

## Interview with Teresa Quiroz. 2 May 2011. Research Social Work in Dictatorship Chile

*Interviewer, Teresa López<sup>1</sup>*

*Style editing, Gabriela Rubilar<sup>2</sup>*

TL: Who is Teresa Quiroz? Please tell me a little about your childhood and family.

TQ: I spent my childhood in Valparaíso. My father was a civil servant at Banco de Chile in Valparaíso. We lived in Playa Ancha for six or seven years. My mother liked living in Valparaíso and Viña del Mar very much, but my father was transferred to the Bank in Santiago, and as that was a promotion in the Bank, we came to Santiago. We moved to Ñuñoa, my parents, my grandmother Julia and the two sisters, Cristina and me. Later, Arturo, Ana María and Carmen Gloria were born in Santiago.

We were living quite tightly because the only income for the family was the father's salary, but the mother contributed by making us the needed clothes.

In addition, her mother was a Red Cross and served a long time as a volunteer at the Red Cross in Ñuñoa in a mother-child care programme. Poverty was very heartbreaking at that time. The mother would give them the address, and many ladies would visit our home. So, we began to relate to poverty, and I think that influenced my social sensitivity.

A few years later, his father was promoted to the bank, and his income was released. When we arrived in Santiago, our father started looking for a school for us and decided to put us in Villa María. This meant a lot of expense, but father thought it was important for us to have a good education and enter a profession and to learn English, typing and shorthand, which they taught at the school, because that would open up better job opportunities in the future. Dad was quite modern for the time and thought it was good for women to work. On the other hand, the nuns were progressive; we had a fun life because the school was linked with other schools, the French Nuns and St George's, among others. I soon started participating in the YCS (Youth of Catholic Students), where we did social work and socialised with young people from other schools. The high schools were also involved in the YCS. Little by little, we became more aware of the young people of the YCW (Young Catholic Workers). We worked directly with a group of domestic workers, whom we supported and taught various subjects. The latter was an institution run by Father Bernardino Piñera, who guided us at the school.

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At that time, the school did not have valid exams, and a classmate of mine, Pilar Rodríguez, found out that at the Liceo N°7 de Niñas, it was possible to study three years in one, taking valid exams before the Ministry of Education. We enrolled, and the same year that we finished the 6th year of humanities<sup>3</sup>, we took the exams and passed the first cycle of humanities (1st, 2nd and 3rd year). The problem arose when we had to take the exams for the second cycle (4th, 5th and 6th year) because the dates coincided with the end-of-year exams of the college. Then, we discovered a special exam date in April for young people doing their military service. We tried to enrol with them, and they accepted us, so we finished secondary school with valid exams. Therefore, we could think about entering university, but to do so, we had to take the baccalaureate.

We registered for the baccalaureate, and at that time, we had to draw lots for a foreign language, between English and French; we drew lots and my friend, with a lot of luck, got English, but I got French, and I had very little time to prepare. I only studied for a couple of days and learnt by heart a text called “Les Petites Choses”, but I was lucky that in my class there was a very understanding and kind teacher, she noticed that I was very nervous, she asked me why, and I told her that I knew tiny French because I had studied in an English school, she listened to me and reassured me. I took the test and passed it, as I did all the subjects in the baccalaureate, although with a low score, and the same thing happened to my friend.

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My father was very angry when he found out that I wanted to study Social Service, but I had made up my mind because I had some knowledge of the social reality. I had ‘worked with children and workers’ in the YCS and in some direct school activities; also, with my mother, I had seen poverty and knew how hard it was.

I applied to several universities, and they called me from the “Alejandro del Río” School. I also applied to the Catholic University, the Chile University, and, I think, the Valparaíso University. I applied to the Catholic University, although my father, who disagreed that I should study social service, decided not to pay for my university studies and even less for the Catholic University because he was not Catholic. Still, my sister, who was already working, offered to finance me, which was not very difficult because, at that time, the Catholic University only charged tuition fees.

Then, I started my studies when Rebeca and Adriana Izquierdo were the school’s directors. They were doing a very good job; advised by Belgian professionals, they were oriented towards education and working with children and companies.

TL: What year did you enter the [Catholic] university? How many years did you

<sup>3</sup>Senior year of secondary education at the time [footnotes are the interviewer’s].



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last, what were the requirements for graduation, and in what year did you graduate?

TQ: I entered university in 1957 and graduated in 1961, after the 1960 earthquake. The degree lasted five years, and to graduate, it was necessary to pass all the courses, the internship, and the thesis. My thesis was based on the '60 earthquake and its title, "The '60 Earthquake: An Experience of Working with Children at Risk".

