

**“Un beso político:” the Chilean Queer Political Movement from Dictatorship to
Democracy, 1973-1994**



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Introduction

In 1992, a year after the democratically elected president Patricio Alwyn officially received the Rettig Report on the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship's human rights abuses, a commemorative human rights march paraded through Santiago. After the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD, the Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared), Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos (CCHDDHH, Chilean Commission of Human Rights), and other prominent human rights organizations passed, a dozen or so masked gay men appeared at the end of the parade and held up the banner "For our fallen siblings, MOVILH Homosexual Movement of Liberation (Por nuestros hermanos caídos, MOVILH Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual)." The groundbreaking appearance was the first time a queer organization in Chile publicly linked itself to an ongoing and politicized human rights struggle.

MOVILH was not the first queer group to become political—that is, to participate in elections, petitions, marches, and direct actions as an organized queer collective, to take a stance on political regimes and policies, and to defend their opinions and actions from the basis of their queer identities. It followed the lead of the lesbian feminist organization Ayuquelén and *travesti* (loosely, trans and crossdressing people) performers Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis in the late 1980s. Indeed, one of the members of Las Yeguas, Pedro Lemebel, kissed the famous Catalan singer Joan Manuel Serrat in 1989. Lemebel calls it the "political kiss (un beso político)," the "kiss with AIDS (un beso con SIDA)," and the "kiss for the colonizer (un beso al conquistador)," highlighting that the politicization of queerness was entangled with the AIDS epidemic and a simultaneous cultural struggle for visibility.¹ However, this wave of queer political activism was

¹ Víctor Hugo Robles, "El 'Beso Con SIDA' de Lemebel a Serrat," YouTube, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgop7PaD6ik>.

new to Chile, as queerness was hardly ever political and seldomly organized before the 1980s. The 1992 MOVILH March was also the first time human rights were publicly associated with queerness.

How to make sense of the 1992 MOVILH march? Why did the queer political movement emerge in the context of the democratic transition? How did they understand queerness politically? Why did they choose the human rights framework? In this thesis, I will examine how Chilean queer activists organized the queer community as a political force as they emerged from the repressions of the dictatorship era and the devastating and stigmatizing AIDS epidemic. I argue that the Chilean queer political movement that embraced the human rights framework in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, symbolized by the 1992 MOVILH March, stemmed from queer activists being expelled from major anti-dictatorship groups and from the social discrimination they faced during the AIDS epidemic. During the 1970s and 1980s, queer activists actively participated in anti-dictatorship work in the Church, leftist parties, human rights organizations, and the feminist movement, all of which expelled or silenced queer activists. Queer people faced violence, job insecurity, social rejection, and the lack of healthcare during the AIDS epidemic, issues that activists increasingly sought to confront politically. Queer activists such as Ayuquelén and Las Yeguas attempted communal, cultural, and political ways of inserting themselves into democracy. But eventually, it was MOVILH who found the language of human rights, which after the fall of the dictatorship was universal and politically influential, to be the most effective in communicating with centers of power. These experiences led to a queer political movement that adopted and expanded on the human rights framework in 1992 that defined queer political participation as legalist and representative.

The Dictatorship and Political Dissidents

In 1973, the Chilean military staged a coup against the Marxist president Salvador Allende, backed by the United States, and installed a military dictatorship that would last until 1989. According to the Rettig Report (1994) and Valech Report (2004), the dictatorship was responsible for the murder of approximately 3,200 people, the disappearances of more than 1000 people, nearly 30,000 arrests with the majority of them incarcerated and tortured, and nearly 40,000 exiles.² The intensity of the repression was greatest in the first days to the first year of the dictatorship, characterized by “outright war against the left,” executions without trial, special military courts, detentions, and torture.³ From 1974 to 1977, the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) carried out secret detentions and disappearances. Though the intensity decreased in the second phase, the populational scope DINA touched broadened from leftist militants and union leaders to centrist intellectuals and political parties. However, unable to fully stamp out the opposition, the state replaced DINA with the Department of National Intelligence (CNI) and carried out arrests only when the opposition became too visible in the streets, regularizing to a certain extent the political situation.⁴

The torture, disappearances, and detentions, alongside curfew, surveillance, and ban on assemblies, had largely destroyed leftist networks and made democratic political institutions and civil spaces defunct. In addition, Pinochet defined women’s roles in traditional terms, promoting submission, family, and raising patriotic youth for the nation.⁵ In the 1980s, economic instability and neoliberal reforms pushed many workers onto the streets, and violent repressions caused

² UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances: Addendum; Mission to Chile*, A/HRC/22/45/Add.1 (January 29, 2013), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A-HRC-22-45-Add1_EN.pdf.

³ Hugo Frühling and Frederick Woodbridge, “Stages of Repression and Legal Strategy for the Defense of Human Rights in Chile: 1973–1980,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (November 1983): 510, <https://doi.org/10.2307/762233>, 513.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 529.

⁵ Megan Allen Kareithi, *Gender Conceptions and Realities under Pinochet* (master’s thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2008), <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstreams/123c612b-35ce-4611-bd5c-e3ef8063c86e/download>.

more rebellions. The dictatorship was therefore characterized by both the faltering of traditional democratic ways of political participation and increasing motives and opportunities for anti-dictatorship political work as political dissidents. In the course of leftist recovery and reinvigorating the feminist movement against the dictatorship, queer activists played an important role as they were predominantly on the left and feminists. However, the two fronts rejected queer visibility and forced them to find their own political space.

Human Rights and the Church

The history of human rights provides the necessary background to understanding why the queer political movement embraced it in 1992 and how. Human rights and its practice of civilians legally defending political dissidents by claiming a universal set of rights the state cannot violate rapidly developed during the dictatorship. Human rights as a concept was formalized in the United Nations' (UN) "Declaration of Universal Human Rights" in 1948 and consisted of a broad set of political and civil rights (such as life, liberty, freedom from torture, equality before the law, freedom from arbitrary arrest, fair trial, freedom of speech and association), economic, social, and cultural rights (such as work, fair remuneration, education, health, and national self-determination), and the equal enjoyment of them regardless of identity (such as gender, nationality, and religious beliefs).⁶ Queer rights were out of the scope of the document, or so the political actors thought. The UN had little means than to entreat the "national efforts" to guarantee these rights, and most of the member states violated them at some point, as the Korean War, the decolonial wars, the Vietnam War, and Amnesty International's documentation of political prisoners on both sides of the Iron Curtain showed.⁷ While the states

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Resolution 217 A (III), December 10, 1948, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>.

⁷ Peter Benenson, "The Forgotten Prisoners," *Amnesty International Information Sheet*, 1961, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/info_sheet_3.pdf.

sidestepped human rights, the civil society exerted minimal efforts to study and advocate for them between the 50s and 60s, pioneered by Amnesty International in 1961.

Human rights discourse and activism began to take the politically hegemonic shape it has today in the late-1970s after the first wave of the disappearances and detentions had calmed. Lawyers, leftists, and the Catholic Church played a crucial role in investigating the crimes, internationalizing solidarity work, and pursuing legal recourse, financial aid, and emotional care for the affected in the years of the dictatorship and after. Various churches formed the Committee of Cooperation for Peace (COPACHI) together in 1973 to offer legal help to fired workers. After publishing an advertisement on a newspaper as a coalition of churches offering labor support and obtaining the government's tacit permission, it grew to having 108 employees in nine months. The growth also benefited from the truce between leftist and Christian Democratic lawyers. Ideological differences that defined the Allende era temporarily abated in the crisis, and Lira argues that the priests' actions came from a moral rather than a political or ideological standpoint and centered around the victims as individuals with rights.⁸ COPACHI's increased capacity involved investigating labor violations, expulsion of university students, sending the politically persecuted out of the country, locating detainees, filing habeas corpus petitions, and providing legal defense in courts-martial proceedings.⁹ The dictatorship shut it down in 1975.

Despite its short life, the organization's rapid institutionalization demonstrates the incredible growth of the civil human rights sector and blazed the trail with its mode of operation consisting of crowd-funded legal defense, investigation, and on-the-ground actions to protect the affected with various ideologies united behind the banner of human rights. After the dictatorship began to permit opposition around 1976, newspapers such as *Hoy*, *APSI*, *Cauce*, and *Análisis*

⁸ Elizabeth Lira, "The Chilean Human Rights Archives and Moral Resistance to Dictatorship," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 11, no. 2 (May 18, 2017): 189–96, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijx015>, 191.

⁹ Frühling and Woodbridge, "Stages of Repression," 514–7.

and human rights NGOs, such as the Vicariate of Solidarity (Vicaría de la Solidaridad), Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias (FASIC), la Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD), la Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos (CCHDH), and el Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU) among others took advantage of the official stance. As their existence became less threatened and their activities regularized, they would replicate the professionalization, work, and organization of COPACHI.

The Church's crucial role in human rights and solidarity work, influenced by liberation theology, would afford them a huge share of political power in the 1990s. The Church's relationship with queer activists was thus complicated—on the one hand, many queer activists were raised religious and attempted to carve a space in Christianity for them; on the other hand, the Church maintained sympathy for HIV-positive people but resoundingly rejected queer identities.

Scholars have noted the international sources of funding of the new wave of NGOs, especially from churches and economic groups in Europe and the US, that hindered the dictatorship's repression against them for fear of international backlash.¹⁰ Amnesty International (which had opened a Washington D.C. office in 1981) and the Human Rights Watch, then named Helsinki Watch, ran reports of Chile's situation based on evidence provided by domestic and exiled Chilean human rights groups to pressure the U.S. Congress. The Human Rights Council (UNHRC) organized Ad-Hoc Working Group on Specific Countries, with the first focused on Chile (1975), the Human Rights Committee (1976), the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (1980), the Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions (1982), and the Special Rapporteur on Torture (1985), all of which produced reports on the human rights

¹⁰ Alan Angell, "Democratization in Latin America: The International Context," in *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. Laurence Whitehead (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 188.

violations in Chile. As a result, Chilean domestic and exiled human rights groups received funding from and delivered information to the international, religious, and civil sources who then placed pressure on the U.S. Congress to check the abuses of Pinochet. The pressure was felt by Kissinger, secretary of the state, when he relayed to Pinochet the significant congressional pressure to restrain aid to Chile due to human rights violations in 1976.¹¹

Human rights, therefore, have a history of expansions, changes, and applications that are intimately connected to the specific historical conditions of Chile. The framework of human rights, pertinent to this thesis, was supposedly universal. But its application importantly did not concern queer rights. Instead, political actors predominantly referred to political dissidents' right to free speech, fair trial, and assembly and from torture. Human rights was developing as a legal profession for lawyers and investigators of the disappeared. And as a politically viable language and organizing call, it was primarily associated with the political dissidents. In the third chapter and the epilogue, this thesis will deal with how queer activists chose the framework, expanded on it (or highlighted its universal feature), and its impact on queer organizing.

History of Queer People and Queerness

Queerness can be understood as a set of expressions, identities, behaviors, and social and political communities that deviated from the social norm. LGBTQ+ people, as a conglomeration of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, are a contemporary label that before the late 1990s in Chile did not exist as a group nor as a political force. Indeed, it is a North American invention that was reclaimed in the late 1980s by American gay activists and spread around the world. In the interviews, Chilean gay men and women tend to refer to themselves as homosexuals (and lesbians if they are women). Trans and crossdressing people

¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Santiago, June 8, 1976, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–11, Part 2, Documents on South America, 1973–1976*, Document 228, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76vol11p2/d228>.

like to refer to themselves as *travestis* because transgender and transsexual were terms, too, unheard of in the 1970s and 1980s. *Locas* (literally, crazy women), *maricones* (faggots), and *yeguas* (mares) were insults directed at the *travestis* and gay people that the group reclaimed or used to refer to themselves ironically. Their pronouns shift in conversation, depending on whether they were in or out of drag and whether they considered themselves to be women. There was indeed no term that referred to all the queer people, as many of them did not consider themselves part of the same group. For the purpose of this thesis and given that the queer activists eventually collaborated and the queer community consolidated, I will use the term queer people to refer to them without using LGBTQ+ as a collection of labels.

The subjects of this thesis, because of the availability of sources, are mostly male. MOVILH, in particular, appeared masculine, professional, and middle-class. However, I caution against presuming masculinity as inherently conducive to social and media attention. In my research, I was unable to find any mention of trans-masculine people, except one Argentine interviewee. In addition, *travestis* who performed femininity attracted social shock and vehement attacks. They were seen as the most visible “gay men.” The gap in the archives demonstrates that the performance of masculinity does not guarantee a historically prominent location, nor was the performance of femininity entirely erased. Rather, social perceptions, the success of the organizations, and historical contingencies all play a factor into who left a voice and who did not.

Queer people, throughout Chilean history, were viewed not as identities that define people but as intimate or private behaviors (namely, sex and attire) that were pathological and sinful. Óscar Contardo argues that the Catholic Church has maintained the view that homosexuality was a sinful, perverse behavior (and thus a choice) until the mid-1970s, when a document “Statements on Certain Questions about Sexual Ethics” in 1975 states that some

homosexuals were “incurable.”¹² This led to a small opening of viewing homosexuality as innate and thus unchangeable, until a more conservative Pope changed the direction back in the mid-1980s. Pathologization, or viewing homosexuality as medical or developmental invertedness and socially lacking in masculinity, arose in the late 19th century when more “scientific” understanding of human sexes began to develop alongside the desire to scientifically manage and cure society’s ills.¹³ Queerness was “political” in the sense that institutions and the society systematically pathologized and disciplined queer bodies, but it was far from a socially organized community, a political topic, or a voting bloc. For the most part, queer people kept their identities to themselves and other queer people, meeting in bars, dark theaters, parks, back alleys, underground porn theaters, hotels, and brothels that were vulnerable to police raids. Although sodomy was criminalized by Article 365 in Chile’s Penal Code of 1874, the police most often arrested people on the basis of violating Article 373 which criminalized “offense to the moral and good customs.” Of course, many queer people had a day job and some even maintained a “respectable” nuclear family, making double-identities and secrecy necessary. Others, such as sex workers and *travestis*, were more visible and openly derided.

Prior to the dictatorship, in 1973, a group of *travestis* (transgender women and transvestite people) staged what is commonly considered the first queer protest in Chile. Marching through the city of Santiago to bewildered audiences who covered their children’s eyes, the participants demanded liberty from police harassment. The media such as Clarín and VEA immediately ridiculed the march, claiming that the *locas* (crazy women, a term referring to trans and *travesti* women) “want to marry.”¹⁴ The demand for security and freedom, which the

¹² Óscar Contardo, *Raro: Una historia gay de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Planeta, 2011), 205.

¹³ Cesare Lombroso, the infamous Italian criminologist, proposed that homosexual men were “inverted.” Ibid., 98.

