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Dipartimento Culture e Società – Università di Palermo
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SOCIORAMA
quaderni 5

Quaderni del Laboratorio Interdisciplinare di ricerca su Corpi, Diritti, Conflitti

Geometries of Control:
Dynamics of Power, Oppression and Resistance

Issue 2

edited by
Riccardo Caldarera and Simone Tuzza

PM edizioni

Sociorama

Norme, potere, controllo sociale

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QUADERNI DEL LABORATORIO
INTERDISCIPLINARE DI RICERCA SU
CORPI, DIRITTI, CONFLITTI (V)

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Sociorama. Norme, potere, controllo sociale

Sociorama esplora le interconnessioni tra cambiamenti sociali, politici e giuridici, soffermandosi sui processi di istituzionalizzazione delle norme e delle loro specificità rispetto ad altre modalità di regolazione. La collana si rivolge a chi desidera esplorare, in un'ottica teorica ed empirica, i modi attraverso cui le società e le loro istituzioni affrontano il controllo sociale, la devianza, la criminalità e le disuguaglianze di potere, esaminando i diversi fenomeni anche in chiave di genere e intersezionale. I temi riguardano in particolare le trasformazioni delle democrazie e i conflitti che interessano le istituzioni politiche e giuridiche dalla prospettiva della sociologia del diritto e della devianza, analizzando la selettività delle norme, i processi decisionali e l'impatto del giuridico sulle comunità. L'obiettivo è offrire una lettura critica delle dinamiche socio-politico-giuridiche, supportando la ricerca accademica. All'interno della collana si situano le sezioni: a) «Ricerche», b) «Classici» e c) «Quaderni del Laboratorio Interdisciplinare di ricerca su Corpi, Diritti, Conflitti» / «Quaderni del Laboratorio su Rappresentazioni sociali della violenza sulle donne». Questa sezione si prefigge di valorizzare le attività seminariali, di ricerca sociologica applicata attivati all'interno del Dipartimento «Culture e Società» dell'Università degli Studi di Palermo.

La collana è sottoposta a un processo di *double-blind peer review*.

Settore di pertinenza della collana: Gruppo scientifico-disciplinare 14/GSPS-07 Sociologia della politica, del diritto e della devianza

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Political militancy and imprisonment in recent Chilean history: authoritarianism, testimonies and resistance from a feminist perspective

*Claudia Spagnulo*¹

Introduction

In the field of humanities and social sciences, the topic of gender-based violence presupposes the possibility of adopting several possible theoretical approaches. In this article, I intend to embrace a feminist and decolonial approach.

Early Chilean historical accounts that addressed violence against women and other subjectivities tended to explain both domestic and public forms of abuse through factors such as poverty, alcoholism, or the broader «cuestión social» (Toro, 1967; Vidal, 1972). This interpretative framework began to shift in the early 1980s, when a feminist movement opposed to gender-based violence, human rights violations and the military dictatorship (1973-1990) gained visibility and coherence. In *Ser política en Chile* (1986), Julieta Kirkwood articulated a decisive connection between patriarchal authoritarianism and gendered violence across both private and public spheres. Her powerful call for «La democracia en el país y en la casa» became a central proposition for addressing gender-based violence structurally.

In 1985, Ximena Bunster-Burotto published a seminal study examining the ties between patriarchal authoritarianism and what she termed the «esclavitud sexual» of female political prisoners in Chile's centres of detention and torture. Her work stands among the earliest attempts to analyse torture under the dictatorship from an explicitly feminist and

1. Claudia Spagnulo is PhD candidate in *Inequalities, Differences, Participation*, University of Palermo.

gendered perspective (Hiner, 2019). A few years later, in 1994, Edda Gaviola, Sandra Palestro, and Eliana Largo released *Una historia necesaria: Mujeres en Chile: 1973-1990*, one of the first studies to employ feminist oral history to investigate the multiple forms of gender-based violence enacted during the regime.

