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# A Feminist Movement to End Capitalism

Bree Busk

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2019

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2019



this labor was evident in September, as the feminists who survived the dictatorship joined hands with the students fresh from their university occupations. Furthermore, green bandanas had come to represent far more than the fight for legal abortion. The movement was slowly transversalizing, and correspondingly, growing more influential. Only 6 months remained until the next International Working Women’s Day and it was time to flex this newfound power under a fresh slogan, one that would soon be on the lips of feminists in every part of Chile: *La huelga general feminista ¡va!* The feminist general strike is coming!

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an *olla comun* or “common pot” in the plaza in front of the presidential palace. In order to survive food shortages under the dictatorship, people came together to share what they had – including subversive ideas. In this modern incarnation, organizers invited participants to recognize the revolutionary heritage present in the simple act of feeding friends and neighbors.

On September 28, CF8M joined with other pro-abortion organizations to host a program of activities to mark the Day for the Depenalization and Legalization of Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean, which included a public forum, a feminist theatrical performance, and a *cacerolazo* in downtown Santiago. These events lacked the robust participation seen in previous months, likely due to the recent defeat in Argentina and lack of government movement on the issue in Chile.

September marked another important date that featured heavy feminist participation but wasn't an official activity organized under the umbrella of “Memories of Feminist Rebellion.” On September 30, immigrant and human rights organizations initiated a March Against Racism with the intention of raising consciousness around the discrimination and inhumane treatment endured by migrants, particularly those from Haiti. This event commemorated the death of Joane Florvil, a Haitian migrant who died after being detained by police for the alleged abandonment of her infant daughter. Joane was mourned as an individual by her loved ones, but the tragedy of her death had also turned her into a symbol for the struggle against state violence. CF8M was the only explicitly feminist formation involved in organizing the march; their participation was motivated by an intersectional analysis of how xenophobia, anti-Black racism, and misogyny manifest in both government policies and individual acts of discrimination. They acknowledged that it was not their place to lead, but to stand in solidarity with all migrants.

Throughout 2018, CF8M was able to anticipate the ebb and flow of the movement and position themselves accordingly. The fruit of

pled the democratically elected government of Dr. Salvador Allende and installed the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet which went on to hold power until 1989. For that reason, September is also a month for reflecting on the atrocities committed in that period and remembering those who were detained or disappeared. It was in this spirit that C8M — now the *Coordinadora Feminista 8 de Marzo* or CF8M — collaborated with the *Colectivo de Mujeres Sobrevivientes, Siempre Resistentes* (Collective of Women Survivors, Always in Resistance or CMS-SR) to transform September into a celebration of the innovative and powerful history of feminist struggle in the face of repression. Together, these organizations coordinated a wide variety of activities around the theme of “Memories of Feminist Rebellion.”

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, a group of feminist collectives carried out an intervention in front the former torture center known as “*Venda Sexy*” or “*La Discotéque*.” Maintained from 1974 to 1975, *Venda Sexy* was the site where many political prisoners were held before being disappeared by Pinochet’s secret police. Among other crimes, it was infamous for the sexual violence inflicted on prisoners as part of their torture. The feminist organizers confronted this legacy directly, highlighting how rape and sexual humiliation were used to not only punish women for their political activity but to show what happens to women who don’t stay meekly in their homes. Speakers described how authorities have failed to recognize these human rights violations as examples of gendered violence, which prevented them from seeing the connection between the brutal tactics employed under the dictatorship and the modern familial violence that often concludes with a femicide. Despite the dark history commemorated at this event, there was still a great deal of joy. The older feminists joined together with the younger under one empowering slogan: “We are not victims of violence, we are survivors!”

All month long, iconic methods of resistance were resurrected within a new context. On September 10, CF8M and CMS-SR hosted

*Black Rose/Rosa Negra is a proud feminist organization. We take our political inspiration from the historical struggles of working class women, including those who carried out their work in the name of other movements or ideologies. While we value the feminisms that can be found in our own neighborhoods and workplaces, we also seek to learn all lessons possible from the parts of the world where feminism is ascendant. Our international partnerships have resulted in a strong Latin American perspective in our writing and ideological perspectives – something we find appropriate for an organization based in the Americas.*

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## **Part I: The Rise of Multisectoral Feminism in Chile**

### **A Feminist Fall**

It’s May of 2018 and as winter descends on Santiago, Chile, something new is growing. Graffiti blooms on every surface and the wheat-pasted posters accumulate on the walls like leaves on the ground. This is a familiar site to any Santiaguino; it marks the beginning of a new cycle of struggle for one of the major social movements. Student issues are always well-represented, but you are just as likely to spot a slogan in support of a Mapuche political prisoner or a poster advertising the latest day of action from the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras No+AFP* (the coalition organized against the corrupt Chilean pension system). However, if you step closer, you will notice that there has been a shift in theme, tone, and frequency: feminism is on the rise, and while there may be messages of sorority in abundance, they are sharpened by an intense anger directed squarely at those who have wielded patriarchal power against the women of this country.

*NO es NO. YO TE CREO. PRACTICA LA VENGANZA.*

NO is No. I believe you. Practice revenge.

When I walk to work in the morning, I run into marches or the evidence of their recent passing. It's not unusual to hear the echoes of distant drumming bouncing down the wide streets of Downtown. On social media, friends and acquaintances are making posts that have transitioned from cautious inquiries to joyous declarations: "Is the downtown campus of PUC occupied?" "Was UCEN taken over?" "Instituto Arcos on feminist strike!" Every week, I spot a new collection of feminist banners hung from the fences of Santiago's most prominent institutions. All the universities are falling to the feminist strike and somehow, it only feels like the beginning.

