

Introduction

The women were the first to organize in Chile for the need to be united. Fundamentally, to defend the family, to defend the children, to defend life; because they had no food, because their husbands didn't have work, because they didn't have a lot of things. So, they united to be able to do things... From the roots of this we saw emerging, not a tiny organization, but a more massive one. And the women organized public demonstrations, not only to be united but also to go out into the street with strength. The first demonstrations in Chile against the dictatorship were done by women. So, they initiated the road to the end of the dictatorship to be able to say to the government, to the military, that despite everything they had done to restrict liberty, the women could do things anyway. And they demonstrated in the street that, yes, you can break what the military had tried to carry out. You see? They went out and no one could stop them. (participant in the women's movement in Arica, Chile)

I don't know how it happened that I grew into adulthood not knowing anything about Chile's dictatorship or the courageous women and men, young and old, who struggled against it. How is it possible that we can live *in* the world, be *of* the world but know so little *about* the world?

This book is one account of the many stories of the women's movement in Chile as it has unfolded over the past decades. It is an empirical account of political learning in social movements through the study of the women's movement in Arica, a small city in Chile's northern frontier. My partner, Héctor González, a Chilean-in-exile, was raised in Arica. He was only ten years old on September 11, 1973 — the day of the military coup in Chile. Along with countless others, he spent his adolescence struggling against the dictatorship. As he shared his memories with me, I was outraged by the injustices he recounted yet captivated by the bravery of the anti-dictatorship activists, especially those in the women's movement. During a visit to Chile in 1993, Héctor introduced me to some of these women. As an adult educator concerned about social justice and social change, this compelling experience prompted me to focus my doctoral research on exploring the women's political learning and drawing attention to the educational processes at work within the women's movement.

Therefore, in 2001–2, I conducted fieldwork in Arica. During that time, I lived in a working-class neighbourhood with Héctor and my four-year-old daughter, fourteen-year-old stepson, and at different intervals, with members of the extended family. Living in Arica as a family with ties to the community and to the past allowed me to participate as a neighbour, as a mother and as the spouse of a citizen of Arica, but with the distinctive status accorded to a Canadian researcher. In this context, buying bread, talking to neighbours, watching television news, participating in social events and many more daily activities were continuous sources of new learning. The

fieldwork was further facilitated through my connection with Casa de Encuentro de la Mujer (CEDEMU), a community-based women's non-governmental organization (NGO) that served as my field base. Although CEDEMU was facing a number of organizational changes at the time, the team of four women welcomed me warmly and provided assistance in multiple ways. Working in Spanish with the collaboration of CEDEMU and local research assistants, I interviewed over fifty women, aged twenty-five to seventy-eight, who had been active in social and political movements in Arica during the previous thirty years; all were activists in the anti-dictatorship struggle during the 1980s. In individual and group interviews, we asked the women to recount their involvement in social and political movements and to describe what and how they learned from those experiences. (See Chapter 5 for more detail on the research methods.)

I returned to Chile to share findings and gather information just before the 2006 election of Chile's first woman president, Michele Bachelet. Later in the same year, a new generation of activists exploded on the scene in Chile, prompting me to revisit my earlier findings about learning in the women's movement. Since then, I have been monitoring media and other electronic literature on the student movement in Chile, complemented by an exploratory interview with two student movement leaders in Arica in 2007.

Why Study Political Learning in the Women's Movement?

Some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it. (Foley 1999: 1–2)

It is this kind of "powerful learning" that inspires my interest in social movements. Social movements are distinct forms of collective action that include political or cultural conflicts, informal networks and a collective identity (della Porta and Diani 2006). Reading between the lines of any account of a social movement, it is clear that political learning is a significant component of activism. Activists continuously and dialectically learn and teach throughout social action. Rarely, however, do social movement scholars explicitly study this pedagogical dimension.

There are exceptions. Along with other scholars in the field of adult education, I have been studying the learning dimension of social movements for almost twenty years. In an earlier project, I explored how abused women learned their way out of victimization to become survivors and then advocates in the struggle against violence against women (Chovanec 1994). The women's journey included a consciousness-raising process that incorporated personal, social and action elements in an abused women's program. The program had three educational segments: two that focused on personal development and a theoretical understanding of abuse as a social issue, and a third that was oriented to change strategies such as personal and public advocacy.

I asked more or less the same question about the anti-dictatorship women's movements in Chile: How did women learn their way out of victimization to become oppositional activists against the dictatorship? More specifically, I asked: What are the methods (processes and content) of political learning within the social movement? How are knowledge and skills transmitted through social movement participation? What is the relationship of these processes to social change? How could the study of political learning in the powerful women's movement in Arica provide inspiration and strategies for social movements throughout the world? This book addresses these questions.

Outline of the Book

Part 1 of this book, the Arica Story, is told through the women's words and experiences. In Chapter 1, I review the setting and the context, incorporating literature about the socio-political situation in Chile. In Chapter 2, I examine some of the familial and social factors that are precursors to the women's activism. In Chapter 3, the women tell the story of their own powerful anti-dictatorship activism, from the inception of the women's movement in Arica to the end of the dictatorship and installation of the newly elected president in 1990. They describe their multiple roles and activities as well as their own learning experiences and the emotions that accompany them. Chapter 4 covers the period from 1990 to the present, in which the women vacillate between despair and hope as they consider both the past and the future. In this chapter, I also introduce the newest generation of political actors, the adolescent descendents of the anti-dictatorship struggle.

In Part 2, I focus on the political learning and educational processes at work in the women's movement. After providing an overview of the research study including theory, context and methods in Chapter 5, I look at three key learning themes that emerged from the narrative in Part 1. These themes are: political consciousness (Chapter 6), social movement praxis (Chapter 7) and how participating in social movements changes lives (Chapter 8). In the final chapter, I consider the role of the adult educator in social movements.

Terms and Translations

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the following:

- All translations from transcripts and original sources in Spanish are mine. Unless otherwise indicated, text in quotation marks is from interviews with the women. "The women" refers to the women who participated in the research study.
- In Spanish, all nouns have a feminine or masculine modifier. When the noun is intended to represent both genders, the masculine modifier is typically used to signify gender neutrality. Following feminists in Chile, I use both modifiers so that both genders are more clearly included, for example, *pobladores/as*.
- "Pinocho" is the Spanish word for Pinocchio and is a derogatory reference to

Between Hope & Despair

the Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet.

- I use the word “popular” as it is used in critical discourse. Derived from the root word *pueblo* (people), “popular” and its derivatives connote something related to the poor and working-class sectors. For example, a *población* is a neighbourhood where *pobladores/as*, poor and working-class people, live.
- All photos but one are from my personal collection of photos that were given to me by various members of the activist community in Arica. The photo in Chapter 4 entitled “Students protest outside the cathedral, June 6, 2006” is used with permission from the photographer, Rodrigo Achá, who posted the photo on flickr®.