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Storying the Good Life: Selfhood and Morality Through the Biographical Narrative Storyline

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Abstract The connection between personal story and morality has been long enunciated, but remains under-researched. Combining moral and narrative theory, this article approaches this relation by introducing a line of narrative inquiry oriented towards the exploration of how ethical intentions with regard to the good life manifest in and shape the biographical *storyline* and the self narratively assembled. The analysis encompasses a first case-based stage focused on the examination of the main motive of the personal story and its effects upon the organization of both self and narrative, followed by a comparative phase in which storylines and moral motives that work as reference of a set of biographical accounts belonging to different social positions, temporalities, or geographies are contrasted in order to establish linkages, breaks, and transformations in the relation between identity and morality across cases. This line of inquiry is applied into a research about intergenerational changes and continuities in the relation between selfhood and morality, based on life stories conducted with Chilean people of successive generations. In the conclusions, this strategy of narrative analysis is assessed in the light of current development of this field of qualitative social research.

Keywords Life Stories; Narrative Analysis; Morality; Self; Cultural Change; Generations; Storyline; Moral Motives

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The Personal Narrative as a Moral Quest

Biographical narratives are situated, intentional, and creative practice of meaning-making through which people organize their life experiences in their concrete social context to render them meaningful in a first person account that is communicated in the most complete and detailed possible way. Despite levels of success, objectives, disjunctions, or activities undertaken, rhetorically, one way of recounting these personal accounts is through the figure of the "quest" (e.g., see: MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989), which organizes the story implicitly or explicitly, as a journey or trajectory with a goal or a mission: something to learn, to overcome, to endure, to conquer, to achieve, or to transform. I learnt this in practice, amidst the analysis of thirty lengthy biographical stories I gathered through interviews with three generations of Chilean families. Despite acute differences in the cultural and socio-political context of reference, disregarding distinction in family and personal trajectories, in one way or another, this communality was evident: interviewees put their narratives as "stories of transformation" (Gergen 1991), "tales of achievement," and "adversity overcome."

And the reason is well-known; biographical accounts are not merely descriptive exercises, they are foremost ethical practices where the legitimation of life and self is at stake. In Charles Taylor's terms (1989), a sense of "the good," and thus about what kind of life is worth living, or is fulfilling or meaningful gives socially and temporally specific orientation to the narratives of the self. My proposition is that those "quests" I found are expression of the *storyline* of the biographical account. The storyline corresponds to the anchor point of the narrative or the recognizable theme around which the account is composed. This storyline is based upon a moral motive or an *ethical intention*, and therefore upon a certain idea of the good. Put otherwise, I argue that those ideas of transformation, achievement, or adversity overcome; those *storylines* around which the biographical account is organized are precisely pointing towards the moral motives or *ethical intentions* of that life (Ricoeur 1992:172), and thus they provide analytical access to the moral constitution of the self in narrative form. Upon these premises in this article, I introduce a line of narrative inquiry into the moral motives of the self, focusing on the analysis of the organization of the biographical account around different "quests."

In the field of narrative studies, the connection between personal story and morality has been enunciated by many. Labov (1982) has argued that narratives are explanatory theories in which storytellers construct "micro-level morality tales" of the events recalled. Labov's point is that narrative is not only a description but an explanation and, in this sense, it represents "a theory of causality" (Squire 2005). Along the same lines, Day Sclater (2001:5) has claimed that "narratives are evaluative frameworks," and therefore "to tell a personal story is to take up a moral position." This is also the point emphasized by Plummer (2001), when he maintains that personal narratives are told as "moral tales," by Stanley (2008), in her view of personal stories as based on moral and other types of claims, and by Cortazzi (2008:384), when he postulates that, in comparison with other type of data, narratives incorporate an evaluative dimension, since most of them "do not simply report events but rather give a teller's perspective on their meaning, relevance, and importance." Taking the point of view of the narrator rather than that of the story, Riessman (2008) has also described personal stories as discourses where the moral character of the protagonist is sustained, while Ochs and Capps (2001:76) have called attention to the fact that "storytellers naturally wish to position themselves as moral persons."

In spite of these claims, little effort has been made to actually research biographical accounts in moral terms. This has been the focus of my work. Combining moral and narrative theory, I have explored biographical stories as "interpretative practices" (e.g., see: Holstein and Gubrium 2000), where narrators negotiate their understanding of who they are in spaces that are culturally and, particularly, morally situated around questions about the "good."

In the study of the relation of self and morality, I follow the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor (1985a; 1985b; 1989; 1992). Taylor's work is, above all, a philosophy of articulation among "goods." His central argument is that human beings are self-interpreting subjects who are moved by the love or respect of a (historically variable) notion of the good. This notion operates as a motivational source, "empowering" individuals to act in a certain way, offering standards by which actions, desire, and motivations can be judged, and helping them "to discriminate what is right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower" (Taylor 1989:4). Morality, in Taylor's account, is then not only a matter of mutual obligations between fellow beings but, crucially, it is what provides the "horizon" allowing each of us to define from place to place and time to time what is good, correct, worthy, and meaningful, or rather what is bad, wrong, superficial, or meaningless. In other terms, "making the best sense of lives requires the use of 'thick' evaluative languages of the good" (Parker 2007:6).