¹⁴ Víctor Hugo Robles, *Bandera hueca: historia del movimiento homosexual de Chile* (Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 2008), 17.

media misconstrued as marriage equality, fell on deaf ears within Allende's government. La Raquel, one of the leaders of the 1973 protest, complained that "in Allende's time, there was more political liberty, but there was no liberty for [the queer people]."¹⁵ Although one could argue that the march was the first queer attempt at politicization, since some of the *travestis* were communists, and one La Fresia Soto claimed she went to obtain a permit, it was hardly a movement. Her comrades doubted whether she really went to obtain the permit, saying she was "a bit of a storyteller."¹⁶ The silence of the government and the ridicule of the media caused them to disperse as quickly as they had emerged. Therefore, little organization went into the ephemeral attempt at the first political queer march, and the participants maintained little contact with later movements. Indeed, queer people would continue to participate in politics by hiding their queer identity until the late 1980s, when they attempted to form their own political movement.

Significance of the Work

This thesis intervenes in the fields of queer studies, democracy and transition studies, and human rights studies. Existing queer literature has been silent on the historical moment when queer groups forced their way into politics through human rights discourses. Instead, some scholars propose that the dictatorship was marked by state terrorism, gendered violence, and disappearances against gay, trans, and *travesti* people.¹⁷ Young queer activists today also recount the dictatorship's violence against queer people in marches in 2019 to de-legitimize the state and

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Hillary Hiner, Juan Carlos Garrido, and Brigitte Walters, "Antitrans State Terrorism: Trans and Travesti Women, Human Rights, and Recent History in Chile," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 194–209, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7348482>. Hillary Hiner, "A Feminist History of Violence against Women and the LGBTQIA+ Community in Chile, 1964–2018," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, edited by William Beezley, 1–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.665>. Shawn R. Schulenberg, "LGBT Rights in Chile: On the Verge of a Gay-Rights Revolution?" *Sexuality, Gender & Policy* 2, no. 2 (2019): 97–119, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sgp2.12009>.

situate themselves in a lineage of state oppression and popular resistance.¹⁸ While recognition and attempts at correction of human rights abuses are always welcomed, the literature confuses the broadened human rights of the Chilean present with the then exclusionary human rights of the 1970s and 1980s, which only recognized the disappearances, torture, and murder of political dissidents. In characterizing the dictatorship's persecution of queer expressions as human rights abuses without an analysis of how it came to be considered as such, scholars blur the historical development of human rights and queer history and overlook the necessity to examine the uneasy and nonlinear embrace human rights and queer activists gave each other during the transitional years and the 1990s. Furthermore, while scholars of queer history have correctly warned against creating queer heroes, they have been equally unwilling to write about positive queer participation in politics. For example, Fischer writes that the performance of quotidian life in exile during the dictatorship by Lorenza Böttner, a transgender woman who had attracted various interpretations of resistance, should not be extrapolated beyond what she intended to show.¹⁹ But there existed politically conscious queer groups who forced their way into democracy and queer activists who suppressed or separated their identity from their political work to continue participating in politics. Their efforts, strategies, and experiences have shaped the subsequent development of the queer movement but were not appreciated.

The gap in literature suggests, for queer studies, that scholars tend to assume queer people carried a cynical or distant attitude toward the political institutions, regimes, and powers that had abused and derided them. In the same vein, studies of subaltern groups frequently assumed subaltern groups participate in national events dictated by the powerful elites without

¹⁸ Hillary Hiner, Manuela Badilla, Ana López, Alejandra Zúñiga-Fajuri, and Fuad Hatibovic, "Patriarchy is a Judge: Young Feminists and LGBTQ+ Activists Performing Transitional Justice in Chile," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 16, no. 1 (2022): 66–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab035>.

¹⁹ Carl Fischer, "Lorenza Böttner: From Chilean Exceptionalism to Queer Inclusion," *American Quarterly* 66 (2014): 749–765.

ideology. Instead, they saw through the political theatre and were only motivated by their interests in bettering their material lot. This is perhaps not entirely off the mark, but to erase all ideological aspirations and political imagination is to also erase the desires and hopes of queer activists who wanted to make democracy as accessible to them as it was to others. This thesis deals with queer activist's positive political participation in marches, organizing, dialogue, and elections, in active re-politicizing after the dictatorship, and in their shaping of the meaning and scope of human rights. This thesis focuses on the ways in which a marginalized group made tremendous an impact on the political events dominated by non-queer elites and argues that the influence of marginalized, "minority" queer groups on national history was far from marginal.

The queer community and identity are not singular or stable. As queerness is a social construct, how people presented themselves and what the society considered "queer" differed over time and from person to person. Queer people are people with multiple intersecting identities, beliefs, and social backgrounds that they pursue and express alongside their queerness. Therefore, although this thesis speaks about queer activists, it also pays attention to the internal dynamics of this community laden with political meaning that was being built toward the end of the dictatorship. In addition, as queer activists aspired to participate in the democratic period and insert themselves into the human rights discourse, how society responded to queer people of different identities and expressions was different. And some, especially masculine, middle-class homosexual men, were more likely than others to be accepted and more willing to integrate in ways that further, perhaps inadvertently, marginalized transgender and *travesti* people, sex workers, and HIV-positive people. For example, Baird Campbell has argued that MOVILH,

made up of largely homosexual men, forged a “hegemonic masculinity” in the queer movement.²⁰

Furthermore, the debate around the terms “sexual diversity (*diversidad sexual*)” and “sexual dissident (*disidencia sexual*)” encapsulates the criticism of the neoliberal queer NGOs in the late 1990s. Sexual dissidence suggests that queer people (including non-queer people) practiced divergent sexuality and identities as a form of dissent and protest against the dominant sexual morality and respectability politics. It is reminiscent of political dissent and implies inherent political power in divergent sexual practices because sexual morality and discipline undergird political power. Sexual diversity, on the other hand, takes away the political and rebellious impetus and makes queer identities and practices benign and harmonious with the nation-building project during the democratic period. Manuela Valle Castro documents that this transformation occurred in official language in the mid and late 1990s, and that queer freedom was enveloped by neoliberal concepts of market and individual freedom.²¹ As the epilogue of this thesis deals with the fragmentation of the 1992 queer political movement, it pays attention to how *travestis*, transgender people, sex workers, and those unwilling and unable to fit into the norms of respectability found ways of rebelling against the cis-masculine and politically benign representation of queerness.

This thesis intervenes in the study of democratic transition by arguing that the transition was a long process, and democracy was made more acceptable from the bottom. During the dictatorship, the curfew, ban on assemblies, the destruction of leftist networks, and the overhaul of political institutions made political participation difficult for most people. As depoliticized

²⁰ Baird Campbell, "Movilh-ization: Hegemonic Masculinity in the Queer Social Movement Industry in Santiago de Chile" (Master's thesis, Tulane University, 2014), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/e74257cf311c6f77a9940ecab18517c2/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>.

²¹ Manuela Valle Castro, "Neoliberal Desires, Spectacles of Market-Nationalism, Utopian Performances: A Feminist Analysis of Gendered Cultural Narratives in Post-Dictatorship Chile" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0166234>.

citizens, the democratic period posed the opportunity to re-politicize oneself. As queer people, however, the identity was never political before. The experience of political participation during the dictatorship and the need for a political solution to discrimination against HIV-positive people forced queer activists to imagine a political queer identity. Queer politicization was, therefore, an expansion of citizenship that further completed the democratic transition. In this way, this thesis pays attention to how the democratic transition was carried out from below in defiance of the silence of the politically powerful president, the Church, and the party leaders.

Much of the literature on post-dictatorship citizenship and democratic nation-building has been about using victimhood and human rights to carry out reconciliation and limit, in this way, full justice to be carried out. Helene Risør has elegantly argued that human rights discourses post-dictatorship posit victims of the dictatorship as forgiving and deserving citizens, whose potential to be victims is used to delineate acceptable political actions and exclude the poor from the full benefits of citizenship.²² This thesis looks at how queer people assumed the identity of victims while struggling with the newfound yet endangered political actions. The queer citizenship, as a result, was constantly debated and redefined..

In the field of human rights, this thesis makes the intervention that considers human rights not as an innate and well-established list of rights for every person but as a language of communication. Although rarely would any marginalized group deny their human rights, these rights and the practices, funding, and institutions used to claim them are not automatic. Queer activists used human rights to insert themselves into politics because it was a widely spoken and accepted language at the time, and speaking it garnered social and political sympathy. Furthermore, the rights had to be outlined and practiced. The framework did not include queer

²² Helene Risør, "Civil Victimhood: Citizenship, Human Rights and Securitization in Post-Dictatorship Chile," *Anthropological Theory* 18, no. 2-3 (2018): 271–295, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499618777433>.

rights but political and civil rights, so queer and HIV-positive activists had to first claim eligibility to the existing rights and later develop their own, such as the right to be different, to marry, and to not be discriminated against based on gender identities and sexualities. The practice includes forming organizations that urge the codification of queer rights into law, fighting legal battles, and holding events and workshops to gain institutional and social power which can be leveraged in supporting or denouncing politicians and policies. Funding would have to come from abroad, the UN, or domestic supporters, which means making queer rights palatable to the interests of these institutions.

For human rights studies, the transformations of and by queer activists on the logic and modes of operation of human rights groups should merit careful research that would contribute to the understanding of human rights as a historical phenomenon. Even scholars who recognize that utilizing human rights has limitations, such as Patrick Kelly, study solely the application of human rights among political dissidents. Scholars of human rights studies have similarly ignored its transforming logic of universality (that everyone deserves these rights), how previously ignored groups could become (and might have resisted in becoming) part of the universal, and the resulting new meanings of human rights and modes of operation. Far from the “end of history,” as Fukuyama argues, the “triumph”²³ of democracy and the human rights ideology, their frictions, the struggles of queer actors who sought to realize the promises of human rights, and their impact on queer life should be repeatedly questioned and studied.

The studies of human rights have rarely looked at the queer expansion of the human rights framework, the queer institutions that formed and have been transformed with the adoption of the human rights and NGO model, and the impact of such changes on queer identities and lives. Taken as granted that every group should have their human rights respected, human rights

²³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

scholars continue to see the gradual expansion of human rights as a linear process that slowly, from the top-down, includes more groups, and that queer people were simply waiting or fighting to be recognized. For example, Hillary Hiner et al.'s detailed study into the state terrorism against transgender women during the dictatorship demonstrates that the human rights reports in the 1990s and 2000s omitted violations of queer rights because they were not considered human rights.²⁴ While the exclusion of queer people from the human rights framework was unsatisfactory, one also has to consider the other side of the expansion process: why and how queer people embraced the human rights framework, and how it could be both helpful and limiting to queer liberation. This thesis, therefore, makes the intervention into human rights studies by historicizing the queer adoption of human rights as a language and the mutual influence queer and human rights groups had on each other.

Archives and Sources

For this thesis, I drew my sources from the collections housed at Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, MMDH), the National Archive (Archivo Nacional, ARN), the National Archive of Administration (Archivo Nacional de la Administración, ARNAD). Digitized archives include Memoria Chilena and Yeguas del Apocalipsis. The majority of my primary sources consist of memoirs, interviews, radio, films, photographs, books, and pamphlets created by the activists. Víctor Hugo Robles' radio show Triángulo Abierto that the ARN preserves, the interviews of queer activists conducted by the various archives, and the memoirs and history written by the activists reconstruct for me the lives, struggles, and desires of queer people at the time. Even Oscar Contardo's book *Raro: una historia gay de Chile*, draws heavily on interviews. This thesis, therefore, uses sources that are not traditionally part of historical investigation and relies on oral history.

²⁴ Hiner, Garrido, and Walters, "Antitrans State Terrorism," 194–209.

The study of queer history, especially in the second half of the 20th century, often relies on interviews, films, and memory because of the inaccessibility of subaltern history from traditional archives. For one, historical records were coded by the language and reality of the time, and knowing the keywords to search leads to more success. For example, one could not find arrest records of sodomy during the dictatorship or in the 1990s, even though it was a crime in Chile throughout the 20th century, because most arrests of queer people occurred on the basis of them violating “moral and good customs (*la moral y las buenas costumbres*).” In addition, some archives were destroyed. After the assassination of one of the founders of Integration Movement (Movimiento Integración), the first recorded gay organization in Chile, and under the pressure of the dictatorship’s surveillance and repression, the other leaders burnt all the communications and photographs of the group out of fear.²⁵ Finally, archiving itself supports a nationalist and patriarchal consolidation and propagation of the state, which then pushes queer history to the margins or erases it altogether. The most salient example was the fact that the entries of ARN’s Women and Gender collection, which contains interviews with lesbian and transgender women activists, were not visible in the ARN’s catalogue. The women archivists who preside over the Women and Gender collection informed me that because women and gender were not typically considered national history, it was not included in the online catalogue for the ARN’s complete archive. There is a printed, separate catalogue for the documents and a separate digital catalogue of the interviews.

How would one ever understand the bustling nightlife, gay bars, brothels, and *travesti* performances that tied together queer meeting spaces and networks in the 1980s by looking at academic and psychiatric institutions that still preached the “invertedness” of homosexuality? How could one find queer people performing care work, remembrance, and community in the

²⁵ Contardo, *Raro*, 214.

AIDS epidemic by looking at hospitals that refused to take them in, official data that registered merely 149 cases of AIDS in 6 years, and newspapers that called AIDS the “gay cancer”?²⁶

Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that “silences” in the archives are intentional and political.²⁷

Power shapes the creation, documentation, and presentation of the sources. The activists’ acts of self-documentation and preservation and the recent rediscovery of queer history through orality provide rich details of the inner workings of the queer spaces, groups, and relations left out in judicial documents or state human rights reports. In seeking out sources to fill the voids of the archives, this thesis engages in the disruption of power. The nascent efforts, often by queer activists themselves, to recover and uncover the memories, lived experiences, and historical voice of queer people showcase a more expansive understanding of history and archiving.

This thesis is divided into five parts. The Introduction provides the argument and the significance. The first chapter explains that queer people kept their identities hidden to participate in politics but were rejected once their identities were known. The second chapter answers how the queer community was consolidated during the AIDS epidemic. The third chapter details the queer political movement’s dialogue with the centers of political power using human rights during the democratic period. Finally, the epilogue concludes the history and points out that since human rights organizations and the framework became professionalized, de-politicized, and distant from the communities they aimed to protect, queer organizations that adopted human rights and the NGO model faced the same plight and criticism.

²⁶ Amelia Donoso and Víctor Hugo Robles, *Sida en Chile: Historias Fragmentadas* (Santiago: Ocho Libros Editores, 2015), <https://www.buscalibre.us/libro-sida-en-chile-historias-fragmentadas/9789569712012/p/47287816>, 9.

²⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Chapter 1: Why Must Political Movements be Queer?

