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The MAPU-Lautaro Then and Now: The Chilean Struggle to Spark Revolution Through the Creation of Revolutionary Subjects

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The MAPU-Lautaro Then and Now: The Chilean Struggle to Spark Revolution Through the Creation of Revolutionary Subjects

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

by

Christopher Brennan

Committee in charge:
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Professor Scott Desposato
Professor Christine Hunefeldt

2018
The thesis of Christopher Brennan is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:
DEDICATION

Para los de la Fetra
Hay hombres que luchan un día y son buenos.
Hay otros que luchan un año y son mejores.
Hay quienes luchan muchos años, y son muy buenos.
Pero hay los que luchan toda la vida, esos son los imprescindibles.
-Bertolt Brecht
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page .................................................................................................................. iii
Dedication ....................................................................................................................... iv
Epigraph ........................................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... ix
Abstract of the Thesis ................................................................................................. x
Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: Historical Overview .............................................................................. 5
   The Lead Up to the Allende Years ........................................................................... 5
   La vía pacífica al socialismo- Allende and the Collapse of Democracy ............... 8
   Pinochet, Chicago boys, 1980 Constitution ............................................................ 11
   1982-83 Recession, 1983 National Protests, Plebiscite, ‘democracia cartucha’ .... 15
   Revival of Protests: 2011 Chilean Student Movement ........................................ 20

Chapter Two: Characteristics and Historical Overview of the MAPU-Lautaro ......... 24
   1983-1986: Subversion of the Masses .................................................................... 27
   First Actions of the MAPU-LAUTARO: Bata Footwear ..................................... 29
   Chickens in the Streets: Rerouting of Hijacked Trucks to the Poblaciones .......... 30
   Prelude to the Escalation of Violence: 1985 ......................................................... 32
   1987-1991: Unleashing the Insurrectional War of the Masses ............................. 33
   Rescue of Marco Ariel Antonioletti ..................................................................... 37
1992-94: Lautaro on the Run ................................................................. 40
Matanza de Apoquindo ................................................................. 41
Imprisonment of Guillermo Ossandón: A Dream Deferred ............... 42
Classification of Direct Actions ......................................................... 43
“Marxista-Leninista-Mapucista-Lautarino” ........................................ 46
Organization and Structure of The Lautaro ...................................... 49
Chapter Three: Analysis of the Ideology and Praxis of the MAPU-Lautaro ................................................................. 50
‘Felicidad’, ‘Alegría’, ‘Aquí y Ahora’ .............................................. 55
‘El Sexo Nuestro’ ........................................................................ 56
Gender Politics Within the MAPU-Lautaro .................................... 58
Lautarino Way of Being, Attempt To Influence Culture .................. 61
Conclusion ...................................................................................... 63
Chapter Four: Analysis of Participant Interviews ............................. 66
Acceptance: View of Institutional Politics ...................................... 68
Lack of faith in the Effectiveness of Social Movements .................. 69
Current Ideology ........................................................................... 70
Resistance: Continued Attempt to Influence Consciousness ........... 72
Hope: Prospects for the Future ...................................................... 76
References ..................................................................................... 78
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Cardboard democracy, protests ................................................................. 19

Figure 2.1: ¿Y qué?! ........................................................................................................ 28

Figure 2.2: Confrontations with the State ..................................................................... 35

Figure 2.3: Member of the FRPL posing with ‘SUZI’ ...................................................... 36

Figure 2.4: La toma de lo cotidiano ............................................................................... 39

Figure 2.5: Truck Recuperations by the Lautaro ............................................................. 44

Figure 2.6: Attacks and Ambushes ............................................................................... 45

Figure 3.1: Mottos of the MAPU, Lautaro, and FRPL .................................................... 54

Figure 3.2: ‘Mujer Metralleta’ ....................................................................................... 60

Figure 3.3: The Lautaro in the news .............................................................................. 65
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The MAPU-Lautaro Then and Now: The Chilean Struggle to Spark Revolution Through the Creation of Revolutionary Subjects

by

Christopher Hancock Brennan

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Nancy Grey Postero, Chair

Abstract:

This thesis is a narrative and analysis of the MAPU-Lautaro, a Chilean Marxist-Leninist organization active from 1983-1994. The group fought to replace socioeconomic inequality and the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship with a Socialist vision for Chilean society. Through direct action the group aimed to alter the mindset of the Chilean population and thereby spark revolutionary consciousness within the working class. Members of the Lautaro, as they preferred to be called, recuperated basic goods and redistributed them in Santiago’s poorest neighborhoods. They later became increasingly involved in more violent actions and confrontations with Chilean security forces, eventually leading to the dismemberment of the group. Interviews with former members were conducted to gauge their levels of engagement in politics and social movements and to determine the forms of resistance they are currently engaged in.
On June 10, 2012, a few thousand Chileans gathered at the Caupolicán Theatre in downtown Santiago to pay tribute to Augusto Pinochet, the former dictator (1973-1990) and, later, Senator-for-life. They watched and applauded the documentary “Pinochet,” which tells the story of the general who saved Chile from the brink of collapse and communism. Attendees chanted “Chi-Chi-Chi-le-le-le, viva Chile Pinochet” and cheerfully sung Pinochet’s name. Many repeated the phrase, “se la buscaron”, best translated as “they asked for it”, referring to those who were detained, tortured, or disappeared by the military government. Pinochet’s grandson, Augusto Pinochet Molina, spoke at the event, emphasizing that the distortion of history must be corrected, and that the event was meant to honor history and to recognize the hard work of so many Chileans to rebuild the nation. The event’s organizer declared that he was pleased; the event broke 20 years of silence, during which Chileans were forced to listen to perversions of history. The ex-minister of the military junta stressed the importance of the film shown for Chile’s youth, which in his opinion has been sold a false historical narrative, badly skewed to the left. One elderly woman expressed this perspective eloquently, saying, “we have our truth”. As they left they theatre, the pinochetistas, - those who supported the late general and his vision for Chile, - were confronted by protestors who shouted at and assaulted many of them. The protestors had a starkly different view of the military junta and its legacy. They held signs saying ‘Ni perdón ni olvido’ (don’t forgive or forget) and ‘no a la herencia de la dictadura.’ (no to the legacy of the dictatorship) as well as pictures of loved ones who went missing during the era, with the interrogative ‘donde están?’ (where are they?). Generals identified as torturers were spat on and brutalized. Riot police
used barricades, tear gas, and water cannons to control the crowds that gathered to protest the event.

Although the attendees who filled the Caupolicán Theatre may represent the most daring element of *pinochetismo*, in their public and unabashed celebration of such a controversial figure, the sentiments they expressed are not uncommon. For many, Pinochet is a heroic figure who saved Chile from the fate of ‘going socialist’, or – worse – becoming another Cuba (Stern 2006: 7). Apologists frequently can be heard to say, ‘*hay que admitir que salvó al país*’ (you have to admit that he saved the country). On the eve of the millennium, eight years after the democratic transition and the revelation of many of the abuses of the dictatorship, an estimated two-fifths of Chileans held this view of the dictatorship that ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990 (Stern 2006: 7).

On September 11, 2016, I attended the annual protest march marking the anniversary of the coup d’État that began the military reign and ushered in a drastic economic restructuring of the country. Every year, thousands march through downtown Santiago, along the Alameda and toward the municipal cemetery. They march to protest the impunity during the dictatorship years, and to commemorate the trauma of torture, murder, and repression. But the march is not stuck in the past: it is a clear message to those in power, to the Chilean elite, and to the Pinochet sympathizers that they are opposed to the current state of affairs in Chile. They do not feel they are represented in the current neoliberal economic system, and they do not share the belief that the country is better off due to the military intervention of 1973.

This is the story of the poor, the working class, the disadvantaged, of those who see the Chile created by the dictatorship as a nightmare instead of a miracle. It is the story of a group of young Chileans who grew up in the aftermath of the coup, and suffered personally from state terror, yet saw beyond repressive governmental tactics and sought to destroy the structures which allowed
for abject poverty and inequality. It is the chronicle of the MAPU-Lautaro, a group of young people who rejected the misery that surrounded them and of their attempt to change the hearts and minds of their peers in order to create a classless society.

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter is a historical overview of political mobilization in Chile in the years that led up to Allende’s Popular Unity government and his attempt to incorporate socialist policies into a capitalist economy through democratic means. Those years provide important context to the political situation in Chilean society in the years following Allende’s dismissal from power. The history of the mass migration of peasant farm workers from the countryside to the city – a phenomenon instrumental to the election of Allende’s coalition – goes back farther than the history I recount here. Nevertheless, I chose to begin the narrative in the 1950s because it provides the basic context necessary for the reader without being too exhaustive to read. The historical background tracks crucial events in the arc of Chile’s recent political history, ending with the Chilean Student Movement of 2011, the demands of which are still being contested in the streets of Santiago and throughout Chile.

The second chapter presents the characteristics and history of the MAPU-Lautaro during the years they were active (from 1983 – 1994). There, I discuss the most common types of actions they engaged in, as well as those for which they came to be most notorious. Chapter three discusses the ideology and worldview of the group, which I regard as their most original and significant contribution to revolutionary struggle. This chapter describes the novel ways in which they actively engaged in politics and shines a spotlight on the political theatre which confounded the traditional Left and bedeviled Chile’s police forces throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s.

The final chapter is a compilation and analysis of my interviews with several former militants of the MAPU-Lautaro. Throughout this thesis, I reference these interviews and, when
appropriate, weave them into the narrative of each chapter to provide depth and perspective on Chile’s history through the eyes of the Lautaro.

The research for the thesis consists primarily of secondary source materials compiled in 2016. This includes several theses written in Spanish about the MAPU-Lautaro, many of which include interviews of former militants. I have drawn heavily from two sources in particular because of their proximity to the group. One was written by the son of a former militant, Nicolás Acevedo, and the second, written by Alvaro González Olivares, which compiles his and other Lautarinos’ first-hand accounts of their past actions.

My overarching objective is to tell a story, for the first time in English, of a group who battled and – in the eyes of outsiders – seem to have lost, but for whom the fight continues in their daily lives in Santiago, Chile.
Chapter One: Historical Overview

To comprehend the motivations which guided the actions of the MAPU-Lautaro, we must look not only at the origins of the group in particular, but also at the context in which it arose. Thus, it is necessary to review the social and political conditions that led to not only the coup, but to Salvador Allende’s accession to the presidency as the region’s only democratically elected socialist. In addition to the rupture of Chile’s long democratic tradition, the military coup led by Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1973, represents a drastic alteration to the political and economic trajectory Chile had embarked upon.

The Lead Up to the Allende Years

First, it is important to dispel the myth that Chile was a socialist utopia in the years prior to Allende’s election in 1970. The Chilean political landscape was badly split between multiple competing factions. According to Smith, the four major parties which vied for power in Chile were the Conservative and Liberal parties, which made up the Right; the centrist Radicals; the Marxist Left, composed primarily of the Communists and Socialists; and the Christian Democrats, a centrist reform-oriented party (2014: 282).

The electorate exhibited high rates of participation but was increasingly polarized. Due to the existence of these factions, it was rarely possible for a presidential candidate to win a clear majority. The Chilean constitution provided that if no candidate won a majority of the vote, then Congress should vote to install the candidate who won the most votes. Congress customarily followed this provision and Chilean citizens routinely accepted the results of these elections, no matter how hotly contested they were. This was the case in the 1952 election, when former General Juan Carlos Ibáñez won the election with a 47% plurality. Similarly, in 1958, conservative
candidate Jorge Alessandri assumed office with 31.2% of the vote. He defeated Salvador Allende, who won 28.5% of the vote as the leader of the Socialist-Communist coalition, and Eduardo Frei, who represented the upstart Christian Democrats (PDC), who won 20.5% of the vote (Valenzuela 1978: 40).

In 1964, the conservative Right formed a coalition with the Christian Democrats, choosing Eduardo Frei to head their unlikely alliance. Ideologically, the conservatives did not agree with the reforms promoted by the PDC but believed that they constituted the lesser of two evils: they feared that Allende’s FRAP (Popular Action Front - a coalition of the Socialist, Communist, and other leftist parties) was becoming too powerful and represented a real threat to win the election. Allende had won nearly a third of the vote in the previous cycle and the FRAP was gaining popularity. A cold war mentality pervaded the campaign, as the PDC painted Allende’s FRAP as a Soviet political front and warned that “the opposition would turn Chile into another Cuba”. The PDC campaign promised a ‘Revolution in Liberty’ as the solution to mounting social problems resulting from Chile’s existing strategy of capitalist development through industrialization and urbanization. Meanwhile, rural poor were migrating in large numbers to the cities, which lacked the infrastructure to properly accommodate and educate them. This influx of people to the cities, combined with electoral reforms meant that the previously marginalized rural poor represented a source of untapped political power that parties from the Center and Left both hoped to tap (Schneider 2007: 351-2). As exhibited by the alliance between the conservatives and the PDC reflected, this pressure also forced the Right to concede reforms on social issues it otherwise would have ignored. In the event, Frei won handily with 55.7% of the votes against Allende’s 38.6% (Valenzuela 1978: 40), however, the so-called ‘revolution’ was anything but. Instead, the plan consisted of reforms which, “called for a more efficient capitalist economy, to be achieved by such
measures as agrarian reform through the expropriation of underused land, increased public housing, and greater control over the U.S. copper companies through Chilean acquisition of part ownership” (Smith 2014: 283).

