and the attitude toward truth commissions*

On comparing participants who agree with the NCTR's work and those who disagree with it, the former have a more positive perception of apologies. Similar results are observed between participants who agree and disagree with the NCPIT's work (Table 2).

In addition, participants who positively evaluate the work of the NCTR are more likely ( $M=2.69$ ) to accept the possibility that victims might forgive those who did harm to them ( $t_{(1206)}=-3.38$ ;  $p=.005$ ;  $d=0.24$ ) than those who disagree with the commission's work



Table 1. Social sharing and emotions related to collective past by attitudes toward TCs (NCTR)

	Agreement with NCTR	Disagreement with NCTR	<i>t</i> test	Effect size <i>r</i>
Positive emot.	2.44 (1.50)	2.06 (1.40)	-3.60**	.09
Negative emot.	3.18 (1.31)	2.70 (1.47)	-5.04**	.14
Social sharing	3.08 (0.99)	2.73 (0.93)	-5.02**	.14
Sadness	4.65 (2.02)	3.49 (2.24)	-7.93**	.22
Guilt	1.54 (1.12)	1.58 (1.20)	0.56	.01
Anger	4.24 (2.09)	3.54 (2.30)	-4.38**	.13
Fear	2.34 (1.68)	2.21 (1.61)	-1.15	.03
Shame	2.97 (2.07)	2.64 (1.99)	-2.31*	.07
Hope	3.03 (1.81)	2.38 (1.78)	-5.06**	.15
Happiness	1.92 (1.56)	1.78 (1.37)	-1.45	.04
Pride	2.30 (1.75)	2.04 (1.57)	-2.27*	.06

Note: Social sharing responses range from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*), and emotions responses range from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*); standard deviation in parentheses.

TC, truth commission; NCTR, National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation.

\*\**p* < .01; \**p* < .05.

Table 2. Global appraisal of apologies, TCs' functions, emotional climate and values by attitudes toward TCs (NCTR)

	Agreement with NCTR	Disagreement with NCTR	<i>t</i> test	Effect size <i>r</i>
Apologies appraisal	2.12 (0.60)	1.65 (0.56)	-11.56**	.31
Functions NCTR	2.44 (1.31)	1.86 (1.47)	-14.78**	.38
Positive social climate (PNEC)	2.85 (0.89)	2.67 (0.93)	-2.82**	.08
Negative social climate (PNEC)	2.97 (0.98)	2.96 (0.93)	0.11	-.003
Positive climate dimensions (CD24)	3.28 (1.13)	3.14 (1.20)	-1.77*	.05
Negative climate dimensions (CD24)	4.26 (0.91)	4.26 (0.76)	0.06	-.03
Universalism values	5.33 (0.77)	4.99 (1.03)	-5.55**	.16

Note: Apologies appraisals, functions NCTR and PNEC responses range from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*), CD-24 and universalism values responses range from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*); standard deviation in parentheses.

TC, truth commission; NCTR, National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation; PNEC, Positive-Negative Emotional Climate; CD24, Climate Dimension Scale.

\*\**p* < .01; \**p* < .05.

(*M* = 2.30). Similar results were obtained for appraisals of the NCPIT's work. However, overall, participants do not accept the possibility of social or inter-group forgiveness.

No interaction effects were found between exposure to violence and attitude toward the commissions as far as forgiveness and social forgetting are concerned.

*Relationship between appraisal of truth commissions' achievement of objectives and the attitude toward truth commissions*

People who positively appraise the NCTR's work are more likely to agree (*M* = 2.66) that this commission has helped victims' families to discover what happened to their loved ones ( $t_{(1204)} = -12.94$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 0.89$ ) than those who disagree with the NCTR (*M* = 2.02); they are more likely to agree (*M* = 2.22,  $t_{(1201)} = -11.61$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 0.80$ ) that

it contributed to generating a comprehensive common history than those who disagree with the commission ( $M = 1.77$ ); they are more likely to agree that it helped to bring people guilty of human rights violations to justice ( $M = 0.42$ ) ( $t_{(1204)} = -11.04$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 0.77$ ) than those who disagree with the commission ( $M = 1.86$ ); and they are more likely to agree that it helped to guarantee that human rights violations would not occur again in Chile ( $M = 2.45$ ) ( $t_{(1202)} = -9.79$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 0.65$ ) than those in disagreement with the NCTR. Similar results were obtained for appraisals of the NCPIT's work (see Table 2 for global scores).

