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Article

The presence of left-wing militant women within projects of *poder popular* during the Popular Unity years in Concepción and Santiago de Chile, 1970–3

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Abstract

This article analyses, from a gender perspective, the socio-political experiences of eight former left-wing militant women in processes linked to so-called *poder popular* (popular power). It does so with a focus on *poblaciones* (shantytowns) and trade unions in Concepción and Santiago between 1970 and 1973. Methodologically, it takes a qualitative approach, contrasting oral history interviews with primary sources. The process of political socialisation in childhood and adolescence influenced women when it came to joining political parties on both the 'traditional left' and the 'revolutionary left'. At the start of the 1970s, these militants participated in grassroots organisations, such as *juntas de abastecimiento y precios* (supply and price control boards, JAPs), shantytowns, *centros de madre* (mothers' centres) and unions, among others. This meant that their practices as party militants had a high degree of continuity with lived social experiences from their youth. The main difference was that as party militants they moved through more politicised spaces and gained access to political training and, in some cases, took on leadership roles within social organisations. Indeed, one woman became a communal – and later, parliamentary – representative. The skills acquired and their experiences during the Popular Unity (UP) period shaped their life trajectories, and consequently, these women have promoted an intergenerational transfer of socio-political practices in new, contemporary Chilean, scenarios.

Keywords: women; leftist militants; socio-political; Popular Unity; Chile

Since October 2019, Chilean society has experienced social and political mobilisations involving different actors, among them, women's movements and feminists. The so-called *estallido social* (social awakening), starting on 18 October 2019, responded to demands by different social groups associated with the repercussions of a neoliberal model that was imposed during the dictatorship and has been deepened in subsequent decades in democratic contexts.

The liberal democratic political regime – with its representative system in which political parties continue to be the benchmark for participating in elections and being part of decision making¹ – has not heard or incorporated the needs or interests of large sectors of the Chilean population.² This has led to the delegitimisation of political parties and a direct democratic response led by the growth of associative, community experiences throughout Chile's territory. Within these social organisations, discussion of 'the political', understood as the space that determines and constitutes sovereignty, has sparked a number of questions regarding who should be considered legitimate actors, what are the multiple forms for exercising sovereignty, the respect for human rights, the ethics and visibility of different, competing citizenships.³ This has generated renewed interest in the relationship between the social and the political, not as separate spaces, but as interconnected ones and, as a corollary, has invited a reconsideration of the traditional representation of private and public spaces as separate.

As a result, the slogans and practices associated with what is often called *poder popular* (popular power) have regained importance as they emerged from the territorial assemblies formed in each locality throughout the country. Poder popular, as a concept, originated during past historical experiences in 1960s and 1970s Chile, but its use today highlights the transversal and intergenerational use of this discourse. How did experiences of poder popular at the end of the 1960s and during the Popular Unity (UP) government in Chile (1970–3) become a legacy that extends across generations to the present?⁴ While further historical research is necessary, this legacy raises questions about the nature of doing politics and the kinds of participation and social activism that militant women engaged in within local spaces, which often extended beyond traditional party spaces during the long 1960s, culminating in the period of the UP government.

To comprehend these present-day events, I apply a gender perspective to analyse the processes of political socialisation in childhood, the decision to join leftist political parties and the transnational influences that positioned women in the social and political worlds of Concepción and Santiago during the UP period. To accomplish this, I examine the trajectories of eight left-wing militant women whose experiences are connected to the socio-political realm through processes associated with calls for the Chilean path to socialism and the exercise of poder popular in *poblaciones* and unions. I appeal to the militant memories of women during the UP period to question the positionality of diverse forms of social and political agency among new generations of Chilean women. Sociologist Elizabeth Jelin proposes that disputed memories are key to the processes of individual and collective identity construction in society.⁵ Methodologically, I adopted a qualitative approach, utilising oral history,⁶ particularly in terms of life histories which allows for the retelling of personal experiences, as well as connecting individual themes with collective representations.⁷ In connection to works on memory, this study assumes the analytical category of gender as a theoretical tool, as it has provided a means of shedding light on and questioning socio-historical practices, norms and cultural symbols attributed to the feminine and the masculine. Historically, social groups have understood and interpreted relations of power, authority and hierarchies from discourses that have assumed separate roles and spaces for the feminine and the masculine, in addition to the division between public and private. Politics constructs gender by utilising symbols, norms, rhetoric and programmes that define the roles of men and women in different spaces of everyday action.⁸

The testimonies of eight women that make up the core of this article were selected from a larger sample of 18 left-wing militants from Concepción and Santiago, based on their socio-political activism during the UP years. The doctoral thesis from which this study derives was designed as a qualitative rather than representative study.⁹ Thus, the selection of the interviewees was guided by a non-probabilistic and intentional sample of 18 militant women from left-wing political parties during the period of study (1960–90) including the Socialist Party of Chile (PSCh), the Communist Party of Chile (PCCh), the

Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) and the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU) from the cities of Concepción and Santiago. The eight women with left-wing militant trajectories were: Lily (PSCh-MIR), Fidelma, Elsa, Imilsa (PSCh), Lusvenia (PCCh), María Eugenia, María Teresa and Rosa (MAPU).¹⁰

For this study we consider the Communist and Socialist parties of Chile as forming the ‘traditional left’, in the sense that, from their origins, both parties’ trajectories were linked to international influences and networks in the first decades of the twentieth century. Movements emerging in the 1960s, such as the MIR and MAPU, form the ‘rupturist left’ and/or ‘revolutionary left’ owing to their positions on strategies and timeframes for advancing towards socialist revolution.¹¹ Although the term ‘New Left’ tends to emphasise the novelty of these new movements,¹² the MIR and MAPU shared elements and structures from political cultures and Leninist traditions of the Chilean Communist and Socialist parties. Indeed, these movements emerging in the 1960s counted among their militants many who had previous political formation within the traditional left.¹³

Within Chilean historiography, political experiences in the nation’s recent history have been analysed without giving women due treatment, and instead minimise or stereotype their actions. This is because women have not been recognised as protagonists within the institutional political acts of democracy; instead, they have mostly been considered as mothers, wives or companions of political leaders and notable men. Outstanding works by Felicitas Kimplen¹⁴ and Julieta Kirkwood first analysed women’s participation in the suffragist movements in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Research centres, such as Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), addressed processes relating to the struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship, highlighting those concerning *pobladoras* (working-class women) and feminists during the 1980s.¹⁶ On the other side of the political divide, the trajectory of right-wing women has been examined by US historian Margaret Power.¹⁷ In the last few years, the history of women as leftist political and social militants in the creation of revolutionary political projects during the 1960s and early 1970s has received new scholarly attention. Historians such as Claudia Rojas, Tamara Vidaurrázaga, Yazmín Lecourt and Carolina Fernández-Niño have dedicated themselves to uncovering women’s Communist, Mirista and Socialist militancy during the twentieth century.¹⁸ Individual or collective autobiographies of former left-wing women militants have also been an important contribution, including significant autobiographies of Communist Party leaders Gladys Marín (2004) and Mireya Baltra (2017), and socialist leader Carmen Lazo (2005).¹⁹ Collective autobiographical publications have also appeared, including regional perspectives, such as *Los muros del Silencio: relatos de mujeres, violencias, identidad y memoria* (2012) by MIR militants Edelmira Carrillo, Ester Hernández and Teresa Veloso. As a contribution to the field of political history, this study considers different types of militancy as social practices that mediate between the social and the political spheres. In doing so, I consider both the structural and subjective conditions of the individuals involved,²⁰ as well as the historical context of militant biographies.²¹

