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# Recovering Refugee Stories: Chilean Refugees and World University Service

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Within the context of a special section of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, this article charts and evaluates the work of the UK-based NGO, World University Service (WUS), in assisting Chileans who fled their country in the wake of the 1973 coup and subsequent Pinochet dictatorship. The article combines documentary research in the WUS archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, and a series of in-depth interviews with 26 Chileans who were assisted by WUS. It begins by outlining the history, structure and development-based focus of the WUS scholarship scheme, which was an important step in the establishment of formal refugee support structures in the UK. It also explores quantitative data of the scheme's academic success, before enriching this with qualitative research focused on analysis of refugees' individual life stories. The research findings reveal tensions between what Chanfrault-Duchet calls the 'inner self' and the 'social self' in the case of women interviewees. The article concludes that a focus on individual life stories as emplotted narratives can enrich quantitative understandings of the effectiveness of formal refugee support programmes and provide important insights into the grassroots experience of exile, helping to avoid the historical decontextualization of discussions of refugee support programmes.

Keywords: refugees, Chile, Pinochet coup d'état, UK refugee policy, refugee history

## Introduction

Studies of humanitarian action to support refugees have tended to privilege elite perspectives, focusing on political figures, diplomats and negotiators; large international organizations (such as the UNHCR, ICRC, Save the Children, Oxfam); high-profile moments of crisis (notably Vietnam, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kosovo), or international legal structures shaping action and response (Barnett 2011). More recently, attention has been paid to giving voice to both the beneficiaries of humanitarian support and the actors involved in its delivery (Hilton *et al.* 2018). This article, drawing on archival research and oral interviews with former refugees and the practitioners who aided them, examines the response of World University Service (WUS), a relatively small UK-based NGO, to a particular historical crisis,

namely the flight of Chileans following the 1973 Pinochet coup d'état. It responds to [Malkki's call \(1996: 378\)](#) for greater insights into the grassroots experience of refugee supports as a means to avoid a 'dehistoricizing universalism' in the study of humanitarian action.

## Historical Context

On 11 September 1973, General Pinochet's *coup d'état* dethroned the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, marking the start of a dictatorship during which up to 200,000 fled into exile ([Wright and Oñate Zúñiga 2007: 31](#)). It is impossible to give a precise figure for the number of exiles, given the disastrous performance of the Chilean economy in the 1970s and early '80s, though one estimate puts the figure at 1.8 million ([Sznajder and Roniger 2009: 230](#)). Many of those in immediate danger on 11 September 1973 sought refuge in embassies, notably the Italian, Swedish, and French and were assisted by the Comisión Nacional de Ayuda a Refugiados (National Commission to Support Refugees, CONAR) led by Bishop Helmut Frenz, as well as international organizations such as the Inter-European Committee for Migration and the International Red Cross ([Angell 2001: 177](#); [Sznajder and Roniger 2009: 233](#)).

Pinochet's Regime approached its practice of political exclusion through a legal mindset. Thus, with the introduction of Decree Law 81 in November 1973, the new Regime gave itself unconditional authority to expel citizens and determine their right to return ([Wright and Oñate Zúñiga 2007: 34](#); [Sznajder and Roniger 2009: 229](#)). Many Chileans left the country before they might face such sanction, though their actions could hardly be considered voluntary. Wright and Oñate Zúñiga estimate that Chileans fled to between 110 and 140 different countries around the globe (2007: 36). For some, the destination may have been selected on the basis of cultural or personal affinities. For those forced to depart hastily, it was often the result of the willingness of embassies in Santiago to receive asylum seekers (contrary to the approach adopted by most European countries, the gates of the British embassy were locked). In other instances, destinations were the result of chance or the decision of an international organization working with willing host countries. WUS was one such body that emerged out of early civic efforts to help Chileans at risk, assisting Chilean refugees in the decade following the Pinochet coup. The longevity of the Regime meant that many experienced not a temporary but a lengthy exile which, despite the return of democracy to Chile, has extended into what [Roniger \(2016\)](#) has termed a 'post-exile', and Uruguayan writer [Benedetti \(1985\)](#) a 'dis-exile'. Both terms are intended to recognize the fact that the scars of exile cannot be completely healed, even over time or with return to the country of origin.