Queer people in Chile had met clandestinely in nocturnal bars, dark corners of the theater and cinemas, brothels, parks, and wealthy patrons' private homes before returning to their day jobs and, in many cases, nuclear families for a long time. What explains the sudden willingness to organize open demonstrations of queerness and its political goals like that of the 1992 Rettig March? The answer lies in the dictatorship's time. I argue in this chapter that queer people had actively participated in the church, leftist parties, human rights organizations, and feminist movements, the most prominent political and social movements of anti-dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s, which led to queer activists' anti-dictatorial political awakening and the accumulation of organizational skills. But they were rejected by the leaders of the movements once their queer identities were made public. The experience of being deprioritized in a political battle they fought and forced out of political and social spaces they had helped to create generated the need for an unapologetic queer movement that would participate in politics.

Attacks from the Church

Some queer activists were raised Christian and participated in Church-led human rights work to shelter and aid the political dissidents and form religious queer groups, experiences that aligned them ideologically with anti-dictatorship sentiments and gave them contacts and expertise in political and social organizing. However, religious leaders held onto homophobic doctrines and denied queer participation within this front of political and social activism.

Many queer activists were raised religious and participated in Church-led human rights work. For example, Daniel Palma Sepúlveda, an HIV-activist and theater designer, was Evangelical like his parents and grandparents.²⁸ Though from a minority sect in a

²⁸ Comisión Internacional de Investigación de Crímenes de la Junta Militar en Chile, "Testimonio, Sepúlveda," *Archivo Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos*, CL MMDH 00000632-000010-000011, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://archivommdh.cl/index.php/cl-mmdh-00000632-cl-mmdh-00000632-000010-000011>.

majority-Catholic country, his story is insightful to how queer activists were initiated into political action through socially-conscious churchwork. His parents were pastors and lived in Uruguay for a while, where they became good friends with *guerrilleros* in the Tupamaros insurgency, a prominent urban left-wing guerrilla that reached the peak of its popularity and power between 1968 and 1972. After Sepúlveda's family moved back to Chile, the Tupamaros frequented them in the years of Allende's presidency, when Chile became a major node for international left-wing networks. The Uruguayan coup in June of 1973 forced many Tupamaros to seek shelter in Chile, and the Chilean coup in September 1973 sent them into exile again. When the Tupamaro *guerrillera* Susana could not escape Chile in time and showed up at their house, they decided sheltering her and her daughter in the Church would be safer. The family and the *guerrillera* all went in a car, pretending to go on a family picnic. The Chilean soldiers who patrolled the streets in search of leftist guerrillas stopped their car but believed their story, and so Susana and her daughter were saved. Subsequently, Sepúlveda and his family continued efforts to rescue, shelter, and help dissidents escape Chile through the church. Indeed, the Church was a "tremendous support" for rescue, aid, and shelter efforts, as Sepúlveda said in the interview. Liberation theology, which emerged in Latin America in the 60s and 1970s and promoted social justice and welfare for the poor, produced both Catholic and Protestant adherents. Individual priests and nuns like those of Sepúlveda's parents worked closely with socialists and communists, sometimes in guerrillas but mostly in education and humanitarian aid. On an institutional level, Chilean churches were the first to organize human rights organizations to defend the disappeared dissidents during Pinochet's dictatorship. The Church provided a rich field for action and organizing for many young queer activists growing up. Sepúlveda's queer and HIV activism, which he began to pursue after graduating from the university, borrowed the

political consciousness and organizing skills from his religious and socially active upbringing.

Marco Ruiz Delgado, one of the founders of MOVILH, said in 1985 in an interview with APSI, a major left-leaning opposition newspaper, that he was a “Christian, socialist, and homosexual,”²⁹ showing queer political activism’s lasting connection to religion.

Queer activists briefly succeeded in building their space within the religious context when the Catholic Church had a progressive opening. The Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared that some homosexuals were “incurable” in 1975, which led to the opening up of some priests, especially those who were affiliated with liberation theology, to homosexuality as an innate characteristic rather than a learned, sinful behavior.³⁰ In some courses in the Chilean Catholic University, which the founders of Movimiento Integración (Integration Movement, the first Chilean gay organization from 1977 to 1983) attended, professors began to teach homosexuality as another variant of human sexuality. Movimiento Integración consisted of a group of 14 middle-class gay men, most of them affiliated with the Catholic University, who met to resolve religious doctrines with their homosexuality. Under the intense surveillance of the military dictatorship that forbade gatherings and arrested people on the basis of offending moral and good customs, which usually translated to arbitrary arrests of *travestis* and gays and raiding queer bars, the group met clandestinely and carefully. Integración could not be interpreted as a queer political organization, despite all the members being against the dictatorship, but only as a sign of queer affiliation with religion because of its over apolitical character.³¹ An old bulletin of Integración proclaimed that they were a “friendly initiative of a group of people interested in reviewing the homosexual issue in the light of religious ideas...[with] no political affiliation

²⁹ *Apsi*, Año 10, números 160-168 (26 de agosto al 29 de diciembre de 1985), *Memoria Chilena*, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-82001.html>.

³⁰ Contardo, *Raro*, 214.

³¹ Interview with Marco Ruiz Delgado, “Audiovisual,” *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos*, Santiago, Chile, 2023, CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

whatsoever.”³² According to the testimony of Marco Ruiz Delgado, one of the members, the group was indeed focused on reconciling homosexuality with the men’s faith, family, partners, and work without political affiliations.³³

The progressive Dutch priest Cornelio Lemmers provided spiritual guidance for the group. Lemmers operated in the window of tolerance created by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He and the members of Integración had even gone to mass at a church in Punta Tralca.³⁴ Many participants held sincere beliefs in Catholicism, and Lemmers’ guidance and Integración’s existence helped them through their spiritual torment. Integración emerged in the time when most queer spaces were closed due to the dictatorship’s assault on assemblies. The space therefore combined spiritual comfort with human companionship in a tumultuous time.

The space was short-lived. Its closure, after it had amassed over 100 participants in the early 1980s, could be attributed, among many reasons, to the conservative backlash in the leadership of the Church and the consequent distancing of queerness.³⁵³⁶ In 1978, the new Pope John Paul II abandoned the progressive spirit. In 1986, the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who led the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a declaration against the previous statement, chastising the “excessive benevolence toward the homosexual condition.” “No authentic pastoral program may include organizations in which homosexual persons associate with each other, without clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral,” declared Ratzinger. In the second half of the decade, Lemmers was moved to a parish outside of Santiago, and many founders left the group. While the reason for the religious queer space’s termination varies, the religious leadership both within and outside of Chile made such efforts difficult to

³² Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 19.

³³ Delgado, Audiovisual,” CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

³⁴ Contardo, *Raro*, 214.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 20-1.

continue. Religion became, therefore, both a source of pain and spiritual unrest they must work to resolve with homosexuality and a buffer they could use to deter the dictatorship's violent censorship. Proclaiming political neutrality and religiosity helped the group convince the dictatorship and their neighbors that they were not a threat. Considering the case of Delgado and Sepúlveda, religion was also the first political awakening and the platform for accumulating organizational skills. However, once queer activists attempted to affiliate itself with religion without compromising their identities, religious spaces were closed to them and the ties cut.

As religion in Chile became an anti-dictatorial fortress, it tended to group homosexuality into the ills of the dictatorship. La Vicaría de la Solidaridad (the Vicar of Solidarity), an organ of the Catholic Church in Chile, was a key voice in the human rights defense that was organized in the wake of the dictatorship's brutal assassinations and arrests. The Vicar prepared legal defense of the political prisoners, helped many escape Chile, and demanded the location of the disappeared. But its focus on human rights did not include queer people. Instead, in the few cases the Vicar's reports discuss homosexuality, it evokes the image of pedophilia and parental and social neglect. "Pelusas," orphaned kids who live a life of petty crime, poverty, and informal labor on the streets, they claim, because of "insecurity and distrust of external media," a "poor affective life," and lacking "social referents such as fathers, families," exhibit "precocious sexuality." Adults would force young boys like these to perform homosexual practices while prostituting the girls.³⁷ The social consciousness of the Church, instead of directed at promoting the rights and acceptance of homosexuality, framed it as a social ill deriving from inequalities, poverty, and the lack of social resources. These structural and societal problems have, of course,

³⁷ *Vicaría de la Solidaridad, Solidaridad: n° 85-107, enero-diciembre de 1980*, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, MC0037007, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-80742.html>, 31.

the dictatorship and the deficit in faith to blame, making homosexuality a sign of the dictatorship's failure.

The Vicaría further derided Northern European normalization of homosexuality, calling them people who have more political freedom but aspire to “have a cemetery for dogs, [become] where homosexuals could marry, or fight against pornography, questions that surely do not motivate Chileans.”³⁸ Of AIDS, the Vicaría mentions the importance of educating the youth on its danger and preventative measures only once in 1987.³⁹ In all cases, the Vicaría saw queerness and AIDS as part of the proof of the dictatorship's moral and economic failing in leading the country into prosperity, causing many to fall into crime and twisted pleasure. With a mixture of paternalistic sympathy and self-righteousness, the organization was an unlikely candidate for queer people to seek rights and justice during the dictatorship without concealing their identities.

Indeed, the Catholic church would continue to deny homosexuality's compatibility with religion well into the democratic period, despite the queer people who participated in the church's political cause. The Church used its soaring social standing for its human rights records during the dictatorship against many progressive social reforms, such as the use of condoms to prevent AIDS and homosexual acceptance. For example, Antonio Moreno, Archbishop of Concepción, declared in September 1990 that the Chilean youth faced “the widespread permissiveness, the generalization of premarital sex, the frequency of separations, the campaign of birth control, the use of condoms, and the tolerance towards homosexuality.” In 1991, Archbishop Carlos Oviedo demanded in his pastoral letter “Moral, Youth and Permissive Society” that “pluralism...be based on the common denominator of the natural moral law, a law that man does not dictate to himself. The letter was in response to the democratic Alwyn

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51, 80.

³⁹ *Vicaría de la Solidaridad, Solidaridad: n° 238-259, enero-diciembre de 1987, Memoria Chilena*, MC0037014, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-80749.html>, 48.

government's campaign to promote the use of condoms (rather than abstention) to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁴⁰

Although queer people in Chile, as individuals and organizations, frequently had religious ties with and participation in the Church's political and humanitarian work, helping the Church achieve its status in the new democracy as a powerful political force and a human rights defender, the Church clamped down on the acceptance of homosexuality, forcing queer activists to find other political channels.

Dismissals from the Left

Queer activists gained organizing experiences and a political consciousness through working in leftist anti-dictatorship youth activities, student movements, and party work, but once their queer identity was revealed or their gender and self-expression were in question, they could not find welcoming relationships in the spaces they helped to create.

Queer members of leftist political parties must hide their identities from their coworkers if they want to ascend in the party. The estrangement of Rolando Jiménez, one of the founders of the queer organization Movilh (Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual), and the Communist Party is representative of queer activists' experiences within the left. During the dictatorship, he was the leader of the Communist Youths. Having lived his life in poverty and fought against the dictatorship in the Mapu Obrero Campesino and later the Communist Party, he was well-connected and respected within the Party and expected to be named the general secretary of the Communist Youths. In the meantime, on the other side of the city, he lived with his male partner and was frequented by his homosexual friends, none of whom shared any political activities with him, nor did the Party know about them. This was a common practice for many gay political activists: they lived a life of secrecy, meeting clandestinely with the comrades of

⁴⁰ Contardo, *Raro*, 9.

their outlawed parties and with their partners in precarious queer spaces. None brought the issue of queerness into party discussions, and many considered the practice normal because there was then nothing political about queerness and intimacy. In 1987, after wandering into the cinema Capri, a cinema for gay gatherings, he was swept up in a police raid and had to call contacts in the Party to be released from detention. But his secret was out, and a woman in the Party soon told him that the Party leaders no longer considered him for the post of General Secretary because they wanted the Party to be legalized. At the Party convention the year after, he overheard the leadership's meeting which confirmed the woman's claim. They feared that the "people would think all of them are homosexuals" if they nominated Jiménez. He walked into the meeting to show them he knew what they said and left the Party, never to return.⁴¹

Another example of leftist parties pushing out queer leaders was that of Felipe Ramírez, a founder of the Party Christian Left (La Izquierda Cristiana), an ex-minister of Salvador Allende, and also a gay man.⁴² Tortured, exiled, and divorced, he returned to Chile to rejoin the clandestine party in the early 1980s. In 1982, he became the general secretary of the Party after its top leaders were arrested and out of the closet to his comrades. At the time, nobody protested. However, after one of his comrades was detained by the CNI (Department of National Intelligence) and released, he informed the Party that the secret services have a photo of Ramírez and another man in a compromising position. The DINA and CNI routinely kept files of the familiars and associates of queer political dissidents to use against them in occasions like this. The Party indeed decided that the photo could be used against them and asked Ramírez to resign, who complied. What the secret services knew well was that the leftist parties would not accept an openly gay leader. The majority of MOVILH's founders, such as Juan Pablo Sutherland, were

⁴¹ Ibid., 256.

⁴² Ibid., 216-7.

ex-members of the Communist Party. Although the political careers imbued Jiménez, Ramírez, Sutherland and the like with a firm political ideology and organizational skills, they had to hide their identities or be forced out of the political spaces they created.

Other queer activists felt close to leftist ideologies but never participated in political parties because of their queerphobia and patriarchal tendencies. Delgado, despite having brothers in the socialist party and political prisoners in the family, as well as having done student and religious organizing as a teenager, withdrew from both the Christian and socialist parties because of their homophobia.⁴³ Lilian Inostroza, a lesbian woman and one of the founders of Ayuquelén, the first lesbian feminist organization in Chile founded in 1984, also had extensive ties in Allende's government and within leftist circles. She was involved in student movements during the dictatorship and considered the Communist Party, but she never joined it, feeling that the "political world had a lot of discrimination against women."⁴⁴ She did not want "something so patriarchal." The leftist parties were also not conducive to queer self-expression. Sepúlveda, despite spending his teenage years and early adulthood entwined with leftist political activities and culture, never joined any political parties.⁴⁵ He engaged actively with counterculture during college, wearing long hair, listening to Silvio Rodríguez, a Cuban folk singer who was popular with the Castro government, and hoped to be the "most rebellious that he could."⁴⁶ His friends also had "similar political thought" to his, and they wished to be "opposers." The leftist parties would have found fertile ground with the youth of the 1980s like him, but Sepúlveda decided that they did not permit the "line of freedom of the person or the self," which cost them his support. Indeed, many contemporary and future queer activists in the dictatorship era formed

⁴³ Delgado, Audiovisual," CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

⁴⁴ Interview with Lilian Inostroza, *Mujeres y Género, Archivo Nacional de Chile*, caja 4, 2014.

