

## QUIMANTÚ: WHEN A POLITICAL EMERGENCY AND RAPID SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION SHAPE AN EDITORIAL PROJECT

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### Abstract

The diverse histories of national and transnational design have included research on institutions, collectives, and entities that developed projects concerned with the practice or teaching of design, with longer or shorter permanence, towards a historiographic construction built on their legacy. In this context, we examine the transience and exceptional nature of Empresa Editora Nacional *Quimantú*, a state publishing project carried out in Chile between 1971 and 1973 by a socialist and democratically elected government that ended abruptly due to a military coup. From a qualitative and quantitative methodological perspective, as well as archival work, we analyse the intersections between design and the editorial guidelines of its catalogue (books and magazines), in addition to the trajectory of the largest publishing enterprise formed in the country, during a brief operating period of two and half years. This instance opened a space for collaboration and experimentation between directors, designers, and workers within management structures. The presence of a large-scale social publishing model is studied for its unprecedented print runs in the national readership market, where the ‘design’ factor—in terms of form, content, and strategy—had a fundamental role, and the volume of printed books exceeded the country’s total population. Interrogating the archives, collections, and titles designed under *Quimantú*—a project that has acquired a ‘publishing mythology’ character for its fleetingness and high production levels—opens the possibility of looking into a heritage of editorial products designed with the urgency of taking culture to popular sectors, and the immediacy of a political process of radical changes that appealed for the mass production of images, texts, and discourses. Finally, the problem of production time becomes relevant as content production teams, collections’ designs, and the dissemination and sales spaces introduced some ideas and innovations into the Chilean publishing milieu.

**Keywords:** large-scale social design, publishing model, editorial catalogue, political transience.

## Introduction

*Empresa Editora Quimantú Limitada* (Quimantu Ltd. Publishing Company) was a company that started its activities in April 1971, as a state publishing project committed to diminishing the cultural barrier as well as the gap between culture and people<sup>1</sup>, through the mass publishing of books and magazines, and as a commercial initiative of educational and ideological vocation under the cloak of the design of magazine and book collections. Salvador Allende had taken office some months before, and among his personal considerations, the book was set out as an instrument of emancipation of consciousness, in a time when culture was referred to at the end of his Basic Government Program of the *Unidad Popular*, which was comprised of 40 first measures in a promotional brochure that read “This is it, comrade” (*Esta es la firme, compañero*)<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this task order, *Quimantú* was a major initiative integrated to the design of cultural public policies, and a mainstay of the educational program of *Unidad Popular* –term used to refer to his 1000 days of government, between 1970 and 1973–, which the former socialist president had been pre-figuring since the submission of a bill during his term as senator in 1967. Namely, a long-standing aspiration to create a State Publishing House that allowed for “the free circulation of books, thoughts, and ideas throughout the country, and that would allow culture to be more than just the patrimony of a few”<sup>3</sup>, besides building the “basis of a graphic and publishing industry that satisfies the cultural needs of the new Chile”<sup>4</sup>.

In some of his presidential speeches, Allende precisely referred to this state publishing project –something unheard of at that time and to this day–, reinforcing its purpose of addressing multiple needs such as the promotion of national literature and scientific and technological development, as well as deepening the study of Chile’s historical, geographical, economic, and cultural reality, among other matters deemed as urgent for the people and the masses (terms occupied by the former president and those who were part of the *Quimantú* project to refer to the recipients of the products resulting from the management of the publishing house). In Allende’s words, the book had to be “a good that is within every Chilean’s reach”<sup>5</sup>. The main publishing background for the development of this unprecedented idea, where graphic design had a key role, came from Cuba and Mexico<sup>6</sup>: countries where this formula had allowed for the increase of print runs, lower production costs, and mass access to books and magazines of various contents with a mainly educational purpose, although not free of a strong ideological component in the case of the island country.

In view of this economic, political, and social scenario, *Quimantú* was an exceptional and transitory publishing project of short permanence in time, in a moment of political emergency: on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1971, the minutes of purchase and transferring of assets from *Empresa Editora Zig-Zag*<sup>7</sup> (which was going through a severe economic crisis) to the Chilean state was signed, and *Empresa Editora Quimantú Limitada* was created in April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1971, with the contribution of two shareholder partners. The first, Chilefilms: a company dedicated to

national film production; and mainly the second, *Corporacion de Fomento de la Produccion (CORFO) (Production Development Corporation)* from which *Quimantú* was spun-off as a subsidiary among the various companies of the so-called *Área de Propiedad Social del Estado (State Social Property Area)*, with the commitment to self-financing (another exception to the rule)<sup>8</sup>. The State-owned company had to discontinue its production line, as a result of the military coup of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, changing its name to *Editora Nacional Gabriela Mistral (Gabriela Mistral National Publishing House)* well into the dictatorship's full exercise of power.