Many of the Chileans assisted by WUS were political refugees, either clandestinely fleeing repression or legally banished. Others were partners or relatives accompanying family members at risk. Some of the individuals whose experiences are included in this study were serially displaced, fleeing dictatorship first in Chile and then Argentina. In all, approximately 900 Chileans were assisted by WUS

over a decade (WUS 1986: 4). While this number is small in comparison to the Chileans who fled elsewhere (notably other countries of Latin America, Canada, Sweden, France, and Spain after the death of Franco), the WUS Chile scholarship programme is significant for its success in extracting Chileans who had suffered or were in danger of suffering political repression and torture, and who had also often been imprisoned. It also supported a number of Chileans who were studying in the UK at the time of the coup, or who had made their way there subsequently. The WUS story is one of an unprecedented collaboration between a national government and an NGO, which makes it a significant moment in the history of organized refugee policy in the UK.

### **Methodology**

This article draws on documentary research in the WUS archive, held in the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, and a series of in-depth interviews with 26 Chileans who were assisted by WUS. The role of the interviews was 2-fold: first, to confirm the structure and working of the WUS programme from the point of view of both WUS professionals and Chilean beneficiaries; second, to place on record the individual experiences and insights of the beneficiaries, permitting a richer assessment of the programme's scope, impact, and achievements almost five decades on. These interviews are 'late life' narratives (Bornat), which offer a longer perspective approximating to the life-story approach to oral history proposed by Chanfrault-Duchet. Chanfrault-Duchet analyses the life-story as a narrative construction of an individual's 'social self', which may be in tension with their 'inner self' (1991: 78). This, she argues is particularly the case for women. My interviews permit both an evaluation of the effects of the WUS scheme across the scope of beneficiaries' working lives, and insights into the impact of arriving, studying and working in the UK in terms of gendered social expectations.

Interviews were conducted with 14 men and 11 women, of whom 5 men and 6 women currently live in Chile, and 9 men and 6 women reside in the UK. Individual interviews were also conducted with three former members of WUS staff, as well as a round-table discussion with a number of WUS beneficiaries who went on to work in refugee support, either with WUS itself or in comparable organizations. Interviews were conducted in the period September 2017 to May 2019, by the author and a research assistant following a set of semi-structured questions. We met interviewees mostly in their homes—in London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Swansea, Plymouth, Leeds, Oxford, Brighton, and Coventry in the UK; in Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, and Santiago in Chile. Interviewees were invited to speak in English or Spanish, and slightly more than half of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. The Chilean interviewees were all first-generation exiles aged between 60 and 75. Because of the nature of the WUS scholarship programme, directed at students and academics, all were well educated and thus unrepresentative of the wider exile phenomenon in 1970s Chile. Interviewees had, in the majority, come to the UK in their early 20s; some were in relatively young relationships or recently married. They were recruited

directly, following public engagement events in the UK and Chile, and then by a snowballing approach through informal networking. As voluntary interviewees, their experience is not necessarily representative of the Chilean exile community in the UK. Each interview lasted approximately 60 min and all but one were audio recorded. Although informed in advance of the intention to audio record the interview, one interviewee declined at the last minute but expressed a wish to contribute to the project. Written field notes were made of the conversation. Interviewees have been anonymized and are indicated by a letter, as per the terms of the project's research ethics approval.

### **History of the WUS Scholarship Programme: Establishment, Structure, and Objectives**

On 13 October 1973, a number of UK academics held the first public meeting of a group entitled Academics for Chile (AFC) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Angell this volume). With a core membership of approximately 20, they were far from uncritical of the Allende Popular Unity government, but they were united in their revulsion at the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship (WUS 1986: 14). Realizing the need for institutional support to achieve the aim of working to assist the victims of such repression, AFC established links with WUS (UK) and they both became founders of a Joint Working Group for the Resettlement of Refugees from Chile (JWG), established in July 1974 to coordinate effective action in the UK. AFC was able to capitalize not only on a series of private donations but also on early offers of grants and fee-waivers from a range of UK universities. These included those with Centres of Latin American Studies, which had been established in the mid-1960s, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, and Liverpool. Other institutions, notably the Universities of Aberdeen, Essex, Warwick, and Portsmouth Polytechnic, which had opened the first Latin American Studies undergraduate degree in the country, were equally supportive. In these latter institutions, sympathetic intellectuals across a range of disciplines championed the Chilean's plight. Following the election of a Labour government in early 1974, AFC and WUS together successfully lobbied UK MPs and ministers to back their activities, while simultaneously gaining the crucial confidence of senior officials in WUS's capacity to deliver an effective refugee scholarship programme.

