

Reproductive Rights Oral History Project

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)
Geneva, Switzerland

Amparo Claro

Interviewed by
Nicole Bourbonnais

January 31 and March 7, 2022
Online via Zoom

Background:

In September 1992, women’s health advocates from around the world gathered together to prepare for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. Together, they agreed on the need for a strong positive statement by women to help set the agenda for ICPD 1994, one that would challenge the existing population agenda and reorient it around the concept of reproductive health and rights. The result was the “[Women’s Declaration on Population Policies](#),” signed by 2,539 individuals and organizations from over 110 countries. This was followed in 1994 by the more expansive “Rio Statement” on Reproductive Health and Justice, produced after a meeting of 215 women from 79 countries in Rio de Janeiro in January 1994. Together, these documents outlined a thorough critique of the status quo in population policies, outlining the fundamental ethical principles and necessary conditions needed to ensure a woman-centered, rights-focused approach. They played a powerful role in shaping the Programme of Action established at Cairo in 1994, as well as the rise of the global reproductive rights movement more broadly.

This oral history project traces the life histories of key activists who were involved in these activities, exploring how their broader trajectory/life experiences shaped their role in the reproductive rights movement and their activism more broadly. The interviews thus provide material of broad relevance to those interested in histories of population control, reproductive rights, feminism, global health, development, and international activism.

Narrator:

Amparo Claro was born on November 5, 1939 in Santiago, Chile. She studied in a Catholic School and in the Chilean Conservatory for Song and Music. She married an architect in 1960 and had two daughters. She lived in Paris one year and also in the US, where she divorced. She then came back to Chile and began to work in different fields until she could live independently with

her daughters. At that time, she became a feminist and worked with a group against the Pinochet dictatorship. In 1984, in a meeting in Colombia she was chosen by Latin American feminist organizations as Coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network (LACWHN), where she worked until the year 2000. At present she lives by herself in Santiago near the pre-cordillera.

Interviewer:

Nicole Bourbonnais is an Associate Professor of International History and Politics at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Her research explores the history of sex, reproduction, motherhood and the family in transnational historical perspective. She is author of *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Restrictions:

None.

Format

2 .Wav audio files: (1) January 31, 2022 – 1:12:04; (2) March 7, 2022, 42:15

Transcript:

Initial transcription produced by Otter.ai; edited and reviewed at IHEID. Transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by Amparo Claro. Due to these edits, the transcript differs in parts from the audio recording.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Audio recording

Bibliography: Claro, Amparo. Interview by Nicole Bourbonnais. Audio recording, January 31 and March 7, 2022, Women's Declaration Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Amparo Claro interview by Nicole Bourbonnais, audio recording, January 31 and March 7, 2022, Women's Declaration Oral History Project, IHEID, interview 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Claro, Amparo. Interview by Nicole Bourbonnais. Transcript, January 31 and March 7, 2022. Women's Declaration Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Amparo Claro, interview by Nicole Bourbonnais, transcript, January 31 and March 7, 2022. Women's Declaration Oral History Project, IHEID, p10.

Amparo Claro Interview 1/2, January 31, 2022

Nicole Bourbonnais

Today is the first interview with Amparo Claro on January 31st, 2022. I wanted to start today by asking you to tell me a bit about your early life: where you're from, where you grew up, a little bit about your family life and your childhood.

Amparo Claro

I was born on 5 November 1939, in Santiago de Chile. I was the first daughter of my mother and father. I lived in the center of the city, which is called today, 'Santiago Centro,' near a park. I went to a religious school, which I didn't like at all. I wasn't a good pupil. You see, in that time, here in Chile, social beliefs were very strong concerning religion, the family, marriage and everything. I began to read a lot of South American literature that was quite good. There were many, many good writers [at that time]. But I couldn't just leave all the things that this society imposed, and that was because I was married, because I was pregnant, because I wanted to be out of my house. And I wasn't all that enthusiastic with marriage.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So maybe tell me a bit more about your family, what your parents did, where they came from?

Amparo Claro

Well, they were both Chilean. My father was an engineer, a professor in the University. He was an engineer that designed bridges and things like that. He designed some big bridges here in Chile, one especially in the south. My mother was of a very high social class in Santiago, in Chile. [She was] not interested in academic things, but she liked music very, very much. My mother played piano and played harp. I had a sister after four and a half years, the second daughter. She's a musician and she lives in Denmark. She's married now to a composer from Denmark. In the beginning, she had another husband that was from the MIR, Movement of Izquierda Revolucionario. Do you know that?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah.

Amparo Claro

Yeah, this was a very big thing with Allende and all that. My sister had to leave because if not, she would be put in jail or disappeared.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So she was in exile?

Amparo Claro

Oh, yes, absolutely. And I was in jail. Not because I was from a political party, because I don't like to be in political parties, but because when the coup came, I helped put get some people into embassies. I had some friends in embassies, in the French Embassy, for instance, so I put a guy who was a lover of a very close friend of mine [in there], because the guy was [being threatened by the military]. He directed a newspaper called Puro Chile, it was very strong against the dictatorship. So this was one thing that was important. And then I put my sister in the Italian embassy with her husband. I remember that I went with a friend, and we tried to get their bodies over the wall, and my sister had her husband with her. He was a strong guy and we couldn't do it. The problem was that the military were armed. [But] everything was good, finally, and my sister decided to go to Denmark, and then was separated from this guy, divorced. She has a son that has made very interesting movies, he is a Director of Photography for movies. What else would you like to know about the family?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Well, you mentioned obviously having gone to a religious school. Was your family also religious?