Over time, scholarly attention to militant women and former political prisoners expanded significantly, particularly after the publication of Tamara Vidaurrázaga's *Mujeres en rojo y negro* (2007) and Cherie Zalaquet's *Chilenas en armas* (2009). Parallel to this academic development, a growing number of testimonies by women who survived detention and torture began to circulate. These accounts describe their political activism, the gendered and political violence they endured and the many strategies of resistance they forged, during imprisonment and later through participation in feminist collectives, political movements and parties (Carrillo, 2012; Centro Cultural por la Memoria La Monche, 2015). In recent years, feminist historians such as Hillary Hiner, Gina Inostroza, and Brandi Townsend have broadened the field further. Their work explores militancy, violence, and resistance from new angles, incorporating regional histories, analyses of masculinity, and research on queer and racialised militants and survivors (Hiner, 2009; 2015a; 2015b; 2016a; 2016b; Hiner and Castro, 2018; Hiner and Garrido, 2019; Inostroza, 2017; Townsend, 2018; 2019).

In this article, the analysis will focus on the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR)², on the forms of oppression imposed on female bodies in detention and torture centers, but above all on the forms of resistance and the development of feminist consciousness among the imprisoned militants. This article emerges from the desire to contribute to a broader collective reconsideration of how women and other subjectivities actively shaped political life, rather than appearing solely as victims of the Chilean military dictatorship. This concern aligns with contemporary feminist approaches that adopt an intergenerational outlook, stressing the need to bridge understandings between groups that have lived through

2. The Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) is a Chilean Marxist-Leninist and Guevarist socio-political organization, founded in August 1965, initially as a guerrilla political-military organization under the leadership of the physician and politician Miguel Enríquez. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the MIR operated as a vanguard movement representing sectors of workers and peasants.

profoundly different political and identity formations. The distance separating the Revolutionary Left Movement of the 1960s (Vezzetti and Carnevale, 2009) from the generations raised after the dictatorship makes it difficult to grasp how political militancy became a central component of identity for women, other subjectivities and men who voluntarily committed themselves to armed revolutionary struggle. Reconstructing the meaning of political militancy during the 1960s and 1970s is especially complex in the context of the MIR, founded in 1965 as an alternative to the institutional left's focus on electoral strategies (Morales Llaña, 2015).

Approaching the memories of MIR militants who experienced repression and resistance during the dictatorship from a historical-political perspective that moves beyond the conventional hero/victim dichotomy opens an entirely new set of questions. How did individuals subjected to extreme repression manage to reorganise and continue participating in resistance? How did MIR militants come to understand patriarchal systemic structures inside and outside the MIR in their feminist struggle during their imprisonment?

Such reflections become difficult when one uncritically accepts the dominant victimisation framework through which the dictatorship has often been narrated, or when one adopts the opposite interpretative model that transforms former victims into heroic figures of the revolution. The suggestion by Oberti and Pittaluga (2006, p. 91) «no buscar arrancar del olvido a las mujeres que participaron de estas experiencias, para colocarlas en un panteón junto a los héroes, sino que recuperar los gestos más sutiles, aquellos más difícilmente representables» encourages the reconstruction of memories and historical accounts attentive to subtle, often unrepresentable gestures. These perspectives make it possible to revisit the contemporary relevance and enduring legacy of these political practices in the societies they continue to shape.

At the same time, narratives that foreground the resistance experiences of women and other subjectivities, from armed struggle to clandestine life and imprisonment, play a crucial role in building collective memory. Formed in the present, such narratives help construct shared representations of the past, contribute to the shaping of social identities, and embed these identities within a broader process of historical continuity and meaning (Traverso, 2007).

Gender, political militancy in the MIR and repression during the dictatorship

The introduction of gender as an analytical category within specific historical settings (Montecino, 1996) helped reveal how women and other subjectivities had long been framed as passive figures positioned on the axis of domination, portrayed primarily as victims of an unequal social order and a sex/gender system that rendered them vulnerable. Montecino's notion of *analytical invisibility* underscores the absence of adequate conceptual and methodological tools to grasp the mechanisms of gendered power relations in history. Her work encourages us to ground gender analysis in concrete historical configurations, so as to capture social and cultural transformations in their full complexity and interconnect-edness.

