The Politics of Literature in Chilean Post-Transition to Democracy Novels: Portraits of Society and the Political Status of Women in the Narrative of Diamela Eltit and Alberto Fuguet

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University of Oxford

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages

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Esta milonga lejos
provinciana y despacio
la canto imaginando
el patio de mi casa

'Milonga para Celinda', Quelentaro

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Short Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between literature and politics through a study of novels published by Diamela Eltit (1949-) and Alberto Fuguet (1964-) in the Chilean post-transition to democracy period (i.e.: after the year 2000). It attempts to demonstrate that Chilean post-transition to democracy literature foregrounds the socio-cultural legacies inherited from the dictatorship (1973-1990), which have been to a great extent endorsed by the Chilean neoliberal transition to democracy. This thesis considers the more recent narrative fiction published by these authors as representative of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, that is, a literature that shares a politico-historical legacy inherited from the Chilean dictatorship, and highlights a social imaginary permeated by the contemporary neoliberal politico-cultural project imposed by the military and to a great extent endorsed by the transition to democracy. In doing so, this work focuses on questions related to the portrayal of contemporary Chilean society and the political status of women.

Commitment in literature does not necessarily come from the author's subjectivity or intention, but from his or her study of society and the way in which s/he presents it. Literary commitment, whether overt or not, remains fundamental in the case of contemporary Chilean writers, who have inherited a neoliberal socio-cultural context imposed by a dictatorship, and who may deploy strategies to either disseminate, perpetuate or resist such a cultural model, creating new ones. Therefore, the values to which literature commits can be traced in the case of both the overtly politically committed author and the apparently apolitical one. This methodology allows us to reveal the way in which Eltit and Fuguet's writing projects represent different but implicitly related views of Chilean society as well as two semi-canonical standpoints which are prominently representative of the twenty-first century Chilean literary sphere.

Full Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between literature and politics through a study of novels published by Diamela Eltit (1949-) and Alberto Fuguet (1964-) in the Chilean post-transition to democracy period (i.e. after the year 2000). This study attempts to demonstrate that Chilean post-transition to democracy literature foregrounds the socio-cultural legacies inherited from the dictatorship (1973-1990), which have been to a great extent endorsed by the Chilean neoliberal transition to democracy. Eltit and Fuguet are two of Chile's most prominent contemporary authors. Eltit is a writer and academic well-recognized by scholars of Latin American literature in Chile, the U.S. and Europe, and Fuguet is a widely-read writer, journalist and filmmaker popular in Chile and the U.S. This thesis considers the more recent narrative fiction published by these authors as representative of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, that is, a literature that shares a politico-historical legacy inherited from the Chilean dictatorship, and highlights a social imaginary permeated by the contemporary neoliberal politico-cultural project imposed by the military and to a great extent endorsed by the transition to democracy. In doing so, this work focuses on questions particularly related to the portrayal of Chilean contemporary society and the political status of women.

This study understands the political status of women as beyond the right of women to occupy positions of political power, but focuses instead on the link between 'the public' and 'the private'. This is a view that puts an end to women's marginalization from the public realm and promotes their positioning as political subjects and full holders of civil rights in all spheres of life. In order to explore this view of the political status of women through literature, this thesis acknowledges a connection between discourses, effects and power relations (Eagleton, 1991: 23-27; 194-198) as a core aspect of the ideologies that are disseminated through the social imaginary conveyed in a society's forms of cultural expressions. In this sense, literature plays a significant role in the creation, validation, and dissemination of such an imaginary as well as in the questioning of it.

In exploring the relationship between 'the socio-political' and literature, this work acknowledges a historical construction involved in 'the literary', which includes both the politico-historical legacy literature is built upon and the politico-cultural effects of such a legacy. Various critics have argued that the commitment of literature does not necessarily come from the author's subjectivity or intention, but from his or her attention to the object, his or her study of society, and the way s/he presents it. Therefore, the literary choices that an author makes to present the fictional social contexts of his/her narrative fiction will bear a specific view of the world. Eagleton refers to this as 'objective partisanship', or the idea that the author does not need to openly impose his or her political views on the text, since:

> if he reveals the real and potential forces *objectively* at work in a situation, he is already in that sense partisan. Partisanship, that is to say, is inherent in reality itself; it emerges in a method of treating social reality rather than in a subjective attitude towards it (Eagleton, 2002: 44, emphasis in the original).

From this point of view, this thesis understands that the commitment of literature, whether overt or not, remains fundamental in the case of contemporary Chilean writers, who have inherited a neoliberal socio-cultural context imposed by a dictatorship and who may deploy strategies to either disseminate, perpetuate or resist such a cultural model, creating new ones. And therefore, the values to which literature commits can be traced in the case of both the overtly politically committed author and the apparently apolitical one.

Standard approaches read Eltit as representing a leftist political project that attempts to resist Chile's neoliberalism and Fuguet as representing that same neoliberal model and often endorsing it. Commentators have read Diamela Eltit's narrative fiction as a criticism of, particularly, the neoliberal economic system; but these approaches do not link this economic model to the specific politico-cultural Chilean context that influences her most recent work. On the other hand, Fuguet's narrative fiction has been often read as representing neoliberal politics, but in his case, the analysis tends to emerge from sociological perspectives. The little scholarly work published on Fuguet does not go deeper into a literary analysis of his work that takes into account the socio-historical legacies of his portrayals but also remains focused on the text. Standard approaches to these authors also accentuate the differences between their

writing projects, which include the following: Eltit's overt recognition of her leftist feminist political commitment versus Fuguet's avoidance of the subject; Eltit's portrayals of the marginalized in contrast to Fuguet's depictions of upper-class young people; Eltit's dense linguistic style in opposition to Fuguet's easily read prose; Eltit's treatment of topics related to social and gender inequalities in contrast to Fuguet's superficial topics linked to Santiago's young upper-class population and the absence of female perspectives typical of his literature; and Eltit's readership as an academic one versus Fuguet's commercial success. There is also a tendency to focus on Eltit and Fuguet's narrative fiction from the 1980s and 1990s, with less attention to their work produced in the new millennium. Instead, this thesis reads Eltit and Fuguet's work published after the year 2000 through a more contextualized approach: as representative of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature. This reading, with a methodology that incorporates historical, political, cultural and literary perspectives, reveals the way in which Eltit and Fuguet's writing projects represent two different but implicitly related views of Chilean society as well as two semi-canonical standpoints which are prominently representative of the twenty-first century Chilean literary sphere.

There is no agreement among political scientists over whether the Chilean transition to democracy has ended or not. However, from a literary and cultural approach, based on the comments of Willy Thayer and Idelber Avelar, who view the Chilean transition as the transition from the state to the market, that is, to Chile's current neoliberal democratic system (Avelar, 2000 and Thayer, 1996), this thesis understands the post-transition as symbolically starting in the year 2000. This year not only witnessed the start of a new century and millennium, thus leaving behind the turmoil of Chilean twentieth-century history, but it is also marked by the election of the first socialist president after the dictatorship, Ricardo Lagos, who governed between 2000 and 2006. Lagos' government, although representing the new Chilean leftist politics, is widely-regarded as having benefitted the private sector and consolidated the legacy of the dictatorship. For example, in his government, various free trade agreements were signed; the privatization of natural resources and public services did not stop; there was significant repression of the student and Mapuche movements; Pinochet's anti-terrorist law was re-enacted to be applied in cases

related to the Mapuche conflict; modifications were made to Pinochet's Constitution of 1980, which validated in democracy a constitution created in dictatorship; and although in 2004, the *Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura*, the Valech Report, was published, Lagos committed to maintaining secret for fifty years the testimonies and the identities of those who committed human right abuses during the dictatorship, a move which prevents the use of the records for trials.

In this context, with such a powerful influence of the dictatorship, the study of the narrative fiction produced after the year 2000 by Eltit and Fuguet provides us with two prominent viewpoints of the contemporary Chilean social imaginary that informs and is informed by literary portraits. Given this legacy, Eltit and Fuguet share a somehow pessimistic view of both higher and lower-class Chilean society. Their writings show awareness of globalization and Chile's neoliberalism; they both write about urban settings highly influenced by these; they both deploy Chilean Spanish in a colloquial and sometimes vulgar linguistic register, which may be said to resist translation; they have both showed an interest in and the influence of urban popular culture, especially visual arts; and they have both been classified by commentators as the founders of new trends in Chilean literature. Thus, Eltit and Fuguet's narrative fictions are significant examples of the relationship between literature and politics in the contemporary Chilean context. Their works provide in conjunction fruitful representations of the social imaginary of the Chilean post-transition to democracy context and are significantly representative of the Chilean twenty-first century literary sphere. Consequently, they are important sources for a comparative analysis of the way in which literature may portray a certain social context in general and the political status of women in particular, as well as the way in which narrative fiction helps create cultural values and beliefs for men and women, which feed a certain social imaginary.

In this thesis, the focus for the analysis of narrative fiction recognizes the socio-historical connections in the reading of fiction, but is also centred on the text and the specific literary devices that a given piece of narrative fiction uses to portray its fictional universe. As such, this thesis conducts a close reading of the narrative

techniques of the novels studied in order to delve into their particular views of contemporary Chilean society and the political status of women. The study explores Diamela Eltit's novels *Mano de obra* (2002) and *Fuerzas especiales* (2013). In the case of the former, it engages in a closer analysis of the literary techniques that the novel uses to portray the contemporary Chilean free-market labour system and it questions the novel's gender component in its portrayal of female domestic labour. In the case of *Fuerzas especiales*, the study focuses on the analysis of the novel's use of form and style to depict the particular social context of a besieged lower-class neighbourhood, and also engages with the novel's view of female agency and public involvement.

The novels written by Alberto Fuguet analyzed in this thesis are *Missing (una investigación)* (2009) and *Aeropuertos* (2010). In the case of the former, the study explores the relationship between the novel and its socio-historical background to demonstrate that, despite its setting outside Chile, the novel deals with local Chilean socio-historical issues inherited from the context of the second half of the twentieth century. It addresses the elements that the novel uses to cross the borders between fact and fiction, its flirtation with politically-loaded terms, and the portrayal of gender roles with their significance in the development of the plot. Finally, in the case of *Aeropuertos*, the study examines the novel's narrative techniques employed to represent Chile's contemporary neoliberal society as well as questions around female sexuality and the search for traditional family love and care in order to analyze the way in which the novel deals with women's political empowerment in such a context.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the relationship between literature and politics through a study of novels published by Diamela Eltit (1949-) and Alberto Fuguet (1964-) in the Chilean post-transition to democracy period, after the year 2000. It attempts to demonstrate that Chilean post-transition to democracy literature foregrounds the socio-cultural legacies inherited from the dictatorship (1973-1990), which have been to a great extent endorsed by the Chilean neoliberal transition to democracy. Specifically, this work addresses questions related to the portrayal of contemporary Chilean society and the political status of women. Eltit and Fuguet are two of Chile's most prominent contemporary authors. Eltit is a writer and academic well-recognized by scholars of Latin American literature in Chile, the U.S. and Europe, and Fuguet is a widely-read writer, journalist and filmmaker popular in Chile and the U.S. They are urban writers, who have inherited the cultural and political legacy of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990). This thesis studies the novels *Mano de obra* (2002) and *Fuerzas especiales* (2013) by Eltit and *Missing (una investigación)* (2009) and *Aeropuertos* (2010) by Fuguet. It considers these as representative of what might be called Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, that is, a literature that shares a politico-historical legacy inherited from the Chilean dictatorship, and highlights a social imaginary permeated by the contemporary neoliberal politico-cultural project imposed by the military and validated by the transition to democracy.

A. Literature and the 'Socio-Political'

1. Writers and the State in Latin America

Following Terry Eagleton, 'the political' is '[...] the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations which this involves[...]' (Eagleton, 2008: 169). In Latin America, examples of the relationship between literature and politics abound from Colonization onwards. Ángel Rama in his book *La ciudad letradra* (1998) explores the socio-political role of the *letrados* in Latin America since Colonization. He reviews the significant relationship between *los letrados* and *la ciudad*, between intellectuals and institutions, in constructing power and in transmitting or perpetuating discourses, either monarchical or republican. Another important referent from a gender perspective is Doris Sommer and her book *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America (1991)*. She points out that literature was a central part of Latin American nation-building projects from Independence onwards. She refers to this as a 'foundational literature', which consists of historical, indigenist, romantic or realist novels created and disseminated as a way of inspiring civil society towards a socially productive sexuality, more harmonious societies, and national consolidation and prosperity (Sommer, 1991: 6-7).

The relationships between writers and the state in Latin America are varied and complex. Some prominent *hombres de letras* were also president of their countries, such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), president of Argentina between 1868 and 1874, who, earlier, in 1840 had been forced into exile in Chile; and Rómulo Gallegos (1884-1969), president of Venezuela in 1948, who also went to

live in exile in 1949, after the 1948 Venezuelan coup. Another example can be found in the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), who was a Communist politician and diplomat. Neruda enjoyed the privileges of being an influential poet and a senator in 1945, but was persecuted by the government and escaped to exile in 1948. Another case is that of the Nicaraguan writer and priest Ernesto Cardenal (1925-), who, from 1979 to 1987, was the minister of culture in the Sandinista government. In his case there is a further complexity in his relationship with an institution like the Catholic Church and in his submission to a Pope, John Paul II, hostile towards Communism. The Pope's reprimand to Cardenal during his visit to Nicaragua in 1983, soon after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution, is well-known. On that occasion, the Pope told Cardenal that he needed to make a decision as to whether he was a priest or would dedicate his life to politics (Esparza, 2014: para.12 of 57). A further example is the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize for literature, who was also a school teacher and diplomat, and a reference point for the nationalist education project promoted by the Chilean state in the early twentieth century. This relationship also entailed a complex link between women and the state at a time when feminists in Chile were fighting for the right to vote. As Licia Fiol-Matta notes, Mistral had a difficult relationship with the literary establishment of her time; she was an educator of lower-class and provincial origins, a lesbian who never had children and who decided to live away from Chile almost half of her life (especially in Europe and the U.S.), but still she was instrumental in becoming a maternal model for women through the complex self-cultivated image of a masculinized school teacher, a republican mother and a poet who praises motherhood and infancy (Licia Fiol-Matta, 2002).

In terms of the two authors to be studied in this thesis, their relationship with the state is also ambiguous and complex. In the case of Fuguet, in an interview from 2010, when the interviewer asks him if he knows *a los del gobierno de ahora* –that of right-wing Sebastián Piñera, whose first government period went from 2010 to 2014–, he answers:

> A ver, conozco a Luciano Cruz-Coke, fue protagonista de Se arrienda. La otra vez pisé por primera vez La Moneda como periodista, para entrevistar a Hinzpeter. Nunca me he sentido parte de ningún gobierno y eso que voté cuatro veces por la Concertación. Nunca me he ganado el Fondart. Jamás sería agregado cultural, ni antes ni ahora. Me alegra no ser parte de eso, porque así no me siento traidor sino observador (Fuguet, 2010b: para. 37 of 48).

From Fuguet's answer one can read an ambiguous relationship to politics and the state. He has had at least a working relationship with people who formed the first right-wing government elected after the dictatorship, as Luciano Cruz Coke is a Chilean actor who was Piñera's minister of culture between 2010-2013. Fuguet also admits that he voted for the *Concertación* four times, the centre-left coalition that governed Chile from 1990 to 2010. But from his words, one could also infer that he might have voted later for right-wing politicians, since the four *concertacionista* presidents that he admits having voted for are Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994), Eduardo Frei (1994-2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) and Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010). However, Fuguet also declares the distance that he feels from any government and that he would not be part of any government project in order presumably not to interfere with his creative freedom, although he has certainly turned to the state funding for the arts (FONDART), applying for it without success.

In the case of Eltit, she has overtly declared her leftist standpoint, her commitment to social and gender equality, and she was an active participant in the artistic scene that

opposed the dictatorship in the 1980s, as will be discussed later. Therefore, she has a closer and more evident relationship to politics than Fuguet. But she has also declared: 'Yo nunca, nunca me he sentido completamente interesada en la Concertación como proyecto político. A mí la Concertación nunca me ha parecido un proyecto político que me convoque enteramente. Sin embargo, evidentemente fue extraordinario que se hubiese producido la Concertación para producirse a su vez la Transición' (Eltit, 2002a: 147). These words reveal an ambiguous relationship with the *concertacionista* state that governed Chile from the end of the dictatorship until Piñera's election. Despite her expressed scepticism, Eltit was from 1991 to 1994 the cultural attaché in Mexico of Aylwin's Christian Democrat and *concertacionista* government, and she is married to Jorge Arrate, a Chilean politician who has been a socialist and a communist, and was a minister under Salvador Allende in the 1970s and under Frei's Christian Democrat and *concertacionista* government in the late 1990s. Accordingly, due to such deferring overt attitudes towards political matters, critics have commonly regarded Eltit as a politically committed author and Fuguet as an apolitical one, as will be discussed in more detail later.

2. Literature and Chile's Neoliberalism

Idelber Avelar points out that in Chile the transition to a new capitalist era had consequences in the literary sphere. Following Willy Thayer (1996), Avelar argues that the Chilean transition period *began* on 11 September 1973 with the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973). This is the transition from the state to the market, or to the current neoliberal democratic system. The transnational and capitalist re-foundation of Chile

could not have happened under democracy and the dictatorship was therefore the beginning of the transition to current Chilean neoliberalism (Avelar, 2000: 29, 78-81).