Amparo Claro

Not really very religious, no. My mother sometimes went to the church, but she wasn't very committed to the [formalities]. But she liked the social life [of church] very much. In my house, from when I was two years old, many people came, and my mother played piano and told jokes because she liked very much to tell jokes to people, to laugh...etc.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So she was a social butterfly, we would say?

Amparo Claro

Absolutely, yeah that is a good name. My father died when I was seven or eight years old.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Oh, okay.

Amparo Claro

At 44 years old, he [passed] away.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So what did the family do after that?

Amparo Claro

Well, my mother worked. She went many times to the US. She brought dresses back and sold them. So that maintained us. My mother was extremely generous. When I had my daughters and I was separated in the US - that happened in the US, because I was in the US with my children and my husband, and I came back separated - she had my daughters and myself in her house again, for

some years, when I was trying to get money to buy a house or something like that. To be independent, and freer.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And so you mentioned that you became pregnant. Do you remember how old you were approximately or when that was?

Amparo Claro

20? I had a baby seven months after marriage, something like that. But I didn't like the marriage at all, because it wasn't with the right person for me. He is - or was, I don't know if he died - living in Canada. He was teaching classes in a university, he had about three or four careers, somebody told me. He was a very backward kind of guy. We were living in the US when I decided to end the relationship.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And you had two daughters?

Amparo Claro

Yes. One lives in Miami now. She works as a producer in [a big TV Enterprise]. She studied in France for 11 years, more or less. And my other daughter lives in Santiago.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And you mentioned also that you read a lot, and that was maybe how you developed a social conscience. Do you remember that? You mentioned that you started to develop a critique of Chilean society from reading. And I was wondering, well if you can remember what aspects you were critical of? Or how that developed? That would be interesting.

Amparo Claro

Well, I don't recall exactly, but this literature, like Rayuela or books from Argentinian or Colombian writers and other people who were showing different ways of living. My mother and father were not at all rich, but the families around us were people with a lot of power, and very much from the right wing. I began to feel this when I was separated. Not before, in the time of adolescence, but after that. Especially when I read some feminist books, it was like [to remove] a handkerchief from my eyes and see the society in a very, very different way. I'm not a person that works on logic: rather, I work on intuition, because if something seems good to do, then I see-

Nicole Bourbonnais

Kind of develop the logic after the intuition, I guess?

Amparo Claro

Yeah. Well, the logic or where I am going. I ask: Where is this going to go? How it is going to be useful or not? Things like that. Questions which are quite pragmatic. But in the beginning, I have

the feeling I need to do something, and then the analysis comes after, in another way. So, when I came back from the US, I began to try to [have economic independence] and I worked in many different things. Then came the coup d'etat. Then I bought the house for \$2,500, because the people who were against the coup d'etat wanted to just get out of Chile. So this was a really important thing for me: to be independent, to have a house, which wasn't fantastic, but was okay. I went to live there with my daughters. I was working in things that weren't connected with feminism. I was also studying in the Conservatory of Music, because I like to sing very much. I studied singing for four or five years. And then all this stuff began of working too much, and the coup d'etat, etc.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And what kind of jobs were you doing at that time?

Amparo Claro

Well, I was Chief of Selling in a factory of a friend of mine, who was a very rich guy. He offered me that job and I worked for a while there. I was also working with the embassies. I had the possibility to have more money to become independent. Then I began to be mix with groups that were looking at spirituality in a way that I found interesting. Who was I? I wanted to know more about myself. And I began to work with a person who became very famous here in Chile, Lola Hoffmann. She was a psychiatrist and she was really interested in Carl Jung. So we began with a group to work with her and I had sessions with her, like therapy.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And what did you learn about yourself?

Amparo Claro

I learned that I don't exist. This wasn't with her. I learned [that] from a Buddhist place. That we are really nothing, in fact. This was important, because I think that this opened the possibility for me to be more connected to what I wanted to do. I wanted to do groups with people to work on our problems. So I began to do that, to work in groups with people saying, "what happens to us?" and developing these things. We did this in a place in Santiago, which was an academic place but also open for activists. This is how it began. The things that I wanted to be were mixed: defending women's rights, and going to the street and facing the military and the police, etc. This was really important. Because, this was like a sort of base of the work later.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Like a foundation?

Amparo Claro

Yes, foundation. Exactly, exactly.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So these were kind of informal groups? Or they were organized through that academic center?

Amparo Claro

No, no, it wasn't academic, but I had the possibility to form this group with other people: seven, eight other women that were discussing mind mechanisms [and mind habits]. I had a little knowledge of that because I was working with Lola Hoffman. I couldn't try to order the group. The important thing here is that this organization received a letter from the Ford Foundation, in which they said that they could be a backer to someone.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Like a scholarship or funding?