Militancy of women in Chilean political parties

As political organisations in the public world, parties have historically been masculine institutions. This is directly related to the process by which women acquired full citizenship, which has always held distinct meanings for different social groups, depending on social class, race and sex, among others, and which has perpetuated inequalities.²² In the context of Chile’s history, the late inclusion of women as full citizens produced unequal political access and knowledge compared to men. Women only voted in municipal elections in 1935, and after 14 years – thanks to the struggle of numerous women throughout the country – they obtained the right to vote and be candidates in national elections. In 1952, the first time women could vote in a presidential election, women composed only 32.3 per cent of the electorate. These figures increased during the 1960s. The biggest increase occurred in 1964, reaching 44.1 per cent of the total registered voting-age population.²³

Beginning in the 1960s, women’s presence in political parties expanded and was distributed across the political spectrum of the so-called three-thirds of Chilean politics comprising the right, centre and left. Yet women’s political participation remained relatively low. According to Elsa Chaney’s pioneering study, in 1972 only 20 per cent of women with voting rights participated in any political activity and when

it came to formal militancy in a political party, the figures dropped to 15 per cent.²⁴ The parties with the highest number of female militants were the PSCh, the PCCh and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). This picture was similar to experiences elsewhere in Latin America, where women's right to full citizenship arrived late.²⁵ Therefore, only a small number of women officially joined political parties as full-fledged militants. While precise statistics are not available, a greater number of men and women were party sympathisers in unions, professional associations, neighbourhood and student groups. Women like Gladys Marín, Mireya Baltra, Carmen Lazo and Fidelma Allende with decision-making positions within the Central Committees of the national and provincial party leaderships were the rare exception. Gladys Marín was appointed a member of the Political Commission of the Central Committee of PCCh in 1962 and, at the age of 27, the Secretary General of the Communist Youth of Chile (JJCC) in 1965.²⁶ For her part, Mireya Baltra, who has a working-class background, became a member of the Central Committee of the PCCh in the 1960s and was appointed Minister of Labour during the Popular Unity government. María Maluenda and Julieta Campusano also participated at the top level of the PCCh throughout the 1960s. Within the PSCh, the leaders Carmen Lazo, Laura Allende and Fidelma Allende managed to take on internal party roles and served as deputies in different periods between 1965 and 1973.²⁷ Within the MIR, Gladys Díaz was a member of the Political Commission in the 1970s. Meanwhile in MAPU, in its short history of existence before the civic-military coup, there were no women within the national leadership. In 1965, in the National Congress, the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies increased from five to 12 women (seven Christian Democrats, two Communists, two Socialists and one from the Radical Party). The only one elected to serve as a senator was the Communist, Julieta Campusano.²⁸

A political and trade union career: The case of Fidelma Allende

Some of the interviewees consulted for this study, along with practising their professions as teachers, doctors, social workers, sociologists and trade employees, also participated within a cell (PCCh), nucleus (PSCh) or front (MIR and MAPU). At the same time, they joined trade unions and professional associations (*gremios*). Others joined activities of the labour movement under the auspices of the Central Única de Trabajadores (Chile's national trade union federation, CUT) identified by their political affiliations. Their activism stemmed both from their own motivations, as well as from party mandates regarding insertion and penetration into workplaces to increase presence and quotas of power in the leadership of the working class. This reflects the position of women militants whose relative public visibility was due to their work as union leaders.

Fidelma Allende is part of a 1950s generation that included middle-class women who acquired a university education and, from there, were subsequently recruited by youth sections of political parties. Her trajectory in the PSCh followed a path from youth activism to candidate for militancy, union leader as a party representative and, finally, candidate to positions chosen by popular election. She rose through her career in the party, taking on internal positions and within the PSCh Central Committees. She was subsequently appointed to run as parliamentarian at the municipal level. She was elected as Santiago's councilwoman from 1971 to 1973 and elected Deputy for the Seventh Departmental Group 'Santiago' First District, Metropolitan Region in March 1973.²⁹

Fidelma joined the Brigada Universitaria Socialista (Socialist University Brigade, BUS) in 1954, quickly becoming delegate of the Pedagogical Institute for the Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile (Student Federation of the University of Chile, FECH), and subsequently led her university nucleus of socialist militants. Given her work as an English teacher, she joined the teachers' union, where she became a delegate for teachers in the Sociedad Nacional de Profesores (National Society of Teachers) and then between 1970 and 1973 in the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Educators, SUTE).³⁰ All of her student and union activism occurred in tandem to her work teaching at a school near bus stop 16 on the Grand Avenue of Población Dávila, where her students came from popular and working-class backgrounds.

Fidelma took advantage of the political lessons gained within the union spaces, and later used these skills and knowledge to advance her political career. In an interview with the author, Fidelma explained:

I learned the tactics for many things, including how to conduct myself. Truthfully, I learned from the people with whom I was a leader, because it is good to be humble and when one arrives oftentimes you stay quiet to listen to what others say and do. Because I was young, yes, the *viejos* (old-timers) helped me.³¹

This account reveals how Fidelma acquired knowledge of politics and political leadership skills from well-regarded older male union leaders, including techniques for management, planning and especially public speaking. She subsequently drew on this training in her political career to represent her party in popular elections. The presence of male figures was a constant within the processes of women's political socialisation and formation within political parties, particularly in terms of imparting standards of behaviour, strategies and leadership skills within mixed spaces.

Fidelma led the CUT's Commission on Culture, Education and Sports which addressed workers' comprehensive development, including the relationship between education and the regulation of vices. Leaders from both the Chilean labour movement and leftist political parties promoted a moral discourse of *cuidado* (self-care) and abstention from vices. This discourse was particularly relevant within the labour movement in the early twentieth century when workers were tempted with alcohol consumption and prostitution.³² However, women's concerns surrounding the elimination of vices among the working-class population has also been a historical constant in Chile and Europe. This is based on women's socialisation to fulfil domestic roles centred on the care of their families' physical and emotional needs.³³

Within trade unions, one of the ways to steer Chilean workers away from the evils of alcoholism and smoking was to promote the arts (i.e., music, folk dance and theatre), in which emotions and bodies were cared for and deployed to produce pleasure and happiness. Union training also contributed to the decrease of another vice among the working class: ignorance. Ignorance was not due to high levels of illiteracy, as was the case in the early twentieth century, but rather to the lack of political formation. Unions sought to educate workers on subjects such as conflict negotiation strategies, legal knowledge, speaking abilities and organisation.

Beyond Fidelma's long-standing socialist militant trajectory, her activism continued to be primarily concerned with nurturing and strengthening the trade union world. She subsequently complemented that with work in her community, serving as a councilwoman and *diputada* (legislator in Chile's lower house the Chamber of Deputies). During exile, she lived in the Federal Republic of Germany, where she resumed her leadership work in the trade union world, coordinating solidarity support networks for Chilean workers.

Political socialisation and women's decision to join political parties in Concepción and Santiago

Women's entry into a political party took place between adolescence and young adulthood: between the ages of 11 and 29, that is, in stages of life in which they were studying in high school, universities and some had already entered the workforce. They lived their childhood and youth from the 1940s to 1960s in a context defined by the aftermath of the Second World War and the emergence of the Cold War, the change of strategies by the Socialist and Communist Internationals, the adhesion of parties worldwide, the convulsion of the Cuban Revolution starting in 1959 and the proposals of May 1968.

