

University of North Carolina at Asheville

¿Dónde están?:
Women's Protest to the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1990

A Senior Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the Department of History
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by
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It is about communities, personal networks, and shared historical memories and their power to unite individuals around a common goal. Its heroes are not political leaders, or members of the military establishment, but rather poor people who ‘burst through the boundaries of the accepted limits of social behavior,’ and risked their lives to fight tyranny and injustice.

-Cathy Lisa Schneider, *Shantytown Protest in Pinochet's Chile*

Women held a vital role in shaping Chile during the years of Augusto Pinochet's regime, 1973-1990, as well as in structuring what the country would become after the dictatorship dissolved. Women's roles are often diminished in the political process and perceived as inconsequential; however, through various forms of protest and by challenging the notions of womanhood, they established a role as political actors within Chile's history. Throughout the protest movements during the regime, there emerged a clear class distinction among the women in regards to method and approach of protesting. The division existed among upper-middle class, conservative women who supported the regime, and lower class, liberal women who comprised the women's labor force. In addition to the action on the ground, a notion of international solidarity and transnational support developed through media coverage and speeches on behalf of the oppressed. Support and solidarity are crucial elements to the women's protest movements and their ability to reach larger numbers of women across the world. Consensus was not reached between the women; however, they operated with similar tactics to attain their goals, which revolved around support for their families. Despite the common desire to support family, how this notion manifested itself was dependent upon social standing.

Accounts generated by scholars, from the social sciences and humanities, gathered from the women contribute to a more complete version of the narratives. In addition to these first hand narratives, secondary accounts based upon interviews conducted by scholars, have contributed to the literature available. These accounts also come from collections of visitors to Chile during the

Pinochet regime. Editors Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth, in *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*, show similarities between women's movements and their roles in activism throughout Chile using selected articles. One of the articles, "Defending Dictatorship: Conservative Women in Pinochet's Chile and the 1988 Plebiscite,"¹ by Margaret Power, is centered on women that supported Pinochet, but allows for an argument to be made based upon class distinctions. The various reactions to Pinochet validate the idea that not all women were in favor of, or protesting the same ideals, there were variations among them. Also in existence is a definite class divide between poor women working to feed their families, and survive and wealthy women that the regime sought to ally themselves with.

Many disadvantaged women sought collective action as a way to survive the economic crises throughout the regime. In the article, "Feminist Anti-Authoritarian Politics: The Role of Women's Organizations in the Chilean Transition to Democracy," by Patricia Chuchryk, found within the collection, *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy*,² edited by Jane S. Jaquette, there is discussion about OEPs, *organizaciones económicas populares* (popular economic organizations). OEPs, for example, would buy one large liter of oil then divide it amongst the community at a lower price. This ability to organize around a common goal self-empowered women and encouraged them to mobilize politically and systematize their own economic strategies.

¹ Margaret Power, "Defending Dictatorship: Conservative Women in Pinochet's Chile and the 1988 Plebiscite," in *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*, eds. Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 299-324.

² Patricia M. Chuchryk, "Feminist Anti-Authoritarian Politics: The Role of Women's Organizations in the Chilean Transition to Democracy," in *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy*, ed. Jane S. Jaquette (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 149-184.

Scholar Steve Stern, in *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile: A Trilogy*³, examines three distinct periods of the Pinochet regime by accumulating interviews from those that lived through the transition from socialist president Salvador Allende to Pinochet, the high-days of Pinochet, and his ultimate arrest. Stern's trilogy allows for a full spectrum perspective of the regime from various sources, which encompassed the effects on people, especially women's experiences. Scholarship has offered varied perspectives, yet historians have not accessed all of the accounts and testimonies. This allows for additional light to be shed and commentaries made in transnational support on previously ignored accounts. These sources allow for the examination of effects, such as psychological and physical abuses, and explore the ways in which women dealt with their experience of the regime.

