

# From ‘we shall prevail’ to ‘weapon of struggle’: Populism, Chile’s *Unidad Popular* government and *Nueva Canción*

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## Abstract

*The Chilean nueva canción (‘new song’) movement is one of Latin America’s most enduring musical phenomena. Strongly associated with the rise of left-wing political forces in the 1960s, and then with anti-dictatorship protests in the 1970s and 1980s, nueva canción is deeply embedded in Chilean political consciousness. This article provides a new perspective on the movement by exploring its populist elements and considering these in relation to Communist Party cultural policy. It focuses on a significant historical moment – the Chilean Communist Party’s 1971 Assembly on the Chilean Revolution and the Problems of Culture – to ascertain how the political potential of ‘Chilean new song’ was viewed by this key partner in the Chilean coalition government. Through this examination, this article offers new insight into the political positioning of CNS, illustrating the movement’s socio-political role in terms of the broader ideological principles and imperatives of the vía chilena (‘Chilean road’) to socialism.*

## Introduction

In 1970, Chile came to be ‘the first country in the Western Hemisphere to elect a Marxist president’, Salvador Allende, in an openly democratic process (De Vylder 1976, p. 24). This was a remarkable political moment during the Cold War, in which Cuba–USA tensions dominated regional geopolitics, and where the USA actively sought to disrupt and destabilise left-wing political movements throughout the continent (Blum 2003; McSherry 2005). Allende’s ascendancy was celebrated globally in leftist circles as a sign that socialism could prevail in a liberal democracy, despite pressures from local elites and the Western hemisphere logics of the Cold War.

Allende was the presidential candidate for a wide-ranging left-wing coalition, the Unidad Popular ('Popular Unity', henceforth PU), which coalesced around a platform of domestic social issues stemming from entrenched poverty and disadvantage. The 1970 election campaign featured widespread public participation in political activism, including the prominent presence of popular musicians who performed in support of the PU and its working-class rhetoric. These musicians were part of a broader cultural movement termed *nueva canción chilena* ('Chilean new song', henceforth CNS). This music, and the activist culture it accompanied, became enduring elements in Chilean politics. CNS musicians spent the entire period of the Pinochet dictatorship years protesting from abroad, and their songs have re-emerged in times of social unrest (Paúl 2019), as in the 2019–2020 *estallido social* (or 'social outburst') protests that culminated in efforts to rewrite Chile's dictatorship era constitution (1980).

Combative, idealistic, militant and explicitly concerned with social justice, CNS had broad populist as well as left-wing political features. Although CNS originated years before the ascendancy of the PU, it nevertheless became a powerful political force for the Chilean left in the 1970 election. This power was reflected in the treatment of CNS after the PU was deposed in the military coup of 1973. Popular musician and Communist Party stalwart Victor Jara was assassinated, artistic activities associated with CNS were prohibited, and many performers fled from Chile as political refugees (McSherry 2017). CNS ensemble Inti-Illimani satirically described their years of exile as 'the longest tour in the history of Chilean music' (Horn 1987, p. 242). Not all CNS performers were overtly politically aligned, however, and many CNS compositions reflected issues and artistic themes that were of interest throughout Chilean society, giving the movement a popular appeal that transcended party politics. In fact, in recent years, politicians from both the left and the right have directly referenced CNS in public speeches and campaign advertisements (CNN Chile 2022; Vilchez 2019).

CNS therefore has a complex history in which politics, populism and popular music are entwined. This article aims to examine this complexity, focusing on the time of ascendancy of the PU coalition (c. 1969–1971). We apply populism as a lens through which to explore CNS key attributes, discussing how these elements potentially aligned with PU initiatives, and then considering these in relation to the cultural policy platform of the Chilean Communist Party – a major contributor to the formation of PU arts policy. The article seeks to make two interlinked contributions to popular music scholarship. First, it engages with emerging conversations about populism and popular music (e.g. Garratt 2019; Patch 2016), extending this discourse to an important context in Latin America. Second, it aims to expand the scope of existing CNS studies by examining an important moment in the development of PU arts policy (Ayo Schmiedecke 2022; Canto Novoa 2012; Fairley 1984; Peters 2020) that has not been the subject of a detailed conceptual and music-focused examination: the Chilean Communist Party's 1971 Assembly on the Chilean Revolution and the Problems of Culture (henceforth 'the Assembly'). Our approach to this topic is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing together complementary interests in political science and cultural studies, Chilean popular music studies (Bendrups 2016, 2011) and social studies of populism (Casanueva Baptista and Sanchez Urribarrí 2018), also building on our shared knowledge of Chilean music, politics and culture.

We consider the Assembly to be significant for several reasons. The Communist Party was a large, powerful and disciplined member of the PU coalition (Winn 1986).