The results of the elections in 1952, 1958, and 1964 demonstrated the growing influence of the urban poor and the left, two overlapping groups previously excluded from the electorate. The Chilean population grew considerably in the middle of the 20th century, from just over 500,000 citizens to nearly 1.5 million in 1958, and upwards of 3.5 million in 1970 (Valenzuela 1978: 40). Due to this growing influence, each of the major parties that had taken turns governing Chile attempted to ameliorate the economic and social problems caused by urbanization (Smith 2014: 282). Ibáñez tried to tackle inflation through IMF-imposed austerity measures, which led to widespread riots in Chile’s cities. The power of labor unions made it difficult for the Ibáñez’s government to maintain anti-inflation policies (Smith 2014: 281). Similarly, Jorge Alessandri addressed Chile’s problems with a conservative political and economic approach consisting of free market economics, favorable conditions for foreign investment, and an orthodox monetary policy (Smith 2014: 281). Foreign funds financed large-scale public works projects to allay fears of a violent communist takeover during Alessandri’s reign (Smith 2014: 282). Alessandri’s government was the first to introduce agrarian reform measures, enacted in 1962 (Cohen 1994: 98). Although they did not go far enough in the eyes of the FRAP, they represented the first overture toward addressing socioeconomic inequality. The growing influence of the Left was particularly evident during the Frei administration, which passed legislation that restructured Chilean society: agrarian reform was strengthened, unionization was legalized, and the minimum wage was extended to the countryside (Cohen 1994: 101). The popular desire for social change was a thorn in the side of the conservative elite, who had to effectively manage those desires or
face the possibility of losing power to those who favored more radical solutions to the country’s social problems.

As summarized by Valenzuela, the social landscape in the years leading up to Allende’s election were characterized by high levels of inequality and a poor standard of living for most of the population. The most important result of these years was that they gave rise to a strong Left, which resulted in the polarization of Chilean politics and the implantation of significant reforms, particularly in terms of the agrarian system. This altered the political landscape such that “the support of the Left gave middle-class parties the necessary impetus to achieve control of the government and to bring about a whole array of reforms that benefited the working class” (Valenzuela 1978: xii).

La vía pacífica al socialismo - Allende and the collapse of democracy

The pressures exerted from the increasingly powerful Left culminated in the election of Salvador Allende in 1970. Although the reforms enacted under Frei’s government represented a step in the right direction, they were not enough in the eyes of the electorate. The Popular Unity took advantage of this sentiment, branding the PDC as sellouts, in the pocket of the domestic elite (Smith 2014: 284). Overselling the ‘Revolution in Liberty’ was partially to blame; although agrarian reform did indeed take place, it did not meet the expectations that its proponents’ rhetoric had engendered. In this election cycle, a three-way race returned. The Right retreated to its ideological roots, disillusioned with the agrarian reforms enacted by their previous allies, and once again selected Jorge Alessandri as its candidate (Valenzuela 1978: 39).
Allende’s victory in the presidential election followed the trend of highly contested and split elections, but came with an addendum: Stated bluntly by Valenzuela, “the basic fact of the Allende presidency from the very outset was that it constituted a minority presidency” (Valenzuela 1978: 41). While he was indeed the first Marxist to be elected by a popular vote, that vote was won by a narrow plurality, not a majority. Allende captured 36.2% of the vote compared with 34.9% for Alessandri, followed by the Christian Democrat candidate with 27.8% of the vote (Valenzuela 1978: 40). Although the results weren’t much different numerically from Alessandri’s victory in 1958 (he beat Allende that year by a 2.7% margin), Allende’s assumption of the presidency was anything but a formality, as it had been for Ibáñez and Alessandri, where a joint session of Congress voted to elect the candidate that had received the highest plurality. The fears associated with the type of legislation Allende might enact made this a special case. Thus, his “accession was contingent upon the support of the Christian Democrats, because his coalition was eighteen seats short of a majority in Congress, and the necessary additional votes could only come from the centrist PDC” (Cohen 1994: 99). To get the votes he needed from Congress, Allende had to provide assurances to the more conservative members of the PDC that he would respect democratic processes, and he did so by signing a Statute of Democratic Guarantees - an ominous sign considering that previous presidents had been elected by plurality without provoking such worry (Cohen 1994: 100). When Allende entered office, there was wide support for social reforms from all parties but those situated on the extreme right. Tensions centered on the speed and extent to which these social policies would be enacted.

From the outset, Allende’s administration faced a political quagmire. Those more leftist elements in the UP, such as the Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) and the radical factions within the Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitario (MAPU; the party from which the
Lautaro originated) did not believe that socialism could be implemented by peaceful means. They saw in Allende’s election a small window of opportunity that needed to be grasped immediately, and therefore pressured the president to pass radical reforms. As Schneider proposes, these factions, along with their “followers in the labor movement [took] actions to bring about the establishment of socialism ahead of and beyond the government through land seizures and factory occupations…In an unruly process of uprooting and replacing, rather than reforming and transforming, formal institutional channels of policymaking and political compromise broke down or were bypassed” (Schneider 2007: 356). On the other hand, measures considered too timid for the radical left were far too drastic for the Christian Democrats and conservative right. They controlled enough of Congress to block Allende’s legislation, and made it clear that they would allow only incremental reforms. In the political arena, Allende needed to proceed at a moderate pace, similar to that which Frei had pursued; anything more would alienate the Christian Democrats and confirm the Cold War mentality-stoked fear that he would ‘turn Chile into another Cuba’ (Cohen 1994: 100).

As the UP encountered obstacles they could not overcome in Congress, they utilized obscure legislation passed during the Frei administration to continue their political and economic agendas. This included the seizure and expropriation of “over 1,300 [agrarian] properties during 1971 alone, a number which exceeded the total property seizures of six years of the previous [Frei] administration” (Cohen 1994: 106). “In addition, the government raised the basic wage by almost 67 percent over the previous year, and by the middle of 1971 the average income per employee had increased by 55 percent. All of these actions were accompanied by a great expansion of social services such as education, health, housing, and sanitation” (Cohen 1994: 106,7). Allende also took over as many as 200 industries by the end of 1972 (Stern 2004: 21). Such actions had the
consequence of further polarizing an already volatile political landscape and led the Right to intensify its hardline stance against the road to socialism.

The middle fell out; moderates in both the PDC and UP were forced to side with the more radical elements in their respective coalitions. This situation could only have been avoided if moderates trusted and worked with each other, but to do this, “the moderates would thus have [had] to break with their extremist allies (or potential allies) unequivocally...the Chileans were caught in a prisoner’s dilemma game in which the rational strategy for each side was to maintain its ties to the extremists in its own coalition” (Cohen 1994: 104). According to Valenzuela, this fate was clear beginning with the election, which showed that “the Christian Democrats had been primarily a Center artificially created by the polarization of the system” (1978: 41). This prisoner's dilemma, created because the PDC and UP could not come to an agreement regarding the level of state control of the Chilean economy, led to a political deadlock that brought Chile’s democracy to a standstill, and ultimately ended with the violent overthrow of Allende.

Pinochet, Chicago boys, 1980 Constitution

On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, with the cooperation of the leaders of Chile’s national police, navy, and air force, bombarded the presidential palace, ending Latin America’s longest standing democracy. In the months that followed, thousands of Allende’s supporters were arrested and held at the national stadium, where they were tortured and many were ‘disappeared’—a juridical word which means they were killed without judicial process or records of their deaths. According to Schneider, the military junta attempted to eradicate all traces of the UP, fearing the power and loyalty of its constituents (2007: 358). In the years that followed, the regime maintained their reign of terror, engaging in an internal war against the ‘Marxist cancer’.
Those who had supported Allende, those who held progressive political and social views, or those who were actively engaged in leftist organizing were deemed ‘subversives’ and were pursued by military agents. A thousand such subversives were tortured and disappeared in the five years that followed the Chilean coup (Schneider 2007: 359).

As part of the war against Marxism, which came to include anything that resembled progressive social reforms, the military junta embarked on a complete demolition and reconstruction of the country’s political system. They attempted to make impossible the kind of political polarization which, in their estimation, led to the collapse of democracy. They suspended the constitution, dissolved Congress, and declared political parties illegal (Smith 2014: 290). A major restructuring of the country’s political institutions and economic system followed. Even reforms dating from before the Allende years, such as the right to strike, job security, education, and health care were abolished or severely limited in the process (Valenzuela 1978: 109-110).

The early years of the Pinochet regime were particularly arduous for workers. The government set out on an economic stabilization program to control rampant inflation. This was achieved through the freezing of wages and the removal of price constraints, in addition to the cutting of social programs and public investment (Winn 2004: 26). Stabilization was achieved, but on the backs of the laborers, who “complained of being reduced to a diet of ‘bread, tea, and onions’” (Winn 2004: 26). One interviewee, when speaking of this period of scarcity, said that it ruined his childhood from a humane point of view, and forced him to rebel (interview Andrés).

In addition to abolishing progressive social reforms and a reworking of the political system, Pinochet’s dictatorial regime embarked on a project of liberalization and privatization of the economy which were detrimental to the poor and working class in Chile. The Washington Consensus-style reforms implemented throughout Latin America following the debt crisis of the
1980’s were applied early in Chile. After initial debate on whether to pursue a pro-market but protectionist economy, the military junta opted to turn the reins over to the “Chicago Boys,” economists trained at the University of Chicago under Milton Friedman, who promoted an orthodox implementation of neoliberal economic theory in Chile (Winn 2004: 25,26). Friedman visited Chile to champion his economic vision while calling for more “shock treatment,” that is, the kind of the policies which led workers to complain of their diet of bread, tea, and onions. Specifically, these measures nullified many reforms implemented by the Christian Democrats under Frei and by Allende, including the “privatization of state-owned enterprises, the reduction of the public sector, the liberalization of the foreign sector (both the current and capital accounts of the balance of payments), the liberalization of the domestic financial sector, and the freeing of other key markets” (Edwards 1985). The transition to this unbridled version of neoliberalism was fully realized in 1978, when “tariffs, which averaged 94 percent in 1973, were cut to 10 percent in 1979. Public spending was slashed to one-half of its 1973 level as a percentage of GNP, amid a new round of privatizations. Prices were freed and the banking system and financial markets deregulated. A new probusiness labor code was decreed and social security was privatized” (Winn 2004: 28). Inherent in these policies was a backlash against the power of the Left; de-industrialization weakened their social base and punished workers for their role in the failed socialist project. The neoliberal project represented an effort to make sure that the Left, particularly the workers and urban poor, would not and could not exert such influence in the political sphere going forward.

Solidification of these reforms was accomplished through the constitution of 1980. Due to international pressures stemming from human rights abuses of his regime, Pinochet, at the request of his advisers, moved to institutionalize and legitimize his rule through the pretense of a plebiscite
calling for a ‘protected democracy’ (Winn 2004: 29). As can be expected given the intolerance of dissent at the time, the Left was barred from contributing to what is still the foundational statute of the nation today (Winn 2004: 30). The plebiscite won by a wide margin, but the legitimacy of the election was widely questioned. Pinochet ran unopposed and the ballot read “Faced with international aggression unleashed against our country, I support President Pinochet in his defense of Chile’s dignity, and I reaffirm the legitimacy of the Government of the Republic to sovereignly lead the process of institutionalization”. The constitution was structured in a manner that made it difficult to amend, forging political and economic rules of the game that future governments would not be able to alter (Winn 2004: 30).

In addition to the constitution, labor legislation, called the ‘Plan Laboral,’ was passed that strongly favored employers and further weakened the “workers and unions that formed the central political base of the Left.” (Winn 31: 2004) The kind of resistance seen during the Ibáñez regime to anti-labor policies (which rendered the government ineffective) was repressed and made impossible during the dictatorship years. The trajectory of Chile in the fifty years leading up to the coup reflected the will of an electorate that increasingly skewed to the Left, including a sizable element that desired social progress and equity. Pinochet’s coup brought not only the trauma of authoritarianism, but also a shift back to labor conditions that were worse than those previous to the enactment of the Labor Code of 1931, which legally made labor relations more equitable (Winn 35: 2004). The new decrees were such that Campero and Valenzuela, in their study on the labor movement under the dictatorship, concluded that ‘the right to strike [did] not exist in Chile’ (cited in Winn 35: 2004).

Patricio Navia sums up the historiographical consensus regarding Pinochet’s legacy: economic reforms and human rights violations. He further elaborates that “the dictatorship years
will go down in history as the period in which a new economic model was adopted that profoundly transformed the country” (2003: 33). For the radical Left and the working classes who proportionally gained much less from the economic growth brought by neoliberalism, the duality of this legacy is particularly harsh: they did not benefit from the economic gains, yet bore the trauma of the human rights violations.

1982-83 Recession, 1983 National Protests, Plebiscite, ‘democracia cartucha’

While the plebiscite of 1988 marked the beginning of the end of Pinochet’s reign, that event was triggered by the economic crisis of 1982-83. Edwards describes the figures associated with one of the largest economic recessions to hit Chile:

By late 1981 it became apparent that the high rates of growth experienced during the previous years were coming to an end. The fourth quarter of 1981 was characterized by extraordinarily high real interest rates (over 40%); a huge current account deficit, amounting to almost 15% of GDP; rising unemployment; and a reduction of real GDP of 3.3% with respect to the fourth quarter of 1980. On the positive side, inflation was only 9% that year. In 1982 the economic situation became almost chaotic: GDP declined by 14.3%, open unemployment (excluding the minimum employment program) reached 23.7% in September of that year, the exchange rate was devalued by almost 100%, a major financial crisis developed, and Chile had serious problems servicing its foreign debt (1985: 244).