Furthering commentary on the experience of women, the collections of Bobbye Ortiz and her daughter, Victoria Ortiz, offer insight into crucial aspects of international solidarity between women. Both, self-professed international feminists, their collections offer materials that are extensive in the history of international women's liberation. The collections also followed the emergence and development of revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. To date, scholars in the field have not used these collections, yet they illuminate the notions of transnational support through women found worldwide. Within Chile there existed a class distinction and divide among the women who protested: that of the elite, who tended to be conservative, and the poorer women, whose protests were based more on community level action. By examining the scholarly contributions to women's protest methods and the availability

³ Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Steve J. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). These are the books within the trilogy of Pinochet, entitled *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile: A Trilogy*.

of documents through the Ortiz collections, parallels can be made between the existence of transnational solidarity and the direct action women had on the ground.

Focusing primarily on transnational efforts in North America, Barbara Ehrenreich, currently an American author still involved in women's rights activism, is a pertinent example of forging connections beyond cultural lines. At the beginning of her career, she was a featured lecturer at various conferences throughout the United States. Her speech given July 4, 1975, at a National Socialist/Feminist Conference is an interpretation on the necessity for women to act in the present. Through her theories on socialist/feminism she explored possible shifts in attitude that occurred. Ehrenreich urged that the whole notion of revolution needed to be reexamined, that "the revolutionary process extends into all aspects of life-including those, which have been defined as 'personal' and not 'political.' And the revolutionary transformation involves a transformation of the entire fabric of social relationships-including those ...defined as 'naturally' determined, such as those between people of different ages- or sexes."⁴ Women's development in the revolutionary process was stifled due to her not being permitted to enter the public sphere from which she was always excluded. By reevaluating what revolution meant it broadened the capacity for involvement and instantly increased its inclusivity.

Ehrenreich continued to unfold socialist/feminism by proclaiming that it is "characterized by an emphasis on the importance of subjective factors in revolutionary change. That is, we don't have to wait until 'after the revolution' to transform ourselves as people...from this point of view, the task of 'consciousness raising' -uprooting deeply entrenched bourgeois, racist and

⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich, "Socialist/Feminism and Revolution," (speech given at the National Socialist/Feminist Conference, Yellow Springs, Ohio, July 4, 1975): 1. Box 22, File: Social and Political Bases of Female Sterilization, Bobbye Ortiz Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Ehrenreich, Bobbye Ortiz Papers).

sexist attitudes is central to political struggle.”⁵ This notion is directly related to women in terms of not having to wait to make changes. Ehrenreich argues that there is no timeline for change, it does not have to follow revolution, it can precede it or not even be a reaction to prodding, chaos or upheaval. She contends that socialist/feminist thinking is “...characterized by a much more dynamic and dialectical notion of history. We know that objective conditions in the historical ‘stage’ we are living in shape our lives; but we also know that we have the power to change those conditions.”⁶ The entirety of her speech rests upon the crux that women are central and critical to revolutions. By solidifying women’s role with the term, “critical importance,” she stresses that it is not manifested in an auxiliary role or a minority group; rather, they are the leading force, which she concluded through her tenants of socialist/feminism. Applying her theory to women activists in the Pinochet regime, it is evident that this internal acceptance of women’s essential role propelled movements forward and garnered more international support.

In April, 1975, female political prisoner and activist, Carmen Castillo, made a speech in Quebec, Canada, as a means to campaign for political prisoners. Her speech inspired and educated those who were not directly involved in the regime, and mobilized their support for the political prisoners. As a political prisoner herself, detained by the military on October 5, 1974, she was able to speak not only with conviction, but firsthand experience as well. Castillo was released through international solidarity efforts and explained that her touring and speeches were a direct impact of her time imprisoned. This resulted in her commitment to spread around the world the reality of the conditions in Chile. Her speech illuminates the repressive measures taken in Chile: “the results [of repression] are visible: more than 30,000 deaths, more than 100,000 prisoners, the torture and humiliation of tens of thousands of persons, collective insecurity... the

⁵ Ehrenreich, 1, Bobbye Ortiz Papers.

