

POLITICS OF GENDER AND
CONSUMPTION IN AUTHORITARIAN
CHILE, 1973–1990

Women Agricultural Workers in the Fruit-Export Industry

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Abstract: This essay explores the impact of new consumer cultures on rural women in Chile's fruit-export sector during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet, 1973–1990. It challenges the longstanding assumption that the "consumerism" associated with Chile's neoliberal makeover was overwhelmingly reactionary in its political consequences and debilitating for working-class communities in particular. It argues that while new consumer cultures emerged within, and sometimes exacerbated, conditions of extraordinary exploitation and want, consumption was also a site through which women fruit workers challenged family patriarchy and created new forms of community with each other. Taking the central valley province of the Aconcagua Valley as its focus, the essay examines women's enthusiasm for the proliferation of imported commodities such as ready-made clothes, makeup, televisions, refrigerators, and electronic music devices, whose availability resulted from employment in the fruit-export sector as well as new sources of consumer debt. It concludes that while such new consumer desires and practices positioned rural women as validating certain aspects of the military's modernization project, it simultaneously encouraged women to resist necessarily linkages between "authoritarian" and "modernity" and to embrace gender ideals that were quite oppositional to those the regime promoted.

Consumption is a bogey in most narratives about life under Pinochet. Scholars and activists alike have argued that Chile's military dictatorship between 1973 and 1990 lasted as long as it did not just because of state terror, but because of material and ideological victories. In particular, it is held that the military government successfully promoted acquisitive, individual consumerism as a replacement for the class-based politics of the 1960s and 1970s. As the story goes, radical neoliberal reforms slashed tariffs and hugely expanded credit, flooding Chile with relatively cheap imported goods that became available to all sectors of society. The military government aggressively celebrated this spectacle of plenty as the basis of

its legitimacy and pointedly contrasted it to the infamous consumer shortages that had plagued Allende's experiment with socialism between 1970 and 1973. Under the dictatorship, private access to televisions, microwaves, and cars substituted for the vibrant public debates that had characterized democratic times. Consumerism trumped the claims of citizenship and bred conformity to authoritarian norms.¹

In such narratives, women and workers appear particularly susceptible to consumption's vice. It was women, after all, who in Allende's last years, marched down the streets of Santiago banging empty pots in protest of socialism's failure to prevent rationing and food lines. And it was large groups of women who beseeched the armed forces to "put on their pants" and save the *patria* from Marxism. This foundational moment of female complicity against democracy haunts much scholarship on the military period, making it difficult to see Chilean women as anything other than reactionary housewives. In contrast, arguments about workers (usually implied to be men) apologize for the proletariat's failed class mission. The Chilean labor movement was initially ineffective in challenging military rule and then accepted neoliberalism as a fait accompli following the 1990 return to democracy. Critics bemoan how desires for American consumer goods and the upper-class lifestyles depicted on television diluted worker militancy.²

The observation that one of Pinochet's greatest triumphs was identifying consumption as a neglected site of power has been critical to understanding neoliberal authoritarianism and the force of its legacy. Likewise, arguments that under conditions of authoritarianism mass consumer culture serves to illegitimate democratic claims offers an important counterpoint to much of the scholarly literature on consumption in the United States and Europe which, despite its nuances, has tended to see consumption as a terrain of identity formation and participation in civil society. Yet consumption and consumer culture in Chile were never exclusively reactionary. Their meanings were never fixed or invented wholesale by neoliberal Chicago Boys. Indeed, if we see consumption as a diverse array of social relations, practices, and meanings, it could be a site for negotiating and contesting the terms of daily life under Pinochet as often as it was a space for conforming to regime agendas.

1. The most representative of this scholarship includes Tomás Moulian, *Chile actual: Anatomía de un mito*, (Santiago de Chile: Arcis, 1997) and Patricio Silva, "Modernization, Consumerism, and Politics in Chile," in David E. Hojman, ed., *Neoliberalism With a Human Face? The Politics and Economics of the Chilean Model* (Liverpool: Institute for Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool, 1995), 118–32.

2. An important exception to the tendency to interpret consumerism as largely negative is Joel Stillerman, "Gender, Class, and Generational Contexts for Consumption in Contemporary Chile," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, no. 1 (2004): 51–78.

This essay examines new forms of consumption and consumer culture that emerged during military rule in one of Chile's principal agricultural regions, the Aconcagua Valley. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Aconcagua Valley was the leading producer in a highly profitable fruit-export industry that had incorporated thousands of rural women into a traditionally male wage-labor force.³ International financial circles hailed the fruit industry as part of Pinochet's economic miracle, while prodemocracy activists decried it for poverty-level wages and the corruption of peasant culture. I argue that although fruit workers' consumer practices and desires did reflect and reinforce a certain atomization of rural society, they also became crucial sites for transforming gender relations and sexuality in ways that challenged prior forms of male dominance in rural families. Such erosions of local patriarchal power, while rarely perceived by the military as a direct threat, were nonetheless quite oppositional to the military's intentions and vision of society. They were also of profound importance to men's and women's lives; indeed, they constituted one of the most basic frameworks in which rural people experienced life under Pinochet.

My goals in this essay are twofold. First, I wish to assert the significance and complexity of workers as protagonists in the history of Latin American consumer culture. Second, I seek to widen how we think about *politics* in relation to consumption and consumer culture. I challenge the twin notions that consumption during Chile's military regime was exclusively reactionary, and that women and workers were its particular dupes. Likewise, I argue that for rural workers, the most political element of consumption was how it changed quotidian practice, rather than how it translated into open support or resistance to military policy.

In comparison with the enormous literature on consumption in the United States and Europe, similar works on Latin America are few and have been mostly concentrated on the middle, upper, and urban classes.⁴ Indeed, for all parts of the world, studies of consumption have focused much less frequently on workers, peasants, and the poor. Labor historians and scholars of contemporary globalization overwhelmingly look

3. The Aconcagua Valley is located sixty miles north of Santiago and includes the administrative departments of San Felipe and Los Andes. It forms part of Chile's agricultural heartland, the larger central valley, which stretches several hundred miles north and south of Santiago.

4. Recent work on consumption in Latin America includes Benjamin Orlove, ed., *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Néstor García Canclini, *Consumidores y ciudadanos. Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1995); Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, Eric Zolov, eds., *The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

at processes of production and state formation (or its breach), as distinct from consumer practice. And where consumption has entered into narratives about workers, it has done so largely within the trope of how it promotes alienation and exploitation,⁵ or, conversely and much less frequently, of how it creates the bases for working-class solidarity.⁶ But in most studies about capitalist expansion in the late twentieth century, the victimization of workers, especially *women* workers, and the vexations of global consumer culture are now classic themes representing larger wrongs.