Political socialisation is a relevant issue for understanding women's party militancy. This process of socialisation encompasses the acquisition of values and norms that organise a map onto which the content and events of daily life are recorded. During childhood there is a process of appropriation of norms, values and knowledge of the environment, integrating them from previously assimilated learnings, but also adapting them, and this would explain the processes of change and subsequent breaks at the generational level.³⁴ French sociologist Philippe Braud (2000) assumes socialisation as a permanent process in a person's life, therefore, there is an early socialisation in children and adolescents, and a secondary one that continues in adulthood.³⁵

For those interviewed, the early primary political socialisation within families was a cognitive and value orientation towards politics and its transformative potential to change the unjust realities in society. The concepts of social justice, freedom and equality were used in discourses throughout the women's home environments. For those coming from popular and working-class families, the experience of

continued economic precarity and family migration were crucial elements for developing an understanding about an unequal reality and a hostile world. Masculine figures – fathers, grandfathers and uncles – had great influence on these women’s formation, whether they were close to them or simply observed and respected them. Some of them were left-wing militants, especially communists. In other cases, it was charismatic people with sympathies for the left or the Radical Party (PR), who had a considerable presence in Concepción. Thus, it was not uncommon that two interviewees grew up within families with ties to the PR and the Freemasons. For some interviewees, secularism was a relevant element in their childhood formation, which departed from the experiences of many peers of the same social class, who in the 1950s and 1960s were educated in conservative Catholic schools run by nuns. Instead, daughters from families with ties to the Masonic Order often attended public schools, particularly high schools (*liceos*) in Concepción and Santiago.

This contrasts with women militants who came from Catholic families and whose relatives joined or sympathised with the PDC. Yet, these families were not entirely conservative. While they held on to traditions and rituals, they were more liberal when it came to cultural practices related to modernity: readings, material consumption, access to media, music, dress and so on. In this way, girls in these homes were allowed to change schools or maintain contact and friendships with other non-religious groups.

Three of the interviewees had early participation in high school student centres during the late 1950s and 1960s. In Santiago, they belonged to emblematic student centres such as Providencia’s Liceo N° 7 and N° 3, as in the case of María Teresa and Lily. Membership in the student centres was not without links to the national political context, as the activities carried out pertained to matters beyond student demands. Rather, student activism was a platform for entering the public world within the poblaciones and backing the work of the *juntas de vecinos* (neighbourhood councils).

It is interesting to revive the memories of two interviewees regarding their relationship with their Catholic religious beliefs, as evidenced by their names: María Teresa and María Eugenia. Both recalled that during their adolescence and youth, they actively participated in social actions promoted by the Catholic Church. To this day, they consider themselves believers ‘in [their] own way’, which implies not participating on a regular basis in lay ecclesiastic life. However, they learned to pray as young children, were baptised, received their first communion and during personal or family crises, they have sought and welcomed support through faith and the implementation of Catholic rites. They were educated by progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, influenced by the changes promoted by the guidelines of Vatican II in 1962 and the Latin American Episcopal Conference in 1968, which ‘contemporised’ the Church by altering the traditional institutional formalities and positions. At the Latin American level, the Church endorsed greater commitment to the poor by priests and lay people.³⁶

From oral histories, it can be inferred that the relationship with Catholic organisations or proximity with certain priests, in this case Jesuits, inspired María Eugenia and María Teresa to engage in social action. According to them, this social action was not merely about providing aid; it was also a mobilising force for the poor. It derived from new theological currents within the Catholic Church, globally, but especially in Latin America, from the 1950s onwards.³⁷ Those who adhered to MAPU’s ideology in the late 1960s had a previous militancy in the Christian Democratic Youth (JDC) or participation in Catholic youth groups. But they believed, along with other young men and women, that the President Eduardo Frei Montalva’s ‘Revolution in Liberty’ did not go far enough. Instead, they held a more critical view of capitalism and hoped for structural changes, not just economic and social reforms. From their perspective, the transformations had to move forward at a faster pace, and many of these young people embraced Marxism.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution was another ideological touchstone, recognised as an example to follow in Latin America for many young people during the long 1960s.³⁸ The prestige of the Cuban Revolution within the Chilean Left is a persistent theme in Chilean historiography, even more so in relation to the degree of influence it had among young university students and within left-wing movements and political parties. Some of the women interviewed learned about events in Cuba during their childhoods from comments by relatives who read the press, or from the Spanish-language *Life* magazine reports on the fall of the Batista regime and the triumph of young revolutionaries, such as Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

For her part, María Eugenia, a former MAPU militant,³⁹ pointed out how as a young woman she was embedded in the politicised world of the University of Concepción (1968–72), where discussions on ideological positions and revolutionary postures included not only the Cuban Revolution but the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionary processes. As María Eugenia explains, ‘we were all with China. We were much closer, we were on that same wavelength with our sister parties in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Cuba and company’.⁴⁰ She added that University of Concepción students, both sympathisers and MAPU militants, recognised the great contribution of analysing economic structures specific to the peoples of the Asian continent, which like Latin America had a large rural sector of impoverished peasants dominated by landowner power, which was distinct from the worker as the revolutionary subject privileged by Marxism. María Teresa continually referred to her brother, Eduardo Aquevedo, provincial leader of MAPU in Concepción, who was very close to the national leader Oscar Guillermo Garretón. They were identified as followers of Chinese currents of Marxism, so for years they were nicknamed *chinos*.⁴¹

Participation in local territories: The social and the political, 1968–73

The spaces of public action in which female interviewees first participated during their adolescence and youth were spaces with clear social and political impact, neither of which was mutually exclusive from the other. María Eugenia and Rosa deployed their activism in *juntas de vecinos*, neighbourhood literacy workshops, mothers’ centres, health committees and the pobladores’ committees in Concepción and Talcahuano. María Eugenia recalled how her work in the field even led her to participate in organisations for the rehabilitation of alcoholic construction workers, tradesmen and street vendors residing in marginal poblaciones of Concepción. Meanwhile, Rosa was actively involved in the *toma de terrenos* (land takeover) to create Campamento Lenin in the semi-urban sector of Talcahuano.

In addition, as a university student in the late 1960s, María Eugenia had access to books and training in literacy pedagogies, thanks to the guidance of Catholic priests from the university parish affiliated with the University of Concepción. Rosa’s social participation was linked to her own survival needs relating to housing. Therefore, her commitment and subsequent growth as a leader developed in the housing sector through direct actions, such as participation in a land takeover.

In view of the classification suggested by the feminist sociologist Teresita de Barbieri, areas of interviewees’ primary participation would be: (a) those that aim to account for various identities and specific social demands, namely those that recognised their status as neighbours in local territories (*juntas de vecinos*, sports club, artistic groups, etc.) or those related to their status as students (student centres, university student federations, etc.); and (b) those related to participation in political organisations as party militants.⁴²

At one point in the life trajectories of the women interviewed, a transition occurred from the first classification to the second. However, some women had a double militancy at the time of joining a political party and, subsequently, in everyday life. Double militancy was a strategy by left-wing movements and parties to expand their action in the worlds of poblaciones, peasants and, of course, students. When it came to gender, these early participatory instances were mixed in nature, which suggests the relevance of diverse identities in which gender was not a priority. From these early experiences, they developed as leaders over time, moving from social to political contexts and/or engaging in parallel activism from within both trenches.

In relation to a revolutionary leftist militancy when it came to the socio-political trajectories of interviewees, the following can be deduced: admission to political parties occurred in similar ways to processes within the ‘traditional left’, namely through high schools and, especially, universities. For those belonging to popular or working-class groups, invitations to militate politically came later, in the workplace or from friends. Similarly to numerous other young people, Lily joined the MIR at the time of its foundation as a new revolutionary movement, as she left the PSCh to join the MIR. She understood this decision as a step forward in her militancy, and towards greater possibilities for action in contexts where there were urgent demands for transformation. Furthermore, the hierarchical and elitist dynamics within the PSCh made her uncomfortable.