Along with Taylor, philosophers, MacIntyre (1984) and Ricoeur (1992), have also emphasized that narratives are a condition for self-interpretation in these substantive terms I have been stressing. They argue that the moral experience itself has a narrative structure, or, in other words, that moral sense-making usually takes a narrative form. Arguments of this kind make the life story and other biographical devices (testimonies, auto-biographies, etc.) an appropriate "technology" for gaining access to the moral constitution of the self.

One of the consequences of the cultural turn for the social sciences is the recognition that "the forms in which experience is encoded, accounted for, and represented help constitute that experience" (Andrews et al. 2000:5). Stories are not only *about* who one is but also "sites" for self-constitution (Smith and Sparkes 2008:19). Thus, it is acknowledged that the practice of storying the self comprises two interrelated activities: the *whats* and the *hows* of the meaning-making process (Holstein and Gubrium 2000), that is, what narrators say the self is, and how they narrate it; the narrative's content—the "told"—and the narrative's mode of production, organization, or structure—the "telling" (Riessman 2008).

Rhetorical devices, modalities of self-enunciation, narrative genre, the interviewee's and interviewer's approach to the narrative work and the social situation of the interview are some of the elements through which the self is assembled in a personal narrative. In this article, I focus on one of these elements—the *storyline* underpinning the organization of the personal narrative—with the aim of showing how narrative biographical work and the self being claimed are shaped around situated, historically specific ideas of the good.

The approach I introduce here access the study of the relation between moral self and narrative from the question of *how* that content is organized in narrative work so as to accomplish the task of delivering a moral tale. Thus, it refers to questions such as: What is the moral character? What are the elements around which this exercise has to revolve? What needs to be embraced, defended, or achieved and also what needs to be left aside in this composition? In this way, the approach sheds light on the cultural conventions and resources for the construction of a moral personal account, or in the inverse sense, it examines how available conventions weave into personal biographies.

To exemplify this connection between biographical storyline and moral motives, I present an intergenerational comparative analysis of biographical stories elaborated with two generations of Chileans. This temporal span of two generations is meant to be taken as a case study to illustrate how changes in the moral sources of the self over time impinge on redefinitions of the biographical narrative main storyline and the self being storied. Apart from temporal relationships, intergenerational or not, this line of inquiry can be used in other comparative analysis of biographical narratives, for instance, across social spaces (landscapes of memory, of work, of migration; geographies of sex and sexual exchange; spaces of violence, suffering, resilience, care or dispute) and across social positions (high and low, able and disable, resourceless and resourcefull). In any case, the comparative exercise should allow linkages, breaks, transformations, and other relations between identity and morality to emerge from the analysis.

Methodological Procedures of a Biographical Research on Self and Morality

In this section, I describe the methodological aspects of the investigation from where I draw to elaborate this article. In the research entitled *Doing the Self: Selfhood and Morality in the Biographical Narratives of Three Generations of Chilean Families*, I examined biographical stories to study transformations and continuities in forms of self-interpretation in successive generations of Chilean people. In previous articles, I have developed particular strands of this relation: I have analyzed the shifting relation of self and morality in the intergenerational discourses of sexuality of the women interviewed (Bernasconi 2010), and the process of temporal expansion and retraction of the moral framework of the mature and elderly interviewees through the analytic tool of the "narrative elasticity" (Bernasconi 2011). This article is an attempt to relate the moral constitution of the self in narrative with the overall form in which that discursive practice is organized. In this sense, I expect to contribute to the systematization of analytical procedures to conduct narrative analysis.

For the research *Doing the Self*, I conducted thirty life story interviews among grandparents, parents, and grandchildren of 10 families living in the capital city of Santiago. Interviews were made in two or three sessions, at informants' homes or places of work, and were carried out in Spanish. On average, each case took five and a half hours in total. All interviews were literally transcribed and a copy of a complete transcript was offered to each interviewee as a form

of reciprocity. Therein publications have used transcripts in which all personal names are changed to protect anonymity.

I worked with a life story interview guide that was organized temporally from birth to the present. Largely, the interviewees touched on most of its topics without the need to probe. I wanted to delve deeper into various topics in the study of selfhood. Although many of them were addressed in the life story, their development was subsumed to the main task at hand: the narration of a complete life. Therefore, I designed a semi-structured in-depth interview on different areas of practices and conceptions of the self, such as the body, self-perception and life stages, turning points in life, aspirations and ethics, discourses of selfhood that predominate in their social circuits. Conversations around these issues shed light on different projected selves and their resources, drawing the space and the boundaries of a person's possibilities of being. Some of these questions required preparation and where given in advance, for example, what their obituary would say if they were able to write it, or the selection of a situation in which they had felt humiliated. During evaluative talking, I also asked the interviewees to provide a title for their stories. Interviews ended with a final comparative section on the continuities and breaks in the lives of the three generations under research. Moving from the personal to the interpersonal, this was also a way of giving closure to the whole process.