Early contributions by Vidaurrázaga (2007) and Zalaquet (2007), drawing on testimonies of women engaged in militant politics, suggest that these subjectivities must be understood as political and social agents in their own right. Even when not articulated explicitly, their practices and lived experiences often contained elements of feminist critique. In the MIR, gender roles were generally reproduced unconsciously and without explicit reflection; nonetheless, certain extreme circumstances and forms of political engagement, encounters with state repression, detention and torture, exile, clandestine resistance, repatriation operations, forced many militants to confront, articulate, or question their assumptions about gender.

At the same time, understandings of gender roles also shifted in relation to the internal power dynamics of the Revolutionary Left Movement and to broader socio-cultural changes, particularly the emergence of public discourses that placed increasing emphasis on women's and feminist demands.

The experience of MIR militants inside the detention and torture centres created after the coup of 11 September 1973 gains particular relevance when examined through this analytical lens. Beyond the human rights violations they suffered, these experiences can also be approached as sites where political and identity-related tensions were renegotiated. Debates, contradictions, and both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interpretations shaped the frameworks through which these memories

were constructed, setting the boundaries for how these events could later be recalled and analysed.

Within the MIR, political and identity struggles generated a model of expected behaviour under repression, an imperative presented as absolute and non-negotiable. At its core stood an idealised revolutionary figure: the MIR militant depicted as young, resilient, daring, intelligent, and critically aware (Morales Llaña, 2015). Much of this ideal derived from the figure of Miguel Enríquez³, whose death at the hands of the DINA⁴ came to be interpreted, in the organisation's narrative, as the ultimate expression of militant heroism (Rivas, 2007; Castillo, 2005; 2007). In a moment in which the organisation faced near-annihilation, the actions of its General Secretary reinforced not only this idealised code of conduct but also the identity bonds among militants, bonds that continued to influence the movement's political orientations. Yet this raises an important question. What occurred when such an ideal model proved impossible to embody within the reality of detention and torture? And how were alternative behaviours judged or criticised by militants, whether imprisoned or still operating in clandestinity, who held differing expectations of what resistance should look like?

Many of the organisation's gendered assumptions were, at the time, reproduced almost unconsciously, later confrontations with the rigid gender stereotypes embedded both in the dictatorship's military culture and in revolutionary movements opened the space for a situated critique. From the perspective of being a woman in the MIR, these militants gradually articulated a feminist awareness grounded in lived experience.

My aim is therefore to reinterpret spaces of imprisonment as arenas where political meanings, identities, and gender consciousness were re-

3. Miguel Humberto Enríquez Espinosa (27 March 1944 - 5 October 1974) was a doctor and one of the founders of the Chilean Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR). He was Secretary General of the MIR between 1967 and his death in 1974.

After the *coup d'état* of 11 September 1973, Enríquez led the MIR's political-military resistance against the newly established dictatorship. After hiding for a year, DINA discovered his hideout in the working-class neighbourhood of San Miguel in Santiago. On 5 October 1974, his house was surrounded by DINA agents, supported by heavily armed security forces personnel in a troop transport vehicle and a helicopter. He was wounded at the beginning of the assault, while covering the retreat of his pregnant wife (Carmen Castillo, also wounded) and two other fleeing men. He received ten gunshot wounds, including one to the head.

4. ² The Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional or DINA was the Chilean secret police during the early period of the military dictatorship.

configured. To do so, I opted to concentrate on the case of María Isabel, a MIR militant since 1967, detained in Villa Grimaldi, Tres Álamos, and Cuatro Álamos between 1975 and 1976. Her reflections on her militancy as a woman, on her condition as a political prisoner subjected simultaneously to political and gender oppression, and on the early feminist critique she developed offer a compelling entry point for this analysis.

To access this experience, I decided to work with a part of the biographical testimony collected in 2015 and put in writing in the article *La libertad en cautiverio: disputas políticas y reflexiones feministas en la experiencia de detención de una militante del MIR* (2015) by Marcela Morales Llaña.

Testimonies of captivity, torture and resistance from the perspective of a MIR militant

Yo soy María Isabel, tengo 73 años, nací (...) un año después del terremoto de 1939, lo que fue muy importante en mi vida porque nací un año después que había muerto la hija mayor de mi abuela materna, y que era como muy importante en la vida familiar. Entonces como que de manera, yo diría, inconsciente, como control líquido, de pequeña yo tenía que ser doctora y yo tenía que parecerme a lo que había sido la tía que era como una persona de construcción de acuerdos, de afecto familiar (María Isabel in Morales Llaña, 2015, p. 89).