At the beginning, *Quimantú* defined itself as a “socialized and worker-owned company”<sup>9</sup> by incorporating employees, workers, and operators from different productive areas horizontally in the institutional organizational chart for decision-making. When the time came to communicate the name of the state project to the public, the names *Gran Editorial de Estado (Great State Publishing House)*, *Camilo Henríquez* (suggested by Salvador Allende)<sup>10</sup>, and *Editorial Estatal (State Publishing House)* were considered, to finally arrive to *Quimantú*: a *Mapuche* neologism that brings together the words *Kim* (knowledge) and *Antu* (sun)<sup>11</sup>, and can be interpreted as “sun of knowledge” or “knowledge of the sun”. Once the company's name was defined, the creative committee of the publishing house's Promotion Department, headed by Claudio Torres and a team of designers, presented the new visual identity to the Publishing Division Management and then to the Union Assembly, who approved its visual concept and design, on an unusually horizontal decision-making process. Thus, the choice of the name and concept of the publishing house by the different political sectors that comprised the government conglomerate and the team of workers of project *Quimantú* was meaningful, by embracing a conception of the State as an agent for the protection of cultural heritage to allow accessibility to the printed book format to the majority of the population, perceiving the book as a product of cultural value rather than a consumer good, despite this double historical condition.

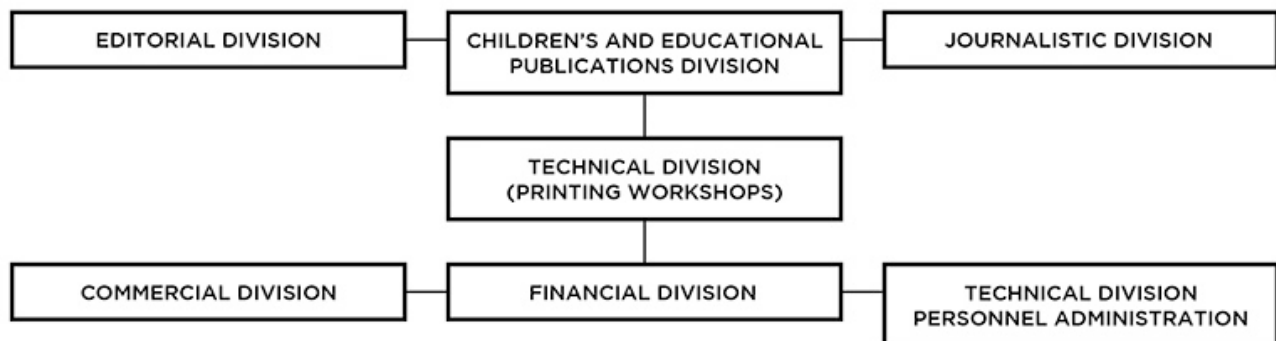


Fig. 1. Organization chart of *Empresa Editora Quimantú Limitada*, structured around seven divisions that operated simultaneously with a staff of approximately 1530 employees. Source: Prepared by the authors.

Between its legal and internal reordering, and after the changeover from a private company founded 66 years before to a state-owned company, with a

project vision practically in the antipodes, the reformed publishing house was structured based on seven divisions which in turn were divided into further subdivisions. The general organizational chart considered a Publishing Division, a Journalistic Division, a Children's and Educational Publications Division, a Commercial Division, a Finance Division, a Personnel and Management Division, and a Technical Division, that corresponded to the printing workshops. Inside the organization, *Quimantú* was deemed as a company run and managed by workers, that responded to the interests of great national majorities, even though there were communication bodies that obeyed opposing interests by officiating as representatives of minorities and of economic and cultural control. Faced in its early days with operational problems due to lack of supplies for print production, monthly economic losses, and poor use of installed capacity resulting from *Zig-Zag's* management, the productive chain and sales of books and magazines experienced an upturn after a semester under an austerity, saving, and technical innovations policy undertaken by all workers<sup>12</sup>, who in their own terms and under the slogan We shall overcome! (*¡Venceremos!*), pointed out that: "Our arguments are based on the quality of our publications and the wide acceptance that they have in the sectors we represent"<sup>13</sup>.

The *Corporación de Fomento de la Producción*, CORFO (Production Development Corporation) branch office responded to Allende's mandate to organize masses to educate masses, in its social capacity as a "bastion of national culture" (in his own words), to "carry out activities inherent to the publishing industry, or directly or indirectly related with it"<sup>14</sup>. Allende's Marxist understanding associated to this great publishing initiative aimed at mitigating limitations to written thought—in the programmatic terms of the time—, leaving the "traditional understanding of education as a service provided by an erudite elite to an ignorant majority" behind. Reference was made on his speeches to people that aspired to fulfill themselves in the figure of a New Man: an individual responsible for the national heritage and destiny, centralizing this rhetorical image in a male condition. But beyond this discursive approach, it becomes necessary to consider *Quimantú's* material production in relation to the figure of a reader conceived as popular by the publishing house, given that it was finally the design and content of the book collections what endowed them with meaning to reach said reader.