I followed a selective sampling procedure (Schatzman and Strauss 1973) to choose participants with the intention of collecting individual and family stories with diverse life trajectories and socio-economic backgrounds. In each generational group, there are five men and five women, as well as people who adhere to right wing and left wing political options. I worked with families of Catholic upbringing, the country's main religion. Neither my grandparents nor my parents nor myself belong to any of the generations being researched. This did not preclude discussion of many of the issues of this research with my own family. The choice of cohorts for the research was related to the recent socio-political history of Chile: the middle generation had to build their families amidst a coup d'état and the subsequent military dictatorship, whereas their children were born after the return to democracy. Methodologically, then, I use time as a dimension of change by working with three generations. Based on the seminal work of Mannheim (1952), but also in further contribution (Kertzer 1983; Pilcher 1994; Kohli 1996; Corsten 1999; Edmunds and Turner 2002) with the concept of generation, I refer to a group of people sharing an identity as a result of having been exposed to events that have molded a common interpretative framework for understanding themselves, which they subsequently use to locate themselves within the larger social group to which they belong (society). In sharing a common history, members of a generation share a temporality or a way of being through time.

A Case Study on Changes in the Biographical Storyline and the Moral Motives of the Self: Intergenerational Narratives of Contemporary Chilean People

Due to space restrictions, in what follows, I apply the line of inquiry proposed to the comparative analysis of the two oldest generations of my research, which complete twenty cases. The grandparents cohort was born between 1925 and 1935—herein called the 30s generation. These interviewees grew up in families composed of, on average, seven siblings. They started working during adolescence and continued to work long after retirement age. The group included peasants, lawyers, miners, union-leaders, self-employed housewives, and businesswomen, who are married, widows, and widowers. On average, they married at the age of twenty-five and had six children. The parents cohort was born between 1948 and 1955—herein called the 50s generation. On average, these interviewees married at the age of twenty-two and had 3-4 children. They averaged fourteen years of schooling, twice as many as their parents. This group included teachers, intellectuals, blue-collar workers, businesspeople, employees, and housewives, who are married, divorced, and annulled. Because of the expansion of Chilean economy during the eight decades the study covers, as a whole, living conditions for the grandparents were harsher, and their cultural, social, and economic capitals more limited than those their descendants possess.

The analysis of biographical accounts in terms of narrative motives requires a case-centered approach, which develops through a close examination of each complete story. In this phase, questions are oriented towards the discovery of the central moral concern around which the elements of the personal story are assembled so as to give it a point and make it look "whole, coherent, and understandable" (Riessman 2008:81). That idea of the "good life" orients the quest around which the narrative of life and self revolves. In my experience, the main motive can often be found encapsulated in common day expressions or iterative sentences. As I said, the exercise of entitling the life story can also be indicative of the idea of the good that works as a point of reference. Once such idea of the good is found, the analysis proceeds with the examination of how that motive serves to organize the narrative storyline and to place the self in a moral light.

In the following step, the analysis asks about the effects of this moral motive in the story being constructed and in the kind of self the narrator claims to be. We can ask questions such as: Which parts of the story does the narrator leave aside? Which ones does he or she stress? Which ones does he or she denounce, contest, or ameliorate? Which ones does he or she use to claim his or her identity?

Subsequently, a comparative analysis takes place looking for connections between storylines within and across groups, in my case, among generational groups. As a result of this exercise, emerging storylines can be delineated and similarities and differences between groups conceptualized.

Storylines and Moral Motives in the Biographical Narratives of the 30s Generation

To illustrate the type of inquiry here introduced, in what follows, I present the extensive analysis of two biographical storylines per generation in their relation to morality and as they develop through the practice of narrative construction. These sections are followed by a comparative intergenerational analysis, where the relation between prevailing storylines

and ideas of the good is developed. The analysis of these four stories is sometimes enlarged with the voices of each generation's peers, with the purpose of adding density and complexity to the description. All excerpts in quotation marks are literal extracts from the interviewees' stories. The conclusions assess the narrative approach taken in the context of biographical inquiries.

30s Generation, Guillermo's Story: "A Life of Much Work and Suffering"

76-year-old Guillermo is a thin, humble, illiterate, blue-collar worker, born in the rural outskirts of the Metropolitan Region. Of Catholic faith and center-leftist political ideas, Guillermo has lived on his own in the family home since the death of his wife five years ago, and is regularly visited by his seven adult children and their families. "A life of much work and suffering" is the title he chose for his biography. "Our life—he elaborates—was only about work, suffering, forced work, all that." The use of the possessive adjective "our" signals the collective nature of this quest in a double sense. First, this is the kind of quest of people of his class, the working class of illiterate peasants. Second, the quest is a family endeavor, headed by Guillermo, but demanding the engagement of all its members. In the enterprise of social advancement Guillermo embarked upon, the family ought to act like a "ship" he says, everyone heading towards the same port.

Guillermo threads the events of his life along his working trajectory, as all the grandfathers I interviewed did. In fact, 31 of the 57 pages of his interviews transcript are about work. Back in the Chilean society of the 30s, labor, and particularly, physical labor was the only legitimate resource a poor man had to "become someone different."

Guillermo opens his story with the self-image of a poor 6-year-old boy, living in the countryside, with a working mother, six siblings, and no father, waking up at four six days a week and walking twelve miles to the estate where he served as a peasant laborer. "Wearing no shoes, only flip-flops."

