CHILEAN NEW SONG AND THE QUESTION OF CULTURE IN THE ALLENDE GOVERNMENT

Voices for a Revolution

Natália Ayo Schmiedecke

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To Guga

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Introduction

Scholars have largely overlooked music as an historical source. In his book *Noise*, economist Jacques Attali reflects upon the consequences of judging a society by its "statistics" rather than its sounds or its arts. He argues that "Today, our sight has dimmed; it no longer sees our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense, and silence. By listening to noise, we can better understand where the folly of men and their calculations is leading us, and what hopes it is still possible to have" (Attali 2009, 3). He claims that music possesses an anticipatory vocation, as "It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible" (Attali 2009, 11). Despite my skepticism regarding the suggestion of such a prophetic power, I agree with the view that certain changes are first processed in the cultural sphere before reaching or being perceived in the political sphere. In certain instances, there is a deliberate undertaking in the artistic milieu to intervene in the course of society, "foreseeing" a desired future. As musicologist Thomas Turino reminds us, the arts exist at the intersection between the actual and the possible domains, forming "a realm where the impossible or nonexistent or the ideal is imagined and made possible" (Turino 2008, 18).

The "thousand days" of the Popular Unity (PU) government (1970–1973) are emblematic of this perspective. Several artists who engaged in the mission of crafting the Chilean Revolution in an unparalleled way endeavored to contribute to the construction of "a new culture" and "a new man." There appears to be a general consensus in the literature of that time as being "one of the periods of greatest debate and cultural production," (Berríos 2003, 240) a period when culture "played an important and decisive role—as a project—in the revolutionary process." (Bowen Silva 2006, 9) Nevertheless, relatively few studies actually address this dimension of the Chilean Experience.[1]

Historians Mario Garcés and Sebastián Leiva published a report in 2004 showing that historiography spent a long time explaining the reasons for the PU government "failure," focusing on the formal political actors. Such studies would often explain that the 1973 crisis stemmed from the actions of the political parties, blaming the crisis on the left parties' lack of unity, the PU government's inefficiency, the right parties' illegal maneuvers, and the political center's failure to play a moderator role. Thus, "most explanations hinge around the same field: the tensions, options, or omissions generated in the ideological and political superstructure" (Garcés and Leiva 2004, 2).

This perspective started to change within the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the military coup (2003), when several new studies addressing the PU were published, among those the collections *La Unidad Popular treinta años después* ("The Popular Unity Thirty Years Later") (2003), edited by Rodrigo Baño, and *Cuando hicimos historia*: *la experiencia de la Unidad Popular* ("When we Made History: the Experience of the Popular Unity") (2005), by Julio Pinto Vallejos,[2] which deserve to be highlighted. Both works demonstrate a thematic expansion: the first covers the political, economic, social, and cultural fields; whereas the second adds the discussion of religious and military issues. In the following years, the approaches underwent several changes, as shown by *Fiesta y drama: nuevas historias de la Unidad Popular* ("Party and Drama: New Stories of the Popular Unity") (2014), a new book published by Pinto Vallejos on the 40th anniversary of the end of the government; by the book collection *Memoria a 40 años* ("Memory for 40 years") (2013), coordinated by Pedro Milos; and by the roundtable "New Histories of the Popular Unity in Chile," which was held at the 34th International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), in 2016.

Despite significant advancements, few studies have investigated the place of culture in the Chilean Road to Socialism. The available literature on the theme is restricted to some academic papers, book chapters, and master theses, with limited relevant research on this topic.[3] This literature is partly devoted to examining the conceptions that supported the left-wing discourse on the "question of culture,"[4] identifying specific trends in the political and intellectual debate. Some other studies primarily address government cultural policies, stressing their role in the educational and editorial fields. Lastly, some authors focus on the cultural production of the period, analyzing how different artistic expressions and media aimed to contribute to *the process*. While some authors adopt a more general approach, others tackle specific issues, choosing as their object of study artistic movements, television networks, or the press (or a specific publication), among other topics.[5]