WUS's Chile programme emerged in the context of the 1974 Labour government's decision to support a section of skilled and educated Chileans who were the victims of brutality and whose plight had provoked an international outcry. Prior to Labour's election win, WUS had received a grant from the Ford Foundation which gave it funding and significant international backing. WUS's Chile scholarship programme was built on the concept that refugee education is both a developmental and a humanitarian activity, and in this, it paved the way for other refugee scholarship programmes and educational projects (WUS 1986: 4). The Pinochet Regime's repressive apparatus after September 1973 was unleashed not only against political actors and party leaders but across the Chilean academic

community. In all, 10,000 students are thought to have been expelled and 18,000 academics and students dismissed from higher education places; the Regime's persecution and purge of the academic community led to a reconfiguration of the Chilean university sector, with the 1980 University Reform Law formalizing the circumscription of intellectual endeavour to a functionalist role (WUS 1986: 11).

When WUS took on the Chilean scholarship programme in 1973, it already had experience of managing significant refugee scholarship programmes for Hungarians (1956) and Czechoslovaks (1968), bringing together university and government support to achieve this. However, the Chilean programme was considerably larger in scope and extended beyond refugees already in the UK to sustained international efforts to rescue Chileans imprisoned and in danger in Chile itself. Working with the Ministry of Overseas Development, and dealing with the ups and downs of varied political commitment and views at the Foreign Office and Home Office, WUS developed a markedly new approach:

The scheme's character, with its emphasis on developmental criteria was fundamentally determined by the fact that it was not the Home Office (responsible for UK asylum policy) nor the Department of Education and Science (responsible for UK education and training policy) that played the key official role: rather it was the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) which is responsible for British overseas aid policy and programmes. It is this involvement that sets the WUS(UK) programme apart from all other international assistance programmes for Chilean exiles. (WUS 1986: 15)

The channelling of assistance through the voluntary sector had the advantage, in the Chilean case, of greater sensitivity towards a group of refugees who had experienced abuse at the hands of their own government. Between 1974 and 1986, the UK contributed over £11 million to the WUS Chile programme (see WUS 1986: Appendix 1 for a breakdown of annual figures).

WUS established a Chile team and an awards committee with a prestigious membership (including Professor Dudley Seers, founding Director of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and Dr Lionel Butler, Principal of Royal Holloway College), whose support and involvement was vital to the organization's work in a delicate political climate (WUS 1986: Appendix 2). Also key to WUS' success in placing Chileans was the informal network of interested academics in universities across the UK, who could draw on disciplinary connections to identify the most fitting programmes for refugees. This network was enhanced by WUS caseworkers' own connections, for they were in the main recent modern languages graduates who had additional links in the British higher education sector at the time. In the early years, priority was given to those, such as political prisoners, who were in immediate danger, and the offer of a WUS scholarship helped to secure their release into exile (Seabrook 2013: 127). It also, as several interviewees noted, gave a sense of protection from further repression at the hands of the DINA, Pinochet's political police, while arrangements for their departure from Chile were made. As the Regime's grip on power consolidated, the

programme widened to include ‘social need’, by which the ODM recognized those who ‘have had their studies interrupted or have no possibility of finding suitable employment in Chile’ (WUS 1986: 16). As the DINA cast an ever-wider net of fear and repression, such a response became increasingly pressing. The Latin American base of the WUS Chile programme was initially handled through the Consejo Latino Americano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Council for Social Sciences, CLASCO), based in Buenos Aires, though it was later managed via a committee in Santiago and then through the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration (ICEM) and the Home Office (WUS 1975: 8). WUS colleagues in Chile and later in Buenos Aires, once the Argentinian political situation deteriorated, worked under the heat of repression, showing enormous personal commitment to the programme (WUS 1986: 18). In its 1975, the Pinochet Regime introduced a decree enabling prison sentences to be commuted to exile (Wright and Oñate Zúñiga 2007: 35). In such a context, awards became central in securing the release of detainees; nevertheless, in its 1975 *Annual Report* WUS noted that difficulties in obtaining a visa were a major obstacle to Chileans’ departure. Delays of up to 6 months, while applications were processed by the Home Office, not only created difficulties in arriving for the start of a new academic year (WUS 1975: 9), but also demonstrated a reluctant participation on the part of UK government as well as the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR). This was a delicate climate that WUS negotiated carefully and strategically (Tyndale 2010). International links would also be important. When WUS (Chile) was established in 1979, it drew upon the wider WUS profile for protection from the Regime, as Germán Molina has noted: ‘It was believed that it was part of the UN’ (interview quoted in Roniger et al. 2018: 94).