Neoliberalism refers to economic policies that stand for a reduction of the state's role, privatization of public assets and cuts in public expenditure. Other prominent characteristics of neoliberalism are the depoliticizing technique of governance, the decollectivization of society and its aim to restore class power guided by business elites and international institutions (Undurraga, 2015: 13-14).[1] In Chile, this doctrine of free-market economy was implemented during the dictatorship in the late 1970s under the guide of the so-called 'Chicago Boys', a group of technocrats educated at the Economics Department of the University of Chicago, following Milton Friedman's principles of economic freedom. With the support of Pinochet, under conditions of political impunity, social discipline imposed by the armed forces and the weakening of unions and collective forces, the 'Chicago Boys' were free to implement neoliberal policies by 'shock', which resulted in the Chilean economic crisis of 1982 (Ibid.: 16-20).[2] Nevertheless, when democracy was restored, supposedly in order to secure governability, the *Concertación* opted for maintaining with little variation the free-market model and the promotion of a demobilized society.[3] In fact, in Chile, even the terms of the transition to democracy were carefully negotiated by the military, which enjoyed a privileged position of power in the subsequent democratically elected governments (Waylen, 2000). Thus, Chilean

[1] For more detailed accounts of neoliberalism, see Harvey, 2005 and Klein, 2007.
[2] For further views of Chile's neoliberalism, see Chonchol, 1996: 141-157; Moulian, 2002: second part, second chapter; Silva, 1991: 390-396; Paley, 2001; and Winn, 2004. Winn's reference offers specific case studies about the impact of Chilean neoliberalism on the textile, metallurgical, fruit and fisheries industries and the copper mine and forestry sectors.
[3] Silva, 1991: 405; Undurraga, 201.: 21-27; Winn, 2004: 49-50.

contemporary democracy is a neoliberal one based on a free-market economy, which has witnessed the development of a consumerist society.[4] This is a context in which power remains on the companies' side with precarious working conditions (Frank, 2004: 73-113; Undurraga, 2015: 27). Consumerism also contributes to work subjugation when workers must accept to be part of a free-market labour system with unfavourable conditions to earn a living and meet their financial obligations, which result from the view of consumerism as a social expectation (Moulian, 2002: 103-107).

The transition to a free-market economy produced a social trauma that also had cultural and literary consequences. Literature was forced to leave its position of privilege –the privileged position that a poet like Neruda had once enjoyed, for example– and came to a situation of 'guetoización irreversible' (Avelar, 2000: 315). In Chile, literature had traditionally flourished under the sponsorship of the state, but in the transition period, in a technocratic state, the former learned humanistic elite was disregarded in favour of an elite formed by experts in economics (Ibid.:48-49). This occurred because another significant characteristic of Chile's neoliberalism is the technocratization of politics, which started during the dictatorship as the military rule attempted to convince the population of the ineptitude of politicians. The influence of the 'Chicago Boys' was central to stressing the need to 'technify' the society, highlighting a view that favoured technical skills over political ones and the need for experts with higher academic training and postgraduate studies, particularly in economics.[5] Nonetheless, the new democratic governments were also

[4] See, for example, Moulian, 2002: first part, third chapter; and Paley, 2001.
[5] Moulian, 2002: 60-80; Silva, 1991: 386-405; Paley, 2001: 6.

characterized by a technocratic orientation and by the influence of another group of technocrats, the 'CIEPLAN Monks', mostly of Christian Democrat orientation. They were members of the Centro de Estudios y Planificación Nacional of Universidad Católica's Faculty of Economics, which was formed in 1970 as an alternative to the Chicago boys. In 1976, they split from this university and as the Christian Democratic party, which supported the coup, started to distance itself from the dictatorship, they emerged as a powerful opposition group, occupying important positions in the subsequent democratic governments (Silva, 1991: 386-405). As Jon Beasley-Murray argues, neoliberalism gives the impression of being based only on technical discourses instead of carrying an ideological content. However, such supposed silence is its major political strength, and therefore its study necessitates, 'una perspectiva histórica que comprenda la transición democrática no como el nuevo comienzo o la pizarra en blanco que sus arquitectos proponen, sino dentro del contexto de, al menos, los últimos 30 años de la historia chilena' (Beasley-Murray, 2001: 32-33).

During the dictatorship, the traditional places for the study of humanities or for cultural and intellectual expression were intervened by the military (Avelar, 2000: 63-66) and universities went from forming humanists and ideological public administrators to forming technocrats. The 1967 Chilean university reform had encouraged cultural movements in general and literary criticism in particular, and during Allende's government, the cultural scene had flourished under the regular sponsorship of the state. In a country of then ten million inhabitants, for example, Editorial Quimantú's *Clásicos Literarios* collection of mini books sold more than three million copies, which were sold not only at established national book shops, but

at popular kiosks as well. But this phenomenon changed dramatically after the Coup and the number of published titles went down from 719 in 1972 to 244 in 1979 (Ibid.: 64-67). In what it is known as the *apagón cultural* –the Chilean cultural blackout, as the dismantling of the cultural scene promoted by the military was known–, by the mid 1970s, the majority of artists, writers and literary critics were either living in the exile, jailed, disappeared, silenced, dead or forced to work under market-driven conditions. The state was no longer the sponsor of the cultural scene and private organizations arose to fund initiatives targeted at improving the corporate image of the companies linked to them. The mass media became central for the support of the military regime in the face of public opinion. In 1973, the military had bombed radio stations linked to the Popular Unity and took over the National Television Channel, commencing a period of censorship and full control of the news and information released to the public. In a similar vein, literary criticism was consolidated under the cultural production of the conservative *El Mercurio* and its critic Ignacio Valente, pseudonym of the Opus Dei priest José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois (Ibid.: 66-67; 107-110). Furthermore, according to Rubí Carreño, as an effect of this traumatic history, Chilean literature produced after the year 2000 relies heavily on memory as a 'macro genre' (Carreño, 2005: 104-106). Some examples are novels such as, *El hombre que pregunta* (2002) by Ramón Díaz Eterovic (1956-); *La burla del tiempo* (2004) by Maurico Electorat (1960-); and *Mapocho* (2002) by Nona Fernández (1971-). In this context, the relationship between Chile's post-transition to democracy literature and its historical, social and political determinants becomes unavoidable.

B. The Authors to Be Studied and Critical Survey

1. Diamela Eltit

Diamela Eltit (1949-) is one of the most influential Chilean female writers, particularly in the intellectual and academic spheres. Before becoming a writer, she was a state school teacher, having graduated as *Profesora de Estado en Castellano*. Eltit came to prominence in Chile in the late 1970s and early 1980s when she was a member of CADA, an Chilean post-coup *Escena de Avanzada* or *neo-vanguardista* leftist activist group of urban artists.[6] She has written both fiction and essays; her fiction includes *Lumpérica* (1983), *Por la patria* (1986), *El cuarto mundo* (1988), *El padre mío* (1989), *Los vigilantes* (1994), *El infarto del alma* (1994), *Mano de obra* (2002), *Puño y letra* (2005), *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007), *Impuesto a la carne* (2010) and *Fuerzas especiales* (2013), among others; some of which have been translated into English and Greek. Currently, she is a tenured academic at the state Universidad Técnica Metropolitana in Santiago and holds a teaching appointment at the New York University in the U.S. She has also been a visiting professor at various internationally renowned universities, such as Stanford University, Columbia University, the University of California, Berkeley in the U.S. and the University of Cambridge in the U.K., among others. In 2010, she won the José Donoso literary prize and in 2011, she was among the finalists of the Rómulo Gallegos prize.

Diamela Eltit has publicly recognized her political commitment, which is strongly linked to equality from a leftist feminist perspective (Eltit, 2003: para. 30 of 38). For

[6] For a detailed discussion of CADA's work, see, Richard, 2011; Avelar, 2000: 222-230; and Neustadt, 2001.

her, literature and reading are political activities and consequently she is also very critical of what she sees as contemporary market-driven parameters for a type of women's writing associated with topics traditionally thought as female, such as love and sentimentalism, for example (Ibid.). Commentators highlight the novelty of Eltit's work in challenging dominant models and placing the city's public space as a central site of intervention and resistance (Brito, 1994: 111), a theme that she inherited from the times of CADA. The plaza in *Lumpérica* (1983), the supermarket in *Mano de obra* (2002) and the *población*[7] in *Fuerzas especiales* (2013) are some examples of the settings of Eltit's narrative fiction. Those spaces are located in what Gareth Williams describes as nameless, geographically and culturally indistinct cities, inhabited by the *lumpen* or people from the margins of the city and society (Williams, 2007: 125).[8]

Particular attention has been paid to Eltit's dense writing style, which has been both praised and criticized. Nelly Richard states that Eltit inaugurates a new literary trend in Chile, one which encourages critical thinking through literary practices of linguistic and psycho-social fragmentation (Richard, 1993: 37-38). Eltit's language style is considered by scholars as a strategy to challenge the dominant forms of socio-economic power, both under the dictatorship and in the transition to democracy period (Richard, 2011: 50-53; Olea, 1998: 47-50). Regarding criticism of Eltit's writing style, Bernardita Llanos thinks this represents a gender bias, since the need for effort on the part of readers is regarded as a strength rather than a weakness in the

[7] *Población* refers to socially stigmatized lower-class neighbourhoods, which in Chile have formal or informal origins. They may be state housing projects or informal slum settlements.

[8] This interest in characters from the margins of society or away from the spheres of power has been widely acknowledged by critics and Eltit herself. See, for example, Brito, 1994: 117; Eltit, 1988: 4; Llanos, 2009: 166; Olea, 1998: 60.

case of male authors (Llanos, 2009: 165). However, Llanos does not question the cultural and educational context in which Eltit's novels are inserted and the politico-historical background of such a context. She does not address language and access to literature as a social barrier or as a mark of social class and vulnerability in contemporary Chilean society. In a similar vein as to Llanos, Eltit has stated that, 'el "no se entiende", que aplicado a algunos autores hombres quizás pudiera ser una frase prestigiosa, un desafío de lectura, en mi caso ha terminado por ser un slogan determinista y excluyente' (Eltit, 1993: 23-24). In this respect, many commentators have also linked Eltit's language style to Spanish baroque literature,[9] particularly her work written in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Lumpérica*, *Por la patria*, *El padre mío* and el *Infarto del alma*; and Eltit has herself openly declared her admiration for that kind of literature (Eltit: 1998: 108).

Eugenia Brito reads Eltit as a postcolonial writer whose writing is influenced by and projects the cultural and political legacies of colonization, decolonization and *mestizaje*.[10] For instance, she states that Eltit's novel *Por la patria*, 'reimprime sobre la lengua madre, colonizada y colonizadora, desde el ingreso de América Latina del español y la consecuente elisión de los lenguajes amerindios hasta el lenguaje actual, la frase popular, el panfleto, la cita obscena, la canción amorosa' (Brito, 1994: 141). In that novel, Brito sees a proposal to read the history of Latin America in the use of topics such as incest as sign of colonization, the fusion of Spanish with Amerindian languages, and in the employment of the lower-class register of Chilean Spanish

[9] Goldman, 2009: 151; Kirkpatrick, 2009: 68; Ortega, 2009: 50; Oyarzún, 2009: 134; Richard, 2009: 219-221.

[10] For extended debates on postcolonial studies in Latin American, see, Coronil, 2004; Fiddian, 2000; Moraña et.al, 2008; Salvatore, 2010.

(Ibid.: 140-141). Brito also highlights the rupture between Eltit's narrative and the realist tradition that has characterized Chilean literature (Brito, 2006: 19; 1994: 111). However, as this thesis will later analyze, one may state that as her oeuvre progresses, Eltit's novels become somehow less hermetic and even more realist, particularly those published in the post-transition period, such as *Mano de obra* and *Fuerzas especiales*.

Basing himself on the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Juan Carlos Lértora classifies Eltit's narrative as an example of 'minor literature'. He characterizes minor literature as 'aquella producida en el espacio de un lenguaje mayor pero que, desde dentro, se propone cuestionar y subvertir sus mecanismos' (Lértora, 1993: 28; Deleuze and Guattari: 1986: 16-18). Lértora also points out that minor literature incorporates fragmented constructions and collective enunciations, and it is focused on characters that inhabit precarious worlds, the *lumpen* in the case of Eltit (Lértora, 1993: 30-31). From this standpoint, Eltit's treatment of topics like gender and class oppression, her deployment of Chilean Spanish, her use of swearing and sometimes a lower-class sociolect as an attempt to capture the *lumpen* language, which cannot be easily translated, might be regarded as an attempt to resist or 'minorize' the dominant culture. However, Eltit's ambiguous and fragmented narrative does not emerge from a minor political position. Eltit writes in Spanish, Chile's official and dominant language,[11] about Santiago's marginal people or the *lumpen*, but not from a marginal position. She does not come from the periphery; she is an upper-middle class, highly educated (significantly over the average in Chile for her generation), heterosexual, married scholar, who incorporates in her writing her views about literary, feminist

[11] Other languages recognized in Chile are Mapudungún, Quechua, Rapa Nui, Huilliche and Aymara.

and social theory via a dense experimental and fragmented language. Therefore, Eltit's supposed position of difference, as Lértora characterizes, in relation to the *lumpen* world that she depicts, is that of the major culture and language rather than the minor ones.

The above debate is closely related to the question of the political project of Eltit's work. For Brito, Eltit's literary politics consists of placing women as the main figure in Chilean literature as author, narrator and protagonist from the marginal positions of the *lumpen* heroine (Brito, 1994: 117; also Olea, 1998: 60-80). As such, for some scholars who read Eltit through a postcolonial approach, in Spivak's terms, Eltit's purpose is 'to allow the subaltern to speak' (Green, 2007: 17). However, although it is widely recognized that the essay written by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) is an influential source for the question of the voice of the subaltern (the economically dispossessed), Spivak has also posited the question of the ethical problem that arises from the representation of the subaltern by people writing from positions of privilege, particularly from the intellectual elite (Spivak 1988, 1993) –and Eltit is part of the Chilean intellectual elite. Consequently, other critics like Diana Palaversich see Eltit as a writer who usurps the subaltern space; she states that the general public is completely excluded from the elitist learned circle of people able to read and understand Eltit's writings (Palaversich, 2005: 99).

Mary Green, in her work on the image of the mother in Eltit's first novels, states that 'the interplay between text and context is crucial to any reading of her novels' (Green, 2007: 2). She links Eltit's political project to her dense and hermetic language, and to the political and revolutionary potential of her work. For her, this

potential lies in her language style rather than in the message (Ibid.: 15). Llanos points out that Eltit attributes to the act of reading a political and social content, being 'a social act that privileges specific discursive and cultural conventions' (Llanos, 2009: 166). She argues that western economies have maintained the colonial status of Latin America and, also through a postcolonial perspective, she reads Eltit's writing project as a reaction against it (Ibid.: 198). For her, Eltit's alliance with characters from the margins of society and her fragmented writing style challenge Chile's contemporary neoliberal literary canons (Ibid: 166-167). Nonetheless, Palaversich argues that precisely because of this ambiguous and hermetic language the *neo-vanguardistas*, including Eltit, are not politically effective, as they cannot communicate their political message to the wider public. Accordingly, she thinks that Eltit's interest in fragmented language makes her a postmodern writer, whose main purpose is not political denunciation, but literary experimentation (Palaversich, 2005: 87-90). However, it is worth mentioning that literary or artistic experimentation does not necessarily exclude political denunciation, as the work of Eltit clearly exemplifies.

Green nevertheless notes that Eltit's post-1988 novels are more readable in linguistic and structural terms, but that they have not lost their semantic and thematic complexity, which encourages readers 'to collaborate in the production, rather than the consumption' (Green, 2007: 19). And Eltit's novels have not reached a wider public but have instead proved very attractive for academic research and more learned readers. About her readers, Eltit has recognized that 'For me, it's not a matter of the number of readers. I work with an ideal, abstract reader, who operates critically while I write my books. But not real readers' (Eltit, 2005: 79). The implied

readers of Eltit's novels are quite erudite, as they need a significant level of knowledge and awareness of the Chilean socio-political context and history, including issues around gender and social inequality, in order to interpret fully the messages of her writing, a question that will be further discussed in the chapters devoted to her novels. The implied reader is defined as 'the profile of readerly traits that seems to be assumed by the text [...] is a projection of the text, and differs in every instance from actual readers, many of whom will not exactly match the profile suggested by the text' (Keen, 2015: 37). Following Suzanne Keen, narrative involves the idea of a 'practice', that is, the co-creation between writers and readers; in her own words, it involves the 'reader's complicity in responding to cues in order to participate in fictional worldmaking' (Keen, 2015: 10). On this matter, as stated by Green, the interplay between text and context is worth exploring in the case of Eltit.

The Chilean education system is based on neoliberal cultural and educational policies, which have significantly discouraged the arts and humanities; for example, in Chile, books carry 19% value added tax (Rojo, 2012: 7). Exemplifying the results of these policies, Grínor Rojo shows that by 2010, 52.8% of people surveyed and 40% of students finishing primary education declare they do not read at all. By 2012, 49% of people surveyed declare that they do not read news about politics (Ibid.: 1); and in the last presidential election, on December 2017, there was a 51% rate of abstention (Servicio Electoral de Chile). These figures are frustrating if we agree with Rojo that 'razón, libro y lectura constituyen así una tríada indisociable' (Rojo, 2012: 3). Also, in Chile, anarchist and socialist perspectives are broadly avoided on the state school curriculum, as are many other politically controversial topics. For example, just in 2009 the teaching of the historical period of the dictatorship and the

return to democracy was incorporated into the education curriculum (MINEDUC, 2009, Sector: Historia, Geografía y Ciencias Sociales, sexto año básico). And, only in 2016, did the government, motivated by the high level of abstention in public elections and people's disinterest in political affairs, re-incorporate the teaching of *formación cívica* at schools (MINEDUC, 2016).

All of the aforementioned factors have helped create the popular saying that Chile, with its depoliticized society, is *un país que no lee*. This specific national context brings back to mind the question of the political project of Eltit's literature and its effectiveness. If, as Eltit recognizes, reading and writing imply a political activity, beyond the mastery of her prose, the question of effectiveness linked to a specific national context is unavoidable. Such politico-cultural effectiveness refers to the capacity that the writing of a leftist author –a state educator with an openly declared concern for social equality– has to overcome cultural and economic barriers, and potentially reach the types of subjects in which her writing is inspired: the marginalized, the *lumpen*, the *obreros*, the *pobladores*. The question remains of the potential or even the intention to integrate these subjects into her literary project, so they are also (eventually) permitted to, in Green's terms, collaborate in the production of such a political content (Green, 2007: 19). This issue is problematic, since it validates the creation not only of economic and social ghettos as most scholars agree that Eltit's work responds to, but cultural and educational ones as well. It also opens an important space to think about other more popular authors like Alberto Fuguet, who reaches a wider audience with more mainstream views, who is regarded as representing neoliberal ideals and might be considered more successful in transmitting and potentially critiquing the cultural effects of the neoliberal model.