Amparo Claro

Yes. To a woman that would write a paper on women's health, because there was this meeting in 1984, in Colombia. And I said: well, this is very interesting for me, because health interests me and this is women's rights. I could not write this, so I talked with a friend of mine, a doctor, and I said, "What do you think? How can I write this?" "Well," she said, "why don't we ask this person who is a doctor, woman and feminist?" And so she wrote a small paper and I sent it to the Ford Foundation, as if it was a paper that I wrote myself. And what happened is that they accepted me immediately. They gave me the scholarship to go to Colombia, to this meeting. This was how the work of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network began.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So you went to Colombia? And what was that experience like, do you remember?

Amparo Claro

Yeah, I went to Colombia. And this was a group of about 50 or 60 women. I don't recall if it was so many people, but it was at least 40. And what happened is that it was four, five, six days, and we discussed a lot about sexual and reproductive rights. We didn't have the language yet, of "rights." We also did things that were quite new: for instance, that we should take a look at our vagina. And this was - for that time - very, very extraordinary. We were [transgressing] within ourselves and also socially. It was really interesting and we discussed a lot, and the people decided that a network was really needed, because there were many organizations in Latin America, especially after the end of the dictatorships in Latin America. Feminists began to create networks and organizations. In many countries, human rights needed the support of religious organizations and began to grow. But the religious organizations were with the political sector, [and didn't include] women's rights, so the women began with women's rights. This was in 1984.

They chose me as a coordinator of the network, to see how I could envision the creation and development of a network that could have a publication. And this would be in Santiago, Chile. We would continue with communication and see what could happen. So I accepted, and I didn't have the slightest idea how to do that. Imagine – nothing! To return to Santiago again and see: what am

I'm going to do with this? And I thought that this should be put within an organization already organized, already working. There was one organization, [FEMPRES], that made publications, and worked with journalists in Latin America. There were two women that invented the project. And I thought, well, I can go to these ladies, which I knew because they were feminist, and I can talk about this project.

But first of all, I needed to know what the I Ching would tell me about this idea. Do you know what the I Ching is? The I Ching is a book that was used by the very old, old, old Chinese generals to make divinations on war or on the political arena in the country. It is a divination book, which I use when I have to take a really important decision on something to do, or to think or to change, etc. You see? It's like the Tarot cards - some people compare us with that. I threw the I Ching for this question, and the I Ching didn't like the idea. And I said: what am I going to do with this, because I'm not going to them?

I heard that they were coming from Italy, ISIS International. ISIS International was created by an American woman. And then there were about three Chilean woman that worked in Italy. All of them also had left because of the political problems here with the dictatorship. They arrived in Santiago, and I heard about them. I began to see what they were doing. And I decided that I will go and offer the project of the Latin American and Caribbean Health Network to be coordinated by ISIS. And I went, and they accepted immediately.

I became the coordinator of the Latin American network. And we began to work and the idea was to have a publication of eight pages, not more, or something like that. We didn't have money and I had to see how we would create the ability - the economic ability - to develop some projects and what those projects would be. The Network began like that: identifying groups in Latin America, writing to the groups, sending news and creating joint knowledge of the groups as they were cited in the publication. We invented a system with a card, where the group described itself, said how many people were working there, how many women, what they do, etc. We began to have this feature of the groups [in the publication].

Then the invitation to the network of a meeting in Amsterdam appeared. This was a meeting, an international meeting, on women and health [The Fourth International Women and Health Meeting, held in 1984]. I went and this was very important, because it was the first time going outside of the [Latin American] network. I had the opportunity to meet with a lot of European [groups], African groups and groups from other countries. I always imagined that this publication in a certain time could also be made in English. I was interested in a more international thing, which was of course out of the question in that moment, but I had it in mind. I met Marge Berer there and we began a sort of communication. We decided- because she was chosen coordinator of an international network on women health [Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights] - to share joint activities internationally. It was a really important meeting for me: an opportunity to know more about the media, feminist health, and women's rights media.

Well, when I came back, we decided in ISIS that we should have a meeting of the Latin American Health Network. I began to also get money from organizations. I became [close to] the Ford Foundation. The organizations that supported the group, supported the network, the project of the network, and the people who were working on the network, were the Ford Foundation and later the MacArthur Foundation, then the Swedish government. Later the Government of the Netherlands also supported the Network, for many years and very, very well. So we had this meeting. And this meeting, I think was really necessary. Women from Latin America came from different countries. I don't know if it was 50 women or something like that. This was in Santiago, the first meeting. They were dedicated to four themes, to see how the discussion was spreading through different countries of Latin America. The themes were: population policies, adolescent pregnancy, AIDS in women, and abortion. The meeting was really very important because it consolidated the network, its agenda in the region, and leadership in defense of women's rights, of course. This was something very important in that time. I don't know if you want to ask some questions, or?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah, so maybe, to just go back a little bit, and then we'll come back also to the network. But I'm still kind of wondering about your early years in activism. So you come back, you're in the US for a while, and then you come back, and you get involved in women's groups. And at that time, are you doing that full time? Are you still working? Did you do any university?