### **The Water is Rising**

When I arrived in Santiago in 2015, I was nothing short of starstruck by the Chilean feminist movement. As a North American accustomed to the moderate, anemic social movements of the US, I wasn't prepared to witness the sheer numbers that would mobilize for almost any cause. I marvelled at the variety of organizations that filled the marches and snapped photos of every spray-painted slogan. I teared-up at the sight of fathers carrying their children on their shoulders during the demonstrations against gendered violence. I was sure that I was witnessing a strong, unified feminist movement for the first time in my life. It took me years to realize that I was viewing events through the lens of my political experience in the US: what I took for a well-developed expression of feminist power was, in reality, quite fragmented. Behind the scenes, conflicts were erupting in every sphere of the Left. Most organizations were struggling to change their sexist internal cultural (with differing degrees of success) while others were experimenting with new political forms and ideas. Many female radicals were resigning from traditional Leftist

provoked right-wing extremists who used the march as an opportunity to launch their first major anti-feminist attack. The *Movimiento Social Patriota* (MSP, a third-positionist fascist organization) drenched the street with animal blood and attempted to disrupt the march route with burning barricades. In a different section of the march, a group of masked individuals appeared and stabbed several women as they passed by. The following day, MSP released a statement denying responsibility, but their account was refuted by the victims and witnesses. As news of this incident spread, feminists responded by saturating social media with inspirational photos from the march, declaring that this act of terrorism would not keep them from the streets.

Two weeks later, feminists had the opportunity to show the far-right opposition that they hadn't been cowed by the recent acts of violence. The time had arrived for the Argentine Senate to hold the decisive vote on the long awaited abortion bill. In solidarity with feminists mobilizing in Argentina and throughout Latin America, C8M and allied feminist formations called for a massive *pañuelazo* to take place in front of the Argentinian Consulate in Santiago. The *marea verde* once again rose to fill the streets, but with disappointing results. After 15 hours of debate, the pressure exerted by the Catholic Church and conservative forces in the northern provinces proved too strong and the Senate narrowly voted down the bill, 38 to 31. Despite this defeat, the feminists who had thrown themselves into the fight for safe and free abortion were undaunted. They had come closer to victory than ever before, and the struggle would continue.

### **Memories of Feminist Rebellion**

In Chile, September marks the return of warm weather and the week-long celebrations in honor of the national holidays. For many, it is a time for family, barbecues, drinking, and relaxation. However, September 11<sup>th</sup> is the anniversary of the *coup d'etat* that top-

pregnancy passed the lower house. The celebratory crowd outside Congress numbered in the hundreds of thousands and with their green bandanas and face-paint, the feminists had transformed into a *marea verde* or “green sea” filling downtown Buenos Aires to the brim.

This victory flew across the Andes to infect Chileans feminists with joy and hope. As recently as 2017, Chile had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in all of Latin America. This law was amended under the Bachelet administration, depenalizing abortion in the cases of threat to the life of the mother, an unviable fetus, or rape in the case of girls 14 and younger. However, feminists had continued the fight under the slogan *#nobastan3causales* or “three causes aren’t enough!” This new wave of transnational feminist enthusiasm was channeled into Chile’s annual march for abortion rights which was just one month away.

The tradition of marching on July 25 began in 2013 with a march that ended in the occupation of one of Santiago’s most important cathedrals, interrupting a special mass attended by the mayor and other government officials. Every year since, abortion rights activists have organized a march through the *Coordinadora Feministas en Lucha* (Feminists in Struggle Coordinator or CFL), a coalition composed of pro-abortion groups, now including C8M. CFL took full advantage of the energy injected into the movement via the advances in Argentina. Their first major accomplishment was developing a Chilean version of the iconic green bandana, featuring a logo combining a historical feminist suffrage graphic with an image of a topless student protester. The new bandanas were mass distributed through *pañuelazos* – pop-up events where feminists rally under a massive green banner and drum up attention for their cause. All told, CFL representatives reported giving out more than 7,000 bandanas in the run-up to the march.

The 2018 march was massive, with almost 100,000 people mobilizing on the national level and 50,000 marching in Santiago. However, the resurgence of abortion as a topic of public debate

groups, often in favor of joining or starting feminist separatist projects. It was a time of great instability, but also a time of great political potential. The frustration and outrage felt by women, trans people, and queers were clearly intensifying, but the tension had yet to find release in a mass, popular movement. Everyone could feel something coming, but no one was sure which combination of events would finally crack the dam. Even now that the tsunami has hit, feminists are still struggling to analyze the moment in which they have found themselves. This process will doubtless be ongoing, but I believe that several contributing factors can be identified: the surge in global feminist visibility, the parallel ascensions of other social movements, and the pressure exerted on all Chileans and indigenous people through the continued application of the neoliberal policies instituted since the return of democracy.

First of all, Chileans are very aware of international political trends, especially those arising in other Spanish speaking countries. For that reason, you will see significant upsurges in Chilean feminist activity in response to global events. The *#metoo* movement in the US and its equivalent in Spain, *#yotecreo* (“I believe you”), aligned neatly with Chile’s history of *funas*, a tactic where people congregate around the homes of public figures in order to denounce and shame them for human rights violations or patriarchal violence. Known originally as an *escrache*, this tactic was developed in the mid-1990’s by HIJOS, an Argentinian organization consisting of the children of those “disappeared” during the dictatorship, and has since been adapted in many other countries. *Funas* or *escraches* are tools used when people believe there is no other recourse for justice, which is often the case with individuals who escaped criminal prosecution for the roles they played during their respective military dictatorships. Unfortunately, this also applies to abusers who, absent a community intervention, are often free to live their lives and perpetuate their violent behavior without experiencing any social or legal consequences.