In response to the plummeting standards of living for the middle classes and the desperate situation of the workers and urban poor, mass protests began in 1983. This represented the first chink in the armor of the dictatorship. The junta provided economic stability after the coup, and the Chilean economy saw a revival in 1977-1980 and a boom in 1981. But when the recession hit, the most marginalized sectors of the population were worse off financially than they had been in 1973 (Garretón 1989: 265). The middle classes saw significant losses to their quality of life and could no longer look the other way when it came to the repressiveness of the dictatorship. The protests of 1983 began in May, initiated by the Copper Workers’ Confederation (CTC), and extended
through all sectors of the population who were unhappy with the Pinochet regime’s mishandling of the economic crisis. This included the middle classes, who in an ironic turn of events now used the same *cacerolazo* protest (banging pots and pans) they had used to “express their opposition to Allende…to symbolize their opposition to the very regime they had helped bring into power. The resistance in Santiago’s shantytowns was strong, with some erecting barricades. The government (characteristically) repressed the protests: ‘two died, fifty were injured, and three hundred people were detained’” (Garretón 1989: 267).

It is within the context of this crisis that the Lautaro came to life. The origins of the group can be traced to the ‘Movimiento de Acción Popular’ (MAPU), which was founded in 1969 and constituted part of Allende’s Popular Unity (UP) coalition. In the southern sector of Santiago, a group of militants from the MAPU maintained their political activity while organizing popular resistance to the dictatorship. They participated in social and cultural organizations, such as collective kitchens, which were widespread in Santiago’s *poblaciones* following the coup. Their participation in basic ecclesial communities was fundamental to the early formation of the group. Initially, in the *poblaciones* of La Granja, Joao Goulart and Malaquías Concha, priests from the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who advocated Liberation Theology provided fertile ground for social gatherings and support against governmental repression.

Within this context, a more formal relationship between the political and social collectives and the structure of the MAPU began around 1979. Simultaneously, the youth began to radicalize. Discussions focused on the political causes and potential ways out of the dictatorship. As their militancy developed and became more disciplined, these youths initiated propaganda activities in addition to the cultural events they were engaged in. The majority were young people from Santiago’s *poblaciones*. Between 1979 and the early 1980’s, young militants took their
message to other poblaciones, giving rapid speeches, graffitiing walls, yelling and tossing pamphlets, and hurrying off after no more than a few minutes before the police could arrive. In the words of one militant,

The Lautaro did not come out of the catacombs, it did not come from the mountains, but instead from the poblaciones. They were socially engaged urban youth, students, neighborhood children, people who greeted neighbors on the street when they walked by. My experience is from la Granja, Malaquías, João Goulart, las Industrias, but the same occurred in other poblaciones. The same happened in the El Salto Christian communities, in Renca as well, with cultural groups, in La Legua, mainly with social groups. All of these experiences combined with ours, with the conclusion that a more radical and all-encompassing response to the dictatorship was necessary. Subsequently, out of those debates, what we could say later became known as the Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro was formed (González Olivares 2014: 36-39).

The Lautaro’s origins are predominately working-class youth from Santiago’s marginalized neighborhoods who came together in order to resist the dictatorship. The element of youth, in the perspective of one interviewee, was even more important than formal political militancy during the 1980’s, and especially when the national protests broke out in 1983, the year in which the Lautaro began as an autonomous organization. He affirmed that the youth played a crucial role in the national protests; “There it wasn’t the Communist Party, or the MIR, it was adolescents….Political organizations took advantage of those social movements and recruited militants, and made adolescents participate. That’s what the FPMR did, that’s what the MIR did, and that’s what the Lautaro did, along with other traditional political organizations.” (interview Javier).

Bowing to international pressure in order to legitimize the repressive government, in 1988 Chileans were given the option of voting in Pinochet as the nation’s president for eight more years, or forcing a presidential election in 1989 to determine who would lead the country. This is known as the ‘plebiscito del sí o no’ (the YES or NO plebiscite), with the affirmative option meaning that
Pinochet would remain in power. Each campaign was given equal television time, although the NO campaign was censured, externally and by internal fears of what the regime would deem admissible. The YES campaign stoked fears that leftist anarchists were plotting to take over the country again, a la 1970’s land expropriation, and showed images of hooded Marxists galloping through fields carrying red flags. The NO campaign’s slogan was “Chile, la alegría ya viene” (Chile, happiness is coming!), and the first televised image of opposition that Chileans saw consisted of a rainbow next to the word NO.

For the Lautaro, the plebiscite represented a farce. They believed, and attempted to convince others, that Chile would merely transition from a ‘protected democracy’ to a ‘cardboard democracy’ (una democracia cartucha). In other words, the possible democratic opening promised by the plebiscite was a scheme to trick Chileans into believing that effectively, societal change would begin with the ouster of the dictatorship. Former militants either didn’t vote, or in the case of Silvio, cast a null vote, marking the ballot with one of the party’s maxims ‘toda la patria para el pueblo- MJL’ (“all the homeland for the people- MJL”). The Lautarinos represented one faction of the Chilean left following the golpe de estado that subscribed to the belief that the dictatorship must be overthrown by violent means. Among those who shared this vision were the MIR and the Frente Popular Manuel Rodriguez. The opposition coalition that began as the ‘Socialist Renovation’ attempted to negotiate the terms of a peaceful democratic transition. In an interview in 1990, the party’s leader, Guillermo Ossandón, expressed that Chile was not experiencing a democratic stabilization, but that instead tensions between classes would become more ingrained and that there would be an exacerbation of conflict between the fundamental elements of society. Furthermore, he characterized the government of Patricio Aylwin as merely administrators of the dictatorship’s handiwork. (Carvajal 1990). Lautarinos viewed the plebiscite as an escape valve.
for the dictatorship, as a way for it to continue its stranglehold on Chilean political, societal, and economic life. Ossandón believed the energy of the masses would dissipate with the transition and conceived of the period as a crossroads, one in which Chile would choose between two very different realities; “One, created by the government, which partners with the International Monetary Fund and has excellent relationships with transnational corporations and imperialism. [It is] of a country of marginalized masses, a country of repression, and of humiliation. Today, the contradictions in this project are being expressed in their highest degree. The masses have said ‘no’ to the dictatorship’s project and are saying ‘yes’ to fundamental transformations in their quality of life, salary, housing, health, education, justice, and liberty” (Carvajal 1990).

Figure 1.1. Cardboard democracy, protests. Source: Carvajal (1990).
In stark contrast to the high levels of mobilization in the 1980s, grass roots militants and social organizing sharply declined with the inauguration of the democratic government in 1990 (Schneider 1992: 275). This has been attributed to several factors, a central one being the sense of betrayal and disillusionment with politics that many Chileans felt when the democratic vision of the Concertación did not live up to their expectations. Pinochet determined many of the conditions of the democratic transition, remained in public life as Senator-for-life and the head of the Army, and ensured that his political and economic legacy would be difficult, if not impossible, to dismantle. Chilean democracy proved timid in the years following the transition, fearing that too much tampering with Chile’s new neoliberal blueprint could lead to a dictatorial relapse, it perpetuated the system put in place by Pinochet’s technocrats. The economic policies that favored business at the expense of the working class remained intact. The Lautaro had foreseen this outcome: their political-military objectives included the removal of Pinochet, but the overarching goal was to destroy the capitalist structures he had implemented, and the position in which his economic advisers had placed the country and its workers: at the service of international investment. As one former militant put it, “Our problem wasn’t with the dictatorship, it was with the capitalism behind it” (interview Andrés).

Revival of Protests: 2011 Chilean Student Movement

Students in Chile burst onto the international stage in June of 2011, coming out in vast numbers to protest neoliberal educational policies and to demand a tuition-free university education. Students engaged in traditional forms of mobilization in the way of tomas (occupations) and marches, but also displayed creativity with new tactics. They staged a massive flash-mob dance across from the presidential palace, dressed as zombies to symbolize the educational system in Chile, which they believed was dead. In response to attempts by the Piñera regime to marginalize
the movement and label it as violent, students on separate occasions orchestrated mass kiss-ins under the slogan ‘passion for education.’ Additionally, students continuously ran laps around La Moneda, striving to reach 1,800 hours, the number of billions of Chilean pesos needed to fund education each year, with thousands joining the run for the last few hours of the protest (Barrionuevo, 2011). In Valparaíso, Santiago, Concepción, and other cities, students used social media to coordinate a simultaneous mass fake suicide, dropping to streets and sidewalks and lying down for several minutes, their ‘deaths’ having been caused by waiting in vain for quality education (Pérez and Guerrero, 2011).

The movement consisted at first of university students, many of whom had participated as secondary students in the pingüinos movement in 2006, but later extended to include high school students, teachers, workers, and large sectors of the general population. The 2011 movement learned from the mistakes of the revolución pingüina, which failed to achieve the deep reforms it sought, having believed in the reforms promised to them by the Bachelet administration. Although the movement quickly dissolved, it showed that there was the potential for a large-scale uprising. Marches were organized by longstanding student organizations, and mainly by the Confederation of Chilean Student Organizations (CONFEC), which consisted of student unions from state and private universities throughout country. The movement benefited initially from charismatic leadership. It was spearheaded by the presidents of Santiago’s most prestigious university organizations: Camila Vallejo from the University of Chile and Giorgio Jackson from the Pontifical University of Chile, who were the most visible spokespersons of the CONFEC.

Student demands included the democratization of educational policy-making, equitable access and gratuity in higher education for all, regulation of for-profit schools and an end to profiteering in education, an increase in federal funding for public universities, and constitutional
reform of educational policies, among others (Carmona, 2011). At the core of these demands was a backlash against the shift towards neoliberalism in the country, which began with reforms outlined by the 1980 constitution. At marches, students repeatedly shouted, “y va a caer, y va a caer, la educación de Pinochet” (the education of Pinochet will fall) (Contreras González, 2016). The educational system, with its roots in Pinochet’s dictatorial reign, was viewed as a culprit in perpetuating social inequality. Elementary and secondary schools in poorer neighborhoods were underfunded and offered very low-quality education, which resulted in poor performance on the PSU, Chile’s college admittance examination (the reworking of which constituted another one of the student’s demands). These students were at a disadvantage compared with those from privileged backgrounds, who went either to private schools or to municipally subsidized, well-funded schools, performed well on the admittance exam, and gained access to the best public universities in the country. Less fortunate students were funneled into private, for-profit universities of lower quality, where they took on heavy debt and entered a lackluster job market with undervalued degrees. Thus, the movement brought to the forefront a discussion on inequality and social justice, which struck a chord in Chilean society. This factor allowed the protests to become massive in scale. The movement mobilized support due to the deep-seated discontent with the neoliberal economic model, which benefited only a select few. Chileans realized that the binomial system hindered any chance at real change and demanded a constitutional referendum as well as more channels for direct democracy. According to one protester, Chileans were tired of economic policies that led to high scores on indicators of progress, but high levels of inequality. In essence, the students’ demands were not only for free and high-quality education, but rather, they strove to create a more just society (Contreras González, 2016).
From its peak in the winter of 2011, the Chilean student movement waned in 2013, and with Bachelet’s education reform (a promise from her second electoral campaign) reached a state of abeyance. Effective educational reform began in May of 2014, with president Bachelet announcing the beginning of the implementation of many reforms demanded during the student movement. However, student leader Melissa Sepúlveda said that the education reform didn't go far enough: "The content is insufficient and contradicts the expectations that the current government created" (Serrano, 2015).
Chapter Two: Characteristics and Historical Overview of the MAPU-Lautaro

The MAPU-Lautaro was consisted of adolescents and young adults from Santiago’s poblaciones. They described themselves as young and poor, an identity which they invoked from the moment of their inception (Faure 2006: 25). These young, poor urban youth represented more than simply a demographic swath of Santiago’s population; rather, the core of Lautaro epitomized a feeling of disenchantment with the Chilean government and, more importantly, with the economic realities they faced as a result of the neoliberal restructuring of the country. They, along with many adolescents in the 80s and 90s, decided that they “needed to break away from the world that they knew, one which from their perspective, no longer made much sense” (Faure 2006: 25).

A core concept of this is the rebellious nature of the organization, including its categorization -or lack thereof- as part of Leftist politics. According to one former militant, “We, the Lautaro, come from the historic rupture from the Chilean Left. In fact, nobody ever recognized us, no political organization viewed us with respect, ever. Never, not even when we were in prison.” (interview Javier).

Thus, while the Lautaro split from the MAPU (more specifically from the Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro, which the party created in 1982 as an attempt to capitalize on the growing discontent of those youth from the poblaciones), it broke radically and violently with the traditional Left to which to which Javier refers. Furthermore, “when you’re from the left, to say it one way, in the 80s, youth played a crucial role in the national protests. It wasn’t the Communist Party or the MIR, no, it was the youth! And these youth weren’t militants of those parties. Political organizations took advantage of social agitation in order to recruit militants. And they turned them into members. That’s what the Lautaro, MIR, and the Front [FPMR] did. And so did the traditional political parties” (interview Javier). However, the MAPU’s politics proved too feeble and too
conservative an outlet for the anger that the youth in Santiago’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods felt towards the dictatorship. They demanded action. Thus, these youths became increasingly radicalized, and demanding not only a more righteous response to the abuses they suffered at the hands of the military dictatorship but the economic restructuring of the country as well.

Their first objective was an exit to the dictatorship. However, they notably championed a violent exit, an approach which isolated them from the Chilean opposition, who favored a negotiated return to democracy. The Lautarinos and their sympathizers believed that the dictatorship represented a flagrant and violent break in Chile’s longstanding democratic tradition, a democratic tradition that saw Salvador Allende and his Popular Unity government into power. Thus, they felt that the violent overthrow of Allende’s socialist program, and its replacement with its near opposite - neoliberalism – should in turn be overthrown with violence, in order to set Chile back on the economic path which Chile had embarked upon. They never accepted the legitimacy of the military junta. So, after removing the dictatorship, their primary goal was to construct what they called ‘Chile Popular’ (a term best translated as People’s Chile). This meant a Chile for the people and by the people, which would eradicate the rampant levels of poverty, lack of access to health care, and the lack of high quality education (Acevedo Arriaza: 2014 27-8).