Electorally successful in the 1969 parliamentary elections, it wielded considerable influence over agenda-setting policy overall with a distinct interest in cultural policy (see Ayo Schmiedecke 2022; Faúndez 1988; Peters 2020). On this basis, the minutes of the Assembly were published in book form in 1971, becoming a public reference point for policy discussion. This publication is useful as a case study through which to understand the political zeitgeist of the early PU government, despite the inherent ambiguities of this method (Gerring 2004). Finally, the Assembly is significant because it took place at a crucial time of policy consolidation in the establishment phase of the PU government, when coalition members were starting to develop a long-term vision for the imagined socialist future of Chile.

In addressing this topic, we also acknowledge some important limitations. First, it is not our intent here to define CNS or the PU as populist (or otherwise), nor to ascribe any ideological judgement. Rather, we seek to discuss how different understandings of populism can be employed to analyse significant CNS and PU sources, in order to illustrate how this popular artistic movement interacts with the socio-political underpinnings of PU cultural policy. Thus, we attempt to show how key perspectives based on populism help illuminate the role of CNS as a political force in connection to the PU coalition. At the same time, we seek to make sense of the coalition's efforts (and challenges) to incorporate seemingly grass roots CNS into a government-led left-wing revolutionary transformation that had a strong top-down direction. This approach echoes that of other scholars who have engaged with populism as a concept in order to understand various elements of the PU campaign and government in different ways (e.g. Cousiño Valdés 2001; Larraín and Meller 1990; Larroulet Vignau 2017; Riveros Ferrada 2021, among others).

Second, while CNS is the subject of this article, we do not provide an exhaustive history of the movement, nor a comprehensive range of musical examples. CNS history is already well represented in established literature in both Spanish and English (e.g. Advis Vitaglich 1996; García 2013; González Rodríguez *et al.* 2009; Inostroza 2007, 2018; Mamani 2013, 2019; McSherry 2015a, b; Morris 1986; Palominos Mandiola 2018; Pino-Ojeda 2015, 2021; Taffet 1997). Rather, we aim to complement these works with new information arising specifically from a music-focused analysis of the Assembly, offering a re-evaluation of the correlation between CNS as a cultural movement with its political environment. Where musical examples are called for, we draw on some of the better-known and most obvious examples mentioned in the Assembly document itself.

Our study now proceeds as follows. The first section provides a summary of perspectives on populism that are pertinent to the Chilean political context of 1970, along with a consideration of this literature in relation to aspects of CNS. The second section focuses on the Assembly document, providing a hermeneutic description of critical passages in which popular music is mentioned. Quotes from the Assembly document are provided verbatim and in translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are our own. Next, we conclude the article with a discussion that compares the populist elements of CNS with the Assembly's depiction of the role of popular music within a revolutionary, socialist movement. We also note points of confluence and tension that arise between populist inclinations and the Assembly's set of policy guidelines.

## Populism, politics and culture

Populism has become an increasingly common – yet contested – concept used to describe and analyse certain types of political projects or movements that typically involve popular leaders who appeal to an aggrieved commons ('the people'). They claim a mandate on their behalf against an individual, a group, a political party or some other entity responsible for the problems of the people, the nation, or both. Although it is a concept with a long and rich tradition in the social sciences, it has become more prominent in recent years. This is in connection with a variety of transformative political projects, where leaders or movements have proposed and sought political change on behalf of the people against the 'establishment' and denounced the status quo as somehow inimical to the people, or the nation as a whole (see Moffitt 2020; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017). While recent uses of the term have often been reserved for right-wing and nativist movements (e.g. the USA under Donald J. Trump, Brexit and the governments of Viktor Orbán and the Law and Justice Party in Poland), there are many examples coming from the political left as well (e.g. the governments of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia), and even some that defy left–right categorisations (e.g. Duterte in the Philippines or, historically, Perón in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil and Nasser in Egypt). The list of examples is vast and varied, and its importance increasingly realised beyond the context of democratic backsliding – the growing consensus, instead, is that populism is a key phenomenon in politics across different types of regime (Anselmi 2018; De La Torre 2018).

What do all these governments, regimes or political movements have in common? In what respect do they vary – both across countries and over time – and why? These are questions that have animated the vast literature on populism and its political implications. Within populism studies, several major perspectives have emerged, which can be grouped into ideational, strategic and socio-cultural approaches (see Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017). Broadly speaking, the first approach focuses on 'the people' as sovereign and pays special attention to its 'protection' against a betraying elite which manifests itself in political discourse, style, aesthetics and other ways. In Mudde's words in his seminal work, 'The populist zeitgeist', populism is defined 'as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004, p. 543). The strategic approach, on the other hand, 'depicts populists essentially as power-seeking opportunists with weak, fickle – but not non-existent – ideological commitments who use policies primarily for instrumental purposes' (Weyland 2021, p. 185). Thus, after rejecting concepts anchored in specific historical locations, class-based composition, types of popular constituency or economic policy, Weyland advocated for a concept that 'focuses on the methods and instruments' leaders or groups use to obtain and wield power (Weyland 2001, p. 12).

