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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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## CHILEAN EXILE The Uncertainties of Return

by Claudio and Marcela Duran

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*"So, really human beings are made of flesh, soul and a passport" . . . (Chilean saying in exile)*

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On September 11, 1973, a military coup led by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Augusto Pinochet, overthrew President Salvador Allende. The level of violence that occurred as part of the military takeover was of a kind never before experienced by Chileans. The repression seemed to have no boundaries and no laws. Many thousands were executed, killed in confrontations, made to "disappear", sent to concentration camps and tortured. Almost everyone among Allende's supporters felt threatened.

It is not surprising, then, that thousands of Chileans filled nearly every embassy in the hope of protecting their lives, their freedom, or their families. In the few months following the coup, tens of thousands of Chileans left their homeland to become established in many different countries for (what they expected

to be) a short time.

Now, more than ten years later, these thousands continue to live in exile. Although the military regime has slowly started to reopen Chile's doors, only a small proportion have been allowed to return. Between 1982 and 1983, 3,000 individuals went back.

The increased possibility of being able to return, but low actual number of returnees, adds to the already strong tensions Chilean exiles feel about their future. From those tensions, a creative culture of exile has arisen, illustrated by the so-called "New Chilean Song" played by several folk groups and mainly by Quilapayun and Inti-Illimani (the former based in France and the latter in Italy) who have spent the last ten years playing and singing all over the world, including most of the big cities in Canada.

One of their songs, called "I Return", has become a sort of "exile anthem":

I return at last without humiliation,  
not asking to be forgiven, but, not  
forgetting.

Man is never really vanquished:  
his defeat is always brief;  
it is a stimulus that moves  
the vocation of his struggle.

For the land that sends him into exile  
and the land that receives him in exile  
will tell him that, after all,  
he suffers the pains of all nations.

Chilean exiles also share a political commitment. Political participation has been high, consistent, well-organized and tied to political activities in Chile itself. However, their political participation and their culture of exile have complicated the difficulties of adjustment in the countries of reception.

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