The manifesto which gave birth to the Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro (the youth wing of the MAPU) was completed in November of 1982 in the ‘La Granja’ población of Santiago. It expressed the feelings that brought the movement to life. They were young citizens who wanted to live dignified lives and have a legitimate chance at happiness;

We are tired of loitering on street corners, of seeing people having to bust their asses just for a piece of bread, of having to see 11-year-old prostitutes…we’re fed up with the murderous military, crazy and pretentious cops, and crooked bosses. We want to be people, to live our youth. We want to study and work, we want to create our own music and our own culture. We want a house where we can form a home and raise our children. There are alternatives to drugs, to strip clubs, and to
the bottle. Things can be different than they are now, these problems have solutions. The dictatorship must be overthrown, so that the country is no longer a prison and so that we can build a new vision for the country (from Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 28).

Thus, at its most ideal, the precursor to the MAPU-Lautaro was founded on the belief that a better life, a happier life was possible, linked with an intense animosity toward the dictatorship and a conviction that the horrors experienced at the hands of military and police should not go unchallenged; the only dignified response was to confront the enemy in battle, not cower acquiesce in the face of repression, torture, and intimidation.

While it was the MAPU’s decision to create a youth wing, according to those who were part of the creation of the MJL, the youth had a lot of autonomy in its decision-making process (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 27). When the Nacional Youth Committee of the party met, they put forth the idea that it should be called a movement and chose its name, flag, and wrote its manifesto. There were two options to choose from for the name: Salvador Allende or Lautaro. Lautaro was a legendary young Mapuche chief (around 16 or 17 years old) who led military campaigns that dealt heavy blows to the Spanish conquerors (LTDLC). Thus, on the one hand, the image of Lautaro represented two fundamental aspects of their identity: youth and violent rebellion. And notably, they voted against using Allende’s name because they wanted to create something new: “We didn’t want to be the continuation of the Popular Unity period” (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 28).

The Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro’s vision for the future of Chile and potential exits to the dictatorship quickly became irreconcilable with the MAPU. A split occurred on August 9, 1983, the day the MAPU was to hold its 5th Plenary. The day before, due to internal conflict with senior members, the ‘insurrectional’ youth of the organization met in La Granja to draft their resignation letter. The day of the Plenary in Peñaflor, they read the letter to the committee, officially leaving the MAPU and giving birth to the MAPU-Lautaro, which was simply known as ‘Lautaro’ to most.
The main point of contention: MAPU leadership had intended for the movement to stay within the bounds of civil disobedience, while the ‘insurrectional’ members championed an armed struggle to overthrow the dictatorship. Furthermore, they believed that the MAPU was stuck in the realm of discourse, while they wanted to engage in a more tangible style of politics (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 32).

1983-1986: Subversion of the Masses

From its inception in 1983, the MAPU-Lautaro engaged in mass actions with a substantial number of militants. They looted and ransacked stores, hijacked trucks carrying meats, milk, and other of their so-called “revolutionary products,” turning the streets of Santiago’s poblaciones into chaotic scenes where in economically dire times necessities, and luxuries, were handed out to citizens for free. This was a period in which the Lautaro was enmeshed with what they called the ‘pueblo rebelde.’ The Lautaro grew out of and tried to take advantage of the national protests that burst out of control in 1983; these signaled that Chileans, in addition to being fed up with the dictatorship, were no longer afraid of the military’s repressive tactics. In this environment, the Lautaro conducted what they called recuperations. The distribution of these products was the embodiment of their political project.
Figure 2.1. ¿Y qué?! Source: Carvajal (1990).
First Actions of the MAPU-LAUTARO: Bata Footwear

The first direct action carried out by the Lautaro occurred in September of 1983. Nine Lautaro brigades armed with alpenstocks and hammers attempted to burn down three banks in the Recoleta and downtown Santiago sectors of Chile’s capital (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 34). It was a violent attack on one of the symbols of repression they desired to topple. Later that year, the Lautaro entered public consciousness with the recuperation of shoes from a Chilean footwear chain, ‘Bata’. According to Órdenes, thirty to forty militants ransacked the store, while Guillermo Ossandón, leader of the organization, put the number of participants at fifty, a figure corroborated by another former militant (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 283; Órdenes 137). Regardless of the exact number, the mass nature of the action and its objective – the recuperation of shoes - was novel for the traditional left. It was considered too risky an operation for such a seemingly insignificant reward. With its early actions, the Lautaro defied convention, instead aiming at a new way of doing politics, and with a praxis which was difficult to comprehend for most. The militants would enter the stores and loot them, using “clubs, knives…[but] fundamentally with the quantity of people, what we did was looting and not an operative assault” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 283). The objective was to debilitate the employees without inflicting any harm, empty the cash registers, and remove as many shoeboxes as possible from the location. “[They] took out all the shoes and threw them onto the street, it was around 6 or 7 in the afternoon and full of people…. Nobody could believe it” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 283).

Another contingent blockaded surrounding streets to ensure that carabineros couldn’t intrude. The shoes were distributed quickly to the crowd while another group of militants distributed Lautaro propaganda, which all told took no more than three minutes to complete
(Órdenes:137). According to one former militant, “in the process that starts from the first operations, those fantastic ones, the idea of recuperating shoes from Bata, from 1983-1984,…that idea of the masses, of the collective face multiplied…that’s why the press afterward said that they were a mob, hordes of people…. The weapons were essentially clubs. Clubs and bare fists.” (González Olivares 2014: 46).

For many militants, this was the ultimate expression of their praxis and represented ‘the most beautiful of the actions we did’ (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 33). In their eyes, the recuperations constituted a space and time – however fleeting – where their vision became reality. A key aspect of their philosophy was to live the revolution “here and now,” not to postpone the changes they envisioned until distant future. In these spaces, they created their revolution; they challenged the paradigm installed by the dictatorship and replaced it with their vision for a socialist Chile.

*Chickens in the Streets: Rerouting of Hijacked Trucks to the Poblaciones*

The Lautaro quickly progressed from actions like Bata footwear recuperations to more complex military style actions, beginning with the hijacking of trucks and tractor-trailers containing a variety of goods. Militants intercepted and rerouted trucks carrying products such as poultry, milk, dried meats, beer and wine (specifically for the national independence celebrations), and pork, amongst others. The goods were distributed at no cost to the members of the community in Santiago’s poblaciones, along with propaganda.

The recuperation and distribution of live chickens is considered to be one of the groups’ emblematic actions and is one that stands out in the minds of former militants, including its leader Guillermo Ossandón, who recounts the event as follows:

> We spotted the trucks on the Pan-American [highway], trucks that were carrying chickens. The first chickens were live chickens…let’s say…500 chickens. We
stopped the truck on the highway, with a recuperated car that we put one of those sirens that goes on the roof. The driver thinks that it’s a traffic stop, and as we approach him he realizes that it isn’t. We throw him down and take the driver with us…. We arrived at one of the poblaciones…La Legua, La Victoria, whichever one, and distributed them. Afterward the cops arrived and searched the homes for the chickens. So, you went into homes, it was a party really…. Nobody who got those chickens will forget about us, ever. We had lunch with them (Faure 2006: 37).

We brought giant trucks with live chickens, we’ve also brought defeathered chickens, but the experience that I’ll recount was with live chickens. Let’s say, 5,000, 1,000, 2,000 live chickens that were in little cages, in a three-story truck brought to a población. The pobladores started to recuperate them, the repression arrives and they start in pursuit of the chickens, because it’s impossible to conceal the product. That’s when a completely ridiculous situation ensued: the police trying to catch the chickens, and the people defending their chickens with barricades, stones, clubs (Carvajal 1990).

Interestingly, most pobladores were initially skeptical of these mass distributions. They were scared and confused, and they couldn’t comprehend why anyone would put themselves at risk to give them something for free. The action went completely against the prevailing sentiment at the time, especially in the poorer neighborhoods in Santiago, which had been hit hard by the economic crises and neoliberal restructuring of the country. But, eventually “the people were quite receptive….We took the trouble to put each chicken in a little bag, separated them and presented them well, with a pamphlet inside explaining why, of course” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 285).

Actions such as the recuperation of shoes and chickens and their redistribution in various Santiago poblaciones marked the beginnings of the Lautaro, signaling their willingness to break from the political discourse of the MAPU and embrace radical direct action. However, some in the movement disagreed with these actions, even though they did not result in deaths or injuries to civilians or police officers. They saw the recuperations of shoes, chickens, and other “revolutionary products” as mere paternalism, or worse, they didn’t see them as recuperations at
all, but as theft, and opted to leave the organization. These defections continued as the Lautaro became increasingly radical and violent in their repertories.

Prelude to the Escalation of Violence: 1985

The evolution from unsophisticated actions, carried out with little to no weaponry, to more violent, political-military style operations, marked a watershed moment for the organization. The Lautaro shifted from the type of actions in which they led mass looting events of their “revolutionary products” to actions that included violent confrontations with police. Up until that point, usually around fifty militants conducted actions, which were characterized by their lack of sophistication (as seen with the Bata store recuperations, where they were armed with only clubs and their own fists). Furthermore, there were no direct confrontations with police or military forces; the actions were completed and products distributed before police could arrive on the scene. As described by one former militant, “So, we go there and we go armed, it’s maybe the first operation where we’re all armed, armed with either revolvers or pistols. Before that, we had done a recuperation of funds in the very heart of Santiago, but two of us had pistols and the other two had fake pistols, weon!” (González Olivares 2014: 55-6).

This turning point occurred in 1985 with the hijacking of a tractor-trailer. A four-member team recuperated the truck as it headed south on the Pan-American highway towards downtown Santiago, en route to the Huamachuco población. As the Lautarinos were making their getaway, they were cut off by the police. The ensuing confrontation resulted in the death of one police officer and the injury of another. This sent shockwaves through the Lautaro. Until then, the party had only claimed responsibility for the recuperations of “revolutionary products”. They were now faced with the dilemma of whether to claim responsibility for an action that resulted in the death of an
agent of the state. They ultimately decided that they would, a decision that had serious consequences. “[It] marked the crossroads…it meant as well some defections. At that time an important segment of students, where we had a strong presence and some territories, faced with that choice (to claim responsibility for the event), backed out. There was an important group of people who decided not to continue, to drop out. That decision, that declaration was very tough” (González Olivares 2014: 57). In their eyes, the event further served to distinguish them from the other radical leftist movements; “The operations of the Front (FPMR) and MIR were primarily sabotage, they didn’t involve a *popular* response of shootout-style confrontations with cops in the *poblaciones*. That kind of volition was very rare…. So, in that sense I think that it was an emblematic operation, there you have a decisive moment” (González Olivares 2014: 58).

**1987-1991: Unleashing the Insurrectional War of the Masses**

The Lautaro viewed the YES or NO plebiscite as a fraud which would lead the Chilean public into a thinly veiled democracy while legitimizing and institutionalizing the economic and ideological restructuring of the country according to the neoliberal model. But the majority of Chileans who opposed the dictatorship (56% voted against keeping Pinochet in power), saw it as a resounding victory. They euphorically and triumphantly marched and paraded in the streets following the successful ‘NO’ vote on October 5, 1988. Yet at their 3rd Congress, in 1988, the Lautaro decided to ramp up their political-military operations, and launched an offensive; “At the [Congress]…all efforts centered on the requirement of bringing about the Chilean Revolution” (Aravena2: 239). They named the struggle they wished to unleash the ‘Insurrectional War of the Masses’ (Guerra Insurreccional de Masas). Furthermore, the Lautaro added more violent types of actions to their repertoire. These included “armed territorial takeovers” (*copamientos territoriales*)
armados), “popular uprisings” (levantamientos populares), and “strategic combats” (combates estratégicos) (Rosas Aravena: 332).

Even before the victory of the plebiscite, “[p]ublic opinion surveys indicate that most Chileans support[ed] peaceful defiance that call[ed] for negotiations to end the military regime. However, most Chileans reject[ed] violent and disruptive activity (FLACSO 1986; Huneuus 1987). In essence, there is widespread approval of strikes, petitioning of authorities, marches, and caceroleos (opposition shown by banging pots and pans at designated times). There [was] little support by contrast, for bombings, blackouts, land seizures, and traffic blockages” (Garretón 1989: 273). Thus, the Lautaro engaged in precisely the kind of activities that the majority of the population deplored. Their wager before and after the plebiscite – that the ganas of the people would soon reach a critical mass and unleash revolution – did not pay off. Following the inauguration of Patricio Aylwin on March 11, 1990, which marked the transition to democracy, “many grass-roots militants [sic] returned to their homes, and participation in social organizations…dramatically declined” (C. Schneider 1992: 275). But as the majority of Chileans retreated to their homes, the Lautaro did precisely the opposite: they doubled down on their wager to instigate a revolutionary war, increasing the number and intensity of their violent actions.
Figure 2.2. Confrontations with the State. Source: Rosas Aravena (2011: 337).
Figure 2.3. Member of the FRPL posing with ‘SUZI’. Source: Carvajal (1990).
Rescue of Marco Ariel Antonioletti

The Lautaro’s decision to push forward with their violent tactics, and their conviction that they could trigger a “Insurrectional War of the Masses”, meant operations of greater scope and audacity. Part of the Lautaro’s decision to actively and brazenly confront Chile’s police forces was driven by the tenet that the group was equal to the state. They repudiated the belief that the state had a monopoly on violence, and consistently proved it. From the mid 1980’s they embodied a combative and defiant mindset: “So, this was the moment that marks our decision that nobody [no agent of the state] was going to grab a member of this movement, of this party, by the collar. No enemy, no matter whether they were equally or better trained legally or materially, was going to be able to grab us by the collar and decide who lived and who died” (González Olivares 2014: 108).