No interaction effects were found between exposure to violence and the attitude toward the commissions with regard to achievement of the TCs' objectives.

#### *Relationship between emotional climate and values and attitude toward truth commissions*

People who positively appraise the NCTR's work perceive a more positive emotional climate (PNEC positive or CD24 positive) than people who disagree with its work (Table 2). For instance, people who agree with the NCTR are more likely to highlight the fact that political, ethnic and religious groups feel inter-group trust ( $M = 2.80$ ) than people who disagree with the commission ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $t = 2.19$ ,  $p = .04$ ). However, no differences were found for the PNEC and CD24 negative emotional climate indexes, and means of positive collective emotions were below the theoretical mean; for instance, only 15% reported high levels of trust in institutions, and a similar percentage perceived high inter-group trust.

With regard to values, people with a positive attitude toward the NCTR are more likely ( $M = 5.20$ ) to accept the need to understand people with different opinions ( $t_{(1208)} = 3.37$ ;  $p = .005$ ) than those who disagree with the commissions' work ( $M = 4.96$ ), and they are more likely to agree with the notion of universal 'justice for everybody' ( $M = 5.44$ ) ( $t_{(1206)} = 6.17$ ;  $p < .005$ ) than those who disagree with the work of the commissions ( $M = 4.96$ ).

No interaction effects were found between exposure to violence and attitude toward the commissions, regarding emotional climate and values.

#### *Social sharing, emotions, appraisal of apologies and truth commission, and reconciliation*

Finally, social sharing was associated with negative emotions,  $r_{(1275)} = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ , positive emotions,  $r_{(1275)} = .08$ ,  $p = .005$ , and the justice for everybody item ( $r_{(1206)} = .13$ ;  $p < .001$ ), but also with PNEC negative emotional climate,  $r_{(1206)} = .17$ ;  $p < .001$ , CD24 negative emotional climate,  $r_{(1206)} = .12$ ,  $p = .005$ , low PNEC positive climate,  $r_{(1206)} = -.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , and low CD24 positive emotional climate,  $r_{(1206)} = -.16$ ,  $p = .005$ .

#### *Multivariate analysis of socio-emotional climate*

A multiple-regression analysis was performed to examine specific associations. Positive emotional climate PNEC and CD24 positive item standardized scores provided a global index of socio-emotional climate and reconciliation. This climate index was regressed on exposure to violence, appraisal of TCs and their functions, appraisal of apologies and their functions, positive and negative emotions and social sharing. First, the correlations between the different predictor variables of the model and the dependent variable were calculated.

Positive socio-emotional climate correlates positively with official apology and the TCs' appraisal and effectiveness total score (and separate scores),  $r_{(1206)} = .36$ , ( $r_{(1206)} = .34$  and  $r_{(1206)} = .33$ , respectively), and with positive emotions related to TCs' facts and activities,  $r_{(1206)} = .15$ , and negatively with exposure to violence [3 (*direct victim*) and 1 (*non-affected*)], social sharing about past collective violence and TC,  $r_{(1206)} = -.11$ , and negative emotions,  $r_{(1206)} = -.13$ , all  $p < .01$ .

The multiple-regression analysis was significant, explaining 20% of the variance ( $R^2 = .20$ ;  $F_{(5, 1089)} = 55.66$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Durbin-Watson test = 1.71). Standardized beta coefficients show a significant effect of the positive appraisal of apology and the positive appraisal of TCs and their functions ( $\beta = .34$ ;  $p < .001$ ), low exposure to violence ( $\beta = -.17$ ;  $p < .001$ ), low negative emotions ( $\beta = -.17$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and high positive emotions ( $\beta = .12$ ;  $p < .001$ ) with respect to TCs' activities and past violence.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the effects of collective violence in Chile have not been overcome, and there is still a long and difficult road ahead if reconciliation is to be achieved. There is a general attitude of agreement with the work of the NCTR and NCPIT that co-exists with a critical view of social forgiveness. This positive appraisal of the commissions' work is supported by the belief that they fulfilled their functions related to truth, justice and prevention, and a positive appraisal of the commissions was associated with a better perception of the social and emotional climate. Moreover, positive outcomes were not affected by being exposed to violence, as the interaction between exposure to violence and the attitude toward TCs was not significant.