Fragment 1

> 1 **Oriana :** Ok, can you tell me about your life, can we start from the beginning?
> 2 **Guillermo:** Ok.
> 3 **O:** Let's start from your place of birth.
> 4 **G:** I was born in Buin, the year I was born, so we devoted our lives to work in the fields, for instance, plowing, woodcutting, coal-burning, herbs drying.
> 5 **O:** Your dad was a peasant?
> 6 **G:** Yes, so, you know, that was our job, and, you know, we had to walk almost twenty kilometers to get to work, we would leave at four in the morning.

Then Guillermo minutely describes every job he did after moving to Santiago at "the age of sixteen, seventeen": courier to a rich family, building-site worker, fruit picker, factory worker, mine worker, manager of the mine dining-hall, and finally a restaurant owner. He tells how he seized every job he was offered, even if it made "his body bleed" and he "had to sleep on the floor," had no proper contract, was at his employer's mercy, and had no holidays.

The main capital of a manual agricultural or industrial worker is bodily strength (Urresti 2007:283-285), thus men's use of corporeal references to speak of their working endurance. A body able to bear pain and long hours of physical work, such as mine worker Jose's, another interviewer of this generation. He describes a "young body" able to take two shifts in a row down the pit, a "healthy enough" body, which has the job "ingrained in the skin," as if it were "the air that one breathes."

Physical power was necessary in this quest, and moral will power, too. Guillermo's story says that not only hard work but also his respectful, humble, and humanitarian attitudes earned him the respect of his superiors, to the extent that the boss often ended up loving him "as a father does his son." In some of his jobs, this *huacho* (pejorative Chilean expression for a son who lacks parental recognition) found the father who had been absent from his own family, while the love and care of the boss's wife compensated the absence of his caring mother. Characterizing the working milieu, Guillermo brings into the scene family characters and roles. This means that the physically extenuating daily work was conducted amidst strong, supportive, and caring relationships, and not among functional, competitive, or merely formal ones. It also tells that the hitherto socio-economically excluded orphan boy has acquired social membership through labor. At the end of his story, Guillermo reflects:

Fragment 2

> 1162 **O:** What has your life been about?
> 1163 **G:** About a lot of suffering, a lot of suffering.
> 1164 **O:** Because of work, the economic situation?
> 1165 **G:** Tell me what job I haven't done. I never thought that I would get where I got, never ever.
> 1166 Imagine working in the fields wearing flip-flops, then the pit, then being the owner of the dining-hall, and then I bought the restaurant here [in Santiago].
> 1167 How could I ever imagine all that? All that in just one life.

The success symbols of modern society—income, class, status—signal the attainment of social respect: Guillermo earned a position in the "middle class," he possesses "his own house" in "a good—decent—neighborhood," was "able to afford his children's studies" so that six out of the seven completed secondary school, and is ending his life feeling proud of the "palaces" in which his children live today. After experiencing "what poverty really is," "suffering a great deal," and "mak[ing] many sacrifices," today Guillermo can return to his land of origin, transformed into "a different person," a "superior" man:

Fragment 3

> 1103 **G:** When one leaves his land, one leaves with the ambition of being someone different, and of coming back to one's land as a superior [being]. If you left wearing shabby trousers, you would want to come back wearing a good suit.

Dress is the sign of respectability that publically speaks of this man's success. Guillermo, however, does not voice out his achievement; he puts a visual image in the place of that text: the shabby kid was transformed into a man in suit. Despite the success, by the time of the interview, Guillermo was 76 and

had a part-time job as a council gardener. Retirement is too boring for this *doer* self:

Fragment 4

> 1119 **G:** I like every job, I don't like laziness. There they tell me, "You are such a good worker, you start working and never stop."
> 1120 And you should see how nice I have the grass there.
> 1121 **O:** You must feel proud, don't you?
> 1122 **G:** I feel proud and I like being working and have everything clean and tidy.

30s Generation, Ricardo's Story: "I Didn't Transform Anything"

If Guillermo's represents the successful story, grandfather Ricardo's contributes to the description of the storyline of material progress from the viewpoint of failure, of the "sad tale" (Goffman 1972), the account of the "wounded storyteller" (Frank 1995), or, in the terms here employed, the failed "quest." Born in 1925 to a casual relationship between a rich employer (the man) and a poor employee (the woman), Ricardo is a retired white-collar worker, a Christian man of right wing political ideas, married, and father of three children. Throughout his narrative, he overtly expresses what he wanted to achieve in life: economic and social progress; in his words, "being somebody else," "changing economic status," "climbing steps socially and economically," and "becoming rich." And he seems to have the resources for this quest. As he recounts, even his school's headmaster could anticipate Ricardo's bright future:

Fragment 5

> 1126 **Ricardo:** He [school headmaster] used to tell to the other students more than to me: "This lad has a good head, he'll become rich, he'll have everything, and he'll come back driving his own car."

Accordingly, Ricardo uses his narrative to show that he did everything the right way to meet that goal. In the past eighty years, he has led a morally worthy life and trusted in the opportunity of advancement that the social structure promised: "If you don't work, you won't progress." Despite not having parents and suffering emotional and economic deprivation, he completed school, got a technical degree, and worked hard and with honesty since the age of eleven, always acting with the right means ("good weapons")—unlike the rest "who wanted to rob and not to work."

