

Armed Resistance and Femininity

The (Self-)Representation of Chilean Gunwomen in Testimonial Narratives and Fiction about Pinochet's Regime (1973–1990)

Lena Seauve

Usted no es mujer, es militante,
¿de acuerdo?
Luz Arce, *El infierno*

1. Introduction

On September 11, 1973, Chile's democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende, committed suicide during the coup that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power. Agents of the illegitimate new regime immediately launched an extensive and extremely violent wave of political repression against its left-wing opponents as well as many others suspected of opposition. As has been detailed in subsequent truth commissions, abuses were particularly widespread in the first days and months after the coup. The most recent national commission estimates that more than forty thousand citizens were subjected to physical violence at the hands of the regime (Valech Aldunate et al. 2011: 51), a number that includes over three thousand dead and »disappeared« – the *desaparecidos*.

My essay examines three specific narratives centering on left-wing militant (gun-)women coerced into becoming right-wing collaborators: Luz Arce's *El infierno* (1993), Marcia Alejandra Merino's *Mi verdad* (1993), and Arturo Fontaine's *La doble vida* (2010).¹ The first two fall within the genre of the autobiographical *testimonio*, of which I will say more presently, while the third is a novel. Though Fontaine's text is fictional, it describes an author collecting an oral history from a protagonist whose biography bears many resemblances to the experiences of real people. Indeed, those

1 The books by Arce and Fontaine have been translated into English (see list of works cited), and my English citations are from these editions. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations are my own.

similarities go so far as to include passages drawn verbatim from the writings of Arce and Merino, among other sources (Blanes 2013: 53–54). Before turning to these works, a few words of historical context are in order.

Chile before the coup had been home to a lively if disparate left-wing scene. While many on the left supported the peaceful, gradual, and democratic shift to socialism (of the sort that Allende embraced at the time of his 1970 election), other leftist organizations had become increasingly more militant throughout the 1960s – a phenomenon that reflected the strong political currents running through Latin America at the time of the Cold War. Some Chilean groups were indeed armed and (at least theoretically) prepared to engage in violence (Donoso 2020: 112). These included branches of the communist MIR party (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*), whose members were targeted with particular ferocity by the junta's secret police and death squads from September 1973 on.

Despite the enormously bloody course that the Pinochet regime pursued against its opponents, and despite the stark division it brought to Chilean society, the civic-military dictatorship is considered to have ended peacefully. *La transición* – that is, Chile's gradual shift to democracy – began as early as 1988 when a referendum set a limit to Pinochet's term as president. The subsequent establishment of truth commissions to investigate the regime's human rights violations – the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in 1990 and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture in 2003 (reopened in 2010) – marked further important steps in this process. Nevertheless, amnesty laws continue even today to hinder the judicial processing of the former regime's crimes. The 1978 amnesty law covering the period from September 11, 1973 to March 10, 1978 remains in effect, even if it is generally no longer applied in cases of human rights violations. One of the *transición's* most serious flaws has thus been the failure to bring the country's former rulers and enforcers to justice.² Not even Pinochet – who led the country for seventeen years and thus bore supreme responsibility for the crimes of his regime – was ever convicted.

The far-reaching and in many cases ongoing impunity of the perpetrators places an enormous burden on their surviving victims. Perpetrators live among victims, and vice versa. Each day potentially brings victims into contact with their former torturers, even under the most banal of circumstances. In response, a very dynamic activist scene has emerged to pursue politics of remembrance; human rights groups actively investigate the fates of the *desaparecidos* and seek out the perpetrators in order to confront them at least publicly (if not legally) with the full extent of their crimes (see Guthrey 2021).

2 See the report of the Federación Internacional de los derechos humanos about impunity in Chile; for more information about the history of impunity in Chile, see also Lira (2015: 147–53).

The narratives I examine center on women (two real, one fictional) who – as members of left-wing guerrilla organizations – initially resisted Chile's ruling junta but became its collaborators after being imprisoned and tortured. Succumbing to the pressure of extreme violence at the hands of the secret police (the notorious *DINA* – *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*), these women and others like them ultimately betrayed their former comrades.

In an essay exploring novels by Arturo Fontaine and Carlos Franz, Hans Lauge Hansen situates certain Chilean collaborators within the same »gray zone« that Primo Levi described in *The Drowned and the Saved*, his last set of essays on the Nazi concentration camps. It is indeed worth revisiting Levi's reflections on the morally ambiguous »space which separates...the victims from the persecutors« (Levi 1989: 40) in his consideration of the disturbing phenomenon of »privilege« among camp inmates (and the Kapos in particular). Levi stressed that imposed *complicity* and *shared guilt* are decisive factors in continuing all manner of crimes and criminal systems – not just in the camps. Namely, *complicity* and *shared guilt* prolong violence by pushing participants to the *point of no return*. In noting that the microcosm of the camps reflected »the macrocosm of totalitarian society« (ibid.: 48), Levi significantly invited the possibility of applying this observation to other systems as well, most notably to the Soviet Gulag but also to other social systems such as the mafia.³ Levi also gave considerable attention to the »identification or imitation« (ibid.: 48) that muddies the distinction between victim and perpetrator and somehow places the victim on the same level as the perpetrator: »Many among the oppressed [...] were contaminated by the oppressors and unconsciously strove to identify with them« (ibid.: 48). At the same time, he warned against confusing the murderers with their victims – a reading he likened to »a moral disease« and a »precious service [...] to the negators of truth« (ibid.: 48–49).