Immediately after the earthquake, together with Sonia Oyarzún, we worked with children at risk who were arriving in Santiago because their families had housing problems and the factories where the workers were working had collapsed. The children were placed in institutions following the social policies established by President Jorge Alessandri. We worked with institutions located in Los Andes and San Felipe.

We received the children in Santiago, who arrived from different parts of the country, and then we had to go and drop them off at the institutions. It wasn't easy to separate ourselves from the children because, in a short time, we established effective relationships with them. We worked near Santiago because we were both pregnant, but the rest of our colleagues worked in different places in southern Chile, the area most affected by the earthquake.

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After I graduated, I went to work at Viña Concha y Toro with the unions, where I had also done an internship. The winery's manager was Agustín Huneeus, who had very good relations with the unions and was very supportive of my work. I worked only a few hours a week because I was already married and had a child; in fact, 'I had three in a row'. Respecting the pre- and post-natal leave, I had access to pre-natal: 6 months, post-natal: 9 months, and one year if breastfeeding. These guidelines were issued by the Social Security Service, the Private Employees' Fund (in my case), and the Public Employees' Fund for State workers.

TL: What was your assessment of the formation you received then, and what is it now, in retrospect?

TQ: Regarding the training received at the university, I remember the contents of some subjects that were of great interest and useful for our professional performance. Among them:

- Social legislation, Álvaro Covarrubias
- Sociology, Andrés Domínguez
- Human Rights, Ramón Luco.

Regarding the internships, we had teachers who guided and supported us. Alicia Forttes was an example of this.



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As for the teaching of the history of Social Service and the study of the three intervention methods<sup>4</sup>, these were taught by the directors of the School of Social Service and professors such as Clara Calvo who studied in the USA.

However, there were important theoretical gaps because the teaching was centred on the contexts of the countries of the North, whose reality was quite different from ours and that of the rest of Latin America. There were tensions with the management because we felt that there was backwardness in training and a lot of rigidity on the part of the management, which we raised and the management did not like.

At one point, the Izquierdo [sisters] went to my house to talk to my mum and told her that I was very rebellious, and my mum agreed with them and said to them that I was also rebellious at home (smiles). During that period, a strong student organisation was created at the School of Social Service. One of our demands was to modernise the syllabuses, link up with the university's social science schools and the country's schools of social service, and organise a common curriculum that would allow us to have a more solid and shared way of thinking with the other schools. This was how a formal organisation was formed that would allow us to participate in the school with a vote.

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Initially, it was up to me to be the organisation's president and to liaise with the other presidents of the university schools. This experience was rich in solidarity and important for strengthening common bonds. Later, it was Virginia Rodríguez's turn to be the president of the students of the school, who also shared the positions mentioned above. The student movement of the students of the university was strengthened, and in August 1968, they took over the university.<sup>5</sup>

This is highlighted by the canvas placed on the front of the Casa Central, which is the phrase that remains in our minds to this day: "Chilenos, el Mercurio Miente" (Chileans, the Mercury Lies). It is worth noting that the School of Social Service students participated extensively in this takeover and the student movement.

The struggle was for a university with a consistent academic programme that responded to the country's needs, greater autonomy from the Church, and a democratic system of university government.

TL: What did you work on when you graduated from university?

TQ: At Viña Concha y Toro, as a social worker. At that time, the unions could include in their demands that the organisation could hire a social worker and a lawyer.

<sup>4</sup>[Refers to case, group and community methods].

<sup>5</sup>This marked the beginning of the University Reform process in Chile.



At that time, family visits were made, and support was sought for student children through small scholarships; the family was involved in health issues, and agreements were made with the San Borja Hospital, which was opposite the industry. We had the opportunity to build two small villages on Gran Avenida with the help of an architect and according to the needs of the workers. The budget for this work was financed by the Management, reducing the taxes that the industry had to pay each year<sup>6</sup>. In total, 46 families were benefited.

One day, while I was in the office of the Concha y Toro winery, I received a call from the Catholic University's School of Social Service inviting me to collaborate with the school in teaching and teaching practice. The management team at the time comprised Nidia Aylwin, Alicia Forttes, and Mónica Jiménez, who had replaced the Izquierdo sisters. A group of professionals, all graduates of the Catholic University, were called to collaborate, and we stayed at the school. We restructured the curriculum, emphasising theoretical training but also methodological aspects.

