

INTRODUCTION

In April 1983, the national union of the Chilean copper miners, under independent leadership for the first time in a decade, called for a general strike in Chile's copper mines and for a day of national protest against the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. The following month, workers in El Teniente, the world's largest underground copper mine, paralyzed production for twenty-four hours in an illegal work stoppage. In response to the copper miners' call, tens of thousands of workers and poor people (*pobladores*) came together to demand democracy and to protest the military regime's use of force to suppress workers' organizations and demands, as well as the regime's new "labor plan" and free-market economic policies. This explosion of mass protest signaled the reemergence of an independent national labor movement and popular civilian opposition to military rule after almost a decade of repression.

Women from the El Teniente mining community played a prominent role in the 1983 strike and protests. They marched and battled the military in the streets, organized collective soup kitchens for the families of workers fired for striking, and banged empty pots and pans in rejection of the regime's combination of brutal repression and harsh neoliberal economic restructuring. Women's participation in political and labor struggles had been a feature of life in the El Teniente mining camps for decades. Miners' wives had joined their husbands on picket lines and formed their own political committees and organizations in the mining camps since the emergence of an independent union movement during the late 1930s. Following the election of the left-center Popular Front coalition in 1938, miners' unions built a powerful challenge to the authority of the mine's North American proprietor, the Kennecott Copper Company's subsidiary, the Braden Copper Company, based on mining families' tight

Provinces

1. Aconcagua
2. Aisén
3. Antofagasta
4. Arauco
5. Atacama
6. Bío Bío
7. Cautín
8. Chiloé
9. Colchagua
10. Concepción
11. Coquimbo
12. Curicó
13. Linares
14. Llanquihue
15. Magallanes
16. Malleco
17. Maule
18. Nuble
19. O'Higgins
20. Osorno
21. Santiago
22. Talca
23. Tarapacá
24. Valdivia
25. Valparaíso

Chile

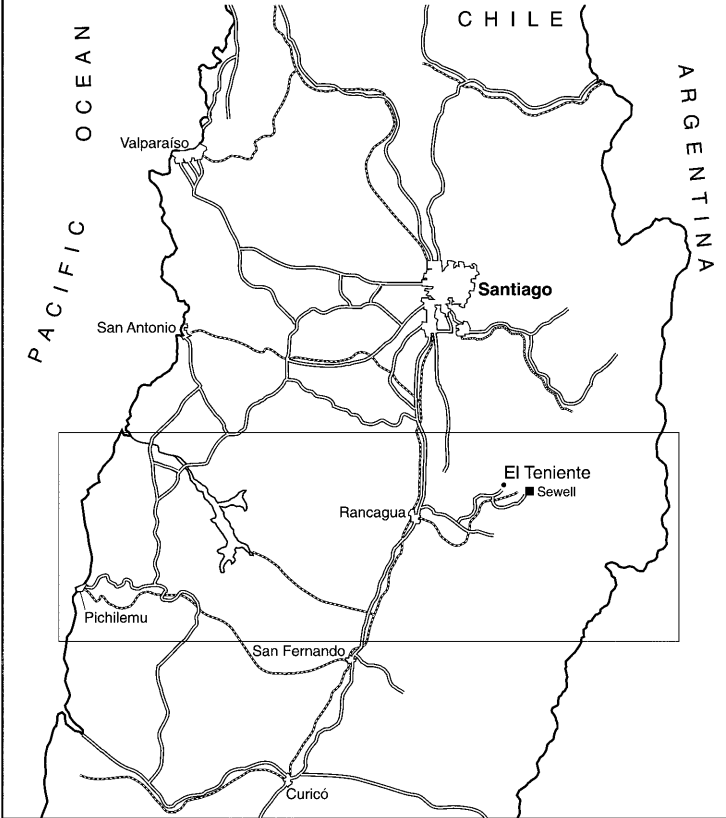


community ties and the mobilization of both men and women in labor struggles.