In line with this thinking, the Lautaro proposed an ambitious rescue attempt of one of their imprisoned members. The militant in question was Marco Ariel Antonioletti, known as Guille or simply Ariel. He had been captured by carabineros in 1989 and was accused of the killing of a police officer. The CNI, Chile’s Central Intelligence Agency, accused him of possessing illegal firearms. He was being held at the Public Jail in central Santiago. The idea for the rescue came from Ariel himself, who sent correspondence to the party’s political commission requesting that the attempt be carried out (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 60). According to his cellmate, fellow former militant Marco Paulsen, Ariel’s decision was a personal choice, driven by his desire for freedom (Silvia Vera 2011: 35). Another former militant affirmed, “Ariel wanted to be free, and it was almost as though it was a matter of honor…. For the Lautaro each militant was important, regardless of whether they were part of the Political Commission or a simple brigadier” (Vera Farias 2011:36). The plan was to take advantage of Ariel’s weekly hospital visits to treat a retinal
detachment, a condition he suffered during torture sessions at the hands of the CNI (Faure 2006: 59; Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 295). The Hospital Sótero del Río, located in Santiago’s Puerto Alto district, in the southeastern section of the capital, became the site of another of the Lautaro’s violent and emblematic actions, which ended up distancing them from the Chilean public and also alienating many of their own members.

The accounts offered by the press, former militants, and the police charged with Ariel’s custody differ greatly. According to the press and the surviving police officers, the Lautarinós entered with a shoot-first mentality, opening fire against the guards escorting Ariel with little regard for the bystanders present that day at the hospital. Statements by Guillermo Ossandón contradict this version. In his account the police officers were outnumbered and instructed to surrender. When they failed to do so, a confrontation ensued. The police officers weren’t murdered but were instead casualties of combat (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 297). The clash resulted in the deaths of three guards and one police officer, but no civilians were hurt.
Figure 2.4. La toma de lo cotidiano. Source: Carvajal (1990).
By the close of 1992, the Robin Hood-style redistribution of goods in poblaciones had vanished almost entirely. The organization was increasingly handicapped by factors which forced them away from large-scale actions such as the ransacking of Bata stores and the hijacking of poultry trucks. First; more and more of their membership were imprisoned. The aggressive tactics implemented by the Aylwin regime proved effective at capturing militants. They had created ‘La Oficina,’ (the office) a department dedicated to the eradication of political extremism during the first years of the transition. The government feared that instability caused by such extremism would precipitate the return of military rule and also wanted to bolster their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

The Lautaro increased the number of bank assaults in order to continue to fund their operations and support the families of imprisoned militants. But the escalation of their violent tactics served to distance them from the poblaciones and was a barrier to entry for new members, as the vetting process became more stringent. Thus, the decision to attempt to provoke the insurrectional war of the masses had the opposite effect; they gained fewer and fewer recruits, which limited their options in terms of the actions they could engage in. The result was a shift towards confrontations and revenge attacks on police, in addition to the numerous bank assaults, actions which further exacerbated the problem of maintaining their numbers. Still, “In September [1993], at the 3rd Plenary, the organization determined that they would continue their armed struggle. One of the militants recalled, “I swore that we were going to bring the revolution in 1995’ as they proposed to crystalize their position of subversive trench in two years, beginning with the strategic combats for the victory of People’s Chile” (quoted in Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 69).
On October 21, 1993, a squadron of five Lautarinos, assaulted a branch of the O’Higgins Bank in Las Condes, one of Santiago’s more affluent neighborhoods. The Lautarinos made off with 6 million Chilean pesos, roughly equivalent to US$10,000. During the assault they injured a security guard, who later died from his wounds. The militants then fled in a hijacked taxi, but due to the fragile psychological state of the driver, they crashed as they attempted to flee. They then boarded a city bus, attempting to blend in with the general public, but they were spotted by bystanders and quickly intercepted and surrounded by police. The initial confrontation began with Lautaristas and police officers exchanging fire. In the exchange, one carabinero was killed, which unleashed a deadly shootout which became known as the Apoquindo Massacre, for the street where it took place.

According to witnesses and bystanders aboard the bus, as well as the testimony of Alvaro González Olivares, once the militants ran out of ammunition and realized they were outnumbered and surrounded by police, they threw their weapons out of the bus’s windows. The driver was sent off the bus waving a white cloth, in an effort to show that the militants had surrendered. The police responded with gunfire, peppering the bus with more than 170 gunshots, according to ballistic reports. The result was six deaths: three innocent passengers and three Lautarinos; Alejandro Sosa, Raul González, and Yuri Uribe. The two Lautarinos who survived were Alvaro González Olivares and Oriana Alcayaga.

The decision by the police to fire on a crowded bus, together with the subsequent support by President Aylwin, who affirmed that the carabineros acted in an acceptable manner, demonstrated that “police forces continued to use the same protocols as the dictatorship. The
government preferred to support police abuse if it meant dismembering rebel organizations” (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 70). It was becoming clear that the Lautaro were overextending themselves and did not possess the experience necessary to successfully execute operations of such scope. However, despite another failed action resulting in Lautaro casualties, the convictions of the members did not waver; “They’re killing us, but we kept on thinking about our compañeros, about our vision, nobody wanted to desert” (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 69).

*Imprisonment of Guillermo Ossandón: A Dream Deferred*

Between 1992 and 1993, Chilean police and intelligence captured 57 militants (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 70), at that rate, the Lautaro couldn’t replenish their ranks. Those few new recruits who entered were well outnumbered by defections and pressure from the police. By this time, in sum, the Lautaro’s desire to unleash a revolution through violence had the opposite effect: it continually cut them off from the masses they were trying to represent. One former member ironically said, ‘We were so vanguard that nobody followed us’. From 1991 forward, The Lautaro progressively engaged in less and less grassroots organizing, and in doing so lost touch with workers, pobladores, and student organizations. Essentially, they had lost touch with the people. For Silvio, “The Lautaro ended up alone, alone, alone, alone…all by itself. Because if you’re proposing to do something for the people, by the people, and from the people, but you don’t have the support of the people…and those people don’t even have a moderate understanding of what you’re trying to do, then it loses all its meaning, catchai? It was the heavy price Lautaro paid for its actions. It lost every possibility it had of keeping a foothold in the poor sectors…which was Lautaro’s only real social support” (Faure 2006: 66). The capture of Lautaro’s leader, Guillermo
Ossandón, on June 15, 1994, marked the end of the dream to create a revolution that would bring socialism to Chile.

**Classification of Direct Actions**

The Lautaro had a versatile repertoire of actions which ranged from the organization of mass looting to high-profile assassinations and the infamous rescue of one of their incarcerated members during a regularly scheduled hospital visit. These included:

**Recuperations**

Lautaro term for robbery or looting of what were deemed to be “revolutionary products” aimed at satisfying the basic survival needs of the poblaciones, as well as ensuring ‘la alegría’ aquí y ahora’ (happiness right here and now). Recuperations varied in scope, scale, and objective. Some were orchestrated by as few as three to five member teams, while others were realized by large contingents of upwards of fifty people. The most illustrative of these recuperations, described earlier, were the Bata footwear and live poultry truck actions. The recuperations can broadly be placed into two categories: (a) actions with the objective of acquiring resources necessary for the Lautaro to continue its operations, and (b) actions with the objective of distributing goods in Santiago’s poblaciones (Rosas Aravena 2004: 122).

Actions with the objective of acquiring resources necessary for the Lautaro to continue its operations included: assaults on banks and financial institutions; weapons extraction from police forces, private security, and armories; and the theft of vehicles, communication equipment. Actions with the objective of distributing goods in Santiago’s poblaciones included the hijacking and rerouting of trucks delivering food and other products to poblaciones, where the cargos were unloaded and redistributed free of charge to pobladores. As the term utilized indicates, for the Lautaro, the products were ‘recuperated’ and returned to their rightful owners; the people. The list
of items became extensive as the years went on and came to include: wine, beer, toys, headphones, diapers, condoms, medicine, cassettes, bicycles, chickens, meat, milk, dried meats, underwear, notebooks, radios, VHS tapes, among other things (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 256). The Lautaro’s dedication to direct actions of this type was a key distinguishing element.

Figure 2.5. Truck Recuperations by the Lautaro. Source: Rosas Aravena (2011: 336).

**Sabotage**

This took the form of the destruction by explosives or fire of infrastructure that symbolized the triad of power (imperialism, police forces, and economic groups). These primarily included the placement of explosives at banks, the arson of Mormon temples, and destruction state and local infrastructure as well as private and transnational businesses (Aravena 334). The explosives were handmade (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 281).
Propaganda and Armed Propaganda

Members of the Lautaro spread propaganda in poblaciones, schools, and universities. Along with pamphlets, they handed out their “revolutionary products” which included condoms, cassettes, underwear, and school supplies. They called this the “Bazar de las Ganas” (Aravena 334). “The Lautaro did a lot of armed propaganda outside of high schools at noon, cachai…. A few shotgun blasts, a barricade, a guy with a megaphone, and wow! And the discourse…the kids were thrilled and then you handed out condoms and some cassettes and caused a ruckus…. Everybody was exhilarated!” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 280).

In addition to armed propaganda, Lautaro actively graffitied Santiago’s buildings with their slogans. According to Magdalena, the brigades had a high level of autonomy when it came to the propaganda, as they themselves often came up with the slogans and also the materials to paint the walls with (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 279). Some of the slogans included: ‘To hell with the Constitution, everything for the people!’ ‘Happy, Rebellious and Subversive: For a People’s Chile’ ‘We’re the force of the power of happiness!’ ‘To hell with Aylwin and his bullshit democracy!’ ‘For the orgy of dreams!’ ‘We’re the power maniacs’ (Faure 2006: 46).

![Figure 2.6. Attacks and Ambushes. Source: Rosas Aravena (2011: 335).](image-url)
“Marxista-Leninista-Mapucista-Lautarino”

The Lautaro defined themselves as a Marxist-Leninist-Mapucist-Lautarino organization. This definition references various aspects of their identity and represents the ‘ideological cocktail’ that combined to form their belief system. The way they chose to describe themselves demonstrates the unconventional and rebellious nature of Lautaro, made manifest at the level of the group as well as in the self-definition of individual members.

The Marxist aspect of their ideology relates to the primary and fundamental aspects of the doctrine that the organization adopted, namely the belief that class struggle was the driving force in history. They adopted and implemented Marx’s concept of praxis. The inclusion of Leninism refers to their adherence to the theory that the only way to create a socialist state was through armed struggle. Mapucista simply means that the party originated from the MAPU, although this element of their identity was of little importance for most of its membership. Finally, and most importantly, is the ‘Lautarino’ feature, which represents original ideological contributions made by the group and constitutes the primary motivating factors which attracted poor, urban youth to the movement. The Lautarino facet included concepts such as ‘la alegría,’ ‘la cotidianidad,’ ‘el sexo nuestro,’ and ‘aquí y ahora,’ which made up the “New Forms of Doing Politics”.

As previously mentioned, members of the Lautaro believed that the only righteous response to the dictatorship was violent confrontation. In this sense, they subscribed to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. However, the Lautaro were not orthodox Marxist-Leninists. They instead focused on the core elements, such as, “the dialectic – the existence of antagonism between the dominant and subjugated class – the aspiration of socialism, and the Leninist characteristic of a war” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 269). They incorporated the Leninist concept of the importance of agitation and propaganda, seeing themselves as a party that ‘combated amongst the masses’ and
sought action simultaneously between the vanguard, which ought to be the party and the people;
“They utilized the notion of a vanguard, in the sense that it was a referent of the popular movement, 
but discarded the conception of the Vanguard as a “super force”, [they] see its construction as 
constant dialectic of unity and differentiation to the interior of the movement, in a complementary 
and hegemony” (Acevedo Arriaza 2006: 381,2). Praxis was the most important element which the 
Lautaro borrowed from Marx (Faure 2006: 22).

It is important to highlight that while the Mapucist current pays respect to the group’s 
origins in Chile’s political institutions; “Ninety-nine percent of the Lautaro didn’t give a damn 
about the MAPU. Some compañeros came from the party and that’s how the MAPU was born, but 
ninety-nine percent of us didn’t give a damn about that shit. We were about the Lautaro, with what 
was being built from it, we were about the chief and the war that Lautaro had unleashed. We 
wanted to start our political military scheme from that standpoint” (Faure 2006: 28). The Lautaro 
were firm in their desire to create something new, something different, and thus had no intention 
of following in the footsteps of Chile’s traditional left. This is illustrated further by their use of 
only ‘Lautaro’ to identify themselves: “[We] never called ourselves MAPU-Lautaro, that was 
something imposed by the press. With the birth of the Lautaro came a fundamental break, we 
started to do something completely different. That last name was transformed into the new name: 
Lautaro was everything, it ended up taking over everything, the conception, praxis, ganas” (Faure 
2006: 28).

The relationship between the Lautaro and the MAPU was tenuous at best, as “reality 
examined up to this point shows that the MAPU contributed little to no ideological foundation to 
its offspring, but rather that it functioned more as a womb that sheltered the Lautaro in its 
embryonic state” (Órdenes 146). MAPU brought Lautaro into existence, and many of its older
members respected the creator of the MAPU, Rodrigo Ambrosio, but the essence of the organization and the youth which gave it its vibrancy cared little for its roots in institutional politics.