2. Alberto Fuguet

Alberto Fuguet was born in 1964 in Santiago, Chile and moved with his family to the U.S. soon after his birth where he lived until he was a teenager. He studied journalism at the Universidad de Chile and is also a filmmaker. He worked for *El Mercurio*, writing for its literary magazine *Zona de Contacto* and he is currently a part-time lecturer at the private Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago. He has written novels, short-stories and chronicles. His narrative includes novels such as, *Mala onda* (1991), *Tinta roja* (1996), *Por favor, rebobinar* (1998), *Las películas de mi vida* (2003), *Missing (una investigación)* (2009), *Aeropuertos* (2010), *No ficción* (2015) and *Sudor* (2016), and collections of short-stories such as *Sobredosis*, (1990), the co-edited *McOndo* (1996) and *Cortos* (2004), among others. Fuguet has been interviewed and has written for international newspapers and magazines like *Time Magazine*, *The Guardian* and the *New York Times*. In 1999, he was named by *Time Magazine* and CNN as one of the fifty Latin American leaders of the new millennium and his work has been translated into various languages, including English, Portuguese and Danish (Palaversich, 2005: 49; Forttes-Zalaquett, 2010: 25).

In 1996, Fuguet along with the Chilean writer Sergio Gómez (1962-) co-edited *McOndo*, a collection of short-stories by writers from Latin America and Spain. In their introduction, the editors of *McOndo* reject magical realism –a genre typically associated with the leftist Latin American writer– as an essentialist and reductionist exploitation of the image of a rural, exotic, indigenous and undeveloped Latin

America. In contrast, what the authors witness is an urban and modern[12] continent (16). Unlike previous generations, the *McOndo* writers are not interested in their countries or communities *per se* and show a highly individualistic approach, 'El gran tema de la identidad latinoamericana (¿quiénes somos?) pareció dejar paso al tema de la identidad personal (¿quién soy?)' (13). With regard to this movement, with its postmodernist touches, commentators have centred on Fuguet as the founder of a new trend in Latin American literature. Palaversich characterizes Fuguet as a postmodern cultural promoter, with a writing project characterized by the minimization of the importance of leftist political ideologies and their power to transform societies, as well as praise of hybrid diversity and individualism (Palaversich, 2005: 43).[13]

Similarly linked to postmodern literature Fuguet has been classified as part of the post-national generation. Following Robbins and González, the strong emphasis on mass and pop culture present in contemporary Latin American writers indicates that they have a new notion of Latin American identity that is no longer tied to a specific place or nation, and therefore we see no longer a conflict between a national (elite) high culture and a (low class) popular culture, but a case of a global popular culture (Robbins and González, 2014: 7). According to them, post-national literature shows characteristics such as, an 'apparent disinterest in politics, specifically in advancing political positions as a response to social problems' (Ibid.: 9) as well as 'The

[12] In this thesis, the word 'modern' refers to 'being in existence at this time; current, present' (Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary*). The use of this term is also related to the word 'modernity', defined as 'The quality or condition of being modern; modernness of character or style' (Ibid.).

[13] For a discussion of the connections between neoliberal cultural hegemony and postmodern discourse in Latin America, see Hopenhayn, 1995, who bases his reflections on Frederic Jameson's influential work on postmodernism and late capitalism (1984).

association of *lo izquierdista* (the Left) with the Boom, and the suggestion that contemporary writers have "no interest in representing a specific ideology"' (Ibid., emphasis in the original). However, in relation to the rejection of magical realism, it is worth noting that Alberto Fuguet has stated that, 'Yo siempre digo que si en América Latina los muertos volvieran las madres de la Plaza de Mayo no existirían' (Fuguet, 2004: para. 82 of 102). From his words, one can read that behind the apparent lack of political interest, there is an aesthetic disagreement with the way in which magical realism portrays Latin American political conflicts.

Fuguet has not received much attention from academic researchers, a fact that Palaversich sees as a mistake because of the link between contemporary Latin American narrative and cultural neoliberalism found in his writing. She poses the question of the nature of Fuguet's rebellion and rupture, stating that he does the same as that which he criticizes in magical realism, namely, he sells a Latin American picture that is reductionist, an exaggeratedly first-world view that puts aside all that does not correspond with his personal experience, like popular indigenous and rural culture, or the poverty and unemployment that abound in Latin America (Ibid: 34-44). For her, Fuguet represents and portrays 'uno de los legados más importantes de Pinochet: la despolitización de una buena parte de la población y de la vida pública, y la conversión del ciudadano [que pasa] de 'ser político' a 'ser consumidor'' (Ibid.: 39). Catalina Forttes-Zalaquett observes that the beginning of Fuguet's work is marked by years of prejudiced rejection due to the apparent apolitical standpoint of his narrative, regarded as excessively influenced by globalization and U.S. popular culture, and aimed only at entertaining; this created an insurmountable distance between him and the literary and cultural canons that in Chile are strongly linked to

the left.[14] But this prejudice was based on newspapers' literary reviews and not on the literary analysis of his writing (Forttes-Zalaquett, 2010: 18-22). Forttes-Zalaquett notes that only after 1996, the year in which *McOndo* was published, did Fuguet start to capture some attention from the academic sphere in Chile, through an analysis that, however, provided only a sociological reading of his work, which attempted to criticize the Chilean neoliberal system and did not present any literary and historical analysis of his fiction (Ibid.).[15] For Forttes-Zalaquett, Fuguet's eventual lack of overt criticism of neoliberalism is not a political agenda *per se*, but the projection of the lack of political memory that predominates in his generation, that of the transition to democracy (Ibid.: 29).

Fuguet's narrative has also been classified as a new form of realism strongly influenced by mass media, technology, U.S. popular culture and economic globalization (Alonso, 2004: 7-8). Scholars have also paid attention to Fuguet's depiction of 'loser' characters in their search for a redemptive escape. His protagonists are characterized by the need to overcome psychological trauma usually

[14] This statement might seem to contradict the view of Chile as a conservative country, for the left is normally associated with more progressive values. But the Chilean left can be quite conservative too, especially in terms of sexuality and family values. An example is the story of the Chilean theoretical physicist Claudio Bunster, son of the Chilean poet Volodia Teitelboim (1916-2008) and his wife Raquel Weitzman. Teitelboim, who in 2002 won Chile's Prize for Literature, was also a communist politician, member of parliament before the dictatorship and the Secretary General of the communist party from 1989 to 1994. In 2005, at the age of 57, Claudio learned that Teitelboim was not his father and that he was the result of an extramarital affair of his mother. In order to avoid social disgrace, the Chilean communist party had recommended that Teitelboim and his wife hide the affair, remain married and register Claudio as Volodia's son. When Claudio discovered this, he decided to change his surname and sever all ties to Volodia (Cooperativa, 'Claudio Bunster...' and 'Volodia Teitelboim se confesó...'; Ampuero, 2005). A further example is the also well-known complex relationship of Pedro Lemebel (1952-2015) with the Chilean communist party. He identified himself as a *comunista maricón*, but distanced himself from the party due to its generally homophobic attitudes, although he maintained his friendship with Gladys Marín, who was one of the most important figures and former Secretary General of that party (Fajardo, 2016: para. 7 of 19).

[15] See for example, Rodrigo Cánovas' *Novela chilena, nuevas generaciones: El abordaje de los huérfanos* (1997) and Cárcamo-Huechante's *Tramas de mercado: Imaginación económica, cultura pública y literatura en el Chile de fines del siglo veinte* (2007).

related to a problematic relationship with parents, which moves them to search for an escape from family or home and places them in an in-between stage, as *fronterizos*. This journey is also framed by multiple references to globalized popular culture, such as U.S. music, mass media and cinema; often this journey also includes a healing process linked to writing, in which Fuguet's lost protagonists learn the necessary lessons to understand or accept their lives (Alonso, 2004: 8-9; Paz Soldán, 2002: 47-48). Following Marc Augé (1995), Forttes-Zalaquett links Fuguet's settings to the concept of non-places. Non-places are characterized by the absence of human relations and by self-service instructions, e.g.: airports, petrol stations, motels and motorways. According to her, in those in-transit places, in a solitude that produces confusion, Fuguet's characters lose their social identity, which results in transformation and change (Forttes-Zalaquett, 2009: 145; see also, Augé, 1995).

Although Fuguet is generally read as an example of a postmodern, apolitical author not interesting in ideological and national or community questions,[16] a few scholars have suggested that his work might be linked to a particular ideological agenda and memory. Patrick O'Connell links Fuguet's work to the question of political memory when he notes that:

> in his memory-motivated collection of personal histories, he contextualizes his generation within a framework of political ambiguity and thematic paradox. Fuguet's characters are metaphors representing the conflict between past and present in Chile, and as such become part of the legacy of Chile's military dictatorship under Pinochet's authoritarian government. Fuguet's characters also symbolize the conscience of a nation shifting between thresholds of memory and the desire to forget (O'Connell, 2001:84-85).

[16] See, for example, Cárcamo-Huechunante, 2007: second part, chapter three; Forttes-Zalaquett, 2010: 18-22; Palaversich, 2005: 40-43; Paz Soldán, 2002: 44-48; Robbins, 2014; and Summers, 2006.

Christian Gundermann argues that although Fuguet intends to portray a modern contemporary view of Latin America, he ends up being as traditional and sexist as the authors of the Boom he criticizes. For him, the absence of the female perspective in Fuguet's writing is not a coincidence, but a core politico-cultural issue of his heteronormative project framed by the traditional realist humanist model. Despite Fuguet's attempts to portray modern and digital societies of young people who can do whatever they please, he deploys the traditional notion of the subject as a coherent, indivisible and heteronormative individual (Gundermann, 2001: 30-31). Moreover, the heterosexualization of Fuguet's subjects occurs through traditional literary education, which contradicts his flirtation with the cyber and pop worlds (Ibid.: 31-33). This is an interesting critique to note in the case of a homosexual writer, although it is important to mention that Fuguet spoke publicly about his homosexuality only towards the end of 2015 (Fuguet, 2015: para. 6 of 8), at the age of 51, with the publication of his first set of novels dealing with the subject, *No ficción* and *Sudor*.

Therefore, it is apparent that the shadow of political ideology has always followed Fuguet's work, since it is influenced by the legacies of the dictatorship and the implementation of neoliberalism. Following Fuguet's wider readership, one can argue that his novels' implied readers are closer to the more general, ordinary readers, and not as knowledgeable as Eltit's. Fuguet's literature being more popular, or immediately accessible or comprehensible, than Eltit's may not necessarily be the result of editorial marketing strategies; after all, both authors are published by mainstream publishing houses, namely Seix Barral and Random House. But the kinds of topics Fuguet's fiction deals with are arguably more superficial and may not

challenge the readers or may not make them feel as uncomfortable as Eltit's fiction does. Additionally, Fuguet's prose is less dense and hermetic than Eltit's. Although more general, Fuguet's implied readers might nonetheless tend to be familiar with or have some kind of connection to Santiago's upper-classes and their life styles, especially in the earlier stage of his career, when, for instance, access to technology and multimedia was not widely available in Chile yet. Nevertheless, Fuguet's wider audiences and success over almost thirty years of his career as a professional writer are further support for inquiring into the potential political effects of his writing. Fuguet's particular depictions of contemporary upper-class Chilean society deserve closer attention, especially in terms of a less explored aspect of his narrative fiction, namely, the portrayal of women's political equality in his narrative fiction.

C. Eltit and Fuguet's Literary Background

1. The *nueva narrativa chilena*

The literary context in which Eltit and Fuguet's production mostly develops is the *nueva narrativa chilena*. Although scholars say that it is difficult to define or characterize it, they agree that it is a literary movement that started in Chile around the second half of the 1980s and consolidated in the 1990s. This literary period has also been labelled as *narrativa chilena actual*, *generación del '80* and the *nuevos novísimos.*[17] According to many commentators, the term *nueva narrativa chilena* refers to the Chilean literature produced predominantly after the military dictatorship

[17] See, Bianchi, 1998; Caro Martín, 2007: 44; Olivares, 1997; Wacquez, 2001: 153-154; Waldman, 2000: 51-55.

(1973-1990), which has been strongly influenced by political, economic and publishing factors and events that took place in Chile towards the end of the twentieth century.[18] Whereas during the dictatorship Chilean authors could not easily publish and large numbers of them were living in exile, towards the end of this period many returned to Chile as the transition to democracy period brought expectations of renewed possibilities for Chilean literature (Waldman, 2000: 51-52).

Commentators agree that there is a wide spectrum of authors within the *nueva narrativa chilena*; they were mostly born around 1950-1964 and include a surprising variety of figures, such as Roberto Ampuero (1953-), Gonzalo Contreras (1958-) Marco Antonio de la Parra (1952-), Ramón Díaz Eterovic (1956-), Diamela Eltit (1949-), Arturo Fontaine (1952-), Carlos Franz (1959-), Alberto Fuguet (1964-), Sergio Gómez (1962-), Hernán Rivera Letelier (1950), Luis Sepúlveda (1949-) and Marcela Serrano (1951-), among others.[19] But this is not a movement of authors with uniform characteristics. One particular area of difference consists of the political connections of the authors and the political influences that their writings show. By way of an example, the often stated apolitical position of authors such as Alberto Fuguet cannot be attributed to, for instance, Diamela Eltit, or Arturo Fontaine, an author with personal links to the liberal-right, whose work such as *La vida doble* (2010) openly address militancy, counter insurgency, torture and repression during the dictatorship.

[18] See, Decante Araya, 2005: 183; Espinosa, 1997; Waldman, 2000: 51.
[19] See, Bianchi, 1998; Caro Martín, 2007: 42-45; Espinosa, 1997; Wacquez, 2001: 153-154; Waldman, 2000: 53-55.

Most critics do agree, however, that much of the commercial success of the *nueva narrativa chilena* is related to marketing and editorial strategies. They also note the fundamental role that literary workshops and newspapers' literary supplements played in its promotion. For instance, José Donoso's literary workshop started in 1981; it was one of the best-known and many authors later included as part of the *nueva narrativa chilena* attended it, such as Carlos Franz, Marco Antonio de la Parra, Arturo Fontaine and Alberto Fuguet. These workshops attracted the attention of international publishing houses like Planeta and Alfaguara, who offered publishing contracts to many of the new authors. With regard to marketing, newspapers' literary supplements, such as *Literatura y libros* in *La Época* from 1987, *Revista de libros* from 1989 and *Zona de contacto* from 1992 both in *El Mercurio* were important spaces to promote the works of the young writers.[20] Soledad Bianchi highlights the commercial purpose behind the term, *nueva narrativa chilena*. For her, this has to do with the emphasis on novelty in post-dictatorship literature, since books needed to perform within the market-driven rules imposed by the new free-market economic model (Bianchi, 1998: para. 3 of 11); it may also have had to do with promoting Chilean narrative at international level, as the international perception of Chilean literature is more linked to poetry.

In 1986, Ramón Díaz Eterovic and Diego Muñoz Valenzuela (1956-) published *Contando el cuento. Antología joven narrativa chilena* [*sic*], a collection of thirty four short stories by seventeen various young authors such as Pía Barros (1956-), Gregory Cohen (1953-), Ana María del Río (1948-), Ramón Díaz Eterovic and

[20] See, Caro Martín, 2007: 43-44; Decante Araya, 2005: 190, note 6; Espinosa, 1997: 66; Waldman, 2000: 55.

Carlos Franz (1959-), among others. In 1987, Editorial Planeta created the *Biblioteca del Sur* collection, which was the first by a non-Chilean publishing house fully dedicated to the promotion and commercialization of Chilean literature, especially novels. In 1991, and unusually, three Chilean novels, all published in 1991, were best sellers in Chile: *Mala onda* by Alberto Fuguet; *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto* by Marcela Serrano; and *La ciudad anterior* by Gonzalo Contreras. In 1992, Jaime Collyer (1955-) published the articles 'Casus belli: todo el poder para nosotros' and 'El guante sobre la mesa' in the magazine *Apsi*, which can be taken as something close to manifesto of the *nueva narrativa chilena*. There, the author pronounces the death of the preceding Latin American literary movements and argues for the search for a new form of Chilean narrative that moves away from literary tradition.[21]

Further context for the promotion of new Chilean literature can be identified in the public policy arena. The 1993 *Ley del Libro* favoured publishing activity in Chile; in it, the Chilean State recognized the book and literary creation as fundamental for the development of national identity and created the *Fondo Nacional de Fomento del Libro y la Lectura* to fund activities such as national and international book fairs; training in library studies and publishing; the development of integrated information systems for books, authors and copyrights; and improvements to public libraries, among others (Castellanos Valenzuela, 2003: 65-66). The same year, the Chilean Ministry of Education launched a media campaign entitled 'Los chilenos necesitan leerse', which not only encouraged people to buy books and read them but also linked literature to national dialogue and reconciliation, that is, as a space not necessarily marked by the political ideologies and divisions of the past (Decante

[21] See, Bianchi, 1998: para. 10 of 11; Caro Martín, 2007: 43; Collyer, 1992; Waldman, 2000: 54-55.

Araya, 2005: 182-183; 190, note 6). In part as a result of these marketing and government promotion strategies, addressing literature and reading as not necessarily a political activity, the *nueva narrativa chilena*, as Stéphanie Decante Araya notes, is framed by a permanent tension between its symbolic and its financial value and has often been negatively regarded by critics, who see it as merely commercial literature (Ibid.: 181-184).

2. Eltit and Fuguet's Significance in Chile's Contemporary Literary Context

In order to explore the idea that there is a certain relationship and dialogue between a given socio-cultural context, the legacy of the past and literature published or written after the year 2000 in Chile, this study analyses literary representations of society and the political status of women in the context of Chile's contemporary, urban, modern and neoliberal transition and post-transition society. It does so by studying some of the most current narrative fiction by two prominent Chilean authors. It seeks to read the work of a female and a male perspective, who, according to commentators, represent a leftist politically-committed female standpoint and a neoliberal, apparently apolitical, male one, both with well-established international recognition in two fronts: academic and commercial, and who still bear the legacies of the past.

Certainly, Eltit and Fuguet are not the only authors from the literary context in which their work emerges and develops who deal with depictions of Chile's neoliberal society and women. In terms of female perspectives, two of the most recognized

authors who deal with representations of women and who are even better-known for the general public than Eltit are Isabel Allende (1942-) and Marcela Serrano (1951-). Although Allende is slightly older that Eltit and might be considered to belong to another generation, Eltit and Allende have indirectly shared the same literary sphere for decades, both publishing their first novels between 1982 (*La casa de los espíritus*) and 1983 (*Lumpérica*). In 2010, there was huge expectation, since Allende and Eltit were the most prominent candidates to win Chile's National Prize for Literature, awarded by the state to mostly male authors (Memoria Chilena, 'Premio...). Allende won the prize, but for many critics and fellow female writers, Eltit's writing had more literary merit to win, whereas Allende had the commercial success that influenced the decision (Faverón, 2010; The Clinic 'Encuesta...').