Women who became wage laborers in Chile's fruit-export industry during military rule *were* exploited and victimized, and they were exploited and victimized in ways that were gender specific and distinct from the ways male fruit workers were also exploited and victimized. Consumption was an important arena where such hardship played out, and new consumer cultures could reinforce authoritarian politics that undermined prior forms of solidarity and demands for economic justice. But new consumer practices and meanings also generated subjectivities and relations quite contrary to, or entirely outside of, the military's agenda. Consumption became spaces where women contested men's authority in the household by asserting control over how their wages would be spent as well as spaces for creating new forms of female community that revolved around gift giving and shopping. And, as I've written elsewhere, occasionally consumer demands became sites of female mobilization in soup kitchens, church groups, and labor organizations that launched specific complaints at employers and challenges to military authorities.⁷

But formal, organized challenges against the regime were never the most significant place where oppositional politics coalesced around consumption. Rather, it was in the transformation of relations of gender

5. Important works include June Nash and María Patricia Fernández-Kelley, eds., *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983); María Patricia Fernández-Kelley, *For We Are Sold, I and My People* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985); Eleanor Leacock and Helen Safa, eds., *Women's Work: Development and the Division of Labor by Gender* (South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey, 1986); Susan Tiano, *Patriarchy on the Line: Labor, Gender, and Ideology in the Mexican Maquila Industry* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

6. See, for example, Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: SUNY, 1987); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Thomas Miller Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1951* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

7. Heidi Tinsman, "Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet's Chile," *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, no. 1 (Fall, 2000): 143–185.

and sexuality within rural households and local communities that consumption generated the greatest challenges to existing authority. Indeed, to the extent that fruit workers' consumer desires often aspired to the material privilege of class superiors, consumption signaled sharp divides between the rural poor and their would-be advocates within the labor movement and other pro-democracy groups. These changes were integral to how Chile's broader social and political culture transformed during the military years, as well as to how Chileans envisioned the future, including democratic futures.

This essay does not fit neatly into the well-established scholarship on women and democratic transitions, which has emphasized the role of social movements (most of them urban) and their intersection with the aspirations of re-emergent political parties.⁸ I am most interested in forms of politics that did *not* necessarily gel into coherent movements to democratize the nation. While such mobilizations are of enormous importance, they are not the only sites of meaningful transformation. Indeed, as Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd have pointed out, we miss a great deal of politics, especially that constituting relations of gender and sexuality, if we look only at those activities that can be folded back into histories of national liberation and class struggle (or their eclipse).⁹ So too, if we assume the nation-state is always the primary point of reference, we more often frame our questions in terms of dichotomies: Was military rule good or bad for women? Was consumption reactionary or progressive for workers in dealing with bosses or government authorities? This essay aims to move beyond such binaries by widening what we understand as political and by differently politicizing how we see consumption.

NEOLIBERAL REFORM AND RADICAL MAKEOVER

Chile's fruit industry—which today exports almost one billion dollars in grapes, apples, peaches, and kiwis, mainly to the United States, but also to Europe and Asia—is the result of a dramatic reorientation of

8. For example, see Sonia Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Jane S. Jaquette, *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women and Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997) and *Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy: Taking Back the Streets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Veronica Schild, "Recasting Popular Movements: Gender and Political Learning in Neighborhood Organizing in Chile," *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (1994): 59–76; Cathy Schneider, *Shantytown Protests in Pinochet's Chile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

9. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *Politics and Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

agriculture away from grain production for domestic consumption and toward luxury-crop production for foreign consumption. Following the 1973 coup against Popular Unity socialism, the military dismantled an ambitious agrarian reform Salvador Allende and his Christian Democratic predecessor Eduardo Frei had carried out between 1964 and 1973. The agrarian reform had expropriated almost half of Chile's agricultural land and begun redistributing it mostly to male heads of household. It also had nurtured a massive rural labor movement which by 1973 numbered a quarter million peasants, 95 percent of whom were men.¹⁰ During military rule, a drive to develop free markets and integrate Chile into the world economy abruptly reversed the agrarian reform's emphasis on economic sovereignty and democratizing production. Land was reconcentrated in the hands of medium-sized growers who took advantage of state credits, U.S. technology transfers, and the near-total repression of organized labor. Although most land and infrastructure remained Chilean owned, multinational investment from companies such as Dole and Standard Fruit helped transform the Aconcagua Valley and other parts of central Chile into agribusiness regions closely resembling their counterparts in California.

By the mid-1980s, women comprised almost half of the fruit industry's estimated 300,000 temporary workers.¹¹ This, too, was a dramatic change from the pre-1973 world, of both the agrarian reform and the previous latifundia system, where men comprised most wage-paying jobs and female labor was absorbed by subsistence farming and housework. The fruit industry employed most women for short, two- to four-month contracts in packing plants where workers cleaned, weighed, and wrapped fruit for shipment. Smaller numbers of women had jobs pruning and harvesting in orchards and vineyards, places where men's labor was concentrated. Labor conditions were intensely exploitative, while the

10. For statistics on land expropriations during the agrarian reform, see Solón Barraclough and José Antonio Fernández, *Diagnóstico de la reforma agraria chilena* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1974). For land expropriation figures on Aconcagua and an analysis of the agrarian reform's gender politics, see Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 211. For rural union membership during the agrarian reform, see Luís Salinas, *Trayectoria de la organización campesina* (Santiago de Chile: AGRA, 1985).

11. The estimated number of fruit workers in the Aconcagua Valley in the mid-1980s was 7,500. Like the national figure, this number is an estimate, based on partial employment surveys (*encuestas de trabajo*), carried out by the National Statistics Institute. For Aconcagua figures, see "Análisis del Sector Rural," unpublished survey by Raimundo García-Huidobro Villalón and Antonio Yaksic Soule, in "Documento final," Departamento de Acción Social, San Felipe, 1984.

climate of fear and restrictive labor laws made overt challenges to the system impossible.¹²

The fruit industry also entailed huge changes for men, namely the loss of their positions as breadwinners. As temporary jobs replaced permanent ones, men lost access to the steady work that the agrarian reform had expanded and made significantly better paid.¹³ A majority of rural households in central Chile became dependent on the cash wages of women. While the three-digit inflation of the Allende years evaporated under the military's stiff monetary policies, fruit workers frequently earned below the official minimum wage, and real agricultural wages did not recover their agrarian-reform-era value until the late 1980s.¹⁴ Most devastating for men, especially on a symbolic level, well over half of those who had received land parcels as a result of the agrarian reform lost it within a decade, while the general hope of other men that they might one day also become small farmers withered entirely.¹⁵

Changes in consumption were central to how the rural poor experienced military rule. Fruit workers relied on cash to satisfy most needs.

12. There is a substantial literature on Chilean fruit workers. Important works include, María Elena Cruz and Cecilia Leiva, "La fruticultura en Chile después de 1973: Un área privilegiada de expansión del capitalismo," working paper, GIA, Santiago de Chile, 1987; Sergio Gómez and Jorge Echenique, *La agricultura chilena: Dos caras de la modernización* (Santiago: CIREN, 1988); Ximena Valdés, "Feminización del mercado de trabajo agrícola: Las temporeras," in *Mundo de mujer: Cambio y continuidad* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 1988), 389–432 and *Mujer, trabajo, y medio ambiente: Los nudos de la modernización agraria* (Santiago: CEM, 1992); Daniel Rodríguez and Silvia Venegas, *De praderas a parronales* (Santiago: GEA, 1989); Gonzalo Falabella, "Trabajo temporal y desorganización social," *Proposiciones* 4 (1988): 34–52; Stephanie Barrientos, Ann Bee, Ann Matear, and Isabel Vogel, *Women and Agribusiness: Working Miracles in the Chilean Fruit Export Sector* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

13. Most government and scholarly sources agree that real agricultural wages and rural livelihoods improved significantly during the agrarian reform. However, they disagree meaningfully on the exact amount by which wages rose, placing the figure between two- and six-fold. For low-end estimates see Solon Barraclough, *Chile: Reforma agraria y gobierno popular* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Periferia, 1973); for high-end estimates, see Brian Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside: Politics and Rural Labor in Chile, 1919–1973* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1976). For official government figures that indicate that wages tripled, see *Estadísticas Laborales* (Santiago de Chile: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas [INE], 1976), 41.