Besides printing books and magazines from *Quimantú's* own line of collections directed at this popular reader, the socialist government used the publishing house's infrastructure to disseminate its activities to the political and public sector. At the same time, it dealt with the printing—mainly of magazines—for private agents, which was one of the main sources of economic income for the company's trial run and subsistence. In this regard, the action of the State in the publishing field did not only originate from a cultural policy, but also from an economic program that took into account the nationalization of industries with management problems and internal demands for transformation, as in the case of *Zig-Zag*.

### Some ideological perspectives behind *Quimantú's* publications

The struggle to define how to read and reach readers was a matter of debate among the teams that made up *Quimantú's* divisions to delineate authors, contents, and book titles on the basis of a system of collections. As the state company was consolidated, despite its short operating term (2 years and 8 months from its purchase to the military coup), its preeminence in the market became increasingly significant, to the point of being the publishing house that published more books in Chile than any other private publishing house during *Unidad Popular*, between 1972 and 1973<sup>15</sup>.



Fig. 2. Exhibition and commercialization of books in the public space on the occasion of the first million copies sold. Photograph by Rodolfo Saavedra González (1972). Source: Carlos Montes de Oca.

While the print runs of books in local publishing houses usually ranged from 1,000 to 3,000 copies, *Quimantú* remained above 5000. Hence, at the beginning of 1973, Volodia Teitelboim, senator and member of the *Partido Comunista* (Communist Party) at the time, published an article titled “5,000,000 books”, in reference to the volume of book sales from the publishing house aimed at a reading nation, in which he stated:

Tell me who reads, which and how many books are read, and we will know if the revolution walks inside. There is no revolution in

contemporary times that has not triggered a real publishing “boom” [...] And a revolution must provide that this staple item is within reach of the modest pocket [...] But it is also clear that there is a revolution inside Chile’s spirit, that needs the book and culture as weapons to secure it and guide it to its destination<sup>16</sup>.

A “publishing revolution” was outlined from the internal organization of the state company, in a context of “publishing renewal”: not only at the level of literary creation, but also in the ways of reaching a broader audience (incarnated in the people) for real mass consumption:

The new publications that have emerged from *Quimantú*’s workshops have advocated for the renewal of usual journalistic standards, delivering novel material in each publication, consistent with the current situation of the country. In doing so, the sense and need that each publication must fulfill have been thoroughly studied [...] In this regard, *Quimantú*’s publications aim at revolutionizing the mainstream market of books and magazines<sup>17</sup>.

In the mediation between author, publishing house, and readers, the influence of the revolutionary process in content creation was a matter of controversy: at times an affinity and at others a disagreement factor inside the company. On the one hand, the need to count with writers and workers of culture committed with the country and its historical time was laid out, as evidence of said commitment from an avowedly anti-fascist literary front to “free great worker masses mentally”<sup>18</sup>. On the other, a less consensual vision was appearing over a strictly ideological stance, taking into account a more complex reality based on a critique to the lack of a more robust cultural policy as an articulating axis<sup>19</sup>. “Everything is possible now, despite the difficulties”<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, the figure of the popular reader that the publishing house intended to address was articulated in a double axis between individuality and mass belonging. The reader was addressed directly, as a possible historical subject: “It is time for you and us to initiate a dialogue, more intense than ever”<sup>21</sup>; but was also deemed as part of a cultural alienation system promoted by mass media. In this regard, there were visions with a common objective within the company – educate the people–, but differing in the configuration of its editorial line, which was made visible in the themes and contents defined for the collections, where it was assumed that the high volume of books coming out of the presses could be an indicator of change in the people’s consciousness, since the assumption of *Unidad Popular*.

*Quimantú*’s production was mainly controlled by the *Partido Comunista*, (Communist Party); the *Partido Socialista* (Socialist Party); the Movimiento de Acción Popular (Unitary Popular Action Movement), and to a much lesser extent, the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement),<sup>22</sup> which represented the toughest militant stance. Even though it would be risky to establish how the publishing policies of *Quimantú*’s collections were defined within the internal fabric of the company, a broad publishing catalogue with public access was outlined by those in charge of the collections together with their work teams, with Joaquín Gutiérrez at the head of the organizational

chart: General Director at *Quimantú* and a member of the Communist Party bind to *Editorial Nascimento* (Nascimento Publishing House), an important company from the Chilean editorial media that had also promoted the popularization of books through low-cost and pocket-size productions<sup>23</sup>.