⁴⁵ *Comisión Internacional de Investigación de Crímenes de la Junta Militar en Chile*, "Testimonio, Sepúlveda," CL MMDH 00000632-000010-000011.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

political associations, performed organizing work, and spread political education from their capacity as student agitators, from families with connections to the left, or from the more progressive wings of the Church but were rejected by them and forced to find other ways of engagement.

APSI would perhaps be the only major political opposition group to open up to homosexuality and AIDS discussions. The magazine was the first to publish an article about homosexuality after interviewing Ernesto Muñoz in 1985.⁴⁷ Subsequently, it published articles that featured Delgado and Ayuquelén and included AIDS in substantive discussions.⁴⁸ Featuring queer people in their own words and discussing the AIDS epidemic in ways that tried to understand and humanize the subjects instead of presenting them as merely pathological symptoms of the ills of the dictatorship were bold moves. They demonstrate that first, APSI, as an opposition newspaper, saw political potential in identities, intimacy, gender and sexual expressions, and health issues that other opposition groups did not; and second, APSI was offering tacit criticism of the discussions around the openness of the new political order, urging the political actors to consider how the incipient democracy could continue to close its doors to some groups who were evidently part of the process of implementing democracy in the country.

However, most queer people experienced political rejection from the leftist parties that they disproportionately sympathized with or worked in, forcing them to carve out their own, queer space for political action.

Silence from Human Rights Groups

Human rights groups, despite their growing popularity, never expanded their framework to queer rights. Human rights was a new field that arose during the dictatorship that gradually

⁴⁷ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

gained political importance and wide-spread acceptance. Many human rights activists and lawyers centered on the political dissidents' right to speech, assembly, fair and speedy trial, and from torture and violence and never considered the violence, arbitrary arrests, and ban on assembly that impacted queer people.

Although queer people experienced violent police arrests and raids on gay bars throughout the 20th century, the dictatorship was a particularly brutal time to many. The police, in fact, rarely based their arrests on Article 365 in Chile's Penal Code of 1874 which criminalized sodomy. Instead, most people suspected of being homosexuals or *travestis* were detained in the streets, beaten up, and sent to prison for about a week on the basis of violating Article 373, which punishes those "who in any way offend modesty or good morals with acts of serious scandal or transcendence."⁴⁹ Victoria Yañez, a transgender woman and 16 at the time of her arrest under the dictatorship, recalls that the police beat her up for dressing like a woman, forced her to perform oral sex, and the judge sent her to 5 days in jail.⁵⁰ Other encounters were fatal. Tomás Rivera González, a *travesti* nicknamed "La Doctora," remembers that the police released hungry dogs on her queer friend La Lety to tear her alive while they shot La Chela.⁵¹ Another police raid in 1973 nearly killed González: a few days after the coup, she went to warn some queer people living at Maturana so they could "leave where they were and throw out their wig," because the police were operating in that area. But the police rounded them up, and as she was dressed in women's clothes, with platform shoes and rings, she "had the most horrific fear of [her] life." In the short documentary "La represión que no importó," the producers Alison Vivanco and María Fernanda Gándara interview Paloma, a transgender woman from Conchalí.

⁴⁹ "Código Penal Artículo 373," *Leyes de Chile*, accessed April 9, 2025, https://leyes-cl.com/codigo_penal/373.htm.

⁵⁰ "Documental 'Los Muchos Triángulos Rosas,'" *YouTube*, posted June 20, 2024, <https://youtu.be/nNtwgYbW0pM> (accessed April 9, 2025).

⁵¹ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 18.

She told the story of how the military raped and tortured her for dressing in women's clothes and imprisoned at the Estadio Nacional, where thousands other political prisoners were held. Despite the violence, violations, and arrests of queer people closely resembling the torture and murder of political dissidents, the human rights defenders poured their resources, legal defense, and sympathies over only the latter group, remaining silent about queer people and the rights MOVILH would try to claim in 1992.

Violence was not the only way to repress queer activities. Queer spaces suffered closure and surveillance because of the dictatorship's heightened control of morality and curfews. Ivan, art professor and the founder of Movimiento Integración, recounts the uncertainty gay people felt uncertain what would happen, saying that the young people were scared because of rumors of a registration (*empadronamiento*), and queer meeting spaces such as night clubs and bohemian brothels (such as the famous La Carlina) were gradually closed because of the curfew.⁵² The ban on assemblies further forbade queer gatherings. Although these incidents of violence, arrests, murder, and impediment on assembly and free speech that parallel the political dissidents created similar fear and disarray among the queer population as they did among the left and the syndicates, the human rights organizations and nationally-commissioned reports in the early years of democracy (Rettig and Valech) did not mention queer experiences. Human rights was a framework unavailable to queer people.⁵³

Many human rights organizations maintained complete silence on queerness or the intimately related issue of AIDS. Human rights groups, Víctor Parra recalls, were focused on fighting against the dictatorship and the recovery of democracy and not as much with respect to

⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁵³ María Fernanda Gándara and Alison Vivanco, "La represión que no importó," *YouTube*, posted February 22, 2018, <https://youtu.be/qDaX0SkbIWI> (accessed April 9, 2025).

AIDS or homosexuality, which they deemed to be inappropriate as a topic.⁵⁴ CODEPU (Corporación de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo), perhaps the most prominent Chilean human rights organization in anti-dictatorship agitation, founded in 1980, was no exception to the rule. In its 2000 pamphlet *CODEPU 20 años*, it proclaims its achievement in giving “lessons of human rights” to the HIV-positive, education of human rights as an “instrument of liberation.”⁵⁵ The photo appears undated without further textual explanation. Considering that in all of its bulletins housed at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights throughout the dictatorship, one could not find a single mention of AIDS, it evidently did not carry out work around HIV/AIDS or homosexuality in its early years. The Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos (CCHDH), similarly, dealt only indirectly with queerness and AIDS. Gonzalo Tabora Molina, the International Secretary of CCHDH, wrote an open letter in October of 1989, a year after the 1988 referendum that removed Pinochet from a potential new term, in which he called for the recognition of HIV/AIDS as a human rights issue.⁵⁶ Although the document recognizes that the state has the obligation of caring for people’s lives and well-being, the patients’ right to privacy, and the human rights of the HIV-positive, the document proposes no specific state action nor program on the CCHDH part. Molina’s ambition in AIDS-related work went beyond the proclamation of human rights, but CCHDH could not support his work with enough funding, so he resigned.⁵⁷

CCHDH’s archive contains only one mention of homosexuality, but what the case demonstrates is how CCHDH paid no attention to queer people in their framework. In 1986, the

⁵⁴ Donoso and Robles, *Sida en Chile*, 28.

⁵⁵ María Luisa Ortiz, *CODEPU 20 años* (Santiago de Chile: CODEPU, 2000), *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos*, entry no. 6.3.4 O771c 2000, 17.

⁵⁶ Gonzalo Tabora, “Documento ‘Sida y Derechos Humanos’,” *Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos*, October 23, 1989, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*, caja 267.

⁵⁷ *Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos*, “Situación Gonzalo Tabora,” 1991, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*, caja 267.

organization took on Pedro Paúl Marín Hernández's case. Hernández testified that the CNI (Centro Nacional de Inteligencia, or the National Intelligence Agency that carried out surveillance and arrests in Chile after 1977) mistook him as one of the conspirators to assassinate Pinochet and arrested him. While beating him up and torturing him, one of the soldiers also raped and sodomized him.⁵⁸ The CCHDH calls for an investigation into the CNI and the soldier named by Hernández, Oscar Gonzalez Zúñiga, on the basis that they violated Article 365. The case had little to do with queer human rights or the violence queer people experienced. Rather, it inadvertently but indirectly reinforced legal discrimination against homosexuals by applying the law against sodomy. Regardless, the case demonstrates that the human rights organizations were willing to take on cases related to sodomy only if the victim had little to do with homosexuality, and the framework of human rights did not consider queer people.

Queer people, on the other hand, made valuable contributions to human rights work and were inspired, in their subsequent queer activism, by their experiences within human rights groups. Delgado, for example, left Chile as a political refugee and went to Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1986. There, he worked on topics of political prisoners, the disappeared, and human rights.⁵⁹ Delgado's political work was significant to his queer organizing later, as he recalls that he became familiar with both "political refugees and homosexuals" in Argentina. The comparability between the two trajectories prepared the ground for borrowing strategies, goals, and frameworks. Delgado, like many other politically active queer people, were situated in the intersection of the human rights and queer liberation movements but frustrated at the refusal of

⁵⁸ *Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos*, "Expediente de Pedro Raúl Marín Hernández," May 13, 1987, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*, caja 84.

⁵⁹ Delgado, "Audiovisual," CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

the former to open its doors to the later. Indeed, it was during his exile that Delgado “had the idea of organizing or joining a group of homosexuals,” leading to him founding Movilh later.⁶⁰

In the context of the 1980s’ resumed social movement against the dictatorship, the human rights organizations’ inability to expand on the framework of human rights to include queer people suffering from violence, job insecurity, and the deprivation of free speech and assembly proves that the framework had to be expanded.

Rupture within Feminist Circles

Although feminists were perhaps the most receptive of queer people among all anti-dictatorial political channels during the 1970s and 1980s, Ayuquelén’s rupture with the feminists at La Casa Morada, a center that provided space to feminist groups to meet and operate, was evidence of the movement’s limitations.

Ayuquelén, founded in 1984, contributed invaluable work for the growth of the feminist movement in the 1980s. Two events inspired the founding of Ayuquelén: Mónica Briones, a lesbian friend of the founders, was punched to death by a man calling her “*maricon* (dyke);” and Cecilia Riquelme attended the lesbian workshop in the Second Latin America and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro in 1983.⁶¹ In Inostroza’s memory, however, they were doing workshops and receiving letters from lesbian women all over Chile before Briones’ murder.⁶² Since the beginning of the group, it has characterized itself as a feminist, anti-dictatorial, and leftist organization of lesbians. In a 1997 internal document titled “History and Description of the Ayuquelén Lesbian Feminist Collective,” the group declares that its original goal was to “denounce the abuses committed between lesbian women in the time of the dictatorship.” The

⁶⁰ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 22.

⁶¹ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4. Eliana Lago, *Calles Caminadas: Anverso y Reverso* (Santiago: Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos. Centro de Investigación Diego Barros, 2014), <https://www.bibliotecanacional.gob.cl/sites/www.bibliotecanacional.gob.cl/files/2022-07/calles%20caminadas.pdf>, 231.

⁶² Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

commitment to feminism and political activism was unwavering, and Ayuquelén felt itself to be a crucial part of the feminist opposition to the dictatorship, participating since 1985 “in almost every event that the women's movement called for.”⁶³ Inostroza recalls that they were working “strongly with women in the network, [such as] MEMS, CEDEM, and ISIS,” all of which were feminist pro-democracy groups in the 1980s.⁶⁴

However, the feminist and lesbian movements did not have an easy relationship. Ayuquelén began meeting in La Casa de la Mujer La Morada, a feminist institution founded in 1983, to attract more members in 1987. Riquelme recalls that “even though in La Morada, they had the [*puerta abierta* (open door)] policy of letting any group of women who solicited meet at their place, we were the ‘special ones.’ For them, it was delicate to work with lesbians.”⁶⁵ In 1987, a journalist from APSI published an article of Ayuquelén in which the organization stated their political and feminist manifesto, with a clear pro-democracy, lesbian, and feminist position. Inostroza had thought that nothing would go wrong, since La Morada had many lesbian members as well, and the feminist organizations in Chile were funded by European women, many of them lesbians. But the institution was unwilling to have its name, La Morada, come out in the article about lesbians for fear of putting their “institutionalism at risk.”⁶⁶ La Morada, like other feminist groups, were afraid of the social perception of them all as lesbians. They sent a letter stating that Ayuquelén’s opinions were their own and not that of the institution, and the interview was “superficial and vulgar.”⁶⁷ Ayuquelén and La Morada’s estrangement caused Ayuquelén to reconsider its position within the feminist movement and how it could contribute without compromising its queer identities. Ayuquelén’s rupture with the heterosexual feminists did not

⁶³ Lago, *Calles Caminadas*, 233.

⁶⁴ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

⁶⁵ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 25.

⁶⁶ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

⁶⁷ Lago, *Calles Caminadas*, 233.

stop there. Inostroza recounts that the Women for Democracy (Mujeres por la democracia) circulated a letter against the dictatorship among the feminists, asking for signatures. Ayuquelén wished to sign on as Colectivo lésbico feminista Ayuquelén (Ayuquelén Lesbian Feminist Collective), but the women asked them to write down only “Ayuquelén.”⁶⁸ “Be generous,” the feminists said, “Now is not the time. They would say all [our] women are lesbians. We would lose the support of the Christian Democrat women.”⁶⁹ Finally, Inostroza’s gender and sex education program for seventh to ninth grade students that was approved by the Instituto de la Mujer was paused after they were thrown out of the institution.

In the book *A New Feminist Silence?*, the authors interview an unnamed lesbian woman who complains that the feminist movement’s relationship with lesbians was often “more bad than good,” and that they did not know “anything about sexuality, of lesbians, of homosexuality, nothing.” Another interviewee states that the feminists had “a huge fear of being seduced by the lesbians, to face their own fears.”⁷⁰ Looking generally at the panorama of feminists’ archives in the 1980s, from those mobilized solely for the political opposition to the dictatorship to socialist feminists in exile, rarely did any engage with the lesbian issue or the queer people at large.⁷¹ The incidents revealed heterosexual feminists’ unwillingness to embrace queerness, despite lesbianism’s central role in the feminist movement. The rupture with the feminists demonstrated that despite Ayuquelén’s critical anti-dictatorship work and the ties they built with other feminist movements, open demonstrations of queer identities caused the cis-heterosexual political

⁶⁸ Marcela Ríos Tobar, Lorena Godoy Catalán, and Elizabeth Guerrero Caviedes, *¿Un nuevo silencio feminista? La transformación de un movimiento social en el Chile posdictadura* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2003), <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/archivos2/pdfs/MC0067525.pdf>. 75.

⁶⁹ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

⁷⁰ Ríos Tobar, Godoy Catalán, and Guerrero Caviedes, *¿Un nuevo silencio feminista?*, 74.

⁷¹ See, for example, Fondos Matus Verónica, Rosenfeld Lotty, Scantlebury Elizalde Marcia, Guerra Berta, and Teresa Valdés. They opposed the dictatorship from a variety of positions but none discussed lesbianism or queerness in depth, available at the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos.

activists to isolate the lesbians. Cooperation on political and social campaigns do not mean reciprocal support for the queer movement.

Chapter 2: Why Must the Queer Movement Be Political?