Finally, the socio-cultural perspective looks at the ways of doing politics and articulating political demands, paying attention to the mobilisational (and even antagonistic) aspects of politics. Within this perspective, of particular note are scholars like Ostiguy (2017) and Moffitt (2016), who call attention to the relational and performative features of populism as a phenomenon. For instance, Moffitt highlights

that populism is a political style; in an approach linked to scholars who look at populism as a discourse (e.g. De La Torre 2010; see also Hawkins 2010), Moffitt advocates going beyond rhetoric, and embrace performative and relational elements of populism. In this view, populism is taken to be 'a performative political style by providing a theoretical framework where the leader is seen as the performer, "the people" as the audience, and crisis and media as the stage on which populism plays out upon' (Moffitt 2016, pp. 4–5).

Each of these perspectives has observable implications for the relationship between CNS and the ascendance of the PU to power under Salvador Allende. That said, our goal is not to advance or test a single explanation regarding a particular aspect of CNS; it is rather to explore CNS as an influential movement with a populism lens highlighting key features of its relationship with the PU government and Chilean society in this era. For this reason, we prefer not to peg our analysis to any approach in particular. Instead, we consider it more useful to use key ideas anchored in the populism literature to assess CNS as an industrious cultural movement, paying attention to the bottom-up, organic processes of its formation and historical trajectory as a popular, nationalist, socially conscious effort linked to wider ambitions for social change. We discuss these ideas as we elaborate the analysis of CNS below, explaining keynote instances of its progression and relationship with Allende's coalition. This includes regarding some of these elements as 'tactical', given the specific ways in which the movement was labelled, co-opted and strategically employed as a vector for expanding the PU's popularity and legitimacy in a time of political turmoil owing to rapid and contested change.

Part of our analysis borrows from the socio-cultural or relational approach described above, in so far as CNS music is performed for the people, with a message of change against an established elite (first), and in favour of a transformative government subsequently. This transpired within a specific media milieu and with discernible effects on social mobilisation and, eventually, changes advocated by the PU. In this sense, our study can be linked to existing (and emerging) research that looks at music as articulating populist politics (see Garratt 2019; Way 2016). At the same time, we are interested in the way the PU government employed policy to control, shape and re-identify CNS as part of an ideological project. Despite the evident Marxist inspiration of this endeavour, a number of PU tactics concerning popular music and policy in this era can also be usefully discussed as a populist strategy – denouncing a prevailing elite in an effort to strategically obtain political dominance on behalf of a large group of people. This is not only useful to understand CNS and PU connections as an isolated case study, but also to bring these connections to potential broader debates concerning the role of music in populist politics, a topic that is vital for other countries in the region (e.g. Alí Primera under the Chavista Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, see Marsh 2016). While we do not develop this comparative angle, we hope this is taken into account by other researchers examining this topic in other socio-political and historical contexts in the future.

## **The emergence and political positioning of CNS**

CNS emerged in the 1960s in parallel with similar musical movements throughout the Americas (Fairley 1984). All these had various features in common. They all engaged with progressive political expression and protest (calling for social justice, decrying militarism or commercialism, or often both), and they were all aesthetically

involved with musical and thematic elements drawn from national or local music cultures, including folk, traditional and in some cases Indigenous references. Likewise, they shared an anti-imperialist attitude towards the increasingly globalised commercial domain of popular music, rejecting productions perceived as foreign, overly commercial, or 'pop' oriented, especially those emanating from the USA.

CNS was not initially perceived as a party-political movement (or affiliated with one). It emerged within a society in which music had, arguably, been a long-standing feature of public activism. This can be observed in a diverse range of historical and cultural contexts: from the revolutionary songs of the War of Independence era (early 1800s), through to the songs of Indigenous activists seeking to confront state injustice (see Bendrups 2006). It is reflected in the role of the *paya* (satirical song 'duel') in folk music, and even in art music compositions such as Luis Advis' *Cantata Santa María de Iquique*, which memorialised the Chilean army massacre of northern saltpetre workers during a strike in 1907.

The broad CNS literature maintains that, from the 1950s onwards, the movement was heavily influenced by the compositions and performances of Violeta Parra and her close collaborators. Parra is credited with awakening a critical voice within Chilean folk music. Horacio Salinas of CNS ensemble Inti-Illimani once reflected that prior to Parra, 'the Chilean song presented a vision from the hacienda and the boss, not from the trades. Violeta Parra saw this new popular subject and sang to its discontent, to its effort and its condition' (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes 2017, p. 39).