14. See Lovell S. Jarvis, *Chilean Agriculture under Military Rule: From Reform to Reaction, 1973–1980* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1985); Apolonia Ramírez, "Dispersión salarial en Chile, 1973–1988," Documento de trabajo, no. 85. (Santiago de Chile: Programa del Economía Trabajo (PET), 1991). Ramírez argues that by 1988 real minimum wages were still 30 percent below what they had been under Allende and 11 percent what they had been under Frei.

15. For Aconcagua, see "Inscripciones de CORA," Bienes Raíces, San Felipe and Los Andes. For national figures on agrarian reform small-holders alone, see Gómez and Echenique, *La agricultura chilena*.

The military's cuts in subsidies for rural housing and food, together with its partial privatization of healthcare and education, made cash more necessary for services formerly provided by the state. New consumer needs were also generated by the heightened attractiveness of ready-made food and clothes, given the absorption of women's labor into the fruit industry and rural families' decreased access to land for subsistence farming. Likewise, imported manufactured goods such as cosmetics, housewares, furniture, radios, televisions, and washing machines were increasingly available in nearby town shops and stores offering credit. Expanding consumer options were fueled by slashing tariffs and selling state enterprises, the same forces that would cut Chile's 1970 domestic manufacturing base nearly in half by 1983.¹⁶

THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN WITH WAGES

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Catholic and leftist activists and spokespersons for the various strains of Chile's pro-democracy movement all complained that *consumismo* (consumerism) was a major source of oppression and an obstacle to mobilizing fruit workers. They argued that the disparity between rural wages and expanding consumer credit caused debilitating cycles and malnutrition, as workers neglected basic food needs in favor of luxury appliances. Rampant consumerism was also held responsible for escalating rates of family breakup, since it provoked spousal fights over money and compelled husbands to migrate in search of extra work. The television and radio were singled out for particular ire. The National Peasant Commission, the representative body for Chile's reemergent rural labor movement in the early 1980s, called mass communication a "major impediment" to unionization because it made peasants "interested in worthless things" and bred individualist competition.¹⁷ Organizers with the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, the Catholic Church's umbrella organization for human rights and pro-democracy groups, similarly complained that television and radio caused peasants to "lose their sense of self," identify with "images of happiness that are not real," and "to want everything."¹⁸

16. For an overview of the military's economic policies and their impact on workers in various economic sectors see, Peter Winn, ed., *Victims of the Chilean Miracle? Chilean Workers and the Neoliberal Model, 1973–1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

17. Minutes from the first meeting of the Comisión Nacional Campesina in August 1982, "Simposio nacional sobre sindicalismo campesino: Acción solidaria por la justicia social," Punta de Tralca, 8 al 12 de octubre (Santiago de Chile: Departamento Campesino, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1982).

18. "Prioridad FAMILIA: Situación de la familia en nuestra sociedad," undated memo, mid-1980s, Departamento de Acción Social, Opispado de San Felipe, San Felipe, Chile

Rural women were seen as particularly vulnerable to consumerism's debilitating messages, and especially to what activists alleged was the inappropriate "urban" culture transmitted through television. The progressive bishop Monseñor Camilo Vial, who supported the Vicaría's pro-union work in the Aconcagua Valley, bemoaned:

The TV is the worst there is. The campesina woman spends all her time watching teleseries, instead of cultivating the garden, making preserves, etc. . . . The TV and radio have the campesino identify with a city ideal . . . [It] does nothing to promote agrarian culture . . . the only good thing is that the family gathers around it at night together, instead of men going out drinking.¹⁹

Pro-democracy activists from Catholic and leftist circles also shared concerns that rural women's need for cash, coupled with the new cityfied trends, increased prostitution. Adolescent girls were believed particularly vulnerable to, as one Catholic memo put it, "using sex to obtain the benefits of the moment, things in style."²⁰ Elsewhere, Communist labor organizers complained that female youths were only interested in earning money for indulgences—smoking cigarettes on the sly, using makeup, and buying new clothes—and that such desires made them susceptible to sexual overtures from bosses.²¹

These anxieties are familiar enough: they echoed debates about the perils of women's incorporation into industrial production at other historical moments. They also reiterated the more than a century-old overlap between Catholicism's and Marxism's respective critiques of wanton materialism. Catholics fretted more about the moral implications of broken marriage vows and illegitimate pregnancies; socialists and communists more often blamed prostitution on capitalism's failure to pay decent wages. No one argued explicitly that women *shouldn't* work (a sharp

(hereafter, DAS); Patricia González, "Situación de la Familia Campesina en la diócesis de Aconcagua," in "Documento final del seminario de diagnóstico de la zona rural de la diócesis de San Felipe, realizado entre el 28 y 30 de noviembre de 1984," DAS; Ana María Campos, "Opiniones sobre la situación actual de la juventud campesina: Apuntes discusión de grupo," in "Documento final," DAS.

19. Monseñor Camilo Vial, Eduardo Olmos, Patricio Asejo, Raimundo García-Huidobro, and Antonio Yaksic, Obispado San Felipe, Internal memo of Obispado de San Felipe, 1984, DAS. Similar concerns about women's relationship to television were voiced by the left. For example, see the discussion of women and mass media by the Marxist rural labor confederation, Unidad Obrero Campesino, "5^o Congreso Nacional de la Confederación Unidad Obrero Campesino de Chile, 26, 27, 28 de agosto, 1986," (Santiago, UOC, 1986).

20. Instituto Nacional de Pastoral Rural (INPRU), "Informe Familia Campesina," internal document, (Santiago de Chile, 1984).

21. Pancha Rodríguez, Departamento Feminino, Confederación El Surco, quoted from author's notes on El Primer Encuentro de la Mujer Temporera, Canelo de Nos, Santiago de Chile, 5,6,7 de junio, 1993.

contrast to the position of some leftists and Catholic reformers earlier in the twentieth century). All advocated equality between men and women workers and a certain redivision of labor at home (a reflection of the recent impact of international and local feminist movements). And yet the melodrama of prostitution still served as a warning about how women's access to wages and participation in consumer culture could make women susceptible to personal corruption and destructive pleasures in ways that men were not.

Such anxiety was a direct response to significant transformations in rural society. By the mid-1980s, women headed at least 20 percent of rural households in the Aconcagua Valley and elsewhere in central Chile, compared to 8 percent in the 1960s.²² Half of women fruit workers were single or separated (53 percent) and an almost equal percentage under age thirty.²³ Agricultural workers were also far more "urban" than a generation before. As peasants were expelled from former estates and agrarian reform units, they built shanties in the outskirts of provincial towns and hamlets. By 1985, over half of the fruit workers in the Aconcagua Valley lived in spaces officially defined as urban (environs with more than 2,500 inhabitants), where the percentage female-headed households was even higher.²⁴ However, because unemployment in cities was greater than in places like the Aconcagua Valley, residents from Santiago and Valparaíso migrated to rural areas during harvests in a striking reversal of the rural-to-urban flight characteristic of most Latin America. So too, Chile's national consumer patterns had changed dramatically. Overall imports of non-food related items reportedly tripled between 1973 and 1979 and rose another eightfold after the mid-1980s.²⁵ Consumption of specific items such as televisions, toiletries, and cosmetics rose between ten- and twenty-fold in the first decade of military rule.²⁶ Elites and the

22. The Chilean government agency MIDEPLAN reported that 20 percent of rural households were headed by women in 1990 (*La Impresión de las cifras. Niños, mujeres, jóvenes y adultos mayores* [Santiago de Chile: Ministerio de Planificación y Cooperación, 1993], cited in Barrientos, et al., *Women and Agribusiness*, 206). Researchers in the major fruit-export sector of Aconcagua province reported 19 percent of rural families as headed by women in the early 1980s (Rodríguez y Venegas, *De praderas a parronales*). In 1960, the percentage of rural households headed by women was 8 percent, *Censo de población: Chile, 1960* (Santiago: INE, 1961).