Amparo Claro

No, I have never been in university, only to study music composition and singing. But I was really very, very dedicated to getting money. And I was committed to go to protests at the time of the dictatorship. We began to appear outside with photographs of people who dissolved the manifestations and all that stuff. I was 100% in those things. My mother - I wasn't a mother, really. I really appreciate my mother who was in charge of my two daughters, because I was so busy with all that stuff.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And what was it like? I mean - I realize as I'm saying it a very big question, but what was it like to be a feminist activist under the military regime?

Amparo Claro

Well, it was dangerous, because any opposition that you made it could mean that you go to jail or that you suffer. That happens when you are [exiled], no? As I was telling you before, at one point two guys appeared in my mother's house, and they told me that they were from an organization of the government and I should go with them. I disappeared for 22 days. And this was because I put this guy, the lover of my friend [in an embassy]. It was really amusing. This is a parenthesis. He was completely from the left wing, totally. But she was from the right, totally right wing. It was like an opera. So, yeah, I was disappeared for 22 days in Tejas Verdes, which was a very, very dangerous place because it was the beginning of the coup. This guy that helped Pinochet to make

all the obscure and black work against people, they were torturing, disappearing or killing people. He was there studying how the gulag began. Manuel Contreras: this was a very bad guy.

But for me, it wasn't so bad. Because when I was in the torture session, this was - how can I say - not torture with pain, but they asked me to take off all my clothes, and etc, etc. Something that I didn't tell you is that I was doing meditation, transcendental meditation for many, many years. So before this situation with these guys I did a long meditation and when I arrived to this place I wasn't afraid. I was in another place. They didn't bite me or torture me or things but they were using - the thing that they wanted was the women naked, and then they put me in a sort of - not bed, but something like that. And they began to touch me with their hands, to see if I was armed, had a revolver or [something].

Then the guy who directed the interrogation asked me for my father and my mother's names. And I told my father's name, Alberto Claro Velasco, and my mother's name Sofia Izquierdo Huneeus. And they showed me some photographs of people to see if I knew them. I said that I didn't know any of them, which was absolutely true because I wasn't [mixed up with] any political things against Salvo. Only feminist activism, which wasn't openly against Pinochet, it was for women's rights. So they finished this session and the guy that was in charge came to this place (that was totally without light in a room of two metres and one metre, something like that) and asked me: "Well, are you family with --" and named a cousin of mine. Second cousin, not first. And I said, "Yes, this is my family." And he said, "I was with him in military school, I know him very well. And so," he told me, "You should be very careful, because they are going to follow you for a while. I know that you are not mixed up in anything, but you should be careful. So you're free in two days." And this was the thing, the guy, he had the name of my cousin and the family, and I felt that this situation was finished because of that.

This was something that, as I was telling you, was a big experience in my life. It showed me the secret things that some people of the right wing never thought were real. I knew that it was completely real. It was also interesting from the psychological point of view, because I made the sort of commitment with myself that I should be really dedicated to a more profound knowledge and commitment to the spiritual life within myself. This gave me that feeling and inner need when I left. Then I arrived at my mother's house and there my daughters were there, nobody knew anything. My mother had a sister that was married to a very important political man, Alessandri, and she couldn't find out where I was. And my other friend that was also very important politically, the right-wing girl, could not find out either. So this obscure world was very protected.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So, but then, you were able to kind of operate as feminist groups even under the regime, if I'm understanding, kind of, by-

Amparo Claro

Yes.

Nicole Bourbonnais

-not explicitly opposing the regime or just trying to stay out of the political debates?

Amparo Claro

What do you mean?

Nicole Bourbonnais

You said that you tried to stay out of the political and just focus on women's rights.

Amparo Claro

Well, of course, we were completely- I mean, not the right wing in this country, but the majority of people were totally against the dictatorship. I was against the dictatorship. Totally. Absolutely. But I wasn't in a party who was committed to do war against them at all. It wasn't my position. No, it was of course- how we can support any dictatorship? Only people who are really loco [crazy].

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah, well that sounds very intense.

Amparo Claro

Of course, it is. You haven't had some experience with friends or things, people near you, in a given moment, that suffered a similar situation? Yeah. Because you see, the suffering of the people is - to use your word - very intense. I was in a small building divided in two sectors and there was about 16 or 20 people inside, in one room: half in one room and the other half in another room and we slept on the floor with just one blanket. Yes, the people suffered so much. This is because the mind nourishes these thoughts, which are very, very difficult if you are interrogated and you are going to suffer, etc. We didn't know. Nobody knew what was going to happen. But I felt the pain [and the situation women were in]. Meditation gives you the possibility to really stay calm, relaxed, when you are in charge of your own mind, and you don't let your mind go with the thoughts that give you pain. Because the thoughts give you the pain, isn't it [true]? Not the other pain [that can be called suffering]. It is much easier in these kinds of situations, if you can dominate your mind.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And did that go back to that early group you talked about with the psychiatrist and the spirituality?

Amparo Claro

No, no, this was different. I had practiced Transcendental Meditation for about almost 20 years. Very rigidly, all day. This other group believed that a social change was possible. That was something that Maharishi said. Maharishi was the Transcendental Meditation guru. He said that if you have 1% or 2% or 3% in the society of people who meditate, society can be changed. These people weren't talking about the percentage of people, but believed that creating a movement that

could expand some ideas was possible. And that's true, sometimes movements are very influential. But of course, everything will change and disappear with some time, this is not going to be part of something that stays. Nothing stays in life, nothing. So, this was different, but it was a very good thing to have these friends. They were becoming influential from that point of view. One of them is a very good friend of mine. He's an astrologer and a psychologist, and he's one of the good ones. And some women were writers also, writing about the movement etc. It was very interesting.