It is interesting to note that there was a degree of continuity when, after starting their party militancy, interviewees' interventions in the public sphere continued to be primarily through social activism and identities linked to labour, local territories and the resolution of problems of a domestic-reproductive nature. Mandates issued by national party leaderships and 'sent down' to nuclei, cells and fronts, mobilised women to take on tasks within local contexts. This was the case both with respect to the UP government's own proposals, and the measures and strategies that radicalised the UP programme, namely *cordones industriales* (industrial belts), land takeovers, *corridos de cerco* (fence running in rural areas) and the creation of popular assemblies.

Most of those interviewed considered themselves as members or mediators between militant party intervention and local social organisations. It is important to note the large presence of women in the *juntas de vecinos*, women's groups, women's labour workshops, sports clubs, religious and cultural groups. In all of these, women frequently engaged in practices linked to the creation of networks of solidarity, cooperation, exchange of knowledge and shared interests. This meant that in practice the women militants were politicised. But their work continued to have a presence in the social world and foregrounded strategic gender needs linked to survival, reproduction and community.

Militant women's participation in land takeovers in Santiago and Concepción-Talcahuano

The world of poblaciones provided another context for women's action. Land takeovers occurred in spaces of coexistence, sociability and housing, spaces in which women were always present. An example from the early twentieth century was the libertarian organisation Unión Femenina (Women's Union) which convened diverse worker organisations to form the Coordinadora por Abaratamiento e Higienización de las Habitaciones (Coordinator of the Care and Hygiene of the Habitats) in May 1921. Tenant strike organisations erupted in the 1920s, one of them coming from the *conventillo* (tenement) el Prado in Santiago, where 200 neighbours were organised. They carried out assemblies every night and, by the end of the first month, 300 tenements were mobilised. Women participated actively within these assemblies: demanding differentiated standards according to interior or exterior housing, such as the repair of plastering and painting, the installation of lights over the benches and in the courtyard or the construction of exterior stoves for domestic use. According to the historian Gabriel Salazar, there was a feminisation of the conflict and, with it, a radicalisation.⁴³

Years later, during the 1950s, women, mainly from popular sectors, actively participated in land takeovers in large Chilean cities, such as Santiago, Concepción and Talcahuano.⁴⁴ However, they were not necessarily leaders often because of the gender compartmentalisation of political power. Their participation can be placed within the social sphere, but it was also political if we understand their actions within a process of historical evolution and including collective actions that have power and meaning for the actors.

In this experience of land takeovers, it is worth pausing and reflecting on female participation. As the Chilean historian Mario Garcés notes, during the twentieth century the poor were able to organise and modify their living standards and place in the city. This was achieved not only by state action, but by the direct actions of men and women in pursuit of the right to live on lands and subsequently to have their own home. According to the figures, by 1970 Chile had a housing deficit of approximately 600,000 homes.⁴⁵

The experience of Rosa and Lusvenia is illustrative in this regard. Both participated in the land takeover and creation of Campamento Lenin, in honour of the Russian revolutionary leader, located on the San Miguel estate in the southern industrial city of Talcahuano.⁴⁶ This direct action was supported by left-wing parties, including the MIR and MAPU.⁴⁷ Left-wing militants were in some cases also union leaders within the industries in Talcahuano and San Vicente. Towards the end of 1969, they included social and political leaders from the Higuera neighbourhood, including Lenin Maldonado, Luis Astete and Mario Alarcón, together with leaders of the industrial federations of Talcahuano, students at the University of Concepción and the Technical University of the State, as well as by certain leaders from the PSCh, MIR and MAPU.⁴⁸

Alliances between trade union leaders, political parties and students allowed many families to gain the right to land and their own housing within a city that expanded with growing economic activity. The

men and women who participated in the land takeover and settled in Campamento Lenin included some who came from other southern provinces. This was Lusvenia's experience, a Communist militant, who came from Puerto Montt and who had experienced the occupation of Pampa Irigoien.⁴⁹ Rosa Jara was another one of them:

I lived in Palomares, we rented. Then some people I knew came by and said to me, 'Girl, we're going to take a piece of land, if you want to participate.' I said yes, immediately. So, I decided to come over here for the takeover, and if he [my partner] had not followed me, I would have still come. All three of us came to the toma.⁵⁰

The occupation took place on 7 May; on a 'tempestuous night, 15 unions from the nearby industries nailed their flags between [the trees]'.⁵¹ Each family, at the agreed time, walked to the grounds of the San Miguel estate, coming from various places. As Laura, a pobladora without party affiliation, remembered, 'The taking of [Campamento] Lenin was great, people came and went with their sticks and put a [Chilean] flag and it was done.'⁵² The experience of the first days in Campamento Lenin's occupation was full of sacrifice that tested their ability to survive in the context of a lack of basic services, such as drinking water, electricity and sewerage.

Soon, organisation and management of resources had to be coordinated to ensure fair distribution within the camp, a process Rosa was actively involved in. She explains:

After about five months, the MIR started bringing food and everything. They arrived after about four or five days to bring order because the MIR and Carabineros [Chile's national police] arrived. For God's sake, they had respect! Because they were about fighting and dying. The [miristas] were all university students. All organized, they said what each person had to do, for example what we were going to have to eat, what to do with the children.⁵³

Rosa points out in her account that they received solidarity from other social and political actors, including MIR leaders, especially young university students who studied medicine, social work and pedagogy, primarily at the University of Concepción. These young people assisted in construction projects and in community defence initiatives. They also provided medical care and assisted in areas like education and children's recreation.

After the first few weeks, it was the women who remained during the day at the land occupation while most of the men from the community went to their workplaces and returned in the evenings. Rosa stood out among them; aware of her proficient oratory skills, she liked to offer her thoughts and opinions during the extended assemblies of pobladores. She quickly assumed responsibility for organising and coordinating tasks with university students, as well as the administration of foodstuffs (through, for example, *ollas comunes*, or communal pots), and other day-to-day tasks in the campamento's micro-world. Responsibilities like these were assigned to Rosa by the pobladores' assembly, which identified her skills and leadership in promoting teamwork and the efficient management of and dialogue with organizations and solidarity groups. This work bore fruit when, six months later, Rosa was elected as secretary for the camp's leadership. Her actions were favourably observed by party militants, especially the población leaders from MAPU who had recruited her:

There were people here, compañeros, who were part of the struggle at that time, and they asked me if I could serve the MAPU, and I said it was no problem. If it meant working for each of my neighbours who had many problems, of course, we had to help out. I was 18 years old, I was still young.⁵⁴

Rosa soon became one of the leading MAPU voices in the process of the land occupation and creation of Campamento Lenin.

Once again, we can see how political parties organised women as social leaders, especially in poblaciones and *campamentos*. Parties opened the door for women to enter politics but also supported their work and interventions at the local level and on social issues, particularly matters that were directly connected to the domestic or private sphere. The benefit of this experience was that women were able to build connections with other political actors, including university students, professionals and party leaders.

In addition, they participated in meetings that addressed a variety of community concerns, and this gave them the opportunity for non-traditional political training. In practice, they learned to raise their voices in a more politicised manner and become spokespeople who engaged with authorities at the municipal, provincial and national levels.

The idea of self-management was promoted from the beginning of the land occupation and was nurtured by the solidarity and cooperation between the workers and pobladores who shared the same territorial space. The coexistence of industrial belts (work spaces) and residency in encampments (living spaces) generated new modes of control over the social space of the city. Solidarity acts came not only from students, but also from trade unions around Talcahuano, including the capital and consumer goods industries of the area, such as Huachipato and others. The successful creation and longevity of Campamento Lenin is directly related to these everyday processes of cooperation, reciprocity, voluntary work and the bonds of solidarity that were forged between pobladores and external actors (union leaders, party members and university leaders). I argue that in these spaces new forms of social capital were constructed,⁵⁵ based on trust and collaborative work, both of which are necessary to achieve collective goals aimed at improving the material and subjective well-being of men, women and children as they created a new dignified life.