23. Rodríguez y Venegas, *De praderas a parronales*.

24. Sergio Gómez y Jorge Echenique, "Trabajadoras temporeras de la agricultura moderna en Chile," Documento de trabajo no. 324 (Santiago de Chile: FLACSO, 1986), 22; Ximena Aranda, *Mujer rural: Diagnóstico para orientar políticas en el agro* (Santiago de Chile: SERNAM, 1992), 20.

25. Margarita Fernández y Mauricio Rosenbluth, "Transformaciones de las pautas de consumo en Chile en una década," *Revista de Economía y Trabajo* 11 (2001): 159–205.

26. Silva, "Modernization, Consumerism, and Politics in Chile," 124.

middle class were by no means the only consumers of such goods. A 1988 study of fruit workers in various parts of central Chile, including Aconcagua, estimated that over three-quarters of all households had a black-and-white TV and radio-cassette player, and half had washing machines and refrigerators.²⁷

The negative assessments of many pro-democracy activists about the fruit industry and its associated consumption patterns were shared by the rural poor themselves. In oral histories that I recorded in the early 1990s and in interviews other researchers conducted in the 1980s, women and men both complained about marital strains that inadequate wages and consumer debt wrought.²⁸ Older men and women (over age forty) tended to agree that the fruit industry had made young people more materialistic and young women more willing to exchange sexual favors for gifts from male supervisors or coworkers.

But there was sharp disagreement between workers and their advocates, as well as between women and men, about *why* these things happened. Married women vociferously objected to the notion that television bamboozled them into wanting meaningless things, and they especially refused the image of women spending money on themselves. Almost without exception, they insisted that they spent *all* of their wages on vital household investments, often purchasing the very materials of the house itself—zinc siding, cement, window-casing, wooden beams. They also bought items for their homes' internal infrastructure: beds, tables, sinks, dishes.²⁹ Sizeable portions of women's wages went to pay for children's school uniforms and fees; and in cases where homes had access to electricity (roughly half by 1980), women might make monthly payments on a television or other appliance. The durable nature of these goods seemed especially important to women as a permanent marker

27. Raul Pablo Dastres Abarca, "El uso de la mano de obra y su manejo en algunas centrales frutícolas de Chile," memoria de título, Facultad de Ciencias Agrarias y Forestales, Universidad de Chile, 1992, 100–101.

28. Between 1990 and 1993, I recorded fifty oral histories and interviews with fruit workers in the Aconcagua Valley departments of San Felipe and Los Andes. In 2003, I conducted another 20 interviews with fruit workers. Oral opinions were also offered in the many union meetings and worker-education seminars I attended during my fieldwork. Likewise, I have drawn on the interviews other researchers conducted and published, especially Ximena Valdés, Sonia Montecino, Kirai de León, eds., *Historias testimoniales de mujeres del campo* (Santiago de Chile: CEDEM, 1983); Ximena Valdés, *Sinopsis de una realidad oculta: Las trabajadoras del campo* (Santiago de Chile: CEM, 1987); Francisca Browne, Dalal Garib, and Marcela Loyola, *Tradición y modernidad en Chañaral Alto: El trabajo temporal en la agricultura como agente de transformaciones culturales* (Santiago: CEDEM y Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, 1995), Barrientos et al., *Women and Agribusiness*.

29. Various oral histories by author. Also see Barrientos, et al., *Women and Agribusiness*, 148–154.

of their labor. As one fruit worker ruefully commented to one researcher, during the long off-season when times became tough, "At least [the refrigerator] is there as a memory, I bought it with my money."³⁰

In sharp contrast to pro-democracy critiques of rural consumption as plagued by inappropriate urban desires, women fruit workers called their expenditures *necesidades* (needs), and seemed far less anxious that acquisition of a washing machine would erode the integrity of peasant culture. Women especially welcomed access to ready-made clothes, which fruit workers bought in second-hand stores and called *ropa europea* (European clothing) as an improvement over the lives of their mothers, who had obtained manufactured clothes as charity from a landowner's wife or on credit in hacienda-controlled stores. Blue jeans and easy-to-wash polyester trousers were a favorite among women workers of all ages.³¹ Halter tops, shorts, and miniskirts were used widely enough by young women in the 1980s that the largest packing plants forbade their use and imposed uniforms.³²

These consumer goods were urban in origin and associated with the modern and purportedly forward-looking trends emanating from cities, especially Santiago. Fruit workers' access to cheap versions of the same household goods enjoyed by the middle and urban working classes marked a surge in rural participation in mass consumer culture. But beyond its urban accents, it was a culture increasingly associated with a cosmopolitan internationalism. Fruit workers preferred "European clothing" (despite the fact that most *ropa europea* was made in Asia or elsewhere in Latin America), and they were enthusiasts for cosmetics and audio equipment with English labels such as Avon and RCA. Brand-identification seemed less important than the commodity's marking as a product "made abroad." Electronics were usually acquired second-hand in flea markets and might have been entirely rebuilt and given a replacement label with generic English words to mark them as "foreign." Women more often made these home-investment purchases, while men's wages more often went towards daily expenses.³³

The value of foreignness marked a shift from the popular nationalism of Chile's agrarian reform, when many new commodities available to peasants were celebrated as "made in Chile." And even if they were

30. Barrientos et al., *Women and Agribusiness*, 154.

31. Oral histories of Pati Muñoz, Santa María, recorded by author, May 15, 1993, and of Erika Muñoz, Santa María, April 26, 1993. Also see Browne, et al., *Tradición y modernidad*, 57.

32. Oral history of Erika Ibacache, recorded by author, Santa María, November 14, 1992.

33. Silvia Venegas, *Una gota al día . . . un chorro al año: El impacto social de la expansión frutícola* (Santiago de Chile: GEA, 1992).

not, economic policies of import substitution *aspired* to have national manufacturing replace foreign goods. In the 1960s, if sewing machines came from New Jersey and Chilean factories underwritten by the World Bank, peasants were still encouraged to experience “owning a sewing machine” or “wearing shoes” in terms of participation in a more sovereign national modernity. Under military rule, by contrast, not only were commodities much more likely to be produced abroad, but the meanings of goods were no longer tied to popular nationalism. Wearing jeans or having a radio-cassette player might signify degrees of “modern Chileanness,” but it was a claim made in the context of an aggressive rejection of state-led development, and explicitly shorn of connotations of class solidarity and political mobilization.