Throughout the 1960s, themes of social justice featured consistently in CNS compositions, alongside anti-imperial sentiments directed at foreign influence in Chilean popular culture; hence the movement found support in a range of institutional and community contexts. For example, as Morris (1986) notes, universities such as the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago provided a staging ground for CNS development. In 1969, this well-established and somewhat traditionalist institution hosted the *Primer Festival de la Nueva Canción Chilena* (or 'First Festival of Chilean New Song'). The University Rector's address to the festival articulated a vision for CNS as a means of preserving and promoting Chilean music and culture in the face of an increasingly penetrative international popular music market.

Towards the end of the 1960s a core group of CNS musicians, including singer-songwriter Victor Jara and prominent folk groups Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani and others, became active participants in Allende's electoral campaign and explicit proponents of the PU's progressive and transformative agenda. While the PU government was not exclusively a populist force, musicians aligned with the coalition engaged in various types of performance practices that sustained a clear stance of popular resistance against perceived elites, reflected across ideological, symbolic and communicatory domains.

Song titles and lyrics conveying popular dissent, protest themed albums and vinyl covers depicting domestic, Indigenous and working-class imagery, provided obvious starting points from which to observe key musical elements that aligned with the political objectives of the PU coalition, and part of an overarching struggle against the political establishment. At times, they also included features that were openly socialist. This is markedly shown in the work of avowed Communist popular musician Victor Jara (McSherry 2015b; Mularski 2014), nearly all of whose songs are explicitly or implicitly political in nature. His 1969 composition (and title

of his 1971 album) 'El Derecho de Vivir en Paz' ('The Right to Live in Peace') is a case in point. The song protests the US invasion of Vietnam, decrying state-based violence and projecting a stance of solidarity with Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and anti-war movements (Karmy and Ayo Schmiedecke 2020). In another song on the 1971 album, 'B.R.P.' (a contraction of *Brigada Ramona Parra*, the 'Ramona Parra Brigade'), Jara sings to the diligent muralists that pay tribute to a young communist who perished in 1946 at the hands of the police force during a workers' rally in Santiago (Memoria Chilena: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile 2021; Palmer 2008). Jara's use of the terms 'young comrade' and 'red cry of freedom' exemplifies his political stance. Songs such as these became part of the broad-based left-wing turn against 'elite' government-sponsored oppression that had flavoured the 1970 election campaign.

Still, the content of these songs was not always ideological; they should also be seen as a continuation of a popular effort that places the people in defiance of privileged sectors, demanding change to the status quo with or without specific ideological content. Then again, by the time the PU came together, the political positioning of CNS grew firmer and more visibly aligned with the PU's programme and main goals. CNS performers actively contributed to Allende's campaign under the motto 'there is no revolution without songs' (González Rodríguez *et al.* 2009, p. 48). Allende's electioneering events featured regularly performed songs that became official or unofficial anthems of the people calling for political change. A notable example is that of 'Venceremos' ('We shall prevail'), in time performed by both Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún. An enthusiastic, participatory invitation to mobilise in favour of Allende (Morris 1986; Rolle 2013; Taffet 1997), this chant fostered at the same time the image of the PU as a grass roots movement against a common political enemy, i.e. the establishment or ruling elites. This element or feature can be best appreciated through a populism lens. An approach grounded on populism helps us understand aspects of the role of CNS figures in the broader process of change taking place in Chilean society.

Another notable instance is in the folk singer's reification as a figure voicing the needs of 'the people'. Violeta Parra and Victor Jara were two salient examples, with Parra becoming canonised after her death in 1967, and Jara later becoming a martyr of the political left after he was assassinated in September 1973, only days after the coup. Parra's appeal to 'the people' was a product of both the popularity of her songs and her prominent contribution to the collection and preservation of Chilean folk music. As asserted by Verba (2013), she harnessed both tradition and creativity to 'perform' herself into a position of perceived authenticity. While many of her songs were not overtly political, she was an adherent to global socialist movements and an advocate for revolutionary songs. One of her most celebrated songs, 'La Carta' ('The Letter'), is a case in point: it begins with the personal narrative of a sister receiving a letter about her brother's imprisonment for his participation in a labour strike, but then unfolds powerfully into a general critique of wealth inequity and the arbitrary wielding of state power. Interestingly, her lyrics illustrate a populist perception of a corrupt privileged class characterised by its ostentation and social disconnect.

Parra and her contemporaries pioneered the combination of folk and Indigenous musical instruments and costumes that would later become symbolic visual elements of CNS. In the mid-1960s, Parra collaborated extensively with (then partner) Gilbert Favre, living and performing with him in both Europe and

Chile. Favre was, in turn, a core member of the Bolivian folk ensemble Los Jairas, who had pioneered a new style of group performance comprising Andean traditional flutes, percussion and the small guitar-like charango. Subsequently, Parra's Santiago performance venue *La Carpa de La Reina* (a repurposed circus tent located in La Reina commune in Santiago) became an experimental space that fostered new combinations of Andean, Indigenous and settler-colonial folk musics within the context of cultivating a domestic audience (Valencia, 2014; Verba 2013). Emerging singer-songwriter Victor Jara performed here. The ensemble Quilapayún, one of the most significant groups to back Allende's campaign, was also a product of this environment. Quilapayún would later be designated Allende's 'cultural ambassadors' (Carrasco 2003).