Copper mining communities have played a prominent role in Chilean history since the decade of the 1930s, when copper replaced nitrates as the motor of the Chilean economy. Because of copper's central role in the Chilean economy, supplying over 80 percent of Chile's foreign earnings by the early 1970s, miners have had an enormous impact on national events. Given the almost constant strike activity in Chile's major Chuquibambilla and El Teniente copper mines from 1938 to 1970, miners occupied a pivotal position in the growing political movement that sought to wrest control of the mines from their North American owners, the Kennecott and Anaconda Copper Companies. Miners' unions, led by militants of the Socialist and Communist Parties, also provided an important base for the increasingly radical labor movement of the 1960s and the election of socialist Salvador Allende's Popular Unity coalition (UP) in 1970.

The scant social scientific literature on Chilean copper miners has focused on the question of whether miners constitute one of Chile's most militant and radical groups of workers or compose a labor aristocracy fighting to preserve their entitlements and advantageous position in the national economy. Studies of copper miners have sought to shed light on the apparently perplexing paradox of miners' class consciousness.¹ In the context of almost constant legal and illegal strike activity during the three decades leading up to the election of Allende, copper miners were heralded as the inheritors of the radical traditions of their predecessors in the nitrate mines, where, in the traditional labor historiography, the Chilean labor movement and the Left are said to have been born. This analysis of the copper miners reflects a more general literature that argues that in enclave economies workers achieve a level of militancy not found in other sectors of the economy as a result of the close, unmediated contact and conflict between labor and capital and the isolation and homogeneity of the mining community.²

Yet, after a strike of mostly white-collar, Christian Democratic workers in the El Teniente mine in 1973 that contributed to the demise of Allende's socialist experiment, sociologists began to stress copper miners' privileged status as a high-paid labor elite.³ Social scientists argued that workers employed in modern sectors of Latin American economies are more skilled and enjoy higher income levels and benefits and are thus separated from



Rancagua and the El Teniente Mine

the less skilled, poorly paid workers in other sectors of the economy.⁴ These writers held that workers in the “advanced” capitalist sectors of dependent economies are concerned with social mobility and the maintenance of their privileged standard of living and are unreceptive to appeals for solidarity with other sectors of the working class.⁵ Chilean copper miners have thus been characterized as the embodiment of the unique revolutionary traditions of the Chilean working class or as a labor aristocracy concerned with immediate economic demands and social ascension. Ironically, both of these models of the copper miners’ consciousness have been inferred from the structural conditions and location of the copper mines. In addition, both the “vanguard” and “labor aristocracy” approaches propose normative models of class consciousness that obscure the complicated and contradictory forms of miners’ everyday culture and political practice forged in the specific historical contexts of workplace, home, and community.

In this book I seek to avoid the constraints of this binary opposition by exploring the historical experiences of the El Teniente copper miners from the beginning of the twentieth century, when the mine went into operation, to the 1950s. I integrate structuralist concerns with politics, the composition of the labor force, the structure of the labor market and industry, and the labor process, with the new labor history’s focus on working-class subjectivity and agency. To understand miners’ consciousness, culture, and politics, I focus on the process of class formation, the transformation of a population of itinerant laborers into a settled and trained workforce in a modern capitalist enterprise. Building a permanent labor force in the copper mine involved a fundamental restructuring of the social relations and cultural worlds within which the men and women who migrated to the mine in search of work conducted their everyday lives. Working-class men and women developed their class identity through their struggles to build new forms of community in response to initiatives by both North American capital and the state to establish a disciplined and stable labor force in the rapidly expanding copper industry.

Rather than accept a model of consciousness and identity as reducible to social-structural location or variables, I understand working-class political consciousness and everyday forms of culture to be produced in the tensions, conflicts, and mutual appropriations that define the process of hegemony building. Raymond Williams, in his discussion of Antonio

Gramsci, argues that hegemony is constituted through “structures of feeling,” the symbolic arrangements through which formal ideology shapes everyday experiences, thoughts, and values. The Gramscian use of hegemony focuses on the naturalization of social systems of appropriation, production, and reproduction through the extension of dominant ideologies into the “cultural unconsciousness” that orders and makes sense of social reality at the level of everyday common sense, “what goes without saying,” or what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as “habitus.”⁶ This understanding of hegemony calls our attention to the interplay of ideology, politics, and the informal cultural worlds of day-to-day life and underlines the importance of examining the dialectical relationship between ordinary people’s “structures of feeling” and political identity and practice.