However, although Allende and Serrano depict a certain social context linked to the dictatorship and its legacies, place women at the centre of their fiction, portraying women as protagonists, main characters and narrators, and address topics related to women, such as motherhood, marriage and sisterhood, unlike Eltit, their fiction tends to be more conservative in posing traditional female stereotypes. Allende's writing represents the prototypical image of serviceable vulnerable women, mothers, grandmothers, daughters and domestic servants. Such image is based on a female identity marked by their, supposedly, essential solidarity and capacity to sow positive feelings and emotional healing in others, which is evident in novels like *La casa de los espíritus* (1982), *Paula* (1994), *Hija de la fortuna* (1998), and short-stories like 'Lo más olvidado del olvido' from the *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (1989) collection,

among many others.[22] Serrano is also widely read in Chile and abroad. She is largely associated with topics related to women's lives, has openly declared an interest in feminist themes and enjoyed a close relationship with Diamela Eltit in the 1980s when they were both part of CADA. But Serrano's representations of women in novels such as *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto* (1991) and *El albergue de las mujeres tristes* (1998) is also marked by what may be called 'feminine' instead of 'feminist' concerns; that is, topics traditionally thought as pertaining to the realm of women, such as love, sentimentalism, a presupposed essentially-female sensitivity, and a view of women as source of succour, protection and spiritual healing.[23] This is an important difference in terms of women's writing, since, as Toril Moi puts it, '[...] patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to makes us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*' (Moi, 2002: 64, emphasis in the original). Also, unlike Eltit, whose characters are from the *lumpen*, Serrano tends to focus on a female perspective that emerges from the Chilean upper-classes.

Eltit avoids referring to the work of Chilean bestselling female authors like Allende and Serrano, but is emphatic in stating that her writing project is different from theirs (Green, 2007: 12). One may say that Allende and Serrano's literature represent a kind of sisterhood that does not challenge traditional views of women imposed by male literary cannons, as Eltit's fiction does. Eltit argues that the literary sphere has politically echoed neoliberal commercial patterns; it has assigned women classifications designed by masculine views and provided them with specific market-

[22] Nelson, 2002: chapter six; Norat, 2002: 135; Palaversich, 2005: chapters 4 and 6; Riquelme, 1999; and Swanson, 1995: 145.
[23] See, Cánovas, 1997a; Gálvez-Carlisle, 1999; Hines, 2002: 69; and Schuck, 2008: 5-8.

driven dramatic themes, such as sentimentalism (Eltit, 2008b: 390-391). This has resulted in a view of women's literature as a subsidiary category, established by the market with commercial purposes and thus 'lo que se entiende por literatura de acuerdo a la operación que hace el mercado continúa el poder de los hombres...'(Eltit, 2003: para. 30 of 38). Unlike this more stereotypical women's writing, Eltit's novels foreground aspects of women which move away from the traditional maternal or pseudo-maternal female identity, and the essentialist desire to provide emotional succour and protection to others. As the analysis will explore, she represents women, sisters, daughters and mothers in more complex, less sentimental and cruder ways, suggesting that gender roles are not essential but socially constructed (Green, 2007: 8).

Also unlike Allende and Serrano, Eltit remained in Chile during the dictatorship. This separation between those who stayed in Chile, defying the dictatorship from within, and those who went to exile created a distance between writers that, as Eltit acknowledges, is perceptible even nowadays. She recognizes that it is a 'difficult [relationship] and definitely marked by mutual incomprehension' (Eltit, 2005: 166). Her staying in Chile meant that her work had to overcome the censorship of the dictatorship and find the necessary creative mechanisms to do so. This may be one of the reasons why Eltit's linguistic register presents the density discussed above, which provides fruitful challenges to critics with respect to analysing social portraits through narrative form. Some commentators, like Palaversich, actually see a dichotomy between literary experimentation and political denunciation. But the analysis of Eltit's novels below will demonstrate that such a dichotomy is not insurmountable.

In the case of Fuguet, it is hard to find in the contemporary Chilean sphere a more fruitful male writer to attempt a political reading of an, apparently, apolitical author. No other male figure conveys Chile's neoliberal context as he does, that is with enormous commercial success in the literary sphere of a market-driven society; superficial topics linked to the Chilean upper-classes; an easily-read prose; a dialogue between literature, U.S. pop culture and the mass media; a profuse and somewhat irreverent depiction of the sociolect of Santiago's upper-class young population; and importantly, through fiction that seems to avoid any complex socio-political questioning. Other fellow male writers from his period have also portrayed Chile's post-dictatorship society with fair success, but have not gained the level of national and international attention that Fuguet's long-standing and stable career over the past three decades as a professional writer has received. Male writers from the same literary context who also touch on questions about transition or post-transition Chilean society, the influence of pop culture and the younger population still, in one way or another, address some political and historical concerns using themes and perspectives which are somehow more challenging to the readers than Fuguet's. They still provide us with less superficial –what one might regard as more evidently 'political'–, views of the past, memory and the Chilean history that surrounds the dictatorship, many times with more overt criticism. Examples might include Contreras's *La ciudad anterior*; Fontain's *La vida doble* and *Cuando éramos inmortales* (1998); *Boleros en la Habana* (1994), *Nuestros años verde olivo* (1999) and *El caso Neruda* (2008) by Ampuero (who was once a member of the Communist Party, went to live in exile during the dictatorship and currently serves as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Piñera's right-wing government); Díaz Eterovic's *El*

hombre que pregunta (2002); and Mauricio Electorat's *La burla del tiempo* (2004), among others.[24]

Representations of multimedia technology as well as legal and illegal drugs found in some of the novels analyzed in this study indirectly connect the views of contemporary Chilean society provided by the work of Eltit and Fuguet. Other authors from Chile's contemporary literary sphere have also touched on similar issues to underline mostly enjoyment, experimentation and transgression. Serrano's *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto* is just one example of a novel that incorporates the use of legal and illegal drugs to underscore upper-class women's ways of experimentation and social transgression; for instance, the taste for whiskey, sleeping pills, marihuana and cocaine of the character María can be read as related to sexual enjoyment and transgressing socially-accepted standards for women (chapter 27). In terms of representations of multimedia technology, an example might be the novel *Synco* (2008) by the Chilean writer Jorge Baradit (1969-). Although slightly younger that Fuguet but still in the context of post-transition to democracy literature, Baradit has widely touched on issues related to technology, including futuristic elements. In *Synco*, Baradit uses them to create an alternate history in which technological advancements are a central part of the success of Allende's imagined government. This use of technology is evidently linked to more communal and historical perspectives than Fuguet's representations, which tend to be focused on individualism. Also, Baradit's novel has arguably a less hopeless aura and a more easily read prose than Eltit's literature (Hernández Tello, 2016; Silva Barandica,

[24] See, Carreño, 2005; Corral et.al, 2013: chapter six; De Toro, 2011; Gallagher, 1994; Lillo Cabezas, 2007.

2008). In the case of Eltit and Fuguet, the combined representations of legal and illegal drugs and multimedia technology in some of the novels under scrutiny are valuable insights into how these phenomena are extended across social classes and point to complex contemporary forms of social discipline and oppression in Chile's post-transition to democracy social imaginary.

Importantly, even though in the beginnings of their careers Eltit and Fuguet were regarded as 'groundbreaking' literary figures, in the light of the new millennium, one could argue that they are 'semi-canonical' Chilean authors. They currently enjoy a privileged status in the Chilean literary sphere; they are well-recognized at international level; they are both published by mainstream publishing houses; their works have been translated into English and Greek in the case of Eltit and into several languages in the case of Fuguet; they are studied in academic programmes in Chile and abroad, perhaps slightly more Eltit than Fuguet, although a movement such as McOndo is referenced in almost any programme and book on contemporary Latin American literature; and they have both been invited to speak at national and international universities.

The works of Eltit and Fuguet have been widely reviewed by national and international press.[25] But press reviews tend to be more positive with Eltit than with Fuguet. For example, Patricia Espinosa, who is also a literary scholar, wrote in the widely disseminated newspaper *Las Últimas Noticias* that *Aeropuertos* is 'una obra

[25] A general search of reviews of Eltit and Fuguet's novels conducted on Google.com on 4 March 2018 shows around 15,000 entries for Eltit and 19,000 for Fuguet, whereas a search on Google Scholar shows approximately 4,000 results for Eltit and 2,000 for Fuguet. This represents an approximation to the treatment of Eltit and Fuguet's work by the more general audience and the academic ones (not all of these entries may actually refer to press review or academic criticism).

apurada, técnicamente frágil e ingenua en su retórica, que supura tonalidades pastorales y vocalizaciones de autoayuda al borde de la vergüenza ajena' (Espinosa, 2010). However, about *Missing, una investigación,* Javier Moreno stated that the novel has 'recursos novedosos[...] una voluntad narrativa inquebrantable [and] un final hermoso' (Moreno, 2011). About Eltit, Espinosa has declared that she is 'una de las más grandes narradoras de la historia chilena y latinoamericana' (Espinosa, 2013: 227). Other comment about Eltit's novels in the press include, about *Puño y letra*, 'elabora discursos de una lucidez difícil de encontrar en nuestra narrativa contemporánea. En ellas maneja una coherente estética estructuralista' (Edwards, 2005) and on *Fuerzas especiales*, 'es una de las mejores novelas escritas en castellano [...] por su excelencia narrativa y por la perspectiva desde la que está narrada' (Ayala-Dip, 2015). Nevertheless, it is Fuguet's work, and seldom Eltit's, which is frequently mentioned as 'must-read' Chilean books by critics at national and international level.[26]

Eltit and Fuguet can also be regarded as trend-setters who have influenced Chile's current and emerging post-transition to democracy literature. Alejandro Zambra (1975-) calls this emerging literature 'literatura de hijos'[27] (cited in De Querol, 2015: para. 5 of 34; also, Franken Osorio, 2017: 188-191) and Lina Meruane (1970-) 'literatura de la posmemoria' (Ibid.: para. 7 of 34; Ibid.). These labels refer to a generation of writers mainly born and/or educated between the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy. They are authors who still deal with the legacies of the dictatorship seemingly not from direct experience, unlike previous

[26] See for example, Fundación La Fuente, 'Libros para regalar...'; Perú21, 'Chile: 10 escritores...'; T13, 'Críticos eligen...'; and Universia Chile, '10 libros...'.
[27] He also uses this expression as a chapter title of his novel *Formas de volver a casa* (2011).

generations, but ‘second hand’ (De Querol, 2015: para. 7 of 34). Nonetheless, as the impact of the dictatorship in Chile has been overwhelming in all spheres of life, the literature of these emerging authors highlights various issues related to that legacy. Some examples might include the novels *Formas de volver a casa* (2011) by Zambra; *Cercadas* (2000) by Meruane; *No aceptes caramelos de extraños* (2011) by Andrea Jeftanovic (1970-); *Ruido* (2012) by Álvaro Bisama (1975-); and *Mapocho* (2002) and *Space Invaders* (2013) by Nona Fernández (1971-). And from the most emerging authors born in the 1980s, examples may include Richard Sandoval (1987-) and his chronicles *Tanto duele Chile* (2017); Diego Zúñiga (1987) and his novels *Camanchaca* (2012) and *Racimo* (2014); and Paulina Flores (1988) with her collection of short-stories *Qué vergüenza* (2016). Although it is still early to draw conclusions about these most recent writings, one may say that they depict a generation highly influenced by the social, political and cultural consequences of the neoliberal model imposed by the dictatorship, which, importantly, remained mostly unquestioned by the transition to democracy. As in Eltit’s narrative, one may observe from many of these emerging authors a willingness to reclaim and place the *población* and the lives of the working class at the centre of fiction, addressing (often from a self-declared feminist approach) a critical perspective on the aforementioned legacy and its consequences in terms of, for example, education, unemployment, pensions and health system, among others. It is also worth noticing that some authors like Meruane and Jeftanovic enjoy a rather close relationship with her by attending her literary workshops, and seem to have inherited some aesthetic and thematic legacies from Eltit, for example, memories about a dictatorial past, complex family relationships and sexual taboos like incest (Zheng, 2017: 355-358).

Nevertheless, it is also interesting to note that as much as in Fuguet's fiction, this emerging narrative also provides us with views from younger perspectives, the *hijos*, with references to national and foreign pop culture, and a language that has been called by some critics 'minimalistic' (De Querol, 2015). They show, in broader terms, a tendency towards shorter stories related using a colloquial and less fragmented or less hermetic language; a linguistic register that portrays the Chilean Spanish sociolects but is also accessible for different kinds of readers. They are stories that depict characters in ordinary situations and settings, who nonetheless delve into complex issues related to memory, sometimes with autobiographical touches, through a more realist perspective, which may also be based on real events.[28] One may thus understand that this most current Chilean post-transition to democracy literature has been influenced, in one way or another, by a combination of the most prominent aspects of Eltit and Fuguet's writing projects. What was in the late 1980s and 1990s considered novelty has opened paths for the development of new figures in Chilean literature, whose fiction combines challenging texts yet opened to various types of readers, including many times a focus on and an aim to reach lower-class, more ordinary and less erudite readers.[29]

Therefore, Eltit and Fuguet's narratives are significant semi-canonical examples of the relationship between literature and politics in the contemporary Chilean context, and provide in conjunction productive representations of the social imaginary of Chile's post-transition to democracy society. They are significant sources for a

[28] For further approaches to this emerging literature, see Corominas, 2011; De Querol, 2015; Espinosa, 2016; Fajardo, 2017; Franken, Osorio, 2017; Lazo Jerez, 2012; Maldonado, 2016; Opazo, 2004; Pardo, 2016; Rojo, 2015; Senabre, 2011; Solano, 2015, and Zheng, 2017.

[29] Authors like Paulina Flores and Richard Sandoval, though educated at Universidad de Chile, have openly claimed their *poblacional* and working class origins, asserting that this is the socio-cultural setting that they wish to explore and address in their works (Ramírez Figueroa, 2017; Pardo, 2016).

comparative analysis of the way in which literature may portray a certain social context in general and the political status of women in particular, as well as the way in which narrative fiction helps create cultural values and beliefs for men and women, which feed a certain social imaginary. In the case of Eltit, it is interesting to take a close look at the potential for resistance against class and gender oppression; resistance being understood not as the mere commitment to a particular political ideology and reaction against the opposite one, but as creative strategies of counter-hegemony that question the current cultural and social hegemony of neoliberalism (Bollig and Casas, 2011: 1-3; Casas, 2012: 54-66). With regard to Fuguet, his public figure and the commercial success of his narrative foreground the idea of mass conventions defined by Franco Moretti as 'essential to the analysis of culture as it indicates when a form has taken definite social root, entering into daily life, innervating and organizing it in ways increasingly undetected and regular –and hence more effective' (Moretti, 1988: 12). In other words, from Fuguet's attempt to give a realist view of contemporary Chilean urban upper-class society and as an author who gets widely disseminated, it is important to read the political implications of his literature, exploring the relationship of his work to the Chilean socio-historical background and the representation of women from a male perspective.

D. An Approach to Reading Eltit and Fuguet's Post-Transition to Democracy Literature

1. Literature, Commitment and the Social Imaginary

Various critics have argued that commitment does not necessarily come from the author's subjectivity or intention, but from his or her attention to the object, his or

her study of society, and the way the s/he presents it.[30] Therefore, the literary choices that an author makes to represent the fictional social contexts of his/her narrative will bear a specific view of the world. Eagleton refers to this as 'objective partisanship', or the idea that the author does not need to impose openly his or her political views on the text, since:

> if he reveals the real and potential forces *objectively* at work in a situation, he is already in that sense partisan. Partisanship, that is to say, is inherent in reality itself; it emerges in a method of treating social reality rather than in a subjective attitude towards it (Eagleton, 2002: 44, emphasis in the original).

From this point of view, one can understand that, whether overt or not, the political commitment of literature remains fundamental and that there are different ways for an author to be political. These can be analyzed by paying close attention to an author's literary choices employed to represent a certain social context. In the case of narrative fiction, it is thus relevant to pay close attention to the narrative technique, for writers may deploy strategies to either disseminate, perpetuate or resist given cultural models, creating new ones and connecting to readers through emotions and aesthetics. Moretti highlights the fact that literary discourse evaluates and persuades through emotions and feelings traditionally thought to belong to the private sphere, but which are actually determined by socio-historical contexts or the public realm (Moretti, 1988: 1). Their aims are not to ascertain an intersubjective truth, but to support a particular system of values. He states that the future of a text –that is, the conventions and world view that it will form or consolidate– is both part of its history and its contribution to history. The text is both influenced by socio-historical factors and it influences them via value-judgements or validations of a determined

[30] See, for example, Booth, 1961: chapter I, II, III and VIII; Eagleton, 2002: chapter 2 and 3; and Moretti, 1988: chapters 1 and 5.

value system in a specific socio-historical space (Ibid.: 1-7). One can thus argue that the cultural, social and historical attachments and legacies of a text unveil its multiple voices. These voices speak about the text's overall political project, which is framed by the socio-historical context in which it is inserted and that which it helps create; that is, these attachments unveil a text's political legacies and commitments as well as its contributions.

According to Italo Calvino, literature is necessary to politics when giving a voice to those silenced or when naming what has no name, especially when the language of politics refuses to do so. Literature is not just the voice of a truth already possessed by politics. If so, this would imply a notion of literature as ornamental and of politics as self-sufficient, or, by itself an authority regarding correct values and truths, an assumption that for Calvino would be catastrophic (Calvino, 1986: 95-97), since politics has to do with the negotiation of interests and the perpetuation of existing power relations. The writer can explore areas and make discoveries, which may sooner or later become areas of collective awareness, a task that nonetheless needs to be combined with the responsibility of the socio-political observer. In other words, the book involves the work of the author as well as the anonymous collective work, and it is the political reading connected to the socio-political context which makes of a text a source for social struggle. The writer has the ability to create models of value essential to any political plan of action, which is both an aesthetic and an ethical task (Ibid.: 99-100). Nevertheless, Calvino places the effectiveness of words in specific contexts of conflict, stating that only when literature is persecuted, does it show its real power by challenging authority (Ibid: 95-97). It is thus important to note that such political effectiveness of literature is not necessarily ascribed to only

situations of conflict or when literature is persecuted, but to any given situation and context of life due to the dynamic relationship between literature and a given social imaginary, as will be analyzed throughout this study.