The cultural phenomenon of the *peña* – traditionally, an informal community musical gathering or party – and the deliberate combination of Andean and European instruments and costumes, offered a complex intermixture of symbols that would subsequently underscore populist elements of the PU campaign, encouraging a notion of the people that went beyond pre-existing categories or groups. This synthesis of cultural elements blurred the boundaries between urban and rural, between Indigenous and *criollo* (Chileans of Spanish heritage), and between community spirit and political activism. Music and musicians that emerged from these spaces shared several characteristics that affirmed the communicatory and ideological aspects of left-wing populism. They created an assortment of politically motivated folk songs, adopting names, attire (such as the woollen *poncho* typically associated with rural Chileans, which derived from Indigenous antecedents) and musical instruments from traditional rural and Indigenous backgrounds. Narratives of oppression integrated these cultural references, coalescing through repertoires rich in massed-vocal choruses that were well suited to audience participation. These renditions also translated readily to visual representation in live performances (often for urban cosmopolitans), as well as imagery in the form of posters, flyers and album covers, combining into compelling and emblematic representations of 'the people'.

The outcome of the 1970 election was close, with Allende securing the slimmest of majorities needed to form government. After the election, the PU moved quickly to address the structural disadvantages they had campaigned against, implementing the changes set out in their 1969 manifesto (Unattributed 1969). These measures often entailed significant alterations to the status quo, and the PU turned to their CNS supporters to help promote these changes in ways that would quickly reach a broad audience. Thus, key CNS musicians found themselves pivoting from being voices of protest to voices of government. This pivot is exemplified in Inti-Illimani's 1970 album, *Canto al Programa* ('Songs to the Program') – a musical homage to, and advertisement for, Allende's wide-ranging reform programme. Produced by a government-run record label created for the purpose of supporting PU-aligned music, the album is presented as an oratorio of songs interspersed with dialogue, all of which refer to some aspect of the coalition's reforms (García 2013). Examples include songs dedicated to the armed forces, constitutional reform, agricultural reform and education, among other issues.

## Popular music and the 1971 Communist Party Assembly

The production of *Canto al Programa* is a useful reference point in the history of CNS, as it exemplifies the clearest link between CNS and government policy. While groups



like Inti-Ilumani were ostensibly well supported by the government to produce and perform PU-friendly music, there was open debate more broadly within the Chilean left about the appropriate or acceptable place for music within a longer-term political strategy. These discussions are encompassed in the minutes of the Communist Party's 1971 Assembly on the 'problems' of culture, which we now present with a focus on specific mentions of music contained therein.

Alongside the Socialist Party, the Communist Party was a major political force within the PU. It controlled most PU committees throughout Allende's election campaign and, according to Falcoff, it 'was the largest, best-organised, most disciplined organisation of its kind in Latin America', comprised not only of common workers, but also of intelligentsia and other left-aligned middle-class Chileans (1989, p. 26). In 1969, the Chilean Communist Party met for its 14th General Congress, in which they claimed to be the largest political Party in Chile with 60,000 members, together with many participants within the Communist Youth (Furci 2008).

The Chilean Communist Party maintained an interest in the character, implication and function of 'culture' within the PU revolutionary endeavour (Ayo Schmiedecke 2022; Canto Novoa 2012), which was coined as the *via chilena al socialismo*, or 'Chilean road to socialism'. A central feature of this Chilean revolutionary design was its 'institutionalised' form. Allende was a self-declared Marxist whose political strategy was peaceful and democratic, running for office within the legal framework rather than seeking power through armed revolution (Fleet 1973). It is within this institutional order that the issue of domestic culture becomes a matter to be formally explored.

This non-violent mode of pushing for profound social and economic changes challenged conventional revolutionary ideas espoused elsewhere, such as those validated by Cuba's 1950s revolutionaries. Allende and the PU advanced the plausibility of a constitutional transition to socialism within the already established framework – a complex and innovative scheme. Once in office, the issue of culture had to be addressed, not only because of its direct relevance to the accomplishment of revolutionary aspirations, but because, according to PU logics, culture had to be guided from a top-down approach. This was consistent with the 'revolution from above' character of the 'Chilean road' project (Winn 2009). By 1971, the Communist Party was beginning to assert control over the politics of culture, appointing party member Waldo Atías to head the Department of Culture of the Presidency, also enabling inclusive discussion among the 'culture-workers' of the Party regarding how to address 'problems of culture' in the September 1971 Assembly (Unattributed 1971).