⁶ Ehrenreich, 2, Bobbye Ortiz Papers.

closure of all opposition media, repression in the Universities, and repression of artistic and cultural activities in general.”⁷ Castillo continued by addressing the manipulation by the military of the women, “[they] are often politically manipulated and used by reactionary elements and the agents of imperialism.”⁸ The government Right:

...was able to mobilize thousands of women, not only from the bourgeoisie, but also from the petit-bourgeoisie and even certain popular strata...this mobilization had two axes: the improvement of their standard of living; that is, the fight against inflation, the black market, and the lack of supplies; phenomena in which the bourgeoisie were not themselves innocent; and the respect for democratic liberties, which it was said were threatened by ‘the advance of communism.’⁹

Castillo claims that the regime knew what their actions entailed; they used women as a political and ideological shield against their opposition. The question of manipulation is difficult to assess, since there are many factors that contribute to feelings of manipulation, and more often than not there is no concrete evidence that can be used to determine an answer.

As a woman, Castillo’s focus was primarily on the role women played throughout the regime, thus her reactions were strongly colored by the disappointment and naivety that she felt was exhibited. She found that these women were not only manipulated, but that they blindly

moment breaking down—which was the basis for feminine inequality.”¹⁰ Even at the end of the regime the debate continued on the issue of political manipulation of women. During a speech to a crowd predominately comprised of women, Pinochet expressed his gratitude to those that supported him. The Santiago Domestic service reported on December 1, 1989, that Pinochet addressed the crowd, relaying the message if the people wanted him out of power, he would leave. Despite this dramatic announcement, the core of Pinochet’s speech was directed toward the women that had supported him during his reign. Pinochet rested his power in the ability to reach, and as some reminisce, manipulate the women voters. He stated, “Chile’s future lies in [the women’s] hands. During meetings with various distinguished Chilean women, I have repeatedly told you to talk to your children—teach them about freedom, about the law—but you do not believe me.”¹¹ He viewed the regime as a successful operation, despite the accusations of manipulation.

Regardless of the support Pinochet thought he had, Castillo addressed in her speech the women’s opposition which countered the regime. For women that were manipulated others were questioning and protesting the regime policies. They started to “participate in the activities of the Resistance Committees, in the factories, in the slums, in the countryside, distributing the clandestine propaganda of the Resistance...the women and men, who today suffer the weight of repression in Chile, are the first to demand a firmer and more unitary action by the entirety of the Chilean Left.”¹² Castillo stressed the importance of solidarity in making a movement progress and become successful. Without the continual sacrifices of those who believe in the cause they

¹⁰ Castillo, 65, WOLA Records.

¹¹“Pinochet Will Leave ‘If The People Ask,’” *Santiago Domestic Service in Spanish*, FBIS-LAT-89-231, December 4, 1989, 53. Box 62, File: Chile 1989 Military Statements, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

¹² Castillo, 66, WOLA Records.

are supporting and fighting for, there would be no change. Regardless of the repression, women continued to protest, and in an open letter sent to all foreign embassies in Santiago, as well as to the head of the Supreme Court, they declared, "...we know that we who want to put an end to this regime of death are the majority."¹³ This powerful action solidified the desire of leftist women to rid Chile of Pinochet's dictatorship. At the Supreme Court, March 8, 1977, over 100 women demonstrated, presenting "...a petition concerning 501 disappeared prisoners signed by 2,300 persons, including bishops, clergymen and union representatives."¹⁴ By involving foreign embassies, these women, who were part of major women's organizations, trade unions, and heads of organizations for the disappeared and political prisoners, appealed to the transnational efforts already in place. They realized that if they received and maintained foreign support, change in leadership would be an inevitable result. Scholar Steve Stern commented on the importance of international solidarity, "...the international aspect mattered...the human rights and dissident memory camp had long valued international connection, opinion, and solidarity."¹⁵ The ability of women to come together across class and cultural lines affected the urgency and success of their message. Both Ehrenreich and Castillo interpret women's role in protest movements as the pivotal element in a successful movement; however, they only touch briefly upon the class distinctions that arose in factions within Chile and throughout transnational support. They stress the importance of women, but not the status required to be heard. There is a correlation between class status, transnational efforts, and those who are ultimately hearing and

¹³ "Women's Action," *Chile Alert*, June 1984, no. 7. Box 66, File: Chile: NGOs/Chile Alert, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as "Women's Action," WOLA Records).