The Chilean example, as an extremely violent inner-state conflict, offers a particularly broad swath of *gray zone*, a terrain riddled with ethical ambiguity. Some victims became perpetrators, and much as Levi described it, collaborators were – often against their will – inexorably bound to the ruling authority and its crimes:

[C]ollaborators who originate in the adversary camp, ex-enemies, are untrustworthy by definition: they betrayed once and they can betray again. It is not enough to relegate them to marginal tasks; the best way to bind them is to burden them with guilt, cover them with blood, compromise them as much as possible, thus establishing a bond of complicity so that they can no longer turn back. (ibid.: 43)

3 At the same time, Levi stressed the singularity of the Nazi camps, emphasizing the total absence of »some form of [...] corrective« there: »Some form of reaction, a corrective of the total tyranny has never been lacking, not even in the Third Reich or Stalin's Soviet Union. [...] Only in the Lager was the restraint from below non-existent and the power of these small satraps was absolute« (Levi 1989: 47).

The *complicity* and *shared guilt* that Levi identified as the perpetrators' prime emotional (and juridical) tools of turning victims into collaborators utterly bar the path back to their own identities, forestalling any possible return to moral integrity.

Without detailing here the highly complex and controversial debates surrounding transitional justice in general and the Chilean government's handling of the past in particular, one thing must be noted: that the will to establish a functioning state as quickly as possible via peaceful *transición* involved suppressing many traumas associated with the dictatorship. These have not been sufficiently addressed, neither legally nor in any other respect. One especially fraught open question is how to interact with those who were both the regime's irrefutable victims and its (forced) collaborators. With these figures, it is less a matter of specific legal prosecution than of channeling violent emotional reactions and the strong subjective sense of injustice. As Mihaela Mihai states in her book *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice*:

Resentment is a reaction triggered by injustice committed *against oneself*, while indignation results from witnessing injustice *against another* [...]. As evaluative emotions, i.e. as emotions that presuppose a moral judgement, they bear normative weight and qualify as legitimate objects of concern for any democratic order. (Mihai 2016: 7)

In a fledgling democracy like Chile's, faced with inadequate transitional justice, the importance of finding an outlet for such emotions can hardly be overstated. Often the complex dynamics of the gray zone in particular cannot be addressed within a legal context. For this reason, emotional reactions and moral judgments are negotiated in other areas of society, for example in literature. (This of course does not apply to the impunity of those perpetrators in the Chilean military who could have been subject to legal persecution were it not for the protection of the aforementioned amnesty laws.)

2. Sincerity, Guilt, and Confession: The *Testimonios*

The three (real and fictional) female protagonists of the texts I analyze here were involved in armed underground resistance groups at the time of Pinochet's coup. Arce and Merino authored their narratives in 1993 within the specific context of the first National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (the Rettig Commission). Their reports fall within the scope of the narrative genre of the *testimonio*, which literary scholar John Beverley defines broadly as

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the

real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a »life« or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include...any of the following textual categories, some of which are considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela-testimonio*, non-fiction novel, or »factographic literature«. (Beverley 1989: 12)

Beverley specifies that »unlike the novel, testimonio promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness« (ibid.: 14). This lack of »literary« quality is corroborated for example in the typography used for Merino's text; the abundance of names in bold print stresses the intent to provide as much information as possible about perpetrators and victims, making names easy to find even for readers who merely skim its pages. Both her text and Arce's aim to provide as sincere (if admittedly subjective) a report as possible.

A deeply Christian understanding of truth and forgiveness guides both accounts. Chile has traditionally been a Catholic country, despite the official separation of church and state in 1925. The role of the Catholic Church during Pinochet's dictatorship is considered ambivalent, because parts of the military appealed to a conservative Catholicism. However, large sections of the clergy more or less openly opposed the dictatorship, supported the politically persecuted, and made human rights violations public. Against this background, it is only consistent that after the transition, Bishop Sergio Valech headed the first of the government-appointed truth commissions. Considering the central role of the Catholic Church for the opposition in Chile, it is not surprising that it is specifically the confessional form that offers Arce and Merino the only possibility of restoring their shattered images of themselves. Drawing on this currency of the truth – sincerity – Arce and Merino seek to purge the shame associated with collaboration and betrayal. Arce describes how conversation with a Catholic priest made it possible for her to verbalize her shame for the first time:

Aside from my husband and children, Father Gerardo was the first person I trusted at that time in my life. He is one of the few people with whom I can just be, without barriers or being fearful. He was the first person to hear my confession and accept my shame. (Arce 2004: 324)⁴

For the authors of both *testimonios*, the complete shattering of their identities was twofold: their experience on one hand as victims of extreme violence (of torture,

4 »El padre Gerardo fue la primera persona, además de mi esposo e hijos, en la cual confíé en esa etapa de mi vida. El es una de las pocas personas frente a las cuales puedo simplemente ser, sin defensas ni temores, el primero en recoger mi confesión y mi vergüenza« (Arce 2004: 339–40).

dread of reprisal, and the associated traumas) and their even more complex experience as perpetrators. For both women were forced to endure years of terrifying collaboration with those they had previously considered their mortal enemies, both ideologically and physically. To save their own lives, they committed acts of treason that included not only betraying their cause but also assisting in the arrest, torture, and murder of former comrades.