The Assembly minutes reveal an intimate relationship between Allende's agenda, the revolutionary process and the role of popular culture. For example, the Assembly commits to taking responsibility for Measure 40 of the PU's catalogue of initiatives, a measure that advocates the opening of art and culture establishments (Unattributed 1970). In response, the Assembly aimed to create centres to nurture popular culture across the entire nation. Allende's 1969 Program itself is rather clear in its objectives, asserting that, in their attempt to reach out to the working class, domestic artistic sectors 'struggle against the cultural deformations typical of a capitalist society', yet in contrast, 'in the new society they will have a leading position' (Unattributed 1969, p. 28). Despite being a top-down objective, this 'new' society with its accompanying culture would not be established by decree. Instead, the Program intended that it should be seen to emerge from a series of ongoing socio-

political struggles, such as the struggle for 'fraternity against individualism', as well as 'national values against cultural colonisation' – which is to say the resistance against the commercialisation of the arts (Unattributed 1969, p. 28). On those grounds, the State would vigorously pursue integrating common people into cultural activity.

The Assembly minutes indicate that, according to the artist-members of the Communist Party, these efforts were still in flux in 1971:

Compartimos plenamente la crítica del compañero Salvador Allende, expresada en su Mensaje al Congreso en mayo recién pasado: 'En estos seis primeros meses aún no hemos logrado movilizar la capacidad intelectual, artística y profesional de muchos chilenos'. [We fully share the criticism of comrade Salvador Allende, expressed in his Message to Congress last May: 'in these first six months we have not yet managed to mobilise the intellectual, artistic and professional capacity of many Chileans'.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 5).

The Assembly not only shared the government's sense of urgency about the role culture plays within the broader political process, but also endorsed the premise that a centralised authority should manage the number of components and mechanisms this mobilisation entails.

Popular music is, then, presented as intrinsic to the Chilean 'road', a necessary component of its realisation. In this highly politicised setting in which culture is crucial, popular musicians see themselves, or are considered by the Assembly, as 'workers of music'. Those speaking at the Assembly clarify this understanding as follows (capitals in original):

Confiamos los músicos populares o TRABAJADORES DE LA MUSICA, que el Gobierno de la Unidad Popular dará forma y organización a nuestros deseos de poder participar DESDE DENTRO en la construcción del socialismo en nuestro país. [We, the popular musicians or WORKERS OF MUSIC, trust that the Government of the Popular Unity will give form and organisation to our wishes to be able to participate FROM WITHIN in the construction of socialism in our country.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 96)

There is a definite strategic element operating throughout the document: the perception that music is a suitable and practicable vehicle for cultural revolution. Meanwhile, there is also an observation that folk and popular forms of music are not all equal in their 'moral value'; hence they do not all share the same worth and function. Since not all folk music touches upon social issues or is a manifestation of the working class, a selection criterion is essential. Thus, the Assembly proposes that:

[N]o puede tomarse indiscriminadamente todo el folklore como fiel manifestación de las clases trabajadoras. Pero esto no impide que formas vernaculares del relato, la poesía, el canto, puedan ser recreadas con nuevos contenidos revolucionarios, como diera magistrales ejemplos, Violeta Parra. [Not all folklore can be taken indiscriminately as a faithful representation of the working classes. Still, this does not prevent vernacular forms of storytelling, poetry, song, from being recreated with new revolutionary content, as in the masterful examples given by Violeta Parra.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 21)

The core criterion for music to be suitable for political purposes is that it manifests the 'working-class condition', rendering other compositional or creative elements as being of secondary importance. The passing reference to the works of Violeta Parra is illuminating because it situates the artist as a transitional participant

in a much greater project. Evaluating and categorising music, including folk music, and proposing to inject distinct political themes into their composition, reveals a highly strategic and utilitarian view of artistic production.

Other prominent CNS exponents – the ensembles Quilapayun, Inti-Illimani and Aparcoa – are described as being ‘militants of our organisation’, a description that situates militantism and party membership as aspirational qualities for popular musicians (Unattributed 1971, p. 93). Another example of the importance of party allegiance is provided in the Assembly’s discussion of *DICAP*, the *Discoteca del Cantar Popular* (‘Record Library of Popular Song’), which was established by the Chilean Communist Youth in 1969 and grew to be the leading label for CNS performers (Ayo Schmiedecke 2014). More interested in political activism than commercial gain, the Assembly remarks on the expansion of *DICAP*, reporting how the money secured from record sales had helped ‘finance important tasks of the JJCC’ (Communist Youth), including the consolidation and strengthening of the CNS:

[N]os ha posibilitado unificar y robustecer el movimiento de La Nueva Canción Chilena [sic], que se ha transformado en un verdadero frente de lucha ideológica que le ha dado duros golpes al enemigo. [This has enabled us to unify and strengthen The Chilean New Song [sic] movement, which has become a true front of ideological struggle, that has dealt heavy blows to the enemy.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 74)