Nicole Bourbonnais

I wanted to ask you also about how you became interested in women's health and reproductive health, in particular?

Amparo Claro

Well, I think that was through sexuality, especially because sexual and reproductive rights had to do with health. But the networks that had health in the name [were much more dedicated] to sexual and reproductive rights, or to violence against women in general. So health interested me, yes, but not as a primary thing. And I did not have the clarity, the intellectual clarity to say: these areas of health interest me. No, I was interested in how women could change their situation. [It had to do with the] energy that could make a social change for women.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Right, so health was just one aspect of that larger goal.

Amparo Claro

Yes.

Nicole Bourbonnais

One other thing. I was just going to ask you, when I was searching on the internet to find out more, I saw that you had been involved in something called Radio Tierra. Do you remember that, Radio Tierra?

Amparo Claro

Oh, Radio Tierra, yes, I remember. Yes, of course. It was important, that project. It was the first women's radio and very feminist. It was very important, the project and [at present it is doing very good work. Excellent interviews!]

Nicole Bourbonnais

I found one article that said that it was a feminist independent radio station or channel. I wondered if you remembered more about it?

Amparo Claro

Yeah, I was there a lot at the radio. They had some meetings also. I was part of a group in that time. Not from the radio, exactly, but there was another group there, the Women's House ("La

Morada”) that they created. I went to many meetings there. This wasn't sexual and reproductive rights, it was the feminist movement, more open, more linked with the organizations that were in Chile and how they were going to do this and that, different kinds of projects and things. Expanding feminism, I would say.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Okay, so maybe then we can kind of fast forward, back to the Latin American Women's Health Network. You had mentioned that you had met in Colombia, and then in Amsterdam, and then back to Santiago, for another meeting. And there were four themes: population policies, adolescent pregnancy, AIDS, and abortion. And so maybe we can think about each of those a little bit, the question of population policies [for example]. I wonder if you remember, at that time, what your interactions had been with the population movement and population policies?

Amparo Claro

Population? Is that what you mean?

Nicole Bourbonnais

The population control movement or population policies?

Amparo Claro

Well, I recall almost nothing very concrete. The majority of people, I think, all the people, all the feminist women were against the population policy mandate. They thought that women should be the ones who defined what they were going to do around reproduction. They were against the use of the [contraceptive] injection, because at that time, there was a population [movement] that gave many injections to [women to] not have children. So one [element] was that women [should] decide what they do, what they want, to affirm that it is women who have control, who must take control of her sexuality, and most of all to decide to have or not have children. That was the thing. Then I remember in New York, many years later, I said to Joan Dunlop and Adrienne [Germain] that homosexuality was a wonderful thing because you don't need to have babies. They laughed a lot.

I am convinced that the quantity of people in the planet has the planet in the situation it is in now. So, to continue bringing babies into the planet in the way that some people do, like, for instance, the guy from the right wing that was fighting in the elections with our new president. He has nine children and he was so proud to go on TV and have a beautiful nice family to photograph. And I think that this should be forbidden. Millions and millions of people that cannot eat at the moment and the earth cannot give the nourishment necessary for all the people at this stage. Well, this is what is happening now.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Do you remember whether there was a kind of Chilean family planning population policy at the time? Or was this more a concern of the international movement? Was it something that you'd see more personally, nationally?

Amparo Claro

It was internationally, I recall, but maybe I'm wrong. I know there wasn't the imposition here that you should have this injection or not. They maybe began to propose to cut the woman to not have babies.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah, like a sterilization.

Amparo Claro

Exactly. So many women did that for themselves, and then also asked men to do it. But [only] if the people wanted it. I do not recall if it was in Chile, but there were other countries where there was a [different] situation, I don't recall where in Latin America it was at all, but I know that it happened.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah. And then the other themes were adolescent pregnancy, AIDS and women and abortion. I wonder if you have any thoughts on why those seemed particularly important in that period?

Amparo Claro

Well, in that moment, it was impossible to think about an abortion law. All the women there were feminists, so they wanted to have the ability to have an abortion under safe conditions. We discussed, for instance, how in Chile there were a lot of abortions done secretly, and that this should be paid for. The people who had very bad results were the poor women that didn't have money to have an abortion. I think that was the first discussion on [abortion], because we were not discussing it openly in Latin America, including different countries of Latin America. So, this was very clearly looking forward to have a law to go with and make the fight for abortion. This was a point which brought a sort of conflict in the long run with ISIS. So when they asked me to take the network independent, it was because of that.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And that was, I guess, around the mid 1980s or late 80s?

Amparo Claro

This must have been in the beginning of the 90s. I don't recall exactly. Yeah, sometime around that. The network became independent with a board of directors. It was quite well supported by the MacArthur Foundation [and the Ford Foundation that also supported ISIS]. This was very good because ISIS was a sort of caretaker of publications, including the big, big publications all over Latin America.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So I'm thinking that maybe we should stop for today and then we can come back and start up on Thursday, discussing more about the network and then also maybe some of the build-up to Cairo. And we can also come back, so you know, if in the next few days you think of anything about what we've already discussed that you want to add, we can come back to anything from today that we want to discuss in more detail.