This much is clear: the life stories of Arce and Merino are hardly the clear-cut narratives of left-wing heroic resistance. Literary scholar Jaume Peris Blanes writes:

[T]he cases of Luz Arce and Marcia Alejandra Merino do not, if anything, inspire identification, and a community or any collective project of political identity can hardly be built around their example. Let us not forget after all that they are survivors, but that in the mind of the Chilean left they stand above all as traitors, collaborators, and informers. (Peris Blanes 2006: 164)⁵

It is precisely to address the judgment of the modern Chilean left that Arce and Merino seek to address this largely unspoken accusation of complicity. The concept of complicity, in the aforementioned sense that Levi used it, has in recent years become increasingly popular in research contexts involving ambivalent relations of violence. In their edited volume on complicity, Cornelia Wächter and Robert Wirth distinguish the concept of complicity from that of compliance. The difference, they say, lies in how current norms are viewed; »compliance« implies a perspective of approval, whereas »complicity« is viewed more critically (Wächter/Wirth 2019: 3). The notion of complicity, understood as a rhetorical concept that can be used to calibrate political narratives, may be particularly useful in the context of the Chilean dictatorship. As Wächter and her colleagues note, it is a nuanced concept that allows for degrees and gradations (ibid.: 3). The moral evaluation of an actor involved in a violent process by the respective recipients of that violent event may differ according to the degree of complicity ascribed to them (by themselves or by others). In this light, we must pay special attention to the narrative purpose of the texts in question, both intradiegetic and extradiegetic.

5 »Porque los casos de Luz Arce y Marcia Alejandra Merino si algo no convocan es la identificación, y no es precisamente en torno a su ejemplo como puede construirse una comunidad o algún proyecto de identidad política colectiva. No olvidemos que, después de todo, son supervivientes, pero sobre todo sus figuras funcionan en el imaginario de la izquierda chilena como traidoras, colaboradoras y deladoras«.

3. Fictionalization and Testimonio as Part of Memory Culture

As in many other countries emerging from totalitarianism, Chilean fiction processing the traumas of state-inflicted violence began to appear comparatively recently. Fontaine's *La doble vida* was first published in 2010, just a few years after Carlos Franz's acclaimed *El Desierto* (2005). A period of latency – the time that passes between a (violent) historical event and its fictionalization – often also allows for re-presentation or re-imagination of trauma within a framework that aesthetically and politically transcends the eyewitness account.

In a brief »documentary bibliography« at the end of *La doble vida*, Fontaine includes the *testimonios* of Luz Arce and Marcia Merino among the many texts and documentary sources he »made use of« in writing his novel. It is not my purpose to explore here the intertextuality of the novel as such.⁶ Rather, I wish to examine the intersection of gun violence and femininity in these works against the backdrop formed by the dynamics of individual and collective guilt and confession.

In her influential work on »remembrance culture«, literary scholar Aleida Assmann notes that »remembering and forgetting are cognitive activities that can be attributed not only to individuals but also to collectives such as groups, societies, and states« (Assmann 2013: 16).⁷ However, this current of collective memory is repeatedly exposed to criticism, which refers to the »identity-political use of memories on the part of minoritarian and disadvantaged groups« that »strengthen separatist tendencies and thus endanger national cohesion [...]« (ibid.: 143).⁸ For this reason, memory culture often becomes contested ground, pitting different interpretations of the past against each other.

In Chile, the continued impunity of those who served under Pinochet in the armed forces and intelligence services contrasts starkly with the ongoing trauma of the victims and their survivors. Memory culture – not only in Chile – is often much more concerned with violence *suffered* than with violence *perpetrated*: »The one-sided focus on negative reference points in the past«, writes Assmann, »is usually accompanied by a privileging of the victim experience that defends suffering as a precious possession and important symbolic capital« (ibid.: 143).⁹ Violence that has been perpetrated, on the other hand (apart from violence that is presented as

6 Jaume Peris Blanes has done this in his essay (2013).

7 »Erinnern und Vergessen [sind] kognitive Tätigkeiten [...], die nicht nur Individuen, sondern auch Kollektiven wie Gruppen, Gesellschaften und Staaten zuzurechnen sind«.

8 »[D]en identitätspolitischen Gebrauch von Erinnerungen seitens minoritärer und benachteiligter Gruppen, die separatistische Tendenzen stärken und damit den nationalen Zusammenhalt [...] gefährden«.

9 »Die einseitige Konzentration auf negative Bezugspunkte in der Vergangenheit geht meist mit einer Privilegierung der Opfererfahrung einher, die Leiden als einen kostbaren Besitz und wichtiges symbolisches Kapital verteidigt«.

heroic) is usually presented as a »necessary evil« and marginalized in the culture of remembrance.

One strategy for retrospectively marginalizing totalitarian violence is to construe it as individual excess. In the Chilean case, too, blame for the state-ordered, organized violence of the Pinochet era has (in some quarters) been redirected toward the criminalized, aberrant individual in an effort to preserve the continuity of the state and maintain its legitimacy.

The texts by Arce, Merino, and Fontaine are simultaneously testimonial accounts (bearing witness to violence suffered) and confessions (of violence inflicted and/or betrayal committed); this double function renders their respective narrative purposes difficult to grasp. Luz Arce's *El infierno*, the first of the three texts to be published, draws on the long tradition of Christian confession. Its last section describes in detail its author's turn to God, a focus reinforced by the framing of the text, which is introduced by a clergyman, José Luis de Miguel: »*The Infierno* is a confession that also seeks conversion, catharsis, reconciliation, and the triumph of truth...« (xv).¹⁰ Arce wrote and published the text after she had already officially testified before the truth commission. Her legal testimony, which provided information about the DINA's crimes and represented an important contribution to the potential legal persecution of the perpetrators, was therefore already complete at the time of publication. *El infierno* serves a different purpose: restoring its author's own identity and correcting the public's understanding of her as a traitor.