It was a commodity’s *foreignness* that made it explicitly esteemed and coveted. Significantly, Chileans often acquired these goods second-hand, suggesting another layer to Walter Benjamin’s observations about capitalism’s ability to promise universal access through the creation of copies.³⁴ The fruit workers’ radios, TVs, and clothes were in a sense copies of copies: used copies, reassembled copies. And it was precisely the recirculation of copies that enabled the poor to participate in the fetish of foreignness, to see such commodities as rewards for hard work, even signs of well-being. Here lies a particular ideological triumph by Pinochet: fruit workers, like other Chileans, increasingly measured their advances or failures in terms of the ability to make individual purchases of imported goods, presumably available to all, and seemingly disconnected from politics. Néstor García Canclini has noted this about Latin American consumer culture as a whole in the late twentieth century. But in Chile, as was true of authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world, the depoliticized nature of consumer culture complemented the state’s explicit effort to cleanse national culture of partisan and class claims.³⁵ In sharp contrast to the United States and Western European association of consumer capitalism with liberal democracy (or even autocratic Mexico’s conflation of consumer modernity with revolutionary nationalism), in Chile, the explosion of mass-produced consumer goods after 1973 was tied to the overt repression of civilian society.

But the meanings of rural consumption were never as stable as pro-democracy critics feared or regime supporters hoped. The military’s boast that it had filled shop windows to the brim generated its own countercritique from workers about their inability to participate in such abundance. Fruit workers joked amongst themselves that, while under Allende they had “enough money to wallpaper their homes with, but

34. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., (Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1969), 217–252.

35. García Canclini, *Consumidores y ciudadanos*.

not much to buy," in the 1980s they had "no money and [therefore] nothing they *could* buy, not even wallpaper."³⁶ Stories also circulated well into the early 1990s that the reason *why* there was such abundance of consumer options under Pinochet was that greedy merchants who had hoarded goods throughout the Popular Unity's rule were still unloading their merchandise. However fantastical, this lore challenged the military's claims to have created a world of plenty, and it reasserted the redistributive goals and class-based demands of the pre-1973 period. Such legends also tapped into real deprivation during military rule. Increased access to home appliances coexisted with significant lack in food-stuffs. Working-class Chileans, in urban as well as rural areas, spent proportionally more income on food (a traditional indicator of poverty) in the 1980s than they had in the 1960s.³⁷ One study reported that in both 1979 and 1988, three fifths of all Chileans did not eat the recommended caloric allowance the United Nations advised.³⁸ As was true elsewhere in the world, the presence of televisions and tennis shoes in Chilean homes did not indicate the absence of want and malnutrition.

But whatever the reality of consumer need, fruit workers were nonetheless quite enthused by the new goods they could acquire or access through neighbors and friends. Women especially valued televisions and radio-cassette players for breaking the repetitiveness of housework and providing a sense of connection to a wider world. During a weekend labor organizing seminar run by the Rural Pastoral Institute in the mid-1980s, several rural women who admitted a passion for the evening *telenovelas* explained that the soap operas reminded them that, although their problems might be bigger than those of the inevitably upper-class heroine, they were heartened to know that these women, too, suffered the trials and travails of controlling men and love gone wrong.³⁹ Whereas Catholic labor organizers worried about the degrading impact of *telenovelas'* explicit sexuality, which normalized premarital sex and extramarital affairs, rural women remarked that soap opera plots seemed familiar, if exaggerated, portrayals of sexual conflicts they knew themselves.⁴⁰ *Telenovelas*

36. Olivia Herrera, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, October 13, 1993.

37. Gómez y Echenique, *Trabajadoras temporeras*; M. Cabezas. "Transformaciones en las pautas de consumo en las últimas dos décadas," Documento de Trabajo, PET No. 88, Santiago, 1992). For nutrition and consumption during the agrarian reform, see Flavio Machicado, "La redistribución del ingreso en Chile y su impacto en la estructura de consumo de alimentos esenciales, 1970–1971" (Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1974).

38. Fernández y Rosenbluth, "Transformaciones de la pautas de consumo," 184.

39. INPRU, "Planteamientos hechos por la comisión de mujeres en la jornada de carta pastoral de Ovalle el día 3 de abril de 1984" (INPRU: Santiago de Chile, 1984).

40. "Prioridad FAMILIA," Undated memo, mid-1980s, Opispado de San Felipe, San Felipe, DAS.

could likewise serve as occasions for critiquing class superiors: wealthy lives were seen as ridiculous and wasteful, and there was a certain pleasure in seeing the bad rich girl disciplined by the show's end.

Rural women also reported that they were a good deal more discriminating in their consumption of mass communication than their advocates believed. One woman told labor organizers during a retreat for campesinas and female fruit workers in 1984, "After the *telenovela*, we shut the TV off and don't watch the news because it's all lies."⁴¹ Other women agreed that news broadcasts were generally shunned as fabrications, and one commented that, contrary to the stereotype of rural youth as particularly besotted with the TV, young people were more skeptical and irreverent than their elders about mass-communicated messages: "The older people believe a little more, but the younger ones say, [the news] is just a 'photomontage' (*fotomontage*) and they laugh and don't believe anything."⁴² Surely it is important not to romanticize television. If fruit workers were discriminating viewers, the tightly controlled programming during military rule was always a powerful tool for legitimating regime visions of modernity. The rural poor's knowledgeable cynicism rarely translated into concrete action. But television and radio were valued by fruit workers for reasons that cannot be reduced to the dictatorship's (real) efforts to ideologically disarticulate working-class consciousness. It is particularly significant that rural women explained their attraction to *telenovelas* as an identification with plots about family dysfunction, illicit love, and attempts by moneyed heroines to escape men's and parents' control. Whereas the labor activists and Catholic progressives were dismayed by whiskey-drinking socialites and fables of individual mobility, rural women consumed the soap opera plots allegorically, understanding tales about sexual conflict with men and female aspirations for greater financial autonomy as echoing the changing dynamics in their own lives.

A SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER

New consumer practices were intimately tied to changes in gender authority within rural households. As the fruit-export industry became a dominant source of employment, men lost control over family expenditures as adult married women and even adolescent girls kept a significant share, if not all, of their wages and made decisions about purchases. This contrasted sharply with previous arrangements. Within *latifundia*, a disproportional amount of what little cash wages that circulated in the rural

41. "Jornadas de mujeres campesinas efectuada en Padre Hurtado el jueves 31 de junio de 1984" (INPRU, 1984).

42. *Ibid.*

economy went to male workers; during the agrarian reform, men staunchly resisted state efforts to get them to turn wages over to wives as part of modern domesticity. Also during the agrarian reform, men were the ones who brokered family access to new consumer goods, first made available to peasants. Radios, bicycles, household furniture, and even entire houses, were distributed through labor unions and state farms, institutions in which women played marginal roles. Sewing machines were available through housewife committees, but access still depended on political contacts. Even food became mediated by partisan institutions, especially under Allende, when government price-control committees and supply stores generated particularly bitter conflicts.

It is worth underscoring that mass industrial commodities did *not* first arrive on the rural scene with neoliberal capitalism, as the scholarship on globalization often assumes. On the contrary, in Chile this happened on a broad scale first with the state-led agrarian reform, which saw expanding peasant access to mass media, household goods, clothing, and transportation as crucial to citizenship and modernization. Such consumption was tied to an explicitly nationalist, state-led development project that championed class-based mobilization and uplift. Poignantly, the first televisions available to rural Chileans anywhere were those in union headquarters or state farms in the 1960s. During military rule, by contrast, the state ceased to be the main arena of consumer access. Individual consumer debts to private businesses replaced the state practice of granting consumer credit to political organizations. Yet, at the same time, rural women no longer relied on men's political affiliations and goodwill to access goods.