In this thesis, the social imaginary is understood from a sociological perspective as 'The creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life' (Thompson, 1984: 6). This approach to the social imaginary has much in common with the idea of 'culture' understood by Sonia Montecino as 'esa trama de valores, símbolos, conductas e instituciones, tejida y retejida en el tiempo [...] ese modo de habitar el mundo, el *ethos*, en donde confluyen contenidos y prácticas que entregan un sentido a la vida humana' (Montecino, 2012: 33, emphasis in the original). The social imaginary cannot be separated from the question of 'ideology'. This thesis focuses the scope of this term following the approach of Eagleton. He summarizes the various meanings linked to 'ideology' as: i) ideas, beliefs and values that are present in social life; ii) ideas and beliefs (whether true or false in the direct interest of the ruling class), which symbolize the conditions and life experiences of a specific, socially-significant group or class; iii) ideology can be linked to the promotion and legitimation of sectoral interests; iv) it can be linked to dominant social power not to, necessarily, impose ideas, but to secure the complicity of subordinated classes and groups; v) it may refer to beliefs and ideas that help legitimate the ruling groups or class by distortion or dissimulation; and vi) it may refer to beliefs that arise from the material structure of society as a whole (Eagleton, 1991: 28-30).

Importantly, with regard to an ideology, Eagleton foregrounds the relationship between worldviews, discourses and political power (Ibid.: 23-27). He stresses that the significance of an ideology has to do with the effects that its discourses may produce and the connection of these effects to political power. In this sense, an ideology involves signs, meanings and values that often help reproduce existing relations of power (Ibid.: 194-198). This view of the importance of an ideology is particularly relevant to the study of literature and its relationship with the 'socio-political', as ideology may significantly inform the social imaginary projected by literary portraits. Nevertheless, not only because of this *projection* is this relationship worth studying, but because, in an interconnected relationship, as fiction, literature also contributes significantly to the *creation* of the social imaginary and to the dissemination of the cultural beliefs, values and power relations that form it. Narrative fiction does not project a given social context in a mimetic way. In a dynamic, mutually reinforcing, relationship between literature and the social imaginary, precisely because of its fictional nature, narrative fiction *(re-)creates* the way in which human beings represent and imagine their collective life. That is, it imagines and creates again worlds that might be inspired by real-life settings, which permits connection with readers through emotions and familiar references, but which are however (re-)created or re-formulated from a chosen standpoint; these fictional worlds are projected to the society as re-arranged from a particular perspective.

2. Women's Political Status: *Ser política*

Feminist political philosophy has widely explored the issue of the biological determinism that influences the socially and historically-determined sexual division

of roles, which has historically prevented women from participating in the public sphere. The ‘nature’ of women has traditionally pushed them to the private realm, since family matters are supposedly incompatible with public responsibilities (Phillips, 1991: 29). According to this view, women lack the necessary conditions to engage in public life, since they are apparently not able to transcend their nature so linked to their bodies and sexual passions, and lack the political morality that men have when being able to use their reason and sublimate their passions (Pateman, 1989: 3-6).

However, Carole Pateman points out that ‘the public’ cannot be comprehended in isolation and needs to be understood in its relationship to ‘the private’. She states that ‘the individual’, so prominent in liberal political theory (a model on which most contemporary democracies are based) is sexually indifferent only if it is disembodied. She notes that only men are born free and equal, and that they constructed sexual difference as a political difference; this is a difference based on men’s alleged natural freedom and women’s natural subjection (Pateman, 1989: 3-5). Liberal theory accepts that some rights are inviolable for they exist in a private sphere; those are marriage, family, household and childcare, where the state cannot interfere. Thus, identifying politics with the ‘the public’ denies the pertinence of gender and defines politics and democracy as male-centred (Phillips, 1991: 6). Liberal individualism promised equality between women and men as naturally free individuals, but at the same time, due to the ‘natural’ subordination of wives to husbands, women have not enjoyed the opportunity to develop capacities in the public space, which has been traditionally denied to them (Pateman, 1989: 217). For Pateman, ‘the public’ and ‘the private’ are a single side of liberal patriarchalism

(Ibid.: 121-122). Gerda Lerner defines patriarchy as 'The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general' (Lerner, 1986: 239). But this does not mean that all women are subordinated to every man or that they are subjugated in the same way, since factors such as class, age and ethnicity are relevant to the particular ways in which patriarchy functions in context (Moi, 1999: 32-36).

In Latin America, important changes for women have taken place in the last decades, such as the decline in fertility, rising levels of education and employment, a weakening in patriarchal household arrangements, upward trends in divorce, increase in the number of female-headed households and, to some extent, a crisis in masculine identity (Chant, 2003: 2-4). Despite this changing situation, the exclusion of women from politics and the public arena, and the view of women's identity as linked to motherhood are still significant (Craske, 1999: 10; Chant, 2003: 9-10). Consequently, a central concern for theorists of the political status of Latin American women is the expansion of what it is understood by the term 'political'. For Cubitt and Greensdale, the strict division between 'the public' and 'the private' produces an essentialized account of women's participation and stresses the simplistic view of 'public man/private woman'. In a similar vein as that of Pateman, they argue for an approach that sees the private sphere as public (Cubitt and Greensdale, 1997: 53-55). This view is especially significant for a region where motherhood is central to women's identity and thus inclusionary notions of the 'political' are needed. These notions must take into account participation in political institutions and practices as well as issues linked to gender, class and ethnicity. The 'political' is fundamentally

connected to 'private' issues, such as motherhood, rape, sexual rights and domestic violence, among others, and to the relationship of these issues to citizenship (Craske, 1999: 1-6; Waylen, 2007: 4-5). Sonia Alvarez argues, for example, that gender-based violence and the criminalization of abortion have to be struggled against because they run counter to women's citizenship, not because 'our body belongs to us' (Alvarez 1998: 300).

In Latin America, the emphasis on motherhood as central to women's identity has resulted in women also focusing on social or domestic issues when they become involved in politics, and parties and regimes of all political tendencies have adhered to the idealization of motherhood as the 'destiny' of women (Craske, 1999: 5-6). This has opened some spaces of political involvement for women, especially in cases of armed and social conflict, when women have been able to make political demands on behalf of others, of human rights and community welfare, but it also means an exclusionary identity for women (Franceschet, 2001: 208-209; Craske, 1999: 13-18). Women's political participation in Latin America and especially in the Southern Cone has been traditionally framed by the politics of motherhood. The politics of motherhood is closely related to the 'militant mothers',[31] which is the idea that women's resistance to military authoritarianism was justified by their traditional responsibilities as mothers (Pieper Mooney, 2009: 104; Chant, 2003: 11-13). Examples of women's movements based on the politics of motherhood in Chile during the second half of the twentieth century include: the *cacerolazos* or 'pots and pans' demonstrations by women who protested against Allende's government and

[31] The first approach to the militant mother was made by Sonia Alvarez in the Brazilian case. See, Alvarez, 1990, chapter three.

questioned the masculinity of the members of the armed forces, mocking them and demanding that they seize power; human rights groups led by women protesting during and after the dictatorship over the disappearance of their relatives; and organizations of poor urban women who worked together to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as the *ollas comunes*, *comprando juntos* and the *cooperativas de ahorro para la vivienda*, among others (Montecino, 2012: 96-108; Carrasco, 2008: 145-148). These women's movements have in common a political motivation based on their role as mothers and political strategies viewed as an extension of the roles that women have traditionally occupied in the family and as providers of welfare to the community.

Julieta Kirkwood, a pioneer of gender studies in the Chilean academia, is a key reference on the question of women's political status in Chile. In her seminal work *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos* (1986), she points out that in Chile, women's political involvements has been widely ignored by mainstream male-centred history. Even in periods of higher levels of social and political participation, women's claims were invisibilized and thought to be solved by the resolution of the class conflict (Kirkwood, 1986: 28-36). In this book, Kirkwood gives a detailed account of the trajectory of women's political participation in Chile, which dates back to 1875, when a group of women in San Felipe attempted to register to vote, arguing that the Chileans' constitutional right to vote also implied women (Ibid.: 89). She also notes that education has been traditionally a core political goal of Chilean feminists: 'La primera experiencia política real de las mujeres la constituye la educación, en tanto salida del enclaustramiento y enfrentamiento a sus opositores'

(Ibid.: 86). But the central concern of *Ser política en Chile*, is not only the visibilization of women's political participation but, in Kirkwood's own words:

> No se trataría tan solo de preguntarse cómo se incorporan –o no se incorporan– las mujeres a la política [...] La cuestión es, fundamentalmente, apuntar a cuál es la dimensión política que le corresponde a la naturaleza de la exacción, o apropiación, o alienación de la cual la mujer, como tal, ha sido objeto en la sociedad [...] habría de detectarse si ella se expresa o no; qué es lo que impide su expresión; cómo se concretiza en fuerza... (Ibid.: 171).

That is the question of *ser política* in Chile. In simple words, it does not mean only the right of women to occupy positions of political power, but rather the *political* status of women. It means a view that puts an end to women's marginalization from 'the public', social and political spheres, and promotes the positioning of women as political subjects and full holders of civil rights –in broader terms, in all spheres of life. The above debates around the relationship between women and 'the political' (centred on the close relationship between the public and the private) are connected to the previously discussed approach to ideologies (centred on the link between discourses, effects and power relations). This connection is the basis of this thesis' understanding of the study of women's political status through literature. Women's political status needs to be addressed and questioned at the level of specific cultural beliefs and social norms that feed the imposition of gender roles and the representations of gender difference, which are disseminated by a society's forms of cultural expression, in which the social imaginary resonates, but may also be perpetuated, subverted and/or (re-)created.

3. Chile's Post-Transition to Democracy Literature

This thesis' approach to the analysis of the chosen novels as post-transition to democracy literature combines consideration of socio-historical attachments with the close reading of narrative fiction.

There is no agreement among political scientists over whether the Chilean transition to democracy has ended or not (Huneeus, 1994). However, from a literary and cultural perspective, based on the ideas of Willy Thayer and Idelber Avelar, who view the Chilean transition as the transition from the state to the market, that is, to Chile's current neoliberal democratic system (Avelar, 2000 and Thayer, 1996), one can understand the post-transition as symbolically starting in the year 2000. This year not only witnessed the start of a new century and millennium, thus leaving behind the turmoil of Chilean twentieth-century history, but it is also marked by the election of the first socialist president after the dictatorship, Ricardo Lagos, who governed between 2000 and 2006.[32] Lagos' government, although representing the new Chilean leftist politics, is widely-regarded as having benefitted the private sector and consolidated the legacy of the dictatorship. In his government, various free trade agreements were signed; the privatization of natural resources and public services did not stop; there was significant repression of the student and Mapuche movements; Pinochet's anti-terrorist law was re-enacted to be applied in cases related to the Mapuche conflict; modifications were made to Pinochet's Constitution of 1980, which validated in democracy a constitution created in dictatorship; and although in

[32] Although by the time he was elected president, Lagos was a member of the social-democratic *Partido por la Democracia* (PPD), he belonged to the Chilean socialist party from 1961 to 1987 and was a prominent socialist figure during the dictatorship; therefore, he is commonly identified as a socialist.

2004, the *Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura*, the Valech Report, was published, Lagos committed to maintaining secret for fifty years the testimonies and the identities of those who committed human right abuses during the dictatorship, a move which prevents the use of the records for trials.

As revealed earlier, critics have tended to read Eltit and Fuguet through either postcolonial or postmodernist frames. In the case of Eltit, she has been considered both a postcolonial and postmodern writer. These approaches foreground her use of dense and fragmented language, which presumably resists translation; the fusion of Spanish with indigenous languages in some earlier novels; the use of the contemporary Chilean Spanish lower-class sociolect; her placing of women and the *lumpen* as central to fiction and as a way of challenging the universalizing that silences the subaltern, and as resistance to western neoliberal economic patterns and the traditional Chilean literary canons. In the case of Fuguet, he has been mostly read as a postmodern writer, especially due to the influence of Chile's neoliberal cultural model in his writing, which shows a focus on globalization, technology, mass media, and U.S. pop culture. Also because his narrative depicts Chile's upper-class, consumerist and individualist society derived from Chile's free-market economy, and shows an apparent detachment from a national territory and distance from political ideologies (especially leftist ones). However, although these views have contributed to reading some general characteristics of these authors' writing, they are also limited in taking into account, from a politico-cultural perspective, the legacies of the socio-historical Chilean context discussed in this Introduction, which strongly influences the work of both authors. Postcolonial and postmodernist approaches tend to remain focused on Eltit and Fuguet's earlier works from the 1980s and 1990s, without

significant questioning of the development of their writing projects in the light of the politico-cultural scenario of the new millennium.

Those approaches also tend to stress the differences between these two authors and critics have classified Eltit and Fuguet as standing on two traditionally opposite political sides (Forttes-Zalaquett, 2010: 22). However, in terms of the political role of literature, which is what concerns this thesis, Fuguet has stated that, 'Se puede optar por querer ser candidato o se puede creer que el rol político de uno es crear un mundo o, bien, intentar reflejarlo' (Fuguet in Forttes-Zalaquett, 2008: 103). These words remind us of the idea that what is political is the act of writing (and reading) –which is Eltit's view of the political potential of writing– and of Eagleton's idea of 'objective partisanship', that is, a commitment that emerges from the way in which the author treats social reality rather than form his or her overt political views (Eagleton, 2002: 44). Furthermore, Carreño states that traditional dichotomies are no longer useful, since globalization has intervened in the contemporary Chilean novel and 'la subjetividad ya no se define por la pertenencia a un género, una etnia, familia, gremio o nación, sino por una trashumancia que muestra el éxodo siempre pobretón, mezcla de exilio político y laboral' (Carreño: 2006: 142). Therefore, one may argue that Fuguet's emphasis on globalization and on the influence of U.S. popular culture is an aesthetic attitude rather than a quasi-declaration of political affiliation. This aesthetic attitude of a *fronterizo*, placed in an in-between stage, is portrayed by a writing marked by the influence of urban popular culture, technology, the mass media and globalization as well as on his use of different literary genres and his references to various cultural expressions, as will be analyzed later.

Thus, bearing in mind the Chilean politico-cultural context exposed earlier, approaching Diamela Eltit's literature from a postcolonial approach, which in Latin America entails a core focus on the relationship between colonial or neocolonial forces, race and ethnicity (Rabasa, 2009: 219-223) is problematic, especially in terms of her most recent work. For example, as the analysis will later explore, Eltit's comments and criticism of gender and class oppression cannot be so obviously linked to racial factors and economic ones connected to ethnicity and colonial legacies. As will be explored, as a result of Chile's neoliberalism, contemporary forms of oppression in the novels analyzed are not linked to a particular ethnic group or land, but to urban settings and dynamics involved in the interrelations between class and gender in contemporary cities. Therefore, Chile's more local contemporary politico-cultural processes cannot be overlooked by the analysis.

From an anthropological perspective, Montecino argues that in the Chilean cultural and historical context, unknown origin is a main feature of *mestizos* (Montecino, 2012: 128). This means that for a significant part of the Chilean population tracing back their indigenous origins is not a concrete possibility. Although this is an issue which has not yet been much studied, recent approaches reveal that the *enmascaramientos identitarios* (Ancán and Calfío, 2002: 6) may be considered to have had great influence in Chile's contemporary cultural context. In the extended processes of migration from rural to urban areas that took place during the twentieth century in Chile, in order to avoid discrimination, most Mapuche descendents (and arguably descendents from other indigenous peoples too) have gone through a definite process of assimilation. Such assimilation has meant the masking of indigenous identity evident not only in, for example, the loss of indigenous

languages and cultural traditions, but also in the definite loss of surnames (Ibid.). In a similar vein, studies show that the influence of indigenous languages in Chilean Spanish has been rather minimal with impact mainly on vocabulary and intonation. Due to processes of migration and Chile's centralization of political and economic power, currently there is not significant regional linguistic differences in Chile, but rather socio-cultural differences in terms of sociolects (Rojas, 2015: 78-80 and chapter 3). This is not to say that Chilean culture and the Chilean population are less indigenous than other Latin Americans or that there may not be a racialized dimension to oppression in contemporary Chilean society; it rather means to acknowledge why a focus on the ethnic factors involved in new forms of oppression in a society that for centuries has *blanqueado* or erased its indigenous roots to the point of the inability of proving ascendance, especially and to a great extent in metropolitan areas as those portrayed by Eltit and Fuguet, cannot be the approach for the analysis of the post-transition literature discussed in this thesis, as it is not a key aspect of the novels under scrutiny. And as already noted, another concept related to postcolonial studies is that of the subaltern (Rodríguez, 2009), but, as discussed earlier, the idea of Eltit's writing allowing the subaltern to speak poses significant politico-cultural question. One is the extent to which she allows the subaltern to speak through her fiction as much as to *read* it, that is, to participate in the co-creation of meanings and interpretations.

In terms of Fuguet's most recent narrative fiction, postmodernist approaches also remain problematic. They, for instance, do not account for the political position of post-transition to democracy authors and do not provide paths to observe and analyze the ideology behind an apparently apolitical writing. Therefore, they could not reveal

the various potential ways for an author of being political and, unlike the approach proposed by this thesis, a postmodernist frame could not unveil the political value that the analysis of more recent readings of the past may have. All of the aforementioned are highly relevant factors in the study of contemporary and emerging Chilean literature. Accordingly, the study of authors like Eltit and Fuguet, whose backgrounds and contexts are strongly influenced by Chilean neoliberalism, demands a contextualized approach that takes into account the politico-historical context upon which they build their narrative fiction in order to conduct a political reading of their work. In doing so, this thesis reads a number of their novels published after the year 2000 as representative of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, that is, a literature that shares a politico-historical legacy inherited from the Chilean dictatorship, and highlights and (re-)creates a social imaginary permeated by the contemporary neoliberal politico-cultural project imposed by the military and to a great extent endorsed by the transition to democracy.