In the current era, *funas* have gone digital and young women bravely post photos of their bruised faces on social media accompanied by explicit accounts of their abuse. Celebrities, musicians, and politicians have come under fire, but so have former romantic partners, friends, co-workers, and classmates. Young Chilean women are naming names and sharing screenshots. I can't help but notice that the photos documenting intimate injuries are now frequently interspersed with selfies of smiling young men with damning captions: SEXIST. ABUSER. RAPIST. Another common slur is "*macho de izquierda* (sexist Leftist)," which is used to call out male Leftists who exhibit the same anti-feminist behavior as their right-wing counterparts. These *funas* serve not only to visibilize the daily struggles of young women, but to create social and political consequences for those who have done wrong. It is clear that perpetrators of gendered violence will no longer be given quarter: not at school, not at work, and certainly not in political spaces.

A war cry against misogynistic violence, #NiUnaMenos ("not one [woman] more") is a slogan that originated in Argentina and resonates strongly with Chilean feminists who are all too familiar with the prevalence of femicide. At home or abroad, it seems like every week brings new headlines about a woman being murdered out of violent jealousy or as a punishment for stepping beyond the traditional limitations imposed on her by society. For example, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2018 marked the two year anniversary of the death of Nicole Saavedra, a young lesbian from a rural, religious community who was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by unknown assailants. Family members and the feminist network that has taken up the cause have stated that they feel the investigation of Nicole's death was neglected due to the lack of importance placed on the lives of women, lesbians in particular. This is a recurring theme for Chilean feminists, who are met with resistance from both the government and media when they insist on the existence of femicide as a unique category that cannot be simply understood or combatted in the same way as other homicides.

Some *tomas* had already been removed by police on the orders of the university administrations, whereas others had been voluntarily dismantled after winning some or all of their demands. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, the feminists of the Uch Law School voted to end their *toma* after negotiating a three-month suspension of the professor accused of sexual harassment. The *toma's* spokesperson swore the fight for the professor's full dismissal would continue, but without the pressure of an occupation, there was no guarantee of success. The feminist wave was clearly receding and many were left wondering what would happen to the movement once the students returned to their classrooms.

## The Green Sea

Beginning in 2015, feminist movements in Chile and Argentina were lifted by a rising tide of outrage against patriarchal violence. Whereas Chilean feminists went on to articulate their struggle as being "against the precaritization of life," Argentinian feminists focused on the fight to legalize abortion. This was a natural extension of the *NiUnaMenos* movement instigated a few years earlier, since Argentinian feminists saw the denial of safe, legal, and accessible abortion as a form of state femicide. Historically, abortion was only legal when the pregnancy threatened the life of the mother or was a product of rape. That said, it was still incredibly difficult to obtain one, even when those conditions were met. The result was a high death rate associated with clandestine abortions.

In April, the Argentine Congress agreed to open discussion on possible changes to the law. Feminists rallied around this political opening, filling the streets and plazas of the capital and beyond with their mobilizations. Like the Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* who resisted the dictatorship while wearing white kerchiefs, the feminists fighting for legal abortion had popularized bright green bandanas as a symbol of their struggle. The momentum peaked on June 14<sup>th</sup> when a bill legalizing abortion in the first 14 days of



policy, and the privatization of natural resources, among other issues. However, the feminists were ready for the fight.

### **Feminist Day of Action Against Precarity**

The June 1<sup>st</sup> day of action was organized to coincide with President Piñera's *cuenta pública*, the Chilean equivalent of a State of the Union speech. With the feminist wave in full swing, Piñera was expected to push his *Agenda Mujer*, a series of policies designed to address gender inequity while avoiding the deeper systemic critiques posed by the feminist movement. His proposals made no mention of non-sexist education, safe and legal abortion, or ending patriarchal violence. Piñera broadly endorsed the economic advancement of women, but failed to address the factors that made it impossible for them to thrive, such as lack of stable employment, affordable healthcare, or access to dignified pensions. In fact, it seemed as if the *Agenda Mujer* was designed exclusively for women already in the upper echelon of society.

When Piñera spoke before the Chilean Congress, C8M carried out of a *cuenta pública* of their own via Twitter. In a 10-minute video, spokespeople took turns describing the complex manifestations of patriarchal oppression in the lives of women in Chile, underscoring the need for a transversal feminist movement. As the day advanced, a wide variety of activities unfolded throughout the country, including neighborhood-level mobilizations, popular assemblies, artistic interventions, unpermitted marches, actions blocking traffic, and *cacerolazos* (noise demonstrations). In the capital, several actions were met with police repression; most notably, police broke up a large downtown feminist gathering with water cannons and arrested over a dozen participants.

Despite its national impact, the day of action was not enough to sustain the initial momentum generated by the *Mayo Feminista*. Late July marked the beginning of a new semester and many student assemblies felt it was time to end their strikes and occupations.

The persistent themes of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and femicide have been targeted by organizations such as the *Red Chilena Contra la Violencia Hacia las Mujeres* (a network dedicated to the eradication of violence against women and girls) and the *Coordinadora #NiUnaMenos* (the 'Not One More' Coordinator or NUM), which successfully instigated massive mobilizations throughout 2016 and into 2017. In May of 2018, the latter called for a "march against rape culture" in response to reports of the rape of a young woman by a gang of football fans and the horrific rape and murder of a 2-year-old girl at the hands of her uncle. The story of young Ambar's death lit up the media not only due to its gruesome character, but because it served as a grim reminder that as of 2017, half of the reported victims of sexual violence in Chile are under 14 years old. Unfortunately, the news continues to deliver up dead women and girls and even the most terrible crimes are swiftly forgotten by the public. For many, the fight against apathy and resignation is a struggle in and of itself. In Chile, remembering is not only about personal reflection. Rather, it is political process that prevents the loss of collective knowledge and preserves the memory of martyrs. Contemporary feminists use the politicization of memory in the same way as the older generation who lived under the dictatorship: by honoring victims of femicide through art and political struggle.