So while the Lautaro defined themselves as Marxist-Leninist-Mapucist-Lautarinos, the Lautaro branch of the definition was by far the most important. According to Guillermo Ossandón, “We certainly had little respect for the traditional conceptual framework that was predominant in the Chilean, Latin American, and International Left in the 1980s. Ganas, dreams, and desire is the core of Lautaro…our Marxism-Leninism suffers a process of essential transformation which has quite a journey…we have a break with traditional concepts and we initiate a process of inventing our story, in our way” (Faure 2006: 20). Much has been written about the group’s lack of ideological preparation or seriousness, especially as the Chilean press sought to discredit their actions and label them as extremists or terrorists. For the members of the Lautaro, the crucial element was not how much theory they had read, but how willing they were to fight: “I don’t believe in ‘ists’, in ‘Marxists,’ ‘Leninists.’ I still believe in the economic and materialist theories of Marx and the practices of Lenin. That’s different, it’s not that I’m an ‘ist’….What difference does it make, whichever banner you wave, what group you’re from: if you’re injured [in battle], I’m going to turn back for you, if they’re going to capture you, I’m going to run back for you.” (interview Andrés). The definitions of communist, anarchist, socialist, etc. were not nearly as important for individual Lautarinos as was the determination to fight against the status quo. The details of the reality that would replace it were a secondary concern at that moment.
Organization and Structure of The Lautaro

The Lautaro operated under a structure that they called the “complejo partidario,” a term invented by the organization. It consisted of three branches: the party (Lautaro), the Movimiento Juvenil Lautaro (MJL), and the Fuerzas Rebeldes y Populares Lautaro (FRPL). The party operated according to a Leninist blueprint:

This consisted of a Central Committee which elected the Political Commission, which in turn had a secretariat formed by two sub-secretaries and one General Secretary. This structure was in place until 1989, with some variations, particularly when five of its leaders were detained in Cajón del Maipo. The militancy was organized by cells inserted in Regional and Local Committees. The first Regional Committees in Santiago were the ‘Cordillera’ (for the El Pinar and La Legua poblaciones and the La Florida, La Granja, and Puente Alto sectors), ‘Ochagavía’ (the La Victoria, Villa Sur, Ochagavía, José María Caro and Santa Adriana poblaciones) and ‘North’ (Renca and Conchalí sectors) (Rosas Aravena 2011:141).

Some years after its birth, a new party structure named the Lautaro Rebel and Popular Forces (Fuerzas Rebeldes y Populares Lautaro- FRPL) was incorporated. It oversaw the recuperation of resources, the defense of the General Secretary, and military actions of greater scope and risk (Faure 2006: 52).
Chapter Three: Analysis of the Ideology and Praxis of the MAPU-Lautaro

How we saw the world, how we’ve seen it, how we’ve understood it, how we’ve felt it, how we’ve confronted it, how it doesn’t bother us to have crashed against it. To the contrary, how amazing to have had the experience of being beyond acceptance, beyond the reasonable, appropriate, hygienic, and healthy attitude of: it’s not the right moment. How incredibly comforting to be able to say, without any shame, that we were in the intense, complete, boundless, naïve, and precarious attempt, but not for any of those things less real, less concrete, or less true, than the fight over meaning (González Olivares 2014: 62).

The recuperation and mass action style direct actions of the MAPU-Lautaro baffled the traditional left. Conventional wisdom dictated that the risk far outweighed the benefit of appropriating those goods that for the Lautaro comprised their list of “revolutionary products”. When Guillermo Ossandón, the leader of the Lautaro, travelled to Cuba to meet with the Communist Party, the Cubans could not comprehend the logic behind the Bata footwear recuperations, or the assault of pharmacies in order to distribute condoms within the poblaciones (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 38). Their list of revolutionary products had continually expanded from groceries such as chicken, meat, milk, and cheese to a wide variety of commodities that ranged from condoms, cassettes, toys, underwear, and even beer for the fiestas patrias; anything and everything that was out of reach for the economically disadvantaged and that the group deemed necessary for the felicidad of the people. Why did the Lautaro put so much emphasis on the distribution of goods, considering the risk that these actions entailed? The key was not simply giving the goods away to the pobladores, but the manner in which it was done. More specifically, the goal of the actions was to elicit a particular type of feeling in the poblaciones. The Lautaro aspired to sound a call to arms for the rest of the population, an invitation to change their relationship with reality and to adopt the mentality of the Lautaro; namely, that products shouldn’t
be withheld from the people because they couldn’t afford them. On the contrary, these were goods that were *rightfully* theirs and should be taken as such. In the words of one of the mottos of the Lautaro: ‘Take everything back because everything belongs to us!’ (*Tomarnos todo porque todo nos pertenece!* (LTDLC 17). The spirit behind the actions was of utmost importance;

For us, the style was very important…it wasn’t just about getting 100 or 200 pair of shoes, because we could have done that with four armed militants. But it was about the style. Here we sought a mass presence, slum youth that would occupy a place with clubs and knives. So, these combative actions opted for mass presence rather than being military style actions (Órdenes 139).

Thus, the recuperations were aimed at imparting the MAPU-Lautaro’s perspective, which had more to with the deeply held feeling that the fundamental conditions governing the poor classes should be rejected. It was based on emotion more than it was on logic; which explains why the traditional left didn’t understand or accept it. That traditional mode of politics and revolution was stuck with the mentality that the overthrow of the state could only come from the mountains, from an armed force which would invade the city and overthrow the regime. Instead of the classic Marxist revolutionary blueprint for the transformation of society, the Lautaro introduced a new paradigm from revolutionary change; living in the present, satisfying the necessities of the lower classes such as sex, music, and recreation, and effectively converting these elements of daily experience into their political discourse (Órdenes 178). The Lautaro opted instead to vie for the hearts and minds of the citizens. They wanted to show the people that anyone could go out and take what they needed or wanted. The average man and woman, with no military background, no weapons other than clubs and knives, could carry out a similar action. Furthermore, they rejected the notion that the struggle against the dictatorship had to consist of army-style warfare. Instead, they believed revolution should be, and had to be, a mass struggle, in which everyone was involved. This was what the traditional Chilean Left did not comprehend.
The Lautaro, as part of their ambition to spread their mindset to the masses, particularly in their subversion of the masses phase from 1983-1986, linked much of their approach to emotion. The account of one militant highlights the importance of sentimentality for the group. He recalled that during one of the recuperations of cheese in a poblacion, he was moved by a young boy of seven or eight years with whom he identified. The child in question looked like the prototypical boy from a poblacion: dark skinned, with indigenous-style hair, his cheeks red, and his nose stuffed up from the cold of the Santiago winter. But, because of the cheese the Lautaro had recuperated and given him, he carried a wide smile on his face. It was a smile that, together with other militants, he had put there, and one which led him to the following conclusion:

This shit, we have to do it no matter what. Not for me, but for all those kids, who like me, were so young and had no hope for the future. At that point I said to myself, there’s no turning back, there’s no chance we’re giving up, no matter what path presents itself, we have to give it our all. Not just with our ideological resolve, but with our whole heart. Because this wasn’t a purely visceral, intellectual, or ideological matter, rather, it had so much to do with our emotions...that smile allowed me to say no to conformity, to say that this is worth it, it’s all worth it, just for that smile… (González Olivares 2014: 131).

This style of politics was new. It didn’t aim at negotiating an exit with the dictatorship or to gain favor with the opposition, but instead represented a radical understanding of politics, rooted in the tradition of direct action of popular movements in the nineteenth century (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 34).

In this way, class antagonisms were at the core of the Lautaro’s movement, and the resulting conviction that the struggle they were engaged in was morally righteous is crucial to understanding their actions. It is from this perspective, from the rejection of a class-based society, that their actions should be viewed: “Upon discovering poverty, a question began to bother me, a question that still bothers me to this day: Why do we accept, and with such resignation, so much
poverty and so much inequality? Why do we have another as our employer? I say employer, but I could easily say boss, owner, or master. Simply put, I did not resign myself to the experience of poverty” (González Olivares 2014: 110).

The actions of the Lautaro were meant to break their fellow pobladores out of the mentality of resignation and the rote acceptance of poverty. They aimed to change the paradigm by which they understood the world around them. Effectively, the first recuperations were met with skepticism and disbelief from some pobladores. According to Magdalena, who participated in the Bata footwear action in 1983, people initially didn’t understand that they were being given something for free, but were then receptive (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 283). Later on, however, they appeared to have successfully transmitted the concept. Ivan, a brigadier from the Lautaro youth movement (MJL), recounted the following interaction as he left the scene on a city bus after a recuperation of chickens in la Florida in 1987: “‘Hey, you guys don’t have any chickens, man!’, ‘Nope’ ‘Fuck, here have some, man.’ And they give us two chickens each, guys that had about six or seven chickens. And a girl at the other end of the bus, after seeing that attitude, grabbed more chickens and shared them with everyone else on the bus” (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 36).
Figure 3.1. Mottos of the MAPU, Lautaro, and FRPL. Source: Carvajal (1990).
‘Felicidad’, ‘Alegría’, ‘Aquí y Ahora’

The Lautaro style of doing politics distinguished them from other Leftist movements, but their concept of how to live the revolution – specifically how to bring it to the people immediately – is perhaps their most significant contribution to revolutionary struggle. They maintained that being a Lautarino did not mean sacrificing their lives for an uncertain future, and furthermore, that it should not be considered a burden. Instead, they believed that at the core, their militancy meant experiencing happiness and living a joyful life in the current moment. For them, it was a fundamental part of their movement: “We are forging a new way of being and living as revolutionaries, appropriating our country for ourselves and everything it contains….This is a new logic, a new way of understanding and doing revolutionary politics, which clearly clashes with traditional forms, and the work of impotence [referring to traditional Left]” (Carvajal 1990). Furthermore, unlike traditional armed movements, which promised paradise at the end of a long struggle, Lautaro sought to provide felicidad and alegría immediately. They accomplished this through the implementation of what they called ‘the politics of concrete and useful goods for the people’ (la política de las cosas concretas y utiles para el pueblo), which meant the recuperation and distribution of their “revolutionary products” to pobladores in Chile’s slums. In this manner, they conveyed their concept of felicidad, bringing it out of the abstract and directly to daily lived experience (cotidianidad), to the here and now. As described by former militant Bernardo, “in other words, that’s where the concept of taking felicidad comes from: your happiness depends on you, you have to capture it, it doesn’t depend on anyone else. That’s the concept” (Órdenes 177). These elements which come directly from their founding manifesto. As the organization progressed, they became concretely defined political concepts and objectives, especially those of felicidad and alegría. Thus, the recuperation of chickens, meat, milk, and cheese satisfied the basic
human need of alleviating hunger, necessary for any person to experience a modicum of felicidad. Products such as cassettes, condoms and beer went a bit further, and were meant to provide people with alegría, more of a sense of enjoying life. For the militants themselves, they maintained normal lives up until their clandestine period. They engaged in social activities just like other young adults; they maintained romantic relationships and had children. Part of their ideology dictated that they be exemplars of the happiness that they were trying to bring to the people. This is the cornerstone of Lautaro’s discourse: “It intersects everything. It is an idea that runs through us completely. Of course, happiness is closely related to joy, to having a good time, but not happiness in the cliched sense, instead enjoying life in the sense of securing all of the conditions in order to live a fulfilled life, and having a good time generating and fighting for those conditions” (Faure 2006: 46).

Fundamental to this concept was the idea that “socialism was going to be a wild adventure which we had to live, where the fundamental wager was constructing happiness, and happiness would be constructed to the extent that health was a universal right, that food security would be a universal right….How we were going to achieve this we didn’t know, but the key was creating the conditions that would allow for the overthrow of power, which we defined as the triad of domination: the military, economic conglomerates and imperialism.” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 253).

‘El Sexo Nuestro’

A key aspect of this ideology was the Lautaro concept of ‘sexo nuestro’ (literally, our sex). This ideology came into existence largely due to the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1987. During a sermon at Chile’s national stadium directed specifically at young Chileans, he asked, “do you truly want to reject the idol of sex, of pleasure, which blocks your yearning to follow Christ…” The
youth responded with an emphatic and obstinate ‘NO’ to the Pope’s plea for abstinence, which led the Lautaro to begin formulating their politics of the ‘sexo nuestro’ (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 46). This combined two elements that the Lautaro viewed as fundamental to their revolutionary struggle. First, they viewed sex, and more specifically the enjoyment of their own bodies, as a crucial symbolic battleground from which they could convey their ideology. Due to the conservative nature of Chilean society during the 1980s, the discourse that sex should be enjoyable was controversial. An article from the journal *Pueblo Rebelde Vencerá*, a publication of the Lautaro in the 80s proclaimed, “They’ve got us full of fear, which they deal in and traffic in. Every day, they sell us fear of joy. The body is a motive for guilt, a marketable item which can be bought or rented, our bodies, our feelings, and love are also part of and a motive of the Revolution” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 261).

For another former militant, Silvio, “the subject of living our sexuality was very profound and very powerful, because the power of neoliberalism and of the catholic church is that it castrates you…it doesn’t allow you to live a full, exciting sexuality, and to enjoy it. Instead they give you that morality bullshit, that ethical immorality, in short, that whole bunch of crap. If our wager was to create a different society, undoubtedly, we had to start by being different ourselves, and enjoy our bodies” (Faure 2006: 50).

Additionally, ‘sexo nuestro’ was seen as another important aspect of the class struggle, one which needed to be addressed in order to break the cycle of poverty;

That was the idea, to appropriate for ourselves our most basic rights; we saw what was happening; everyone has sex, that’s what allows us to reproduce. But what happens: the poor, because we don’t have sex education, because we don’t have access to contraceptives, girls quickly get pregnant. Young couples then have to form families before finishing school and they end up reproducing the system of domination because they can’t continue studying. The conditions which keep them in a cycle of exploitation are exacerbated and they become yet another link in the chain of exploitation. On the other hand, the rich, the bourgeois, have everything
they need for prevention, etcetera, and are able to build their lives more fully (Órdenes 179).