This thesis' approach also pays close attention to the narrative form, that is, to 'the strategies used in the making of narrative fiction and the traits, shapes, and conventions that a careful reader can observe in narratives such as novels and stories' (Keen, 2015: x). Following Keen, a close reading of the narrative form can productively be combined with a theoretically-informed textual analysis, bringing together form and content, structure and context, and history and theory in order to show how forms are used in historically specific contexts, with emphasis on the ideological implications of their use (Ibid.: xii; 50-52). Thus, as this study will demonstrate, the acknowledgment of the socio-historical connections in the reading

of narrative fiction can be fruitfully combined with a close reading of the narrative techniques that the chosen novels use to portray its fictional universe, such as, for instance, those pertaining to setting, plot, style and theme. In order to analyze the way in which narrative fiction may deploy creative strategies to project as well as to (re-)create a certain social imaginary and values and beliefs associated with it, this approach combines a consideration of socio-historical context with a close reading of the narrative situation, by analyzing questions around, for example, the type of narrator and its position within the story; the narrator's reliability, opinions, obtrusive commentary and interventions; the narrator's relationship to characters; the different functions of character and narrator in instances of first person narration; the use of reflectors or perspective-bearing characters; and the consequences of the different use of narrative modalities such as free indirect discourse versus direct speech and unattributed dialogue.

In this way, a reading of Eltit and Fuguet's most recent narrative fiction as post-transition to democracy literature, with this methodology that incorporates historical, political, cultural and literary perspectives, which acknowledges a dynamic dialogue between literature and a certain social imaginary shows that these authors' more recent fiction represents two implicitly related views of contemporary Chilean society and two semi-canonical standpoints prominently representative of the twenty-first century Chilean literary sphere. By considering the socio-historical attachments of literature as well as giving close attention to narrative form, this approach underlines the existence of different ways in which an author may be political as well as the value of attempting new readings of the dictatorial past from the perspective given as the decades pass by. This approach for a comparative analysis of Eltit and

Fuguet's recent work may also start to reveal new perspectives of post-dictatorship Chilean society and the most current complex forms of social control and oppression in democracy. The combined analysis of the chosen novels shows that they incorporate both the upper and lower classes into portrayals of Chile's modern, consumerist, globalized and individualist society. As stated earlier, for example, the focus and emphasis on legal and illegal drugs, and multimedia technology found in some of the novels studied indirectly connect the views of contemporary Chilean society provided by the work of these two authors. As will be analyzed below, such representations are insights into how these phenomena are extended across social classes and point not only to contemporary ways of female and young people's enjoyment, experimentation and social transgression, but underscore oppression and social control, yet sometimes also to images of potential resistance. The context from which these novels emerge and which they address consists of a complex conjugation of local political, historical and cultural trajectories. These trajectories have resulted in forms of oppression based on an inter-relation of factors linked to the cultural, economic and political influence of Chile's neoliberalism, which is a legacy of the dictatorship. Thus, this post-transition to democracy literature approach also allows us to expand on and question further not only the politico-cultural consequences of the dictatorship, but of Chile's transition to democracy as well.

Specifically in this study, Chapter I analyzes Diamela Eltit's novel *Mano de obra* (2002); it engages in a close analysis of the narrative techniques that the novel uses to portray the contemporary Chilean neoliberal free-market labour system and, through a close reading, it enquires about the novel's gender component in its portrayal of female domestic labour. Chapter II is dedicated to Eltit's most recent

novel, *Fuerzas especiales* (2013); it focuses on the analysis of the novel's use of form and style to depict the particular social context of a besieged lower-class neighbourhood, and also engages with the model of female leadership that the novel portrays. Chapter III is devoted to Alberto Fuguet's novel *Missing (una investigación)* (2009). This analysis explores the relationship between the novel and its socio-historical background to demonstrate that, despite its setting outside Chile, the novel addresses local Chilean socio-cultural issues inherited from the politico-historical Chilean context of the twentieth century. The analysis pays attention to the elements that the novel uses to cross the borders between fact and fiction, its flirtation with politically-loaded terms, and the portrayal of gender roles with their significance in the development of the plot. Finally, Chapter IV discusses Fuguet's novel *Aeropuertos* (2010), exploring the representation of emotional versus economic stability in a neoliberal society as well as questions of female sexual rights and the search for traditional family love in order to analyze the novel's depictions of contemporary Chilean society and female political empowerment.

Chapter I

A Contemporary Labour System Without Hope in Diamela Eltit's *Mano de obra*

A. Introduction

Mano de obra was published in Santiago, Chile, in 2002 by Editorial Planeta. The novel's title is an evident reference to the work force and the story is mostly set in a supermarket in an undetermined time and place. However, it has references to Chilean twentieth-century culture and history, as will be discussed throughout this chapter. The novel is divided into two parts, 'I El despertar de los trabajadores (Iquique, 1911)' and 'II Puro Chile (Santiago, 1970)'. The novel's epigraph is taken from the poem 'Un abedul' by the Argentinean poet Sandra Cornejo (1962-), and reads: *"Algunas veces, por un instante / la historia debería sentir compasión y alertarnos"* (emphasis in the original). These words introduce a relationship between the novel's plot and history, a relationship that seems to be framed by a sense of pessimism and, perhaps, a plea, as the emphasis placed on 'por un instante', linked to the word 'compasión' may imply. This relationship to history is also suggested in the titles of the two parts of the novel and in the titles of part I's sub-sections, which are all names and dates of old Chilean newspapers. These newspapers belong to the period of the *movimiento obrero* that flourished in Chile in the first half of the twentieth century and is also an important precursor to Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government (1970-1973).

Part I's title refers to one of the most representative newspapers of the *prensa obrera chilena*,[33] *El despertar de los trabajadores*, founded in Iquique by the Chilean printer and union leader Luis Emilio Recabarren (1876-1924). This newspaper is significant

[33] For an account of the importance of the socialist and anarchist press in the Chilean *movimiento obrero*, see Arias Escobedo's *La prensa obrera en Chile 1900-1930* (1970).

not only for the role that played in the promotion of the ideals of the *movimiento obrero*, but also because it witnessed the transition of Recabarren's political views –and with him of an important part of the movement– as moving from the reformist politics of the Partido Demócrata to the more radical views of the Partido Obrero Socialista, founded by Recabarren and predecessor of the Chilean Communist Party (Memoria Chilena, 'Luis Emilio Recabarren 1876-1924'). This newspaper also included several articles defending female liberation, since, as Kirkwood notes, Recabarren was a firm defender of women's emancipation (Kirkwood, 1986: 97-104).

Similarly, part II's title, 'Puro Chile (Santiago, 1970)' alludes to one of the newspapers that supported Allende's government in the early 1970s (Uribe, 1997: 6-9). However, these words may also be linked to the first line of the Chilean national anthem, 'Puro, Chile, es tu cielo azulado', which is a strong symbol of national identification and patriotism. This curious coincidence blurs the boundaries between an *obrero* resistance of the past and a present that witnesses the absence of those revolutionary aims, replacing them with a form of nationalism that, although dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, is nowadays popularly known as a contemporary expression of patriotism.[34] Linked to this idea of a change of social relations, as opposed to part I, part II is sub-divided into nineteen sub-sections with titles that do not refer to any past *obrero* resistance, but mostly describe the routines of the novel's characters. This difference has to do with the sort of human relations that both parts of the novel portray. In the novel, there is a highly important transition

[34] See, for example, Diario UChile, 'Ser patriota'; El Ciudadano, '¿No necesitamos banderas?...'; El Mostrador, 'El patriotismo...'.

from a first-person singular narrator in Part I to a first-person plural one in Part II. Part I's lack of human relationships is significant, meanwhile in part II the readers find relationships, which, although not framed by any socio-political goal, are still complex human interactions that unite the characters in one way or another. Also relevant is the fact that in Part I the sub-section titles make reference to what may be presumed by the readers to be dynamic and rich community relations framed by political aims, whereas what the novel portrays in this part is actually the absence of these sort of community relationships. This contradiction is a striking image of the fatalistic way in which the novel depicts the development of past forms of socio-political and communal ties and also introduces a sense of disconnection between the subversive past that the novel brings to mind by naming the *prensa obrera* titles, and the actual story related by the novel.

Part I is narrated in the first-person singular, with a formal language register and as the interior monologue of the narrator and protagonist, whom one assumes works in the supermarket. The protagonist's actions and potential mistakes are permanently analyzed, which might eventually lead to dismissal from the supermarket (15, 29). Therefore, the readers are also put in a position of vigilance, obliged to witness an uncomfortable situation for this worker. Presumably as a result of his fear of losing his job, the protagonist can be read as servile and submissive and he even collaborates with the supermarket's fraud against customers in order to sell products in bad condition (22-25). The narrator is never named, but one understands that it is a male worker, referring to himself in masculine terms (15, 45). The only other people mentioned by the narrator in this part of the novel are the customers and the supervisors, and he demonstrates contradictory feelings for them. He values the

customers who buy many products and he dislikes those who do not buy much and make a mess of the displays: bad customers, children and older people (18-21, 33-36), but he shows himself to be servile in front of them (20). Also, he wants to please the supervisors (19), but he fakes much of his submissiveness (46). Part I's protagonist works extensive hours, including twenty-four continuous hours over the New Year period (55), as customers try desperately to take advantage of the end-of-year offers (59). This consumerism can be read as a new form of religious devotion, in phrases such as 'Es increíble. Definitivamente increíble. Tocan los productos igual que si rozaran a Dios' (14).

Those are the main characteristics of the labour context in which the novel is set. It is a context that echoes Chile's contemporary neoliberalism. In Chile, the implementation of the free-market economy had a strong impact on labour policies, which in 1987 were made more flexible and repealed various workers and union rights in order to benefit companies and reduce even further the cost of cheap labour (Chonchol, 1996: 157; Winn, 2004: 15). The novel's labour system is influenced by a free-market economy that results in poor working conditions and a consumerist society with competitive individuals and workers who need to look obsequious to keep their jobs. As such, the characters need to pretend and consequently the only thing that is real is the threat of dispossession, of joblessness.

Part II is also narrated in the first person but plural; it is one person that speaks for a group. It is the perspective of an unnamed male narrator, who is one of the supermarket's workers and speaks for the group he lives with in a crowded house shared by several characters connected with the supermarket. Part II shares with part

I the previously described social context of labour exploitation (55, 58) and permanent vigilance (89). However, part II shows human relationships and employs both a formal and colloquial, sometimes even vulgar, language registers.

A number of critics have assessed *Mano de obra*. In general, most of them comment on the relationship between Chile's contemporary neoliberal free-market economy and the novel's setting of the supermarket, with a special emphasis on the importance of memory in the references to the *prensa obrera* newspapers.[35] This emphasis sometimes includes the potential for resistance symbolized by these mentions, which presumably resist oblivion. Another shared focus of analysis is the human body, both in terms of the effects that the system has on people's bodies and as also symbolizing a potential for resistance in the idea that certain human characteristics cannot be ultimately dominated. For example, the need to urinate (55, 88); menstruation (125); the effects of alcohol and drugs (58, 130-133); and bodies with bad odour (100, 101, 116).[36] This analysis accentuates the idea that the body may well reflect a particular socio-political project, in this case, the project of a labour system based on a free-market economy with, above all, financial aims, regardless of the effects that the meeting of these aims may have on human beings. This idea has been recognized by Eltit herself, for example: 'Ya desde mi novela *Vaca sagrada* arrastro la problemática laboral en el sentido que los sistemas laborales cooptan el cuerpo para hacer de él un instrumento productivo' (Eltit, 2003: para. 22 of 38).

[35] See, for example, Blanco, 2006: 177; Carreño, 2003: para. 23 of 29; Escudero-Alie, 2007: para. 36-39 of 39; Fornicito, 2010: 91-92; Olea, 2002, para. 6 of 11; Oliver, 2015: para. 3-5, 32 of 33; Richard, 'Tres recursos...', para. 2-4 of 13; and Tomkins, 2004: 116.

[36] See, for example, Carreño, 2003: para. 16 of 29; Fornicito, 2010: 93-95, 102; Olea, 2002: para. 9 of 11; Tomkins, 2004: 115; and Richard, 'Tres recursos...', para. 6-8 of 13.

Finally, another characteristic mentioned by scholars is the use of linguistic register to symbolize the potential for resistance, particularly, when the novel employs the informal and more vulgar register.[37] This chapter will not explore in detail these already discussed comments and will rather engage with them only in some cases of disagreement. This chapter focuses on aspects of the novel that have been less explored. It will engage in a close analysis of the literary techniques that the novel uses to portray the social context already mentioned by other scholars and, through a close reading, it will interrogate the novel's gender component in its portrayal of the female domestic labour and the relationship between this particular work force and the aforementioned social context.

B. The Portrayal of the Labour Force of a Neoliberal Labour System

1. Enumeration and Repetition in the Objectification of the Labour Force

A prominent characteristic of the novel's narrative technique is the enumeration and repetition of products throughout the story. For example, in the following phrase from part I: 'Ordeno una a una las manzanas. Ordeno una a una las manzanas. Ordeno una a una (las manzanas)' (45), the repetition and the rhythm of the prose provide the readers with a sense of monotony and of the sameness of everyday life, and especially of the work routine. These notions are accentuated by the use of the parenthesis, which breaks the rhythm of the reading by allowing the readers to take a breath, or a break. Such a break reminds us of the repetitive nature of the tasks performed by this worker and it also gives the impression of fatigue and boredom. It

[37] See, Fornicito, 2010: 97 and Richard, 'Tres recursos...', para. 9-10 of 13.

seems to suggest that such a break is available to the readers but not to the character. In the light of a repetitive and monotonous role, the absence of a creative activity at work makes the protagonist apparently forget to overtly mention the obvious last part of the repetition, 'las manzanas', which is therefore put it in the parenthesis that makes the repetition slightly different. Such a difference is not linked to the activity, the verb, but to the product, which is however the same in the whole example. This subtle contradiction, same product in a slightly different format (parenthesis), stresses the idea that no matter the type of product, this worker has to permanently repeat the same mechanical activity. The placing of the products in parenthesis, that is, separated from the activity performed by this worker, points to this worker's alienation from the products commercialized in his workplace. This narrative technique leaves us with a feeling that the narrator is bored at both the work done and telling us about it, which accentuates even further the sense of monotony and sameness.

In this part of the novel, the repetitive naming of the products contrasts with the anonymous nature of the worker, about whom the readers do not get any personal information. Such anonymity, linked to the overwhelming presence of products, represents the objectification of this worker, but also suggests the idea that the limit between the products and the worker's individuality is blurred. Such individuality also gets blurred in a few parts where he provides hints of a potential multitudinous dimension; for example, in his words: 'Próspero el año y yo aquí, de pie cautelando la estricta circulación de la moneda. Cajera, aseador yo, empaquetador, promotora, guardia de pasillo, custodio, encargado de la botillería' (60). This potential multitudinous dimension leaves us with the idea that this could be the story of any

unskilled worker immersed in a labour system based on free-market economy and it is a bridge between the two parts of the novel, as the aforementioned occupations are most of the roles that the characters of part II play in the supermarket.

Although part II identifies the characters by proving their first names, as opposed to the anonymity of part I's protagonist, they still can be seen as objectified and in a similar position to that of supermarket products. They are moved by the supervisors from store to store or from section to section as if they were products (64, 100, 103). Also, both characters and products are crowded in their habitat and come in and out of the novel's setting. This temporary and sometimes non-continuous presence of the characters as well as the permanent incorporation of new ones, including near the end of the novel, produce an effect of confusion and give the impression of the assimilation of these workers, as the readers cannot easily distinguish their individualities at all times.

Confusion and assimilation also point to a similarity between these people and the supermarket products, which helps to blur the limits between the supermarket, the home and people. People are interchangeable and not important as individuals. This impression of assimilation and confusion is further accentuated by part II's type of narrator. This narrator speaks in the first-person plural on behalf of the group he lives with. It is a 'nosotros' narrator that creates an effect of confusion regarding who is actually speaking and on behalf of who exactly, as the narrator is not provided with any particular identity by the novel and there is not clarity over who or how many people live with him in the same house either. Following its etymology, the pronoun 'nosotros' is formed by the Latin 'nos', plural of 'ego' or *yo* (RAE, *Diccionario de la*

lengua española), and 'otros', which comes from the Latin 'alter', and is defined as 'Dicho de una persona o de una cosa: Distinta de aquella de que se habla' (Ibid.). Therefore, one may read this 'nosotros' as implying 'I *and* others', including, potentially, others beyond those who the narrator is actually speaking on behalf of. Thus, the confusion and assimilation surrounding this narrator might leave the readers with a sense of comprehensiveness or extension of the group that is represented by the narrator. The narrator might be speaking on behalf of, or represent, a wider unidentified group.

Further evidence of part II's focus on the objectification of people is found in the following words by the narrator:

> Hileras de mujeres o de hombres (ahora, para controlar el proceso los clasificaban por sexo, por peso, por porte, por salud, por edad, por oficio) parados en medio de un frío inacabable. Una helada que blanqueaba el entorno hasta la confusión. Pero allí estaba, alineados, buscando trabajo por horas (111).

By referring to queues of people, their classification according to anatomical facts and skills, and the image of the 'frío inacabable' that 'blanqueaba el entorno', this example reminds us of cinematic images of the concentration camps of World War II, bringing the readers back to a context when all sorts of civil and human rights were violated. A similar reference is also highlighted elsewhere in the novel by the mention of the 'listas' of workers to be made redundant (96, 97, 121) and the fear that the characters feel of being put on those lists. But these bellicose words, which bring to mind crude images of abuse and dehumanization, are actually about the many people who come to the supermarket to apply for a job or who have been recently hired by the supermarket, since dismissals are taking place very frequently.

The narrator provides further details of the way these dismissals work: 'el papel de despido lo teníamos que firmar cuando nos contrataban. Cada treinta días firmábamos los papeles' (73). This is a hyperbolic image of a sort of labour abuse actually illegal in Chile. According to the Chilean *Código del Trabajo*, the *finiquito*, or legal document that establishes the formal end of a contractual relationship, must be signed by the employee, the employer and a notary public or another authorized labour inspector within ten working days following the employee's end of functions (Dirección del Trabajo, Código del Trabajo, art. 163bis and 177). Therefore, this hyperbole stresses the impression that as the novel progresses, both labour insecurity and abuse increase. The workers are given fewer hours of work, the longer-serving workers are made redundant and more new workers come to work casual hours, (83, 85, 87, 91). The process of recruitment also suggests the similarities between people and goods that come in and out of the supermarket. In this way, the novel suggests the brutality of a labour system that is based on abuse and insecurity, whereas the link between people and products, as well as the words that carry belligerent connotations, provide a firm view of this dehumanizing system.