However, life did not turn out as promised, and a deep sense of unfairness fuels Ricardo's narrative. He was not allowed to reach the place he thought he deserved. The series of "betrayals" that prevented him from achieving his goal gives this narrative its structure. In storying the self, he articulates his defense, explaining the reasons of this failed quest. For a start, he was betrayed by both of his parents. Having been born from a casual relationship, he was denied a family, and grew up like a *huacho*: "I had nobody to count on." The mother never took care of him, and the father only sent him money during his childhood.

Fragment 6

> 787 **R:** My dream was to become a lawyer, but I got stuck there [in the South, where we was sent to be taken care of] had my father wanted to help me ... I could have gone on studying … the others had [the resources] for studying and I had nobody.

Then he was betrayed by his father's relatives who denied him in the more elementary way, "they changed my surname." Being 15 years old, through a copy of his birth certificate he needed for a school application, Ricardo realized that he was legally registered under another surname and that the place and date of birth he always took as his were wrong. For Ricardo, the main consequence of this change of identity was that he could no longer show his life achievements. "It seemed as if I was dead, I said, 'To whom can I show my sport trophies, my diplomas,' they had another name." Out of anger, "I set them on fire." This scene shows that rather than to a sense of self-accountability or self-reward, his sense of identity is tied to external recognition, one for which he no longer has the proper proof.

Next, he was deceived by his step-grandmother, who kept for herself the money Ricardo's father sent for his care:

Fragment 7

> 64 **R:** Everybody said: "Look, that one has a millionaire father, but goes around like a shabby kid." I didn't even had shoes, I went around in bare feet.
> 65 With the amount of money he sent I could have had the life of a king. The lady [step-grandmother] even got a house with the money.

Ricardo was a "king" in earnest not only because he held the ideal of becoming rich and powerful since an early age but also because his father was a "millionaire." However, the heir spent childhood looking like a "shabby," marginal kid.

Once married, he was betrayed by his wife who "wasted" his salary helping everyone in need. To Ricardo's mind, as much as to his generational peers', wife and kids should be part of the economic enterprise. Ricardo blames part of his failure on his wife. She "squandered" what he earned; she was not the "partner to succeeding."

Then, in the recollections of his working trajectory, Ricardo tells how a number of employers made profit out of his working achievement without giving him any benefit. The final strike was given by the public institution in which he worked for two decades. Ricardo was rated as an "excellent" employee year after year and "had not a single stain" in his career in the institution, "despite those who attempted at making me falling." But, during the military dictatorship, the institution forced him to retire with a miserable pension on the wrong grounds that he was an infiltrated communist in the public apparatus. Ricardo reflects: "I have never had a good pay, I found it very unfair; I've done so many sacrifices to be repaid this way."

There he was when we met, juggling to make a living out of an "unfair" pension, living in his in-laws' house, counting only with his bedroom for a personal space. He was physically and emotionally ill, after an ulcer that carried with it half of his stomach, and after a psychiatric treatment for alcoholism and depression. And he also gave in morally. He tells how, when he was about to leave

his job in the public sector, he took profit of the position to bribe.

Today he is unable to work, and he looks and feels deteriorated. A skinny body and a thin voice stream. Moreover, Ricardo does not get along with the wife or with her family, and at this point in time, "there are no friends."

Ricardo could not find out a title for his life story. Not because there were no ideas, but because—he explains—"I didn't transform anything." There was not a successful quest to name. Ricardo tells the story of a defeat, but he is not the one to blame: "I made many sacrifices; I taught and helped so many people." The system failed. It "did not pay" as deserved. He has been wronged by society. Instead of glory, he got what he calls the "Chile's pay": "betrayals," "deceit," "robbery," "bribes," "treacheries," in a world of "dirty" people ("pigs") and "bent paths." Although he did not choose it, I think this is the title that summarizes his narrative in his own terms; a story about the "unfair pay of Chile."

The 30s Generation Moral Quest: The "Struggle to Make Something of Oneself" Through Material Progress

As Guillermo's and Ricardo's accounts illustrate, storying the self through a social narrative of material progress emerges as a common structural feature of the biographical tales I collected among this generation. The idea of "becoming another person" is a central narrative drive in this cohort. This "transformation" of the self does not depend on an inner search nor is it about overcoming emotional deprivation, despite the lack of individual attention, affection, and emotional support evident in many of their accounts.

This generation's quest aims to change initial living conditions through material progress and social advancement so as to give their families "a different life." This goal underpins the idea of *surgir*—literally, "to arise"—which is at the base of these stories. S*urgir* refers to the struggle to get ahead, to make something of oneself, the will to improve. For those interviewees belonging to the working and lower-middle classes, *surgir* basically means to move up a social class—"looking for greater well-being," "a change of life," "carrying on building and building," "coming to have a lot," "climbing higher," "changing economic status," "living better," "going further than your forebears," or becoming a "superior" person are all connotations of this idea that they use.