At the time of her arrest by the DINA, Arce had been a militant supporter of the Chilean Socialist Party, the SP. For her part Marcia Alejandra Merino was one of the few female leaders of Chile's MIR party of the revolutionary left. Her text, *Mi verdad*, is less extensive and detailed than Arce's account but it, too, shares the Christian confessional component that marks Arce's text – albeit in a less pronounced way. Merino describes her decision to tell the truth, despite her fear of revenge from the DINA's successor organizations, as »mi camino hacia la libertad« (Merino 1993: 138) – her path to freedom. This »freedom« presumably has several layers: freedom from shame, freedom from fear, and freedom after years of imprisonment, both physical and psychological.

The narrative situation that unfolds in Fontaine's novel is based on altogether different premises. The protagonist, Lorena, declares that she cannot forgive herself, nor does she expect others to forgive her. Even though she, too, consents to tell her story, she rejects the Christian dimension of guilt and confession entirely, choosing as her point of reference a Dantean devil instead:

10 »El Infierno es una confesión que busca, además, conversión, catarsis, reconciliación, triunfo de la verdad« (Arce 1993: 17).

The Devil doesn't repent and yet he cries, he cries hopelessly. There is something undignified about repentance and the desire for forgiveness, something Christianoid that bothers me. The Devil, even in defeat, stays faithful to himself and to his own contradiction... He is the supreme traitor. (Fontaine Talavera 2014: 33)¹¹

Fontaine structures his narrative around one long interview between an unnamed writer and the exiled protagonist, who is dying of cancer in a Stockholm hospice. Irene/Lorena recounts her life story so he can novelize it; in return she receives money from him that she intends to give to her estranged daughter in Chile.¹²

In her analysis of confessional texts, Johanna Schumm states, »Literary confessions [...] are determined by three moments: Addressing, self-exposure, and healing« (Schumm 2013: 9).¹³ These elements are present in all three texts, albeit in different forms. Merino and Arce clearly »address« the Chilean public, especially their former comrades on the Chilean left, even though the palpable Christian element in both texts makes God their ultimate addressee. For her part, the character of Irene/Lorena addresses a single interviewer but is aware that her story will ultimately reach a larger public. In all three texts, the »self-exposure« extends to intimate bodily details, for example in descriptions of rape; even though certain elements may remain hidden, the gesture of extreme exposure is evident. As for the »moment« of healing, it is conspicuously absent from Fontaine's novel, whereas for Merino and Arce, the writing of the texts themselves becomes part of the healing process. Irene/Lorena's character knows that she will not heal; cancer has already destroyed her body, and she harbors no hope that her account will promote any kind of spiritual healing.

4. The Depiction of Guns and Gun Violence

The violence in Fontaine's novel forms a sort of triptych: the protagonist is first introduced as an armed resistance fighter, engaged in the act of shooting; in the second phase she becomes a prisoner and a victim of torture; and in the third she (again) exerts (gun) violence, only now as a collaborator with the regime. The protagonist

11 »El Demonio no se arrepiente y sin embargo llora, llora sin esperanza. Hay algo indigno en el arrepentimiento y el deseo de perdón, algo christianoido que me molesta. El Demonio, incluso en la derrota, sigue siendo fiel a sí mismo y a su propia contradicción. [...]. Es el traidor insuperable« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 40).

12 The economic dimension of this trade as well as the central role of economic factors within the novel as a whole have been analyzed by Ksenia Bilbija.

13 »Literarische Bekenntnisse [...] sind durch drei Momente bestimmt: Adressierung, Selbstentblößung und Heilung«.

(or, more precisely, the narrator who interviews her) stages herself as an armed and thus powerful woman, both before and after she changes sides.

This contrasts markedly with the witness texts of Arce and Merino, who only very rarely present themselves bearing arms. Most of the instances Arce describes involving guns are indirect, for example a scene that took place just before the coup in which her lover gives her his gun as a farewell gift before he leaves for Cuba: »He gave me ›la negrita‹, which is what he called his CZ-635 pistol. He put it in my hands and said, ›Other than you, this is what I love most‹» (Arce 2004: 14).¹⁴ The weapon is her male lover's token of love and a fetish object at the same time, as indicated by the gun's female name and its explicit type designation. At the time of the coup, Arce and a few comrades attempt – against party orders – to join the fight, but they soon realize that they have no chance: »If we had had more weapons, perhaps, but as it was, it would have been very irresponsible to take them along« (ibid.: 20).¹⁵ After the coup, Arce hides weapons and documents in her house. The text even suggests that during her brief time among President Allende's personal bodyguards Arce received a kind of basic paramilitary training, which she describes as deficient. Likewise, she admits to having been involved in armed actions before the coup but claims that they were never directed against individuals: »It is true that I did participate in armed confrontations. I am not trying to defend this, but I do want to clarify that the GEA never tried to kill anyone« (ibid.: 11).¹⁶

Merino's much sparser account contains even less gun violence. At no point in her report does she comment on her own involvement in armed resistance. She describes her duties as purely administrative. Of being armed after the *DINA* forced her to defect, Merino tersely comments: »Finally, as a *DINA* officer, I was given a handgun, for my own defense against possible attack. I carried it for a while, but I never used it.«¹⁷ Whether or not Arce's and Merino's statements are true – and their accounts have widely been deemed plausible – both authors downplay the aspect of militancy, and with it, their involvement in gun violence.