This stressful labour environment places the characters in a permanent state of alert and in fear of losing their jobs, which contributes to their obsequiousness and complete identification with the workplace, as if they had no other role to play in society than that of a supermarket worker. They have transferred such a single role to the domestic sphere too and their house has become a place very much like the supermarket. They all live crowded together and accumulate goods (96), and the affection among the housemates is mediated by their working capacities. For example, when Isabel, the product promoter, is described by the narrator as

depressive and indifferent to work, he informs us that 'Pensábamos que Isabel nos había dejado de querer' (107). Also, Isabel convinces Enrique to buy an expensive television and music system that are later repossessed because he is unable to pay the monthly instalments (75-76). Isabel is aware of the labour conditions of the supermarket workers, but still her only interest is to sell and she is not able to give Enrique better advice, although they live together and, one could presume, there might be, if not friendship, at least some minor feelings of empathy involved.

Although living in the same house, the characters do not trust each other, 'Nosotros ya le habíamos encomendado a Gabriel que vigilara a Andrés' (95), the narrator notes. Thus, vigilance does not come only from the supermarket supervisors and the security cameras, but it is a common practice among the workers as well. The characters' difficulty in playing other social roles, such as friendship or co-worker solidarity, is further evidence of the brutal effects of a system that objectifies people to the point of blurring the limits between public and private roles, between the supermarket and the house, which accentuates a pessimistic perspective in the novel. As the analysis so far demonstrates, *Mano de obra* highlights an individualistic, competitive and submissive society, which shows lack of significant human bonds among people. This foregrounds some of the core aims of the dictatorship: the depolitization of the population, the supremacy of the market, the flexibilization of labour, the weakening of workers unions, and a disciplinary society, which are the backgrounds of the mostly lack of interest in political affairs of Chile's contemporary post-transition to democracy society (Frank, 2004: 73-113; Undurraga, 2015: 27).

2. The Stress on Appearances and Hypocrisy

Mano de obra recurrently deals with the theme of appearances. A significant expression of this is the 'fracaso de las mercaderías', or product decomposition, especially meat, and the way in which the supermarket tricks its customers by making the products look always fresh (25, 44). This product failure points to the hypocrisy of a system that overvalues appearances, for they are useful to consumerism. But it also offers a critique in the idea that the sale of products –or the free-market economy perhaps– would fail if not underpinned by people, it would fail without the labour force. Products do not survive by themselves and it is people who have the creative capacity to make them useful. This could suggest, in a practical vein, the eventual failure of a free-market economy that centres on inert products instead of people, instead of the labour force who are actually the core factor for this system to work.

Also linked to the question of appearances is the way in which the characters seem to value an Anglo-Saxon and Northern European ideal of beauty. This ideal is, moreover, linked to the leaders Enrique and later the younger Gabriel (83-85). For example, of Gabriel, the narrator states: 'era (ahora lo notábamos gracias a la luz natural) un poquito más blanco que todos nosotros. Ah, sí, él tenía el porte y tenía la presencia que necesitábamos' (139-140). Here, there is a parenthesis that clarifies the group's sudden realization. There is significant use of parentheses throughout the novel, which will be analyzed in the next section, but in this specific example, the parenthesis provides the further context, the natural light –or an epiphany perhaps–, needed for the group to evaluate and come to a conclusion regarding Gabriel's

physical suitability for his new role as a leader. It also leaves us with a sense of self-persuasion by the group, who, in the lack of a leader, attempt to convince themselves that Gabriel qualifies for the role. This self-persuasion is linked to a certain sense of hypocrisy, since while Enrique was the leader, they did not see such attributes in the young Gabriel. This hints at a critique of the Chilean overvaluing of white western or northern ideals in contrast to those inherited from indigenous peoples. This critique is significantly framed by the idea that in leadership, or the forces in power, white western values have not lost their supremacy despite the generational change, which contributes to the novel's pessimistic tone (from the perspective of Chilean workers).

Similarly linked to appearances, in part II, the readers are at moments left with the impression that there is something unrevealed, for example, the narrator tells us, '[Enrique] Era una persona extraordinariamente pensativa. Nosotros sabíamos en qué pensaba y por eso lo dejábamos tranquilo' (75). But the readers are not provided with any more clues about this potential information shared by the characters. This information not accessible to the reader has to do with the main characteristics of the social context that the novel portrays: consumerist, cynical and overvaluing appearances, which hinders the revelation of people's true nature. Also, part II presents some contradictions in the characterization that the narrator makes of some of the housemates. Enrique is described negatively as having 'altanero' attitudes (68) and being 'violento' (85), but also in positive terms, such as 'generoso' (75); and Gabriel is described as 'discreto' (80) as well as being unable to 'cerrar la boca' (104). These contradictions may also speak of people acting out their parts and to a consumerist society that relies on appearances to the point of not being able to know people's true personalities. And again, these contradictions are significantly present

in the case of the two leaders of the group. This may highlight the hypocrisy of contemporary forms of technocracy or, as discussed in the Introduction, of Chile's contemporary neoliberal elite. This elite includes technocrats from both right-wing and leftist backgrounds, who have enjoyed and shared political and economic power from the years of the dictatorship to current post-transition times. Thus, and linked to the themes discussed in the previous section, the analysis continues to show the way in which the novel suggests the supremacy of the market and offers a critique of a contemporary neoliberal social context based on consumerism and the overvaluing of appearances.

3. The Use of Parentheses: Reflection and the Stress on De-Humanization

Another significant characteristic of the narrative technique is the use of parentheses, which are more recurrent in part I, as the narrator's interior monologue prevails here. Linked to the theme discussed in the previous section, the prevalence of their use suggests that in the consumerist context that the novel portrays, appearances are significant and therefore they come to show the innermost thoughts of the narrator. In part I, the parentheses offer a view of a deeper level of the narrator's subjectivity. At this level, one finds a human being who goes through some processes of reflection and is to a certain extent aware of his labour context and his position within it, as the following example shows:

> Estoy enfermo, necesito con urgencia un permiso, un médico, una revisión total de mi anatomía, un examen biológico, el desmembramiento hostil, una radiación completa que me permita unos días de tregua. Estoy, lo he dicho, completamente al margen de las mercaderías y de los sonidos intermitentes del súper. Estoy enfermo. Me muevo hoy con los horribles estertores que caracteriza a un herido (de muerte) (43).

Through the agitated rhythm of the prose given particularly by the use of parataxis, framed by the phrase ‘estoy enfermo’; through the repetition of this condition and the contrast between ‘enfermo’ and the parenthesis ‘(de muerte)’; and through hyperbole found in phrases such as, ‘desmembramiento hostil’ and ‘radiación completa’, the passage shows the protagonist’s awareness of the impact that his work has had on him, so much that he openly requests for sick leave. He also requests ‘un examen biológico’, which points to his need to be viewed and regarded as a human being. One can also read such stress on human nature from the emphasis that this example shows on this worker’s sick body. He also refers to the leave he needs as a ‘tregua’, a word that, like examples discussed above, also has a bellicose connotation. Thus, he feels he is fighting some sort of battle, in which he openly declares himself ill and hurt. The parenthesis ‘(de muerte)’ accentuates such a self-characterization by providing further clues as to how definite he feels his fatigue is. Here, he also seems aware of potential consequences (dismissal maybe) if he does not get this ‘tregua’, as the exaggeration of ‘de muerte’ –or the end, perhaps– suggests.

Although the novel is full of references to people’s objectification and their submissiveness to work, in the above example, one finds a person tired of a life entirely dominated by work. The use of words related to human biology and medical terms, and the emphasis that comes from the accelerated rhythm of the prose, help the readers to focus on this person’s human nature. The example also suggests that the narrator is aware of his declining status due to the exhausting demands of the labour system he is inserted in, awareness that produces a sense of estrangement and thus he feels ‘completamente al margen de las mercaderías’. The separation he feels from the goods commercialized in the novel’s supermarket –commercialization that

is core to the working system he needs to cope with– can be read as the novel's comment on both this worker's human nature and his political position within the system. It can be taken as a critique of a labour system that uses workers for purposes unconnected to them. This is a system in which workers need to participate in order to earn a living, but which does not provide significant benefits to them, other than monotonous, fatiguing and unsecure jobs they are in constant fear of losing. As noted earlier, the interest in the portraits of characters who are 'al margen' of the system –that emerge from the margins of Chile's neoliberal society or are away from the spheres of economic and political power– has been a constant interest of Eltit's writing project, widely recognized by critics and herself.[38]

Towards the end of part I, the protagonist can also be seen getting drunk with *pisco* as a way of coping with the extensive hours of work and the obligation to perform at the Christmas nativity scene despite his fatigue (51), as the following example shows:

> Mi Dios (mi Diosito lindo) me lo concede porque yo soy el padre de su hijo y como suplemento (no me digas que Dios se va a privar, no te atrevas a decir que Dios haría una cosa así) cumplo con el oficio histórico que le fue asignado a la puta. Yo soy (también) la niña obscena que va a enderezar su alicaído senil miembro. Me he vestido con el disfraz que mejor me representa y Él me ha reconocido. Aquí mismo. Yo, su padre. A la entrada del súper encabezo el pesebre disfrazado como un santurrón de pacotilla [...].
> Pero el Dios que hoy me habita me permite soportar la constante infección de mi ojo y me otorga, también, entrada a la botellas. (52).

This example is composed of very complex sentences that, to some extent, remind us of Eltit's interest in Spanish baroque literature and shows, again, a relationship between consumerism and religion. It includes hints of avoidance of reality and

[38] See for example, Brito, 1994: 117; Eltit, 1988: 4; Llanos, 2009: 166; Olea, 1998: 60; and Williams, 2007: 125.

mysticism; these are the convoluted words of a drunk person, who imagines that God himself allows him to drink alcohol as a form of compensation. It also shows self-hatred in the protagonist's self-characterization as 'la puta' and 'santurrón de pacotilla'; irony in the play between this worker being nearly divine versus his decadent status as a worker and human being; and pessimism in the idea of God not recognizing him. The protagonist is so exhausted that the parenthesis '(mi Diosito lindo)' seems a profound plea to a God that, although apparently esteemed by this person, does not listen to him, as the narrator's self-persuading phrase in the parenthesis '(no te atrevas a decir que Dios haría una cosa así)' suggests. In a rather obscene image, one can read this God as old, or 'alicaído' and 'senil', indifferent and dirty. He does not identify his creatures and in order to be recognized by God, the narrator needs to use the costume that he thinks best represents him: that of a 'santurrón de pacotillas', or an obsequious worker accepting to play in this nativity scene, willing to meet the demands of the labour system without question. This image of a 'blind' and insensitive God, and of Christian religion by extension, provides a sense of profound hopelessness and of the impossibility of religious beliefs as a source of succour in this cruel labour context that regards workers as if they were concentration camp prisoners or criminals. Such hopelessness leaves the protagonist with a single and mundane way of relief: alcohol. Similarly in part II, most of the characters succumb to drugs as a way of relief and to relate to each other (133-134).

The example also carries a gender component in the references to 'la puta' and 'la niña obscena', that is, a reference to female prostitution and the need to perform denigrating sexual activities not expected from a supermarket worker. On the one

hand, these references suggest the idea that these workers need to prostitute themselves in order to be part of the novel's depraved labour system. They need to be willing to play a role in the abuse conducted against themselves and they are therefore indirectly forced to 'sell themselves' in order to keep their jobs. This is further emphasized by the word 'suplemento' and the parenthesis '(también)'. That is, this willingness from workers to compromise their own dignity, to accept bad and denigrating labour practices is an addition that should not be taken as constitutive of a worker's role. Furthermore, this kind of prostitution is an 'oficio histórico', it derives from a historical trajectory. This reference to history reminds us of the *prensa obrera* sub-titles and the chronological order of the titles of the two main parts of the novel, 1911 and 1970 respectively. This chronological order might be interpreted as referring to the fact that the neoliberal model implemented by the dictatorship repealed many workers' rights (Chonchol, 1996: 157). However, this potential link is unclear and remains at the level of speculation, since the issue of the military coup does not find further space in the novel.

The parenthesis '(también)' also gives the impression that the speaker is talking about himself and somebody else; it incorporates a subject that is specifically female: 'la niña obscena', 'la puta'. This worker is therefore feminized. The idea of prostitution as a symbol of the degradation of workers in a neoliberal labour environment is not unique to this novel and it is also suggested in *Fuerzas especiales*, as will be seen in the next chapter. At first sight, this idea reminds us of the Marxist view of prostitution as symbolizing workers' exploitation under capitalism, since, as Pateman discusses, 'For Marx, prostitution was a metaphor for wage labour' (Pateman, 1988: 209). However, Pateman also highlights the irony behind

representing the worker by the figure of the female prostitute, since in political philosophy 'the worker' has historically been a male one (Ibid.: 201-202). In her influential work *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman explores the relationship between sex, slavery and capitalism and links prostitution to the implicit sexual contract upon which contemporary patriarchal societies have been constructed, which is based on the subjection of women, male fraternity and men's sex-right over women (Ibid.: chapter 7). This sexual contract is the origin of all gender inequalities in contemporary societies, for example, women's lower salaries, higher workload, gender violence, rape, femicide, women's lower access to land and property, among others. At the core of this contract, Pateman sees prostitution as an 'integral part of patriarchal capitalism [...] men can buy sexual access to women's bodies in the capitalist market' (Ibid.:189).

In line with this link between a female subject, labour abuse and prostitution, Isabel, the product promoter is described by the novel as having to perform sexual favours to the managers in order to keep her job and the necessary money (63, 64) that allows her to stay in the house with her baby, something that no other male character needs to do. This emphasis on gender differentiation provides hints of the different treatment that men and women receive within the novel's working environment. It alludes to a labour system that has historically abused women in particular ways. Further, regarding such particularities, although with some mention of two female workers who do paid work at the supermarket (Isabel and Sonia), *Mano de obra* has a clear focus on the issue of female domestic labour, which will be analyzed in the next section.

The reference to prostitution, the image of an indifferent and obscene God, and an abusive labour system, leave a sense of the complete abandonment of the worker in a system that requires workers to wear the costume of submissiveness and obedience in order to be somehow recognized by it, to earn a living. This idea of disguise again reminds us of hypocrisy and people acting out their parts in order to keep their jobs, as this is a costume that only *represents* the worker; it is not quite him and obsequiousness may not be his true nature. Accordingly, the narrator is aware of his status and is not fully happy with this role he has been assigned, he is somehow critical of it and of himself as his self-judgemental words 'santurrón de pacotilla' reveal. Although the worker is forced to play the role that he has been dictated with, the narrator still reminds us that he feels *al margen* and that he has been abandoned by this all-consuming system.

One can read discomfort and potentially deadly fatigue from the protagonist's body: his infected eye. With regard to the signs of tiredness and discomfort, Carreño reads such bodily marks as symbolizing a way of resisting or escaping the oppressive and repressive system that the novel portrays. In *Mano de obra*, she reads 'El cuerpo enfermo [herido, alcohólico, drogadicto, con tics, etc.] como única salida a la vigilancia y al disciplinamiento' (Carreño, 2003: para. 16 of 29). Fornicito agrees with Carreño that 'Los excesos de corporalidad en *Mano de obra* sirven para representar al mismo tiempo la sumisión de la subjetividad y el desacato desorganizado de ese "resto" que no puede someterse' (Fornicito, 2010: 94). For her, this is a space of resistance that evidences the impossibility of repeating the norms of the economic model portrayed by the novel and thus of the potential failure of this oppressive system (Ibid.: 103). She does not regard this as a consciously articulated

form of resistance, but as a play between spaces of 'control y fuga' (Ibid.: 104). She reads the novel's emphasis on the body and its afflictions also as a sign of the feminization of the human body, which she again links to the notions of *control* and potential *fuga* (Ibid: 103-104). The link between the female body and afflictions or pain has also been explored by Eltit herself, for example, in her work on letters written by Gabriela Mistal and Elena Caffarena (1903-2003), a Chilean lawyer founder of MEMCH, who played a central role in the struggle for women's right to vote. Eltit notes that in their letters, references to physical pain and affliction are abundant and she links these references to the still pending female emancipation and to potential means of liberation (Eltit, 2011: 28-29).

Following the same argument of resistance, or quasi-resistance, in reference to the *prensa obrera* newspaper names, Fornicito states that 'Para Eltit es la memoria la que tiene el poder de restituir esos lazos significativos entre los sujetos sociales' (Fornicito, 2010: 96). Another similar reading of *Mano de obra* is presented by Richard. She argues that the novel shows three *recursos de emergencia* that resist the oppression of the dominant free-market economy. These are: the constant reference to names of *prensa obrera* newspapers; the impossibility for the characters to hide the humanity of their bodies (the need to urinate, menstruation, cuts, odour and diarrhoea, among others); and the use of a colloquial and sometimes even vulgar register of the Chilean Spanish, particularly in the second part of the novel, that resists translation (Richard, 'Tres recursos...'; also Fornicito, 2010: 97), although the novel has been translated into a language such as Greek. However, this idea of the novel representing spaces of resistance or escape is questionable, as what prevails in the text is an overwhelming sense of pessimism and hopelessness. As Tompkins

notes, 'el efecto de *Mano de obra* es tan devastador porque la creciente explotación, alienación y colonización (del subconsciente) de los personajes imposibilita que recurran a tradiciones culturales que les permitan sustentarse anímicamente y/o incitarlos a la rebelión' (Tompkins, 2008: 123).

Although in part I the novel constantly provides us with titles of the *prensa obrera* newspapers, there is not a clear connection between them and the story told by each sub-section. Any potential reference (found with difficulty) that may link these titles to the story actually told is ambiguous and pessimistic. An example is found in the following words of the narrator:

> Aunque siempre me aceche la primitiva esperanza que se reúna esa turba. Pese a que me invade (salvaje, irreprimible) el deseo de que avance y se desplace anónima soportando los golpes y el imperativo y bello fluir de la sangre, sé que hasta ella (el esplendor de la turba injuriosa) va a acudir con premura la desesperación del gas, el brutal desalojo, el desorden final de los productos. Y así podría consumarse (necesario) el despido masivo (47).