In late 2017, the struggle against femicide and gendered violence converged with the nascent immigrant rights movement with the death of Joane Florvil, a young Haitian woman who was accused of abandoning her infant daughter and was subsequently arrested and held in detention until her death 30 days later. As a recent migrant who didn't speak Spanish, Joane was placed in a position of hyper-vulnerability, unable to explain her actions to the police or to defend herself against their accusations. Her crime was being a black migrant and mother in a country that is quickly learning to see her and others like her as an invading force. Joane was neither the first nor the last migrant woman to suffer or die from xeno-

phobic discrimination, but the notoriety surrounding her case was so great that the image of her tear-streaked face as she was led away in handcuffs has come to stand as a symbol of the cruelty of the Chilean state towards the rapidly expanding migrant population — an antagonism exacerbated by anti-black racism and misogyny. Joane is remembered by her church, her community, and her partner, also a Haitian migrant, who gave a heartbreaking interview last May in which he famously said, “Chile taught me misery.” This tragedy continues to motivate those struggling to defend and improve conditions for migrants, as demonstrated by the recent founding of the *Escuela Popular Joane Florvil*, a popular education initiative designed to provide free Spanish language classes to Haitian women. Joane’s memory is also honored through the *Coordinadora 30 de Septiembre* (the September 30<sup>th</sup> Coordinator), a pro-migrant and anti-racist organization named in commemoration of the day Joane died in the hospital without knowing justice or being reunited with her baby. With the passage of a new decree that singles out Haitians for a more restrictive immigration process, conditions will only become more precarious for this vulnerable group and feminism may come to be the lens through which these crises are understood and confronted.

The themes of income disparity, reproductive labor, and precarity at home and in the workplace have been taken up most notably by the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras No Más AFP* (the National No More AFP Workers’ Coordinator or No+AFP), the massive coalition organized to reform and/or replace the corrupt pension system installed during the dictatorship. While not immediately recognizable as a feminist formation, this movement has been propelled forward by female trade unionists (among others) and hasn’t hesitated to highlight how women are uniquely disadvantaged under the current capitalist system due to gender-based income disparity and the uncompensated nature of work in the home (only 48.5% of women participate in the formal job market and on average earn 31.7% less than men). This movement is a

When the floor opened to discussion, participants used the platform to introduce their unions or territorial organizations, give rousing speeches, and even ask for advice on how to promote feminism in their daily lives.

One of the assembly’s priorities was to discuss mobilizing for a general strike on March 8, 2019. This theme evoked both excitement and controversy, since it was clear that many participants were wary of a feminist movement anchored in the elite universities of the capital. One attendee passionately argued that not all feminists could occupy their school or go on strike for even one day. A C8M member provided a response, reminding participants that the seeds of a transversal movement had already been planted and that perfection should not be the enemy of the good. To build a general strike that was truly representative of the complex realities experienced by Chilean, migrant, and indigenous women, she argued, the movement had to develop political common ground and advance multisectoral demands that leave no one behind. The general strike – like feminism itself – must be a tool to confront patriarchy on all fronts.

The assembly determined that the first test of this commitment would take place on June 1<sup>st</sup>, with a call for a “Day of Feminist Action Against Precarity.” Instead of limiting themselves to a march through downtown Santiago, C8M encouraged decentralized actions reflecting the daily struggles of participants. This strategy arose from an understanding of how precarity itself was the primary condition impeding women’s participation in traditional methods of resistance. Informal workers had no unions, homemakers and caregivers received no wages, and migrants risked legal consequences if they walked off the job. Therefore, the fight against precarity would also be a fight to create the conditions in which these marginalized workers could self-organize and build power. This would require going toe-to-toe with the Piñera administration on labor rights, healthcare, education, immigration

## C8M Popular Assembly

In 2011, the fight for free education opened the door to wider critiques of how neoliberal policies of privatization impacted working people. In this way, the student movement was able to reinvigorate social movement activity on multiple fronts. In the *Mayo Feminista*, the students once again dominated the popular narrative. However, the movement was only just re-activating and lacked the strategy and infrastructure necessary to unite feminists beyond the realm of education. This task would fall to the *Coordinadora 8 de Marzo*, which had the distinction of being the only broad feminist coalition still active when the university strikes began.

Five weeks earlier, C8M successfully brought together feminists representing Chile's diverse social movements to march on International Working Women's Day. Now, it faced the challenge of doing the same – not for a day, but indefinitely. This work was enabled by the fact that the coalition already counted on the participation of many of the most active student feminists. Furthermore, members of the *Coordinadora No+AFP* remained active in the coalition, using it as a launching pad for their first official conference on the topic of "Women and Pensions." In this way, representatives of the country's most powerful social movements were able to come together under a shared analysis to midwife a new era of feminist struggle into being. However, the movement was still largely defined by student activity and action had to be taken to transversalize it. C8M determined that the first step towards this goal was calling for an open assembly and actively soliciting the participation of women and sexual dissidents outside the educational sector.

The assembly was held on May 19<sup>th</sup> at the UCh Law School, the glowing ember at the heart of the student feminist movement. Over 100 feminists attended, with male students handling registration, security and childcare. Facilitation was provided by members of C8M whose job was not to determine the discussion, but rather to articulate and advance it through a series of guiding questions.

national phenomenon, but it is also grounded in neighborhood and zonal formations where neighbors and co-workers meet to discuss and advance the struggle. Whereas the feminist wing of the student movement presents itself as young and transgressive (imagine: balaclavas, body-paint, and performance art), the women of No+AFP are less ostentatious in their mobilizations. However, this doesn't mean they are any less aggressive in demanding their rights. In fact, many of them are seasoned militants active in neighborhood assemblies, labor unions, and political parties. The tension emerges when the feminism of the labor movement and *poblaciones* (shantytowns or working-class communities) intersects with the feminism of the student movement, which has largely, but not exclusively, been developed in the context of the most politicized high schools and universities. Certainly there is a vast gulf of experience between poor, rural Chileans and those who are able to attend the best universities in the capital city of Santiago, but it is the project of every social movement to identify the common threads capable of binding these groups together across and through their diverse experiences.