Much has been written about the musicians' support for the government with respect to the *Nueva Canción Chilena* (The Chilean New Song, NCCh) movement. Nevertheless, although they claimed that such artists shared the "new man" and the "new culture" imagery, the works on the NCCh often disregarded the different projects, policies, and discussions that characterized the cultural field of that period. There are also some important exceptions. In 1977, historian Jan Fairley had already underlined the links observed between the movement and the cultural policy of the Communist Party of Chile (CP), with which many of its representatives were affiliated (Fairley 1977). Afterward, historians César Albornoz (2005) and Martín Bowen Silva (2006) included numerous examples of songs, records and other NCCh musicians' productions in their works on the culture of the PU government, while Javier Rodríguez Aedo (2011)[6] directed his master's thesis research specifically toward the relationship between popular music and the imaginary of the new man during the PU.

In dialogue with those studies, I focus on the different viewpoints adopted on the "question of culture" in the PU context, which I mapped in order to situate the discourses and production of the NCCh. The research I conducted aimed, on the one hand, to cover the NCCh movement in its entirety, without prioritizing specific personalities, and to include artists and works seldom remembered by analysts; while, on the other hand, extrapolating the musical field and establishing connections with the wider universe of the Chilean left.

The following questions guided my study: How is the pursuit of contributing to *the process* in the cultural field represented in the NCCh? How did the viewpoints represented by the musicians engage with the main trends of the cultural debate of the time? How did these conceptions come out in their discourses and artistic production? Was there space for the musicians to express their opinions regarding the cultural policies as they were developed and implemented? Were they directly benefited by the Left's rise to power? From this perspective, what were the real relationships established between the NCCh movement and the PU government?

I argue that the NCCh musicians, in the context I analyzed, were part of the intellectuals engaged in the project of the Vía chilena al socialismo (the Chilean Road to Socialism). Therefore, they actively participated in the discussion and propositions around integrating culture into the revolutionary process, thereby playing a crucial political and cultural role. This argument is relevant if we consider that the bibliography usually draws a distinction between the terms "musician" and "intellectual." Furthermore, as previously mentioned, only a small portion of the studies that focus on the cultural dimension of the Chilean Experience address artistic expressions in general and the NCCh in particular.

The term "engaged art," as noted by historian Marcos Napolitano, "causes several conceptual misunderstandings and raises theoretical value judgments, either against or in favor of," and "The very status of the 'engaged artist' (ultimately, the 'engaged intellectual') has been the topic of not only academic but also political discussion" (Napolitano 2011, 27). In the academic debates on this issue, there is a predominance of the French tradition. The French school—strongly influenced by the propositions of the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre,[7] who developed his conception of *engagement* through and particularly for Literature while rejecting the possibility of applying it to other arts—"tends to associate the modern concept of 'intellectual' to the very idea of engagement, given that the intellectual is defined as the one who places his 'literary-journalistic' word at the service of humanist, republican and progressive causes" (Napolitano 2011, 27).

Special consideration of the written word as a distinctive instrument of intervention or intellectual identity has been contested by a growing number of works aimed at examining the relationships established between artistic movements and political regimes. This movement remains highly important regarding Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. Due to structural changes in the artistic field, "the privileged performance space of the artist/intellectual was not prose or essay [. . .], but rather the arts that appealed to bodily senses through images, sounds, and rhythms" (Napolitano 2001a, 104). This perspective can be seen in several NCCh musicians' statements, particularly in the interview headline "Nuestra mejor contribución la hacemos cantando" ("Our Best Contribution is Made by Singing"). Here, the members of the Inti-Illimani group explain that music was their chosen medium to contribute to the Chilean Revolution ("Inti-Illimani: Nuestra" 1973).

The research was founded on multiple concepts that require clarification. According to historian Roger Chartier, "there is no practice or structure that is not the product of contradictory and confronting representations by which individuals and groups give sense to their world" (Chartier 2002, 66). These representations are understood as the way in which a given reality at different places and times is constructed, thought out, and read through the correlation between a present image and an absent object (Chartier 2002, 61–79). From this perspective, I seek to understand the NCCh as both the product and agent of the social reality in which the movement developed, thus observing the practices and representations that emerged in response to the expectations of changing the established order.