Drawing on the testimony collected by Marcela Morales Llaña on María Isabel's⁵ experience of life and militancy can be relevant for a historical reconstruction in which the leading voices of that period are placed at the centre. In this case, the choice is to begin the account of María Isabel's experience from her childhood memories and her bond with her maternal grandmother to understand how female figures began to influence María Isabel's life from a very young age. In this passage, María Isabel reflects on her early life and the personal and family circumstances that shaped her sense of identity and future aspirations. She begins by introducing herself and situating her birth in a specific historical context, she was

5. María Isabel was a militant in the MIR.

born one year after the 1939 earthquake. This detail is not merely chronological; she emphasizes its significance for her personal and family life, explaining that she was born a year after the death of her maternal grandmother's eldest daughter, a figure who had held great importance within the family. María Isabel reflects that, in ways she could hardly articulate at the time, the loss within her family subtly shaped her early sense of responsibility and the expectations placed upon her. From a very young age, she felt compelled to pursue a medical career, aspiring to embody the qualities of her late aunt. In this way, she highlights how family history and childhood experiences influenced her self-understanding, her ambitions and her perceived role within the family. This example illustrates how personal biography, familial dynamics and early life experiences intertwine in the construction of identity, revealing the delicate balance between unconscious pressures and conscious goals in María Isabel's life.

María Isabel had moved to Santiago de Chile during the 1960s, where she began actively engaging in the social transformation movements of the decade.

(...) leíamos mucho en esa época, leíamos Fanon, a la Simone de Beauvoir, pero sin plantearnos todavía en términos feministas, una suerte de militancia feminista. Era más la cultura feminista lo que nosotros creíamos, pero al mismo tiempo con esa mescolanza que teníamos en los sesenta, de la izquierda y el feminismo, que no era que el feminismo, sino que era que el socialismo, iba a resolver todos esos problemas, y por lo tanto nosotros luchábamos por el socialismo porque ahí todos íbamos a ser iguales, bueno todo el discurso más de la izquierda en que acomodábamos nuestras lecturas a esa propuesta de nueva sociedad. Y ahí vinieron todos los hechos, la revolución cubana, China, ahí teníamos amigos también que se fueron a China, que volvieron de China, que fueron a Cuba, que volvieron de Cuba, entonces, todo eso, fue amalgamándose digamos, en una visión ya de necesidad de militancia (*Ibidem*).

During 1960s, María Isabel describes how she and her comrades read authors like Fanon and de Beauvoir but did not yet frame their activism explicitly as feminist. Their engagement combined a feminist cultural awareness with leftist socialist ideals, believing that socialism would resolve social inequalities. They adapted their readings to fit a vision of a

just, new society. International events, such as the Cuban and Chinese revolutions, and friends' experiences in those countries, further shaped their outlook. Over time, these influences merged, fostering a sense of political militancy and the perceived necessity for activism.

The "we" that María Isabel evokes belongs to the 1960s, a collective "we" shaped by discussion, reading, learning and the exchange of ideas and responsibilities. Within this milieu, political militancy often emerged as a necessary avenue for pursuing social transformation. In her narrative, the events of 11 September 1973 appear almost foreseeable, as if they were part of the long, intricate trajectory toward the construction of socialism. The coup d'état marked a decisive biographical turning point. María Isabel was forced into clandestinity, navigating the dual challenge of continuing to resist and organise against the dictatorship while safeguarding her own life. The MIR, at that stage, chose not to seek political asylum abroad; instead, resistance to the regime became the organisation's defining political strategy.

In the immediate aftermath of the military takeover, the dictatorship's security apparatus focused their repression on groups capable of mounting organised opposition, with the MIR being a primary target. The regime implemented a policy of systematic extermination against militants and supporters alike.

In the early months of 1975, María Isabel was arrested in a neighborhood in eastern Santiago, where she had been living in hiding with other militants. Although she attempted to flee and resist capture, DINA agents discovered the house and apprehended her.

