

Megan Allen Kareithi

PhD Candidate, History Department

Tulane University

Women of Santiago: Gender Conceptions and Realities under Pinochet

Chile changed considerably from 1973 to 1990 under dictator Augusto Pinochet due to the regime's economic, political and municipal reforms. The impact of the dictatorship can be seen in all aspects of Chilean society and culture, including gender conceptions. In general, Pinochet promoted traditional gender roles for women, such as being loyal and submissive wives and not working outside the home. The regime did this through organizations like CEMA-Chile and the National Secretariat of Women, both headed by the dictator's wife, Lucia Hiriart Pinochet. Yet, paradoxically, Pinochet appointed several women to prominent political positions, especially as mayors. In addition, neoliberal reform drove more families into poverty and therefore forced more women into the workforce as it became harder for lower and middle class women to feed and care for their families.

The Pinochet regime believed that women were defined by their roles as mothers and their lives should revolve around the fulfillment of this role, remaining in the home and raising patriotic youth for the betterment of the nation. The regime exhorted these views through propaganda but they also enforced their ideology upon women through legal reform and public policy, affecting both the public and private lives of women in the capital city of Santiago. Women throughout the city experienced the regime differently than their husbands, sons, and brothers and these differences were compounded by factors such as class and political affiliation. Ultimately elite right-wing women strove to reinforce the regime's traditional gender roles, while opponents of the regime defied these conservative values through their employment outside the home and political mobilization.

Background of women and politics

Like most of Latin America, Chilean women have historically been restricted by their gender, or rather society's conception of how they should act. The ideal Chilean woman was like the Virgin Mary, self-sacrificing, chaste, and subservient to men. This ideal is often referred to as *marianismo*.¹ And as in most nations in the nineteenth century, women in Chile were excluded from the political realm and from . Women's primary education improved throughout the 1800s, though education was typically administered through the Catholic Church and reinforced the traditional female gender role of *marianismo*.² In 1877 legislation was enacted that made it possible for women to enroll in higher education and soon Chile saw its first female professionals.³ Yet women remained unable to vote as many men in Chile opposed female suffrage because women were seen as inherently connected to the Catholic Church and would therefore blindly support Conservative politicians.

While Chilean women were not granted the right to vote in national elections until 1949, even before this, upper class women were active in municipal politics. In fact the first female mayor of Santiago was Graciela Contreras de Schnake, appointed by President Pedro Aguirre Cerda in 1939.⁴ Contreras was not only the first female mayor, but also the first Socialist to be appointed to the alcade position. While she had direct no previous experience in public office, she had been involved in her husband's political activities as the head of Chile's Socialist Party. Contreras had also been involved in several women's organizations such as the Acción de

¹ Evelyn Stevens, "The Prospects for a Women's Liberation Movement in Latin America," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 35:2 (1973), 315. 313-321

² Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 21.

³ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés. "Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women's movement in Chile." (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993), 4.

⁴ Rick Walter, "Urban Pioneers: The Role of Women in the Local Government of Santiago, Chile, 1935-1946," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:4 (2004), 687. 661-699

Mujeres Socialistas and the Movimiento pro Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena. Chileans across the political spectrum were surprised by the appointment. They had not expected a socialist to be appointed, much less a socialist woman.⁵ The move surprised both Chileans and foreigners, such as the US Ambassador Claude Bowers who said, “On my arrival in Chile I was amazed to find that the mayor of Santiago was a woman. She was a very clever person and I knew her slightly.”⁶ He was also impressed with the then mayor of Providencia, Alicia Cañas and Chilean women’s involvement in politics in general.⁷ In fact, in the 1930s as women struggled to gain the right to vote nationally, women formed several organizations including the Movimiento pro Emancipación de Mujeres de Chile (MEMCh), the Federación Chilena de Instituciones Femeninas (FECHIF) and the Partido Femenino de Chile, all aimed at addressing suffrage and other feminine issues.⁸

Women gained the vote in 1949 and slowly entered politics. As women moved into the upper echelons of the political arena, they typically held posts in fields like education, such as María Teresa del Canto, the first woman to hold the position of Minister of Education. This was not always the case though, as with Adriana Olgún de Baltra who was appointed by President Gabriel González Videla as Minister of State, in the field of Justice in 1952. While Olgún was clearly an accomplished lawyer and deserving of her appointment, it is likely it would not have been possible without the support of her husband, Alberto Baltra Cortés, a Radical Party Senator.⁹ Thus while several women obtained prominent political positions in this era, they

⁵ Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Santiago*, 221-224.