The main areas that made up the structure of *Quimantú*'s publishing model were: the Publishing Division, directed by Gutiérrez (who was in charge of book collections), and that was divided into a Publishing Department in charge of Luciano Rodrigo and a Special Editions Department, headed by Alejandro Chelen; the Children and Educational Publications Division, led by Patricio García and directed towards the production of school texts and the publishing of comic books and learning handbooks, along with a line of publications that was titled Special Documents; and the Journalistic Division, under the supervision of Alejandro Vivanco, in charge of adult, youth and children's magazines. The work of these three areas converged in the Technical Division, where the print workshops were located. These divisions also received counselling and support from a group of collaborators: mainly editors, writers, journalists, sociologists, cultural critics, photographers, and designers.

Certain visions that influenced the ways through which the editorial line and the content and layout of collections were defined, arose from this conjunction of employees and collaborators from the state company, mainly due to partisan policies and intellectual sensibilities inside *Quimantú* that had a direct impact on editorial decisions. We can confirm a first stance that suggested the existence of a popular culture in direct opposition to a bourgeois culture, making a clear distinction between "high culture" and "low culture"; a second – more dialectic– stance that did not discard the cultural value of bourgeois productions, but emphasized the expressions of popular culture within a condition of alienation and underdevelopment, to produce a "new culture" and overcome both realities; and a third way, that took a distance from bourgeois culture and popular culture, unavoidably alienated as a consequence of the predominance of mass culture tending to favor foreign ways.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of an "alternative culture" was raised here, facing the unavoidable dilemma of moving towards a revolutionary press or continuing to walk the fatal way of populism, as intellectual Armand Mattelart pointed out, who considered that revolutionary press should start from the basics and reflect the social practice of the agents of a revolutionary process rooted in mass mobilization<sup>25</sup>.

Therefore, these "cultural workers", as they were referred to at the time, participated in this crossing between left-wing political groups and local intellectual sectors bind to social sciences, literature, and some academic centers, and advocated for the search of a co-production with the people of a new and imagined actor and popular reader, main character of its historical evolution. They were joined by workers participating in print workshops, specialized in "field" work and in the mechanic-manual production of books, which allowed to calm intellectual thirst. Sergio Maurin, former General Manager at *Quimantú*, recalls that to produce contents and collections:

We discussed a lot, reflected on what had transformed us into good readers; we spoke about this with a lot of people, we prepared lists containing

the authors that had introduced us to literature, until we reached a few clarifications<sup>26</sup>.

If private publishing companies defined their own catalogues according to a fragmented reader's market, *Quimantú* had to assume a greater and more complex role manifesting itself as a state publishing house, which implied to turn its production around to avoid the problem of monopolizing or controlling the circulation of ideas, in a country that was changing rapidly. However, Allende's government required a means to deliver information and to support its cultural crusade.

Marketing was a support tool to restore the status of the book as a piece of work and an agent for the promotion of ideas, over its consideration as a commodity. There was a Promotion Department behind *Quimantú* that was present in the releases of publications, displaying signs in all cities and co-productions with television under an advertising company logic, to strengthen the outflow of specific products such as the *Nosotros los Chilenos* collection: one of the most relevant inside the publishing house. The circulation of thousands and later millions of books was reinforced this way, through campaigns and dissemination activities that presented them as "A Key to Open Any Door", "Your Best Friend", "Your Best Tool for Progress", and "Only Those Who Know Can Progress", among other slogans. Marketing was an essential strategic device for this, even though its ideological context of implementation –*Unidad Popular*– did not tune in with this kind of persuasive mechanism of commercial positioning imported from liberal capitalist economies.



Fig. 3. Promotional ads for *Quimantú* books published in *Ahora* magazine in 1971. Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.



The commercialization of books from private publishing houses was done mainly in bookstores located at the more central and wealthy sectors, at prices that usually exceeded the value of basic necessities. In this sense, one of the key elements that defined the potential of the state publishing house was the distribution of works on kiosks throughout the country, taking advantage of a mechanism that was unknown in Chile, but had been tested in other countries<sup>27</sup>. Some state companies also assembled book sales points, with discounts for unions, and some rural bookstores were created, aimed at decentralizing circulation from the capital city. At the same time, the idea of implementing a *bibliobus* (mobile libraries) arose from the Publishing Division, which allowed for the circulation of mobile libraries throughout popular neighborhoods, with the support of production committees organized by sections and departments. Furthermore, a stock of books made up of paper cuttings from the press was sent to several regions in the country every once in a while, and cultural events among groups of workers from *Quimantú* were organized to deliver the materials to the locals, who were part of a critical reading mass whose demands were unsatisfied by the traditional means of access to reading.



Fig. 4. Image of a shopper at a kiosk on the street, with some Quimantú publications for sale. Photograph taken by José Carvajal, for *Mayoría* magazine 1971. Source: Carlos Montes de Oca.

*Quimantú* managed to become the main agent for the production and reproduction of cultural content in the country in a short period of time, through

a social responsibility logic, not only as an alternative to national and foreign publishing houses from the private sector, but also as a dynamics activator in the distribution, consumption, and promotion of mass reading. In this way, the promotion of culture and literacy among people was not a lateral introduction, but a main axis in the “Chilean road towards socialism”, given that emphasis was made on the importance of people taking the lead role of a culture-producing agent, from a new culture that was projected from bottom to top.