The naturalization of dominant ideologies and social relations in the patterns of daily life is not a unilinear, unmediated, or uncontested process. As Williams argues, hegemony does not “just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.”⁷ Working-class subjectivity and political identity must be understood, then, in the tensions, contradictions, and relations between ideology, social realities, and everyday forms of cultural and political practice. In the case of El Teniente, I argue, working-class men and women drew on and appropriated elements of elite ideologies, as well as traditions of working-class culture rooted in the nineteenth century, to shape counterhegemonic strategies, to build their own collective identity, and to critique the harsh social realities of work and life in the mine and its camps.

In this sense, the political consciousness of the mining community was hybrid; the structures of feeling and political culture of the community were composed by often competing and contrasting ideological formations and by the interpenetration of both class and nonclass discourses and practices.⁸ Miners’ political culture did not reflect an autonomous or univocal working-class identity, dictated by the structural circumstances of their labor. Rather, working-class men and women built their sense of class and community from the cultural resources at their disposal; elements drawn from the ideologies of employers, the state, middle-class social reformers, and organized labor and the Left shaped both miners’ everyday forms of sociability and their political identity. The mining community

elaborated what Williams calls “practical wisdom” or “common sense” in the context of the shifting balance of resistance and accommodation to the pressures and ideological initiatives of the state and employers. The result was forms of cultural and political practice defined by tension and contradiction.

Despite the profound impact of capitalist economic development on gender relations and women’s role in early labor movements, historians have tended to ignore the role of gender in shaping working-class culture and politics in Latin America. In their focus on the transformation of peasants and artisans into miners or industrial workers, the separation of workers from the means of subsistence, the deskilling of labor, the introduction of new production techniques, and the development of the scientific management of the labor process, labor historians have written about class as homogeneous, unified, and implicitly masculine. By eliding gender’s role in working-class formation, historians have naturalized the masculinization of labor and class identity and have neglected women’s role in the process of proletarianization. They have also ignored the ways in which working-class formation was structured by gender ideologies and involved the reorganization of relations between men and women and social constructions of masculinity and femininity.⁹

I argue that the process of class formation in the copper mines must be understood as a “gendered” process in which formal gender ideologies and informal norms, values, and practices surrounding sexuality shaped working-class structures of feeling and political consciousness.¹⁰ A number of feminist scholars have argued that sexual difference may have biological standing, but its social and cultural form, organization, and meaning is historical and in a constant process of elaboration. Gender is, then, the historical process of ordering and organizing the social construction of sexual difference.¹¹ This implies that a “gendered” history must focus on working-class masculinity and femininity, treating both men and women as “gendered” historical subjects; it must also explore the ways in which working-class politics and subjectivity are shaped by social practices and hierarchies based on the arrangement of power surrounding sexuality.

In *El Teniente*, I argue, the material social relations and symbolic universe that defined the cultural worlds of the mining camps during the process of proletarianization were organized along the axis of gender, as well as the axis of class. Managerial practices, state policies, and workers’

responses were played out on the field of gender and sexuality. Proletarianization in the mine involved a reorganization of the gendered division of labor and redefinition of masculinity and femininity. Rather than separate variables, gender and class composed interlocking organizations of social power and cultural meaning in the mining camps. Hegemony was constituted by the process in which class relations were produced and reproduced in articulation with the organization of sexuality and the construction of gender. Thus, an analysis of the forms of working-class politics and culture produced in the mining camps must account for the ways in which new arrangements of gender were naturalized during the process of proletarianization and the ways in which men and women sought control and meaning in their lives, not just in the sphere of work and wages, but in the worlds of sexuality, family, and community as well.

The first three chapters of this book examine the transformation of a transient population of migrant, single male and female workers into a stable working-class community built on the foundation of the male-headed nuclear family from the early years of copper production beginning in 1904 until the late 1930s. In Chapter 1 I focus on the development of the North American mining enterprise, the origins of El Teniente's early workforce, and mine workers' strategies of resistance to proletarianization. Anthropologists have shown how miners and peasants in Latin America employed autonomous village traditions to judge the exploitative social relations of agrarian or industrial capitalism and then acted collectively to transform them. Such writers as June Nash and Michael Taussig have demonstrated that the reinvention of Andean cultural practices in the Bolivian tin mines allowed workers to build an image of the past with which they condemned the conditions of work and life they confronted in the mines.¹² Chilean copper miners had no common peasant traditions or community structures to draw on as they confronted the grim social realities of labor in a modern capitalist enterprise. Most miners came from diverse origins and had been part of a transient labor force that traveled the length of the country in search of employment. Mine workers in El Teniente deployed the traditions of mobility of nineteenth-century itinerant peons (*peones*) to resist pressures to conform to new rhythms of discipline and work in the copper industry. The migration of male workers was accompanied by a parallel movement of single women