The neoliberal policies instituted under the dictatorship and expanded on by subsequent right-wing governments have touched the lives of all Chileans and indigenous people, and not with a soft hand. When seen from this perspective, the movements against privatized education, privatized social security, privatized healthcare, neoliberal labor reforms, and state violence (particularly against indigenous people) have everything to gain from recognizing and acting on their complementary objectives. This *multisectoral* approach is exemplified by the national organization *Movimiento Salud para Todas y Todos* (Healthcare for All Movement or MSpT), which unites healthcare workers, medical students, and patients to demand healthcare as a public right. They pursue this goal through many diverse campaigns, including support for Mapuche hunger strikers, improvement of patient conditions, public health education workshops, and the decriminalization and expansion

of abortion rights. In the language of the Chilean Left, sectors are defined areas of struggle, such as labor, *territorial* (grounded in land and community), and student. Multisectoralism means having a cross-sectional analysis of these social movements and developing relationships of solidarity across these sectors, resulting in multisectoral support for specific demands.

The multisectoral movements of today reflect the experiments and advances of the past, as evidenced by the *Revolución Pingüina* (the high school student uprising in 2006), which opened the door for students to collectively interrogate the dynamics of oppression in other spheres of their lives. This heritage is clearly visible in contemporary political formations such as MSpT and the feminist organization *La Alzada*, which emerged from the student movement and went on to focus its political energy in the labor sector, where it offered anti-sexist trainings and supported the union struggles of both local and immigrant domestic workers. *La Alzada* was one of many university-based organizations empowered by the demand for an *educación no sexista* (non-sexist education), which was formulated in the peripheries of the student movement but went on to be a major force in shaping all struggles occurring within the educational sphere.

The student movement has proven itself to be remarkably flexible, capable of incubating new ideas and putting them into practice at a rate that the traditional Left can only watch with envy. One of these ideas was “sexual dissidence,” a radical answer to the neoliberal politics of inclusion and diversity. Popularized within the student movement by such groups as *Colectivo Universitario de Disidencia Sexual* (Sexual Dissidence University Collective or CUDS), sexual dissidence denotes “constant resistance to the prevailing sexual system, to its economic hegemony and its postcolonial logic” and rejects the idea of subversive identities (gay, lesbian, queer, trans, drag, etc.) in favor of subversive analysis and action. The result is an inclusive, combative politics that cannot be easily co-opted or institutionalized, no matter how many priv-

school become gender-mixed. Both demands reflected the broader program for non-sexist education.

Before the *toma* was dismantled in the early afternoon, the students of Carmela Carvajal, Javiera Carrera, and the Instituto Nacional called a spontaneous assembly on the back patio of the premises. In this meeting they discussed what needed to change – not just at their particular schools, but in the student movement and society as a whole. The president of the Instituto Nacional’s student government, Vicente Salinas, was quoted as saying, “We understand [this political intervention] as a new call to our conscience [...] understanding that we have to energetically take charge of this issue and not turn a blind eye.” Less than two weeks later, Instituto Nacional students had their own *toma* violently broken up by riot police. This raid was unusually brutal, resulting in 20 reported injuries and 10 arrests – the latter including Vicente Salinas. After the fact, some feminists speculated that this act of repression on the part of the state was intended to discipline the student body for transgressing the pact of masculinity embodied by their elite, all-male institution.

All told, nearly a dozen high schools throughout the country participated in some aspect of the feminist strike, including a variety of solidarity actions carried out by male students. Separatist tensions remained, but it didn’t take long for feminism to become such a dominant force that male students felt obligated to get on board or risk being left behind. This robust participation was reflected in the size of the marches that occurred throughout May and into June. United under the banners of non-sexist education and an end to patriarchal violence, Santiago-based high school and university students mobilized on May 16<sup>th</sup> in record numbers. Initiated by the Chilean Student Federation (CONFECH), this march caught the world’s eye with its flashy contingents of young women marching topless while wearing maroon balaclavas – a choice that was as much a demonstration of power as a celebration of bodily autonomy.

their leadership was not. This understandably produced some confusion for many male students who found themselves relegated to the back seat when it came to making political decisions for the student movement. This dynamic was especially visible in the *liceos emblemáticos* (emblematic high schools), the country's most prestigious public schools whose mixed class character has produced a long tradition of leftist student resistance. The feminist wave forced the conversation on intra-movement sexism, threatening a separatist rupture if male students couldn't adapt to the new political reality.

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 200 students from the all-girls school Carmela Carvajal de Prat invaded and occupied the all-boys school Instituto Nacional in a landmark event. Using chairs and metal barriers as improvised stairs, the girls entered the campus at 12:15pm and established themselves in the building with barricades and feminist banners. A few hours later, they were joined by a new contingent of 60 students from Javiera Carrera (another emblematic all-girls school) who initiated a solidarity protest outside. This headline-grabbing action marked a turning point for these student bodies, because for the first time, their fight wasn't exclusively against the school administrations.