Within the UK, WUS established a clear administrative structure that included a number of caseworkers. Each scholarship holder was assigned a caseworker for the duration of their studies. Caseworkers—who at the height of the programme may have handled up to 100 cases—assisted with the payment of grants; liaised with universities and polytechnics, and with the Department of Health and Social Security; supported Chileans in seeking housing and training; and assisted their dependents (WUS 1986: 20). The pressures on caseworkers were enormous, and they noted the inadequacy of conventional social work practices in the case of exiled individuals who, they felt, were rendered passive recipients, thus making it more difficult to adapt to the conditions of exile (WUS 1986: 21; confirmed in interviews with Ms E. and Ms L.). Caseworkers also had little training in dealing with traumatized individuals and one noted the need at times to keep a professional distance to ‘safeguard’ oneself. As WUS itself noted, the Chile scholarships constituted ‘a tertiary-level educational/developmental programme of which the professional aspects did not square well, at least initially, with the responsibilities of a welfare agency’ (1986: 21). The situation in the UK was further complicated by the lack of a coherent overall policy and effective structures for dealing with large refugee influxes, in addition to the fact that Chileans who arrived after 1973 were politically attuned and vocal in their demands for adequate support. WUS’ early support for the formation of the JWG was significant in tackling such



problems. Through its advocacy for the creation of the British Refugee Council, WUS also played a significant role in transforming UK structures and policies with regard to refugee work. With hindsight, this was a major—if unexpected—result of the WUS programme, whose history is therefore important in relation to the development UK humanitarianism.

### Academic Outcomes and Challenges

The WUS Chile programme was characterized by a conjunction of educational and developmental goals, and this gave the programme a future-oriented dimension with social justice as a core concern. The programme was thus underpinned by an enabling desire to offer Chilean refugees the capability to continue their education and training, enjoy a sense of freedom and well-being, and thus attend to their broader life goals despite the disruption of sudden and enforced exile. An evaluation of the WUS programme illustrates how it not only responded to the crisis of the Pinochet Regime's violation of human rights but did so also with a social justice objective that both saved lives and helped people to rebuild their futures. If we assess the WUS programme through the lens of social justice—that is, in the words of Sen (2000: 285), the 'capacity to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value'—we find evidence of the programme's effectiveness not only through quantitative measures of educational achievement but also through a qualitative study of refugees' own perceptions of what they defined and valued as achievement in life, and the manner in which each sought to achieve this. I therefore briefly review data on the academic outcomes of the WUS Chile programme, and the particular challenges noted by WUS in its own evaluation, before complementing these with an analysis of the life narratives of interviewees over four decades later.

In its 1986 report, *A Study in Exile*, WUS noted an overall pass rate of 64% for its Chile scholarship programme, which is remarkable given the difficulties of embarking on academic study immediately after leaving one's home country in traumatic circumstances (WUS 1986: 7). This success rate also reflects the high standards of Chilean universities, which made WUS' job all the easier. As of 1986, 900 grants had been awarded, 606 to men and 294 to women (WUS 1986: 27). The majority, for both genders, went to individuals in the 25–29 age group, followed by a significant number to those aged 30–34 (WUS 1986: 27). The peak number of awards occurred in the academic year 1977–78 (WUS 1986: 27), and postgraduate qualifications predominated initially. As the programme developed and the needs of awardees changed, there was a swing to undergraduate study from 1975 on. Although awards to women were few at first, their numbers grew quickly in the late 1970s, and—notably—women ultimately achieved a higher percentage pass rate (69.7%) than men (60.9%). Nevertheless, the report noted that academic performance indicators were only one measure of success, and those who did not complete courses were likely to have benefitted from the experience in other ways (WUS 1986: 7). At a minimum, they were free and safe.