Among those with a lower socio-economic background, the idea of self-improvement through social mobility also conveys a civilizing component. For example, when explaining the importance of giving his kids all the opportunities to get a good and complete education, 85-year-old grandfather José explains:

Fragment 8

> 32 **José:** We started with that idea that our children wouldn't be like little animals running around adrift like slum dogs.
> 33 We gave them a Christian education to become professionals.

Beyond class differences, the moral culture needed to make something of oneself depends on "hard work," "sacrifice," "suffering," "major efforts," "will," "seriousness," "responsibility," "perseverance," and fair rewards. These are the values and virtues that strengthen the moral basis of the self.

The notion of social advancement present in these narratives is grounded in an idea of history as a linear progression and in a sense of confidence regarding the possibilities society offers for achieving a satisfactory standard of living. Sometimes hyper-realistically, members of this generation describe their capacity to overcome hardship without anybody's help. The heroic tone imprinted upon their narratives helps to represent this idea of the good, while also prepares the story to provoke feelings of admiration or imitation. When in 1939 grandmother Margarita married Alberto, they were "poor as rats" and had to "start from scratch." Asking no one for help, "owning not so much as a pencil," they "came to have a lot."

A "culture of endurance" underlies this generation's moral economy (Urresti 2007)—having "a bruised life," "a life full of blows," "a long-suffering life," or "a life of struggle." This is the good life, "as it prepares you for everything." Life is not something enjoyable, but a "tough" reality to surmount. "Happiness" and "satisfaction" depend upon "knowing how to act in life," that is, upon knowing how "to accomplish one's duties."

I now turn to the analysis of the storylines and moral motives of the 50s generation, through the cases of Elena and Miguel.

50s Generation, Elena's Storyline: Working Over Emotionally Threatening Events, a Healing Process

53-year-old Elena is the elderly of seven siblings in an upper-middle class family. She is a Catholic woman with right wing political ideas, a technical education, her own business to attend, a married life in crisis, and three professional children who have been the center of her life.

The working trajectory was the connector of Guillermo's and Ricardo's stories. Elena has worked since she was young, and in a number of occasions, she has been the main provider for her immediate family. Yet, unlike the grandfathers, she articulates her story through psychological "traumas"; emotionally threatening events that had long-lasting effects on her psychical make-up. Through these traumas, Elena establishes temporal links between adolescence, youth, and maturity, and constructs the portrayal of her family and of herself.

Elena's account starts with "the first big blow of my life"—an unexpected change of school due to the family's straightened circumstances. The second school enjoyed a lower status, but the trauma was not socio-economic:

Fragment 9

> 12 **Elena:** After twelve years I was suddenly in another school. It was one of those things that have marked my life, from one moment to the next seeing yourself in another environment, with other classmates. I knew nobody.

Elena presents the change of school as an emotionally stressful event that abruptly transformed her everyday environment and the landscape of her relationships; it threatened her familiar world and represented the "first" moment in life where she felt displaced, helpless, confused, and insecure.

Elena discloses a second trauma in response to a general question about her family memories. As the oldest child, the teenage Elena had to care for her seven siblings and the home while her parents were at work. Whereas the previous generation takes this as the most "natural" and unquestioned of duties, Elena considers that such a "burden" should not be an adolescent's responsibility. In her case, it caused a "trauma" that disrupted the relationship with her mother (see: lines 82-85) and siblings (see: line 81) and her own identity:

Fragment 10

74 **E:** My family life was chaos, I mean, um, chaos in the sense that I think that, this part is really difficult for me [starts crying].
75 The thing is that it was a huge burden for me, you see, um, I dislike it because it has brought consequences to my adult life.
76 My parents worked, I'm the eldest of eight.
77 So, in a way, I was the mother of my siblings.
78 One of the things I have worked upon in life is that period of my life when [I had to] assume the responsibility for that household
79 [a responsibility] I shouldn't have had to assume.
80 It meant I didn't have a youth.
81 It made the relationship with my siblings nonexistent.
82 It's been hard to get rid of this baggage and not to keep reproaching my mother as I did at one point.
83 I used to think she worked to evade the mess the eight of us made.
84 So I had to bear the mess.
85 And that shit fucked me up, it really fucked me up a lot. It marked me very much, until this very day.

Over the years, Elena has worked upon this event of her biography in search of "personal growth." She has worked through her negative emotions and the relationship with her mother and siblings. She has also elaborated an interpretation with which to confront her pain, and is deeply aware of the possible influences of this trauma upon her own maternal role:

Fragment 11

114 **E:** The anger built up and built up, and it began to take over me,
115 and I began to take it away through therapies, personal therapies of personal growth.
116 I've got rid of this baggage and I've tried to understand why it happened.

She has embarked on what other members of the 50s generation call a "healing process," trying to be at peace with her story, and thus with herself. Trying also to discover the positive side of this stressful experience. This is the case of the following characterization of her family's spirit:

Fragment 12

126 **E:** We are the children of rigor; we are all hard workers,
127 we don't mind starting from scratch or breaking our backs,
128 we are hard workers, we can survive any storm,
129 we have such a strength, such capacity to move on.
130 I think we learned that from what we had to live.
131 Now, I'm grateful of what I am and of what my parents gave to me.
132 They gave what they could ... it could have been worse.