### **Design of book collections for a “popular reader”**

*Quimantú*’s edition of titles and books, at the light of the speeches and messages of the state company, and the contents and designs of publications, provide valuable information on the way that the “popular reader” (subject of reception of its production)<sup>28</sup> was perceived, through a series of decisions that caused an impact on its editorial line, the visual concept of its products, and the way these were fed to the presses in an unstoppable production logic. In this regard, a sense of urgency and resource economy to diminish the production cost of books was more urgent when selling them to the consumer audience than the design of a catalogue raisonné on a medium or long term. Part of the publishing house’s view was, precisely, to edit books with the highest print run at the lowest price. This certainly does not mean that this accelerated dynamic of production or “battle for production” did not establish a publishing structure under a logic of social commitment, with the intention of publishing millions of cheap books, which implied for example, to structure catalogues from some emblematic collections such as *Minilibros* and *Quimantú para Todos*, under a criteria of selection that avoided the payment of copyright under law 17.336 of Intellectual Property in force at the time, without prejudice to the literary quality of the writing.<sup>29</sup>

The company’s book catalogue focused mainly on productions managed from the Publishing Division, and on a lesser extent, from the Children’s and Educational Publications Division, given that the rest of the areas were oriented towards magazine publishing, the dominant reading format from the Chilean publishing scene in market terms. The Publishing Division subdivided into an Editorial Department, which published the *Cordillera*, *Cuncuna*, *Minilibros*, *Pintamonos* and *Quimantú para Todos* collections; and a Special Editions Department, in charge of the *Camino Abierto*, *Clásicos del Pensamiento Social*, *Cuaderno de Educación Poular*, *Figuras de América* and *Nosotros los Chilenos* collections. The Children’s and Educational Publications Division, on its part, edited the *Colección Manuales de Salud* (Health Series Handbook), *Documentos Especiales* (Special Documents), *Documentos Gráficos* (Graphic Documents), and *Reportajes Especiales* (Special Articles collections), with formats between book and magazine, aimed at informing on political and social events of national and international contingency (educational crisis, sicknesses, copper mining, fascism, trade unionism, wars, movements and protests, communal organization, repression, torture, etc). At the same time, given the political urgencies and the quickness with which the productive chain of the company had

to assemble, some books came to being without having an editorial seal or belonging to a particular collection.

As a producer of collections with a high social impact, the Publishing Division is of particular interest, since it produced some of the most emblematic book series, with the highest number of readers, as were *Minilibros* (Minibooks, a pocket book collection) and *Nosotros los Chilenos* (Us Chileans), which will be analyzed in this text. Behind these collections, mediated by a Reading Commission made up of intellectuals and professionals, there was a strong interest for teaching the popular individual to read and write, understood as part of a system of cultural alienation that had to be guided towards critical emancipation; though a second way was also possible: one that deemed comprehending and decoding book contents from a more autonomous individual conscience, for a socialist organization of life. Joaquín Gutiérrez, a key element in the publishing line's organization, set forth the "three levels (basic, medium and high) and three contents (educational, cultural, and ideological" formula inside the superstructure of Marxist basis in which *Quimantú* operated, with a decisive emphasis on attracting the broader sectors of the population to reading. In the case of the *Minilibros* collections, with weekly print runs of 60,000 to 100,000 copies, a *photellinesque* format was defined, inspired by the romantic literature of *Corín Tellado*. In this editorial outline, directed to a broad audience, this collection sought to "transit from subculture to more elevated forms of literature, taking advantage of diverse characteristics, including graphics, assimilated by said mass of readers.

In fact, *Minilibros* consisted in a collection of little paperback books (10 x 14 cm) with illustrated covers printed in four colors, and inside pages in one color. The publishing house promoted them by noting: "Now You can put great writers inside your pocket. The *Minilibros* collection allows you to carry the best police, adventure, love, humor, or mystery works in your pocket, and read them wherever you please". *Minilibros* was the collection with more published titles, reaching 55, with a total print run of 3,690,000 books from August 1972 to September 1973. It was an unseen production number at the time, considering that it was only one more collection from the *Quimantú* catalogue, but strategically designed: low-cost editions whose price was no higher than the cheapest cigarette pack, with an average of 100 pages per edition.