It was precisely neoliberalism's dramatic reorganization of production that made consumption a key terrain for undermining family patriarchy. But women fruit workers did not see this as especially liberatory, even though most defended women's control of wages and associated it with increased autonomy. Most informants, male and female, also linked the changes ushered in by the fruit industry to bitter marital fights and male abandonment. In one oral history, *Selfa Antimán*, a fifty-year-old married fruit worker, commented on the advantages of women's access to cash wages with great caution:

The majority of women handle their own money . . . they feel more independent, more self-assured that this is their money and that they don't have to depend on their husbands to give them money. This is a real advantage. But, on the other hand, it's a disadvantage because problems with the couple begin. . . . There are a lot of separations because of the [violent] fights, because of the money, because the woman is now freer, has more contact, sometimes with other women, she has her little outings, her little parties, or she sees a male friend on the road and gives him everything . . . so then you have separations and children born out of wedlock . . . Men don't like it that women work. No matter how good the man, he doesn't want to feel inferior, and the woman who works

feels much more sociable, more independent, more secure, because she can manage her money.⁴³

Antimán's distinction between "good" and "bad" forms of female consumption reproduces the familiar dichotomy between women's family-based virtues and extrafamilial vices: "married women who spend wages on the household" versus "girls and single women who have 'little parties' and [sexually] 'give everything to men.'" But however lacking in sisterly solidarity, it is this very distinction that creates Antimán's *defense* of women's control over wages and critique of male authority. The rescue of "the good woman worker" as "good consumer" provides the indictment of "even the best man who objects to wives working."

This subjectivity deviated sharply from the official vision of gender promoted by the military regime. Pinochet praised Chilean women for their self-abnegation, patriotism, and desire for stern male leadership. His speeches repeatedly invoked women's 1973 marches against Allende and their insistence that the military seize power.⁴⁴ Eliding the problem of women's evident capacity for militancy, Pinochet stressed female contributions as sacrificing mothers within homes headed by men who were soldiers and breadwinners.⁴⁵ The military government also made special efforts to mobilize women as consumers, organizing homemakers' associations (called Mothers' Centers) that taught home economics and sold subsidized merchandise.⁴⁶ But fruit workers like Selfa Antimán defended their right to make purchases for their family not in terms of how the household constituted a special sphere of female jurisdiction and sacrifice, but in terms of how the act of earning money entitled women to control its destination. So too, women like Antimán lay claim to men's longstanding association between breadwinning and exercising authority at home. This fused the ideologies of two distinct political moments: it accepted the military's equation of personal agency with market transactions, while also invoking the agrarian reform's emphasis on worker entitlement and justice.

It is significant to note that Selfa Antimán was Mapuche, a member of the indigenous communities most heavily concentrated in, and associated with, southern Chile. Like thousands of other Mapuche during

43. Oral history, Selfa Antimán, recorded by author, Santa María, May 15, 1993.

44. For example, see "Mensaje a la mujer chilena: Texto del discurso pronunciado por el Presidente de la Junta de Gobierno, General Augusto Pinochet, en el acto organizado por la Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer" (24 de abril, 1974). Also see various speeches quoted in *AMIGA*, the monthly publication of Centros de Madres de Chile, the regime-sponsored homemakers' societies headed by Pinochet's wife.

45. Baldez, *Why Women Protest*.

46. Teresa Valdés, Marisa Weinstein, María Isabel Toledo y Lilian Letelier, "Centros de Madre 1973–1989: Solo disciplinamiento?" Documento de Trabajo No. 416. FLACSO, Santiago, 1989.

military rule, Antimán had migrated north in search of work, following the 1979 privatization of indigenous communal lands. Mapuche migrants made up an estimated 5 to 10 percent of fruit workers in the Aconcagua Valley, a reality that both disrupted and reinforced how the fruit-export industry was recasting racial formations in Chile's more Hispanicized and mestizo center. On one hand, the internationally minded business classes of fruit growers and exporters asserted a shared cultural identity with their Euro-American counterparts, a theme that was reinforced by the military government's celebration of the "unique entrepreneurial heritage" of Chile's nineteenth-century German, English, and Italian immigrants. Gone was the agrarian reform's populist imaginary of creating an inclusive *raza chilena* (Chilean race) and *pueblo unido* (united people) in which indigenous and nonindigenous workers united, and peasants were shorn of latifundia's association of servile labor with backward *indios*. Certainly the agrarian reform never lived up to the utopian rhetoric, and its race-blind ideals and focus on class-based organizing actively subordinated ethnic claims. But military rule and the fruit-export industry marked a *re-racialization* of class distinctions wherein laborers again became associated with insufficient Europeanness. Yet at the same time, the fruit sector's claim to a hypermodernity implied that those who worked in the export industry were also being modernized, not simply turned back into latifundia peons.

The arrival of Mapuche migrants fanned both the fantasy that export capitalism would assimilate Indianness, and created an acute acknowledgement of racial difference among workers. On one hand, Mapuche migrants were often racially disparaged by other fruit workers as drunken, sexually delinquent, and prone to work for lower wages—racial others that marked longtime Aconcagua residents as *not* Indian, whatever their employers might think. On the other hand, Mapuche integration into poor neighborhoods and workspaces (neither of which were segregated), generated occasions for interethnic solidarity and a collective rejections of elite racism. It is striking to note that, when the rural labor movement reemerged in the mid-1980s, Mapuche Associations were created alongside, and thoroughly integrated with, unions, and both had interethnic memberships. Changes in gender relations among Mapuche fruit workers shared many aspects of those taking place among other groups of rural laborers. Many Mapuche were married to partners, or had family members, who were not Mapuche, a practice also common in the south. But Mapuche women migrated north in greater numbers, often initially unaccompanied by men in a pattern that additionally denied the ideal of male-headed families.

Shifts in household authority were hotly contested by all workers, as suggested by Antimán's and many other informants' discussion of widespread domestic fights that ended in violence and/or male abandonment.

Other records support this. By the end of the 1980s, women in Aconcagua and elsewhere in central Chile headed households in numbers almost triple those of the 1960s, a statistic that reflected not only male flight but also women's greater ability to live without partners and leave abusive situations. By mid-1980s, the number of judicial cases involving incidences of wife beating among agricultural workers in the Aconcagua department of San Felipe had increased threefold from the number in the mid-1960s.⁴⁷ Multiple factors contributed to the rise, including women's increased proximity to urban areas and willingness to report violence, but there were meaningful shifts in the stated reasons *why* men used violence against women. In cases from the 1960s men were reported to have beaten wives for inadequate housework and objections to *men's* extramarital affairs. By the 1980s, wife-beating cases centered more often around fights over money, both male objections to women buying things without permission and female complaints that men didn't make enough. So too, fights were now more often sparked by husbands' accusations that *women* were having affairs with men who could better meet their consumer desires. Stories circulated in oral histories of female fruit workers who "gave themselves away" to bosses who took them for rides in fancy cars or bought them attractive clothes.⁴⁸

The widespread association of female wage work with illicit intimacy encouraged men's surveillance of women. In one oral history, Erika Muñoz, a thirty-three-year-old fruit worker who cohabitated with a man who had been a prominent union leader during the agrarian reform, linked men's sexual jealousy to their disappointment that women who worked no longer provided the same level of domestic labor:

[When I'm at the packing plant], Raúl starts in complaining, "Look at the hour you're coming home, people are looking for you." He hints that I'm shirking responsibilities to others. But that's not really it. What [men] worry about is that it's four in the morning and they are in bed, you are away. . . . In my case, Raul makes me have [sexual] relations with him when I get home from a shift. . . . [It's] a way of testing where I've been. . . . It really bothers a man to arrive home and the woman isn't there to serve him his meal. . . . [Husbands] want their breakfast served [on time], they want lunch at straight-up noon. They don't get it, that's because you got home at four in the morning, you couldn't do the ironing, the washing.⁴⁹

47. There was an average of eleven domestic violence cases per year in the 1960s, an average of thirty-eight cases during the UP, and an average of sixty during the 1980s. "Registro de Crímenes," San Felipe Juzgado de Crimen, San Felipe.