Soon after, the Assembly goes on to describe an intent to support artists who disseminate their work among working class and student groups, practising music as an ‘arma de lucha’ or ‘weapon of struggle’ (Unattributed 1971, p. 76). The 1907 Santa María School Massacre (the Chilean army massacre of saltpetre workers mentioned earlier) is offered as an example of this, and the Assembly claims that the awareness of the massacre by most Chileans demonstrates the transformational power of music:

Que la matanza en la Escuela Santa María de Iquique, un hecho histórico un tanto olvidado, sea en este momento un hecho conocido y ubicado por una gran mayoría de chilenos, nos demuestra el poder de educación masiva que puede adquirir determinada obra artística. [That the massacre at the Santa Maria School of Iquique, a historical, somewhat forgotten event, is at this moment a known and recognised event by a large majority of Chileans, shows us the mass education power that a certain work of art can acquire.] (Unattributed 1971, pp. 76–7)

A topic of some clear consternation for the Assembly is how (and whether) to incorporate folk music and musicians into the Communist cultural policy scheme. Despite the cultural continuum between traditional and folk styles of music and CNS, the Party is not interested in supporting folk music that is intended purely for cultural preservation purposes. Here, the Assembly members describe the problem as they see it:

Existe a nivel popular una gran cantidad de conjuntos folklóricos que se plantean como objetivo último la recopilación, convencidos que con esto están haciendo un gran aporte al conocimiento del folklore, la gran mayoría de las veces estos grupos no tienen una acabada formación científica que les permita evaluar correctamente estas recopilaciones. [Among popular culture, there is a large number of folk ensembles who have preservation as their ultimate objective, convinced that with this, they are making a grand contribution to the knowledge of folklore; in most cases, these groups do not have a complete scientific background that allows them to correctly evaluate the works they seek to preserve.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 92)

The 'problem' is elaborated further with regard to folklorists' long-established roles as collectors and preservers of traditional and folk music:

Creemos que la recopilación folklórica no puede ser la finalidad de los conjuntos musicales forjados en el seno de las masas, la recopilación debe ser un medio que le permita a los conjuntos contar con una mayor base para la creación colectiva de canciones que hablen de los problemas e inquietudes de los trabajadores. [We believe that folklore preservation cannot be the end goal of music ensembles forged from within the masses; preservation must be a means that enables ensembles to develop a greater basis for the collaborative creation of songs that speak to the problems and concerns of the workers.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 92)

Since not all folkloric expressions correspond with the revolutionary interests of 'the masses', rules for differentiation are imperative. Commending musical forms that 'speak of the noblest popular ideals, leaving aside those that do not contribute to the revolutionary process', is a crucial part of this differentiating practice (Unattributed 1971, p. 93). The popular element of popular music hence comes to be both meaningful and influential. In this revolutionary framework, artists become constrained by the Party's understanding of 'the popular'. Although popular artists, according to the Party, ought to recreate 'folkloric values', the final decision on the validity of their creations is not made by the artists themselves. Instead:

Entendemos que los valores folklóricos deben ser recreados por los artistas populares, pero esa recreación tendrá validez en la medida que sea aceptada por el pueblo. [We understand that folkloric values must be recreated by popular artists, but that recreation will be valid to the extent that it is accepted by the people.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 93)

Meanwhile, rather inconsistently, the Assembly members also assert that the use of already popular musics may be a valid strategy for the creation of revolutionary works:

También se puede emplear el proceso inverso, y partir de una forma musical ya probada en el gusto popular, y recrearla con nuevos contenidos revolucionarios. [You can also use the reverse process, and start with a musical form already tested in popular taste, and recreate it with new revolutionary content.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 93)

Then again, this observation does not apply to all popular music forms per se; the Assembly attempts to clarify what aspects and varieties of popular music categorically fall outside of their policy intentions (with emphasis in original):

El músico popular, el de las orquestas bailables, el que acompaña a cantantes, bailarinas, que graba discos y actúa en programas de TV, festivales, etc, paradójicamente, NO TIENE CABIDA FRATERNAL EN NINGUNA PARTE. [The popular musician, the one from dance orchestras, the one who backs singers, dancers, who makes records and performs on TV programmes, festivals, etc., paradoxically, HAS NO FRATERNAL ROOM ANYWHERE.] (Unattributed 1971, p. 95)

This cultural negotiation not only appears inconsistent with the Assembly's seeming rigorous standards but lacks detail as to the artistic means through which these new compositions would emerge. Still, what remains unvarying is the need to reflect to the audience a set of popular common people and grass roots symbols to advance the coalition's revolutionary objectives. Yet, if folk music as a popular

art form loses creative autonomy once assimilated into the greater ideological struggle, this assimilation means its artistic integrity and genuine folkloric continuity are challenged. Regardless, this attitude is required for the repertoire to remain ideologically consistent. Since the Communist Party recognises music's potential to influence a large-scale audience, this influence ought to be focused.