¹⁴ "Campaign for Disappeared Political Prisoners," Pamphlet. Box 56, Patrick Ahern Files: Pamphlets and non-serial publications undated, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

¹⁵ Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 274.

acting upon the messages of Ehrenreich and Castillo. Regardless of the propagandistic features of both speeches, noticeable change did not occur within the realm of transnational support and certainly did not change within Chile until nearly a decade later.

The spring and summer of 1983 saw the greatest increase of protests, street violence, and arrests since the coup. On May Day 1983, the army arrested seventy-six people, followed 10 days later, by a National day of protest organized by the copper workers trade union (CTC), which was widely supported. Ultimately, the army killed two civilians, injured 150, and arrested 600. As the protest raged on the death toll reached five and on the second day alone more than 1,000 people were arrested, including the president of the union, Rodolfo Seguel.¹⁶ July 12, 1983, another day of national protest, was the first time since the coup that the army arrived to clear the streets.¹⁷ Scholars suggest that 1983 marked a turn in women's protesting, as well as this 'spark' in the nation as a whole to challenge the established regime. Historian Steve Stern explains, "...as with so much in Chile, after 1983 the subterranean turned visible, and ferment turned explosive. Oppositional women turned into a new social movement actor and a new symbol, beyond the actions and symbolism of women in the 1970s."¹⁸ By 1983, liberal women had enough of the repressive policies of the regime and began to challenge the government on all fronts placing them at the forefront of the oppositional movement. Despite the increase in protests the repression continued and during a rally, "On March 8, 1988, International Women's Day, 4,000 demonstrated in Valparaiso, demanding the right to life, liberty, justice, and democracy...over 20 women were arrested, including five journalists."¹⁹ In comparison to the

¹⁶ Phillip O'Brien, *Chile: The Pinochet Decade: The Rise and Fall of the Chicago Boys* (London: Latin American Bureau Monthly Review, June 1983), 7.

¹⁷ O'Brien, 8.

¹⁸ Stern, 276.

¹⁹ "Women's Action," WOLA Records.

1970s, women became main actors in protest movements and demanded the due process of change. Poorer women, in the *poblaciones*²⁰, took charge of protest movements furthering the already evident class divide of support for Pinochet.

Part of understanding 1983 as a marker in Chilean women's history, are the years that led up to the protests and the increasing importance that feminism and women's rights played in the international community. In 1975, the United Nations, organized an International Year of Women, followed by a UN declaration for the Decade of Women (1975-1985). The theme of solidarity and unity progressed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, which corroborates with the interest in Latin American women's movements by the Ortiz women. Through the UN conference, women learned that by deliberate and intensive activism they could capture the attention of world governments and UN officials, thus focusing male attention to the goals of the Decade: sustainable development, peace, and women's equality. Curiosity arose on an international scale to obtain knowledge of the events as they happened, which promoted international solidarity.

Prior to the Pinochet regime, "a complex and shifting relationship emerged between the new social movements, the labor movement and the political parties...In general, however, up until 1973, the political parties provided the direction and political activists headed most social organizations."²¹ Meanwhile, Chile was attempting to organize itself politically with constant strain from the waning economy and pressure from larger export countries, especially the United States, to find a way to support and uphold democracy without following the same path as Cuba,

²⁰ *Poblaciones* are slums around Santiago where the working class and poor live. There is often no piped water, sewage facilities, or street lighting. For more information refer to Cathy Lisa Schneider, *Out of the Shadows*, 18-9.

²¹ Teresa Valdés, *Chilean Social Movements and Participatory Democracy: Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO)*, 15-16. Box 66, File: Chile On A Path To Change 1986, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Valdés, WOLA Records).