Chilean students faced a number of difficulties, not least the formal challenge of studying in a foreign language. Although the award criteria did include knowledge of English, and supplementary English language courses were provided in the UK, the structure of ODM (later ODA) funding—approved only on an annual basis, close to the beginning of the academic year—compressed considerably the time available for such training in advance of the commencement of a scholarship holder’s course of study. The ODA was keen to have people start courses as soon as possible, and delay threatened the loss of grants (WUS 1986: 34). This begs the question, did the ODA insistence on early entry to higher education increase the difficulties for Chileans and so impact success rates? One of my interviewees voluntarily decided to suspend her studies in order to improve her English, and can now look back on a successful career in social work. While this may be an instance of correlation rather than causation, it was clear to WUS, from the reports of tutors and lecturers supporting individual students at higher education institutions, that the demands of succeeding in English with little time to adjust increased the pressures upon Chileans. Of those who extended or deferred their studies, 36% cited language difficulties as the origin of their problems (WUS 1986: 34).

Perhaps not unexpectedly, psychological problems may have lain behind less competent academic performances, with confessions of language impediments or a different study culture concealing a deeper legacy of torture, physical and mental suffering, and difficulties in adjusting to life in the UK. Statistics do not easily reveal such information. As WUS itself judged:

The programme was based on the assumption that candidates were making a free and deliberate decision to study. In fact their choices were rather more circumscribed. Study courses are vital for many refugees in acquiring the credentials for rebuilding a constructive life, but we feel that other elements of resettlement provision need serious review. Adequate and comprehensive resettlement arrangements are needed to make education and training provision more effective. (WUS 1986: 35)

Material to evaluating the success of the programme was the fact that individuals in the 25–39 age group showed the strongest completion rate, raising the issue of life stage and expectations. It may have been harder for those over 40 to come to terms with the professional and personal disruption to their lives that exile inevitably brought, and thus to envision a new future. The experience of studying in exile also differed for men and women, with the latter statistically performing better in academic terms. I therefore draw on qualitative interviews with former scholarship holders to examine, first, how they view the scholarship programme and life in exile at a distance of 45 years, and, second, how the life narratives recounted in these interviews reveal contrasting gendered experiences.

### **Experiences of Former WUS Scholarship Holders**

In the light of Malkki’s call for researchers to present refugees as historical actors rather than mute, dehistoricized victims (1996: 378), I sought to supplement WUS’



own evaluation of its Chile scholarship programme with insights provided by former scholarship holders. In interviewing them, I was keen to understand how Chileans actively constructed new lives and how this self-realization may have been influenced by the new social context in which they found themselves in the UK. This changed social context was commented upon by both male and female interviewees, but evidence of a tension between socio-political expectations and individual ambitions and desires was most marked in the narratives of female participants.

The life stories narrated by my interviewees unfolded in at least a two spatial and temporal frames: the enormous upheavals in the Chile they left behind, and those they experienced in the UK, with its shifting political and power relations in the 1970s and '80s. The majority of my interviewees fled Chile following political repression, though the supposed infractions that had led to their detention, or the threat of it, were slight, including membership of a particular political party or academic work in a field such as sociology. As Sr A. noted, by the time he was arrested—like many WUS scholarship holders, he had been involved in leftist politics but was not a major figure—the Regime's repressive apparatus had extended across the whole of society and needed to be 'fed', as he put it, with the identification of ever more internal enemies. My interviewees echo long-standing historical research confirming the Regime's brutality, which was both direct and indirect. It involved abuse against individuals and threats to their families. Physical incarceration, mistreatment, beatings, electrocution, rape, being constantly blindfolded, and enduring loud noise were all mentioned. One interviewee recounted the manner in which the Regime would conceal its violence, noting the similarities for him of Chilean detention camps to German Second World War concentration camps. He also recounted how the Regime inflicted torture at first, would let individuals recover from their injuries, and then let them receive visits from their families. Another compared Chilean guards in the same detention camp to Nazi soldiers in their cruelty.

Many of the Chileans helped by WUS had thus been subjected to physical and mental torture, and were in the words of one, 'super vulnerable'. Beginning a course of study in a new country with limited linguistic and cultural knowledge was a huge challenge in itself; to do so straight out of prison or having fled persecution intensified these difficulties (on health issues, see [Gideon 2018](#) and this volume). WUS caseworkers interviewed for this research confirmed that they were not trained in providing supports to traumatized individuals, and although Chileans did organize informal support groups, professional help was limited. Three interviewees explicitly noted that they needed formal psychotherapy sessions, even if these were a financial drain. Two of my interviewees suspended their grants temporarily until they were able to study productively. Sra C. took a job in a factory in Yorkshire to support herself while she studied English at a local college. In her working environment, she encountered individuals who had migrated at an earlier moment in history—Polish workers who had arrived in the UK at the end of the Second World War—and learned the industrial history of the region, a memory of intercultural connection that she was keen to stress in interview.