In the last chapter, I explained how queer activists derived their political opposition to the dictatorship and their organizing skills from the religious, leftist, human rights, and feminist anti-dictatorship movements that rejected the queer contributors. These are the political strategies, skills, and experiences of the queer activists that charted the path toward a unique queer political movement. I return to the question laid out in the beginning of the first chapter that asks why queer people, who had always hid their intimate relationships in nocturnal bars, theaters, and private homes, chose to come out at the end of 1980s and early 1990s, encapsulated in the 1992 Rettig march, with a focus on the queer communities. I will attempt to answer two questions: How did the queer community consolidate? And how did the queer identity become political? I argue that the social stigma of the HIV/AIDS carriers and the care work and mobilization to combat the AIDS epidemic consolidated Chilean queer community and gave it the political character. Although AIDS impacted more than the queer population in Chile, the society associated it exclusively with homosexuality, prompting homophobic attacks on bodies, jobs, and property. Because AIDS made a prominent mark on the face and the body, the HIV-positive patients, most often homosexual men, saw their lives suddenly upended by labor, economic, and social challenges that they increasingly thought could be resolved only through political organization. At the same time, the most-impacted gay men (rather than other queer people) led the political organization of the queer community to combat governmental neglect and the fearful apathy of the society, giving a specific, masculine-presenting face for queer political action geared toward their needs and worldviews.

Deaths and Stigmatization

The AIDS epidemic in Chile caused untold suffering and deaths in the queer population, especially for homosexual men and *travestis*. In 1984, the first official case of AIDS was diagnosed in a 38 year-old professor by the name Edmundo at the Clinic Hospital of the Catholic University in Santiago. By the end of 1989, Pinochet's Ministry of Health documented a mere 149 cases and 60 deaths. Linda Aiken et al. note that the cumulative cases in 1994 numbered 1016, with an additional 1627 seropositive cases of HIV.⁷² The real death and infection toll, however, was much larger, given the lack of testing, stigma that caused people to avoid treatment, and hospitals turning people away. Óscar Contardo argues that the first case should have arrived in Chile in the early 1980s, because Edmundo contracted HIV domestically. In addition, the undiagnosed husband of the first woman to die from AIDS exhibited similar symptoms and died before Edmundo's passing, suggesting that many others should have already contracted and died from AIDS before Edmundo.⁷³

Although there does not exist an accurate assessment of the people who died of AIDS and its complications, oral sources and literature provide the scene of devastation and loss. In the famous queer performer and writer Pedro Lemebel's urban chronicle *Loco Afán: Crónica del Sidario* (*Crazy Desire: Chronicle of AIDS Ward*), he describes in the first chapter a *travesti* party on the eve of 1973. Of the dozen of *travestis* photographed, many of them sex workers, most did not survive the AIDS epidemic. La Pilola Alessandri, the host and from an upper class family, contracted AIDS in New York as she was traveling, and died "so tight, so puckered, so stylish and beautiful in the aristocratic economy of his petty death."⁷⁴ La Palma could not stand the dictatorship's raids and fled to Brazil, another hot spot of AIDS at the time, and died back in

⁷² Linda H. Aiken, Harriet L. Smith, and Elaine T. Lake, "Using Existing Health Care Systems to Respond to the AIDS Epidemic: Research and Recommendations for Chile," *International Journal of Health Services* 27, no. 1 (1997): 177-99, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9031019/>.

⁷³ Contardo, *Raro*, 231.

⁷⁴ Pedro Lemebel, *Loco afán: crónicas de sidario* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 1996), 16.

Chile after many sexual encounters. La Chumilou forewent protection as a sex worker with an American client, eager for money to pay for her mother's dental surgery, and died on the day the dictatorship came to an end. Her coffin and the *locas* that followed it toward her resting place crossed through cheering crowds like her "final salute to democracy."⁷⁵ The photo stays as the last fading reminder of the active *travesti* circles destroyed by the AIDS epidemic. In another interview in 2005, Felipe Paredes, an HIV carrier who since 1989 had been living in a shelter in Ñuñoa said that of the "much more" than 20 people he had seen in the shelter, only one other besides him were alive.⁷⁶ The deaths were so fearsome, many queer people considered a positive test the automatic death sentence, foregoing treatments altogether. The most salient memory of the mid-1980s to the 1990s was the death and destruction of queer people, the social circles they formed, and the spirits they built up over the past years.

The rapid spread of AIDS, its initial undetectability (the test of Elisa was put into use in Chile in 1987, and even then many could not or did not want to obtain it), and the fear of death and destruction caused the disappearance of the clients who frequented bars, brothers, and *travesti* discos that served as the 1980s' queer meeting spaces propelled by the neoliberal reforms.⁷⁷ Performers also died. A *travesti* performer Sheila Fox at the bar Quasar, an 1980s' gay bar, was the first in her workplace to become sick and die, the transformist host of the bar Mauricio Centeno remembers. While Fox was interned at Lucio Córdova Hospital, many did not receive any treatment. The death of the clients and the performers, both marginalized people, disappeared without any official or social recognition, even in numbers. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health prohibited the operation of brothels and requires that educational programs warn about the 'social pathologies' of sexuality that included homosexuality, prostitution, rape,

⁷⁵ Lemebel, *Loco afán*, 21.

⁷⁶ Contardo, *Raro*, 242.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 228.

statutory rape, and incest.”⁷⁸ The combined effect of official prohibition and the deaths shut down many spaces for queer meetings. As a result, the locations and social relations that queer people used to express their identity became inaccessible to them, breaking the precarious balance they maintained between their cisheteronormative day job and their queer nightlife. The loss of life, relationships, and spaces destroyed the queer networks at the time and left the space open (as well as the dire necessity) for the formation and consolidation of a new queer community.

The visible marks of AIDS further forced queer people out of closet to intense social stigma, the experience of which imbued future queer organizing with a political outlook. The visible marks of HIV/AIDS—weight loss, sunken eyes, mouth ulcers, and Kaposi sarcoma, which previously only appeared in famine and war victims—forced many queer people out of the closet. Conceivably, the poor and the feminine-presenting *travestis* working in stigmatized trades (sex work, for example) faced poverty, violence, and the apathy of the media and the government. The epidemic also outed those who worked middle-class professional jobs, lived in heterosexual families, and adhered to the rules of respectability. The doctor Guillermo Acuña, the head of the hospital floor on which Edmundo was interned, commented that Edmundo was “not feminine [and] completely normal.”⁷⁹ The doctor’s surprise demonstrates that the stereotype of gayness, the feminized *travesti* figure, did not match the people who sought treatment for AIDS. This means that the middle-class, masculine (and therefore less visible) gay professionals could not stay sheltered by their class and social capital. They lost income, were isolated from the social circles they used to enjoy, and their families rejected them after finding out they were homosexual. Edmundo’s father, while picking up his body from the hospital, said that to learn of

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 233.

his son's sexuality was more painful than to learn of his death.⁸⁰ The AIDS epidemic, therefore, became a common ground on which the queer community could form, despite differences in class and expression.

In the mid- to late 1980s, homosexuality became synonymous with AIDS and thus disease, death, filth, sexual promiscuity, and social irresponsibility. For example, *La Tercera*, a weekend newspaper that circulated in Santiago and Valparaíso, reported Edmundo's death saying "The Gay Cancer Patient Has Died."⁸¹ AIDS, of course, impacted more than the queer population, but in news reporting and in government announcements, it was synonymous with homosexuality, which was in turn branded as a sick and contagious epidemic. *La Cuarta* daily news reported the fifth patient to die from AIDS with the title: "He was a good little man: the transfusion of blood infected him."⁸² The fact that AIDS patients who were not homosexuals had to be highlighted indicates that the society was ingrained with the understanding that homosexuality automatically led to AIDS. In addition, it attempted to distinguish between the "good" and thus innocent victims whose reputation has to be protected and the "bad" and deserving homosexuals. In this way, homosexuality was stigmatized and pathologized. While most of the fire was aimed at gay men and *travestis* who were presumed to be promiscuous and diseased, sexually active bisexual and heterosexual men (and women) also came under scrutiny because they could potentially bring the virus to their more faithful and thus "innocent" partners.

The government and leading medical experts attempted to calm down the public hysteria about the fatal disease, using categories of "high risk" and "low risk" populations, the former being homosexuals, non-monogamous people, sex workers, and bisexual men who would contract the disease and pass it onto their women partners. Contardo argues that the division

⁸⁰ Ibid., 234.

⁸¹ Donoso and Robles, *Sida en Chile*, 9.

⁸² Contardo, *Raro*, 12.

justifies the marginalization of already marginalized populations and implies that the rest, well-behaved population would have nothing to worry about. Indeed, such categories became more moralized, taking on religious tones. “AIDS: The Angel of Death” was journalist Enrique Lafourcade’s column title published in *El Mercurio* in 1985. He considers the children and women innocent, stating that “You know, if you are normal, don’t get AIDS until the plague becomes normalized.”⁸³ Even in the democratic government, such association of homosexuality with AIDS, the categorization of the guilty homosexual and the innocent monogamous heterosexual families, and the stigmatization of the former persisted. In 1990, Dr. Jorge Jiménez de la Jara, Minister of Health in Patricio Aylwin’s government, stated in *El Mercurio* that AIDS would not “reach the monogamous population but will remain in high-risk groups.”⁸⁴

Discrimination came in the form of job insecurity, property damage, inadequate healthcare, and social and familial rejection, problems that provided an entryway into expanding the human rights framework and politicization. Adequate healthcare was the hardest to obtain. In September of 1984, Pinochet issued Decree N° 294, which added AIDS to the list of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).⁸⁵ Title N° II of Decree 362 requires that all the documents related to STDs’ reports and investigation should be placed under the judicial authorities. Article N° 22 of Title IV, regarding sexual education, demands that educational programs teach the “social pathology of sexuality: homosexuality, prostitution, rape, statutory rape, and incest.”⁸⁶ Finally, Articles 10 and 25 allow Health officials to call the police for backup in the case that they wish to test someone for AIDS and the person refuses. These laws, together, militarized the government’s response to AIDS by subjecting its response to the judicial and police forces.

⁸³ Contardo, *Raro*, 235-6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸⁵ Donoso and Robles, *Sida en Chile*, 13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Furthermore, it stigmatized homosexuality as a social and sexual pathology, reinforcing its automatic connection to AIDS and other STDs. The police enforced forceful and obligatory exams of sex workers, many of them *travestis*, often accompanied by violence and rape.

Obviously, the violent and criminalizing tactics did not effectively counteract the spread of the epidemic. Hospitals were underprepared in terms of knowledge, willingness, procedures, and resources for the patients but overly fearful and prejudiced. Despite knowing that HIV was transmitted through blood, the hospitals frequently took extreme measures to isolate the patients and replace the medical equipment. Some doctors took their team out of the floor Edmundo was interned in. In the Clinic Hospital of the University of Chile where doctor Cecilia Sepúlveda worked, she remembers they had protocols to burn every equipment used by HIV patients and sanitize even the telephone if they were on call with their friends and families. The hospital prepared separate rooms, special clothes, and left their food trays at the patients' door to minimize contact. Similarly, many doctors and nurses refused to attend to HIV patients. Doctor Guillermo Acuña remembers that a patient in Concepción in 1984 was isolated, could not receive visits, and the personnel used masks when they came into contact with him. Such isolating tactics not only made the patients' last days miserable and frightful, thus decreasing people's willingness to seek treatment, they also increased the cost of the hospitals and furthered the fear of the medical professionals. The refusal to medically attend to patients was fatal. Paz Valenzuela, a woman who cared for her sick gay friend in 1986, berates the House of Christ nurses in an interview with Contardo for refusing to come and inject medicine for her friend.⁸⁷ Even in the cases where hospitals did not refuse treatment, there was initially little they could do other than to send the patients home, since AZT was not used until 1987, and even then the slow approval process and the lack of free treatments made them unavailable to most people.

⁸⁷ Contardo, *Raro*, 235.

In democracy, similar attitudes toward homosexuality stalled the progress of effective prevention. The government's sponsoring of a society-wide campaign to use condoms caused controversy among the more conservative sectors and officials. De la Jara, for example, was a firm opponent, opting to "target policies to risk groups through focused, discreet but efficient means. Homosexuals and prostitutes are not hooked through television."⁸⁸ Inadequate healthcare and the stigmatization of homosexuality among health professionals, the government, and the society was the first life-costing obstacle to many queer people with AIDS. The Catholic Church, which both urged the humanitarian provision of shelter and care for the seropositive and denigrated homosexuality and sexual liberation as a perversion, was firmly opposed to the campaign. Their human rights record during the dictatorship again afforded them the political and social power to delay the campaign's implementation. Monsignor Carlos Oviedo, the archbishop of Santiago, referred to the appearance of two homosexual men on TV as "inciting 'sexual licentiousness.'"⁸⁹ Even during Pinochet's dictatorship in 1984, the priest Raúl Hasbún had declared that "every victim of AIDS through [sexual] means has had sexual relations with 40 different partners in the last 12 months...Homosexuality objectively is a disorder of human sexuality."⁹⁰ As noted in the first chapter, many queer people grew up in religious families and were affiliated with the Church spiritually. The Church's promotion of guilt further reinforced the moral and medical categories of "deserved" and "high risk," adding guilt and condemnation into the range of feelings that deterred the seropositive from seeking treatment and help. For the Chilean society, the Catholic Church's propaganda added the sense of apocalypse to the epidemic, increasing fear and hysteria against the HIV positive. The Catholic Church's efforts

⁸⁸ Ibid., 239.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 243.

⁹⁰ Donoso and Robles, *Sida en Chile*, 31.

caused TV channels like Canal 13 and Megavisión to refuse airing content about using condoms to prevent HIV.

In addition to medical access, discrimination in judicial and social aspects were prevalent. In 1987, the gendarmerie of Santiago announced that they planned to move all the homosexual defendants in Santiago to a jail in Putaendo, because one inmate tested positive for the virus. The population of Putaendo protested against the decision, fearing an outbreak of AIDS in their location. One protester was reported saying all the gays should be isolated so they would not continue to spread the horrifying sickness.⁹¹ The societal fear of AIDS was violent. The neighbors of the patient at Concepción burned down his house once he was interned in the hospital, and job loss was frequent.

Community Organizing

Gay men, previously closeted, now led the movement to consolidate the queer community. Although they were eager to connect with other queer people and non-queer sympathizers, who were less impacted, the queer political movement in its embryonic stage was already significantly influenced by their needs and experiences.