⁶ Claude G. Bowers, *Chile Through Embassy Windows: 1939-1953* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 209.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés. *Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women’s movement in Chile*. (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993), 5.

⁹ Lidia Baltra M., *Señora Presidente: Mujeres que gobiernan países* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Mare Nostrum, 2006) 68-69.

were almost always elite women of the Radical Party whose husbands were also involved in politics. Political positions remained closed for the rest of Chile's women.

While upper and middle class women voted, had access to education and sometimes the option to work professionally outside the home, poor women in Chile did not have access to these kinds of opportunities. Indeed, they were often forced to work outside the home, often for little pay, either in the informal economy, domestic service or manufacturing.¹⁰ By the second half of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Chileans had access to basic education, but women still lagged slightly behind men in regard to literacy. Nationally the illiteracy rate was 26.2%.¹¹ Within this statistic, women lagged behind men in literacy rates. In 1970 in Santiago and the surrounding area, 88,203 women were illiterate compared to 64,557 men.¹² Thus while certain political and educational opportunities were open to wealthy and middle class women, these opportunities still did not extend to all Chilean women, even by the second half of the nineteenth century.

Women mobilize on both the Left and the Right

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chilean politics became increasingly polarized. These political divisions often mirrored class divisions, as can be seen with the case of women. This process began during the initial stages of Allende's campaign for president, as women from the right threw their support behind the elderly former president Jorge Alessandri. In Alessandri's previous campaign in 1958, he won the election due to the support he received from women and

¹⁰ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés. "Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women's movement in Chile." (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993), 1.

¹¹ María Eugenia Letelier, *Analfabetismo femenino en Chile de los '90* (Santiago, Chile: UNESCO, 1996), 10.

¹² Chile, *Características Básicas de la Población* (Santiago: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 1970), 44.

his campaign used this strategy again in 1969. They did this by trying to convince Chilean mothers that Allende's Communist ways would put the children of Chile at risk.¹³ The right was not able to consolidate quite enough support and Allende won the election with 36.6% of the ballots, barely edging out Alessandri, who had 35.2% of the vote.¹⁴ The Christian Democrat Radomiro Tomic placed a distant third, with only 28.1% of the vote.¹⁵ Allende had won the vote, and yet a majority of Chileans had not voted for him.

The election of Allende very quickly upset the traditional social paradigm. From the moment of his election, many middle and upper class Chileans were gravely concerned that he and his movement would fundamentally threaten their socio-economic position with his "Chilean way to socialism." And very early on this movement mobilized through feminine opposition. Before Allende entered office a several wealthy women gathered outside of the Moneda, dressed for a funeral: the funeral of democracy in Chile.¹⁶ As opposition grew, women created the opposition party formed El Poder Feminino, an organization with the expressed purpose of deposing Allende from office. These women staged "The March of the Empty Pots," walking from Providencia to the downtown area, banging on pots and pans and denouncing Allende's Socialist policies as causing food shortages and hunger. The *New York Times* reported on December 5, 1971, that the "the rhythmic pounding of empty pots and pans by thousands of Chilean women last week had the sound of war drums."¹⁷ This movement was organized and initiated by upper-class Santiago women. These were women who had for the most part left

¹³ Power, *Right wing women*, 126-128.

¹⁴ Mark Falcoff, *Modern Chile 1970-1989: A Critical History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 15.

¹⁵ Jorge Mario Eastman, *De Allende y Pinochet e el 'milagro' chileno* (Bogotá, Columbia: Editorial Ariel, 1997), 44-45.