Scholarship holders, as noted above, were not always free to choose their preferred course of study, an inherent limitation of the WUS scheme. Because of its development priorities, WUS funds were channelled towards study in this field, with a view to training Chileans who could, if able to return home, assist in the future development of their country or, if unable to return, work in development spheres elsewhere. Some 10 scholarship recipients went to Africa, and one that I interviewed worked in urban and management planning contexts in Tunisia and Morocco before later joining the British Refugee Council. However, the wife of a third interviewee, herself also a WUS scholar, was not able to study her preferred profession of acting, leading to considerable frustration. Another of my sample was unable to follow a course in music and instead studied management. He would later pursue his career preference as a musician and teacher, noting to me that he was thankful for he was ultimately able to develop a music career more easily in the UK than he believed he could have done in Chile.

### **Gender and Life Narratives: Tensions between Women's 'Social Selves' and 'Inner Selves'**

A number of interviews with female WUS beneficiaries reveal a perception of differential experiences and opportunities offered to men and their wives or partners by the WUS scheme. For example, some interviewees expressed a belief that grants were limited to one per household and only awardable to the husband, despite the fact that this was not part of the WUS selection criteria and both partners could hold an award if they each fulfilled the scheme parameters. Two female interviewees stated that, in order to ease access to a UK visa, they married their partners before leaving Chile, and both noted that the marriage was difficult as a result. For women who were in relationships where a grant had been given to a male partner, the result could be a sense of disenfranchisement and relegation to a secondary status. For example, although she admits clearly that men were more frequently the victims of direct repression within Chile, one woman stated that a husband's political activism and status as grant awardee conferred a sense of empowerment whereas their female partner was simply 'a spouse' (see also [Gideon 2018: 227](#)). Furthermore, a spouse's or other relative's efforts to secure the release of an individual and complete the paperwork relating to a WUS scholarship and UK visa were often carried out under intense indirect repression. A woman who was in contact with WUS in order to secure the release of her husband was followed by the DINA, had her house placed under surveillance, and suffered what she calls an extremely intense 'masquerade of repression', including knocks on her window at night, all of which instilled a deep-seated fear for her own safety. Such trauma has not, my interviewee argued, been fully recognized in prevailing narratives of Chilean exile and suffering.

We need, therefore, to attend to complex experiences of repression and victimhood, including gendered ones, in approaching these exile narratives. As Chanfrault-Duchet has suggested, life stories may be analysed according to particular narrative models or plots. She discusses the epic, the romanesque, and the

picaresque (1991: 80), proposing that such models help to give structure and coherence to life stories. Thus, the epic model offers a vision in which ‘the subject melds with the community’ through shared values which do not change; the romanesque ‘dramatizes a vision in which the subject views the possibilities of change through notions of ‘progress’ and individual challenge’; and the picaresque elaborates a vision ‘in which change is confronted through a questioning of the dominant social values’ (1991:81). In addition, in her feminist approach to life stories, Chanfrault-Duchet emphasizes the manner in which female life narratives are determined by ‘the collective representations of woman as they have been shaped by the society with which the woman being interviewed must deal’ (1991: 78). That is to say, not only do interviewees construct narratives according to recognizable models, but these models may highlight tensions and contradictions between one’s ‘social self’ and one’s ‘inner self’ (1991: 78). Chanfrault-Duchet’s proposition is that such tensions are more evident in female life stories, a point which is borne out by my corpus of interviews. I consider first three male interviewees, two of whose stories follow Chanfrault-Duchet’s epic model, and a third which might be said to display both epic and romanesque elements. I then examine women’s stories, which echo the picaresque model and, in addition, highlight tensions between Chilean and UK social expectations, and the women’s own political and social values.