The political efforts made by the interviewees centred around the fulfilment of basic rights, particularly those linked to survival, like housing and food. But such actions also focused on legitimising the self-management of residential spaces, something that was central to slogans about the construction of *poder popular*. The private and public intersected with one another on the land, in encampments and through the administration and preservation of the lives of children and families. Beyond the community itself, these experiences led women leaders to join and participate in traditionally masculine actions, such as guarding and defending land occupations with weapons like sticks and knives, for example, participating in public events and speaking on behalf of pobladores in meetings with the governors and mayors. Some women even had opportunities to travel to Santiago where they met with President Salvador Allende.⁵⁶

Within an encampment, pobladores took measures to organise and carry out different internal security tasks in the face of constant harassment and threats of police eviction. Another focus was the requisition and management of resources, including the direct provisioning of essential goods. For example, a commissary was created to receive food and other goods that were donated by other neighbours, small shopkeepers in Talcahuano and Concepción, university students and others. The interesting thing is that a distribution system was implemented, similar to the JAPs. Lusvenia recalled how Campamento Lenin residents were provided *fichas* (tokens), as well as ‘an entry and exit card’.⁵⁷

The *ollas comunes* worked daily and were run principally by women and university students. This practice had been part of everyday life in Chile during times of socio-economic crisis for decades, but the creation of *ollas comunes* is not simply an associative response to address collective survival. Rather it also represents a form of protest and resistance to the prevailing economic and political system. Since the Great Depression during the 1930s, workers’ organisations, trade unions and *gremios* organised *ollas comunes*. During the years that followed, they became practices that accompanied work stoppages and strikes, whether by unions, students or pobladores. The formation of communal pots represents not only an economic response but also a creative and solidarity-driven response.⁵⁸ In the organisation of these initiatives, women have played a major role in both the gender-based division of labour and in providing the organisational capacities needed to acquire, prepare and distribute resources. Those individuals, who in the private sphere carried out reproductive work and supported the survival of the family, transitioned to the public sphere where they socialised knowledge and practices that benefited the larger family, whether it was serving pobladores, workers or students. Participation in communal pots and other survival actions at the local level provided leadership opportunities for women; it also granted collective decision-making power to women in ways that did not necessarily involve direct militancy in political parties. The sociability that was forged around communal pots allowed women to share, discuss and collectivise childcare as well.

In this sense, from daily coexistence a novel approach emerged to address the administration of internal justice, particularly as it related to the resolution of conflicts between couples and recognising –

and penalising – instances of domestic violence against women. A few anecdotes highlight such processes. As Lusvenia tells us,

When Juana Cabrera's husband indulged his bad habit of beating her, someone could call for the internal militia and they came to defend her, according to the internal rules of the occupation. This response helped other women to no longer be victimised in this way, as a beating was very common the time.⁵⁹

However, not only was this case of domestic abuse identified, but Rosa, as the encampment's leader, recalls how alcoholism was always associated with violence against women, so commissions were set up to control the circulation of alcoholic beverages. These became known in Chile as 'dry areas'. Such measures became the unwritten rules that allowed for everyday coexistence between pobladores. An example of one such rule was the expulsion of domestic violence perpetrators from the encampment. This action highlights the community's recognition of problems and conflicts within the private order, its determination of its own system of punishments, and in turn, the construction of personal values that went beyond the existing legislation of the Chilean state. In the case of violence against women, only in 1994 did Chile pass a law on domestic violence, an issue that was previously considered private in nature and in which the state was not involved.

Experiences on the supply and price control boards (JAPs): Collective management of food distribution

In the context of the business-led boycotts and instances of hoarding that began in 1971 to oppose the government of President Salvador Allende, access to and distribution of mass consumer goods became greatly restricted on the official market. This situation quickly impacted Chilean families. Faced with these challenges, political authorities decided to create the JAPs, whose purpose was to manage the supply chain in local neighbourhoods and poblaciones. However, presenting the origin of the JAPs in this way has overlooked and erased the important role of housewives in the creation of JAPs, and is therefore critical to revisit official sources. An issue of the magazine *Chile Hoy*⁶⁰ reported that the Minister of Economy, Pedro Vuskovic, participated in an extended meeting with housewives at the Estadio Chile on 29 July 1971. In that meeting, the women in attendance expressed the idea of creating a state strategy for the distribution of food among the Chilean population.⁶¹ In this way, we can see how the idea of the JAP emerged as a proposal from housewives in the poblaciones, who faced shortages of basic goods and constant attacks from the right, not to mention the opposition of the female population from Chile's middle and upper classes. Drawing upon the existing spatial logics of neighbourhoods and poblaciones, the solution that these women proposed involved enrolling families to directly receive supplies of food and hygiene items. The idea was adopted by Economy Minister Pedro Vuskovic, who together with his ministerial team ordered DIRINCO to assume control of the new programme for consumer distribution. Meanwhile, JAPs were established across Chile and put under the control of neighbourhood residents themselves; after 11 months, such committees were also organised in the more rural provinces. The government told *Chile Hoy* that, with 'state-supported control over harmonious distribution', the JAPs 'have reduced the problems of supply and speculation, mainly in popular neighbourhoods and poblaciones'. But, according to the magazine, 'of greatest importance', was the fact that JAPs 'have become one of the most accomplished expressions of mass mobilisation in which groups defend their own immediate interests'.⁶²

In sum, the JAPs emerged as an organic institution, managed and organised by women in different territories between 1971 and 1973. Imilsa and María Eugenia, residents of Concepción, remembered participating in the management of food distribution, either as JAP members or in a supporting role, as militants of the PSCh and MAPU. Imilsa recalled participating in the JAP in Barrio Norte, 'because they were in need of people'. She remembered how 'they called me one day and I went. Because every month food arrived at the food stores, the deliveries were scheduled; for example, on a certain date, a barrel of cooking oil would arrive for the people [of the neighbourhood]'.⁶³ According to María Eugenia's memories, 'the JAPs work was well established. I carried my notebook and wrote down what came in and out.' She noted that 'besides that, there was a real sense of power, which was then reworked for the

resistance [against the Pinochet dictatorship]'. She referred to the JAPs as 'combative spaces, for those who believed in the political power of the people'.⁶⁴

Both women recognised their work with the JAPs as enriching experiences in Santiago and Concepción; in addition to resolving the problem of food provisioning for the people and securing an equitable system of distribution when confronted with hoarding, the women were also supporting the UP government's mission. The organisation of the JAPs was efficient and involved female heads of household. Thus, it allowed them to move from the domestic world into public spaces, where they then socialised and collaborated with each other.

Elsa was another woman involved in these efforts. She remembered those years fondly, since she was allowed to carry out support work with the pobladores from the popular sectors in the Santiago comuna of Quinta Normal. There she also had the opportunity to learn alongside the prominent senator, Laura Allende, an important female leader within the PSCh.⁶⁵ Elsa acknowledged that the PSCh sent militants like her to do grassroots work aimed at resolving the everyday problems of families, and among other things, address supply shortages, hoarding and the emergence of the black market. Elsa, at the time, was a member of the group called Lenin Valenzuela, and participated in the company of her husband, who was also a socialist militant.