¹⁶ Michele Mattelart, "Chile: The Feminine Version of the Coup D'etat," in *Sex and Class in Latin America: Women's Perspectives on Politics, Economics and the Family in the Third World*, June Nash and Helen Icken Safa, eds, (South Hadley MA: J.F. Bergin Publishers, Inc, 1980), 282. 279-301

¹⁷ "The Ominous Pounding of Pots," *The New York Times*, Dec 5 1971, pg E4.

politics to their husbands. But they emphasized that their recent mobilization was because Allende and the Popular Unity government were threatening their economic comfort and stability. While they were able to attract some middle class women to their movement and wives of striking workers, lower class women did not join in large forces. This movement was designed to protect class interests against Marxism and therefore did not appeal to the majority of lower class women.¹⁸ The Left generally saw these marches as insincere, as these were some of the wealthiest women in Santiago. As Allende's translator Marc Cooper said, "What theater of the absurd! Here were the best-fed, best-clothed, fattest, and wealthiest people in Chile, many of whom controlled and owned the still private-sector food distribution system from top to bottom, claiming hunger."¹⁹ A Chilean women of the left recalled, "This polarization along class lines was reflected sharply among Chilean women... The women who belonged to the aristocracy or to the upper-middle class saw their station in life infringed upon."²⁰ The elite of Chile saw Allende's government as a direct and frightening threat to the status quo.

There has been some debate over what came to be known as the March of the Empty Pots and Pans, as some believe this was an organic demonstration by the women and others who saw them as pawns in the hands of male Conservative leaders.²¹ What is known is that the women's protests drew attention from the media and the country. The women themselves formed the conservative, anti-Allende group Poder Femenino. The protests swelled as more and more men and women became frustrated by lines for food and necessities. Even though these right-wing women continually mobilized to protest Allende's policies, they also continually emphasized that

¹⁸ Maria de los Angeles Crummett, "El Poder Femenino: The Mobilization of Women Against Socialism in Chile," *Latin American Perspectives* 4: 4 (Autumn, 1977), 109.

¹⁹ Cooper, *Pinochet and Me*, 15.

²⁰ Samuel Chavkin, *Storm Over Chile: The Junta Under Siege*, (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989), 199.

²¹ Power, *Right Wing Women*, 144.

they were apolitical. They stressed that their actions were based on their roles as women and mothers, not as politically engaged citizens. The women protested only because of the calamity caused by Socialist politics.²² These women had stepped outside the traditional paradigm for right-wing women, which believed that they should remain apolitical and in the home. But extraordinary times, allowed for extraordinary measures, and their actions were permissible in order to achieve the overthrow of Allende.

As women on the right organized against Allende, women of the left took an active role in trying to create the Chilean path to Socialism. One aspect of this was their work in the Centros de Madres. Under Allende CEMA was reorganized as the Confederación Nacional de Centros de Madres (COCEMA), which now espoused socialist ideology and played an active part in government health campaigns and neighborhood projects. Women involved with COCEMA were encouraged to actively participate in Popular Unity politics.²³ In addition to changing CEMA to fit its own political needs, the Popular Unity government also greatly increased the number of Mother's Centers. By 1973 there were one million women active in COCEMA centers.²⁴ While the Allende government did encourage female political participation, particularly through COCEMA, they were focused on the needs of the worker, regardless of gender. Thus they did little else to address the social and educational needs of women.²⁵ For the left, the needs of women were second to their needs as workers, while the right saw women primarily as mothers. This ideology of the right would be then be pushed on the nation through political rhetoric, propaganda, legislation, and volunteer organizations.

²² Susan Franceschet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005)

54.

²³ Dandavati, 22.

²⁴ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés. "Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women's movement in Chile." (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993, 7.

²⁵ Dandavati, 22. Franceschet, 51.

Pinochet and a Paradigm Shift

In the immediate aftermath of the military coup, men and women were all shut out of any kind of political activity. And in addition to the curfews and other restrictions, the government began to crack down on subversive dressing; men with long hair were harassed and women in pants. As this went on, it became clear that Pinochet did not simply want to transform the Chilean government. He wanted to reform Chilean society as well. Thus the regime not only espoused gendered ideology about women's place in society, but it also enacted legislation ensuring women's subservient role. The government reenacted the *potestad marital*, which due to women's supposed inherent inferiority, gave men legal control of their wives and their wives' property. In addition, divorce was not legal in Chile, and while the creation of divorce laws had been explored by the Ministry of Justice in 1971, the Pinochet regime was clearly not going to institute any such reform.²⁶ Thus many women who separated from their husbands were in vulnerable positions as their husbands still maintained legal control over their lives and their minor children.²⁷ Granted, legal annulment was still possible, but was a costly process and not available to the vast majority of poor Chileans wanting a divorce.²⁸ While many women suffered because of the lack of divorce laws, the poor were hit hardest.