Both of the witness texts therefore omit a crucial (first) phase of violence: the violence perpetrated during the period of resistance, prior to arrest. Moreover (in contrast to the description in Fontaine's novel), Arce and Merino's narratives contain absolutely no account of any violence they themselves perpetrated during their time as *DINA* collaborators (which would correspond to the third phase of violence

14 »Me entregó ›la negrita‹, como llamaba a su pistola CZ-635. La puso en mis manos diciendo: Aparte de ti, es lo que más quiero« (Arce 1993: 33).

15 »Si hubiéramos tenido más armas, quizás, pero así habría sido muy irresponsable llevarlos« (Arce 1993: 39).

16 »Es efectivo que participé en acciones de propaganda armada, no es mi ánimo legitimarlas, sólo deseo dejar claro que el GEA nunca atentó en contra de personas« (Arce 1993: 30).

17 »Finalmente, siendo funcionaría *DINA* me entregaron un arma corta, para mi defensa frente a una eventual agresión. La llevé durante un tiempo, pero nunca la usé« (Merino 1993: 103).

in Fontaine's novel). Rather, they report only on the violence they witnessed. As Arce and Merino describe them, their tasks in the *DINA* consisted first exclusively in identifying their former comrades so that they could be detained – and subsequently tortured and »disappeared«. (Although their violence is only indirect, these acts of betrayal did of course contribute to the crimes of torture and forced disappearance, something both authors acknowledge.) In later stages, their work for the *DINA* included political analysis and briefing intelligence officers on communism.¹⁸

The violence Arce and Merino describe focuses entirely on what corresponds to the »middle phase« in Fontaine's novel: their respective experiences as victims of torture and coercion. Fontaine flanks his protagonist's account of being victimized with descriptions of violence she perpetrated on either side of the torture divide – that is, both before and after Irene/Lorena switches sides. His tripartite presentation of the narrative of violence completely shifts the emphasis from the victim's experience to that of the perpetrator.

Like Arce and Merino, Fontaine's fictional character has also provided testimony before a judge, but later she explains to the novel's narrator that she had deliberately concealed her own involvement in violent acts in order to avoid prosecution. The implicit suggestion here is that Arce and Merino – two of Fontaine's acknowledged sources for the novel – did the same.

While Arce and Merino's *testimonios* are confessional texts focused on explaining the reasons for their acts of betrayal (namely, torture and fear), Fontaine's text works the other way around. It highlights the violence perpetrated by the protagonist. The very first pages of the novel offer a detailed description of her participation in a bank robbery leading up to her arrest.

I knew I needed to draw my gun right away... and I found in my hand a trembling Beretta that was already threatening the cashier... I was pointing my gun at the cashier... she was unresolved. In spite of my Beretta, which was still shaking a little bit, not a lot, as I tried to keep it steady. Ridiculous, I told myself, in a well-trained combatant like me... I hit the woman in the teeth with the butt of

18 Other *testimonios* by female resistance fighters include accounts of receiving weapons training, especially in training camps in Cuba. While armed struggle was indeed part of the strategy of certain anti-Pinochet groups, and bank robberies took place as part of the so-called supply and expropriation operations, most of the fighters' work, even underground, consisted of organizational and political activities.

my Beretta. It made a loud noise. The sound of teeth. (Fontaine Talavera 2014: 109–10)¹⁹

Our perception of the protagonist is influenced by the fact that the first scene in which she appears features her as an armed, violent woman; the so-called primacy effect ensures that the first information a text gives is better remembered than details introduced later.

Weapons in general play an important role in Fontaine's novel. They are frequently named – with explicit type designations – and described in detail.

Samuel had to... cover us with his Kalashnikov, which was easily capable of reaching a human target three hundred yards away. It's dependable, that gun. For rapid fire, it's the best. It's so easy to use. I know that gun by heart. The Polish AKMS, too, the one that has a folding stock and is a little lighter. (ibid.: 112)²⁰

This description establishes the protagonist as a well-trained and experienced fighter with a fascination for weapons and violence. Fontaine also recounts her ideological and physical training, stressing her eagerness to be taught the use of arms from the very beginning. In Fontaine's text, guns exert an almost erotic fascination, especially among women, which corresponds to a stereotypical representation of guns as phallic symbols:

[T]here were two long, black, brand-new 7.62-caliber AKMSs with collapsible stocks, made in Poland. »I'd like to pet them«, Pancha told me with a deliberately sensual smile... There are some guns that are beautiful, don't you think? And is it possible to separate their beauty from their function? (ibid.: 150)²¹

The phenomenon of a woman's desire to kill is also present here in the explicit linking of the beauty of the weapon to its purpose, killing. After her arrest, while awaiting

19 »[P]ensaba que tenía que sacar mi arma sin demora... y encontré en mi mano una Beretta temblona que ya estaba amenazando a la cajera... Pero no se decidía. Pese a mi Beretta, que seguía temblando algo, no mucho, mientras yo intentaba estabilizarla. Algo absurdo, me decía, en una combatiente bien adiestrada, como yo... La golpeé los dientes con el cañón de la Beretta. Sonaron clarito. Sonido de dientes« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 115–16).

20 »Samuel debía [...] cubrirnos con su Kalashnikov, capaz de alcanzar con facilidad un blanco de humano situado a trescientos metros. Es confiable esa arma. Para disparar en ráfaga es lo mejor. Su manipulación es tan sencilla. Me conozco esa arma de memoria. También los AKMS polacos, los de culata plegable que son un poco más livianos« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 118).