In continuity with narratives of the 30s generation, Elena refers to the culture of endurance as the capacity of standing any adversity. But, instead of holding a physical connotation—how a good man "stands" long hours of painstaking work—she links the expression to a strength of spirit, illustrating the interiorization of the idea of endurance.

Finally, Elena recounts the trauma of her marital separation. Three years ago, Marcelo, her husband, lost his job. He moved to the South to start a new business. Once there, Marcelo began to neglect his family, and Elena had to make all the effort to keep their relationship going. Left alone in Santiago, in charge of the home and their three children, Elena felt overwhelmed and disheartened. After some months, she decided to split up with him. But, during these years, they have come together and separated a number of times. The future looks uncertain. Elena no longer knows what she needs him for. In his absence, she became the "man" of the house, providing for the children both economically and emotionally. She misses his company, but she is also enjoying living a life of her own.

Constructing her story from trauma to trauma, Elena presents her identity as the result of disruptive events and of all the personal traits they have imprinted on her: being courageous and never disheartened, having strength of spirit, becoming "a man," and taking the lead if necessary. Most of these traumas are caused within the context of intimate relationships (family of origin or of procreation).

Elena entitled her story as "A life that has not been easy nor boring"; learning about one's life and thus about oneself is a basic condition for structuring a sense of inner integration. In her case, the biographical narrative articulates a sense of psychological continuity and helps to cope with life.

50s Generation, Miguel's Storyline: "Why So Lonely?"

Miguel, a 56-year-old blue-collar worker of kind manners, easy smile, and sincere talk, is another interviewee of the 50s generation. A feeling of loneliness pervades this man's account. At the end of our five-hour interviews, he explicitly comes up to this conclusion, choosing to entitle his story "Why so lonely?"

Miguel opens his narrative with the image of a nomadic childhood, just like "gypsies": many changes of residence and of school, and the continual transformation of his immediate environment due to his father's precarious working situation. He blames to this instability the little memories he is able to retrieve from these early years. Neither could he reconstruct his infancy "borrowing" memories from his main carers. His parents were "weird, to say the least," they did not used to talk to him. Miguel portrays himself as a reserved boy, most of the time

playing alone. To these he adds the figure of an alcoholic father who beat up and quarreled with his mother. "I listened, but I did not interfere in these quarrels," he tells. "Maybe because of these early experiences—he continues—I got separated from my wife." Seeing his parents arguing, he developed aversion towards conflict and never learned how to negotiate disagreements. In fact, as an adult, he came to beat his wife once. He tells that after seeing himself enacting the conduct that horrified him in childhood, he chose to get separated.

In his recollections of adolescence and adulthood, Miguel connects the feeling of loneliness to the lack of confidence his father and then his wife showed in him. He could not develop rewarding relationships because they did not "believe" in him. Going to school, one rainy day he fell out of the bus, and ended up all wet and full of mud. So instead of going to school, he headed back home. The father did not believe his story and thought he had made it up just because Miguel did not like studying (the father, by way of contrast, was an excellent student, as I was notified by the three interviewees of this family). His father's distrust profoundly "marked" Miguel. After the episode, he made the decision to abandon the school and began a period of "rebelliousness." He was 12 years old.

Miguel identifies his separation in the early 90s as the next, and probably the most profound, landmark in his life. This is his deepest "regret." He never lost touch with his three kids, and has spent every Saturday with them since. But, until this day, he cannot be "at peace" because he has not been at home on a daily basis. He even blames the misbehavior of his youngest son on his absence. Unlike Ricardo, it is not in Miguel's interest to start distributing guilt, blame, or responsibilities. Differences apart, he has never spoken ill about his wife. But, through his version of the story, he implicitly signals his wife's mistrust as the main factor that drove them apart. After twelve years of marriage, she started saying, "that I was lazy, that we would never have our own house, that I couldn't save a penny, and that I was seeing another woman." Miguel used to spend every Saturday with his football team, having drinks and getting drunk. But, "I also worked hard," he says in his defense. And, "I never missed my responsibilities" and "I had never asked anybody's help." But, "if the other person is telling you all the time that you are lazy, at the end of the day, it gets tiring." At a point he identifies this lack of trust as a reason for looking for another woman's company. He feels humiliated by the lack of confidence of his wife. She undermined his sense of self. Ultimately, what Miguel has been claiming throughout his narrative is recognition. He needs to feel loved so he can restore his sense of self and put an end to a story of loneliness.

Comparative Intergenerational Analysis: From the Quest of Material Progress to the Quest of Personal Growth

Whereas narratives of the 30s generation constitute the moral domain by telling realistic stories of traversing hardships, those of the 50s generation recount personal narratives about facing turning points and overcoming "traumas" and "baggage." They draw on a sense of psychological interiority and on a "therapeutic relation to the self" (Rose 1999:xx). This is their moral voice. At the core of this generation's narratives there is a quest for "personal growth." A state of health, solace, and a meaningful and fulfilling life are sought not through the transformation of material circumstances, but through learning to come to terms with one's story and gaining self-reflexivity and self-understanding.

If the 30s generation's quests revolve around economic resources—work, property, goods—the 50s generation assemble their narratives with personal relationships, ties, and bonds. When the moral sources of the self rely on external figures, the public realm is a central space of narrative production. Much of the accounts of the 30s generation concern public life: their working trajectory and their community life. The 50s generation, by contrast, set large sections of their narratives within the intimate space of the family.