to the El Teniente copper mine and to the informal settlements (*callampas*) on the outskirts of the mine's camps in search of wage labor in domestic service and in an underground economy of bars and brothels. Men and women established informal sexual/romantic relationships and participated together in a tumultuous everyday culture. Drinking, fighting, and the expression of an unruly sense of masculine virility shaped the contours of miners' opposition to company and state authority.

In Chapter 2, I examine how, following the First World War, the copper company combined rigorously repressive labor policies backed by sympathetic Chilean governments and local elites with a program of corporate social welfare with which it hoped to eliminate workers' disruptive forms of sociability, transience, and labor militancy. I trace shifting international corporate strategies and the gendered nature of North American capital's social and labor policies. Corporate welfare programs in the El Teniente mine focused on the regulation of sexuality as the cornerstone of cultural reform and labor discipline. The North American company located the source of workers' instability in the fluid world of working-class gender relations and prescribed the "modern" nuclear family and the domestic space, drawn from a middle-class ideal, as an antidote to male and female workers' transience and disorderly habits. These corporate welfare policies resonated at the national level to the interest of Chilean social reformers in establishing social and labor legislation in response to the labor upheavals of the 1919 postwar recession.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the formation of a permanent working-class community in the mining camps and the elaboration of a leftist labor tradition rooted in the history of the northern nitrate mines following the 1930–1932 world recession. I explore how the world economic crisis and domestic social and economic dislocations created the conditions for the formation of a stable working-class community. The international economic crisis dealt a final blow to the nitrate industry that had fueled Chilean economic development since the late nineteenth century. Many former nitrate miners found work in the copper mine and brought with them the experiences of labor conflict and leftist political activism gained in the northern desert. With the inducements provided by the North American company's corporate welfare system, men and women started to marry and form families with greater frequency. As they began

to make their lives in the mining camps during the 1930s, the labor traditions of the north supplied a coherent, shared symbolic past that served as the basis for the developing community identity of the mining families.

In Chapter 4 I describe the role played by the state in the gendered process of working-class formation in El Teniente. Between 1938 and 1947 a series of coalition governments, including the Chilean Popular Front, headed by the Radical Party (PR) and including, at varying times, the Chilean Communist (PC) and Socialist (PS) Parties, implemented labor reforms, provided support for the urban labor movement, and established welfare programs at the state level. Workers were able to reap the benefits of the new system of labor relations by using their organizational power to strike and force the Braden Copper Company to sign collective contracts that provided wage increases, pensions, cost-of-living raises, and a special subsidy for workers with families. The coalition governments also provided copper workers new languages of nationalism, democracy, and citizenship that they could use to express their interests in conflicts with the foreign copper company. The miners drew on the rhetoric of democracy and citizenship in their struggles with the copper company, reading “class-specific” intonations into Popular Front ideology and producing their own militant version of the Popular Front’s imagined national community. The Popular Front reproduced the Braden Copper Company’s corporate welfare program at the state level by engaging in similar projects of moral and cultural reform. In the copper mines, the Socialist and Communist Parties and the miners’ union embarked on campaigns to reform “disruptive” forms of working-class sociability. Like the company, the miners’ union also focused on the family as the arena in which a “proletarian morality” would be formed. The social projects of the Left, organized labor, and the Popular Front thus overlapped with the North American copper company’s gendered corporate welfare strategies of social and moral reform.¹³

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide an examination of the ways in which the men and women who settled in El Teniente accommodated to the new order of social relations in the modern copper industry, while crafting strategies of resistance to the emergent regimes of class and gender. In Chapter 5 I explore the tensions between accommodation and resistance in the workplace, positing that the hegemony of the labor process and organization of work was established on a field of power defined by gender. Inside the mine, workers built a combative work culture based on an

intense sense of masculine pride and self-assertion. Codes of honor and manhood defined solidarities within work crews and provided the basis for collective action in wildcat section strikes. At the same time, driven by a system of incentives and work bonuses, miners began to locate masculine pride in their capacity for hard physical labor, work skills, and high earnings. Miners' sense of manhood thus provided the basis for both informal forms of opposition to company authority and workers' adaptation to the company's demands for production and the organization of the labor process. In addition, the masculinization of labor reaffirmed male workers' sense of patriarchal authority and naturalized the sexual division of labor and women's subordination within the household.