The feminist takeover was initiated in response to the sexual assault of a Haitian janitor who reported being groped from behind by a male student a few days earlier. Tensions had already reached their breaking-point after the circulation of a mock rape video featuring Instituto Nacional students and an image of a school jacket customized with a crude sexist slogan. The students of Carmela Carvajal insisted on the resignation of the principal, Fernando Soto, arguing that he was a major contributor to the culture which produced sexist behavior in the student body. Furthermore, they endorsed a petition previously put forward by the Instituto Nacional's English department which called for an official protocol to handle cases of sexual harassment or assault. They also insisted that the

ileged individual participants are peeled away by token reforms. Since the theorization and practice of sexual dissidence developed in conjunction with the growth of student feminist activity, there is a significant movement tendency (concentrated in the capital city of Santiago) that has proved resistant to trans exclusive radical feminism or other regressive forms of feminist thought. This positive influence is visible in popular feminist assemblies and public demonstrations where trans and nonbinary feminists show up in far greater numbers than can be seen in the US and even hold leadership positions in their various organizations.

Contemporary Chilean feminism is refreshingly experimental and resilient, grounded in historical Leftist analysis, but open to integrating new theories and tactics as they emerge on the global level. By maintaining a class struggle orientation and infusing their analysis with lessons learned from Black and indigenous feminisms, this generation of feminists has created an opening for themselves to advance the struggle much farther than was previously considered possible. However, there are a number of forces that stand in ideological opposition to feminism and seek to sabotage the movement at every opportunity.

### **Co-option, Fascism, and Threats From Within**

The first threat comes from the Piñera administration, which is actively seeking to defuse and institutionalize the feminist movement by rolling out reforms under the banner of neoliberal gender equality. His proposed projects include ending the rule prohibiting women from remarrying until 270 days after the dissolution of their first marriage, instituting a project of "*sala cuna universal*" which entitles mothers with formal, salaried employment to childcare, introducing the right to breastfeed and the right to accompaniment for those with vulnerable pregnancies, and providing additional resources directed to the prevention of teen pregnancy, among others. This is the carrot dangled in front of political moderates, while

the stick is represented by harsh new policies which seek to further criminalize both migrants (especially those with either Haiti or Colombia as countries of origin) and Mapuche (the indigenous people who inhabit central and southern Chile as well as parts of Argentina) who are locked in conflict with the Chilean state over issues of autonomy and land recovery.

Piñera's neoliberal strategy can be understood as the "gentler" institutional approach when compared with the borderline fascist positions taken by contemporary far-right politicians such as congressman and failed presidential candidate José Antonio Kast, whose 2017 campaign drew support from conservative, libertarian, nationalist, *pinochetista* (supporter of the former Pinochet regime), and retired military groups, among others. He took traditional conservative stances against abortion and gay marriage, but stirred controversy by publicly declaring Chilean transgender actress Daniela Vega was "a man" and stating in an interview that he wouldn't hesitate to shoot any criminal that entered his home. Together with his "law and order" approach towards illegal immigration and crime, these positions made him an inspirational figure to members of far-right groups organizing on the grassroots level. While it is presently unacceptable for a politician to openly identify as a *pinochetista*, it is no secret that many people in positions of governmental power were active supporters of the military government and benefited greatly from that participation. On the streets, however, fascists have no such reservations about making their violent agenda known and are increasingly bold in their mobilizations. The ascent of nationalist and ethno-suprematist movements in the US and Europe has given Chilean fascists a feeling of increased legitimacy and the threat of organized political violence against Black migrants and mobilized feminists is transitioning from empty posturing on social media to real violence on the streets.

Unfortunately, the final and possibly most potent threat comes from within the movement itself, which has been plagued by ide-

On May 11<sup>th</sup>, the public was shocked when a group of 127 female students from the Law School of *Pontificia Universidad Católica* (PUC) delivered a public letter condemning the sexist environment they had been forced to endure, including a list of misogynistic comments heard in classrooms. The shock, however, came not from the content of this letter, but from its place of origin: PUC is a conservative, religious institution far more likely to be associated with *gremialismo* (a far-right ideology championed by Pinochet-advisor Jaime Guzmán) than feminism. Even at the height of student resistance in 2011, PUC only experienced a single *toma*. Of note, this occupation was motivated by the demand to dismantle the Chilean Constitution of which Guzmán was the primary architect. It was carried out at PUC's East Campus, the location of Guzmán's assassination in 1991 at the hands of the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez.

Everything changed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, when a group of feminist students occupied *La Casa Central*, the main building of the downtown campus. This historic event was marked with controversy, as the occupiers clashed with other students whose positions ranged from liberal feminist politics to outright fascism. These ideological conflicts largely played out in the media, but on the first night of the *toma*, students reported a brief confrontation between the occupiers and *gremialistas*. Both the unexpected nature of the feminist takeover at PUC and the subsequent right-wing backlash foreshadowed larger trends as the feminist wave continued to advance through the country.

### **High School Students Join the Struggle**

There are several factors which distinguished the 2018 feminist wave from previous eras of student resistance, the most significant being that many of the popular assemblies voted in favor of "separatist" occupations, meaning that only women and sexual dissidents were welcome. Even in spaces where men were tolerated,

blies to exercise their power. The movement has evolved over time, eventually incorporating a series of feminist demands. However, the eruption of feminist strikes in 2018 demonstrated that change was not happening fast enough.

The first feminist occupation or *toma* took place in April 2018 at the Universidad Austral, located in the south of Chile. It was carried out in reaction to the mishandling of a disciplinary case against a professor accused of sexual harassment. It was almost immediately followed by a second, more prominent *toma* at the law school of the Universidad de Chile (UCh). UCh, centrally located in Santiago, is one of the most prestigious universities in the country and is known as a hotbed of leftist political activity. A specifically feminist takeover was completely unprecedented; however, the student body was used to leaping into action and the feminist occupiers promptly transformed their school into an informal headquarters for the growing movement. In a matter of weeks, over a dozen university departments were occupied or otherwise paralyzed by strikes.