Ahí me lleva, ya no me acuerdo así... parece que me llevaba del brazo, empujándome y apuntándome con su pistola y me devuelve hacia la casa y ahí entonces me coloca, había como tres autos y en uno de los autos estaba el compañero que vivía conmigo en la misma casa y él estaba herido, sangrando en el auto. Entonces me meten al auto y veo que está la ventana abierta y empecé a gritar, estaba lleno de gente, en las esquinas... mucha, mucha gente. Entonces yo empecé a gritar y grité nuestros nombres y dije 'hay un herido aquí, nos van a matar, nos van a Desaparecer (*Ibidem*).

In this passage, María Isabel recalls being forced toward a house at gunpoint. She describes seeing three cars, one of which contained a

companion from her household, who was injured and bleeding. She was pushed into the car and noticed the window was open, allowing her to see the crowded streets outside. She began shouting, calling out their names and alerting others that someone was wounded, while feeling afraid of being killed or disappeared.

Upon arrival at the Villa Grimaldi detention centre, prisoners were immediately subjected to a systematic regimen designed to break their spirits, combining physical abuse, psychological pressure and various forms of subjugation. Faced with physical torture, María Isabel consciously maintained a composed and deliberate stance, a resilience likely reinforced by her medical training. In those moments, the act of resistance took on a critical meaning: refusing to divulge information to DINA agents, protecting the integrity and morale of fellow militants and preserving one's political commitment. Within this harrowing environment, María Isabel recalls experiencing a remarkable sense of detachment from the fear of death, a psychological shield that allowed her to endure and persist.

Pero el miedo a morir, yo creo que por la épica que teníamos en ese entonces, que teníamos que ser guerrilleras heroicas hasta la muerte, entonces el miedo a morir en mi caso y en el de muchas compañeras y compañeros no era lo que prevalecía en ese momento (...) lo más terrible era el dolor de ese minuto (Ivi, p. 93).

In this passage, the militant explains that the fear of dying was not the dominant feeling for her or many of her comrades. Instead, what was most overwhelming in the moment was the intense, immediate pain they experienced.

Even while still blindfolded, women detained in the military dictatorship's torture centres found ways to communicate with one another. In the midst of these extreme conditions, small spaces of connection, mutual support and subtle resistance began to emerge. Among María Isabel's recollections is the memory of a room with bunk beds, where, after enduring intense physical and psychological torture, a group of fellow detainees received her with warmth, care and «te acogían para que sintieras de algún modo que estabas en otro espacio que el que te habían-

tocado minutos antes» (*Ibidem*). She describes this space of solidarity and affection as one shared exclusively among women.

This separation by gender was also a deliberate tactic imposed by DINA agents, who prevented women from seeing their male comrades and vice versa. The detainees were forced to confront the reality that the military sought not only to dominate them, but also to supplant the revolutionary movement's men with a constructed form of masculinity designed to assert absolute control.

Incluso en Villa Grimaldi llegó un día un señor y me sacaron a conversar con él en un patiecito. Él me dijo, te vengo a ofrecer que trabajes con nosotros, porque con nosotros vas a tenerlo todo, nosotros ahora tenemos un poder ilimitado, no te imaginas todo lo que vas a poder tener, si trabajas con nosotros.

Bueno ahí, yo obviamente ahí... era un señor que estaba vestido de otra manera, que se notaba que tenía un don de mando porque estaba él y Moren Brito (...) Moren Brito me llevó donde él y Moren Brito se le cuadraba, o sea era como el jefe de Moren Brito. Y ahí yo le dije, no, yo me voy a dedicar ahora, si es que salgo viva de aquí me voy a dedicar a mi profesión, le dije cualquier lesera, me hice como la tecnócrata... (Ivi, p. 94).

María Isabel recalls being approached by a man at Villa Grimaldi who offered her wealth and power if she worked with them. She describes him as authoritative, noting that even Moren Brito, a figure of influence, showed deference to him. Despite the tempting offer, María Isabel refused, telling him that if she survived, she would focus on her professional career. The passage highlights both the pressure and the moral choices faced by detainees.

This strategy, rooted in the gendered logic of both military and patriarchal systems, highlights another dimension of the repression, as women were treated as objects, as spoils of war. Against this backdrop, the communication networks that imprisoned women developed to relay information to men in other sections can be seen as a further form of resistance. From the women's bathroom, they would discreetly transmit messages through a small window opening onto a tiny courtyard where male detainees were held.