Amparo Claro

Okay, good.

[End of First Interview]

Amparo Claro Interview 2/2, March 7, 2022.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Okay, so this is the second interview with Amparo Claro on 7 March 2022. We were just about to start talking about the feminist movement in Chile, in the 1970s and 1980s-1990s. We talked a lot last session about some of the work that you did with the Latin American Women's Health Network. Do you have anything else that you wanted to add about that before we move on?

Amparo Claro

About the Network first, you mean?

Nicole Bourbonnais

The network, or we can move right into the question of feminism in Chile and some of your different activities.

Amparo Claro

Okay, then I can come back to the network. Well, first, there was a Circle of Studies of the Women's Condition: that was the name, this was a group of academics that met and was created in 1978. There were a lot of other women who wanted to express their need for feminism, and this organization gave space for all these groups that made theater and workshops and everything. Many, many of these women were absolutely against the conditions under Pinochet, which were quite bad. Many of us were in the street also meeting and [protesting] against the dictatorship. This group was also connected with the church at that moment. In fact, in December 1983, Raúl Silva Henríquez - that was a wonderful arzobispo, very well accepted and loved by the people because he was defending many, many people from being caught, the people who were taken and never reappeared, and the people who were tortured. The church was very good in that sense. But in December '83, the Church turned away the Circle of Studies on the Condition of Women because this group began to talk and mobilize for abortion. So, this group was out.

So La Morada [the Woman's House] was then created in 1983, and also Radio Tierra. I suggest to you, Nicole, that you look for both on the web, because both exist today. You can go [see] what they are doing. And what is interesting about all these groups from the 80s and 90s, is that the big feminist movement that is appearing now - thousands of women in the streets in Chile, very young women - are now connected with this circle and la Morada. These women, they sustain what Julieta Kirkwood proposed, a very, very famous expression that said: "democracy in the country and in the house," or "democracy in the country and at home," as you might put it. This was a very strong phrase that was in the streets. It's necessary to know that La Morada was an organization for radical feminists, and from it came La Radio Tierra. This is what I had to tell you. Antonia Orellana, who is the Minister of Women for our new government, is connected with La Morada and with all these people that have been working in that space. [Now Chile has become a country that

has half women in the government and is asking the same number of women in all areas of public work].

Nicole Bourbonnais

And were you involved in that?

Amparo Claro

Yeah, I was involved many years ago. On the streets, against the police or not against but trying to ensure that the police didn't give us very bad treatment. Yes, I was quite involved. And I was involved in La Morada, making workshops on being aware of what we wanted to do as women.

Nicole Bourbonnais

So kind of feminist workshops, I guess.

Amparo Claro

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Interesting. And then did you want to add anything else about the Latin American Women's Health Network? We talked about how it was formed, and some of the early meetings.

Amparo Claro

Yeah, the meeting in Chile was the first big meeting we had done. And I think I told you the four topics [that we had]. The Network began to be associated also with academic centers. When I was the general coordinator of the network it seemed very interesting that these academic centers could teach health and women's rights, women's sexual rights in different countries in Latin America, to groups and organizations that were not very well prepared on those topics. So we invented the "Itinerant University." This was a project that was supported by the Dutch government and I think the Swedish also. This was interesting because we identified which people - let's say, doctors, feminist doctors, or academics who were working on describing and explaining reproductive and sexual rights - to teach different women's groups in different countries. This Itinerant University moved all over Latin America for quite a while. We identified not only Chilean women or academic women but also from other countries that could be part of the Itinerant University. This was one of the projects of the network.

Another issue [was the English publication]. In a meeting in Costa Rica, the network connected with international women's health groups and networks. Marge Berer and the Global Network came to this meeting in Costa Rica. The meeting was very interesting, at least for myself, it was very important. I was trying to produce the Revista Mujer Salud in English as "Women's Health Journal." This was important because I thought that other people were trying to also produce another publication in English. [But we launched it at the meeting.] So we produced the Women's Health Journal. And we brought it there [to Costa Rica], because this was a big meeting, with

many people that were talking in English, not only from Latin America, but people who came from Barbados or other countries that talk English, as well as from Africa and Europe. So we [had] a workshop with Marge Berer and I proposed to Marge: "Why don't we create an International Day of Action?" And this was the day of May 28. And she said, "Yes, that's wonderful, in this workshop, this day will be created," and May 28 exists today as the International Day of Action of Women's Health. Now, many years after, the National Day of Action on Women's Health, May 28, is celebrated.