As highlighted by sociologist José Joaquín Brunner (1988, 83), the PU government's experience questioned the foundations of a hegemonic order, thus changing the perception of possibilities, the strongest constant in the social imaginary. Such changes would prompt "a broad feeling that 'anything is

possible'" (Brunner 1988, 82)—including the idea of a radical change in the cultural sphere. Philosopher Bronislaw Baczko (1985, 296–332) explains that such an influence on people's mindsets largely depends on its diffusion and, consequently, on the means that enable its communication on a grand scale. For this reason, it is relevant to examine how popular music took part in the diffusion of the "new man" and the "new culture" imaginary.

When I refer to "culture," I mainly reference Brunner's propositions, which draw the methodological distinction between the two meanings of the term. First, culture is understood in its daily or "anthropological" sense; and secondly, it emerges as "a specialized sphere of society that is responsible for producing, transmitting, and organizing symbolic worlds" (Brunner 1988, 46). Based on these definitions, Brunner recognizes two main spheres in which culture is constituted:

> One, a microscopic, everyday dimension of the private sphere, where individuals interact directly with each other, forming a world of shared meanings. Another one of macro social and public dimensions and of institutional processes, through which culture is composed, transmitted and consumed in relatively specialized ways. (Brunner 1992, 205)

Daily cultural changes would take place slowly and in connection with the broader process of transforming the general conditions of the organization within the society. Therefore, they could not be the direct result of specific policies (Brunner 1992, 206–207). These changes would be directed to the socially organized culture, "that is, the set of agents, institutions (or apparatuses), processes and means that are involved in a socially organized symbolic production to reach particular audiences through specific communication channels" (Brunner 1992, 208). In this way, cultural policies would be forms of intervention that tend to operate on the public and institutional sphere of culture (Brunner 1992, 211).

My analysis centers around the organizational level of culture by focusing on the actions conducted by the PU government in the cultural field and the responses they aroused in the intellectual milieu. Notwithstanding, while the notion of a "new culture" is comprised of the two previously mentioned definitions of the term, I understand that it was through the actions in the public sphere that the subjects studied sought to postulate their bases, using, toward that end, both institutions and mass media.

Regarding the concept of "cultural policy," recent studies have been problematizing its limitation to governmental actions alone. As argued by historian Mariana Villaça (2010, 24), "along with the government cultural policy, there are cultural policies developed within cultural institutions [. . .] by the agents who operate in them and thus produce their own action

circuits: the cultural micro-circuits." From this standpoint, "cultural policy" emerges as something diffuse, related to different vectors (agents, actions, works, debates) that may or may not intersect in a given context. In the case of the Popular Unity's Chile, as I will explain in the first chapter of this book, the government neither outlined nor implemented a clearly oriented line of action in the cultural field, in spite of some existing, recognizable trends in the implemented measures. The fact that the government cultural policy was under construction has instigated the broad debate which I have attempted to map.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that my approach also comprises the concept of "political culture," understood as a "coherent system of worldviews" (Berstein 2009, 32). According to historian Serge Berstein (2009, 31), it is "a global view of the world and its evolution, of the place occupied by man, and of the very nature of the problems related to power as well—a view that is shared by an important group of society in a given country and at a given moment in its history." Berstein understands the term "political culture" as a system of representations with norms and values that give identity to large political families, as in the case of political parties. Within this set, there would be a specific political language, consisting of symbols, rites, gestures, and visual representations that would converge to the same worldview (Dutra 2002, 24–25). Likewise, historian Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (2009, 21) proposes the following conceptualization: "a set of values, traditions, practices, and representations shared by a particular human group, which expresses a collective identity and offers common readings of the past and inspiration for future political projects."

Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework, I turn my attention to examining the relationships established between the Marxist political culture—which the PU sought to represent at the institutional level—the cultural policies, and the musical creations developed in Chile from 1970 to 1973.