The government also believed it knew what was best for women's bodies. The Popular Unity government's health programs included comprehensive family planning plans and because

²⁶ *El divorcio: Informe elaborado a petición del Ministerio de Justicia* (Santiago: Instituto de Docencia e Investigación Jurídicas, 1972), 5.

²⁷ M. Elena Valenzuela, Sylvia Venegas, and Carmen Andrade, eds. *De mujer sola a jefa de hogar: Género, pobreza y políticas públicas*. (Santiago: Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, 1994), 399.

²⁸ Patricia Richards, *Pobladoras, indígenas and the State: Conflicts over women's rights in Chile*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 91.

of this contraception was made available to approximately 40% of the female population of child-bearing age.²⁹ These programs were ended by the Pinochet regime, not only because the government cut numerous social programs as part of their neoliberal policies, but also because in their view, Chilean women should focus on taking care of their numerous children.³⁰ The regime also maintained the illegality of abortion and in the final years of the regime made the law more stringent, so that abortion was illegal even when a woman's life was in danger.³¹ In fact, the regime required that doctors report any women who came to them with signs that they had received an illegal abortion and those women could then face harassment, imprisonment, or torture.³² Clearly the regime, comprised exclusively of men, felt it should control women's reproductive rights.

Like most Latin American dictators, Pinochet's regime promoted traditional Latin American family values and gender roles: a patriarchal family headed by a male breadwinner. Pinochet was the nation's father and his wife, Lucia Hiriart Pinochet, its mother. The fulfillment of a woman's life was in her role as mother and wife. When asked about what he thought of the women of Chile, Pinochet answered "que la mujer chilena es hermosa, defensora indomable de su hogar, madre abnegada y leal esposa."³³ And in fulfilling that role, she also helped her country by producing children for "la patria."³⁴ Pinochet's rhetoric also said that Chile's problems stemmed from the fact that the nation had become too politicized during the Frei and Allende eras. Women were therefore seen as even more virtuous because they were not involved

²⁹ Acuña Moenne and Webb, 155.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Baldez, 179.

³² Acuña Moenne and Webb, 157.

³³ Cema-Chile, *Revista aniversario CEMA-Chile* (Santiago, Chile: La Nación, 1983), 7.

³⁴ María Elena Acuña Moenne and Matthew Webb, "Embodying Memory: Women and the Legacy of the Military Government in Chile," *Feminist Review* 79 (2005), 151. 150-161.

in politics.³⁵ Women were to be involved in volunteer organizations that were theoretically not political, though the rhetoric they espoused clearly endorsed and promoted the dictatorship.

Lucía Hiriart solidified her role as mother of the nation through acting as the head of several organizations focused on helping women and children, including, but not limited to: National Foundation for Community Aid, the National Foundation for Nursery Schools and Christmas, National Secretariat of Women, National Cancer Corporation, Volunteers of the Military Hospital, and most notably CEMA-Chile Foundation.³⁶ Lucía's devotion to women's and children's causes, both in reality and propaganda, is reminiscent of Eva Perón's charity work in Argentina.

Much of the first lady's focus was on CEMA, which sought to reorganize and refocus the Centros de Madres. Though CEMA-Chile was technically a private institution, it was under the direct control of the government and inherently linked to the government. Hiriart Pinochet headed the organization and also appointed the other leaders, most of whom were wives of Chilean military leaders. According to the CEMA published literature, it was the First Lady's desire to reorganize the institution and not a directive from the state. The vast majority of CEMA-Chile's work was done by its volunteers, who were middle and upper class women and supporters of the regime. They took the organization's oath to "Velar por el fortalecimiento de los valores patrios y de la familia, contenidos en la Declaración de Principios del gobierno de Chile que inspiró los preceptos de la nueva Constitución. Asistir con amor al necesitado,

³⁵ Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile*, 60.

³⁶ Lucia Hiriart de Pinochet. *La mujer chilena y su compromiso histórico*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Renacimiento, 1985, 15-30.

cuidando del desarrollo de la mujer y la familia.”³⁷ Their work would promote and reinforce the regime’s belief that women’s primary devotions should be her family and the nation.

The yearly CEMA promotional catalog states that the organization would perform activities that “provide a greater spiritual and material well fare to the Chilean woman, qualifying her for supporting her family with her incomes. Likewise, it tends to elevate the economic, social, and cultural level of the Chilean woman and of her family group, in the margin of any kind of proselytism.”³⁸ Clearly this promotional literature was not just for the benefit of the Chilean people, as the catalog was translated, albeit awkwardly, into English as well. For CEMA was not just about creating an avenue for female participation in the government’s projects, but it was also about addressing criticisms that the regime was hurting Chile’s poor through its’ neoliberal economic policies.