The Assembly ascertains a non-negotiable criterion with no interest in inconsequential musical expressions, yet it also presents a degree of flexibility if revolutionary content is inserted. The initial perception of a highly uncompromising vision of culture is defied once cultural constructs can be adjusted to serve ideological objectives. This inconsistency in the function of cultural products, calculated not for artistic purposes but to serve political aims, can be explored as a populist type of instrumentalising. Importantly, by remarking on the CNS as effective members in this 'ideological struggle', the Assembly is thus remarking on the fact that music produced by CNS artists engages, in some form, in these cultural negotiations.

### Discussion: wherefore populism?

Our translation and examination of the Assembly document demonstrates various alignments and divergences between the idea of CNS as a populist force on the one hand, and the place of popular music within the Communist Party's cultural policy manifesto on the other. Conceivably these dynamics informed the broader cultural policy of the PU government, although the government ultimately did not survive long enough for their effects to be realised in full.

The Assembly members clearly accept popular music as integral to the revolutionary process of the Chilean 'road', acknowledging that popular forms of performance, such as CNS, can be valuable tools for both harnessing social forces and informing society about policy objectives. Despite that, the document stipulates in a few different ways that revolutionary aims are not served by free artistry, or by the fostering of market-driven perceptions of what is popular, as the resulting cultural products may not be aligned with cardinal and distinct revolutionary precepts. Here, the question is not whether politics is above culture but how culture serves political ambition and the mechanisms employed to sustain this correlation.

Within the context of the Chilean revolution, the accompanying culture is expected to be socially integrated in specific ways, at the hand of the working class, yet guided in order to act as a genuine projection of 'the people', becoming symbolic of a definite set of ideals. Art that is independent of this alignment is dismissed as irrelevant to the political process. Understanding this solid position on popular culture's crucial function within the revolutionary project helps understand how CNS complies with the Assembly's strategic vision. If these suitable variants are perhaps not found or available, they may need to be ideologically constructed outside of the creative realm. In part, this was a role served by *DICAP*, which was both a distribution label and a source of revenue through which to support new and emerging artists.

Another point of interest and divergence is the Party's attitude towards individual 'star' performers. Part of the success of the PU was its fruitful relationship with CNS, which had to do with the participation of key individuals and the development of a fan base for major ensembles. The effective political rhetoric stemming from Allende's PU coalition functioned conjointly with captivating CNS compositions

and performances, denouncing the powerful establishment on behalf of the suppressed common people, of which they presented themselves as members.

If CNS musicians had been, in whatever sense, 'un-popular', they would not have served the coalition's political agenda, so there is a definite dividend that derives from the nurturing of high-profile musicians. These prominent artists tirelessly echoed PU political messaging, providing 'working-class' legitimacy to the coalition by reflecting society's everyday tribulations caused by the imperial-friendly elites. Nevertheless, the Assembly document points out that neither star individuals, nor specific songs, nor styles of performance, are to receive special treatment in cultural policy. As if to underscore this, it is worth remembering that the Assembly makes only passing reference to the performers who were politically aligned with or supported the PU campaign, focusing on their merits as models (Parra) and militants (Qulilapayún and others) more than as creative artists.

## Conclusion

This article has considered a multilayered reflection of popular music through a document review, considering the potential for music to assimilate, and be assimilated by, ideological strategies within a specific socio-political context. PU's political idioms, particularly those voiced by the Communist Party, encompassed populist elements that resounded through CNS. On the one hand, the top-down policy direction and reading of art and culture presented in the 1971 Assembly of the cultural workers of the Chilean Communist Party stands in remarkable contrast to the street-level and participatory role of CNS in the 1970 election campaign. The CNS phase leading to Allende's election was bottom-up, seeking change as part of a broader movement that placed popular-driven aspirations against the ruling political establishment. On the other hand, the highly strategic negotiations on culture to effectively reach and expand their revolutionary audience reveal that the Assembly's cultural leaders were concerned about co-opting artists as part of a struggle for consolidating their power.

The timing here is significant: while the Assembly opens with a critical appraisal of cultural progress since 1970, it does so because its adherents are in an empowered position, unconcerned with the possibility that the whole PU project would soon succumb to a violent military coup, and therefore at ease with proposing sweeping ideological positions. Whilst popular and folk musics are conventionally assumed as organic, collective and fluctuating artistic expressions, adverse to this perception, the title of the Assembly calls attention to 'the problems of culture' – a social phenomenon in need of careful oversight. However, while Chile would not return to a government with such an explicitly ideological agenda for cultural policy (or, at least, has not done so to date), the music that supported Allende's coalition to power has indeed endured in popular imaginaries, populist tropes and political forces in Chilean public cultural spheres through to the present day.

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