21 »[E]ran dos largos y oscuros y flamantes AKMS calibre 7,62 de culata plegable, fabricados en Polonia. Me dan ganas de acariciarlos, me dijo Pancha con una sonrisa buscadamente sensual... Hay armas que son bellas, ¿no encuentras tu? ¿Y sería posible separar esa belleza de su función?« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 155).

more torture in a secret detention center, the protagonist escapes into dreams of handling weapons. Later, once heavy torture has transformed »Irene« into »Lorena« – a torturer herself and an armed agent of the regime – it is merely the logical continuation of a suite of violence and counter-violence. She describes her involvement in armed operations as an exciting, positive emotional and physical experience:

Once, an urgent mission had come down to our cell: clear out a safe house that had been marked... Agents of the repression were en route. It could be necessary to shoot. And this very Lorena was there. So you'll see... I went in disguise, and carrying my service weapon, my 9-mm CZ... I was pleased to hear my heart pounding again in anticipation of action. I was alive. It was an intense moment. I was consumed by *a thirst for enemies and opposition and triumph*. (ibid.: 192)²²

The italics in the passage flag the inclusion of a quote from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, namely the famous passage likening victims to lambs and birds of prey to perpetrators, where Nietzsche argues that birds of prey cannot be blamed for their natural inclination to snatch lambs. The reference makes clear that Lorena's motivations have less to do with the political justifications for violence than with the Nietzschean premise of the strong exerting power over the weak.

In the guise of a taboo-breaking novel that critically explores the *gray zones* of Chilean memory culture, Fontaine's book ultimately measures poorly against the sparse and comparatively restrained witness texts it acknowledges in its bibliography. Its notably intense descriptions of gun violence, much like its extensive descriptions of female sexuality (of which I will say more in the next section) betray an unfortunate – and I would argue *uniquely male* – tendency to lean on the worn and persistent cultural trope of the woman-at-arms. Where Arce and Merino (and arguably the other authors of the other first-person accounts Fontaine »made use of« for his novel) openly acknowledged that they were prepared to use violence for their political ideals but ultimately did not, Fontaine falls back on a long-lived, general stereotype: of the psychologically compromised, sexually promiscuous, and violent armed women.

Martina Thiele has examined this stereotype in a different historical context, pointing out that Nazi propaganda introduced the pejorative term *Flintenweib* (roughly, »machine-gun wench«) to demonize women serving in the Red Army. And negative portrayals of armed women have indeed persisted beyond the World War II context, for example, in the West German media's stigmatization of women involved

22 »Una vez nos tocó levantar una casa de seguridad que había sido marcada... Los agentes de la repre estaban en camino. Podía ser necesario disparar. Y esta Lorena estuvo ahí. Para que veas... Partí caracterizada y con mi pistola de servicio, mi CZ de 9mm... Me gustó de nuevo mis palpitaciones antes de la acción. Estaba viva. La intensidad repletaba el momento. Me recomía *una sed de enemigos y de resistencias y de triunfos*« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 194–95).

in the militant left-wing RAF (Red Army Faction) in the 1970s, as Clare Bielby has noted. There are interesting parallels between how RAF women were maligned in the German media of the day and Fontaine's fictional depiction of his (presumably Chilean) gunwoman – although the exact historical context and level of violence that the RAF women faced cannot be compared with the immense violence faced by members of the Chilean resistance. From a (male, establishment, conservative) perspective, the type of the left-wing woman as an armed revolutionary signifies a double threat, not only to the patriarchy but also to liberal consumerist society. For this reason, *La doble vida*'s orientation toward an international audience and the author's tendency to generalize beyond the specific Chilean context further justifies a comparison of Fontaine's mechanisms of representation with the German press's tendency in the 1970s to demonize the female members of RAF.

5. The Representation of Female Sexuality

Whereas Merino's testimonio contains a few (very discreet) references to love and sexuality, Arce comments quite openly on the subject:

[T]he most frequent question was how I managed sexually, whether I masturbated or what. The truth is that if there was one thing I never felt, it was the desire to have a sexual relationship with someone. I needed affection, tenderness, companionship, to feel understood. That, yes, and a lot of it. (Merino 1993:149)²³

Unlike the relationship the fictional character Lorena conducts with her supervisor, Luz Arce describes an intimate relationship a DINA officer later pursued with her as a forced liaison involving unequal partners. She openly mentions other affairs during her fifteen-year association with the DINA but emphasizes that those relationships were never about desire or sexuality – she even mentions suffering from anorgasmia. Rather, they were always connected to her need for affection and tenderness. She emphasizes following a principle of never selling herself (sexually) but only giving herself away when she felt so inclined (Arce 1993: 264). This attitude is in clear contrast to that of Fontaine's fictional protagonist, who repeatedly refers to herself as a prostitute. He portrays her as a sexually active woman both before and after she defects, a person defined primarily by her body, her desires, and her

23 »[L]a pregunta más frecuente era cómo me las arreglaba en el plano sexual, si me masturbaba o qué. La verdad es que si algo no sentí jamás fue deseo de relacionarme sexualmente con alguien. Necesidad de afecto, de cariño, de compañía, de sentirme entendida. Eso sí y mucha« (Merino 1993: 167).