Although *Quimantú* can be considered a company that facilitated ideologically mediated access to culture, other types of issues were privileged in the case of *Minilibros*, given that the texts contained European, North American, Soviet, Latin American and Chilean novels (in decreasing order), with the main purpose of entertaining the reader, as opposed to other collections such as *Cordillera*, with a more specialized literary approach; or *Clásicos del Pensamiento Social* (Social Thinking Classics), where the ideological component is evident through the sustained inclusion of Soviet authors and references to the revolutionary process. Just like it happened with the leadership of the company's divisions and the committees that defined the titles of collections, the consideration of female authors and writers in *Minilibros* is scarce<sup>30</sup>, and their presence is subject to the content of some of the novels where they are related,

as characters, with romance, adventure, intrigue, politics or eroticism. In this sense, and differing from the magazines edited by *Quimantú*, the production of books was subject to male dominance, except for the *Cuaderno de Educación Popular* (Popular Education Journal), which was led by Marta Harnecker and Gabriela Uribe<sup>31</sup>.

*Minilibro*'s dissemination and design strategies allowed to reach the popular reader and citizen by foot, through books that were shared hand by hand, whose presence in the public space and transport also put under tension the usual book paradigm as a private good, difficult to access. If around 40% of Chileans was at the margin of book distribution at the time, the image of kiosks containing *Quimantú*'s publications in the capital city and the other region's neighborhoods are of great power as a corollary of its real social impact during *Unidad Popular*'s short period. However, said strategies of promotion and design also revealed some contradictions by presenting similarities with those products of consumption from mass culture of which the reader was intended to distance from. This created a crossing between ideological contents coming from Eastern countries with shapes and visualities from the Western capitalist culture, a paradox that was also present in Chilean design on a broader context of productions and graphic formats (signs, record covers, graphic identifiers, magazines, etc.).



Fig. 5. Covers of *El chiflón del diablo* by Baldomero Lillo, first issue of the *Minilibros* collection published in August 1972 with a print run of 50,000 copies, and *El cuarenta y uno*, by Boris Lavreniov, published in August 1972. Both editions were designed by Renato Andrade (Nato) and the covers were illustrated by Julio Berríos and Roberto Tapia, respectively. Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

The cover of each of the *Minilibros* used three basic shapes (container circle, illustration, and title), and a literal coding of the graphic message: each title's concept is represented in a direct way, without recurring to metaphors, figures of speech or other discursive figures. Each *Minilibro* is a simple graphic object that narrates a story based on a type of realism of lesser complexity, for a bigger immersion in the reading experience. In the case of Boris Lavreniov's novel *El Cuarenta y Uno (The Forty First)*, the plot stages the romance between a sniper from the Red Army and an officer from the White Army during the bloody Russian Civil War. Thus, the concise image of the revolutionary town woman protesting with her red scarf, gripping a rifle, condenses the story's intention. On the other hand, *El Chifón del Diablo (The Devil's Blast)* by Chilean writer Baldomero Lillo, presents a stark narrative of the reality of coal mine workers, the permanent situation of angst of their families, and the exploitation they were subject to, through a cover that reflects this conflict and social reality directly. In this collection, the reader is offered content of national and international origin, in a thematic arc that goes from pure entertainment to the approach of social conflicts, oriented towards the revolution horizon of literary works, as a key to reading the political contingency.

In this unprecedented publishing project, aimed at broadening the participation in the field of literature of an audience not used to reading, through the teaching of reading and writing and cultural consumption (with a regulatory intent at times), the material design of books played a significant role: to induce a certain type of meaning intended by the editorial team of the print, based on the author's writing. The visual design of each book, therefore, aimed at representing the way of reading the work, aimed at a popular reader that wanted to transit from passiveness to action and critical thinking.

Unlike the *Minilibros* collection, *Nosotros los Chilenos* distanced itself from international events, to place the national reality at the center of reading, aiming at activating the production of political and social identities through a set of studies of the country's historical and cultural events, to "get to know ourselves". In this collection, the design of the possible reading experiences to teach the popular consumer to read and write become even more clear. In this way, the popular readers are questioned more directly: they are the main characters of this great historical moment, participating in a common territory with a very diverse physical and human geography, for the construction of "another story", looking inside the country.

In a series of books in horizontal booklet format (18.5 x 14 cm) published biweekly, the collection addressed a variety of subjects related with arts, crafts, food, sports, legends, political movements, social issues, productive sectors, popular characters, native peoples, life stages, and genre issues, in an inclusive key. This horizontal format was appealing to evoke both family photo albums, as well as tour guides in a strategic way, giving a visual identity to the collection and an own distinctive seal. These cultural artifacts were promoted by the publishing house in the following terms: "We are the characters of this collection,

ordinary Chileans, moving throughout the length and breadth of our country, sharing the way we are, live, and work, as well as the most important things that we have lived in Chile's history”.



Fig. 6. Cover of the first edition of the collection *Nosotros los chilenos*, published in October 1971 with a print run of 50,000 copies. Design by Rosario Torres Pereira and photography by Pool Fotográfico de Quimantú. Source: personal file.