The regime tied access to certain benefits that poor women desperately needed to membership in the CEMA Centros. Childcare, scholarships, access to the discounted food stores was dependent on membership in a Centro. As Hiriart noted in the organization’s yearly publication in 1982, “No hay área de la vida de una mujer que no hayamos tocado,” and that CEMA-Chile was “una preparación superior para su papel de madres, esposas y ciudadanas.”³⁹ Indeed there were numerous CEMA centers in Chilean cities. By 1982 there were 9,061 throughout the country. They also worked to assist and indoctrinate young girls through their Cemitas centers.

³⁷ Cema-Chile, *Revista aniversario CEMA-Chile* (Santiago, Chile: La Nación, 1983), 100.

³⁸ CEMA Chile. *La Artesanía de un país es la más fiel exponente de su Cultura*. Trans. Silvia Rivera Carreño. Santiago, Mueller, SA, 1982, 14.

³⁹ Cema-Chile, *Revista aniversario CEMA-Chile* (Santiago, Chile: La Nación, 1983), 3.

Another organization with similar goals and structure was the SNM. The Popular Unity government established the Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer (SNM) in 1972, which was focused on women's health and needs as workers, such as education and health care. After 1973, the organization was then headed by Lucia. It functioned very much in the same manner as CEMA. The SNM emphasized that if women did have to work outside the home, it should be temporary and only out of extreme need.⁴⁰

But right-wing women were not confined to participation in organizations such as CEMA and the SNM. Pinochet himself appointed several women to important *alcadesa* positions at precisely the time when municipalities took on more responsibilities and functions for the people. In 1979, the government changed the organization of Santiago from sixteen municipalities to thirty-two more socially homogenous *comunas*, each responsible for providing health services, education, and services to its citizens.⁴¹ There was also a marked change in the type of people Pinochet appointed as mayors of many of these new *comunas*. The vast majority of his mayoral appointments up to this point were men with military experience. But in the early 1980s he began to appoint more women to mayoral positions including María Angélica Cristi Marfil. Granted, Cristi did not have any military experience herself, but she was the daughter of General de Carabineros Óscar Cristi Gallo. Cristi was a sociologist with an advanced degree in infant psychology before she began her political career. For eleven years, up until 1981, she and her husband, along with their three sons lived outside of the country. Though unlike so many other Chilean exiles of this era, they lived abroad for business, not political purposes.⁴² Cristi

⁴⁰ Dandavati, 39.

⁴¹ María Victoria Legassa, *Gobierno Local y Políticas Sociales en el Gran Santiago* (Santiago, Chile: Programa de Economía del Trabajo, 1993), 13.

⁴² "Cinco Anos de Realizaciones de María Angélica Cristi" *Tu Amigo de Peñalolén* I, No 10, June 1989. pg 3

enthusiastically began the work of transforming Peñalolén into a modern, prosperous comuna, working long 12 to 13 hour days. She made countless appearances at inaugurations of schools, health projects, housing initiatives, and commemorative events.⁴³

Tu Amigo de Peñalolén, the official paper of the municipality always made sure to paint Cristi in a very favorable light. Photos of her often show her engaged in charitable acts, usually surrounded by a gaggle of children. Photos that appear next to her editorials show a photo of a beautiful woman in fashionable yet serious clothing, with her long dark hair slicked back into a ponytail or bun.⁴⁴ These images very much evoke Evita: a feminine, beautiful woman devoted to improving the lives of children and the poor. Cristi and other female appointees of Pinochet seem to focus primarily on the needs of children. Thus while it was at times permissible for women to enter the political arena, they were expected to focus on appropriate platforms and maintain the role of devoted mother.

Realities for women under the regime

While the regime promoted rhetoric emphasizing traditional gender roles, their free market economic policies negatively affected many Chilean families. As poverty increased in Chile and government subsidies decreased, more and more women were forced to work outside the home.⁴⁵ The regime's ideal of women staying at home and raising numerous children for the

⁴³ "Peñalolén hace Proprietarios," *Tu Amigo de Peñalolén* I, No 3, 1988, pg 3. "Nuevo centro de integración juvenil," *Tu Amigo de Peñalolén* I, No 6, January 1989 pg 3.