At that time, we were very critical of traditional social work, which, in our opinion, did not contribute to social change; we were also critical of the methodological application that was done in Social Service and in that area we published a book on "Basic Method in Social Intervention", that was the name of the publication which the university financed.

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In 1967, we took over the School and restructured it<sup>7</sup>. That was a period of study and networking with schools in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, and others, which were developing processes similar to ours. We incorporated Marxist theory but had a mechanical understanding based on Marta Harnecker's manuals. We were supported by professors who worked at the university, among others, Franz Hinkelammert, professor of philosophy and economist, who taught the course on historical materialism; Diego Palma, sociologist, the course on social research; Jorge Gissi, psychologist, who taught social psychology; Oscar Guillermo Garretón, in economics; Jacques Chonchol, director of CEREN<sup>8</sup> taught courses on Agrarian Reform. We also had Paulo Freire and a professor who had been Brazil's Minister of Education as teachers.

<sup>6</sup>At that time, by law, companies had to contribute to improving and/or providing housing for their workers and deduct an annual percentage of their taxes for this purpose.

<sup>7</sup>In 1967, Nidia Aylwin, headmistress until 1969, took over as headmistress of the school. Between 1969 and 1971, Virginia Rodríguez took over as headmistress, and in 1972-1973, the interviewee took over as headmistress. It is very likely that this expression 'we' refers to the three of them.

<sup>8</sup> Centre for the Study of National Reality



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We restructured the internships, which were supervised by the teacher from the school, who went with the students to the internship centres. We created three areas of professional practice that functioned in the School, with 10 departments with a certain degree of independence: the Rural Area, with teachers and students linked to the Agrarian Reform; the Population Area, which worked preferably with camps; and the Industrial Area, which worked with the industrial cordons. I worked in that area, the industrial area.

The practice became the central pedagogical instance, since the theory and the intervention methodology were delivered on the basis of the practices; we created the workshops, which were run by the same teachers who supervised the students' practices. This methodological form was later taken up by other Schools of Social Work as well. The number of professionals hired directly by and for the School increased significantly; we social workers were teachers of the social work courses, internships and workshops.

The staff of social worker teachers was composed of:

Nidia Aylwin	Mónica Jiménez
Alicia Forttes	Carmen Salineros
Mercedes Cagten	Carmen Ramirez
Ana Maria Mediogli	Wanda Lao
Lucy Gómez	Gloria Vio
Adriana Falcón	Ninfa Pérez
Ana María de la Jara	Teresa Quiroz
Veronica Gonzalez	Daniela Sánchez

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Most were full-time teachers, but there were also some hourly teachers.

The process of withdrawal from the School of the Directors Rebeca and Adriana Izquierdo and the hiring of new teachers was led by Nidia Aylwin, who was well accepted by the students and teachers and, at the same time, was recognised by the Izquierdo sisters. In 1969, Virginia Rodríguez took over the direction of the school. She consolidated the teaching team with professionals from various social sciences, strengthening the work of the Areas, teacher training and the other tasks mentioned above, which served to consolidate the epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches at the service of the practices.

Because Virginia was invited to work with the government<sup>9</sup> on a popular participation programme that she found appealing, she left the school... After some deliberation by teachers and students, I was asked to apply for the Director of the School position, when Fernando Castillo Velasco was the Rector of the university. At that time, we had

<sup>9</sup>The Popular Unity government, which had just taken office at the time.





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150 students, and there was a democratic system for voting within the university. This system consisted of each student having the right to one vote, as did the professors, each with one vote. The result was that 100% of the teachers' votes went to me, and at the same time, every student voted for me, leaving 100% of the votes for me in both cases. The administrators who counted the votes pointed out that this situation had never happened before.

In this way, we were able to have a very well-established teaching team with a good academic level. We further developed the workshops based on the theory-practice relationship. At that time, we also created the *Revista de Trabajo Social de la Escuela*<sup>10</sup>, in which the professors of the School wrote and received contributions from other professionals. The analyses of the workshops, as well as analyses of the national situation, theoretical issues and specific social problems, were the main topics covered by the Journal. We managed to publish 10 issues until the military coup of 1973. At that time, the Editorial ECRO<sup>11</sup> was created in Argentina and was dedicated only to publishing documents, articles, and books on social work. Many regional meetings were held in Chile and Latin America because ALAETS (Latin American Association of Schools of Social Work) had been created. I remember that as a time of great creativity, significant social and political commitment, and tensions.