From the moment the *Nosotros los Chilenos* collection appeared, the socialist project of *Unidad Popular* was reaffirmed, aiming at achieving a deep cultural revolution that allowed for an authentic transformation of what was considered an “official culture” or “elite culture”, as opposed to a “mass culture” or “second class culture”. In this reconstruction of identity, based on the representation of subaltern sectors, two cycles can be distinguished in the editorial design of the collection regarding the elaboration of cover pages. A standardized design is proposed in the first 17 issues, through the use of thick and condensed Sans Serif fonts (as in newspaper headlines) and bleed page photographs in black and white, with the addition of national colors (blue, red and white).

In the rest of the collection (32 issues), the layout is disassembled with a less clear art direction, that makes use of several resources such as color photographs, illustrations or collages, in sometimes dissimilar languages. The font, which had also granted a seal to the first stage of the collection, is gradually diversified towards other alphabet typologies, creating discontinuity. At a symbolic level, the black and white imaginary associated with *Unidad Popular*

probably had to do with this shift towards a more colorful and expressive design. However, the complex internal operating structure of the pre-press and printing areas, a printing machinery infrastructure in the process of obsolescence, as well as the immediate design decisions also caused an impact, given that it was an editorial product of high print runs, with public outlets twice a month.



Fig. 7. Cover designs of the two stages of the *Nosotros los Chilenos* collection. Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

However, *Nosotros los Chilenos* and *Minilibros* were able to transform into collections rooted in the national imaginary, with an activist graphic sense through the display of images associated with social movements and left-wing politics, where photography and its strong realism played an important role. The preservation of popular memory resulted in a novel questioning exercise about the distinctive features of the Chilean, broadening our gaze towards issues with little visibility in the local publishing market. In that sense, *Nosotros los Chilenos* achieves a visual and discursive integration between enlightened culture, mass culture, and popular culture, under a marked ideological stance of Marxist nature that discards other realities, but finally reflects the contradictions that characterized the short and complex historical period of *Unidad Popular*.

### Final words for a truncated publishing revolution

*Quimantú* managed to become the main agent for the production and reproduction of cultural content in the country in a short period of time, through a social responsibility logic, not only as an alternative to national and foreign publishing houses from the private sector, but also as a dynamics activator in the distribution, consumption, and promotion of mass reading. In this way, the

promotion of culture and literacy among people was not a lateral introduction, but a main axis in the “Chilean road towards socialism”, given that emphasis was made on the importance of people taking the lead role of a culture-producing agent, from a new culture that was projected from bottom to top.

*Quimantú*'s publishing projects were based on a series of collections, which we can define in three fundamental axes. The first is that of literature, through which it tried to disseminate among the population the main literary works of Chile and the world in a unique and popular format, as in the case of the *Minilibros*; a second axis of political education, characterized by the dissemination of the classics of Marxist thought and political pedagogy texts with a more specialized language, and a third, broader and undefined, where the collection *Nosotros los Chilenos* fits, with a simple and entertaining visual and narrative construction.

The publishing house appealed, in its words and practices, as well as in the construction of its wide editorial catalog, to a sort of “epic” which connected the emergence of a new social process with the daily life of the ordinary citizen in a context of strong political and social changes. In this sense, the great historical, political and cultural accounts, together with universal literature, lived together with micro-stories, little stories and texts with practical information of individual kind.

Almost half a century from its start-up, this state editorial initiative, unprecedented at the country level, continues being a question on aspects related to the formation of a new illustrated culture and to the mass production of images, texts and words, issues truly incumbent upon the discipline of Design, since it is part of the elaboration of new social dynamics which fed the political ideology of a project of welfare State.

Quimantú was a publishing device that was part of that long period called Cold War, from a country geographically distant from that juncture but at the same time ideologically connected to that political confrontation; it sought a criticism of the bourgeoisie and a familiarization with the installation of a democratic revolution. It was a failed act but also a transitory evidence of the difficulties to organize state cultural projects in fragile economies such as those of Latin America, particularly at that historical moment. As Pihlainen (2023) points out, history is a failed act that implies a difficult access to the otherness of the past, especially when it is a conversation with that which occurred and which does not necessarily constitute a coherent entity since the past does not address us. It is us who interpellate it looking for traces or signs.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The constant allusion to the “people” on his speeches transformed it into a standard government concept of the Unidad Popular, above the concept of “mother country” and at the expense of that of “nation”, which was associated to right-wing politics. It was a fundamental idea in the collective aspect of feeling, and a reference to social energies for the transformation process towards a new culture.

<sup>2</sup> *Programa básico de Gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Impresora Horizonte, 1969), 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Textos de Salvador Allende* (Santiago: Biblioteca Clodomiro Almeyda, Partido Socialista de Chile, 2018): 76.



<sup>4</sup> *Allende a 50 años de su elección. Discursos fundamentales* (Santiago: Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2020): 114.