Sr. H. recounted how he had studied Economics briefly in the UK before being invited to assist the Nicaraguan air force during the Revolution, a move that he interpreted as a ‘privileged’ opportunity to continue his earlier political commitment. This narrative fits within an epic model in which unchanging political and social values provide a coherent focus for a life lived across three different countries: Chile, the UK, and Nicaragua. A second interviewee, Sr. B., had studied Civil Engineering in Chile and was completing a doctoral thesis when he was imprisoned by the Pinochet Regime in the infamous Villa Grimaldi torture centre in Santiago. He surmised that his research on signals had led the authorities to suspect him of political subversion. Following his move to the UK and the successful completion of his studies, Sr. B. pursued a career in telecommunications and became involved in regional trade-union work. During the course of an hour-long interview, it became clear that the traumas of torture and dislocation had been tempered by this trade-union service, and Sr. B reiterated its importance frequently. His efforts in defending workers’ rights were, he said, a way of paying back the support the British people had shown him. This commitment to union work was not just a source of pride, but a story of grateful service articulated as an epic narrative in which Sr. B. was able to manifest his earlier political solidarity in a new context. In short, Sr. B.’s social values provided a means to heal the dislocation between his life in Chile and his experience of extended exile. A third interviewee, Sr. F., recounted how he had forged a successful international career in IT, made possible because of his WUS studies and his careful choice of a postgraduate diploma in the then-emerging area of Computer Science. While the underpinning structure of this part of the life narrative was a romanesque tale of individual success in the face of challenges, the interviewee went on to

recount a shift towards an epic model comparable to the social justice concerns of Srs H. and B. After 16 years of travelling in planes and taxis, Sr. F. began to feel declining job satisfaction in the corporate world. Instead, he wished to do something that had a direct impact on people's wellbeing and was now engaged in providing home care and support for individuals with dementia. This same interviewee had also narrated how, as young trainee PE teacher, his politics had been influenced by seeing the poverty of Chilean children too tired to exercise because they had not had breakfast. While all of these individuals had found their political values—no matter how strongly or weakly articulated through activism—in conflict with the Pinochet dictatorship, none of them narrated a conflict between their own aspirations and values, and their UK exile experience. Instead, they each structured their life story as the coherent expression of a particular social self which coincided with their inner values.

In contrast, while there were some female interviewees who recounted similar stories of career satisfaction—one, for example, setting up a maternity hospital in post-Revolution Nicaragua, and another working in Ernesto Cardenal's Culture Ministry—there was a weaker sense of unified focus and coherence across the life span of the majority of women who participated in interviews. Women were more likely to present successes as short-lived career highlights tempered by moments of considerable challenge which led them to question traditional social structures. A number of Chilean women emphasized the extent to which their move to the UK had forced them to confront tensions between the political values that they had upheld in Chile and the experience of life in exile in the UK. Sra C. and Sra G. both noted a conflict between left-wing Chilean politics and the feminist discourses that they encountered studying in the UK, which we might interpret as picaresque narratives that reveal a conflict between two different socially determined selves: the Chilean context from which they had fled, and the UK environment in which they now found themselves. Both felt that the UK academic contexts in which they studied were more aligned with their particular social values, pointing to a contradiction within left-wing politics in Chile. Sra G. found herself studying at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham under the guidance of Stuart Hall. Her Chilean Socialist militancy had focused on class and party issues, but these now conflicted with her growing recognition that in Chilean political circles women 'took notes and made coffee' at meetings, and were not regarded as equal discussants. Sra C. encountered similar political strictures, in that her party colleagues wanted her to discuss her experiences of torture as part of a campaign to raise UK public awareness of the brutality of the Pinochet Regime. She did not wish to reveal such intimate details in public, and became acutely conscious of the fact that her political compatriots also did not welcome her interest in feminism and assertion of individual political identity. She credits reading Hartmann's article, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism', during her studies as having 'opened her eyes' to an inherent conflict that would lead her to end her political party membership. 'The left

has always been ambivalent about the women's movement,' writes Hartmann (1979: 23),

often viewing it as dangerous to the cause of socialist revolution. When left women espouse feminism, it may be personally threatening to left men. And of course many left organizations benefit from the labour of women. Therefore, many left analyses (both in progressive and traditional forms) are self-serving, both theoretically and politically. They seek to influence women to abandon their attempt to develop an independent understanding of women's situation and to adopt their understanding of the situation.