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In Chile, many professionals linked to work in private companies had more conservative positions. They were members of the College of Social Assistants (they) who disagreed with our proposal, which created some tensions. ...One of the issues that was achieved was that I had a great struggle to get the Rector to change our location. The school was in Vicuña Mackenna, next to a very busy motel, and it was also full of mice. Finally, they accepted, and we moved to the East Campus, together with the other Schools of Social Sciences and Education. We settled in with teaching offices, classroom space, canteens, and gardens.

When I was a teacher at the school, the academic vice-rector of the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso asked me to advise the school at that university on the construction of a new curriculum. This was because the students had been on strike for six months demanding changes, and both the students and the directors were aware of the changes we had made in Santiago and the experience we

<sup>10</sup>The Journal of Social Work of the School of Social Work of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) has been published without interruption from the first issue to the present day. All published issues can be found at in the archives of the School of Social Work and in the Central Library of the PUC. Previously there had been a Social Work Journal in Chile, that of the School of Social Work 'Dr. Alejandro del Río', the first publication specialised in social work created in the country. However, at the time of the creation of the *Revista de la Escuela de la Católica*, the publication of the *Revista de la Escuela 'Alejandro del Río'* had already ceased.

<sup>11</sup>[Editorial ECRO opened the first bookshop specialising in Social Work, on 1 September 1967, in its premises at Lavalle 2327, in the city of Buenos Aires. Note published by Norberto Alayón, on 26 September 2016 at <https://www.facebook.com/@norbertoAlayon/>]



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had gained. The school accepted the request, and I worked simultaneously in Santiago and Valparaíso for two years. We built and began to apply the new curriculum.

For this task, the Catholic University of Valparaíso appointed a commission made up of professors Eloisa Pizarro, Mirta Crocco, Edith Jofré, Vicente de Paula Faleiro (Brazilian) and Juan Mojica (Colombian), with whom I worked as a team to rethink the school and build the new curriculum that was applied until the 1973 coup d'état.

TL: What happened to you after the coup?

TQ: In September 1973, the coup d'état took place in Chile. I was still the headmistress of the school. We stayed at the school for a month. During that time, we held meetings and assemblies with the students to analyse the school's situation in the new reality of the country, and we also held workshops to control the practices that the students were carrying out. This was a period of intense and also very painful work and analysis. Sometimes, parents of our students would come to ask about their children, and when they had not gone home or returned to the university and had not communicated with us, it was because they had been taken prisoner.

The military government dismissed Rector Fernando Castillo Velasco<sup>12</sup> and appointed Admiral Swett.

In those days, a teacher from the school gave the new Rector a list with the names and political affiliations of all the teachers at the school; she told us that she had done so, and when we rebuked her for this action, she told us that she was very honest and that she could not lie or cover up for us. We begged her to leave the directors of the school on the list but to remove two teachers from the list, one because she was very ill, on medical leave at the time, and the other because she was pregnant, was contracted by the hour at the school and had an important position in a government agency. The response from the person who told us was that 'the list was already in the hands of the new Rector and even if it wasn't, she had to be honest, so she couldn't keep quiet about what she knew'.

In those days, a professor who had held an important position in the previous Rector's office and who was still at the university called me into his office and told me that the situation at the school was very difficult because Rector Swett and his advisors knew what was being done at the school, who the professors were, and were especially upset about the work that had been done in the camps and the industrial areas. He recommended that we leave the school to avoid major problems and that we should not return to the university. If we could, we should leave the country. When I asked him what to do, he informed me that

<sup>12</sup>The government did the same with the rectors of the other universities in the country. In all of them, it appointed rectors as government delegates. The universities absolutely lost their autonomy.



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he knew that the Argentinean embassy was receiving people seeking political asylum.

I informed professors and students of this situation, but it was not easy to convince some of them. They thought our school was small, without much weight in the university, and of a certain academic level. They thought both situations would combine and nothing would happen to the school and us. We talked a lot about it and finally decided to leave the school that night and not return the following day. So we did.

That same night, they arrested teacher Adriana Falcón, beat her, broke her head and tortured her a lot, but then 'released' her. She left for a small town in the North of the United States, near the Canadian border, where she stayed and became mayor of the city. She still lives in the USA but comes to Chile from time to time. They had also arrested Virginia Rodríguez and were looking for Oscar Guillermo Garretón, her husband. They had arrested the Director of the School of Social Work at the Chile de Antofagasta, who had a position in ALAETS.