<sup>5</sup> Allende's statement regarding the purchase of *Empresa Editora Zig-Zag*, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1971. Quoted in: Contreras, Gonzalo and Eduardo Vassallo, *La cultura con Allende*, Volume I, 1970-1971 (Santiago: Alterables: Etnika, 2014): 179.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, check: Isabel Molina (Ed.), *Quimantú: prácticas, política y memoria* (Santiago: Grafito Ediciones, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the two largest Chilean publishing companies at the time, with printers of their own, were *Empresa Editora Zig-Zag* and *Lord Cochrane S.A.*, which mainly published magazines, given that this market was more profitable.

<sup>8</sup> *Quimantú* was one of the 183 companies nationalized by the *Unidad Popular* government, presenting a distinctive feature for being purchased by the state through a common agreement with its former owner (*Empresa Editora Zig-Zag*), and not nationalized or expropriated in exchange of a possible financial compensation.

<sup>9</sup> These were “labor executives” that were part of *Quimantú*'s Executive Committee, along with its “directors”. For example, a rotogravure photographer, a bookbinder, a phototone assembler, or a proofreader could take on the role of “labor manager”, jointly with the higher executives designated by the Socialist government's office. In: “Los gerentes obreros de Quimantú”, *Ahora* 21 (1971): 21.

<sup>10</sup> This proposal, not imposed by Allende, tried to embody Camilo Henríquez's thinking: a priest that promoted the independent movement in Chile, by acknowledging his rebellious and illustrated attitude while making a nod to the work of journalism on foundational terms.

<sup>11</sup> The choice obeyed to the search of a concept that reinforced the culture originated from native peoples inhabiting national territory before the arrival of Spanish conquerors. Inspired by a book on Araucanian grammar written by priest Felix Jose de la Augusta, journalist Maria Elena Hurtado found the two terms that gave life to the name of the publishing house.

<sup>12</sup> Here we refer to the Union, Executive Committee, and Production Committee of the national company.

<sup>13</sup> “Los trabajadores de Quimantú a la opinión pública”, *Onda* 6 (1971): 52.

<sup>14</sup> *First message of president Allende before the plenary Congress* (Santiago: Talleres Gráficos del Servicio de Prisiones, 1971), 124.

<sup>15</sup> It reached its maximum turning point in 1973, with around 15% of national production.

<sup>16</sup> Volodia Teitelboim, “5.000.000 de libros”, *La Quinta Rueda* 4 (1973): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Chile, Pueblo que supo encontrar su destino. Suplemento de *Ahora*, (Santiago: Empresa Editora Nacional Quimantú, 1971): 92.

<sup>18</sup> “Política cultural. Lo que hay y lo que falta”, *La Quinta Rueda* 6 (1973): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Particularly, the insufficiency of the implementation of so-called “Measure 40” was criticized by artists, writers and intellectuals.

<sup>20</sup> Mariano Aguirre, “8 escritores frente a la realidad”, *Quinta Rueda* 2 (1972): 6.

<sup>21</sup> Lidia Baltra, “Nuevos rumbos”, *Telecran* 77, (1971): 1.

<sup>22</sup> Martín Bowen, “El proyecto sociocultural de la izquierda chilena durante la Unidad Popular. Crítica, verdad e inmunología política”, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* 8, (2008): 3.

<sup>23</sup> For example, *Biblioteca Popular Nascimento* (Nascimento Public Library), a book collection aimed at a broader audience, and also at a school level. More information on: Felipe Reyes, Nascimento. *El editor de los chilenos* (Santiago: Ventana Abierta Editores, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> More information in: Juan Cristóbal Marinello. *Quén es Chile. La visión de lo nacional en la colección 'Nosotros los Chilenos' de la Editora Nacional Quimantú, 1971-1973*. Santiago: Instituto de Historia, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile - LOM Ediciones, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Hernán Lavín Cerda, “Armand Mattelart: la dura lucha ideológica”, *Ahora* 35 (1971): 64.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in: Hilda López, *Un sueño llamado Quimantú* (Santiago, Ceibo Ediciones, 2014), 99.

<sup>27</sup> The design and set-up of *Quimantú*'s own kiosks were also considered, but because news vendors opposed to this, the existent distribution network in open public spaces was used. This is an important fact given that there were no more than 100 bookstores at the time, while kiosks counted with almost 9000 stands.

<sup>28</sup> Anwandter, Christian, “La figura del lector popular en Quimantú: placer, trabajo y revolución”, *Kamchatka* 17 (2021): 33.

<sup>29</sup> Solène Bergot, “Quimantú: editorial del Estado durante la Unidad Popular chilena (1970-1973)”, *Pensamiento Crítico* 4 (2004): 4.

<sup>30</sup> Selgma Lagerlöf, Swedish writer and first woman to obtain the Nobel Prize in Literature, was the only one considered among the 55 published books, perhaps because of this reward.

<sup>31</sup>A collection that had a significant level of involvement, with print runs that reached 100,000 copies in some cases.

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