in terms of communism or a leader like Fidel Castro. Teresa Valdés, currently a senior researcher at the Center for the Study and Development of Women (CEDEM) in Santiago, Chile, was also a prisoner of the Pinochet regime. Her speech, as a member of the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Chile, analyzed the impending destruction from the economic initiatives taking place in the early 1970s. Valdés concluded that the culmination of pressures from the outside and the modernization process, along with the growing numbers of poor, caused the social explosion that destroyed Chile's economic and political system. By way of response, the Christian Democratic Party²² designed "...a political, social and institutional framework that would incorporate the marginalized people. It created *promocion popular*, [popular promotion,] and legislation giving birth to a new network of community organizations and rural workers' unions."²³ On September 11, 1973, a planned military coup d'état attacked the presidential palace of *La Moneda*. As a result, military commander Augusto Pinochet assumed power, overthrowing the Allende government by utilizing the military branches. The initial government was comprised of General Gustavo Leigh, commander of the air force, José Toribio Medina, the commander of the navy, and César Mendoza, head of the *carabineros*,²⁴ to destroy the freely elected presidency of socialist Salvador Allende.²⁵ September 11, 1973, was seen as a day of salvation by some, yet simultaneously is recognized as the beginning of a stain on Chilean national history.

²² The Christian Democratic Party was in power prior to the Allende years. Their vote was essential in declaring Allende president since he received less than the needed 50% vote. Despite their initial support of Allende they were opposed to his economic policies. By 1973, the majority of the Christian Democrats no longer supported Allende.

²³ Valdés, 15-16, WOLA records.

²⁴ members of the National Guard and part of the junta

²⁵ Jerry Foley, "The Coup in Chile." *Tragedy in Chile: Lessons of the Revolutionary Upsurge and Its Defeat* (October 1973): 8. Box 57, Patrick Ahern Files: Pamphlets and non-serial publications, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

The coup affectively suspended and banned powers of the Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*) party, supporters of Allende's government, as well as dissolving the National Trade Union Confederation and Congress. The *junta*, as it came to be called, controlled the government as well as the people with strict economic policies and terror. In 1974, DINA (*Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia*), National Intelligence, the secret police under the authority of Pinochet and Colonel Manuel Contreras, formed to perform searches of *poblaciones* looking for supporters of Allende, activists, and dissenters. An article in *The Nation*, from August 1999, confirms that DINA was ““behind the recent increase in torture, illegal detentions, and unexplained ‘disappearances.’”²⁶ The article continues to identify the role that Colonel Contreras played as a close confidant of Pinochet, “...Contreras answers directly to the President, and it is unlikely that he would act without the knowledge and approval of his superior,”²⁷ Contreras briefed Pinochet every morning on the activities of DINA.

In 1977, all political parties were made illegal as the economic situation worsened. It also marked the first public discussion of the “disappeared” bodies from 1973 found at *Lonquén*²⁸. The *Central Nacional de Inteligencia* (CNI), National Central Intelligence, replaced DINA; however, the switch to CNI promoted a no less volatile or violent approach to political prisoners. As Pinochet began to tighten his control of Chile, more extreme reforms and restrictions followed. By the 1980s there was a much-needed revival of the government, constitution, and overall economic structure of the country.

²⁶ Peter Kornbluh, “Chile Declassified,” *The Nation*, August 9-16, 1999: 22. Box 64, File: Pinochet 1999 2 of 2, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Kornbluh, WOLA Records).

²⁷ Kornbluh, 22-3, WOLA Records.

²⁸ Information on human remains was passed to the Church then along to the *Vicaria*, a human rights organization through the church. This information was received in December 1978; the bodies matched with those who were “disappeared.” It was the first tangible evidence of permanent disappearances that came into public knowledge.

The economic crisis spurred by the repressive policies, exacerbated by political instability and lack of support for the people had a dramatic effect on the women. The effects ranged from unemployment to poverty, which culminated in forced entry into the labor market. Women's participation in the labor force steadily rose from 1976, and in 1985 women comprised 34.6 percent of the total labor force.²⁹ Women work, mainly, in the low wage sectors of the economy, traditionally and primarily within the service occupations (see appendix 1). Nearly a quarter of women workers are domestic servants. Women are "...oppressed by an economic order that reinforces the hierarchical, competitive and exploitive relations in society that generally leave women at the bottom of the pecking order, and by sexism reinforced and institutionalized by tradition and strict religious codes."³⁰ No opportunity existed for upward mobility economically, and as numbers of women workers rose, the government reduced contributions to them. By privatizing education, the number of daycare centers reduced, and those that survived increased their fees. Furthering the lack of support from the government, laws did not impose regulatory hours on domestic service. Women responded to the rising unemployment rates and subsequent poverty by becoming creative in their approaches for survival. Often, when women were forced to find other means for the survival of their families, it was a reflection of their husbands who were chronically unemployed and demoralized from the lack of work. Thus, one of the byproducts that emerged from this situation "...has been the amount of (undesired) role reversal which has occurred, especially among the urban working-class poor."³¹ Through this role

²⁹ Chuchryk, 153.