School occupations are more than just a symbol of defiance or an act of civil disobedience. The interruption of “business as usual” serves as a check on institutional power and can force university administrations to find faster or more satisfying answers to student concerns. Furthermore, the occupied spaces become centers of self-managed educational, cultural, and political development. Students host and attend a wide variety of workshops and may even request specific trainings or political presentations from outside groups. Run by popular assemblies, *tomas* give students the opportunity to form their own opinions and participate in direct democracy. In intense periods of struggle such as 2006 and 2011, school occupations were so common that they became a cultural touchstone for a whole generation. This has led some Chileans to develop a jaded perspective, viewing student resistance as little more than an excuse to get out of class. However, the feminist strike gave new dimension to these traditional tactics.

ological splits and power struggles. After instigating massive mobilizations throughout 2016, the *Coordinadora NiUnaMenos* (NUM) effectively tore itself to pieces. The first split came as a result of the actions taken by *Pan y Rosas* (Bread and Roses), one of the larger member organizations, which acted in defense of a distant member of their partner political organization (*Partido de Trabajadores Revolucionarios* or Revolutionary Workers Party) accused of sexual harassment. After receiving considerable blowback for this stance, they attempted to use their numbers to force NUM to throw its support behind one of their besieged members, Bárbara Brito, who was serving as vice president of the Student Federation of the University of Chile (FECh). This blatant power-grab resulted in their expulsion from the coalition, but tensions remained high. Political factions had coalesced around two main tendencies: the feminists who promoted and were members of mixed gender political organizations and the anti-organizational feminists who rejected participation in all mixed organizations in addition to traditional Leftist groups or parties. The latter took a hardline position, going as far as accusing their opponents of being mere mouthpieces for the male members of their respective organizations. The atmosphere grew toxic and political debate devolved into bullying and personal attacks.

A second crisis rapidly emerged, stemming from a *funa* publicized through the NUM Facebook page. One of the rapists outed in this process threatened legal action and, instead of pursuing a collective response to this threat, a member of the anti-organizationalist faction chose to turn over the names of the page administrators to the police. This individual went on to make a deal with the rapist where NUM would publicly apologize for the *funa* and retract the charges against him. Before this series of events had finished playing out, the remaining pro-organizational feminists collectively determined that the coalition was no longer a safe or productive vehicle for their politics and chose to make their exit.

This rise and fall was mirrored throughout the Chilean Left, as the constant flood of *funas* and unsatisfactory disciplinary or transformational justice processes fragmented the smaller groups and caused deep rifts in the larger ones. For some, the disintegration of NUM must have been a cruel disappointment, especially after experiencing such a vibrant resurgence of feminist activity. However, the women who had discovered political affinity while navigating the myriad conflicts of NUM were far from despondent. On the contrary, the adversity they experienced forced them to hone their political analysis and articulate fresh alternatives to the positions and practices they opposed. These lessons were transmitted to the surviving mixed organizations and in this way, the metaphorical blood shed in this difficult period came to fertilize the soil from which the next stage of the movement would grow. As the dust finally began to settle at the close of 2017, some feminists continued to turn to groups of friends or separatist spaces to do their politics, while others began to grapple with the project of defining feminism as something transversal, multisectoral, and far more ambitious than what had come before.

### **Naming the Moment**

Thus we arrive in January of 2018, with a mosaic of social movements, leftist parties, cultural collectives, neighborhood assemblies, and politicized individuals repositioning themselves to confront the new political landscape unfolding as the Piñera administration prepares to take power. Feminists are freshly outraged at the appointment of Isabel Plá (an anti-abortion right-wing extremist) to lead the Ministry of the Woman and Gender Equity and International Working Women's Day is fast approaching. It is in this context that the *Coordinadora 8 de Marzo* (March 8<sup>th</sup> Coordinator or C8M) met to discuss the *coyuntura* (the combination of factors and circumstances that characterize a situation in a determined moment) of Chilean feminism.

by the contagious energy of Argentina's feminists who were making historic progress in their struggle for abortion rights. By July, Chilean feminists had donned their own green bandanas in imitation of their *compañeras* across the border. Consequently, Chile's growing fascist movement launched its first counterattack. Meanwhile, the shifting political landscape compelled both grassroots and government forces to adapt to the new reality opened up by the student feminist wave.

### **Mayo Feminista**

The feminist wave was carried forward by a surge of collective frustration with university leadership regarding the handling of sexual harassment complaints. While some student bodies had successfully pressured their universities into implementing protocols to resolve cases of abuse, the slow pace of bureaucracy and lack of will on the part of the administrations often led to disappointing results. Other schools had no protocols whatsoever and feminists had to start from zero. Wherever the student movement had a foothold, this catalyzing issue was woven into the fabric of more established demands, such as the need for a non-sexist education (a disruptive demand raised in 2011 during the previous era of student mobilizations), institutional acceptance of queer and transgender students, and an educational experience free of sexual harassment and discrimination. Student feminists drew strength and direction from these common demands, but also organized at the level of their departments or institutions to define their own political priorities and determine appropriate tactics.

In Chile, high schools and universities have been self-organized for decades, tracing back to the period before the dictatorship. Students are often knowledgeable about their institution's unique heritage and take pride in passing political traditions on to the next generation. When necessary, they draw on their popular memory of struggle, using strikes, school occupations, and popular assem-



## Part II: Between the Feminist Wave and the Green Sea

The student feminist wave of 2018 struck so suddenly and spread so quickly that its impact resonated far beyond Chile's national borders. Like the student movement that rocked the country 7 years earlier, feminism forced its way into the public consciousness, changing the course of the country's many social movements as well as government policy. This was accomplished through a series of groundbreaking events instigated by university and high school students as well as some of the largest feminist mobilizations ever to take place in Chile.