In response to the apparent government neglect and societal hostility, gay activists began to think of communitarian responses. Discussions behind closed doors led to the foundation of the Corporación Chilena de Prevención del SIDA in 1987, which aimed to educate queer people, especially gay men, on prevention and facts about AIDS. The Corporación's model of informal cooperation with the Ministry of Health and its broad reach set a de-politicized framework that allowed for its survival, the social construction of the queer/sympathizer community, and the dissatisfaction of the political queer activists. Ana María San Martín, later the director of the HIV/AIDS program at the Ministry of Health (MINSAL) during Piñera's presidency, was

⁹¹ Contardo, *Raro*, 237.

working on a thesis about STDs when the MINSAL asked her to lead a program on HIV/AIDS. Activists such as Tim Frasca, Jorge Pavetti, Gustavo Hermosilla, and Jorge Guzmán had long been discussing the possibility of an educational program aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention, and they eagerly responded to her call. The Corporación never received any funding from the government, even after the democratic government legalized it in 1991. Frasca complains that in 1991, the one million dollars Dutch organizations donated to the Chile was divided up by the MINSAL-owned Comisión Nacional del SIDA de Chile (CONASIDA), Asociación Chilena de Prevención del SIDA (FRENASIDA, an organization of youths for AIDS prevention in the streets), and APROFA (a human rights organization focused on sexual and reproductive rights). “For the gays, who took up 98% of the cases of AIDS in Chile, nothing,” Frasca remembers bitterly.⁹² However informal and precarious the relationship with Pinochet’s government was, it was the first time the government did social programs for queer people. San Martín had to inform the police of their location and their apolitical purpose of education because of the large number of participants in meetings to ensure that they would not be harassed.⁹³ The apolitical model allowed the group to survive, despite the lack of funding and other support causing its closing, relocation, and directorial changes in 1988. But the group persevered and continued education, sending out leaflets in discos, setting up hotlines for concerned queer people, and hosting meetings and workshops to teach AIDS prevention. The model of apolitical education, social work, and AIDS prevention would be replicated in the 1990s by CONASIDA, FRENASIDA, APROFA, and the like, when the democratic government and the international NGOs’ funding permitted more social organizations to appear. These meetings, workshops, and outreach efforts rebuilt the informal queer networks that were destroyed by the sense of doom

⁹² Donoso and Robles, *Sida en Chile*, 69.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

and fear AIDS created. Aside from bars and discos, a semi-official and more secure space for meeting and knowing each other was available to queer people. The queer community began to be constituted in the context of AIDS as a gay activist group that brought information and above all else, the hope that the disease could be overcome.

The model, which used a combination of factual information and personal experience to dispel fear of AIDS and consequently of homosexuality, reached sympathizers. Fundación EPES was an organization that worked on gender violence and sexual and reproductive education for women living in shantytowns (*pobladoras*). They hoped to add information about AIDS prevention into their materials and found the Corporación's leaflets invaluable. After attending one of the Corporación's presentations, the health monitors of EPES embraced in tears the speaker Sigifredo Barra, a seropositive gay activist who talked about the humiliation he faced as a gay man during his hospitalization. "I never knew anything about the gay men, only jokes about them," the EPES women remembered, "Now I see up close that their situation is similar to ours [as *pobladoras*]." ⁹⁴ Indeed, story-telling and useful materials reached across the societal fear about homosexuality and built alliances between queer and women groups, which gave the later queer political organizations a broad support base. The alliance was replicated and enlarged when around 24 human rights, religious, women's, queer, sex workers', HIV/AIDS, health workers', and women squatters' organizations formed the Red de Acción Comunitaria en VIH/SIDA in 1991. The organizations initiated massive actions commemorating the International Day of AIDS and held workshops for its members on necessary information and precautions, further breaking down social barriers to queer recognition. EPES, for example, developed the thesis around violence against poor women and increasing risk of AIDS,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 56.

formulating a socioeconomic understanding of AIDS that is no longer based on legal, moral, or religious judgement of “deserved” promiscuous gays versus “innocent” women and children.

The wide net of support also managed to influence reforms on AIDS laws and placed informal and formal demands on government action. The Red began to approach congressional members such as Laura Rodríguez and Fanny Pollarolo and lawyer Hugo Ocampo to discuss an AIDS Law (Ley de SIDA) in 1991 and 1992. Although the law would not be promulgated until the early 2000s, the organizations showed informal interests in converting the politicization of AIDS into concrete political action in the early 1990s, around the same time MOVILH took its historical move toward politicizing queerness.

The queer and sympathizer connections also grew out of care work and friendships in the time of AIDS. Paz Valenzuela and her husband, for example, cared for her gay friend until he died. Viola Acuña, another woman who remembered that she lost more than ten of her gay friends, learned to care for the sick in the 1980s.⁹⁵ There were doctors and nurses who took on personal initiatives to care for the sick, such as doctor Marta Velasco who helped Valenzuela care for her friend without charge.⁹⁶ Priests heeded the call of the Church to shelter seropositive people who were homeless because they were kicked out by their families or lost their jobs. Father Baldo Santi created a shelter in Vergara, Santiago in the late 1980s. The neighbors called it “the House of AIDS” and insulted and pushed him. Someone even threw a molotov bomb at it from their car in 1990. He created another shelter in Ñuñoa in 1989, permanently covered in insulting graffiti the neighbors painted, where people who lived in the “most complete marginalization” stayed.⁹⁷ José Claro smuggled treatment not yet approved by the Chilean government or sold at unaffordable prices from the U.S. to Chile and either freely gave them

⁹⁵ Contardo, *Raro*, 30.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

away or sold it at cost.⁹⁸ Medical institutions including Fundación Arriarán and CAPVIH began to attend to seropositive patients. These efforts, though not as sustained or well-publicized as the Corporación's, also forged the queer-sympathizer community.

However, the connection between AIDS organizing and queer political organizing was not straightforward. MOVILH was founded after its members, all members of the Corporación, were kicked out. In 1990, the founders of MOVILH, such as Rolando Jiménez, Marco Ruiz Delgado, and Juan Pablo Sutherland, had been studying laws that were used against queer people they hoped to defeat. Their political activities caused alarm within the Corporación, whose leaders told them to leave and forbade them from using the space to meet. It was clear that the apolitical model of informal cooperation with the MINSAL, community outreach, and education was no longer capable of satisfying the queer political movement. AIDS' many social barriers, from employment and healthcare to property damage and violence could not be solved simply with using condoms and practicing safe and consensual sex. These challenges must be addressed politically, especially when the country was entering a time of political reckoning with past violence and political opening as a democracy. Furthermore, AIDS politicized the body, as it placed the body and its intimate relations under scrutiny by militarized police and health officials. The Corporación's model could not contain the increasingly politicized queer identity, body, and networks. Nevertheless, MOVILH would benefit from the queer community brought together by the shared trauma of AIDS, the predominantly gay men activist networks created to combat it, and the increasing social support the Corporación and AIDS activists generated.

Queer Identity and Politicization

These memories and experiences of medical, judicial, labor, and societal discrimination led to the foregrounding of queer human rights and political activism as essential parts of the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 246.

queer identity in the late 1980s to the early 1990s. The economic and social discrimination of the HIV/AIDS carriers and their association with homosexuality prompted the expansion and politicization of queerness from an intimate, private relation to an identity with many forms of discrimination to fight against. The lack of healthcare fed into the rallying cry of “the right to life.” Gonzalo Taborga Molina’s declaration positioned AIDS as a human rights issue, and despite the lack of subsequent actions and mention of homosexuality, it served as an important step into the expansion of the human rights framework and the politicization of “personal” issues. He cites the World Health Organizations’ resolution that urges the states to protect “the human rights and the dignity of the carriers of the virus and those with AIDS...and avoid discrimination and stigmatization in the provision of services, employment, and travels.”⁹⁹ In the document, Molina proposes that the challenge of AIDS requires the “creation of the political will by the joint society, in all its levels and conditions...[to] organize ourselves, learn to fight, prevent this illness, and carry out the duty toward the society we have as persons and responsible citizens.” The document provided an insightful look into one of the earliest expansions of human rights from political dissidence to the care and de-stigmatization of a sexually transmitted disease. Human rights, in this case, became the bridge between the personal and the political. Furthermore, the rights generated around AIDS included a broad set of civil rights against different treatment by both public and private institutions. MOVILH’s campaign in the 1990s would call for similar anti-discrimination guarantees in employment and services for queer people. Indeed, the expansion of the human rights framework to HIV/AIDS carriers not only aided the politicization of the epidemic but also charted the path for the queer movement to embrace and expand the framework.

⁹⁹ Taborga, “Documento ‘Sida y Derechos Humanos’,” caja 267.

Queer identity, most famously MOVILH's masculine, legalist image, consolidated during the AIDS epidemic partly because AIDS was exclusively associated with homosexuality and because gay men led the movement. Previous queer groups had not been so predominantly masculine nor professional. One of the participants of the 1973 travesti march, discussed in the Introduction, remembers that three groups of *travestis* met in Santiago regularly. The most "regal" and high class were in Huérfanos, the middle class in Alameda, and the poorest group in which she belonged met at Plaza de Armas.¹⁰⁰ The later group was the ones who attended the march. Integración was dominated by gay men who were exclusively middle-class religious professionals. Only later did the group become "less bourgeois," but during the 1984 economic crisis, the group proved ill-prepared for the amount of participants who were looking for jobs and mutual aid, leading to the disbanding of the group.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, gay groups in the late 1980s were seldomly in regular contact with lesbian groups (granted, only Ayuquelén was operational), nor were they concerned with feminist questions and the framework Ayuquelén was operating under. These examples demonstrate how diverse and disjoint the queer community and expressions were before it was consolidated into the post-dictatorship political community. The AIDS epidemic and the society's intense stigmatization of homosexuality brought a temporary connection between classes and expressions that fostered the queer political movement. Gay men began to organize and reach out to other queer groups and sympathizers, giving the movement its masculine and professional face. Although MOVILH's speakers would consciously say "gays and lesbians" in interviews regarding their mission and vision, they did not have any lesbian members at its founding.¹⁰² *Travestis*, equally devastated by the AIDS epidemic but were left out

¹⁰⁰ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 14-5.

¹⁰¹ Contardo, *Raro*, 211.

¹⁰² Víctor Hugo Robles and Soledad Suit, *Triángulo Abierto: la voz de la diversidad en AM*, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.archivonacional.gob.cl/archivos-mujeres-y-generos/galerias/triangulo-abierto-la-voz-de-la-diversidad-en-am>.

of the Corporación's discourse because of their visible queerness, would challenge the new blueprint (in the next chapter).

Queer activists, after setbacks in political fields in the heterosexual world, began queer political organizing in AIDS groups. Marco Ruiz Delgado, for example, met with other queer people in AIDS prevention groups, such as Jorge Guzmán who brought him into their groups and shared the desire for queer organizing with him. Delgado returned from exile in Argentina and joined Guzmán's group, the Corporación, in Santiago.¹⁰³ It was in the Corporación where he met the future founders of MOVILH who were willing to do queer political organizing. AIDS offered a rich field where queer people organized under the dictatorship on issues initially not deemed political but later became potent forces in the political and human rights discourse. Queer communities in the early 1980s began to revolve around bars, discotheques, and private houses that the dictatorship permitted in the vein of neoliberalization. In the late 1980s, however, organized meeting groups shared information and gradually changed behaviors in intimacy. Indeed, community and organizing became central themes toward the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, and queer political activities developed out of the communitarian networks of AIDS treatment and prevention.

AIDS placed the queer bodies under scrutiny and control, stigmatized bodies that were subjected to systematic violence and social rejection. Initially combating the disease from a medical perspective, queer activists gradually moved toward the social and political aspects, linking the personal (intimacy, love, and sex) to the political and the social through human rights and broad social support, which would manifest in the queer political movement in the early 1990s.

¹⁰³ Interview with Marco Ruiz Delgado, "Audiovisual," CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

Chapter 3: The Queer Political Movement

In the first chapter, I argued that Chilean queer people were active anti-dictatorship activists within the Church, the socialist and communist parties, the human rights organizations, and the feminist movement, from where they gained political consciousness, organizational skills, and justified their entitlement to the coming democracy. The organizations' shunning of queer equality forced queer activists to find other spaces to realize their political actions. In the second chapter, I argued that the queer identity was constituted politically during the social stigmatization of AIDS, and the queer community was organized to fight the epidemic and gain social, economic, and political access for the seropositive. In this chapter, I contend that the queer political movement encapsulated by MOVILH in the early 1990s, after experimenting with religious and cultural interventions, found expanding the already politically-influential human rights framework to include queer rights the most effective method of inserting themselves into politics. In this process, MOVILH first elaborated a set of identity-based rights, linking socially constructed identities to civil rights. Then, they embodied the cultural front of the democratic opening and redefined, therefore, contemporary understanding of democracy as inclusive of (open to) diverse identities. Finally, as an organization, MOVILH embraced the NGO mode of operation, installing themselves as the unofficial (and unelected) representatives of the queer community.

Ayuquelén

The first recorded organization to politicize queerness after the ephemeral *travesti* march of 1973 was Ayuquelén, an aforementioned lesbian feminist group that began in the mid-1980s. Ayuquelén directly associated lesbianism with political power but had little means of realizing political participation during the dictatorship. In APSI's interview with the group, which was the

first time the group came out publicly, Liliana Inostroza (Elena in the article) affirmed their political character:

Lesbianism is a political issue. Society has always said that the private is not political, in the sense that whatever happens in the quotidian life, in the sphere of women, does not involve social change. We, as lesbians who take on the option of a distinct life, make a political change to the extent that we socialize our option. If I am a lesbian and I question the issue of roles and sex in the society, of how the society is structured, this is a political position.¹⁰⁴

The statement indicates that the group was seeing their lesbian identity and the reflection on social and political structures based on their identity as a political act. Their identity and experiences are used to question the limitations placed on lesbian bodies by the dominant family structures, institutions, and political powers. From this angle, lesbianism could make a significant intervention in the mainstream political and social operations. Furthermore, the contemplation of the wholesale system of society and politics as lesbians, whose love and sex were thought of as private life choices, helps break lesbianism out of its confinement to the politically powerless and invisible private life and connects it to political changes. Castro claims that the group demonstrated the “political importance in a heteronormative society.”¹⁰⁵ From a theoretical perspective, Ayuquelén began the politicization of queerness by pointing to how it can revolutionize what was discussed and how in the public sphere. Naturally, the lesbians took a stance against the dictatorship. Inostroza remembers that despite the hunger and poverty she and her partner endured, they refused to take on state jobs.¹⁰⁶ However, the dictatorship’s censorship

¹⁰⁴ Colectivo Ayuquelén, “Somos lesbianas por opción,” *APSI*, no. 206 (June 22–28, 1987): 29–32, interview by Milena Vodanović, *Memoria Chilena*, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-551177.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Lago, *Calles Caminadas*, 233.

¹⁰⁶ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

and the rupture with the feminist movement meant they did not have opportunities to materialize their politicization into actions to directly influence the state.