Thus, access to contraceptives was considered part of a class struggle, but it was also important because contraceptives could change the experience that youth in the poblaciones had with their bodies, a crucial element for a successful revolution and for bringing felicidad to the here and now. They chose condoms as the symbol they would use in order to break the taboo surrounding sex, and they chose to recuperate them in a high-profile manner: breaking into pharmacies and holding them up at gunpoint only for condoms:

…at the beginning we didn’t even take money from the register, we only took condoms. It was madness. Later we began to take medicine, but, that was a symbol, that is language….With that symbol we were talking about the idea of happiness, of course, with 100 condoms you aren’t going to be happy, but it was a symbol, it was the idea. And for us that matter is key…I get the impression that we’re the only ones who have done things like that. It didn’t start with capital (money) but instead, it started with the senses. It brought ganas as the essential point, and it addressed the problem of satisfying desires, of experiencing the wonder that is sexuality (Faure 2006: 51).

Again, the Lautaro’s politics intersects multiple elements, combining their ideology surrounding sex and bringing it into the present moment. “There were compañeros who said, ‘fine, what does sex have to do with politics, what does it have to do with the revolution?’ And we said, ‘It has everything to do with it!’ And maybe with time that issue has left its mark, more than we had intended, it has left its mark and has installed itself within society” (Órdenes 180).

**Gender Politics Within the MAPU-Lautaro**

The Lautaro also distinguished themselves from other radical leftist groups in their approach to gender politics. In contrast to the MIR and Frente Popular Manuel Rodriguez, where women were relegated to more traditional roles, the female militants of the Lautaro were
protagonists within the organization. They took part in violent actions and formed all-female brigades. Per Ossandón, “Effectively, our compañeras have had and continue to have a prominent role in our organization and in the realization of our politics…” (Carvajal 1990). This emphasis on gender equality represented another way in which their concept of felicidad was put in practice in their daily lived experience. Furthermore, the Lautaro utilized all-women tactical teams, as well as the image of the mujer metralleta (submachine gun woman) as a powerful symbol that challenged gender norms. For them, those norms represented part of the patriarchal system of domination and were an integral aspect of the capitalist system they sought to dismantle: “This combination of woman and subversive, of woman and revolutionary, in societies like ours, strikes deeply at essential elements of domination…. These are unbearable and painful combinations for capitalism” (Carvajal 1990). Women not only participated in, but were the leaders of assaults on banks, pharmacies, and stores, while touting heavy weapons. The Lautaro considered this a particularly effective way to generate controversy, especially considering the traditional roles women occupied in Chilean society during the 1980s and 90s. The Lautaro’s utilization of the image of a topless woman holding a machine gun was intended to challenge the mindset of the general public, but could also have been used as a recruiting tool, considering that the majority of the militancy was urban youth.
The proclamation by former leader Ossandón that “we’ve never had any problem of discrimination” is supported by interviews of former female militants in Subiabre and Gallardo (2007: 325). When asked if traditional gender roles were present in the party, the interviewees categorically responded that they did not experience any sexism within the organization: “Everybody did everything, participation in one or another aspect was due to the capacity of each person, and never because someone was woman or a man would they be given a specific role over another,” and “That never occurred in the party as far as I remember,” “We’re all operatives, and as such are instructed in various kinds of weapons. When necessary, we use submachine guns, rifles, or revolvers” (Subiabre and Gallardo 2007: 323, 5). Thus, there is evidence that the external image portrayed by party leadership was in fact backed up by the actions of its members.
Furthermore, the female militants indicated that there was no explicit feminist discourse present in the party. Instead, this happened in a more natural manner, again highlighting how the Lautaro channeled elements present in the Left and incorporated them into the party.

However, while the Lautaro’s stance on women might have been more enlightened than that of many other radical Leftist groups, it was in accordance with the prevailing trend in Chilean society. Women were not content to sit on the sidelines, but instead played important roles in the social movements of the previous generations. The women of the Lautaro represented a continuation of this combative attitude (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 54). According to Subiabre and Gallardo, “Lautarino women were triple offenders of the system because they did not channel the traditional mores of patriarchy and the marianismo proposed by the dictatorship; did not accept the political-economic models imposed at the time, and as such, did not depoliticize. Thus, they transformed themselves into unrelenting enemies of the State and the system” (2007: 334). Indeed, the role of women in the Lautaro indicates yet another way in which the organization successfully interpreted and implemented the zeitgeist of the poblaciones. This was one of the contributing factors to the Lautaro’s influence in the poblaciones during the early phase of its mass actions; they capitalized on the feelings and emotions of the people, and successfully converted those emotions into direct actions using creative symbolic language.

_Lautarino Way of Being, Attempt To Influence Culture_

The condom recuperations are representative of Lautaro’s distinct political project: their direct actions strove to convey their message in part through symbols. Their intention was to create a unique culture, one that they hoped would replace the neoliberal one that had been implemented by the dictatorship. This culture they were trying to spread was meant to spark a revolution of the
very way people lived their day-to-day lives. They sought to transform society by transforming the men and women who constituted society (Carvajal 1990). The Lautarinos aspired to do this by imparting their concepts of alegría, felicidad, aquí y ahora, and cotidianidad, which for them constituted a distinct lifestyle, on the poblacion, and hoped that they would become the prevailing culture. As previously mentioned, they did not conceive of the revolution as a destination, a plateau that would only be realized after a long struggle. Therefore, it was crucial for them to make changes in their day-to-day lives, in their cotidianidad:

if you want to change your life, you have to do it day to day. If you don’t change your life in your daily experiences, you aren’t changing anything; and you have to change it in all aspects, from the smallest to the biggest. I mean, if we’re talking about a new society, let’s live that new society, let’s eradicate machismo from our homes, from our romantic relationships, let’s remove the patriarchy from our beds (Faure 2006: 41).

In this way, the politics of the Lautaro were a way of life, and being a Lautarino meant action more than adherence to a particular political ideology. In fact, it was not until 1988 at their 3rd Plenary, that they revealed their military strategy, their plan for insurrection that would overthrow the state. Up until that point, they were primarily engaged in symbolic mass actions instead of those that had clear political-military objectives. Or in Gramscian terms, the Lautaro was engaged in a war of position instead of a war of maneuvers.

It was the idea of doing politics beyond the State, that according to Rosas Aravena, linked the idea of ‘popular power’ with the concrete necessities of the poblaciones (2011: 75). The action of ‘taking’ conceived of the union of tactics with the political strategy of the party, in other words: in order to make the revolution, they had to generate actions on a daily basis that brought with them the revolutionary program (living and doing). Thus, the taking of Chile as a final strategy, was brought to the present through the taking of necessities…while ‘recuperations’ weren’t unprecedented in Chile, the ML conceptualized them best (Acevedo Arriaza 2014: 34)
**Conclusion**

One of the reasons the Lautaro defy classification is precisely because they did not strictly adhere to a specific political doctrine. The position of Andrés, who iterated that he didn’t consider himself an ‘ist’ of any particular belief system, is representative of the way that the group conducted their politics. They weren’t orthodox Marxists, and while their actions embody aspects of theories of several of the West’s thinkers, the Lautaro did not follow any teaching dogmatically. In fact, it wasn’t until their incarceration that they read the works of Michel Foucault and other social theorists. In my casual conversations with former members, they shrink from the suggestion that these concepts somehow belong to those theorists, and that they were borrowing them. On the contrary, as Acevedo asserts, “[The Lautaro] integrated into its discourse a series of cultural practices which at the beginning of the 90s were completely novel (sex, happiness, marijuana, sexual diversity)” (2014: 47).

But where exactly did those ideas come from? Clearly, the Lautaro did not invent the discourses surrounding gender equality, sexual liberation, or the acceptance of different sexual orientations. They did, however, because of their decision to reject their condition of poverty and of a class-based society, question the structure of the world around them, and invented new ways of doing politics that attempted to strike at that very power structure. Thus, one key aspect of the Lautaro was the rejection of the notion of absolute truth: “Here, it’s about one person doing one thing and the other doing what they want to, and later we find our common ground. There’s no such thing as custodians of truth, there’s no such thing as ‘the way things are done.’” So, the concept of diversity was very present in us” (Faure 2006: 42). The fascinating contribution of the Lautaro is how they repackaged concepts that were present in the groundwater of the revolutionary Left in Latin America, particularly in historically combative *poblaciones*, sites of resistance to the
dictatorship where support for Allende’s Popular Unity coalition was strongest. The concepts they dealt in were not completely new, but the creativity with which they brought feminism, sexual liberation, felicidad, etc. to the masses, and their attempt to bring the revolution into the present, certainly were. It hadn’t occurred to anyone before the Lautaro to attack pharmacies for the sole purpose of expropriating condoms. No other group distributed shoes to the public in the middle of the day, using numbers as their primary weapon. No other group conducted recuperations of basic consumer goods with the scale and frequency of the Lautaro.

Along with this creativity goes the Lautaro’s resourcefulness, which connects to its belief in creating the revolution aquí y ahora. One of the Lautaro’s distinguishing characteristics was its attitude for creating the conditions necessary for revolution, for recuperating anything they needed in order to make that happen. They made due with what they had. They did not look to outside sources for help, and didn’t maintain relationships with foreign revolutionary groups, or look for handouts; theirs was a self-made revolution. This can be seen in their use of artisanal weapons. The Lautaro called them ‘horacios’: two pieces of iron that came together to form a handmade gun. Or when weapons weren’t available, fake guns. Theirs was a creativity and a determination to make the revolution, and if the ‘conditions’ weren’t right, they found a way to create them.
Figure 3.3. The Lautaro in the news. Source: Carvajal (1990).
Chapter Four: Analysis of Participant Interviews

I conducted interviews with the former members of the MAPU-Lautaro during the winter of 2016. I contacted the interviewees through friends, whom I met while living in the capital between 2011 and 2013. During those years, I shared a residence with several former members of the MAPU-Lautaro, some of whom granted me interviews for this study. Others shared conversations and answered questions, or engaged in informal conversations relating to my topic, but preferred not to grant formal interviews.

While living in Santiago, I took part in several events organized to commemorate their key dates, peñas (fundraising gatherings), the day of the youth combatant (“el día del joven combatiente”), the September 11th protest march, the remembrance of the Vergara siblings, mural painting in Villa Francia, protests for the Chilean Student Movement, confrontations with riot police, as well as the day to day interactions that come with sharing a house with others. Through these events, I became immersed in the worldview and mindset of the former militants. I learned about how the group saw the world, how they managed the neoliberal capitalist system, and more specifically, how they tried to navigate it after having been so thoroughly defeated in their attempt to introduce an alternative. Although it was not my intent at the time, I found myself conducting a sort of informal ethnography of the Lautaro.

The interviews I was able to conduct were only possible because of the close relationships I developed with those formal militants. Still, it was difficult to secure interviews. The group is still apprehensive. Because of the nature of their actions and the fact that some cases are still open, distrust for the police and Chilean intelligence agency is widespread.

The principle themes of the interviews grew out of questions I couldn’t answer about the group while I lived with them, including my inability to comprehend the stoicism with which
they conducted lives after the defeat of their project. I was intrigued by the different ways in which they went about their daily lives: precisely how it was they made money? were they making ends meet with primarily through the informal economy? how did they feel about having to reintegrate themselves into the capitalist society they attempted to destroy? I also asked myself simple questions. Were they happy now? Were they happy with the lives they led? How did they cope with the failure of their project? How did they view current projects to alter society? That led to the primary question, the one that drove the interviews and forms the backbone of this narrative: what techniques do revolutionary subjects (in this case, ones who previously tried and failed to overthrow capitalism) use to resist neoliberalism today. This was a question which excited the interviewees; previous studies of the group focused on what they had done in the past, not what they were striving for now. The militants I talked to are no longer active in the MAPU-Lautaro, but they haven’t given up their struggle to change society.

The interviewees share similar views on a range of topics, one main concern is a give and take between acceptance and resistance. The militants accept the failure of their project and concede the dominance of the government and system that defeated them. I choose the word “acceptance” here instead of “resignation” because while they acknowledge the power structures that surround them, they do not surrender to them. Instead, they resist in a fundamental way, which is a continuation of the MAPU-Lautaro concept of ‘cotidianidad;’ their daily lives are a manifestation of their political project, and through that project they attempt to build class consciousness.
None of the participants I interviewed are currently engaged in institutional politics. In fact, all claim never to have participated in electoral politics. They see this abstention as a political act, the most notable being their abstention in the plebiscite of 1988. That decision is indicative of the former militants’ complete lack of faith in institutional politics. As a whole, they have a cynical view of the government’s policy towards Chile’s disadvantaged population. They believe the constitution implemented by the military junta created an underlying structure that makes participation in the electoral system pointless. Their mindset is rooted in a Marxist reading of power structures, and they utilize Marxist terminology (bourgeoisie, proletariat, class consciousness, fetishization, etc.) to explain their refusal to vote. They refer to themselves as “slaves,” when they describe their condition as members of the working class. In their eyes, Chile’s economic elite own and control the country. They do not expect any beneficial change to come from the ballot and do not believe that the government will enact any legislation to significantly change the plight of the poor, because it is fated to serve the bourgeoisie who control the system from above.

This represents a common theme amongst the interviewees. Their radical ideology, rooted in the desire to create a classless society, means that they do not believe that incremental change is either beneficial or desirable. They view any reforms as mere palliatives that temporarily reduce tensions within the capitalist system in order to ensure its survival. Put plainly, even the best capitalist system is unacceptable: “My idea, my aspiration is to destroy a class-based society, to destroy capitalism from its foundation and to generate a different society”.

(my trans, interview, F). They consider their abstention from voting to be another form of
resistance. Their decision not to vote is also rooted in the trauma of the coup: interviewees stressed that they do not believe that Chile’s democracy is truly a democracy.