Chapter 6 focuses on male workers' forms of everyday culture outside the mine. Miners sought to assert control over their nonwork lives in such social practices as drinking, gambling, and illicit sex, in which they reproduced their masculine work identity and workplace solidarities and expressed opposition to company authority. At the same time, the promise of social mobility and the ideal of middle-class respectability disseminated in the company's welfare programs shaped the development of a new form of working-class masculinity in the mining camps. Male workers who participated in company-sanctioned cultural activities found masculine affirmation in a sense of middle-class respectability. Social and cultural institutions, however, established forms of social solidarity that could be mobilized during labor conflicts as workers sought to make the company's paternalist promises of social mobility material reality. Ultimately, both forms of workers' cultural practice created the basis for styles of opposition which coincided in defining public space as a male domain and which thus contributed to the masculinization of class identity and politics.

In Chapter 7 I discuss women's responses to the shifting terrain of gender in the mining camps. Single women who worked as domestic servants and maids often sought to maintain their sexual and economic autonomy by engaging in multiple informal relationships with men based on the exchange of sex, service, and companionship for money and goods. Yet, pushed by the low pay of work as domestic servants and the strict regulatory regime established by the company and the state and pulled by the inducement of the economic and social security of marriage, women increasingly settled in the mining camps and formed families, redefining their femininity in terms of their position as housewife and mother.

Women invoked the dominant moral codes of the emergent gender ideology of female domesticity and appealed to company and state agencies to assert a measure of control over their families' resources and their relationships with their husbands. Restricted to the household, excluded from public space, and increasingly identified with their families, married women employed hegemonic notions of appropriate female behavior and respectability to construct a language of rights to economic security and social welfare for themselves and their children. This sense of gendered rights could be mobilized in both conflicts with their husbands and confrontations with the company and state.

Chapter 8 describes how the newly formed mining families established tight community ties that laid the basis for a powerful union movement during the 1940s. Although men and women increasingly conformed to the new arrangements of work and family life in El Teniente, the settling of a permanent workforce in the mine did not lead to labor peace. Male workers and their wives looked to the state and the company welfare system to satisfy their rights to a decent living. But to fulfill their aspirations to a better life—to make the promises of citizenship, social welfare, and middle-class respectability material reality—men and women also turned to collective action. In combative strike movements throughout the 1940s, miners phrased their conflicts with the company and the state in terms of their perceived rights to protection from the galloping cost of living and arbitrary firings, as well as to social benefits for their families. Miners' unions drew strength from the intimate ties that bound their families and community together around a set of common interests and in opposition to a shared enemy. Women's dependence on their husband's wages and on the copper company for a series of benefits brought them together with men in collective movements. Women drew on their duties as wives and mothers and their new sense of rights to make demands for their families' welfare.

In Chapter 9 I chart the growing combativeness of the miners' strikes, which exposed the limits of the Popular Front's reformist social and economic program and the crevices in its "popular-democratic" ideology. The mining community's mobilizations revealed the contradictions in the Front's ideology of class harmony by pushing its nationalist and "popular-democratic" politics in the direction of working-class militancy.¹⁴ Strikes in the copper mines after 1946 threatened the political and economic sta-

bility of the coalition government and led to its demise, as Radical Party president Gabriel González Videla presided over the widespread repression both of labor and of the Communist Party in 1947 and 1948. Despite the dismissal and arrest of hundreds of union activists and Communist Party militants, however, the Popular Front left a legacy of a strengthened labor movement with powerful ties to the Left. The copper miners emerged in 1951 from the repression of the late 1940s to form a national labor confederation that led the fight for the nationalization of the copper industry and whose general strikes played a major role in the movements of the 1960s that led to the victory of Allende's UP coalition in 1970.