Although the JAPs were an organisation organised around traditional conceptualisations of gender, the fact that they dealt with the management of food allowed women to gain significant amounts of influence at the community level. They occupied public spaces and carried out everyday practices that included economic planning, management and distribution tasks. In turn, all of this experience helped to provide legitimacy to the broader community of pobladores and neighbours.⁶⁶ I agree with the analytical insights of Mexican sociologist María Luisa Tarrés who notes that this logic of organisation often works differently from that in the institutional field, which validates access to power and the capacity to manage rational discourse over the horizontal communication and emotional support.⁶⁷

People's assembly: Experience of poder popular with the presence of women militants and social organisations (Concepción, 1972)

The People's Assembly took place in 1972. It turned out to be a complex year for the UP government because the project of the 'Chilean road to socialism' faced structural obstacles, such as the deepening of the Social Property Area (APS) by a state governed by the Constitution of 1925. In addition, the pressure of the opposition restricted the transformative actions at the level of poder popular. The assembly process had two moments: The Assembly of 12 May held at the Forum of the University of Concepción (inside the university campus) and that of 27 July 1972 at the theatre of the same university (in front of the Plaza de Armas of the city). The diversity of participants included secondary and university students, pobladores, workers and professionals.⁶⁸

According to our interviewees as well as two former MIR militants, who were leaders of the Revolutionary Peasant Movement (MCR) and the Revolutionary Student Front (FER), women's participation in the People's Assembly came from diverse sectors. Lily recalled the participation of students, especially from the Liceo Experimental de Concepción, an emblematic school founded in the 1960s as a product of educational reforms, from which left-wing high school leaders emerged, and later achieved remarkable political careers in trade unions and local parties. The interviewees highlighted the presence of leaders from the teachers and health workers union such as Alicia Navarro, Graciela Cruz, Pascuala Estrada and Rosita Valenzuela. In addition, there were prominent MIR militants such as Irene Romero, as well as numerous high school and university students.⁶⁹ The adolescent girls came from public women's high schools, such as the Liceo Fiscal de Niñas and the Liceo Experimental de Concepción, while the University of Concepción students studied education, sociology and anthropology. While there were some female participants from urban poblaciones, in a complementary interview a male MCR leader acknowledged that 'comrades from the countryside were few, some seven or eight from Hualqui'.⁷⁰

Women from campamentos and poblaciones also attended as participants from mothers' centres. In their origin, mothers' centres reproduced 'female' tasks such as knitting and embroidery – traditional gendered work from the private sphere. These centres operated in communal spaces which produced an

opening for women from populous sectors and the lower-middle class to leave the ‘four walls’ of the home and join a feminine public space.⁷¹ Coordination of mothers’ centres with neighbourhood committees and JAPs was promoted during the UP years.⁷² And it should be noted that the emergence of women participating in the People’s Assembly was due to the degree of legitimacy of the leadership work in the variety of union, student and población organisations. For the most part, pobladoras did not speak on stage, but rather composed the audience, which signified being present in new ways of imagining *poder popular*.

The discourse of the Chilean Left and the mandates for leftist militants during the long 1960s and the first three years of the 1970s always followed traditional gender norms in terms of the principal tasks and roles for women: first as mothers and wives, and second as workers and students. Women’s political roles and their own aspirations regarding their condition and position in society were marked by dedication to the revolutionary cause, which was led by patriarchal leaders and thought. In Chile’s recent history, during the government of Salvador Allende, left-wing militant women and intellectuals called on women not to be confused by ideologies outside Marxism–Leninism. For example, the leftist magazine *Punto Final* explained the need to:

Strengthen our work towards housewives, workers, professionals, and peasants, i.e. to all places where women are present, either for reasons of work or housing. It expressed that this work has marked remarkable progress, but that it is necessary to strengthen the fight against the price raises, against evictions, against the repressive and anti-worker policies of the government . . . While women generally live in an inferior position, their problems are directly related to the situation of the class to which they belong. The fight for women’s liberation is a political and revolutionary struggle, and because it is a struggle against the capitalist system, which maintains and requires the oppression of women, it is embedded in the context of class struggle and has to be led by the working class, through their peers and vanguard organizations.⁷³

These reflections were written by the Brazilian political scientist of great influence in the Latin American and Chilean left, Vania Bambirra. The ideas outlined contain a gender perspective, novel in the 1970s, in both roles and processes of female subordination, but from a Marxist–Leninist perspective. However, Bambirra emphasises the deviations of the discourses critical of the unequal condition of women in relation to men, as they erase class division, the cause of all subordination. The discursive elements on gender equality, machismo and greater positioning of women in circles of power, are presented in a modern and contemporary language. Yet at the time the Marxist–Leninist left considered them ‘petit bourgeois’ in nature and dismissed them as irrelevant products of foreign thought, particularly European and American feminist movements. Concerns about women’s condition and unequal status were attributed to a bourgeois sphere, on the assumption that spaces associated with working and peasant women belonged to the family sphere. According to Marxist–Leninist political groups, any change must first take aim at solving material needs, and second the cultural, the superstructure, which would involve changes in the political, judicial and educational realms. The vanguard tried to imagine a new society and relationships, but without considering individuality or gendered divisions between men and women.

Therefore, the participation of left-wing militants with internal and external responsibilities within the union world, such as Lily Rivas, who was one of the speakers at the 27 July People’s Assembly, stands out. According to Miguel Silva’s study, based on testimonies from MAPU and MIR militants, ‘The pressure of the attendees . . . who approached the stage and started shouting, “let the people speak” influenced the assembly to take another course.’⁷⁴ Lily participated through her role as a leader in the Revolutionary Worker’s Front (FTR), and she confirmed, that when the chant happened, it marked a turn in the trajectory of the open meeting: ‘The microphone circulated in the assembly. Within the open-assembly format, those interventions were always a dialogue with the issues being presented from those up front.’⁷⁵ She highlighted her perception of a favourable and supportive environment towards the UP government, amid strong opposition from the right. However, she mentions the understanding that it was necessary to advance beyond what had been achieved and move towards revolutionary transformations that meant major changes in the structure of property and in favour of the working class. On the issues raised by speakers in the Assembly, they covered multiple areas, depending on the type of organisation each speaker

came from. Lily acknowledged ‘that workers and pobladores have to be present and make demand. The word demand was very important, to raise, to propose.’⁷⁶

From a restricted format, the round-table style of speeches by designated political party representatives was changed to a more horizontal structure, in which the voices of leaders from the various social organisations in attendance were also heard. The allusion to ‘let the people speak’ was a clear reference to a citizen-based assembly, of actors involved in the direction of events and the control of power. The organic form of the Assembly in its two versions went beyond the traditional structure of forums and rallies, in which party leaders lead and take the floor for hours. This way of doing politics more horizontally included practices that can be found in the assemblies of *asalariados y artesanos* (salaried workers and craftsmen) in the first half of the twentieth century. In the context of the 1970s, this constituted something dangerous, out of control, even threatening to the state’s institutionalism and should be considered alongside the so-called ‘everyday revolutions’ that took place during the Chilean path to socialism, as raised by the American historian Marian Schlotterbeck in her book, *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende’s Chile* (2018). She highlights the grassroots activism of men and women, primarily militants and supporters of the Revolutionary New Left in different labour, shantytown and student spaces within southern Chile, including Concepción, Tomé and Coronel.⁷⁷ As Chile’s Revolutionary Left Movement, the MIR advocated for radicalising the measures of the UP government in favour of a broad participatory democracy among trade unions and working-class sectors.

There was a concern about the autonomous power of Concepción leftist activists at the regional level in relation to state institutions and even the political parties themselves. This devolved into a dispute about the so-called people’s power that formed part of the 1969 UP programme, but which had a distinct meaning for the sectors that convened the People’s Assembly, and of course for the MIR. Only one of the interviewees, Lily, recalled the issue of constitutional change being raised as well as debating in what form the People’s Assembly could continue.