*Lack of faith in the Effectiveness of Social Movements*

Given their stance on institutional politics, interviewees doubt that social movements will improve the living conditions of the working class. While they hold social movements in higher regard than electoral politics, they still seem a fruitless endeavor. In their minds, social movements are weak because they beg for change instead of taking matters into their own hands. For one, “they seem to me to be no more than people getting together to say ‘we disagree’, but hoping that others solve their problems for them” (interview Silvio). This former militant elaborated this point by drawing a historical connection between the oppressors of the past and present: “You can’t expect anything from the guys who’ve always screwed us over, our whole lives. These guys are the sons, grandsons, great-grandsons of the fuckers that screwed over our fathers, our grandfathers, great-grandfathers, everybody man! If you look at it, those are the same fancy last names as from when the Basque-Spaniard oligarchy took control of Chile” (interview Silvio) This is a clear reference to the MAPU-Lautaro attitude of taking power and creating the conditions for revolution.

Another interviewee expressed disdain for the recent protest marches: “That shit doesn’t excite me. What do the people get by doing that? On Saturday there was a march for indebted students and there were a few thousand people. And the papers, ‘El Mercurio,’ the duopolistic press which handled it, showed the front page as if nothing happened, because when there’s no violence they lower the number of attendance, it’s like they’re just playing with the story.” (interview Andrés). This person went on to say that going to protest is the least people can do,
leaving plenty to be desired. With respect to frequent violent clashes between police and the
masked protestors who engage them at the end of marches, Javier is only a bit more sympathetic:
“I subscribe to the mask as a method of political action. I’m masked, that’s how I define myself
at 43. I’m masked, and I am a brother and comrade of all masked who go out and protest, who
destroy churches, who light crucifixes on fire. I subscribe to those forms of action, I consider
them profoundly political”. Other interviewees choose not to attend marches because they
believe that the movements will simply be co-opted by the Chilean Communist Party, and do not
want to ‘give them numbers’.

Current Ideology

All but one of the interviewees still consider themselves to be Marxist-Leninists today.
Those who maintain the MAPU-Lautaro stance of “Marxism-Leninism-Mapucism-Lautarism”
continue to view Marx’s dialectic as the best way to analyze society and transform it. Others
share this view and continue to adhere to Marx’s dialectic of a society divided between the
owners of the means of production and the non-owners. Said one interviewee, “In my opinion,
there’s no middle class. There are the poor and the rich. There are those who, as Marx says, are
the owners of the means of production and those who sell their labor power.” (interview Silvio).
Andrés simply stated that he still believed in Marx’s economic and material theory and the
practice of Lenin. Silvio looks back on his ideological beliefs in a way that expresses the group’s
acceptance of their past actions; “I have never abandoned the idea of looking at society with a
Marxist lens, the idea of building society from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. I’m not bitter. In
fact, I've always said if I was eighteen again, I would probably do exactly the same thing. And if
I was 18 years old today I would definitely be involved....”. Jorge is still a Marxist-Leninist, but
stressed the progression of his thought; “I continue to consider myself a Marxist-Leninist….There are two things: I still am and there’s also been an evolution. I believe that thought like this constantly evolves and transforms. It can’t become stagnant. If it doesn’t [evolve] it’s nothing, it would be something else. So, I’m still the same as I was when I was a militant in the MAPU, with the Lautaro. I still identify myself as Marxist-Leninist. I’m convinced that it’s the best possible explanation for the transformation of society” (interview Jorge).

One interviewee among the former militants no longer defines himself as a Marxist-Leninist. Instead, Javier now considers himself an anarchist. He repeatedly expressed not so much a sense of regret but what I would characterize as a measured, logical analysis of his idealistic actions as a youth. Today, he considers that the MAPU-Lautaro concept of seizing power was ridiculous and impossible, and by extension that Marxism-Leninism was an organizing ontology with no chance of success. This position does not amount to resignation or regret per se of his actions as a militant but a pessimistic assessment of society. Javier again used the term ‘slaves’ to refer to the working class. The ‘slaves’ do not have the capability of overthrowing the current system because of their very condition of being ‘slaves’:

I mean, the idea of taking power is absurd. Today that’s how I feel, and this is an idea, something that I’ve defended throughout the years, and that the Lautaro defended; the idea of taking power. And that shit is ridiculous. Nobody can take power, it’s impossible. We don’t have one very important thing: we don’t have the weapons in order to do it. Slaves will never have sufficient weapons to take power. We can’t. Yes, we can fuck with the elite, and give them a hard time. And that’s completely legitimate. Nonetheless, anyone who believes that they can take power, who confronts power, I respect them. Even though they’re wrong (interview Javier).

This former militant expresses the seemingly contradictory relationship between acceptance and resistance well, although a bit heavy handedly for some fellow former militants. However,
despite its apparent defeatism, at the core it represents how they group navigates the neoliberal model in the aftermath of the shipwreck that was their collective project. They do not regret the actions they took as militants, nor have they changed their minds about the need to struggle against the inequalities inherent in capitalism. Instead, they acknowledge the overwhelming power of the current system as well as the unlikelihood that it will change, but they still strive to live according to their ideology and impart it in their immediate surroundings. Silvio put it this way: “I was imprisoned in ‘93. And I’m talking about [when I thought about this in] 2005. It [had been] twelve, thirteen years… I [did] an analysis of all that [happened]. When I was imprisoned we were crazy, we were terrorists, we were f**ked up, [they said] ‘this isn’t how you solve problems,’ this, that and the other basically. But I came to understand that in [those] thirteen years, including eleven years in prison, nobody has ever convinced me that I was wrong, or that they were right. Quite the opposite” (interview Silvio). Their thought hasn’t changed so much as their tactics.

*Resistance: Continued Attempt to Influence Consciousness*

As we’ve seen, the former militants do not pursue change through institutional politics or social movements. None of them are currently active in political parties. Their dream of overthrowing the bourgeois system failed. So how do they attempt to effect change in society today? The lifestyles and actions of the militants interviewed are still directed towards the reordering of society, but the group is now focused on short-term goals that are much more limited in scope than those which ordered their political action in the past. Gabriela expressed that: “Today we don’t expect to transform society as a whole, but I hope to live a different way in my house, in my circle, in my family, and with my partner.” (Gabriela). But their political
action reaches beyond the home as well. Many in the group engage in activities that primarily aim towards changing consciousness at the grassroots level, first in the *poblaciones*, and stress that “the struggle is for the long haul”. The goal of these actions reflects the ideology of the MAPU-Lautaro during their mass action stage: they aim to create a new society by helping to form other revolutionary subjects, by changing the day-to-day lived experiences of the *pobladores*.

These activities include dance, syndicate organizing, literacy classes and pedagogy instruction, among others. Furthermore, all the former militants consider themselves actively engaged in various forms of resistance to neoliberal capitalism. These actions range from not voting, evasion of payment for public services, and support for and engagement in violent confrontations with police.

While these actions do not appear at first glance to be political acts, their aim is political and the struggle for them affords meaning to those who engage in them. The emphasis that they place on the MAPU-Lautaro concept of *cotidianidad* is crucial. Each reiterated the importance of the day to day lifestyles they have chosen as an expression of resistance: “I disagree with the implication that daily life is different from politics, or that daily life is something other than doing politics. Instead, daily life aims at those changes, at cultural transformations that become political transformations” (interview Jorge). This belief was reiterated by all interviewees: they see their day to day lives as mindful choices that are a clear manifestation of their politics. They no longer aspire to transform society through the violent overthrow of the state, and they accept that this is highly improbable in the short term. Instead, they attempt to influence power relations at the micro level even though they accept that radical change is improbable. One interviewee expressed that her focus was on the “micro-social. On daily life. That’s why the ’useful and
concrete goods for the people’ make so much sense to me. I think that today the political discourse of the Lautaro is better understood than it was in the 90s. In the 90s I think it was postmodern, surrealist for what we were living and shaking up. I really do think that the discourse was way ahead of its time for what society was experiencing. That was a tactical mistake, we should have pulled back and built more.” (interview Gabriela).

By focusing on the “micro-social, on daily life”, interviewees hope to alter the consciousness of Chileans. Their top priority is to reverse the epidemic of individualism they see in Chilean society. According to Gabriela, the dictatorship conditioned Chileans to be wary of their neighbors and to pursue an individualist agenda. The implementation of neoliberalism further cemented this mentality. Thus, in order for any substantial change to be realized, a revival of class consciousness must first be achieved: “Deep individualism has penetrated so strongly in this society that it must change, people have to relate to each other in different way. They have to feel that it’s possible to live another way” (interview Gabriela).

This is a shared view. According to Silvio; “the effect of the coup was not just economic. After the neoliberal invention was set loose here in Chile as a great experiment, [it] has penetrated deeply in social aspects in addition to the economic ones… it has penetrated deeply into the soul of the people” (interview Silvio). Silvio elaborates on this idea, again using the Marxist term for the proletariat – “slaves” – to highlight the importance of first changing consciousness:

I told you before about modern slaves. The worst of all is that they have no consciousness, they are not aware that they should be resisting. [From] their bodies, a less oppressed body from the point of view of blows, but from the social suffering, which is there all the time. It’s subject to the whims of others, the decisions of others. It is marked by a supposed liberal democracy, a democracy that respects the freedom of the human being. Lies, the least you have is that. There’s not even human dignity, much less freedom…. At least that exists here in Chile, the illusion of freedom.
Interviewees hoped to bring their revolutionary ideas to the very *poblaciones* that were most severely affected by the dictatorship. “I believe in popular expression at the grassroot levels, in the *poblaciones*. That’s where reconstruction happens, because that’s where the military and the system did the most damage. That’s essentially where the defeat manifested itself, intensely” (interview Andrés). This concept of resistance was further iterated by Andrés:

> What I’m doing today, I’m working on a wonderful idea called [literacy classes] for adults in the neighborhood where I live. That's my vocation. That is my wager at the level of doing something social. It’s not a job, not paid employment, but instead something that you do out of conviction, because, for me that is part of militancy. Being a militant, and really belonging to militancy is revolutionary militancy, the militancy of change, of transforming all this. I do that today, I'm with a group of colleagues and that’s where I have my poker chips…working with the *pobladores*. They’re the ones who were defeated. I’m not talking from a place of defeatism, but instead in terms of the facts. You have to accept it in order to consider the possibility of continuing the fight. Because this shit was just one battle. It was a battle, and [we] lost. That’s what I believe in, that the task is done inch by inch.

Bringing micro-social changes to *poblaciones* and other neighborhoods is seen as revolutionary because it reflects the objective of the chicken recuperations of the 1980s. It is an attempt to change the mentality of Chile’s youth. The MAPU Lautaro, when they had the most numbers, aimed at creating revolutionary subjects, at sparking revolutionary consciousness through mass action. When this war of maneuvering shifted to a war of position, when the MAPU-Lautaro began primarily engaging Chile’s military instead of the minds of the *pobladores*, their influence quickly faded. Jorge’s strategy acknowledges those mistakes, and is squarely focused on revive class consciousness in the *poblaciones*:

> The objective continues to be the construction of a classless society. To end capitalism. That’s it. However, today, because of the political situation, the consciousness of the working class has been defeated, annihilated, beaten down, and is totally diminished in all honesty. I think it’s fundamental to return to the grassroots: organizing. [It’s not] bureaucratic organizing, not organizing by elites,
of leaders, but rather building a new fabric, raising consciousness, and that consciousness is built through struggle. It’s not an academic consciousness. Discourse doesn’t create consciousness. Discussion doesn’t create consciousness. There is no conviction unless it’s through struggle. And that struggle has to be daily. That’s the only true struggle, I believe a heroic one, not the fetishization of armed struggle, but instead it has to do with – and here’s where we harken back to what we said in the MAPU, that the struggle is every day, part of your day-to-day life. That’s what transforms lives. And it has to go on transforming society. However, if the question is the longer term, I think that if we really want to defeat capitalism, violence will play an integral role in that battle. It has to, because the elite will protect their interests, and it’s logical from their point of view. They have privileges and there’s no way in hell they’re going to give them up peacefully. They are going to defend those privileges with all the strength they have.

**Hope: Prospects for the Future**

Finally, interviewees hold out hope. The have a realistic, pragmatic appraisal of the current situation, yet they are convinced that things can change. They can’t conceive of any other way to live their lives. They don’t consider themselves victims, and their vision is primarily forward, looking to how they can change the future instead of dwelling on the past. For Jorge:

Nobody is a victim in this. I don’t feel that I was a victim, and I was imprisoned with my compañeros. I was exiled, tortured, all of that. But I don’t think we're victims. We knew what could happen. And it happened. Today I also make choices…. Nobody forces me [to do anything] …. But despite that…. I think it is insufficient to only consider [yourself] a member of the resistance against capitalism; I believe that not only must we resist, but that we must fight against it and change it.

When closing the interviews, the participants shared their prescriptions for alleviating the ills of living under neoliberal capitalism; “I think that the crucial aspect of all this is not to accept the system, all the cosmetics. I don’t buy it. Instead, I focus on the concrete and day-to-day experience of being happy, of enjoying life, enjoying living, and making the revolution. And that joy and happiness is an essential part of your life. That to me is very Lautarino” (interview Gabriela). As put succinctly by Andrés:
And that's where [you] maintain this discursivity and practice, these places of resistance, that’s where you have to be. Because if you’re not, everything you did before is worthless, it’s worth jack shit….I still believe in this. Sometimes I’m pissed, I get angry, sometimes I’m disenchanted, I say ‘to hell with it all’. I see the people on the busses, the ones the television says are the new poor Chilean fascist (class traitor). And there are people who are risking their asses for them. Maybe not for them but for this. But, in spite of that, I have that little light that like a heartbeat is there. And what’s beautiful is that I know it was born. I have a sort of photographic album of it. And that's a treasure where it's going to end, that's what’s being done in this movie. That keeps me calm, reassures me, and sustains me. It helps me maintain my dignity…
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