physique, which is repeatedly described.²⁴ The narrator's male gaze is only superficially (and not very convincingly) couched in Lorena's own voice: »[W]as I turning into a whore?... I looked at my breasts in the mirror as if they were my very being. I thought: If my soul existed it would be in my breast[s]« (Fontaine Talavera 2014: 143–44).²⁵ It is lustfulness in a traditionally negative sense that brings about her perfect and thorough incorporation into the *DINA*, for it enables her to become the mistress of one of the officers. Her only apparent power is the sexual desire she is able to trigger in others: »And he looks back and then lowers his gaze to my breasts and then returns to my eyes. I have him, I feel it... »I have them«, I think to myself... I look at Flaco and at Jerónimo. I've got these fuckers now« (ibid.: 158–159).²⁶ Her pseudo-power eventually gives way to total submission to the point of self-sacrifice and self dissolution: »I want to obey him and please him and them, to please them all until there is nothing left of me, just a stain...and something breaks inside me and I cross an invisible barrier...« (ibid.: 159).²⁷

The protagonist's sexual promiscuity serves moreover as an entirely predictable metaphor for her political unreliability. Irene/Lorena is first introduced as a psychologically unstable, pleasure-seeking woman with father issues, a woman whose commitment to the revolution stems at best from her taste for (sexual) adventure. She repeatedly addresses the question of whether she has prostituted herself. She has one of the *DINA* agents buy her clothes, and in explicit contrast to her time in the leftist resistance, describes her pleasure in finding herself beautiful and seductive in the luxurious fabrics. Lorena's relationships with different intelligence officers are furthermore determined by material elements. She is given a Lancôme make-up set and new clothes; one of her lovers drives a brand-new Volvo and wears Ray-Bans; the other rides a Harley Davidson. She constantly drops brand names into her account. That she ultimately sells her life story is consistent with this logic and also betrays its protagonist's political convictions, completing the picture of her as a consumerist fetishist (Bilbija 2015: 305), not only but especially with regard to weapons.

24 Paradoxically, her body also plays the decisive role in the torture scenes that stage her as a victim. The female body holding the firearm is simultaneously the locus of a series of extremely different discourses oscillating between female agency and the loss of female agency; female desire and female violence are juxtaposed with male voyeurism and male violence.

25 »¿Me estaría volviendo medio puta?... contemplaba mis pechos en el espejo como si fueron yo misma. Pensé: si existiera el alma, estaría en mis pechos« (Arce 1993: 148–49).

26 »Y él me mira pero baja la vista a mis pechos y vuelve a mis ojos. Lo tengo, siento... Los tengo, me digo... Miro al Flaco y a Jerónimo. ¡Como los tengo a estos carajos!« (Arce 1993: 163–64).

27 »[Y]o quiero obedecerle y complacerlo a él y a ellos, y complacerlos hasta que no quede nada de mí, salvo un borrón... y algo se rasga en mí y atravieso un cerco invisible« (Arce 1993: 164).

6. Conclusion

The different (non)stagings of gunwomen in these three texts is rooted in their different narrative purpose and thus in their narrative strategies. While the *testimonios* of Arce and Merino are plainly intended to restore identities broken by torture and years of forced collaboration, Fontaine's novel tells a completely different story. His female protagonist's defection to the side of the enemy, though presented as a rupture, turns out on closer inspection to be consistent with her (fictional) character. Moral deficiencies mark her from the very beginning and continue uninterrupted through the novel: her (female) lustfulness, which goes hand in hand with masochistic inclinations; her uncritical fascination with luxury goods; her attraction to dominant men. The physical and psychological pressure of torture merely catalyzes a pre-ordained development – betrayal – marked here with typically female traits. Viviana Plotnik has examined Fontaine's collaborator character in terms of Stockholm Syndrome. This psychologizing aligns with Fontaine's interpretation of the testimonies, for it too ultimately denies armed women any political agency. Plotnik concentrates her analysis on the violence suffered (and its individual psychological consequences) without addressing the deliberate pathologization, sexualization, and depoliticization in Fontaine's Lorena character.

Fontaine casts the type of the armed leftist resistance fighter as a traitor not only to her comrades but also to her values. By foregrounding her promiscuity and consumer fetishism so explicitly, he exposes her former political beliefs as mere pretext.

Fontaine is »making use« of the authentic experiences (and the actual words) of real women who were tortured and raped by the secret police in Chile merely in order to tell a general story about a violent, sexually depraved, politically dishonest woman. Specifically, he (ab)uses the accounts of real torture to make his description of a woman being (sexually) tortured more »authentic« and more interesting to (male) readers. And by this he (as an author) does much the same thing that his narrator does: engage in voyeurism. Already at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist confronts her unnamed interviewer with his voyeurism: »Enough, isn't it? Let's leave it at that. I don't want to go on. It's too much. I don't like your curious eyes, I don't like the corners of your mouth; there's something obscene about them« (Fontaine Talavera 2014: 16).²⁸ And indeed, the narrator's portrayal amply confirms the accusation. His gaze turns the protagonist into a victim after all, the victim of a voyeuristic *mise-en-scene* that treats her as a stereotypical Lady in Arms.

28 »;Basta, no? Dejemos esto aquí. No quiero seguir. Es demasiado. No me gusta tu mirada curiosa los comisuras de tu boca no me gustan, un dejo obsceno« (Fontaine Talavera 2010: 24).