Within the detention and torture centres, María Isabel and her fellow prisoners were confronted with a system that oppressed them not only as revolutionary militants but also as women, embodying the full weight of military and patriarchal ideology. By participating in political life, women and other subjectivities challenged a gender order that the regime sought to uphold and violently restore.

Yo creo que a las mujeres había formas específicas de torturar y maltratar, como era... desde el inicio establecer que tú no habías cumplido con el rol de mujer y que, por lo tanto eras una puta (...) repetir que eras una puta en cada tortura (...), que habías llegado a esto por un tipo que te había seducido y que tú, tonta y puta estabas en esta situación. El maltrato por ser una mujer que se había metido en algo que no le correspondía, porque la política era asunto de hombres y tú tenías que estar en la casa, como buena esposa y madre teniendo hijos, esa era una gran diferencia y que nosotras lo computamos desde el primer momento (...) de obligarte, de mandarte a asumir el rol femenino clásico (Ivi, p. 95).

The passage illustrates how women were subjected to specific forms of torture and mistreatment. From the very beginning, interrogators emphasized that women had failed to fulfill their “womanly” role, repeatedly insulting them and blaming them for their situation. She describes how they were condemned for engaging in politics, seen as a male domain, instead of fulfilling traditional roles as wives and mothers. The violence inflicted upon women in the detention centres was a direct punishment for transgressing the rigid gender norms imposed by the regime. It underscores how expectations tied to gender shaped both the methods and intensity of the abuse they suffered. Torturers, acting as agents of the state, operated under the assumption that women lacked autonomy in political life and occupied subordinate positions within their organizations. In turn, some detainees strategically leveraged this belief to their advantage, presenting themselves as uninformed or politically powerless in order to protect themselves from further harm.

Había compañeras que estaban muy, muy mal. Compañeras que estaban resistiendo de una manera increíble, que sus compañeros todavía no habían caído y que las interrogaban para que cayera su compañero y ellas resistían y resistían (*Ibidem*).

María Isabel recounts how her fellow women militants endured extreme suffering while demonstrating remarkable resistance. Even in cases where their male comrades had not been arrested, they were subjected to intense interrogations designed to break their spirit, yet they persisted in resisting with determination. These experiences prompted María Isabel to reflect on what can now be understood as the intersections between gender, hierarchical structures, and power relations, highlighting how identity and authority were contested within the oppressive context of detention.

Ese poder de resistencia de las mujeres que después modificaron su comportamiento, que para mí fue como el primer chispazo, desde mi reflexión rebelde feminista, de ese momento, de que qué pasaba ahí con esta cosa del amor y de las relaciones de poder, que yo en ese momento todavía no les decía relaciones de poder en la pareja, pero te digo, esto de ser una mujer estupenda y después quedar así quebrada totalmente (...) Esa diferencia que eran las relaciones de poder que podían ejercer tus parejas en un momento y que expresaban indudablemente el patriarcado al interior de la organización política (Ivi, p. 96).

The narrator of the testimony reflects on the women's remarkable resistance, which later changed their behavior. She sees this as an early spark for her feminist critique, noticing how power dynamics in relationships could leave women broken, recognizing these dynamics as expressions of patriarchy within political organization. This reflection reveals that the so-called "appropriate behaviour" expected of female MIR militants was often upheld by women only insofar as their male partners were able to meet the same standard. During torture, DINA agents humiliated the women not solely because of their gender, but also because they were militants perceived as subordinate to men. María Isabel gradually recognized that the political leadership of the MIR was overwhelmingly male and that this hierarchical structure had never been seriously questioned within the organisation.

Paradoxically, however, the very process of resistance and the consolidation of militant identity also gave rise to an early, subtle critical awareness among the women of the MIR. This awareness began to challenge the monolithic, patriarchal character of the organisation itself. In the extreme conditions of detention and torture, the militants developed

a line of reflection that would become a resource for their subsequent development of feminist theories, practices of care, and solidarity. After spending two weeks at Villa Grimaldi, María Isabel and fifteen other detainees were transferred to Cuatro Álamos.