We lived at that time in Gran Avenida, in front of Ciudad del Niño, and that day, the children were at home with the 'nana'. We thought it was not convenient to stay in the house. I called my sister on a public phone, and she realised we were 'complicated' although I didn't tell her anything. She offered to pick up the children and take them to her house. And that's what she did, which reassured us even though we had nowhere to go at the time. My sister found us temporary accommodation in a nuns' house, and we could stay there for a few days, but then we had to leave 'because it became known that we were there'. After that, we wandered around different places with little support from the family, and during that time, they raided our house and took our books and other things (our passports and some money). Some time later, we received an invitation, obtained by my sister, who lived in Canada, to give a lecture at a Canadian university<sup>13</sup>. We managed to get a passport, and in October or early November, we left Chile with the support of the Canadian Embassy; we made a stopover in Peru and stayed a few days in the house of a Peruvian social worker. The Peruvian comrades were very supportive, and we began to calm down a bit. They communicated with Costa Rica, the country that received us.

Finally, we arrived in Costa Rica and were hired by the university. Although it took a few months to process our salaries, with the help of our Costa Rican colleagues and a Colombian colleague who helped us financially, we managed to survive, albeit with difficulties. There were days when even food was scarce; it was a hard period but with hope. During that period, many Chileans arrived in Costa Rica, and some

<sup>13</sup>This was a mechanism widely used in the first months of the dictatorship to facilitate the departure abroad of people who were at risk in Chile.



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of them were in very bad shape, physically and psychologically, because they had been tortured. We listened to their stories of torture and suffering, and we did our best to help them. Among them came the director of the Social Work course at the University of Chile in Antofagasta, surnamed Osorio.

In Costa Rica, we worked for a couple of years teaching at the university; I worked, among other things, in community practice with medical students so that they would understand the social reality in which they were inserted. This turned out to be complex because, in the community, you have to make commitments, and this was very difficult for the students. Together with a group of professors, we also created a degree in Social Planning at a new university, the National University. I taught for two years and then went to work at a research centre on agricultural issues, where I worked for almost nine years.

Diego<sup>14</sup> then went to Honduras to help organise and work on the ALAETS<sup>15</sup> Masters in Social Work. He spent two years in that country as Director of the Master's programme, which counted among its professors Vicente de Paula Faleiro, Paulo Netto and Franz Hinkelammert. The Master's was very well evaluated.

Diego's work in Honduras forced us to live some years apart, although we were very close and saw each other regularly.

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TL: How long have you been in Costa Rica, and how was your life in that country?

TQ: We were in Costa Rica for 11 years. The Costa Ricans were very supportive; they treated us very well and opened up many interesting job opportunities for us. It was a reasonable period in Costa Rica, both in terms of family, study and work. While working at the Research Centre, I had the opportunity to study for and pass a Master's degree in Sociology at CLACSO<sup>16</sup>. My thesis was on "The Image of Women in Television Series". My guiding professor was Franz Hinkelammert, who had been a professor at the School of Social Work at la Católica, in Chile, and like us, lived and worked in Costa Rica and was a professor of the Masters in Rural Sociology, which CLACSO had created.

<sup>14</sup>[Diego Palma, husband of Teresa Quiroz].

<sup>15</sup> Latin American Association of Schools of Social Work

<sup>16</sup> Latin American Social Science Council.



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Teresita (his daughter) decided to leave to study in Nicaragua, which initially complicated things for us because the Sandinista Front was in the midst of a war of liberation against Somoza, but in that same period, Somoza ‘fell’, and that reassured us. Around the same time, Leila Lima<sup>17</sup> invited us to work at CELATS. Although we were doing very well in Costa Rica, for some years, we wanted to be closer to Chile. It was difficult to leave Costa Rica, but even so, we went to Peru happy and very excited and started working at CELATS<sup>18</sup> in 1985.

(After a little more than two hours, by mutual agreement between the researcher and the interviewee, the interview was suspended and agreed to continue on Tuesday, 11 May, at 3.30 p.m. at the College of Social Workers. Before closing the interview, the researcher asks TQ two questions with which the following interview will begin).

### Publication note:

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The published text is a verbatim interview transcript, including the footnotes by Teresa López after the interviewee revised the transcript.

Some minor edits have been made for publication in the Journal, which have been identified using [square brackets].

The second part of the interview will be published in the next issue of the journal *Propuesta Críticas en Trabajo Social*.

<sup>17</sup>A well-known social worker who was Director of CELATS for several years.

<sup>18</sup> Centro Latino Americano de Trabajo Social, a body under the auspices of ALAETS