The first article in this series described how the current Chilean feminist movement held the potential to revitalize the country's diverse social struggles through transversal, multisectoral politics. This strategy was exemplified by the *Coordinadora 8 de Marzo* (C8M), the feminist coalition which advanced under the slogan, "Against the Precarization of Life!" in answer to the suffering generated by the neoliberal project in Chile and the pervasive threat of patriarchal violence.

C8M emerged from a movement rife with ideological conflict and harried by external threats. After coordinating a massive mobilization on International Working Women's Day 2018, they might have easily disbanded or collapsed under the pressure of internal divisions like the *Coordinadora NiUnaMenos* before them. However, they were thrust into the driver's seat of the movement when outrage peaked in the universities, eventually sparking feminist activity throughout the country. This rapid succession of events came to be called the *Mayo Feminista* (Feminist May) and marked C8M's rise to prominence as the most representative body of the expanding movement.

As 2018 wore on, the wave of university occupations began to wane. However, the movement would soon be jolted back to life

C8M is an open coalition with a deceptively simple mission: to bring together a variety of social organizations, labor unions, and individual feminists to plan the annual march associated with its name. Every year, veteran participants and newcomers must coalesce around a common analysis of the state of feminist struggle and identify a theme capable of uniting a heterogeneous and conflictual movement. Recent years have highlighted the deadly effects of patriarchal violence with slogans such as "all the women against all the violence" and, of course, #NiUnaMenos. However, naming the moment in a way that speaks to women's struggles in all their diversity is no small task.

As most modern feminists will admit, there is no universal experience of womanhood or gender-based oppression. Each individual stands at a unique intersection of identities and associated oppressions, a conclusion that has led some feminists to divide the movement into ever smaller organizations in order to insulate the hyper-oppressed from the moderately oppressed. When toxic dynamics produced by racism or transphobia divide the movement, a separatist approach is more than justified. That said, a potent movement is, by necessity, one that weaves together women of diverse backgrounds and experiences into a force capable of challenging patriarchal power on a systemic level. The feminists of C8M, many of whom were veterans of the conflicts of the #NiUnaMenos era, knew that isolationist separatism was a dead end for their political objectives. To build the movement they all felt was necessary, they needed to find the common thread that passed through the lives of all working-class women and gender dissidents: something to bring people together instead of tearing them apart. Towards this end, they adopted a *transversal* feminist approach.

Transversal politics is an organizational method designed to generate collective identity in non-hierarchical coalitions across and through the diverse positionalities of their members. In fact, these very differences are considered an asset, since it is only through analyzing a problem from multiple perspectives

can “the truth” be ascertained. This method seeks to avoid the excessive universalism of the Left (which flattens differences, often in an ethnocentric and exclusionary manner) as well as the excessive relativism of contemporary identity politics (which are often essentialist and substitute individual identity for collective identity). Furthermore, transversal politics are not at odds with intersectionality (an analytic framework to understand the intersecting nature of systems of oppression and exploitation). Rather, they are an application of that theory in an inclusive coalition setting. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins writes of how transversal politics show how we can remain rooted in the unique struggles of our own group while finding commonality with others experiencing a different facet of the same oppression. In order to build bonds of solidarity across our differences, “Empathy, not sympathy becomes the basis of coalition.” C8M would come to define two commonalities through which to channel this politicized empathy: the experience of individual and structural violence and the condition of working for others. The latter was interpreted in a broad way, acknowledging that women’s labor takes many forms, both salaried and informal, and must be visibilized in all places it occurs. This analysis opened the door for feminist struggle on all fronts, permeating all social movements positioned against capitalist exploitation and state oppression. It was possible, they posited, that feminism itself could become the commonality to unite and reinvigorate the Left as a whole.

What slogan could possibly speak to this common condition of labor exploitation and violence in all its myriad expressions? This year, C8M decided, feminists would mobilize “Against the Precarization of Life” in solidarity with the call for an international women’s strike. This theme spoke to the effects of 30 years of neoliberal policies instituted in Chile after the return to democracy. While not always explicit in their targeting of women, the result of these policies was the further immiseration of a group already

placed at a historical disadvantage. Whether a Mapuche on her ancestral territory, a student in the classroom, a worker on the job, a mother or care-taker maintaining her home and family, or an immigrant building a new life in a strange land, all women have felt the sting of intimate or structural violence and the systemic stripping of their autonomy and resources. C8M went on to identify four areas in which this slogan would enable the recognition of our interconnected struggles: racism and territory, salaried labor and social security, sexual and reproductive rights, and sexual dis-sidence. This year’s march would, by necessity, weave together the territorial organizations of the *poblaciones*, the zonal formations of NO+AFP, the typical female-dominated trade unions, the myriad student feminist organizations, immigrant organizations such as *30 de Septiembre*, and many, many more, essentially representing a complete picture of Chilean social movements, all united through feminism.

This convergence of struggles was evident on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2018, when a never-ending stream of feminists of all ages, races, and genders overflowed the streets. I chose to follow the boisterous immigrant contingent and joined in the chants of “*Mujeres migrantes, la lucha está delante!* (Migrant women, the struggle lies ahead!)” and “*Chilena o extranjera, la misma clase obrera!* (Chilean or foreigner, the same working class!)” Although I didn’t have the words to describe it at the time, I could feel that something significant had shifted, that forces were coming into alignment. Months later, members of C8M would reflect that they knew discontent was rising in the universities as early as their first meeting in January. That said, few could have anticipated the feminist wave, better described as the feminist tsunami, that would sweep away schools and universities throughout the country just a few short weeks later.