Another difference is that unlike their children's generation, narrators of the 30s generation do not dwell on the effects that emotional wounds can have on their sense of self. When they got to a point in their stories where a sensitive issue was to be disclosed, typically they said very little. Thirty years ago, retired blue-collar worker, Anselmo, lost his youngest son in a car accident. He recounts the event, tells of his deep sorrow, and recalls how he sought solitude to cry out his grief. But, sorrows, Anselmo concludes, "have to be faced and then shouldered, and you have to get on with life." He does not dwell on the consequences of this loss for his sense of self. But, the fact that sufferings are not thematized does not mean they are forgotten. Every morning since that car accident, Anselmo has commended himself into his son's hands.

Those interviewees born in the 30s frame the good life as one of sacrifice and suffering, one gained in the "struggle" to "get ahead" and "make something of oneself," basically, through the betterment of living conditions. The storylines of 50s generation interviewees divert from issues of ordinary life, work, and production. In this case, narrative work is oriented towards the problematization of the relationship of self upon self—these interviewees place at center stage the capacity to come to terms with the personal story and to integrate the events of life into a meaningful and comprehensible account. A sign of this generational shift in the underlying motif of the biographical account is the replacement of the idea of "improvement" for that of "growth." A transit from social stories of material progress to inner narratives of personal growth, and from descriptive and over-realistic accounts to more impressionistic and experimental narrative styles accompanies this shift.

In this process, the moral culture of endurance—based on "self-sacrifice," "suffering," and self-postponement—gives way to a moral culture based on self-examination, self-knowledge, and self-expressiveness. These transformations, I want to propose, are indicative of what Charles Taylor (1989) calls the emergence of the question of the meaning of life as an "inner search." When the notion of the good is externally defined, life is not interpretable or questionable, nor is it subject to reflexive analysis or evaluative claims. Narrators of the 30s generation do not frame their stories as a search for a sense of being. In contrast, their children's narratives express the need to discover their fundamental orientations in life through inner exploration. A question that can

only be answered once moral authority has been transferred to the interiority of the self. Taylor defines interiorization as the process of relocation of the authoritative power in moral issues from a moral ontology that gives predominance to the voice of others to one that gives prevalence to the person's voice. In the cases here examined, this transit does not mean that the members of the 30s generation lack a sense of interiority. What is new is the status granted by their descendants to that "interiority" as the primordial moral locus of the self.

To develop this sense of inwardness, being in touch with one's feelings and emotions comes to be something people have to attain to be true and full human beings (Taylor 1989). In the narratives of the 30s generation, being a moral agent has little to do with their inner feelings and emotions, whilst their descendants afford these a key role in the moral constitution of the self.

Conclusions: The Proposed Approach in Perspective

The connection between personal story and morality has been long enunciated, but remains under-researched. Combining moral and narrative theory, I have tried to contribute to filling this gap, developing an analytical strategy for the examination of the relation between biographical narratives and ideas of the good. In particular, I have argued and illustrated how elements of the organization of the biographical story can be of analytical use for the study of the moral constitution of the self in narrative form—specifically, how different storylines go along with situated ideas of the good. This proposal is built under the premise that biographical accounts require the use of "thick" language of the good or "thick ethical concepts" (Taylor's terminology).

To this end, I have offered a comparative analysis of the main motive underpinning the life stories of two generations of Chilean people. This set the basis for examining changes in the moral culture of this society over the past eight decades, especially regarding transformations of the rhetoric of the good life. This line of inquiry into the moral motives organizing the storyline of the personal narrative sheds light on the moral basis of the self being narratively enacted, allowing the study of shifting, historically situated, culturally embedded, although dynamically narrated selves. In particular, in the empirical exercise developed, the category of the generation served as a gateway to the cultural repertoires of the self around which to establish the experiences of both the *contemporary* and the *predecessors* (Shütz 1967) over time.

A search for storylines and central moral motives may run the risk of promoting narrative over-coherence, over-consistency, and unitary visions of the self. This is probably a risk any formal account oriented towards the discovery of common trends among groups of narratives may face. Two preventions may help to reduce this risk. On the one hand, to talk about narrative composition, I purposefully use the word organization rather than that of structure. Although within a set of limited cultural resources this choice is meant to provide analytical space of authorship to the narrator, it also takes distance from any claim for a kind of teleological project inevitably lying behind each narrative. Moreover, I have stressed that the overall intention of the analytical exercise here proposed is to show how moral conventions work as points of reference for the composition of personal narratives. On the other hand, it is my view that dangers of monolithic, single, unitary versions of narrated selves are to be tackled, to a large extent, in the writing process, giving space for deviations, contradictions, and loose ends. Finally, and beyond the scope of the analytical exercise offered here, it is important to stress that the articulation of personal narratives around ideas of the good, as proposed following Taylor, allows the necessary analytical space to examine tensions and compromises among different goods, as well as overtly or unconscious practices of repression of moral feelings as a consequence of the value narrators pose in one of these goods. Taylor's idea of "ethical articulation" and the notion of "repertoire of moral motives" provide the basis for such analysis.

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