Conclusions

It is necessary to remember that UP represented a heterogeneous coalition. Independent of the critical positions of their respective parties, the leftist women interviewed supported this coalition, and in particular placed hope in the Allende government’s proposals for social transformations. They participated in the political organisations and strategies deployed to achieve the broader goals of wealth redistribution, deepening democracy and *poder popular* proposals to accelerate the process of revolutionary change in the country. In the interviews, the women all highlighted their unforgettable and once-in-a-lifetime experiences as part of collective projects for revolutionary change. On the ground these women were actors and also mediators, promoting the greater politicisation and democratisation of women and men, especially in rural and urban popular sectors. They engaged in activism related to securing access to food, self-governance within *campamentos* and *poblaciones* and even in the provincial experience of the so-called People’s Assembly in Concepción. From the south of Chile, the experiences of the People’s Assembly in Concepción highlight that women from different parties, social organisations and territories were present and shared their perspectives based on their lived experiences. As a display of local society, these men and women also saw themselves as political actors, as Tomás Moulian observes, they experienced ‘being historical actors’. In their political subjectivity, according to Moulian: ‘militant people, who lived the experience of mass democracy, decision-making on the ground, equal dialogue with leaders, did not feel like a manipulated “mass”, but rather as part of the collective decision-making process’.⁷⁸ In the case of *poblaciones* that resulted from organised land takeovers, women like Rosa Jara, Elsa and Imilsa were both social leaders and political militants, as such the leftist political parties urged them to participate actively in coordinating the everyday tasks of running the camp and mediating with authorities. Their labour remains to this day largely invisible and insufficiently analysed in the historiography, particularly at the regional level. By contrast, it should be noted that there were militants, such as Fidelma Allende, who held elected positions within unions, municipalities and congress. In her leadership positions, she had a profound sense of connection with the social, economic and cultural concerns of the popular-sector world she represented.

The experiences of women's participation at the local level in grassroots organisations, namely neighbourhood councils, campamentos and productive workshops, among others, meant that their party-affiliated militant practice existed as a continuation of their social activism as youth. The transition to more politicised spaces allowed these women to access political training and internal responsibilities – and for a more limited number, assuming leadership responsibilities at the municipal and parliamentary level. Some of these women from the generations of the 1950s and 1960s later joined the women's and feminist movements during the dictatorship. They have also not been absent from contemporary debates and mobilisations in the current context of social rebellion.

It is important to note that the experiences of female militancy in parties of the so-called traditional left and the revolutionary left do not differ greatly in terms of the everyday practices of militancy. This leads us to consider that such activisms are interconnected within a field of action of 'left-wing political culture', using the concept of the Uruguayan historian Vania Markarian, which allows the use of a gender analysis to understand differences but also similarities in shaping the trajectory of political identities and political subjectivities.⁷⁹

The link between the social and the political was more visible because of the historical context; the existence of organisations created in the moment of ensuring access to food and economic self-management combined with political action. This convergence required not only regrouping with militant peers but also joining other forms of more effective, creative and more horizontally oriented organisations in terms of power management. These spaces were precisely where women became visible in various territories. They assumed responsibilities, managed scarce resources and deployed their skills to carry out actions in addition to showing solidarity with political prisoners after the coup d'état. Despite how invisible leftist women are in the scholarly literature, by using oral histories it was possible to confirm women's active presence and participation in multiple spaces. Women participated through diverse identities, as left-wing militants, workers, pobladoras, high school and university students, and even as members of mothers' centres in poblaciones. Their voice and importance in the discourses at the time was marginal, due to the context of those years and due to the sexist political culture present within the Chilean Left. Topics on greater participation in all areas, sexual and reproductive rights, the right to non-violence, autonomy and so on, were considered 'petit bourgeois', and the engine of revolution prioritised class struggle and not gender equality.

In recent years, the experiences of the former women militants of revolutionary left-wing parties have become more visible, particularly in Concepción. For example, two of the interviewees are members of the La Monche Cultural Center for Memory (2014), which is a feminist social organisation committed to human rights and the recovery of the historical memory of women who survived political and sexual violence during the dictatorship in the Bío-Bío region. The intergenerational exchange of knowledge and memories has been validated by both the protagonists and a new generation of young feminists – professionals and university students. This possibility of re-signifying the past through memory has allowed these women, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, to unearth the past.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, we can reflect on the contemporary reality of social awakening and health crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the process of observation and investigation, we anticipate that within communities, at least in the Concepción area, assemblies have become the legitimate associative forms of decision-making at the level of neighbours, pobladores, students and workers, facing the delegitimisation of the role of political parties as mediators between the state and civil society.

The exchange of information, including testimonies about the participation in the 1972 Concepción People's Assembly, land takeovers and JAPs, have been introduced into ongoing intergenerational dialogues within territorial assemblies. In a very different context from the 1970s, the organisational forms and internal political cultures of today's movements and organisations appeal to a greater delegation of power, horizontality and rotation of power (e.g. spokespersons and not presidencies). With a significant female presence, many women have led or taken on relevant roles, becoming visible spokeswomen in media and on social media – practices that have been used and adopted by different feminist organisations over the years. Young and adult women, as well as students, pobladores and activists, have generationally

had another type of socialisation and have criticised the micro-machismos within mixed groups as rooted in patriarchal practices.

The ways in which these ideas and practices circulate have been transmitted orally by former left-wing militants and local oral history projects carried out by NGOs, and even undergraduate history student researchers mainly in the provinces. As Reinhart Koselleck proposes, the present is full of the experiences of the past, which can be considered legacies, but which are also processes that can be analysed and questioned from the present.

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Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this article.

Notes

¹Benedicto, 'La construcción', 34.

²See Ruiz, *Octubre Chileno*; Araujo, *Las calles*; Garcés, *Estallido social*.

³Marchart, 'La política y la diferencia ontológica', 91; Retamozo, 'Lo político y la política', 79–81.

⁴Historiography focused on analysing the last 50 years of Chilean recent history includes the discourses and practices of generations embarked on political projects that marked the life and future of the Chilean population. Among these milestones are those related to the creation of People's Power from civil society during the period of the government of Popular Unity (1970–3). A concept that has been analysed by national and foreign authors. The exercise of this poder popular involved the questioning of concepts such as state, sovereignty, mechanisms of participation and, by the way, the real power of the subjects involved in the daily life of a government that was installed with the slogan of 'Govern from the People'.

⁵Aceves, *Historia oral*; Garcés, *Recreando el pasado*.

⁶This research considers fieldwork through the application of interviews and documentation (primary sources: archives, press and magazines).

⁷Qualitative methodology, analytical level, because from primary oral and documentary sources an analysis was developed that identified and characterised practices, values and ideological processes within women's speeches. Cornejo, 'El Enfoque Biográfico', 95–106; De Gaulejac, 'Historia de vida y sociología clínica', 1999, 1–8; Arfuch, *El espacio biográfico*.

⁸Scott, 'El Género', 37–89; McGee Deutsch, 'Gender and Sociopolitical Change', 259–306.

⁹Inostroza, 'Trayectorias de mujeres militantes de izquierda'.

¹⁰They were part of the intentional sample of a major investigation concerning my doctoral thesis in relation to militant trajectories of parties of the so-called Traditional Left and the Revolutionary Left from the late 1960s to the 1990s in Santiago and from Great Conception. Inostroza, 'Trayectorias de mujeres militantes de izquierda'.

¹¹See Orueta and Zarco, *La idea de generación*, 109; Palieraki, 'La opción por las armas'; Prestholdt, 'Resurrecting Che'; Corvalán, *Los Partidos Políticos*; Casals, *El alba de una revolución*.