³⁰ "Women's Opression Effects," *MIR newsletter*, 1978. Box 13, File: Chile: Organizational Publications, MIR, MEMCH, Bobbye Ortiz Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³¹ Chuchryk, 154.

reversal, of traditionally accepted responsibilities, women became empowered in their communities, coming together to make a difference.

As part of their creative endeavors, women formed collective strategies including the popular economic organizations (*organizaciones económicas populares*, OEPs), which consisted of women in a community coming together to provide for one another. They "...began to organize around the problem of feeding their children or earning money. Soup kitchens, consumer groups and workshops emerged in poor neighborhoods as new forms of organization."³² Women were the majority participants in these organizations and did everything from set-up to maintenance. The organization's services provided the poor with at least one hot meal through the *ollas comunes*³³ to establishing shopping collectives, *comprando juntas*. They also donated clothes and tended to community gardens. Although women were actively involved within their communities, opposition came in the question of social mobility within these organizations. In the article, "Women in the Revolutionary Movement," circulated in March 1977, the newsletter *Obreros En Marcha*, commented on the role of women and lack of mobility and change within social movements. The criticisms are based upon the failure to fully utilize women in movements, the "incapacity to recognize the revolutionary potential of women."³⁴ The article commented that "even within the internal functioning of the organizations we find that women are delegated to the secretarial, mechanical and clerical tasks and in the mass activities they are assigned to daycare and kitchen work."³⁵ However, scholars have noted that there is an

³² Valdés, 19, WOLA Records.

³³ *Olla Comunes* are essentially soup kitchens, places where people could come from the community to receive a meal, place to stay etc.

³⁴ "Women in the Revolutionary Movement," *Obreros En Marcha* (March 1977): 3. Box 13, File: Chile: Articles (clippings), Bobbye Ortiz Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as "Women in the Revolutionary Movement," Bobbye Ortiz Papers).

³⁵ "Women in the Revolutionary Movement," 3, Bobbye Ortiz Papers.

inextricable tie between women's participation in political organizations and shifts in attitude about gender:

Women's ability to shift the gendered distribution of power was also conditioned by characteristics of the party system. As societal attitudes about gender shifted in response to women's growing power, constraints on gendered and nongendered social policy formation loosened. The policies that emerged from this process (both gendered and nongendered), fed a feedback mechanism that reshaped aspects of the labor market and the context in which women's mobilization was carried out.³⁶

By accepting the possibilities of women's participation in political organizations, the realm of their contributions were broadened.

The formation of OEPs, were a response to the economic crisis, stimulated by the repressive policies of the regime, and resulted in action dominated by the skills women possessed to offer one another. Due to the rising prices of basic food needs, it was impossible for some to afford a liter of cooking oil; to combat this problem, "women have organized centers where people can buy food essentials at lower prices. In 1982, there were 495 OEPs in Greater Santiago and the surrounding area. In 1985, there were 1,125 in Santiago alone."³⁷ The spike in numbers for these organizations speaks to their value within the communities and the increasing poverty in Chile through the 1980s. Many assume that these women were operating under "housewife economics;" however, these organizations afforded poor women the opportunity for political organization and self-education, as a means of self-empowerment. For the women, banding together "...supplied a framework through which personal experience of food shortages, social disorder, political confrontation, familial embitterment, and outright fear connected to a

³⁶ Jennifer Pribble, "Women and Welfare The Politics of Coping with New Social Risks in Chile and Uruguay," *Latin American Research Review* 41, no. 2 (2006): 94, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/latin_american_research_review/v041/41.2pribble.pdf (accessed February 21, 2011).

³⁷ Chuchryk, 154.

larger collective drama.”³⁸ The studies and numbers prove that when women come together, they do have a political impact regardless of the constant push away from politics.