The direct victims are more critical and do not believe in the sincerity of the official apologies, expressing low levels of institutional confidence. Although they believe the commissions play an important role, they think they are incapable of finishing the job, especially with regard to justice (although this aspect is explicitly eliminated from the commissions' attributions, with this work being carried out by the courts, while the commissions have to keep the names of the perpetrators anonymous). They also express their belief about the impossibility of forgiving the perpetrators of the violence and their whole-hearted opposition to forgetting. In other words, they manifest a problematic and vigilant attitude of fighting to defend the memory of the victims. Their idea is that no one should attempt to administratively close the topic of justice for the atrocities of the past, at the same time that they use their pain to generate awareness and avert the eruption of new cycles of violence.

The population's positive opinion of the commissions' work is coherent with the findings of previous surveys and even indicates a historical trend toward a more positive appraisal of TRCs. Results confirm that three-quarters of the Chilean sample are in favour of TRCs, particularly indirect victims, while the unaffected and direct victims are slightly more critical (Cardenas et al., in press). The direct victims think the commissions have made much progress in terms of truth but very little in terms of justice, and unaffected people think that the commissions have made little progress toward truth, and that the pressure of legally trying the past would be too much. This profile is in line with the hypothesis that the commissions' impact is seen as more positive among indirect victims than among direct victims (Stein et al., 2008).

People with a positive attitude toward the efforts of the NCTR/NCPIT report higher levels of positive and negative emotions, such as sadness, shame, hope and pride. Results confirm that satisfactory institutional activity to repair the past functions as an expiation ritual, reactivating a negative moral emotion, shame, and a positive moral emotion, pride, along with negative emotions, such as sadness, and positive ones such as hope (Páez, 2010). Unlike other studies (Halloran, 2007), we found no association between guilt and support for the commissions. In fact, it is significant that so many years after the events, emotions of this type are not observed in the group most symbolically linked to the perpetrators. This is probably one of the reasons that the apologies are not considered sincere by the victims, and that the people who were unaffected by the violence and those who disapprove of the work of the commissions think the commissions have already done their job and that we should leave the past alone in order to avoid re-opening wounds.

On the whole, the results suggest that both negative and positive emotions are involved, as anger, sadness and shame mobilize people for reparation and re-empowerment, while pride and hope about the activities of TCs allow people to look to the future with optimism. However, positive emotional climate was positively predicted only by positive emotions, confirming their role in extending and building social resources (Fredrickson, 2009), while negative emotions eroded a positive perception of the socio-emotional climate.

As far as inter-group forgiveness is concerned, confirming the impact of the NCTR and NCPIT on reconciliation, the results show that a positive appraisal of the commissions' work was associated with greater acceptance of social forgiveness. However, it is important to stress that neither victims (direct or indirect) nor the general population believe that forgiveness can be achieved. In this sense, it is interesting to contemplate the idea of a reconciliation model that does not include interpersonal forgiveness, and that focuses more on restoring the adequate functioning of the institutions, creating a common narrative and increasing the confidence between groups. In the Chilean case, there have been more than 600 trials against agents of the dictatorship, and most of those responsible for the most serious human rights violations have been sent to jail. In any case, these results have to be viewed with caution, as this is an indirect measure about the belief that the victims are able to forgive. In the future, people should be consulted directly about their own willingness to forgive.

Our findings also show that people with a positive attitude toward TCs also think they have contributed more substantially to creating a common account of the past, providing information to victims' families, advancing the cause of justice and helping to avoid future violent events. This result suggests that when the commissions' work is regarded as efficient, it facilitates the positive influence of institutional apologies. In fact, people who agree with the commissions also believe that the apologies are more sincere and effective for increasing inter-group empathy and trust. This perception of apologies correlates with the perception of a more positive social climate, confirming that such processes are associated with inter-group reconciliation (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008).