And this became known because of the different things we did. For instance, one of the things that the Latin American Health Network proposed to the Board of Directors was that we could, on the 28th May, give money to the smaller groups: groups from Latin America that needed support, let's say US \$200, US\$500, no more than that, to support more groups. And we proposed that to the founders, and the founders agreed with it. And we proposed that the groups send us projects to do on May 28, or two days or one day around that day. This also became one of the activities of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network. That was, I think, quite well accepted and wanted by the women's groups. Small women's groups, not big organizations, of course, but women's groups that would go to a school, have a workshop or go to the street or on the radio to do different things to promote reproductive and sexual rights. This was also something that began to happen in the network for some years. What else can I tell you? I don't know. What else would you ask?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Well, I guess then - since we've talked a little bit about your relationship with the Women's Global Network and Marge Berer: do you remember at all how you became involved in the [Women's Declaration]? You know, when I originally reached out it was because you're listed as this initiator of the Women's Declaration on Population Policies. And as I understand it, this was a group formed largely by the International Women's Health Coalition, Joan Dunlop, Adrienne Germaine, and then brought together with Claudia Garcia Moreno, yourself, Marge, a lot of actors. So I wonder if you remember at all, how you became involved in that?

Amparo Claro

Yeah, we had a relationship with the International Women's Health Coalition. I was sending projects to the UNFPA and they supported the network. I was going to New York often and they gave support, financial support. We met each other at a meeting we were preparing [with] the UNFPA. And the Network also got support to bring some people from Latin America to New York, because we wanted to translate how different sexual and reproductive rights could be described in the UN, to be part of the propositions of the governments in the meetings. So we went, I don't recall how many years - two or three - to New York with Latin American advocates and women who were very good in the [conceptualization] of reproductive rights, in how you describe reproductive rights. We were working there from the point of view of women activists, talking with the different governments that were open [to it]. Naturally, we could not talk or try to convince at all people from the Arab countries or the Vatican. We had a very big fight with them. [On the other

hand] there were many countries that were supporting sexual education in schools, and also with sexual education, you were reflecting on sexual rights. And I recall there were some countries that were quite open, like Brazil or Peru, in some moments. Even with all the opposition of the Vatican and the Arabs, it was, I think, quite useful, this way of working with activists and with intellectuals who were feminist women that could describe or have long talks with people that were representing governments in the meetings. And then I was in Cairo with, I don't recall the name of her, the woman who was in charge of the UNFPA?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Nafis Sadik?

Amparo Claro

Si [yes]. We opened the session, there were four people – her, another two people and myself - that opened the session in Cairo. I don't know if [it was the opening session], but it was something very big, with many people there. So we benefited from that, we had many publications of the network [with us]. I was charged with kilos and kilos and kilos of publications for Cairo. And yeah, we had a very good relationship with UNFPA and with Nafis Sadik and with the other people that worked with her. That's what I recall, Nicole.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And do you remember how you felt after Cairo? With the outcome? Whether you were satisfied or critical or...?

Amparo Claro

Well, no, I don't, but things are always like that. In some moments, when that happens, [there are] bad things, and it is not going well, and then it recovers. But I think it was very important. [Even if there were some] difficulties, reproductive and sexual rights were discussed and now 20 years after, they are on the agenda, on the global agenda. And it is like that. Like [the] feminist movement in Chile: in the 80s and in the 70s, we were in the streets. In the 80s when Pinochet was out, we were more peaceful because, [we did not want to have bad relations] with the government that finally ended the dictatorship. The movement, in the 90s, was not very present. But now it is very, very present and in a way that I never imagined. Of course, it is happening because different things [happened] in different parts of the world. What's the name [of the movement about] all the guys who have been having problems now, with women that said in in the United States that they were violated or...?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Oh, the #Metoo movement.

Amparo Claro

Exactly. So that is something that was slow and low at first, and definitely [erupted now] with lots of energy and a large quantity of people committed to it. But still, awful things are happening. For

instance, Mabel Bianco, who has been one of the board of directors of the Latin American Network, I have been talking with her. She's in Buenos Aires, she's a wonderful person and was many, many years in the Latin American Health Network as part of the Board of Directors. We had seven women from different countries, Mabel was one. She was telling me about this rape by six guys of a woman in a car; you know that, I presume? Last week?

Nicole Bourbonnais

No, I didn't hear about that. Where was that?

Amparo Claro

It has been awful. It was in a very elegant [area] in Buenos Aires in the day with full sun, alight. These guys were in a car raping a woman and the public began to surround the car and they took the guys and kept them for the police. But this was awful. One of them took the woman by the hair and through the- oh in the most violent ways. Now this has been- I saw it in in many different journals, different journals, even British journals. So what I mean is that violence continues. They are talking about 15 years in jail for all the six guys. So things are in the air. You can see it.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah, but also more mobilization, active mobilization. Maybe to come back - in between Cairo and today. I mean, from the mid 90s to the early 2000s, what were you doing in general, then? Were you still working with the Latin American Women's Health Network?

Amparo Claro

Well, yeah. We were working on what I [have told you]. With the different projects I had to get money, and so I traveled quite a lot to or [was] talking with the Netherlands. [They] were wonderful always, the government from the Netherlands. All this preparation was very interesting. With the Itinerant University, we were working a lot. This was the big project. And the publication. We had two editors: the Spanish editor and the English editor. And so the Network was going well, in general. Up until, well - in 2000 I left. And they chose a Colombian, I think, a Colombian coordinator. After her was a Puerto Rican coordinator, until the Network left Santiago, Chile, and went to Ecuador. But the support, the economic support was very, very [much in decline]. So they were working on other different projects, smaller, I think.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And have you continued to follow that work and the debates on reproductive rights? Or are you enjoying retirement, a little bit?