To achieve the proposed objectives, I used different types of sources, which included printed and recorded publications. The selected media were those that highlighted the NCCh and/or supported the debates on the "question of culture." Therefore, I examined the following publications: the youth magazine *Onda* (1971–1973), the youth magazine *Ramona* (1971–1973), the cultural magazine *La Quinta Rueda* (1972–1973), the current affairs magazine *Ahora* (1971), the newspaper (1940–1973) and the magazine (1971–1973) *El Siglo*, the academic journal *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional* (1969–1973), and the musical magazine *El Musiquero* (1964–1973). This list includes publications by the Communist Party of Chile (CP), the Center for the Study of National Reality (CEREN), and the publishing houses Editora Nacional Quimantú and Editorial Lord Cochrane.

As noted by historian Tânia Garcia (2014, 215), "Magazines or newspapers can be used in research as only a source, or may simultaneously be used as both an object and a source." In the first case, the information can be clipped from different publications, based on the objectives outlined. In that way, although the newspaper or magazine profile as well as the journalists who wrote the articles and their target audience may be identified, this is never done with the same systematic technique that would be required in cases where the printed source is also the object of analysis.

In my research, those publications that are themselves an expression of the government activities, the CP, and the leftist intellectuals in the cultural field correspond to the latter case. Therefore, when looking at the magazines *La Quinta Rueda*, *Onda*, and *Ramona*, I aimed to understand the strategies adopted in their pages in order to intervene in the conjuncture. Given that the magazines establish relationship networks and represent the "point of view of a group, its political-ideological interventions, its place, and its tools in the cultural arena" (Crespo 2010, 3). I also observed the space devoted to the NCCh movement and how it is represented, bearing in mind both the specific interests of the publishers as well as their target audience. The magazines *El Siglo*, *Ahora*, and *El Musiquero*, as well as the academic journal *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, were used as auxiliary sources.

I also covered other types of printed texts in my study, such as memoirs written by the NCCh musicians or by people connected to them, documents by the Communist Party, and publications by groups of writers and artists engaged in the project of the Chilean Road to Socialism.

Working with printed sources enabled me to identify the most popular themes in the cultural debate promoted within the Chilean Left, and to observe both the NCCh musicians' positions and the national and international impacts of their work. From this survey, I selected and analyzed musical sources. Then, based on a comparison of information collected from different sources,[8] I organized a list of names of musicians who were considered in my study to be members of the movement in the period prior to the military coup. Subsequently, I listened to 90 albums recorded by those musicians between the late 1960s and 1973 to test the following: to what extent the musicians' discourse in the press aligned with their record production; whether there was any change in emphasis (in terms of form and content) after the Popular Unity came to power; and how their work engaged with the main themes of the cultural debate.

With respect to the magazines *Onda*, *Ramona*, and *La Quinta Rueda*, a special emphasis was given to the catalog of the record company Discoteca del Cantar Popular (The Discotheque of Popular Song)—DICAP. Founded in 1968 and managed by the Communist Youth of Chile until 1973, DICAP

was the main production and distribution channel of albums by the NCCh musicians. In this context, studying its catalog allowed me to observe the relationships between the Party's cultural policies and the NCCh movement.

As stated by historian Mariana Arantes, there are currently a great number of authors who draw our attention to the relevance and specificity of using magazines for historical research, and who agree that "Using cultural magazines as documentation demands an analysis of the social groups involved in their creation and development, and of their physical characteristics, circulation forms and content, that is, an analysis of their textual and paratextual dimensions" (Arantes 2016, 32–33). Along the same lines, Regina Crespo (2010, 9) underlines the need to "try to understand how [the magazines] interacted with the society in which they are immersed, with which social sectors they intended to engage and with which they actually engaged, how they intervened in their present and how they defended or fought certain political, cultural and aesthetic positions," while María del Carmen Grillo lists forty major methodological procedures to account for the magazines' complexities. Fernanda Beigel (2003, 113), in turn, believes it is mandatory to reconstruct the discursive universe of the era, along with including the process of ideological definitions that the magazine helped to establish. I took into account all of these different elements as I conducted my research.