- ¹²See Ollier, 'La creencia y la pasión'; Palieraki. 'La opción por las armas'; and Kimplen, *La mujer chilena*.
- ¹³See Corvalán, *Los Partidos Políticos*; Casals, *El alba de una revolución*; Palieraki, 'La opción por las armas'.
- ¹⁴See Kimplen, *La mujer chilena*.
- ¹⁵Gaviola, Jiles, Lopresti and Rojas, *Queremos votar*.
- ¹⁶See Valdés, *Las mujeres y la dictadura militar en Chile*; Valenzuela, *La mujer en el Chile militar*; Palestro, *Mujeres en movimiento*.
- ¹⁷See Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*; Power, *La mujer de derecha*.
- ¹⁸See Vidaurrázaga, 'Mujeres en Rojo y Negro'; Lacourt, 'Relación de género'.
- ¹⁹See Marín, *La vida es hoy*; Baltra, *Del quiosco al Ministerio del Trabajo*; Lazo and Cea, *La negra Lazo*.
- ²⁰See Pirker, 'La redefinición de lo posible'.
- ²¹Pudal, 'Los enfoques teóricos', 49–55.
- ²²Astelarra, 'Recuperar la voz', 46.
- ²³Urzúa, *Historia política*, 553.
- ²⁴Urzúa, *Historia política*, 553.
- ²⁵Hurtado, 'Concentración de población y desarrollo económico', 50–4; Muñoz, *Crecimiento industrial*, 105–7.
- ²⁶See Marín, *La vida es hoy*; Baltra, *Del quiosco al Ministerio del Trabajo*;
- ²⁷See Lazo and Cea, *La negra Lazo*.
- ²⁸See Gaviola, Jiles, Lopresti and Rojas, *Queremos votar*.
- ²⁹Biography of Fidelma Allende. In Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (online). Accessed 27 September 2016. https://www.bcn.cl/historiapolitica/resenas_parlamentarias/wiki/Fidelma_Allende_Miranda.
- ³⁰Under the Labor Code, the unionisation of public employees was still prohibited in 1970. The UP government proposed a bill for the unionisation public employees that passed in the National Congress. Fischer-Bollin, *Sindicatos docentes*, 100.
- ³¹Interview with Fidelma Allende by author, May 2016, Santiago.
- ³²The ideas embodied in the writings of Fernando Santa María and Marcial González are a good example of the perception of the social problems that the most off-the-book figures of national liberalism had. Both at the conference given before an audience of artisans by Santa María (*Ojeada sobre la condición del obrero y medios de mejorarla*), as in Marcial González's article 'La moral del ahorro' (1877) in Grez, *La 'cuestión social' en Chile*, 577; Barría Serón, *Breve Historia del Sindicalismo Chileno*, 6.
- ³³See Ramos, '¿Madres de la revolución?'; Veneros and Ayala, 'Dos vertientes del movimiento Pro emancipación de la Mujer en Chile'.
- ³⁴Percheron, *La socialisation politique*.
- ³⁵Braud, *Sociología política*.
- ³⁶Braud, *Sociología política*, 137.
- ³⁷They had begun in the 1920s with the Guidelines of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, continued with the Encyclical *Cuadragésimo Anno* (1931). See Cuadra, 'La Iglesia Católica chilena', 134.
- ³⁸See Traverso, *La historia como campo de batalla*; Bobbio and Matteucci, *Diccionario de Ciencia Política*; Sartori, *Elementos de las Teorías Políticas*.
- ³⁹MAPU was a generational party, its mostly young base included university students, newly graduated professionals, pobaldores and workers. Moyano, *MAPU o la seducción del poder y la juventud*, 56.
- ⁴⁰Interview with María Teresa Aquevedo by author, May 2016, Santiago.
- ⁴¹Interview with María Teresa Aquevedo by author, May 2016, Santiago.
- ⁴²Barbieri and de Oliveira, 'Nuevos sujetos sociales', 7–8.
- ⁴³Salazar and Pinto, *Historia Contemporánea*, 246–7.
- ⁴⁴Garcés, *Memorias de la dictadura en La Legua*, 41; Cofré, 'El movimiento de pobladores en el Gran Santiago', 134–5.
- ⁴⁵Garcés, 'Los pobladores', 39.

- ⁴⁶Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo, *Diego Portales I, Comuna de Talcahuano*, 15.
- ⁴⁷In Santiago they had already installed on ‘26 January’ 1970 Ranquil, Elmo Catalán and Magaly Honorato, those that gave rise in November 1970 to the well-known Camp Nueva Habana (La Florida commune). Cofré, ‘El movimiento de pobladores’, 136.
- ⁴⁸Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo, *Diego Portales I, Comuna de Talcahuano*, 10.
- ⁴⁹Interview with Lusvenia Fernández, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁵⁰Interview with Rosa Jara by author, May 2016, Concepción. The Palomares sector is an area in the eastern sector of the Concepción commune with semi-rural characteristics.
- ⁵¹Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo, *Diego Portales I, Comuna de Talcahuano*, 10.
- ⁵²Interview with Laura Jara, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁵³Interview with Rosa Jara by author, May 2016, Concepción.
- ⁵⁴Interview with Lusvenia Fernández, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁵⁵See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 500–6.
- ⁵⁶The train journey from Santiago to La Moneda was in March 1972. Interview with Lusvenia Fernández, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁵⁷Interview with Lusvenia Fernández, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁵⁸Gatica, *Perdiendo el miedo*.
- ⁵⁹Interview with Lusvenia Fernández, June 2015, Hualpén.
- ⁶⁰A left-wing magazine, whose objective was to reflect on topics of politics, Marxist theory and news from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Chile. It had prominent Chilean intellectual columnists such as Marta Harnecker, Faride Zerán and from other nations, such as Brazilian intellectual Theotonio Dos Santos among others.
- ⁶¹González and Modinguer, ‘Las JAP poder de la dueña de casa’, 3.
- ⁶²González and Modinguer, ‘Las JAP poder de la dueña de casa’, 3.
- ⁶³Interview with Imilsa Contreras by author, April 2016, Concepción.
- ⁶⁴Interview with María Eugenia Aguayo by author, April 2015, Concepción.
- ⁶⁵Salvador Allende’s sister Laura Allende Gossen, a PSCh militant from the 1940s onwards, soon became part of the party’s Central Committee. She led the Independent Committee of Allendist Women (CIMA). She was elected deputy by the 7th departmental group of Santiago for the period 1964–9 and re-elected 1969–73 and 1973–7. Rojas, ‘Poder, Mujeres y cambio en Chile’, 129–30.
- ⁶⁶See Díaz, ‘La Participación de las mujeres’, 41–3.
- ⁶⁷Tarrés, ‘Más allá de lo público y lo privado’, 207–8.
- ⁶⁸See Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard*.
- ⁶⁹Interview with Lily Rivas by author, June 2015, Concepción; Interview with Eduardo Cruz, Skype videocall, June 2015; Interview with Manque, June 2015, Concepción.
- ⁷⁰Interview with Manque, June 2015, Concepción.
- ⁷¹This type of organisation was installed by the Program of Popular Promotion of Christian Democracy. Mires, ‘Las mujeres y su articulación’, 5.
- ⁷²In 1973 they reached 20,000 with nearly 1 million affiliates. UP changed certain structures. Mires, ‘Las mujeres y su articulación’, 6.
- ⁷³Bambirra, ‘La mujer chilena en la transición al socialismo’, 5.
- ⁷⁴See Silva, *Los cordones*, 45.
- ⁷⁵Interview with Lily Rivas by author, June 2015, Concepción.
- ⁷⁶Interview with Lily Rivas by author, June 2015, Concepción.
- ⁷⁷Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard*.
- ⁷⁸Moulian, *Fracturas*, 265.
- ⁷⁹Markarian, *El 68 uruguayo*, 33–7.
- ⁸⁰See Benjamin, ‘Sobre el concepto de historia’.

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