Congruently, the political crisis mobilized women around human rights issues as a means of focusing them. Women mobilized immediately after the coup of September 11th; on October 1, 1973, the *Agrupación de Mujeres Democráticas*, the Association of Democratic Women, formed to work with political prisoners and their families. As opposed to OEPs, this organization focused more on societal needs and community action through political organization. They never officially integrated economic concerns in their political opposition. Those who participated in the movement claim that it was simply easier for women to work underground due to the tendency of the military to ignore them. The association, over their years of commitment and involvement provided “basic food stuffs for prisoners and their families, strike support work, taking food to the *ollas comunes* in poor neighborhoods, and political self-education.”³⁹ In their early years, to camouflage their meetings, they used traditional female activities as a cover-up, such as tea parties or group knitting sessions to come together to organize their activities. This group offered a voice and place of participation for the women, many of whom experienced a position of leadership for the first time, “this recognition and growing self-awareness is one of the most common consequences of participation in a women’s group, regardless of the kind of group.”⁴⁰ Despite how or why they became active, they were united. The context of their work, being close to the coup is what made their actions politically significant and dangerous; during the first months after the coup, women took the first tentative steps toward rebuilding political networks. Women played an indispensable role in making political statements and protesting on

³⁸ Stern, 74.

³⁹ Chuchryk, 157.

⁴⁰ Horacio Larraín Walker, “Transformation of Practices in Grass Roots Organizations: A Case Study in Chile,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada 1986.

behalf of their families. They came together as communities to muster strength and courage to continue despite the losses, setbacks, and despair.

A study done by Horacio Walker, a prominent Chilean popular educator, identifies the transformations women undergo when they are placed in roles of power. He studied an all female *olla común* in Santiago that performed all of the manual labor by themselves to maintain the property and provide meals. The study indicated that the women within this community made a conscious decision to exclude men from their daily activities, which allowed the women to "... discover that they are capable of much more than raising children and cooking and cleaning [in their own homes], that indeed they are capable of political action."⁴¹ Through the development of an all woman *olla común*, women protected themselves from domestic violence associated with political prisoner abuse. Cynthia Brown, prominent international human rights activist, wrote a memo on September 25, 1990 to Americas Watch, a newsletter that detailed the events in Chile. She reviewed SERNAM (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*), a new government sponsored organization for women. Brown devoted an entire subsection of the memo to violence against women; she contended, "the subject of domestic violence is beginning to be aired here, as is the general subject of women's rights."⁴² Finally, women received the publicity needed to demonstrate that domestic violence was a reality for them and that they desperately needed whatever aid could be offered.

In 1990, SERNAM conducted a survey on domestic abuse, the results showed that the Santiago police stations received 3,000 reports of battery to women each year; however, the police estimated that this figure represented only 5 percent of actual crimes, thus the total

⁴¹ Walker, 95.

⁴² Cynthia Brown, memo written from Brown to *Americas Watch*, September 25, 1990: 4. Box 66, File: Chile Americas Watch: Cynthia Brown 1990, Washington Office on Latin America Records, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Brown, WOLA Records).

number of cases per year would be closer to 60,000.⁴³ These numbers only touch the surface of the reality and brutality of these women's lives. Brown's memo reproduced the process that women must go through to make a complaint of domestic violence, before their case is even validated. The woman first would go to the Forensic Institute to have the claim ratified by examination, which was often delayed several days so that the marks would disappear. Adding to the delay was the lack of a legal definition of the crime "domestic violence," which contributed to low numbers of conviction. Even if a woman was fortunate enough to have her case validated, studies from 1987-1988, show that over 70 percent of cases were suspended for lack of proof, and in rape or attempted rape cases, for every 100 cases approximately 20 were reported, only 10 perpetrators were identified, and then only one was convicted.⁴⁴ Victims of abuse described their situation as a long nightmare in which they never knew when they would awake.⁴⁵

Brown used the statistics to support her claim that there was a relationship between women who were abused and political repression. In her memo, she also referred to an article in Chilean news magazine, *Andlisis* that demonstrated this relationship. The magazine contained an interview with "... a former victim of battery, who lived for five years with a man who repeatedly beat her and forbade her to leave the house; one reason she felt she could not denounce him was that both had been detained and tortured, and she could not bear the idea of turning him over to the system that had tortured him before."⁴⁶ The correlation between political abuses and battery is evident from this woman's account; however, she was not the only victim to connect these two atrocities into a single, unified experience. The interview validated the

⁴³ Brown, 4, WOLA Records.