Amparo Claro

Yeah, of course. No, I left and I didn't follow at all. Yeah. I needed to take a big descanso [break].

Nicole Bourbonnais

Well, maybe then if we can just reflect a little more broadly on your life and your activism? Are there any kind of common connecting threads that you see in your work? What drove you over those years to get involved in the causes that you were involved? And what do you see as your role in those movements?

Amparo Claro

Excuse me? I didn't get exactly the question.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Thinking more broadly about your life and activism and wondering if there's any sort of common themes or key goals or objectives that you've had throughout? Or how do you see your role in the feminist movement? It's a big question.

Amparo Claro

Si, it's how do I see what - my life, you mean? Or what?

Nicole Bourbonnais

Yeah, your activism, your role in these different movements?

Amparo Claro

You see, I feel that this was like a chance for me to have the opportunity to give support to things that are so needed in this planet vis a vis women. To find out how you can give or can support these ideas that could change the planet, no? And not have these psychopath leaders like we are having now, no? Like Trump or this Russian guy, who are really psychopaths. To have a planet closer to the caring [nature] that is always much more [present] in women than men, probably because we have the children. We are more caring than men in life, for different things. I am not saying that all men are bad guys or all women are good guys. No, not at all. But women have something which is very, how can I say: they know how to [make] bread! They know how to do things very, very practically. At the same time, I feel that women are more careful about things, not [to have] a reaction too violent. So I think, in that way, feminism brings different things.

We cannot talk about one feminism. On the contrary, I was reading an article yesterday in which there was a woman feminist, a very young one, but so interested in showing the intellectual side: so intellectual that it was very difficult to read, the article. It wasn't interesting. No, not at all! This woman wanted to show how she developed the intellectual ideas from one side to the other one that was very, very - how can I say - boring. This is one way in which feminism could go, but feminism can [go] so many different ways. But it [is] preoccupied, first of all, with violence against women, and women's opportunities.

Like what is happening now in Chile: the ministers and the people inside the cabinet of Boric, women are [represented] in the same number as men, a little bit more than men. This is the first time that this is happening. I don't know if in another part of the world this has happened. You

know that Boric had, for instance, a Ministry of Interior, and this woman is a doctor. Well, Boric, I think that [he] offered the Ministry of Health to this woman because this woman has been a fantastic person around the campaign of Boric. She had a baby of six months and she went to the north and south of Chile - all over the country - with the baby. The husband was in charge of the baby. And there they were, the three of them, and the guy seemed very, very nice and supportive of her. And I think that she produced very good support for Boric in the elections. So Boric offered her the Ministry of Health, because she's a doctor. But [it seems that] she said no, what I want is the Ministry of Interior.

But, Nicole, what is happening in Chile, in the south: there is a group of Mapuches, all these Indian people that you know very well, if you are from Canada. All the things that Canada has [done] for the people who are from another race, we wanted to do it here also. But we never did it like in Canada or in Australia. This group has burned about 40 houses of people who live in the south connected with old eucalyptus wood and the wood that you import or export. And they are armed. I don't know where they got it, because it seems that they are at war. This woman said that she wanted to face that, because they want to stop this. They killed quite a few people already, and they burned machines to make things in the countryside. They burned also the harvests. They have been also burning the things that the Earth gave. This is a big problem we have in Chile in this moment. And this woman chose that. I think that she is really someone very strong. I hope that she will do well, because this is one of the biggest problems that we have in this moment.

Nicole Bourbonnais

And you have also this new constitution.

Amparo Claro

Of course. And this is interesting, because I didn't mention that many of the feminists that were selected for the Convention, were people connected with La Morada and with Radio Tierra, and they are getting connected with all these feminists that are still there. This is important.

Nicole Bourbonnais

That's interesting. So it's kind of a coming together of older and a newer generation of feminists.

Amparo Claro

Oh yeah, absolutely. And the quantity of young women is incredible. If you plan to come to Santiago, I invite you to stay in my house. Even if you cannot take a bath all days because I almost have very, very little water to do it. But delighted if you want to come, Nicole.

Nicole Bourbonnais

It seems like a very exciting time to be in Chile. Is there anything else you want to add?

Amparo Claro

No, I think it's a very nice initiative that you are giving support to the history of this joint activity of the UNFPA and the feminist groups, because this is a way to show that things in history [can change] because this happened. And this was one of the [movements that] made sexual and reproductive rights [appear]. As a feminist, I am very thankful to UNFPA, to the openness of the people who were there in that moment, to have the opportunity to work together. That gave me a lot of happiness, when we did that. I told you in the first session, I think that was wonderful, to feel the energy of all the women who were together and meeting to try to make a change. So that's what I felt, and I feel that this has advanced quite a lot in this poor planet today.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Well, that's maybe a good place to end the recording at least. Kind of nice, actually, quite encouraging. So thank you so much for the interview.

Amparo Claro

Thank you. Thank you, Nicole, also, I really believe what I just told you. It's very important that books, history, the memory of the things that happened and how they happened exist. Very important. So I congratulate you for your work.

Nicole Bourbonnais

Thank you.