

Nursing student activism 1972–1973 in Chile, relating to a case

Abstract

Unveiling the political and union formalization of the Chilean nursing student movement in the socio political space of 1972-1973 contributes to the historical knowledge of nursing. The situations of need for nursing students in 1972 were formalized through the Federation of Nursing Students, which culminated with the military coup of 1970, where its members dissolved the Federation and were persecuted and expelled from their study centres. Despite reinsertion, the marks of this episode stripped them of their union ideals.

Keywords: history, nurse, students, politics

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Introduction

Youth social movements They develop in conjunction with political transformations, being characterized by different ways of understanding the political, of configuring their own identity and of linking with the institutional expressions of politics.¹ These have operated as a problematic dimension around which definitions, practices, meanings and logics of action are developed that are in permanent mutation.² Incorporating structural conditions defined by the State and the political system, expressing an institutionalized field, whose relationships establish opportunities and restrictions, the union between youth and politics being relevant, which is in constant change and in search of definition.² Jointly, history reveals that social movements generate opportunities to transform the conditions associated with the political dimension, senses and meanings.³ Coherently, in Latin America, between the fifties and sixties, university education became more accessible for the children of workers and peasants, however, precarious living conditions remained, which added to the political tensions of the time, gender a movement, specified as “Student Federations”.⁴

Now, in the case of Chile, during the 20th century, youth spaces, especially in the 1970s, were highly politicized by youth,⁵ and were expressed with leadership and political initiatives that expanded to universities.⁶ Politically, young people sought to understand the alternatives for revolutionary change, acting between rebellion and conformism.⁷ They sought to demolish totalizing myths, structurally inserting themselves, emphasizing parties, student federations and unions; After the coup d'état, youth movements revealed themselves in the contexts of anti-dictatorial protest, economic crisis and authoritarian closure of participation channels.⁷ In the educational and university training dimension, the Chilean university community was immersed in various mobilizations, explained by the great burden that the middle sectors had in the class structure, social political situation, predominantly urban character of the Chilean population and in the weakness of economic development in relation to education.⁸ At the VII National Congress of Nurses, in 1972⁹ a group of students from different universities founded the first National Federation of Nursing Students in Chile. The research aims to contribute to the historical development of the nursing union, which is why it raises the question:

How was the formalization? union politician motion Chilean nursing student, in the socio political space 1972-1973? Addressing the memory and evolution of the student movement, the motivations and impact of the military dictatorship on the union movement are of interest, the objective is to reveal the union political formalization of the motion Chilean nursing student, in the socio political space 1972-1973.

Methodology

The present study was approached as a historical investigation, through a life history story, to understand the social phenomenon from the point of view of the main actor, it was complemented with images and documents of the time, provided by the interviewee. The proposal allows us to explain how the formalization was union politician motion Chilean nursing student, in the socio political space 1972-1973? The purposive theoretical sample considered a retired nurse, a participant in the Federation of Nursing Students between the years 1972-1973, the sample was obtained by convenience, through groups of nurses who studied the profession between the years 1970-1973, and who participated in the Federation of Nursing Students of Chile, the data was collected between June and July 2021, through in-depth interviews, with 3 new contacts being necessary to complete the information and resolve questions. The interviews were based on three dialogue-generating questions, which were subject to rounds of validity by experts in historical research. Once informed about the study, he confirmed his participation by signing an informed consent form. A voice recorder was used, and the interview was fully transcribed, lasting 90 minutes. Afterwards, the microanalysis of the data began, through the Atlas ti® program, and whose interpretation was complemented with iconographic elements. The interview was coded with the letter C and a consecutive number to maintain anonymity.^{10,11}

Results

From a first microanalysis, 30 codes were obtained, which after several rounds of review were reduced¹² in which it was possible to identify the meta category of political formalization or union of nursing student movement; socio political space: dictatorship; and

student reintegration, with their respective intermediate categories, which were ordered according to the number of associated codes, some quotes that became relevant were extracted, which were ordered according to meta category and intermediate category, the

social context is understood, through a photograph provided by the interviewee (Table 1-3), in which a group of students can be seen at the Congress of the College of Nurses, wearing clothing typical of the time.