48. For a more extensive discussion of domestic violence see Heidi Tinsman, "Household Patroness: Wife Beating and Sexual Control in Rural Chile, 1958–1988," in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers*, John D. French and Daniel James, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 264–296.

49. Erika Muñoz, oral history.

Women resented men's suspicions and lack of appreciation for their double burdens, and they contested charges of infidelity. Muñoz immediately followed her lament about Raúl with a story about a man who abused his wife for cheating on him, asserting that all the woman's co-workers at the packing plant knew that it was really *he* who "hung-out on street corners, wasting money and flirting with girls," while his wife "slaved away to put bread on the table."⁵⁰ Here, Muñoz not only reverses the scenario of who was cheating on whom, she figures the husband as the "prostitute" who used cash "on street corners" to purchase sensual pleasure.

But a more common narrative strategy for defending one's respectability was for women to blame rumors about sexual and consumer irresponsibility on other women, particularly on young unmarried and adolescent workers. Isabel Vera, married and age forty, complained in an oral history that young women in the 1980s ran around *bien pintada* (heavily painted), a reference to liberal use of makeup but also an implicit allusion to prostitution. Although Vera admitted that she, too, had been sexually active as an adolescent, she distinguished her behavior as acceptable because she had married her boyfriend. In contrast, she said, "These girls go from man to man. They are looking for men, not husbands, not [in] this day in age. They are looking for a boy to give them some money and, from there, who knows [what they do]?"⁵¹ When Selfa Antimán complained that children born out of wedlock were a particular danger for fruit workers who spent money on themselves, she no doubt was thinking about her own unmarried sixteen-year-old daughter who had had a child the previous year.⁵² Mari Herrera, a thirty-five-year-old married fruit worker, reported with regret that when her teenage daughter became pregnant, she and her husband took the money that they had been saving for her education at a technical school (a responsible expenditure) and paid for her wedding and a bedroom set (a lamentable necessity that would give the newlyweds some respectability).⁵³

At times, women strained against the moral grid of defending female work and consumer choices only in terms of family sacrifice in order to approach a tenuous assertion of their own desires. Although such assertions were usually folded back into a narrative about loyalty to children, they are suggestive of how porous the boundaries of legitimate female consumption could be. A highly contradictory passage of Erika Muñoz's oral history is worth quoting at length:

50. Ibid.

51. Isabel Ordenas Vera, oral history, recorded by author, Putaendo, June 4, 1993.

52. Selfa Antimán, oral history

53. Mari Herrera, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, May 10, 1993.

I've talked to a lot of women who say they really like working because, "See, I'm in charge of my salary and I satisfy my own needs with my salary. Of course I worry about the house, but I have my own needs, so with my own money I satisfy my own needs. . . ." Husbands don't get it. They don't pay attention to what the house needs . . . but it's not that women really go out [on the town]. Most just go out to their folks' house. . . . There are the single girls who say, "look, I'm saving money for school, but I have money to go to the pool, to the movies. . . . But this really is just a thing for girls. The mature women are responsible, they have responsibilities, they have children, a husband. . . ." They only talk about satisfying basic needs, like taking advantage of buying winter clothing, or buying herself a pair of shoes, a blouse, maybe buy a little picture [for the house]. . . . But what are [women's] needs? Once I asked a señora who said "With my money I do what I want, I buy shoes for the kids, I pay their school fees, I buy this [or that] for the boys,"—in sum, these are the needs of her children, not her personal needs, and I think she feels good about herself. (Erika Muñoz, oral history)

Muñoz gives herself permission to acknowledge women's own needs in two ways. First, she rhetorically replaces me as the ethnographer by discussing her *own* interviews and conversations with women who have told her about purchasing clothing and decorative objects for themselves, women who have expressed pride in "satisfying their own needs." Second, she simultaneously affirms and criticizes the scenario in which women's "own needs" turn out to be the same as "family needs." She acknowledges that school supplies and children's clothing are part of the working woman's needs and that making such purchases is satisfying. But she is also quick to point out that such items are not the working woman's *own* needs. There is an implied longing for more resources and license for a woman to care for herself, even as Muñoz praises women's loyalty to family and contrasts it to men's obliviousness. Muñoz is also remarkably nonjudgmental of the less-encumbered girls, who have time and money for swimming and films. Although she contrasts them to "responsible, mature women," she does not question their sexual morality. Moreover, she is ambivalent about *why* mature women are responsible in the first place: they have obligations to children and family that prevent them from addressing their *own* needs.

Women fruit workers' abilities to question at least indirectly the logic of female consumer sacrifice for family raised the issue of the "mature women's" entitlement to self-oriented pleasure and extrafamilial forms of socializing. It also challenged the presumption that women owed sexual loyalty to men in all cases. In another remarkable passage of Muñoz's oral history, she defended a situation in which a woman worker might have an affair: "You know, there can be a case of a good woman, who works very hard, who maybe is forced to look for affection in the packing plant because her husband is always cheating on her."⁵⁴

54. Erika Muñoz, oral history.

Perhaps reflecting on her own situation, Muñoz argues that women's hard work in the fruit industry entitled them to a certain sexual respect from husbands, and when it wasn't forthcoming, women were justified in looking elsewhere.

CONSUMPTION, COMMUNITY, AND FEMALE INTIMACY

Pleasure with men outside of marriage was not the only danger raised by new forms of consumption. Women's defensiveness about spending wages only on family was also a response to rising anxiety about women's increased intimacy with other women. Packing plant assembly lines created an all-female work culture where women gossiped about problems at home, shared sandwiches and cigarettes, and competed with, and depended, on each other for how fast they could load grapes into boxes and earn their piece rates. Women also socialized together at an array of rural sandwich bars and mini-markets that catered to workers with money in their pocket during the harvest season. On Sundays, female coworkers gathered at local plazas to appraise merchandise sold by small vendors and frequented concession stands at local soccer games. At community dance and music events hosted by the local fire department or rodeo club, women workers shared tables and passed around bottles of beer and soda. Such activities involved women with husbands and children, not just single women and adolescent girls. But husbands did not always accompany wives, and even married women had opportunities for outings on their own. This flatly contradicts women's self-portrayal in oral histories as dedicating time and money only to family. The point is not that women's stories are insincere, but that the formulaic insistence that married women were family oriented suggests how much this norm was actually in flux and how aware married women workers were of the risk that their lives could be morally questioned as a result.