Ayuquelén's workshops and conferences focused on gendered violence, lesbian life, and feminism. These activities made critical interventions and tied together the lesbian community, but they did not aim to insert themselves into the new democracy. After democratization, Ayuquelén's members were not particularly keen on interventions into political proceedings on the national stage. Instead, most of their work lies in workshops, conferences, and mutual aid for lesbians. From the beginning of the group, Inostroza recalls that they began to receive letters from other lesbians.¹⁰⁷ Many were on the verge of suicide because of familial rejection, the threat of violence, and the lack of mental support. Susana Peña Castro, another founder of the group, states that although they did not want Ayuquelén to be a therapy provider, they always tried to find solutions for those in crisis.¹⁰⁸ Their workshops and mutual aid therefore focused on gendered violence and roles, lesbian sexuality, navigating family relations, and feminist critique. Ayuquelén also maintained active collaboration with feminist organizations. Their correspondence book in the early 1990s would show they were invited by the feminist magazine *Revista Mujeres en Acción* founded by ISIS Internacional, an Austrian human right group, and *Mujeres Jóvenes Feministas* to meetings and to submit articles throughout the nation and beyond.¹⁰⁹ Their activities and focus might lead to the belief that they do not have political actions, given they did not endorse or criticize candidates, support political parties, or make public announcements regarding policies. However, I argue that precisely because they believed the critique of society from the position of lesbianism is a political position, workshops and

¹⁰⁷ Inostroza, Interview, Caja 4.

¹⁰⁸ Lago, *Calles Caminadas*, 232.

¹⁰⁹ Carolina Peredo Couratier, "Libro de correspondencia," *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos*, September 17, 1992 – November 16, 1995, caja 1.

conferences focused on re-theorizing gender, sexuality, and social structures are congruent with their understanding of political actions. However, it is also evident that their political actions did not seek traditional democratic channels of participation, which made sense given their perception of the state as patriarchal and unwilling to address gendered violence and exploitation.

Ayuquelén, despite its later queer rights collaboration with MOVILH, could not gain a foothold in the mainstream political arena. One of the reasons, I argue, is that the group's tactics of workshops and mutual aid flew under the radar of the media, and thus they did not amount social capital to convert themselves into a politically attractive voting bloc. For another, the social and psychological pain of coming out of the closet was still too much. Natalia, one of the Ayuquelén members, was in the MOVILH march, where almost all members participated masked.¹¹⁰ But Ayuquelén did not participate as a group, nor did they publicize their actions. Natalia recognizes that because the cost of coming out for women was so high that many stayed quiet about their sexuality. Ayuquelén's members, to her, must come out onto the streets and face their fear.¹¹¹ This reflection demonstrates that democracy was not an automatic opening up process where the restoration of liberal democratic institutions naturally led to more freedom in sexuality and gender expressions. For attitudes toward queer people to change, much activism was still needed.

On top of that, to influence liberal democracy as a group, rather than as individual voters, through endorsement and dialogues with the politicians, Ayuquelén must convince politicians first that the lesbian community exists and exists as attractive voters. Second, Ayuquelén must become the recognized representative of this community for politicians to believe they could get

¹¹⁰ Robles and Suit, *Triángulo Abierto*, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

to lesbian voters through Ayuquelén. Finally, lesbian voters must see politicians respecting Ayuquelén, the representative, as a promise of respecting the lesbian community. This social leadership requires social capital both recognized within and outside of the lesbian community. But to “launch structural revolutions” from a feminist and lesbian perspective was to avoid such patriarchal attempts at monopolizing opinions and expressions.¹¹² Therefore, Ayuquelén’s activities remained within the circles of queer and feminist activists.

Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis

If Ayuquelén’s politicization of queerness was ultimately resolved in social and gendered intra-community initiatives, las Yeguas del Apocalipsis performed to the cis-heterosexual audience to disrupt normative political procedures. In 1987, Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas, both distinguished queer writers and poets on the left, formed Las Yeguas. Their political performances always combined queerness, feminine expressions, and naked bodies (acting on the term “loca,” or crazy woman) that sharply contrasted with the “good customs” and “respectable” presentations that dictated public events. In 1988, their performance in the Catholic University called attention to violence against homosexuality. Riding a horse naked in the University of Chile eroticizes and queers the image of the conquistador. In 1989, the duo’s performances called attention to the Tiananmen Square massacre. They also, dressed in pantyhose and heels, walked into the Cariola theater where the newly elected president Patricio Aylwin was meeting with prominent artists, and showed the slogan “homosexuals for change.” In the same year, the duo created a short film titled “Casa Particular” with *travesti* sex workers at Calle Camilo, in which they parodied the Biblical last dinner, toasting to the “final dinner of the dictatorship.” By inserting their bodies into the spotlight, Lemebel and Casas demonstrated that queerness was intimately connected to “mainstream” political issues and brought sexuality into

¹¹² Colectivo Ayuquelén, “Somos lesbianas por opción,” *APSI*, no. 206 (June 22–28, 1987): 29–32.

the focus. Their discussion of political issues through queer bodies, though not verbal, was very similar to Ayuquelén's method of using workshops and conferences to make a lesbian political point. The duo's performances made the political centers aware of queer political opinions and actions as well as queer political contributions.

The duo connected human rights to queerness, taking the first step in expanding the framework. In October 1989, the duo danced cueca over the map of Latin America at the Comisión Chilena de los Derechos Humanos in their "most political" act.¹¹³ Cueca is a Chilean national folk dance typically performed by a pair. During the dictatorship, cueca sola, where a (usually) woman dances alone, indicated the disappearance of her loved one and became a form of protest. By dancing over the map of Latin America littered with broken glasses of Coca-Cola bottles, the duo accused North American imperialism of supporting various dictatorships across the Southern Cone.¹¹⁴ The performance, importantly, crossed human rights with homosexuality, in possibly the first time in public. Lemebel says that, as their feet bled over the glasses, the performance connotes "blood, dance...the AIDS contagion, the disappeared, two men, and also the dubbing of two women on their own."¹¹⁵ The performance thus connects the death and disappearances of queer and seropositive people with the disappeared political dissidents. However, the duo did not intend to expand human rights to queer rights or discuss the violations of them by the dictatorship. Rather, Casas suggests that "human slaughter that our country was living through outweighed everything else. The homosexual came after. First it was the social commitment to those most defenseless and later the commitment to homosexuals."¹¹⁶ Therefore, the duo's intentions were not to connect the politically powerful and widely accepted language of

¹¹³ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 49.

¹¹⁴ Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, "La Conquista de América," performance at Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos, Santiago, Chile, October 12, 1989, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/1989-la-conquista-de-america/>.

¹¹⁵ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 49.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

human rights to queer struggles, despite their political intentions and the physical placement of their bodies on the issue of human rights. Human rights, in this performance, remained the rallying call behind the political dissidents.

Performances, provocative but ephemeral, did not facilitate prolonged dialogue or organize the queer community for repeated political actions. Indeed, as the human rights performance demonstrates, it was an ephemeral act that did not continue to elaborate on queer rights. Although Aylwin clapped for them for their Cariola performance, his daughter Mariana later berated the duo, fearing that the right would think that her father “supports the homosexuals.”¹¹⁷ They repeated the act one more time at the Santa Laura Stadium where the Communist Party was meeting. Casas recalls that “the entire stadium...yelled at us: ‘faggots!’” Evidently, provocative performances provoked the audience and were met with shock and hostility, but subsequently could not change the course of their actions. Lemebel and Casas’ artistic success and popularity in the 2000s suggests the eventual popular embrace of queerness and that the artistic world ultimately recognized the value of queer history and performances. However, in the democratic transition, politically powerful centers remained unreceptive of queer protests, and some forms of dialogue were needed and demands put forth, neither of which the performances could or intended to do. Furthermore, unlike Ayuquelén, the duo did not seek to organize the queer community or expand their group. The two remained the sole members of Las Yeguas until it disbanded in 1993. While their actions inspired many queer activists, such as Víctor Hugo Robles, they too could not nor intended to form a formidable voting bloc out of queer people to gain the social capital necessary for political parties to pay attention to queer issues. The hostility shown by the political parties from the left to the right indicates that intra-community workshops and cultural protests were not immediately effective. How to

¹¹⁷ Contardo, *Raro*, 229.

communicate with political powers when queer people never had the opportunity to do so, and how to socially characterize queerness, synonym of scandal and disgrace, in brighter and more appealing terms was a challenge that must be confronted.

Importantly, the three organizations in this chapter are not narrated to imply a procession from closed community work to increasingly public and longer-lasting queer organization. Las Yeguas consciously fashioned itself as a challenge to the legalist, masculine, and professional image of MOVILH (in the next section). Lemebel, in recounting the stories of *travestis* before and during the dictatorship, emphasizes that the *travestis* and their femininity were the first to challenge the cis-heterosexual political paradigm, and that path of provocative if not ephemeral direct action continues to exist in the new neoliberal age that imposes respectability politics and nominal inclusion. Although briefly in 1992, the two groups collaborated on human rights, creating the moment of the Chilean queer community's political insertion, the consensus soon broke down over questions of representability, representation, and the legalist, masculine presentation crowding out other forms of expression.

Las Yeguas' queer, political performances publicly connected queer bodies to ongoing political and historical debates and challenged social norms and the centers of power with their provocative actions. Unlike Ayuquelén, they made the cis-heterosexual world their audience. But in the same way Ayuquelén could not and did not intend to bring the lesbian community to influence policies or political discourse in democracy, neither could Las Yeguas change Alwyn or the Communist Party's agenda, even if they inserted themselves temporarily, figuratively and physically, onto the political stage. This is not a failure but a difference in ideology, strategy, and the mode of organizing. The duo did not fail to provide workshops for *travestis* like Ayuquelén did for the lesbians, because the aim of Las Yeguas was not to provide a closed-door space for

queer discussions but to provoke, subvert, and theorize about queer political subjectivities through bodily acts. Las Yeguas and Ayuquelén contributed to how queerness could be politicized and what actions could realize this conviction. Furthermore, by connecting human rights to queerness and building relations with prominent human rights groups, the duo explored, though not fully, the path for a more enduring and productive conversation with the dominant political actors.

MOVILH

The Movement for Homosexual Liberation (MOVILH), formed in 1991, expounded a political program of anti-discrimination and queer rights, expanding the human rights framework to include identity-based rights.

MOVILH viewed queer politicization as bringing queer issues into politics and thus desired political power and long-term dialogues with politicians. In 1991, Delgado recalls, when the founders of MOVILH were still members of the Corporación, he and the others went to a workshop where a lawyer talked about homosexuality and human rights. It was the first time he heard the connection of the two concepts, which piqued his interest. As the group of 12 became more invested in the politicization of queerness and its “connection to the rest of the society,” going beyond “food, intimacy, sex, and desire,” they were banned from the Corporación.¹¹⁸ After they finally found a place to meet again, they began to develop queer rights and expand on the human rights’ framework. However, their conceptualization of the politicization of queerness was much different from the framework Ayuquelén and Las Yeguas proposed. Delgado states that they understood the organization to be “making demands” (*reivindicativa*).¹¹⁹ While Las Yeguas made temporary interventions in political proceedings, MOVILH intended to make

¹¹⁸ Interview with Marco Ruiz Delgado, “Audiovisual,” CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

¹¹⁹ Robles and Suit, *Triángulo Abierto*, Archivo Nacional de Chile.

longer-lasting demands on the politicians. Instead of voicing opinions on political issues from a queer perspective, as Las Yeguas and Ayuquélén had done, MOVILH wanted to select queer issues and made them political. Specifically, on top of “reflections of the society and discrimination,” they wanted a “political way to fight against discrimination”¹²⁰ and to “take on the dignity of gays and lesbians in Chile.”¹²¹ That is to say, MOVILH leaders experienced the violence, harassment, police raids, job terminations, social stigma, and fear not as an unfortunate but inevitable part of being queer, or as something queer people deserved for being deviant. Rather, they saw them as discriminations that could be fought against in the same way violations of human and civil rights of the political dissidents were redressed in democracy. Queer suffering, therefore, could end through existing political means. Therefore, to take political power became paramount. MOVILH specified its desire to gain political power in the group’s manifesto. Its goals were “to organize the homosexual, educate and create consciousness about its reality, to create a political strategy to access the means of power, to bring about change.”¹²² Unlike Ayuquélén or Las Yeguas, the group aimed to take existing democratic political power, which suggests dialoguing with politicians, making endorsements and demanding promises of change, running for elections, forcing queer issues into candidates’ political agenda, and to have enough social capital to carry out their project. This goal meant converting MOVILH from an ambulatory group of a dozen gay men into an institution of legal research, support, and investigation that both politicians and queer people look to as experts on queer conditions and rights.

Queer rights that expanded on the human rights framework became an important tool for MOVILH’s rise in political importance. Following the workshop in 1991, the would-be founders

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 32.

of MOVILH, Ayuquélén, Las Yeguas, and other queer and AIDS organizations met in November 1991 in the First Chilean Homosexual Congress in the southern city of Coronel. At this meeting, among other things, queer activists identified “sexuality, economic inequality, the problem of power...and the legal discrimination, specifically the existence of Article 365 in the Penal Code” as the main obstacles of interest to them.¹²³ As we have noted, Ayuquélén and Las Yeguas did not continue to elaborate on or study queer human rights or civil rights and their coverage despite being in agreement with the concept. MOVILH, however, developed the idea in a more substantial manner. In 1992, MOVILH was officially founded with democratically elected leaders. It conducted a survey of 141 homosexual Chilean men in the capital, finding that most feel shame of their identity, fear job loss, and cannot imagine the possibility of expressing themselves in society.¹²⁴ They presented this finding at the Chilean Society of Sexology and Sexual Education, a scientific and academic institution founded originally in 1965 under a different name. This step marks a significant difference between MOVILH and the other aforementioned groups because MOVILH conducted studies of the situations of queer people and used them to provide quantifiable proof of discrimination. In this sense, MOVILH delineated a framework—queer equality understood as feeling, expressing themselves, and having the same social and economic accesses as heterosexual and cisgender people—which normalized in the first place queer rights as essential human rights. If queer people were not entitled to such equal rights to express themselves and have their jobs protected, why conduct a study framed in “discrimination”? Then, it shows that much is needed to promote equal rights, with quantifiable results adding credibility and elevating their studies into the realm of social science. Using their contacts among queer people and willingness to study what the academia had ignored, MOVILH

¹²³ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 34.

began to move toward what contemporary human rights NGOs in Europe and the U.S. had been doing—generating knowledge about their subjects and urging for activism to the larger society, in the same way Corporación was presenting its findings to forge broad social alliances. Rather than using bodily acts to intervene in political processes which solidified queerness as a subversion and rarity and distanced public opinion on the possibility of queer people participating in traditional democratic methods, MOVILH positioned queer people as victims who desire something common to everybody—equal rights. This positionality makes queerness less threatening to the cis-heterosexual people because the desire for equal rights reinforces, rather than challenges, as Las Yeguas did, the existing democracy, as democracy that defeated the rights-violating dictatorship was supposed to guarantee such rights.