(Cuatro Álamos) que era el lugar que nos llevaban por un tiempo, para que de alguna manera desaparecieran las señales y pudieran ser presentada después en Tres Álamos, que era el campo de concentración... donde ya se te reconocía a ti como prisionera política, porque antes tú estabas desaparecida, igual que todos los que desaparecieron (Ivi, p. 98).

Cuatro Álamos functioned as a temporary holding site, designed to erase any trace of detainees before their transfer to Tres Álamos, the concentration camp where they were officially registered as political prisoners. Until that point, they were treated as disappeared, like all those abducted by the regime. Upon arrival, María Isabel and the other women were placed in a cell with six or seven fellow detainees, featuring a single window that looked out onto a small courtyard.

(...) por esas ventanas de las piezas, ya establecimos todo un sistema de comunicación con los compañeros, a través incluso de los reflejos de los vidrios, porque algunas ventanas se abrían y en esas ventanas escribíamos con las manos y el reflejo en la ventana lo veían ellos del otro lado, era una cosa increíble. Así hacíamos las listas de los que estaban pasando, de las personas que no llegaban todavía... (*Ibidem*).

The passage highlights how the women devised a system of communication with fellow detainees through the windows. Using reflections on the glass, they were able to exchange information, keep track of who had arrived and who was still missing and coordinate their efforts with remarkable resourcefulness despite the constraints of captivity. Eventually, many of the detainees were moved to Tres Álamos, where they began to establish a strong sense of collective organization. There, they engaged in economic activities such as crafting and found ways to reorganize their political militancy. María Isabel recalls the transfer to Tres Álamos and the reconstruction of the collective almost as a moment of celebration. This transition signified a return to life, sustained and strengthened by the solidarity and support of the women's community.

Esa noche como a las 4 de mañana, se abren las puertas y entramos a Tres Álamos, y era una cosa que nadie entendía nada, porque... entramos las mujeres a un lado y los hombres a otro; a los hombres los llevaron a un pabellón de hombres y nosotras a unas barracas que estaban al final de Tres Álamos. Donde se abrió una puerta de madera y yo veía, cómo decenas de mujeres se nos tiraban encima desde las camas y nos abrazaban y nos llevaban a un patio y nos daban de comer... a las cuatro de la mañana y todas despiertas y tirando las almohadas y aquí están a salvo. Eran casi 200 mujeres que en ese momento estaban ahí... y dicen, que aquí hay que respetar, que las que llegan tienen que estar durmiendo en el suelo y las otras a medida que las otras se van yendo ya después pueden después tocar cama, pero por ahora colchonetas en el suelo. Pero nosotras felices con una colchoneta en el suelo, ya con tanta gente, nosotros estábamos como que no entendíamos nada, todavía no (Ivi, p. 99).

María Isabel remembers arriving at Tres Álamos during the night, disoriented by the unfamiliar surroundings. Men and women were separated, and she recalls being warmly received by dozens of women who embraced them, led them to a yard and offered them food. Nearly 200 women were held there, and despite having to sleep on mats on the floor, they felt a sense of relief and happiness at being safe among so many comrades. Rebuilding the collective also involved practical organization, including generating income through work. Using support from the Red Cross, they were able to produce and sell handcrafted items both within Chile and abroad, relying on the solidarity networks that assisted Chilean political prisoners, «iniciando lo que le llamamos el taller laboral, fabricaban vestidos mexicanos, blusas; taller de diseño, de costura, de bordados... miles de talleres» (*Ibidem*). The proceeds were shared equally among all detainees, without distinction of political affiliation. At the same time, a more structured form of militant life developed within these spaces. As María Isabel recalls, «como el comandante Pacheco decía, las que fosforean; y fosforear era tener reuniones políticas. Nosotras, mientras bordábamos, ahí sí que nos juntábamos las de un partido, las de otro y ahí hacíamos nuestros análisis» (Ivi, p. 100). Political militancy was thus rearticulated alongside the daily routines of detention. It was within these spaces that early feminist reflections began to take shape and intertwine with their collective experience.