Table 1 Union political formalization of the nursing student movement

Intermediate category	Interview extract
Strong union organization	<i>[...and we went to fight at the central house, and finally we took the central house and there we met with a dean who was the devil himself, he tried to put us in prison, but we managed to have a meeting with him and he found our reason, because our purpose was not political, the rest of the people walked with political party flags and we did not, it was something completely union...], [...Once we all got together in Concepción and went three or four days to Talcahuano; to carry out union activities, we were inspired young people..]</i>
Non-standardized curricula	<i>[...the curricular frameworks of the nursing degree at the time were different, and that for us meant more expense and cost, because the degree was extended, a semester and other times years, because in some places of the degree, there were subjects, such as psychiatry, that were taught in the second semester, so we had to wait a semester without doing anything, to go to Santiago to take the subject...]</i>
Destabilization of the country	<i>[...in the first months of 1973; There were very few classes that were held, we were inspired by our movement, but the universities went on strike, occupation and strike...]</i>
Context of impoverished country	<i>[...the only thing we wanted was to improve the economic part, which meant a lot, in some of us, our parents could finance our studies and in other cases not, we worked and studied], [...we were poor, we wanted to emerge and study, it was just that, we did not request or have help from any political party, for us the concern was having money, our parents had the minimum income and we were worried about paying for accommodation and food and pay for the course registration...]</i>

Table 2 Sociopolitical space: dictatorship

Intermediate category	Interview extract
Persecution of members	<i>[...this lasted almost a year, because then the summer came and the coup d'état and we all went outside, that is, all of us, course presidents, delegates, all expelled by the police and -Why? It was not known, they were all just expelled...][...later we were threatened, and I, for example, was expelled for being class president...]</i>
Murders	<i>[...they killed people who protected and helped us, this was a lesson for us, I can't tell you how many friends died...][...a nurse colleague who supported and promoted the entire union movement in the same way, died with her children and her husband in 1973, they did it to warn us, to immobilize us, and so that we would not complain, the situation remained like this, and it was never found out who killed her, they said she committed suicide, but I know that was not the case... They said she was a communist, and it was a lie, I had never seen a woman so dedicated to teaching, to her students before.]</i>
Clandestine and exile.	<i>[...all clandestine, one day sleeping in one part, another day in another place and so on and we were all treated equally...][who did we ask for help? - to no one, we lost all contacts...][...I went to Putre to close a circle, to see if what I had experienced had been true or a nightmare, and if it was true...][...I didn't leave! The government of the time sent me, they banned me for two years and one day to Putre...].</i>

Table 3 Student reintegration

University change	<i>[...when in 1976 I managed to reintegrate into the university, this was another. I had studied in an environment of respect, democracy and plurality, there was debate, it was a real university and when I returned it was something totally different, completely militarized...]</i>
Social rejection	<i>[...everyone distrusted us and there I never again had dreams of being a union member, nor dreams of freedom, everything was over...][...after they expelled me, I became the plagued one, and when I rejoined no one came close to me, I thought I smell bad, and I was bathing, and no, that's how they were, no one wanted to approach me...][...I went up to ask, for example - what was about Lucia -, and absolutely no one answered me, it was horrible...]</i>

Discussion, similarities and disparities

Student movements are a representation of the social context of a country, and an approximation to the state of the educational system.¹⁰ In the case of nursing in 1970, the College of Nurses in its “Study of Human Resources in Nursing”, published in 1971 in the magazine of the College of Nurses, establishes that the nursing student faces “Shortage of scholarships or student loans”, “insufficient university homes for students from the provinces”; which added to a serious economic crisis in which the Popular Unity Government.¹¹ found itself, in the context of poorly conceived policies by the government, as well as the international offensive by the United States, associated with the transition to socialism, kept Chile at the centre of the political dilemmas of the cold war.¹² This situation and context generated a union interest in students, which was reflected through the construction of

the National Federation of Nursing Students of Chile in 1972. Created during the VI National Congress of Nurses in October 1972, this is where the nursing student of the time culminated the union political formalization of the nursing student movement. It is proposed that, at the end of the 1970s, students were gaining space in the task of democratizing student centres through open elections, contravening prohibitions and therefore facing sanctions, however, these are also the years in which to intervene. In reality, achieving changes was seen as a possibility that became desirable, experienced by many as a duty, which is associated with the revolution.¹³