⁴⁴ "Editorial" *Tu Amigo de Peñalolén* I No 3, 1988.

⁴⁵ Stephanie Barrientos, "The Other Side of Economic Success: Poverty, Inequality and Women in Chile," *Focus on Gender*, Vol 1, No 3, Oct 1993, pg 38. 38-40. Margaret Power, "Gender and Chile's Split Culture: Continuing Contradictions in Women's Lives," *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Spring 2004), 34.

betterment of the country was never achieved. During the seventeen years of the regime, the number of children each Chilean woman had declined while the percentage of women working outside the home increased.⁴⁶ Pinochet's economic policies made it harder for the poor women of Chile to feed and care for their families and fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and wives.

The economic hardships also placed stressed on many marriages. Because of the inherent machismo in Chilean society, men who could not provide for their families with steady work felt shame and ignominy. Those men that had to enroll in the government unemployment relief programs felt humiliated by this. One young man in Peñalolén said that enrolling in PEM, "Me daba vergüenza, huevón, a veces andar en la calle."⁴⁷ Many turned to alcoholism and the nation saw a rise in domestic violence and men abandoning their families.⁴⁸ The stress of the regime's policies was such that by the end of the dictatorship only 54.4% of Chilean homes were comprised of the traditional nuclear family.⁴⁹ The regime's economic policies worked against the gender ideologies they promoted of a nuclear family headed by a male breadwinner with a loyal wife staying at home to raise numerous children.

Women respond

The simultaneous increase in poverty and decrease in governmental assistance for the poor led to the rise of "self-help" organizations, many of them run by women. The Vicariate of Solidarity, formed by Santiago's Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez in 1976, helped to organize

⁴⁶ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés. "Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women's movement in Chile." (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993, 6.

⁴⁷ José Weinstein, *Los jóvenes pobladores y el estado: Una relación difícil* (Santiago: CIDE, 1990), 108.

⁴⁸ Dandavati, 40.

⁴⁹ Valenzuela, et al. *De mujer*, 15.

these soup kitchens and community programs for many of Santiago's shantytowns in addition to providing legal aid for the detained and families of the disappeared.⁵⁰ By the late 1970s there were about 350 soup kitchens providing food for over 30,000 Santiaguenses.⁵¹

The Vicariate also began holding workshops for women to create *arpilleras*, embroidered wall hangings depicting scenes from daily life, throughout the 1970s. Many of these women were also members of the Association of Families of Detained-Disappeared. The project began as a way to raise money for food for the families of impoverished women, but quickly became a means of denouncing the pervasive political oppression these communities felt. The *arpilleras* were smuggled and sold outside of Chile and became a means of telling the world about the human rights abuses. They are often "simple cloth pictures of arrests, beatings, bodies being buried in haste at night, empty pots, empty chairs are a devastating indictment of the Junta's policies."⁵² As one woman making *arpilleras* said, "Chile is a country divided by mountains but also divided within. The *arpilleras* show, try to explain, this separation."⁵³ Eventually there were as many as 200 groups of women who would meet 3 times a week throughout Santiago's shantytowns to denounce the regime through sewing.⁵⁴ These *arpilleras* became a documentation of the other Chile that Pinochet's policies created, the Chile that lived in fear and poverty. The organization of these women also helped to solidify and coordinate their opposition to the regime.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J. *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 54-55.

⁵¹ Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973 -1988* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 104. Cathy Schneider, *Shantytown Protest in Pinochet's Chile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 118.

⁵² Marjorie Agosin, *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras*. Trans. Cola Franzen. (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1987), 12.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁵⁴ Jacqueline Adams, "Art in Social Movements: Shantytown Women's Protests in Pinochet's Chile." *Sociological Forum* 17:1 (2002), 30. 21-56.