Ahí incluso empezamos a hacer el análisis feminista de lo que nos estaba sucediendo. Muchas de nosotras decíamos, antes creíamos que éramos feministas, y ahí creo que empezamos a tener otro tipo de conciencia feminista, que ya podíamos hacer este análisis... de que parece que el socialismo no iba a poder solucionar los problemas de todo el mundo, incluidas las mujeres; y que, al interior de la organización existía machismo, y empezamos ahí entonces a analizar (*Ibidem*).

María Isabel recounts how they began to develop a feminist perspective on their own experiences. They came to recognize that, unlike before, they could critically assess the limitations of socialism, understanding that it alone could not address all issues, particularly those affecting women, and that sexism was present even within their own organization. This realization marked the emergence of a deeper feminist consciousness. Their reflections extended beyond personal insight, prompting them to question their own militancy within the MIR. A small group of seven or eight women, including María Isabel, initiated discussions that challenged the gendered division of tasks within the movement. Through this process, they implicitly asserted that such divisions were not natural or inevitable but socially constructed, and therefore open to change.

(...) Las mujeres escribían a máquina, llevaban mensajitos. Había solo una del Comité Central, dos dirigentes regionales y una o dos jefas de grupos políticos militares, y el resto toda era mensajera o escritora a máquina... entonces todo eso y nuestro análisis acerca de todo eso (*Ibidem*).

The testimony illustrates how women in the movement often occupied roles such as typists or couriers, with only a few assuming leadership positions. Even within these seemingly subordinate tasks, they engaged in critical reflection and analysis about their circumstances and the organization itself. This work took place in secrecy, under the constant threat of imprisonment and military surveillance, demanding careful coordination and the cultivation of specialized skills. As María Isabel recalls, «(...) eso lo escribimos en unas batistas, que hacíamos unos bastidores de madera, los clavábamos y escribíamos en las noches ahí, poníamos una frazada negra y ahí adentro una lamparita y escribíamos» (*Ibidem*).

Despite these restrictive conditions, the women succeeded not only in collectively drafting a political document but also in sending it abroad to a group in France that supported Chilean resistance. In Morales Llaña's account, María Isabel emphasizes that this small group sustained and strengthened itself not merely as MIR militants but also through the cultivation of an emerging feminist consciousness.

Conclusions

Analysing and interpreting María Isabel's testimony from a critical perspective has not been an easy task, as it required interpreting the memory of a militant through the study of writings in which her story already emerged. However, the collected works of other Latin American scholars have been fundamental in both bringing these testimonies to light and developing this contribution. It is also important to emphasize that in interpreting a single story, there is no intention to suggest that the path followed by María Isabel and her comrades (expressed through the use of "we") was the only possible route toward the emergence of a critical feminist reflection within the MIR. Clearly, this contribution must also be understood within the limits of partiality.

Some memories tend to be marginalised or entirely omitted from the dominant narratives of the recent past, particularly those concerning experiences of political repression, detention, and everyday resistance. These omissions often stem from a combination of social, political and institutional factors shaped by colonial and patriarchal structures, including the selective recording of history and the privileging of certain voices over others. Bringing these forms of resistance to the forefront is essential, as detention centres were, and continue to be, not only sites of control and punishment but also spaces where acts of everyday solidarity and resistance emerged and continue to emerge. These acts, precisely because of their often-imperceptible nature, are far more challenging to recognise, interpret, and historicise within traditional historical narratives.

The circulation of testimonies and interpretations, such as those associated with María Isabel's experience, encourages us to critically examine which histories have been silenced, marginalised, or neglected, and to uncover a broader spectrum of experiences related to detention and po-

litical resistance. By documenting and analysing these personal accounts, we gain insight into the nuanced ways in which individuals navigated oppressive environments, asserting their existence even under the most restrictive circumstances. Such narratives provide not only a window into the everyday mechanisms of domination, surveillance and control, but also illuminate the diverse strategies of resistance that arise in response, ranging from individual acts of defiance to more organised forms of collective protest.

Moreover, engaging with these memories challenges dominant historiographical frameworks, invites a more pluralistic understanding of the past and highlights the importance of recognising these types of experiences, revealing how resistance can manifest in multiple forms. Ultimately, incorporating these stories into academic discourse not only enriches our historical understanding but also challenges existing power hierarchies by adopting a feminist perspective, even within the academy.

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