One can see how this might be relevant to political contexts where women took notes, made tea and, as Sra D. recalled to me, *empanadas* (or Chilean meat pasties) to raise money for the cause. In the experience of a significant number of Chilean women who were politically active when they arrived in the UK, forced migration to a new context not only 'shed light on the shifting power relations embedded in gender' (Hanson 2010: 8), but led them to identify a conflict between their inner aspirations and values, the socially determined selves expected in Chile and later in the Chilean exile community, and the opportunities which life in the UK offered to establish new social selves. These women offered picaresque tales in which the disruptions of exile led them to challenge dominant social values. They highlighted the extent to which studying and living in the UK increased their awareness of contradictions, as Chanfrault-Duchet might put it, between their inner selves, the social selves determined by Chilean society and leftist politics, and the differing social selves enabled by the encounter with feminism in the UK. For two of my interviewees, this contradiction opened new perspectives, enabling them to develop different social selves and assert individual agency in shaping their futures. One now looks back on a successful career as a social worker; the other was instrumental in establishing women's organizations and research projects in Chile.

Of course, not all the life narratives recounted for this research conveyed a sense of personal fulfilment in overcoming the tension between social expectations, and personal aspirations and values. Women especially made reference to difficulties in securing work as well as recourse to more menial jobs such as cleaning at more than one moment of financial difficulty. The case of Sra D. may stand as an illustration. She expressed her difficulties as a single mother whose husband had left her shortly after arriving in the UK in terms of being 'devoid of any agency'. She also signalled the ups and downs in her life story with the refrain, 'back to cleaning', to mark moments of particular difficulty. It was only when she became involved in running a Chilean Saturday School in North London in the mid-1980s that she began to feel a sense of fulfilment; that period 'meant a lot' to her in terms of her contribution to the Chilean community. Sra C. reflected with hindsight that at the time she 'didn't realize she was surviving' in those early months in the UK by establishing a daily routine and being what she described as a 'goody goody'. We thus need to pay attention to the intersections between the experience of exile, its

remembrance four and a half decades later, and the transformation of those memories into narratives—that is, into stories constructed from particular vantage points in time and according to particular models such as the epic, romanesque, and picaresque—if we are to understand the ways in which interviewees structure late-life reflections and evaluate individual achievements.

### Conclusion

When WUS issued its 1986 report into the Chile scholarship scheme, entitled *A Study in Exile*, it presented it as ‘the largest test case’ of an educational training and development programme operating in the UK (WUS 1986: 5). The initial success of the scheme led to similar NGO-UK government collaborative projects to support Ethiopian and Ugandan refugees and highlighted the need for a comprehensive refugee education policy in the UK. Provision of access to social welfare supports as well as third-level study on the same basis as UK home students are singular characteristics of the WUS programme. Its development model largely followed the idea of Western professionals acting within a binary vision of Chilean migration to the UK as a temporary experience that would hopefully lead to a voluntary return movement beneficial to the reestablishment of Chilean democracy. In this sense, the programme was of its time, and should be judged as such. It responded to a specific traumatic upheaval though the available legal and governmental structures, which then shaped the nature of the support provided. It also expressed its objectives and evaluated its achievements using a development vocabulary meaningful to the ODA, for whom the 1986 report was written.

Success was envisaged in the 1986 report principally in terms of course completion rates, and WUS itself noted the need for more granular studies of the impact of age, gender, subject, and level of study on these figures (WUS 1986: 35). Conceptions of exile and their effect upon identities and subjectivities have become more complex, multifaceted and transnational in recent years. An evaluation of the WUS scheme which draws on interviews with participants thus facilitates a richer and more rounded understanding of the programme’s impact on Chilean exiles. In approaching these interviews as late-life narratives with particular plots which enable interviewees to structure their experiences meaningfully, this research reveals that the statistical success attributed by WUS to female beneficiaries conceals a series of challenges at the level of everyday experience. Moreover, these challenges shape the narratives that women remember over four decades later, underscoring Chanfrault-Duchet’s work on feminist oral narratives and the tensions which they reveal between social and inner selves. Approaching interviews as narratives permits interviewees to communicate their own perceptions of achievement in life, not only giving voice to former refugees, and thus historicizing and contextualizing their evaluations, but highlighting the fact that—as the life stories discussed here reveal—the sense of achievement and self-realization which former refugees recount at a temporal distance may differ from those which they identified earlier in life and may point to a sense of fulfilment deriving precisely from having challenged prevailing social expectations.



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