Men's responses to new forms of female camaraderie were sometimes hostile and often sexualized.⁵⁵ Women who danced together at local functions were jeered as *machas* and *muy hombre* (masculine women).⁵⁶ One woman's husband argued that her socializing with coworkers made her forget the duty of her sex.⁵⁷ Another woman reported that her husband warned her about the dangers of female supervisors in the packing plants asking for sexual favors.⁵⁸ Although accusations that women were having explicit affairs with other women were far less common than allegations

55. Various oral histories, including María Trujillo, recorded by author, Santa María, October, 26, 1992.

56. Norma Cárdenas, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, March 10, 1993.

57. Sonia Gutiérrez, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, June 14, 1993.

58. Rita Galdámez, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, April 20, 1993.

of female infidelity with men, women's widened homo-social world was clearly perceived as a sexual threat. Men labeled women's intimacy with each other as rude, promiscuous, and unfeminine and juxtaposed it to the purportedly natural desire of a woman to be with husband and children.

Male concern about women's changing social and sexual proclivities was not unfounded. Women workers *did* spend more time with each other, and they enjoyed it. In oral histories, women almost unanimously agreed that one of the most satisfying things about fruit work was the friendships made with other women and the break from family routine. Women fruit workers also enthusiastically participated in a bawdy shop-floor culture where gossip and jokes about sex were a primary way of critiquing their reality and passing time. They referred to male supervisors and bosses with sexual derisive names such as *el dedito* (pinky finger) or *el gorito* (a reference to being cuckolded, having a hat pulled over one's eyes), rhetorical gestures that both recognized the sexual power that managers could exercise over women workers and negated it.

So too, women fruit workers employed sexualized language to challenge the authority of female supervisors, who were commonly called *lesbianas* and accused of unsolicited fondling.⁵⁹ Although "lesbian" was certainly meant as an insult, sex between women was referenced less to indicate abhorrence than a fascination with female power. María Elena Galdámez, a married thirty-five-year-old fruit worker, recounted in an oral history how, when she was once propositioned by female supervisor, whom she described as *una lesbiana bien guapa* (a very handsome lesbian), she rebuffed the offer because "the only way to get ahead was to work side-by-side with [fellow fruit workers]."⁶⁰ On one hand, her rendition reiterates the classic leftist tale about working-class solidarity and morality in the face of employer exploitation and sexual degeneracy. Yet Galdámez's appreciation of the supervisor's attractiveness and her emphasis on her own choice in the matter hints that it was not a foregone conclusion that she would do so or that the encounter itself was displeasing. Her narration is identical to the ways women regularly recounted refusing the advances of male supervisors, a parallel that emphasizes that women who were managers could have the same types of status-derived sexual authority as men.

When speaking among and about their peers, women fruit workers acknowledged that worker solidarity and sexual interest between women could be more compatible. They regularly joked about "going steady" (*pololeando*) with each other, particularly with fellow workers from the same

59. María Elena Galdámez, oral history, recorded by author, Santa María, November 4, 1992.

60. *Ibid.*

packing line. Others humorously threatened to set up house together to be rid of annoying husbands.⁶¹ Some women more seriously recounted the specifics of various dates and love-crushes they had with women.⁶²

Acts of consumption played a significant role in women's imagining such forms of female intimacy. Women workers on the same packing plant lines often bought each other small gifts of candy, hair clips, and nail polish as tokens of friendship and mutual commitment. They purchased popcorn and empanadas for each other at local sports events, chose each other as dance partners and bought each other drinks at community festivals. Of course not all gifts indicated sexual attraction. But they did define female intimacy in ways that departed meaningfully from the recent past when "gifts" between women were usually homemade and geared towards a neighbor woman's family survival needs. Indeed, ties of reciprocity had long mediated women's exchanges of diapers, clothing, food, and fuel on haciendas and small farms. In contrast, fruit workers bought gifts of cosmetics and hair products for one another with their own money and intended them for another woman's own personal enjoyment. Such gifts were inscribed in a language, if not always a practice, of heterosexual dating rather than one of neighborliness. The woman who treated another woman to a beer or Coke at a corner food stand was thanked for being such a good *marido* (husband) or *buen macho* (manly man).⁶³ Only very occasionally did women discuss outings in more explicitly sexual terms. At a weekend gathering of women fruit workers at a Catholic meeting center, women who bunked together in the facility's dormitories swapped stories of amorous encounters with other women. One married woman detailed to a rapt audience the finer points of why movie theaters were particularly perfect places for women to explore each other's bodies.⁶⁴

THE POLITICS OF CONSUMPTION

The conditions of authoritarian rule and export capitalism did not "empower" women to be more sexually free, nor did changing relations in the family mark a simple stride forward in a long march from the rigid patriarchy of yore to the more liberated sexual landscape of late-modernity.⁶⁵ If some forms of male dominance weakened, others were

61. Erika Muñoz, oral history; Olga Gutiérrez, oral history, Santa María, April, 1993.

62. Author's notes from El Primer Encuentro de la Mujer Temporera, Canelo de Nos, 5-7 de junio, 1993.

63. Olga Gutiérrez and Erika Muñoz, oral histories.

64. Author's notes from El Primer Encuentro de la Mujer Temporera, Canelo de Nos, 5-7 de junio, 1993.

65. In the nineteenth century, rural Chile was most characterized by informal and highly fluid relations of sexuality and cohabitation. See Gabriel Salazar, *Laboradores*,

certainly strengthened. The military restricted access to birth control and cracked down on clinical abortion (both of which had become more available to rural women during the agrarian reform).⁶⁶ So too, the military aggressively demonized and repressed homosexual behaviors within its own ranks as well as gay/lesbian social spaces in urban areas. Packing plants involved heightened forms of sexual coercion, female-headed households were invariably the most impoverished, and the extreme insecurity of temporary fruit work brought intolerable and unwelcome strains to bonds of affection and loyalty, within both families and broader communities of neighbors and fellow-workers.

Nonetheless, new consumption practices, together with the specific forms of export capitalism and female proletarianization that enabled them, did bring profound changes, many of which women welcomed. It was through access to wages and control over purchases, in a context where market transactions increasingly mattered, that many women lay claim to men's longstanding privileges that connected earning and authority at home, earning and spending, earning and personal indulgence. The terms of the fruit-export economy also made the connections between money and sexual loyalty more transparent and contested. Within the female world of the packing plants, shared acts of consumption forged intimate loyalties among working women.

Such changes occurred despite, rather than because, of military authorities' intentions. Although certainly a product of how military rule had restructured rural society, the erosion of family patriarchy was quite oppositional to the military's vision of the well-ordered society, and worker discussions of what was "just" and "equitable" had problematic implications for authoritarian sensibilities. This did not make women fruit workers (or male workers) automatic "opponents" of the regime, either actively or personally. But women workers' relationship to new consumer practices and cultures was hardly one of acquiescence to regime agendas, or social conformity more broadly. On the contrary, consumption was at the heart of a very testy re-negotiation of power within the family and broader community that often eroded prior forms of dominance.

peones, y proletarios: Formación y crisis de la sociedad popular chilena del siglo XIX, (Santiago de Chile: SUR, 1986); Nara Milanich, "Children of Fate: Families, Class, and the State in Chile, 1857–1930" (PhD diss, Yale University, 2002).

66. See Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*, chapters four and six.