The results also confirm that agreement with TRCs was related not only to the construction of a common integrated narrative of past collective violence and forgiveness but also to high levels of inter-group trust, perceived solidarity and confidence in institutions (Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2011). Finally, agreement with TRCs was related to agreement with Universalism values—or high agreement with tolerance of differences and justice for everybody, the subjective value facet of reconciliation (Gibson, 2004). These

results confirm the findings of other studies (Halloran, 2007), in which universalist values (considered equivalent to egalitarianism) accurately predict positive attitudes toward reconciliation. Our findings must be viewed with caution owing to the low reliability level this dimension obtained for this application. However, absolute levels of inter-group and institutional trust were low, and negative collective emotions were stressed more than positive ones, suggesting that a critical view of the society prevails. Moreover, negative collective emotions were not related to agreement with the TCs, suggesting that transitional rituals are capable of enhancing positive collective emotions, but negative emotions are more related to negative events and collective trauma than to reparatory initiatives. This is comparable with the finding that positive affect is mainly related to social support, while negative affect is mainly related to negative events, but not to social support (Watson, 2000).

Social sharing plays a similar role to a positive attitude toward TCs, correlating with positive emotions, positive appraisal of TCs and apologies, and egalitarian, tolerant and universal justice beliefs. However, social sharing plays a more ambivalent role, as it also reinforces negative emotions and climate, eroding positive emotional climate. This result was similar to those from a previous study with a small Chilean sample (Páez et al., 1997a), suggesting that sharing, when focused on trauma, fuels negative emotions, while also providing support for finding benefits.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to show that TRCs act as a social tool for increasing overall inter-group reconciliation. Moreover, social sharing related to past collective violence and TC activities was also associated with positive emotions with regard to political or religious ideological beliefs. These results confirm the role of social sharing (Rimé et al., 1998) and positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2009) in the construction of social well-being, with the latter understood as the evaluation we make of the circumstances and of the functioning within the society (Keyes, 1998). Furthermore, they suggest that interpersonal communication or social sharing and positive emotions complement the positive influence of transitional justice activities and act as ‘micro-social rituals’ of the construction of meaning (Rimé et al., 2011). Thus, the TCs contribute to counteracting the isolation, loneliness and suspicion that victims feel toward the social institutions and other members of society (one of the long-term effects of political violence is the destruction of confidence and the installation of fear as the predominant way of relating). They would also contribute to validating the victims’ stories (which are often questioned) and ending the ‘conspiracy of silence’ (Danieli, 1998).

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

Our results show that low exposure to violence and also the positive appraisal of institutional apologies and the perception that commission work has acted as a symbolic reconstruction ritual are relevant variables in predicting evaluations of the country’s social climate. This means that the commissions’ work to discover the truth, to see justice done, to create a comprehensive history that includes different views and to guarantee that these violent events will not happen again reinforces solidarity and perceived positive emotions—even controlling for exposure to violence and negative and positive emotional reactions. (The emotional reactions are much more delicate and full of nuances in the controversial context under study. Is there a place for participants’ silence/lack of response?)

Thus, the Chilean population believes that learning from the past can prevent violence, and the commissions have clarified this past, helping to bring out the truth and fostering a climate of the pursuit of justice by punishing the guilty. The population agrees on the need to compensate victims and their family members for the harm done. People who appraise the commissions' work in this way also foresee a more optimistic future and give better appraisals of the country's social climate; they also consider victims' forgiveness of the perpetrators of violence to be more possible.

Given the correlational nature of this study, attributions of causality are limited; moreover, the conclusions are based only on self-reports. Even so, the large sample of citizens, which can be considered to represent the majority of the Chilean population, and the long list of items based on a previous successful survey (Gibson, 2004) allow us to be confident about our conclusions. In any case, it seems obvious that these results must be verified in future studies and complemented with a more detailed and in-depth examination of them. Studies should analyse the role of silence and the contradictory effects that testimony made to the commissions seems to have, as on the one hand, it seems to revive negative emotions and different types of symptomatology in the victims (Brounéus, 2008), while on the other hand, it constitutes a forum where they can be listened to and have their stories socially validated. It seems evident that at the social level, this is a painful but necessary process, given that what is beneficial to society is not necessarily pleasant for the victims (even though they themselves have always demanded this space in our context and been keepers of the memory and avoided social amnesia). In a similar way, the function of the commissions is to gather detailed information about the greatest number of victims and document the abuses committed during the period of violence, rather than providing a therapeutic space for the victims (a question that the recommended reparation measures should consider).

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