⁴⁴ Brown, 5, WOLA Records.

⁴⁵ "Rettig Report," *Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation 1990*, United States Institute of Peace, 1002, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/collections/truth_commissions/Chile90-Report/Chile90-Report.pdf (accessed February 21, 2011).

⁴⁶ Brown, 5, WOLA Records.

situation of thousands of women throughout the regime and their fear of speaking out against their husbands, the mark of a patriarchal society, and their government, for fear of garnering unwanted and often fatal attention. These small, seemingly innocuous steps created the means for women to protest and find a voice against the regime. There is a direct correlation between the need to create these alternative survival strategies and women organizing. These women directly protested the regime by organizing themselves under an opposing economic strategy to combat the repression felt within.

At various points throughout the regime, there were spikes in numbers of people that supported the policies of Pinochet; in the early years of the regime, the notion that Pinochet was a savior was found more readily than as the years continued. From the congressional elections in March 1973, the figures show that 57 percent of the vote was from *Unidad Popular* opposition, which solidified the notion that only a military solution could solve the problems of Chile.⁴⁷ Pinochet pushed this ideal symbolism of respectable women undertaking the role of an authentic voice of the Chilean people, especially in their time of need. The liberators, as some saw it, were self-sacrificing and paternalistic authorities, who guarded Chileans and Chilean tradition; this included and specifically focused on Pinochet himself.

Many of the conservative women who supported Pinochet agreed that motherhood was the quintessential element of womanhood; accordingly, most defined themselves by their families and the success they thought would come from Pinochet's policies. The perspective of these women came from what they experienced as the chaos and uncertainty of the Allende years, to a government that offered political and economic stability. They "looked to the military to restore patriarchal order in society and their families and welcomed the affirmation of

⁴⁷ Stern, 74.

traditional gender roles...defining themselves as patriots, they cloaked their enthusiasm for the dictatorship in the mantle of nationalism.”⁴⁸ Scholar Steve Stern, conducted interviews in part to find answers to what he calls the memory question of the Pinochet era. He interviewed Doña Elena in his search to find various perspectives on the regime. She was from an upper-middle class, conservative family that upheld many of the views associated with right-wing women. When Stern asked her about the disappearances and deaths he commented that she was quick to frame an answer and direct in her speech, responding: “I do not know any country in the world that escapes chaos and a state of war without producing deaths and without producing unfortunately some injustices [she alludes that Chile was lucky in this sense, comparatively]...I am very tough in thinking that the country would have fallen into a horror of deaths, of greater hardships, of jailings—there were not more than a minor amount, with considerable harshness, of course.”⁴⁹ Doña Elena’s response is not meant to denounce or simplify the horrors of the regime; rather, her reply demonstrates how the actions could be justified. Pinochet acknowledged his female supporters by honoring them in speeches determining that their role, in supporting his policies, kept his government running.

Throughout Chile and abroad, many were surprised by the 1988 plebiscite⁵⁰ decision to keep Pinochet in power. In an interview with Abraham Santibáñez, editor of *HOY* magazine, from February 17, 1989, he discussed what was understood as a transition to democracy within

⁴⁸ Power, 302.

⁴⁹ Doña Elena, interview by author (1996), quoted in Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 29-30.

⁵⁰ In 1980 a referendum on the constitution was taken and reported that 67% of the Chilean people had approved of the dictatorship. However, as the years between 1980 and the 1988 plebiscite showed confidence in the dictatorship waned with the economic crisis of 1982. Found in “Defending Dictatorship,” by Margaret Power, originally in the International Commission of the Latin American Studies Association to Observe the Chilean Plebiscite, “The Chilean Plebiscite: A First Step Toward Redemocratization” (Pittsburgh: LASA Secretariat, 1989)