Works Cited

- Allende, Andrés Pascal/Vidaurrezaga Aránguiz, Tamara (2011): *MIR. Die Revolutionäre Linke Chiles*, Hamburg: LAIKA.
- Arce, Luz (1993): *El infierno*, Santiago: Planeta.
- Arce, Luz (2004): *The Inferno: A Story of Terror and Survival in Chile*. Translated by Stacey Alba Skar, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Assmann, Aleida (2013): *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*, Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Beverly, John (1989): »The Margin at the Center. On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)«, in: *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 35.1, pp. 11–28.
- Bielby, Clare (2014): »Bewaffnete Kämpferinnen. Linksterrorismus, Frauen und die Waffe in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von den späten 1970er Jahren bis heute«, in: Dagmar Ellerbrock/Ulrike Weckel (eds.), *Waffenschwestern*, Essen: Klartext Verlag, pp. 77–101.
- Bilbija, Ksenia (2015): »Transacciones y fracturas neoliberales. El valor de la pena desde Luz Arce a Arturo Fontaine«, in: Oswaldo Estrada (ed.), *Senderos de violencia: Latinoamérica y sus narrativas armadas*, Valencia: Albatros, pp. 289–307.
- Donoso, Igor Goicovic (2020): »Formation and Development of the Armed Left in Chile (1965–1990)«, in: Dirk Kruijt et al. (ed.), *Latin American Guerrilla Movements: Origins, Evolution, Outcomes*, New York: Routledge, pp. 111–19.
- Fontaine Talavera, Arturo (2010): *La Vida doble*, Barcelona: Tusquets.
- Fontaine Talavera, Arturo (2014): *La vida doble. A novel*. Translated by Megan McDowell, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Guthrey, Holly L. (2021): »»Vigilante« Expressions of Social Memory in Chile. Exploring La Comisión Funa as a Response to Justice Deficits«, in: Tomislav Dulic (ed.), *Memories in Conflict: Historical trauma, collective memory and justice since 1989*, Uppsala: Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia, pp. 99–120.
- Lauge Hansen, Hans (2018): »Modos de representación literaria de la zona gris. Una lectura de dos novelas chilenas«, in: *Memoria y Narración: Revista de estudios sobre el pasado conflictivo de sociedades y culturas contemporáneas* 1, pp. 150–66.
- Levi, Primo (1989): *The Drowned and the Saved*. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal, New York: Vintage International.
- Lira, Elizabeth (2015): »Algunas reflexiones sobre la ruta de la justicia y la memoria: Chile 1973–2013«, in: Ana Buriano Castro et al. (ed.), *Política y memoria. A cuarenta años de los golpes de Estado en Chile y Uruguay, México: FLACSO México*, Instituto Mora, pp. 141–64.
- Merino, Marcia Alejandra (1993): *Mi verdad. »Mas allá del horror, yo accuso...«*, Santiago: A.T.G.

- Mihai, Mihaela (2016): *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Moreno Fonseret, Roque (2018): »Verdad y Impunidad en America Central«, in: Roque Moreno Fonseret/Pedro Payá López (eds.), *Memoria y justicia transicional en Europa y América Latina*, Granada: Editorial Comares, pp. 175–204.
- Peris Blanes, Jaume (2006): »El quiebre, la traición, una socialista en la DINA. El caso de Luz Arce«, in: Ana Maria Costa Da Toscano (ed.), *Mulheres más: Percepção e representações da mulher transgressora no mundo luso-hispánico: America Latina*, Porto: Universidade Fernando Pessoa, pp. 154–67.
- Peris Blanes, Jaume (2008): *Historia del testimonio chileno. De las estrategias de denuncia a las políticas de memoria*, Valencia: University of Valencia.
- Peris Blanes, Jaume (2013): »Contradicciones de la memoria. Ficcionalización del testimonio y figuración de la traición en La vida doble (Arturo Fontaine, 2010)«, in: *Les Ateliers du SAL* 3, pp. 49–63.
- Pinto Vallejos, Julio (2019): »Treinta años de postdictadura. Una mirada panorámica«, in: Julio Pinto Vallejos (ed.), *Las largas sombras de la dictadura a 30 años del plebiscito: A 30 años del plebiscito*, Santiago: LOM Ediciones, pp. 15–34.
- Plotnik, Viviana (2017): »La figura de la colaboradora en la narrativa chilena. El síndrome de Estocolmo y la zona gris en ›La vida doble‹ de Arturo Fontaine y ›Carne de Perra‹ de Fátima Sime«, in: *Chasqui: revista de literatura latinoamericana* 46.2, pp. 82–95.
- Report of the Federación Internacional de los derechos humanos (no. 444/3, April 2006): <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/ngos/lucha-impunida.d.pdf>.
- Schumm, Johanna (2013): *Confessio, Confessiones, »Circonfession«: Zum literarischen Bekenntnis bei Augustinus und Derrida*, Munich: W. Fink.
- Valech Aldunate, Sergio et al. (August 2011): Valech-Report II: Informe de la Comisión Presidencial Asesora para la Calificación de Detenidos Desaparecidos, Ejecutados Políticos y Víctimas de Prisión Política y Tortura [Report of the Advisory Commission on the Classification of Disappeared Detainees, Victims of Political Executions and Victims of Political Imprisonment and Torture]: Government of Chile, 55 pp. https://derechoshumanos.udp.cl/cms/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Informe_valech_2011.pdf.
- Valech Aldunate, Sergio et al. (November 2004): Valech-Report I: Informe Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura [The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report]: Government of Chile. <http://www.derechoshumanos.net/paises/America/derechos-humanos-Chile/informes-comision/s/Informe-Comision-Valech.pdf>
- Wächter, Cornelia/Wirth, Robert (2019): *Complicity and the Politics of Representation*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

Zalaquett A., Cherie (2018): *Chilenas en armas: Testimonio e historia de mujeres militares y guerrilleras subversivas*, Santiago: Editorial Catalonia.