The strong union organization that evidenced the union movement of nursing students demonstrates commitment to change and generating organization within nursing students, for this they had directives, delegates and representation in different regions, which

served as a link in a time in which communication between regions was scarce. This becomes key for any student movement, where the student becomes aware of the problems in their environment¹⁰, taking concrete actions and working towards a common goal. It is highlighted how the students presented a dissociation between the concepts of politics and unionism, giving the former a negative connotation, associated with the partisanship of political parties, generally associated with left-wing parties¹⁴ which at the time had a strong connection with the communist party, within the context of the cold war, phrases such as “we had no political militancy, nor intention to engage in partisanship within the federation.” The activities of the National Federation of Nursing Students ended with the Military Coup of 1973, after 2 years of organization and development, its activities ceased and its members were persecuted. The Chilean Civic-Military Dictatorship is presented with a double desire to refound the state based on the pillars of a new political institutionality, which had an authoritarian character, with limited pluralism; neoliberal approach.² The educational doctrine that was established during the Dictatorship was marked by repression through the doctrine of national security,¹⁵ which emerged as a measure against communism.¹⁴ This is how the will to cleanse the Universities is described, eliminating all partisan ideology, establishing the military junta’s own ideological perception.¹⁶

The violation of Human Rights committed during the Military Dictatorship left a total of 28,459 victims according to the Valech Commission, of which rape, torture, mistreatment or injuries by state agents have been proven.^{17,18} According to the reports. “They killed people who protected and helped us, this was like a lesson for us, I can’t tell you how many friends died”. These episodes caused feelings of helplessness, which added to the exile that the members experienced, who were forced to abandon their homes and families, either in search of safety, or exiled by the government to prisons and detention centres “The government of the time sent me, they banned me to Putre for two years and one day”, this coercive and destructive violence is linked to a dictatorial regime that built its foundations on violence, with an environment of fear and terror in the population¹⁴ used to repress and immobilize, with an institutional framework that used violence as a form of power, to achieve objectives.

The members’ university reintegration was marked by fear and rejection. The authoritarian dictatorship turns the thoughts and opinions of the population towards a certain direction, with a subjectivity that becomes inherent to it,¹⁹ causing rejection and aversion towards certain sectors; associated with the belief that for the existence of some, others must be neutralized or eliminated and rigidifying human relationships¹² within the stories it is extracted ““After they expelled me, I became the plagued one, and when I reintegrated, no one came close to me.”, in the university reintegration, the expelled members were rejected by the educational community, carrying prejudices, which led to union demotivation ““Everyone distrusted us and there I never again had dreams of being a union member, nor dreams of freedom, everything was over. “It describes how the torture and murders that occurred during the 17 years of dictatorship left a Chilean population traumatized.¹²

Conclusion

Addressing union and political youth in a period in which there is oppression in freedoms is a challenge. In the research proposed we are able to see how the situations of need of the nursing student in 1972, in relation to the polarized social context and the difficult economic environment, were formalized through the construction of the Federation of Nursing Students, which culminated with the

military coup of 1973, where their members dissolved the Federation, and our interviewee was persecuted and expelled from his study centre, despite the reintegration, the marks of this episode stripped him of the unionist ideal, this leaves us with the questions of how this period affected future generations of nurses in terms of their union and political impetus? Currently, nursing is dissociated from politics, with low participation in union activities, with a nurse who gives politics a negative connotation. Understanding how this period of history is still present in nurses becomes necessary, so we suggest the need to continue with studies that address the political history of nursing and thereby promote the identity of the professional nurse. Only having one study subject was presented as a limitation, however, due to the richness of the story, the research continued, since it was considered that it emerges as an edge to the political history of Chilean Nursing.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declares that there are no conflict of interests.

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