The key role of social organizations in helping people deal with the harsh economic conditions was somewhat ironic, given that before the coup, Chile did not have many prominent social movements. Scholars such as Annie Dandavati argue that this was because of the overwhelming role of politics in Chilean society before 1973. The vast majority of social movements were created or subsumed by political movements.⁵⁵ But once Pinochet and his regime eliminated all avenues for political participation and expression, Chileans actively engaged in social organizations, both as an avenue for change and as a way to address people's immediate physical needs. And even after the end of the regime, women continued to play a leadership role in community organizations, such as the *talleres solidarios* and *ollas comunes*, holding 82% and 95% of the leadership positions, respectively.⁵⁶

The response of women to the regime was not solely focused on facing economic hardships. While political organization was virtually impossible in the early years of the regime, by the late 1970s the political opposition began to regroup and speak out against Pinochet. Chile's traditional feminist movement had been composed of mostly middle and upper class women and was not connected to the needs and realities of poor Chilean women. Yet after 1973 Chilean women were able to organize across classes, uniting against Pinochet.⁵⁷ There is a significant body of academic work discussing how women played key roles in several countries' anti-authoritarian movements, most notably with the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.⁵⁸ This was also the case in Chile, as one of the first significant public protests against Pinochet was

⁵⁵ Annie Dandavati, *Engendering Democracy in Chile* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 5.

⁵⁶ Susan Franceschet, *Women and Politics in Chile*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, 3.

⁵⁷ Patricia Richards, "The Politics of Difference and Women's Rights: Lessons from Pobladoras and Mapuche Women in Chile." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 13:1 (2006), 6. 1-29

⁵⁸ See Jane S. Jaquette, *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England), 1991; Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001);

the gathering on International Women's Day, March 8, 1978, by the Women's Department, a female trade union group.⁵⁹ Over the next decade International Women's Day continued to be a day for women to voice their opposition to the regime, though these women typically faced tear gas and arrest by police forces and received no press coverage.⁶⁰ By the 1980s women united around the rallying cry of "Democracy in the street and in the home," and joined organizations such as the Agrupación de Mujeres Democráticas to oppose the numerous human right violations of the regime.⁶¹ The brutality and oppressiveness of the Pinochet regime, especially toward women, was enough to unite women across class lines in a way that they had never before done.

Conclusion

In general the Pinochet era was a difficult era for women. Women found their legal and political rights restricted by a regime that viewed them as inherently weaker than men and primarily suited for raising children. Radical leftist women and anyone suspected of being "subversive" faced torture, rape and death. The neoliberal economic policies of the regime left many Chileans unemployed or underemployed. Many lower class women were forced to work in the informal economy or as domestic servants in an effort to keep their families fed. And many families were forced to turn to organizations like the Vicariate of Solidarity for food and legal assistance.

⁵⁹ Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés, *Democracy in the Country and in the Home: The Women's movement in Chile* (Santiago Chile: FLASCO, Dec 1993), 6.

⁶⁰ Michelle Friedman, "Briefing: International Women's Day in Chile," *Agenda* 1 (1987), 27.

⁶¹ Margaret Power, "Gender and Chile's Split Culture: Continuing Contradictions in Women's Lives." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. (Spring 2004), 34.

Yet all these hardships often served to unite Chilean women in a way they never had before. Women moved across the traditional class barriers that had kept them separated in the years before the coup and formed organizations to denounce the regime and their human right violations, including *arpilleristas*. They actively participated in the organization of communal soup kitchens instead of simply relying on charity. After the coup it was clear that the government was not there to help poor Chileans. They had to unite and help themselves.

Yet the story of women in Chile under the coup is not simply a story of an oppressive government trying to enforce an outdated gender ideology on women while at the same time pushing more women into poverty through their neoliberal economic policies. This story is more complex. Because there were also numerous women who worked to help the regime promote the ideal of submissive, apolitical women staying at home to raise numerous children. The most notable leader in this cause was Lucia Hiriart Pinochet, but she was aided in this quest by many elite and middle class women. Their economic security afforded them the luxury of not working outside the home and they believed that all women should aspire to this.

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of gender in the Pinochet era, were the female mayor appointments Pinochet made in the 1980s, along with a few appointments to posts like the ministry of education. Prior to this time Pinochet and members of his government had made it explicitly clear that women did not belong in government. So it seems that they had somewhat softened in this stance. But the women like María Angélica Cristi Marfil that were appointed to this position had to conform to the traditional gender roles the regime ascribed to. They were married and mothers, but with children high school age or older so that their work did not interfere with their roles as mothers.

Ultimately, the regime's promotion of these conservative gender roles did not have a profound effect on the way women viewed themselves and their work. Women continued to do what they need to do in order to feed and care for their families. And the oppression women faced underneath the regime, along with economic hardship, united them in a unique way to deal with the challenges of living in a dictatorship.

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