To investigate the relation between politics, ideology, and the way these are lived and practiced in the everyday worlds of work, family, and leisure poses difficulties in terms of sources. I have relied on a series of "indirect" or "elite" sources to provide a window on the dialectical relationships between elite ideologies, working-class politics, and what Antonio Gramsci calls "the world of common sense" through which ordinary people order their everyday lives.¹⁵ The personnel records of the Braden Copper Company, now the state-run Sociedad Minera El Teniente of the Chilean National Copper Corporation (CODELCO), were especially helpful in terms of documenting workers' patterns of mobility and issues of work habits and discipline. The writings of the subaltern studies group have demonstrated that a careful "reading against the grain" of official government and elite sources can shed light on the ways in which subalterns imposed their own will on the documents and thus left traces of their consciousness and praxis.¹⁶ In the case of Kennecott's Braden Copper Company, the new style of management that combined rigorous control of everyday life with an extensive social welfare apparatus produced an important body of knowledge about working-class conditions.¹⁷ In essence, the company's interest in reorganizing and regulating workers' lives in the spheres of sexuality and leisure, as well as in the workplace, provided new institutions dedicated to the project of discipline and surveillance that also produced detailed information about workers' lives and activities. The company sources I use in this book themselves reflect the development of new management practices in the form of corporate welfare.

The Braden Copper Company's North American administration left no archive when it abandoned Chile following the nationalization of the mine in 1971. Instead, in what appears to be an act of sabotage, it de-

destroyed documents and threw what remained together in a disorganized heap, thus revealing the ways in which social and political relations of power, in this case North American imperialism, shape the documentary evidence available to the historian. These documents are now housed in plastic garbage bags covered with dirt and animal excrement in a warehouse high up in the Andes in the mine's Coya camp. They provide, however, a wealth of useful information about workers' lives, company policy, and labor politics between 1904 and 1951. The records of the U.S. Department of State, located in the United States National Archives in Washington, D.C., contain detailed documentation of labor relations, politics, and strikes in the Chilean copper industry.

The miners' largest union, the *Sindicato Industrial Sewell y Mina*, has a small archive with excellent documentation of the first strikes in the mine and a complete collection of the union newspaper *Despertar Minero* (1938–1947). In the Chilean National Archives, I used the archive of the provincial government, the O'Higgins intendency, for documentation of early strikes, working conditions, and accidents in the mine through the early 1920s. Some of the most valuable sources were the cases of the local court in the mining camps, located in the *Conservador de Bienes y Raíces* in the city of Rancagua. These were particularly useful in finding information about relations between men and women in the camps. Although criminal cases may not represent a generalizable view of the patterns of local society or an unmediated view of men's and women's subjectivities, I read these sources as texts that reveal the moral and ideological codes and languages, both hegemonic and counterhegemonic, that structured social relations in the mining camps. Courts are arenas in which the hegemony of the state, as well as of class and gender relations, is played out. In this sense, court cases proved an important lens on the contested processes that structured men's and women's everyday lives, including shifting state policy, management practices, and working-class responses.

Finally, oral history interviews with retired miners and male and female former residents of the mining camps provided an important resource, both for documenting aspects of the informal patterns of social and cultural practice in the camps and for providing a window onto the formation of subjective identity. As a number of writers have pointed out, oral histories are complicated; they provide neither a direct account of "what really happened" nor an unmediated and transparent vision of subjective

consciousness.¹⁸ Oral histories, like any other document, are shaped by subjective agendas and presentist concerns, are fragmentary, and contain gaps and silences. Like any source they must be read with care, taking into account the arrangement of social power and cultural forces that produced “the document.”

Although oral accounts were useful in providing information on social realities omitted in traditional documentary sources—women’s work in the household, family life, relations within work crews—they were particularly important to understanding the “structures of feeling” of the mining camps. Oral histories are narratives that, when read critically, may be interpreted in terms of the codes, conventions, values, and traditions that shape the cultural world of historical subjects. Thus, oral histories provide a view, albeit not an unmediated one, of how men and women build their own subjectivity and consciousness with the cultural and ideological resources at their disposal. Oral histories not only bring us the voice of working people who otherwise leave little historical trace but also help us to understand how people build narratives, traditions, and collective identities which explain and make sense of social realities and which thus provide the basis for their active intervention in history itself.