MOVILH's queer rights expansion was supported further by its legal research. Juan Cabrera, a member of the organization and a law student, began researching the legal code that justified police raids and thus unfairly discriminated against queer people. Despite the frequency of police raids during the dictatorship and after, Article 365 that punished sodomy was not common knowledge.¹²⁵ Instead, most queer people assumed they must move clandestinely, and their nightlife came with police violence and social stigma. Upon discovery of the article, one of the group's main goals became to defeat this law, which was only modified in 1999 and defeated in 2022. Of course, as noted, the police did not frequently make arrests based on Article 365 but on 373, which is still in effect. Nevertheless, Cabrera's research covered eight courts in the capital and concludes that the first part of the law that punishes consensual sodomy is impractical when most cases before the courts were better classified as sodomy rapes.¹²⁶ This report solidified the group's decision to defeat the law. Subsequently, the group would begin to receive

¹²⁵ Contardo, *Raro*, 257.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

international grants to support gay people with legal battles and publish more reports on queer legal rights.¹²⁷

MOVILH's human rights strategy was successful in building dialogues with politicians and citizens, and soon even the opposers of queerness conceded to their rights. When a Danish journalist asked Aylwin, in 1993, about discrimination against queer people, he answered that "In Chile there is no discrimination of that kind...In general, the Chilean society does not react with sympathy to homosexuality."¹²⁸ While Aylwin was not yet thinking about queer people in terms of rights but in terms of sympathy, cracks were showing everywhere. In 1992, MOVILH decided to join the Rettig march to demonstrate their rightful place in the human rights field: "the respect of dignity and the rights of the human person."¹²⁹ In Sutherland's defense to the Assembly of Human Rights, organizers of the march, "human rights belong to us as they do everybody, and all have the right to demand to not be discriminated against."¹³⁰ Holding up the banner, "for our fallen siblings," the movement made reference to the queer deaths by AIDS and violence during the dictatorship, highlighting their similarity to the other, more publicized deaths of the political dissidents. Sutherland recalls that the Assembly of Human Rights and the other participants were reluctant. Eventually, they agreed to have MOVILH literally and metaphorically at the tail end of the human rights march. Nevertheless, MOVILH marched because it utilized the argument of universal human rights and sustained its dialogue with the politically powerful human rights organizers. In the second year, more queer people joined the same march, this time taking off their masks to reveal their identities. The incredible growth owed itself to the effectiveness of the human rights strategy.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁹ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 36

¹³⁰ Contardo, *Raro*, 257

The human rights dialogues fueled the growth of more openings. In 1993, after MOVILH's founders held a meeting where they revealed their identities, the national newspaper *La Nación* ran an extended issue denouncing labor discrimination against gay men.¹³¹ Politicians started to face a new pressure: having to publicly answer questions about discrimination against queer people. While Alwyn was hounded by foreign press, Gustavo Alessandri, the Renovación Nacional Party's candidate, was asked by APSI on homosexuals' civil rights. Although his answers continued to divide queer people between "good" and "dangerous," the fact that he had to answer this question demonstrated the popularity of queer rights as human rights and the social capital of queer organizations who championed this framework. In 1993, Triángulo Abierto, a queer radio program started by Víctor Hugo Robles asked a number of politicians on organized homosexual resistance and its importance to the political road. The responses, whether lukewarm or enthusiastic, hoping to co-opt queer voters or hoping to maintain existing social norms, all respected queer rights to assembly, organization, vote, and participate in traditional channels of liberal democracy. Mireya Baltra of the Communist Party, for example, states that "for us human rights are a fundamental point of society" while welcoming queer organizations if they organize on the left and pay attention to "other sectors" such as human rights, the poor, and the marginalized. Mario Palestro of the Socialist Party similarly states that "every person has the full right to act in their life as they see fit." Mario Devaud Ojeda of the Radical Party affirms that "whatever institution in the society has the perfect right to organize itself." Dario Paya of the Independent Democratic Party believes that while the homosexual movement will always be marginal because it is against the concept of having a family, the society will always have space

¹³¹ Contardo, *Raro*, 259.

for it because of “fundamental human rights.”¹³² Evidently, queer rights as human rights made a successful political foothold in mainstream politics.

The queer political movement’s insertion into democracy redefined an open democracy as inclusive of various identities. Many of the discussions above are inseparable from the concept or the right of queer community, as organizations and individuals without hiding their identities, to participate in democracy. MOVILH was adamant, from the very beginning, of queer political participation in democracy not only as individual voters but as a queer organization that demands rights. Delgado, in the first installment of *Triángulo Abierto* in 1993, states that the goal of MOVILH was to “occupy an important site in this space called democracy and society.” Rolando Jiménez, in a later episode, also insists that homosexuality has a political vocation and is a political category. He imagines MOVILH networking with other “marginalized groups” to “conquer our rights.” He believes that “to the extent that [queer people] participate for [their] rights, [they] advance and deepen the construction of democracy in this country.” MOVILH’s strong sense of queer political participation became the drive for their particular mode of operation—as an institution, armed with the language of human rights, that produces knowledge about queer rights and forces politicians to dialogue with them. Queer participation in democracy gave the liberal, post-dictator democracy, the character of openness. Jiménez positions queer political participation, which was not without hostility and reluctance (Jaime Ravinet, the ex-mayor of Santiago, claimed to not see how queer people “could contribute to Chile’s political life,” being an “illness that has to be treated”¹³³), as a way for democracy to become less elitist. Politics should, he believes, not only go to the parties but also to the “masses,” such as “organizations like ours, feminist organizations, students, *pobladores* (shanty-town dwellers),

¹³² Robles and Suit, *Triángulo Abierto*, *Archivo Nacional de Chile*.

¹³³ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 53.

Mapuches, and others.”¹³⁴ His vision places MOVILH as not only a part of a broad, rights-seeking social alliance representing a diverse array of identity-based groups but also as the representative of the queer community that connects the community to the political elites. The means for queer people to dialogue with and participate in politics is through organizations like MOVILH who identify and collect queer issues to present to politicians, backed by queer people’s support through marches, activities in the organization, and funding. Democracy was “open” because it opened up to queer people and other identities. When Alwyn declares to the Danish reporter that gays were not discriminated against in Chile, Delgado announced that MOVILH would present a letter to the president with data on queer discrimination, which the government should receive as a “gesture to breadth and plurality.”¹³⁵ Queer democratic participation therefore became a litmus test to the openness of democracy, giving it a meaning it never had before the dictatorship.

MOVILH consolidated its position as the representative of the queer community through NGO-ization and institutionalization, which was perhaps the best way to support their political pursuit. Reports and studies allowed MOVILH to build connections with queer people, gain social capital as the experts on queer experiences, and earn them funding from international and national sources. The findings can also galvanize their audience into activism. After their rupture with the Corporación, they congregated at the headquarters of the Partido Democrático de Izquierda (PDI), a party made up of leftists disenchanted with the communists. However, the party soon voted to kick them out. Juan Pablo Sutherland, leader of MOVILH, related later that the party decided that “neither PDI nor the Chilean society were ready to accept a *sui generis* relation between a political party and a homosexual movement.”¹³⁶ The Dutch Catholic nuns

¹³⁴ Robles and Suit, *Triángulo Abierto*, Archivo Nacional de Chile.

¹³⁵ Robles and Suit, *Triángulo Abierto*, Archivo Nacional de Chile.

¹³⁶ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 40.

Zusters Van Liefde came to the rescue, apportioning a million dollars as donations to MOVILH. With the money, MOVILH established the Centro de Estudios de la Sexualidad (CES, the Center for the Studying of Sexuality) used to administer the funds and study the law's application to queer adults. The process of institutionalization was not easy, as the activists were volunteers who worked other jobs to support themselves and had no experience in running an organization that was expected to produce social impact in exchange for funding. They had bitter arguments about what to do with the funds, including whether they should pay themselves, before settling on the Center. This incident shows that for all intents and purposes, MOVILH was beginning its transformation into an NGO. As it gained social capital, funding, knowledge, and experiences, its range of actions also consolidated into legal investigations, reports, workshops, and conferences on the topic of queer human rights.

Epilogue

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that the queer political movement encapsulated by MOVILH's 1992 Rettig march had its roots in the dictatorship period. Political participation in the Church, the leftist political parties, the human rights organizations, and the feminist organizations gave queer activists the political awakening and organizing experiences. But these fronts of anti-dictatorship agitation shunned the queer activists, and the sense of being rejected from spaces they helped to create led queer activists to seek their own political movements. The AIDS epidemic caused intense social stigma on queer bodies and made queerness more visible. Queer activists began to see queerness as inherently political, and queer networks of care eventually drew together the community and non-queer sympathizers, forming the base for future political action. During the dictatorship, the first attempt at queer politicization focused on intra-community support. The second resulted in a series of radical, subversive interjection of queer bodies onto national political proceedings and discourse. However, the one that had the most impact on political agendas was MOVILH, which in the post-dictatorship utilized and expanded on the widely-accepted language of human rights to insert itself into political dialogues. In the process, however, it also positioned itself as the representative of the queer community, became an institution with tremendous social capital and influence, and adopted a view of queer politicization that was entirely legalist and rights-based and differed from the other groups' cultural, communal, or direct political actions.

The adoption of the human rights framework is a new development that consolidated around 1993 and led to several ruptures within the temporarily united queer community. The first manifestation of dissent happened during the 1991 Chilean Homosexual Congress (Congreso Homosexual Chileno) in the Chilean city Coronel, which most existing queer groups attended.

Despite their agreement on queer rights as human rights, Las Yeguas accused MOVILH's founders of monopolizing political opinions.¹³⁷ In subsequent years, three significant ruptures occurred within MOVILH: Jiménez's expulsion, Claudia Rodríguez's breakup, and the *Toma travesti*.

In this Epilogue, I pose the questions that deal with representation in liberal democracy and the politicization of queerness through a brief discussion of the questions surrounding these ruptures: Who can participate in democracy? What can be politicized? And how to participate and politicize queerness?

MOVILH, as an institution, began with a democratic vision, having elected its leaders and voted on and debated major decisions. As the organization became increasingly like an NGO, its internal democratic principle came under pressure. Jiménez was MOVILH's representative to the annual conference hosted by the International Gays and Lesbians Association (ILGA) in New York in 1994. To maintain the rank of a U.N. consulting body, ILGA was asked to expel the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) for promoting pedophilia, for which a vote was held. Before the journey, MOVILH's internal vote was to abstain, given the little information they had about the organization in question. Jiménez, however, changed the vote to be in favor of NAMBLA's membership. Jiménez defended himself, stating that MOVILH did not know what even was a U.N. consulting body, and he voted because he sensed the lack of debate time allotted to the issue and that the U.S. government solicited the vote.¹³⁸ In 1995, he accused the "effeminate" gay men and *travestis* of reaffirming the homophobic talking point that placed gay people in a zone where they were "neither women nor men."¹³⁹ Previously, he refused to have MOVILH discuss AIDS, causing the members working

¹³⁷ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 33.

¹³⁸ Contardo, *Raro*, 261.

¹³⁹ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 79.

on AIDS to break away and form the separate organization called LAMBDA. Jiménez believed that associating the “sick” with homosexuals would not change society’s conception of the gays.¹⁴⁰ Because of his “machismo and authoritarianism,” he was expelled by a group vote in 1995.¹⁴¹

MOVILH’s breakup, in addition to struggles over its democratic procedures within the organization, was also characterized by the queer community’s struggle over the concept of representation. Claudia Rodríguez, a transgender woman, a former member of MOVILH, and today a prominent transgender activist, accused MOVILH and other queer organizations of using her “for diversity,” as she was the only transgender woman in the group.¹⁴² While at MOVILH, a man visited her and showed her his breasts, saying that as a construction worker, his co-workers would have sex with him because of his breasts. He was not a sex worker but someone who enjoyed having breasts. Rodríguez concluded that queerness was about such subversions of social norms, having autonomy of one’s body, and relating to one’s local communities. Queer organizations “respond to what society wants to hear,” and the society “did not want to listen to so much perversion.” But “perversion is the richness of the *travesti*.” Psychiatric definitions of transvestite, transgender, and similar terms “clean the image of the *travesti*” and obscure the “people’s survival and their conquest of happiness” that authors like Pedro Lemebel write about. She expounds the right to be a monster (*el derecho a ser un monstruo*): the unrepresented and unrepresentable queerness missing from the masculine, hygienic, and socially respectable image of MOVILH.

Finally, in 1996, MOVILH’s founders Delgado and Roberto Pablo ran for elections, and the latter was elected as the first homosexual representative in the Santiago municipal

¹⁴⁰ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 78.

¹⁴² Claudia Rodríguez, *Mujeres y Género*, Archivo Nacional de Chile, Caja 1, 2011.

government. Víctor Hugo Robles and the travesti activist Michelle Clementi barricaded themselves in MOVILH's headquarters to protest the participation in elections. They declared that "*travestis*, lesbians, and people living with HIV/AIDS were missing" from the representation.¹⁴³ Robles told the press that the homosexual struggle was not a political but a cultural one.¹⁴⁴ Delgado, in his 2023 interview, appears to address a similar concern. He states that the queer movement today is co-opted because queer people believe having a gay representative or official is the signal of equality. But the movement has forgotten about social mobilization and become capitalist as queer people aim to accumulate social capital, which does not serve the community.¹⁴⁵

These ruptures and reflections demonstrate several issues with MOVILH's mode of operation, consolidated by 1993. First, the queer community consisted of a vast array of expressions, sexualities, and identities that able-bodied, middle-class gay men from the capital could not and did not represent. The varied politicization and practices of the queer community are also different from MOVILH's image as a masculine, hygienic, and socially acceptable queer group and their legalistic, rights-based political imaginary. Second, embracing the human rights framework led to the NGO-ization of MOVILH, as many other human rights groups also did. They focused on obtaining funding, connecting with international queer and NGO groups, and accumulating social capital in the process. However, this representative-appointing system jeopardized the internal democracy of the group and the equality of the queer community at large, prioritizing certain queer people over others in obtaining funding and propagating their priorities. Finally, by engaging with liberal democracy, MOVILH's positionality as the unofficial

¹⁴³ Robles, *Bandera hueca*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Víctor Hugo Robles, "Toma Travesti de Movilh Histórico (1996)," *YouTube*, June 1, 1996, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9utzr6JQRE>.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Marco Ruiz Delgado, "Audiovisual," CL MMDH 00002133-000008.

representative of the queer community reinforced the erasure of diverse expressions, ideologies, theorization of the political queerness, and the social power dynamics between MOVILH and other queer groups and individuals. MOVILH doubtlessly politicized queer issues and facilitated progressive changes, but the process incurred historical debts difficult to repay. The transition of queerness from an intimate sexual perversion to a political force and the transition from dictatorship to neoliberal democracy reinforced each other, and, in the process, the democratic practice of representation both expanded into subaltern groups and further excluded them.

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