With regard to the analysis of musical sources, I had as main references works by Philip Tagg, Juan Pablo González, César Albornoz, Tânia Garcia, Marcos Napolitano, and José Geraldo Vinci de Moraes, which seek to understand the popular music produced in the twentieth century from its redefinition in modern, urban, and industrial society. The analysis of the records included the different sound and printed elements of which they were composed: phonograms, covers, back covers, booklets and record seals. As for the work related to the songs, it was based on the relationship between "two different instances, though never disconnected: the instance of poetic language and that of musical language" (Moraes 2000, 214–215). This research, aimed to carry out a historical approach of the NCCh, captured as profoundly and suitably as possible the musical elements. It was grounded on the assumption that, even if the historian is neither a musician nor a musicologist with a specific educational background, he or she "can understand general aspects of the musical language and create his own criteria, goals and limits when handling the documentation" (Moraes 2000, 210).

This book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter addresses the broader context of policies and cultural discussions that took place in the Popular Unity's Chile, examining the government's projects and actions in the cultural field and their impact on artists and writers who manifested themselves in *La Quinta Rueda* magazine. Subsequently, I carefully examined

diverse texts to both distinguish interpretive trends and identify the main topics around which the intellectual debate on the "question of culture" occurred.

In the second chapter, I argue that engagement plays a key role in defining the NCCh as a movement, and I address the recurring argument in the literature which states that the Left's rise to power resulted in strong support for the NCCh, converting it into an "official music." In addition to identifying policies aimed toward the musical field, I also analyze some media broadcasted by the following government institutions: the magazines *Onda* and *Ramona* and the record companies DICAP and IRT. I argue that, in their endeavor to attract a young audience, they were far from any ideological orthodoxy and maintained different relationships with the NCCh and the political project of the Popular Unity.

In the third chapter, I present the themes deemed as central to the debate over the "question of culture" to analyze the engaged discourse of the musicians linked to the movement. In this way, I observe the different positions adopted by them regarding three main issues: "pamphlet art," "national and popular culture," and "bourgeois cultural heritage." In this last chapter, apart from deeming the musicians part of the intelligentsia committed to *the process*, I reaffirm an argument advocated throughout this work, according to which the cultural debate in the context of the Popular Unity was developed around two notions: an "ideological battle" and a "new culture." They refer to the different temporalities involved in the revolutionary project.

The previously stated theses have the common objective of shedding light on the cultural scenario in which the three years of the Chilean Experience occurred, exposing the diversity of positions and proposals sustained within the Left and also the multiplicity of actors who were the protagonists of that history.

NOTES

1. Known as *La vía chilena al socialismo* (the Chilean Road to Socialism), the government program of the Popular Unity aimed to establish socialism in Chile through the electoral route, respecting the democratic institutions. Its three years in office, led by Salvador Allende, were known at that time as the Chilean Process, and afterwards as the Chilean Experience.

2. Some additional relevant books produced in that context are: Rolle (2003), Gaudichaud (2004), Winn (2004), and Zapata (2006).

3. Exceptions are the following recently published books: López (2014), Faure (2017), and Chavarría et al. (2018).

4. In the Marxist left context, the expression "question of culture" refers to the place of culture in the revolutionary process.

5. Throughout the book, I dialogue with works representing these different views, which are indicated in the final references.

6. The author himself provided me with the consulted version of this work, which is not paginated.

7. In his essay "What Is Literature?" (1947), Sartre draws a distinction between Literature and other Arts, postulating that "And it is one thing to work with colour and sound, and another to express oneself by means of words. Notes, colours, and forms are not signs. They refer to nothing exterior to themselves." The writer, on the contrary, could use language to "guide the reader" and raise his awareness (Sartre 1988, 25).

8. Primary sources (press and records), studies by other scholars and interviews I conducted with musicologist Alfonso Padilla between 2015 and 2016.