In this example, the protagonist seems to be having thoughts, or perhaps dreaming, of a revolt that would, potentially, liberate him from his labour oppression. One might, perhaps, understand that 'esa turba' is linked to the *movimiento obrero* that the newspaper names refer to; and the protagonist seems to value the strength of the *turba*, as his innermost thoughts provided by the parentheses suggest with words such as, 'irreprimible', 'esplendor' and 'injuriosa'. Nevertheless, these thoughts are ambiguous and highlight hopelessness. The narrator is certain –as the words 'sé que' show– that if this revolt actually happened, it would be brutally repressed and, consequently, he adds, 'No es posible el asalto. Sigo acumulando la manzana tras un orden seriado y agotadoramente perfecto' (47). This potential and unclear reference to a subversive *obrero* past within the narration remains at the level of a thought not

shared by other characters of the novel, as neither the narrator or any other character show awareness of these newspaper titles. Therefore, this potential reference is framed by a sense of pessimism rather than by the suggestion of any potential capacity of memory to restore past socio-political bonds, to liberate or resist. Such a disconnection may be regarded as an emphasis, perhaps even a critique, of the contemporary lack of historical memory, but it still leaves us with a major sense of disillusion and a feeling that whatever these *obreros* of the past fought for, it was not worth it and does not make sense today, nor does it have any space in the novel's contemporary context of the supermarket. Thus, there is no evidence in the novel that memory may have the power to rebuild old or lost forms of social bonds and the novel remains a work of denunciation rather than proposing a model for resistance. Moreover, In part I, the narrator seems to have been less submissive in the past than he is in the present, as it is suggested by his words, 'Me obligo a la mansedumbre (ya no me cuesta nada, nada en absoluto. Quizás finalmente sea manso, ¿no?)' (20). Here, the parenthesis provides information on the narrator's reflection about how difficult submissiveness used to be for him in the past and informs us that he seems to be in the process of accepting that he got used to it, which at first sight might refer to notions of past workers resistance. However, this earlier lower degree of submissiveness has been completely annulled by the labour system portrayed. This example demonstrates that in *Mano de obra*, the labour subjugation model does get repeated and, thus, it could not be stated that the system fails in its oppression. This, again, contributes to the pessimistic view of the novel.

A possibly firmer link between the struggles of this *obrero* past and the contemporary setting of the novel could have been given by references to the

dictatorship and its implementation of the neoliberal free-market labour reforms that are the pillars of the novel's themes. Neoliberal reforms meant the weakening of labour unions by abolishing most of the benefits that workers had gained during Allende's government, a period in which workers reached historic heights of income, political organization, power and influence (Winn, 2004: 15-19). According to Peter Winn, during the Popular Unity era, workers were the protagonists of the revolutionary process, an image echoed in the leftist media, that constantly praised workers' consciousness and solidarity (Ibid.: 17). However, the novel does not provide clear links to the dictatorship. This is curious, since one finds clear references to the dictatorship in most, if not all, of Eltit's work. One may interpret this as *Mano de obra*'s firm focus on its fictionality, avoiding, in Richard's terms, any sociological naturalism, that is, any potential mimetic relation between the novel's fictional world and the natural and social worlds. This is, according to Richard, an aim of Eltit's dense and fragmented narrative technique (Richard, 2009: 220-221).

A curious characteristic of the mentions of these newspapers which by the beginning of the twentieth century defended social demands is that there is no reference to feminist struggles. Kirkwood shows us that in Chile, the period of the formation of the feminist movement goes from 1915 to 1924, with actions that can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century. Feminist struggles were prominent during the first half of the twentieth century, as women demanded and gained the right to vote (Kirkwood, 1986: 89-97). Moreover, in 1922 the first feminist newspaper was launched in Chile, *Acción Femenina*, which during 14 years extensively claimed for female emancipation, with print runs that reached 10,000 units (Ibid.: 109). The

absence of women's political involvement from those references is curious in the novel of an author that has openly declared her commitment to gender equality and who wrote the essay *Crónica del sufragio femenino en Chile* (1994), that is, an author widely familiar with the history of feminism in Chile. This absence seems to echo the erasure of women's political activism and their status as political subjects from mainstream male-centred accounts of Chilean history, and from social and political sciences, as noted by Kirkwood (1986) and discussed earlier.

What the novel does seem to suggest, particularly through the use of the parenthesis, is not necessarily an idea of resistance or escape, but the notion of a potential process of self-discovery and awareness. This process, which is not overtly declared, is not linked to a desire to resist, but to extreme fatigue. In part I, such a process of self-awareness results in a worker who surrenders himself to tiredness and to the potential consequences of his fatigue: dismissal. An example of this process is found in the following:

> Me torno ajeno. Desorientado busco un norte, cualquier miserable referencia entre esta multitud que me avasalla y me golpea con sus carros. Y como si fuera un guerrero capturado me empuja hasta el centro de la arena. A combatir (entiendes, supongo, de qué hablo, comprendes que me refiero a mi puesto de trabajo). No a combatir sino a enfrentarme pasivamente con la fiera (56).

This example again suggests a disconnection of the protagonist with his workplace. In his search for any link that re-connects him with it, the narrator uses words such as, 'multitud', 'avasallar', 'golpear', 'carros', 'guerrero capturado', 'arena' and 'combatir'. All of these are, again, bellicose terms that leave the impression that he feels he is fighting a battle. But this is not any battle, it is an ancient one that subjugates him. One can read such a long-standing battle from the similarity of the

word ‘avasallar’ with the medieval figure of the *vasallo*; and from the use of the words ‘guerrero’, as opposed to the more contemporary term *soldado*, and ‘arena’ instead of *campo de batalla*. The term ‘arena’ also brings to mind the Roman Colosseum and with it, the early Christians fed to the lions. This reference is also supported by the last part of the example, as the protagonist prepares himself to confront a ‘fiera’ and leaves us with the image of innocent victims sacrificed for a cause, both in ancient and contemporary times, which is connected to the novel’s references to past *obrero* resistance. In the context of the Chilean *movimiento obrero* of the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, on 21 December 1907, many striking workers demanding better working and living conditions were killed and thousands were injured by the Chilean Army in what is known as la *Masacre de la Escuela Santa María de Iquique*.[39] In the context of these social struggles, certain working conditions were established by law in Chile for the first time, for instance, in 1907, the Sunday break was granted; in 1916, an act on work accident compensation was passed; and in 1917 childcare was encouraged in the form of the right of women to breastfeed at work for one hour (Poblete Troncoso, 1924: 15-24). Nonetheless, the above example suggests that the battle that the novel’s contemporary worker is fighting is still the same one that the old *movimiento obrero* fought for and poses the question of good versus bad *multitudes*, of workers fighting for their rights versus consumers. With a pessimistic tone, this image suggests the lack of political aims of the contemporary working class, it shows, that in *Mano de obra*’s contemporary setting, workers do not get together to demand *obrero* political goals, but rather to consume.

[39] It is still not clear how many were killed, but estimates range from around 120 to 300 people (Devés, 1988: 196-199; Memoria Chilena, ‘Masacre...’; Archivo Nacional de Chile, ‘Matanza...’).

In the above example, as the protagonist is apparently unable to find the connection with his workplace he is looking for, he prepares to fight back. At this point, important evidence is provided by the narrator's deeper level of subjectivity in the parenthesis. The phrase 'entiendes de qué hablo' is a rhetorical question that attempts to remind himself and the readers that he is not actually at a battlefield, but just at his workplace. Accordingly, following this process of self-awareness, the narrator concludes that he is not fighting against anybody and that he just must face another day of work, or to face a labour routine that seems to him like an indomitable 'fiera'. The disconnection that the protagonist is starting to feel from his workplace, caused by this extreme fatigue, and which leads him towards a process of self-awareness, can be linked to the disconnection (or at least highly ambiguous connection) between the politicized past of the newspaper titles and the content of the sub-sections relate. Again, this estrangement produces an effect that emphasizes the cruelty of the labour system that the novel portrays, which does not permit a dialogue between a subversive memory and a submissive present. This is further evidence of the novel's pessimistic view of the system in which the characters are immersed, which does not provide them with any space for rebellion.

The process of reflection and self-awareness is also linked to human nature, to feelings, senses and the physical exhaustion of a human body, which contrast to the emotionless nature of the supermarket products. For example, the narrator tells us that 'La terrible palabra destructiva que me dirigen retumba en mi cabeza y me hace sentir mal. Me hiere y me perfora la palabra abriendo un boquete en mi riñón [...] Me impulsa a pensar que el trabajo, al que le dedico toda mi energía, no vale la pena' (21). This example shows the human nature of this worker by mentioning both

physical characteristics and human feelings. He is considerably hurt by the way in which customers treat him, so much that he feels physically hurt as if he were, again, fighting a battle in which he is fatally injured. The corporeal effects of his arduous labour routine along with the feelings that the treatment of the customers provoke in him result in reflections and make him ask himself important questions, such as the value of the job to which he has dedicated his whole life. Therefore, again, this first-person narrator can be read as somehow critical of his own status as a worker. The example also talks about 'palabras' that have powerful effects on the protagonist through the feelings that they provoke in him; words that significantly lead him towards a process of thinking. This is the political potential of words and, perhaps, of literature, as already discussed in the Introduction with regard to Eltit's view of the political implications of reading and writing.

Another example of the significance of feelings and senses as related to the protagonist's process of reflection and awareness is found in his contradictory views of older customers, he says: 'los nombro (con una abierta pasión clasificatoria) como: "los viejos del súper" [...]. Sin embargo, debo ser honesto y reconocer que me causan una efímera entretención cuando los diviso ultra concentrados en la tarea alevosa de conservar el equilibrio (34)'. On the one hand, in this example, the parenthesis provides important information about the emotionless way in which the protagonist views older customers, as objects that can be classified as products. These words seem to be a mocking way to refer to the vulnerability of people who cannot fend for themselves. However, on the other hand, this example also shows this worker's capacity to be moved by others, and he seems to appreciate the arduous attempts of these people to get the products they need. Moreover, he adds 'Pero

(tengo que reconocerlo) ellos están provistos de una sabiduría emanada de un mapa orgánico correcto [...] Analizan las frecuencias, las intensidades, los antecedentes, los efectos que alcanza un dolor en otro dolor y en el siguiente (35-36). These latter words emphasize this worker's process of reflection; the humanity of the older customers, through the emphasis on their body pains; and significantly, the protagonist's appreciation of their wisdom.

The wisdom of the elderly could in principle allude to previous generations in positive terms and might thus remind us of the *movimiento obrero* newspapers' titles and the significance of memory. The parenthesis '(tengo que reconocerlo)' is a rhetorical statement that stresses the narrator's reflection process and might suggest the need to look back into or to reflect about the historical memory of a subversive past. One could read such retrospection as necessary to appreciate the abilities, courage and solidarity of the many who, for the first time in Chile, fought collectively to gain workers' rights and better living conditions for the most vulnerable population, the *obreros*. But importantly, this concern does not reach the characters, since none of them shows awareness of such a relevant political and historical memory. Furthermore, in fact, the narrator sees the old customers –those from perhaps one or two generations previous to that of the protagonist– purely in commercial terms. Through this view of the elderly, one intuits rather what the narrator might be overlooking: historical memory, memory of a different poor and workers' struggles. Thus, this view of the elderly offers a critique of a past generation with no political memory, a generation of people who can only consume, even at the most vulnerable stage of their lives: the old age.

The narrator has contradictory views of the elderly. On the one hand, as customers, they do not seem to be of much value for him, but on the other hand, as vulnerable human beings, the *viejos* produce in him feelings of admiration and empathy for the perseverance with which they put up with difficulties. These contradictory views of the elderly lead to another significant reflection by the narrator in the following words: 'Yo me considero una persona que se expresa desde el corazón de la sabiduría. Después de todo soy un hombre, aunque en algún sentido (lo sé), termino enredado a la imagen con que se define a una mujer. Mujercita yo' (38). These words, which have to do with the emotions that the older customers provoke in him, convey a mocking, self-criticizing and self-recriminating comparison between the narrator and a woman expressed in the use of the diminutive 'mujercita yo', which carries a pejorative tone. In these words, there is a contradiction in the idea that the narrator refers to himself in masculine terms but also thinks of himself as a woman, a contradiction permitted by the word 'aunque' that reveals the existence of two opposite clauses. The distribution of attributes given by such a word places masculinity and wisdom on the one side and the pejorative term 'mujercita' on the other. It suggests a comparison between supposedly masculine attributes (wisdom) and feminine characteristics (weakness and sensitivity) that leaves the female ones on the negative, pejorative and self-recriminating side. This foregrounds the idea of a certain gender differentiation within the novel's setting, which leaves women on the more negative side, and underlines the different ways in which the novel's labour system oppresses male and females workers, as will be discussed in the next section. These words also stress, again, the overall human nature of the protagonist –a human being who may be male or female, that is, the narrator may represent above all any human being. It highlights his process towards an accentuation of emotions and the

importance of these emotions to potentially lead to thinking and awareness. All these examples suggest that this worker is not an indifferent emotionless person and that, perhaps, he has just learned to fight his own battle or, in other words, he has had to adapt himself to this labour system in order to survive, for it may understand that the system is omnipotent and strong as a *fiera*.

As part I progresses one finds a protagonist more and more tired and bored of his labour routine (45). He lets us know, 'La fiera avanza remeciendo los estantes y me busca. Estoy cercado, vencido de antemano como un guerrero exhausto' (58). These words remind us of the bellicose terms earlier discussed, they reflect the level of exhaustion of this worker and may indicate that he has surrendered or given up. At the end of part I, the protagonist has been badly abused (59). He is so tired that he does not care if he is made redundant or not and he says, '24 (horas). Qué importa la inminencia del despido. Hay que poner fin a este capítulo' (60). Here, the term 'capítulo', as stated earlier, may be self-referential and literally mean the end of this part of the novel, or it may point to history, to the desire –or perhaps a plea– that this *capítulo de la historia*, so cruel to workers, comes to an end soon. But above all, these examples, along with the protagonist's process of reflection and awareness, show that he has succumbed to his human nature. He is exhausted, he gets drunk at work, he is thirsty and his body does not respond to the requirements of a labour system that regards him as a quasi robot.

However, although at the end of part I the protagonist seems willing to admit the possibility of dismissal, it is unclear whether this actually happens or not. At the end of part II, most of the characters are actually fired from work, but, in a significant

lack of agency, one can also read them as urgently needing a leader (140), as will be analyzed later. Consequently, one can state that *Mano de obra* does not suggest any actual or potential space of contemporary resistance or escape. What the analysis so far demonstrates is that a pessimistic point of view prevails in the novel in order to highlight the hopelessness of a contemporary neoliberal and oppressive work system. The novel suggests a pessimistic view of a contemporary free-market labour system but highlights at the same time the humanity of the labour force. It uses pessimism to emphasize the brutality of a system that dehumanizes workers, whereas, concurrently, the use of the parenthesis stresses the humanity of workers as well as a process of reflection, and to some extent criticism by the narrator. Thus, with its play between dehumanization and humanization, the novel questions the erasure of an apparently obvious fact: workers are human beings and as such, subjects of some basic rights, which they do not enjoy in the novel's contemporary free-market setting of the supermarket.

4. *Obrero* Resistance and the Bridge Between Past and Present

By using newspaper titles associated with past *obrero* resistance but which lack a clear link to the contemporary setting of the novel, *Mano de obra* leaves the potential reconstruction of such a missing link for the readers. Thus, the novel (or literature more broadly) may be or become the main, if not the only, meeting point between an activist and politically resistant *obrero* past and the cruel present of the contemporary worker. This idea is also supported by the novel's self referential words with which each section ends, 'Hay que poner fin a este capítulo' (60) in part I and 'Demos vuelta la página' (140) in part II. This self-reference keeps the readers' attention on

the text, as a way of emphasizing or placing the novel as the only remaining link between subversive memory and an oppressive present. As much as part I's narrator seems to somehow develop a rather more critical view of his own status as a worker, tracing the clues left by the novel might lead the readers to reflect on and question certain aspects of the story. For example, to question why the newspapers titles head each section of Part I if they do not seem to have any connection to the story told, that is, to question the lack of an overt link between those references to memory and the portrayal of the workers' obsequious present. This reconstruction of a missing link between political memory and the present being left for the readers again reminds us of Eltit's view of the political implications of reading and writing exposed earlier.

However, the question remains of the implied reader of this novel, which takes us to the political effectiveness of literature and with it, the political implication of the novel's narrative technique. Bearing in mind the particular Chilean politico-cultural context from which the novel emerges, what kind of readers are in a position to question the novel's lack of a link between subversive past and submissive present, and be able to reconstruct it? Could the novel's important political messages reach, for example, ordinary readers such as *obreros*; supermarket workers; those educated at state schools in which until some years ago there existed no *educación cívica*; that 52.8% who do not read at all; or that 51% not interested in voting in the last presidential election? According to Keen, narrative involves the idea of a 'practice' or co-creation between writers and readers (Keen, 2015: 10-14) and following Calvino, who views the political power of literature in situations in which it is persecuted, this co-creation can make of a text a source for social struggle (Calvino,

1986: 99-100). *Mano de obra* demonstrates that, contrary to what Calvino seems to believe, the political effectiveness of a novel and its connections with social struggles are not circumscribed only to situations in which literature is persecuted, that is, to contexts of political conflict in which writers are persecuted and literature is banned or under the surveillance of censorship, as it challenges totalitarianism and gives a voice to those without one (Ibid.: 95-97). *Mano de obra* proves that the political effects of literature can be traced in post-transition to democracy literature as well. Nevertheless, the question of the socio-political observer, or reader, remains central to this novel. *Mano de obra*'s clues are often very ambiguous, which leads us, again, to the issue of Eltit's readership.

As seen earlier, Eltit has recognized that when writing, she does not think of real readers, but rather works with an ideal reader who has a critical view of her texts; and this is also evident from *Mano de obra*. Reading at first sight the more general topic of the hopelessness of a contemporary neoliberal and oppressive labour system may not be too challenging a task for readers, since these are characteristics which are not necessarily unique to the Chilean society. However, in terms of the political function of reading –which Eltit herself and her critics consider central to her writing project–, one may argue that in order to be able to regard this text as a bridge that allows the reconstruction of a relevant political link between memory and the present, this novel's readers need to have a significant level of awareness of Chilean social and political history in the twentieth century. The newspaper titles do not say much by themselves; it is their link to history which speaks volumes, their pointing at an insurgent *obrero* past. And readers need such an awareness to uncover the significance of these titles, to reconstruct the missing story of the influence of the

dictatorship in Chile's current neoliberal system of work and connect these to the present that the story narrates. Such expectation of awareness and knowledge to unpack the core political messages of a story is controversial in the case of the Chilean depoliticized society *que no lee*, which, as discussed earlier, inherits such a socio-cultural legacy from the dictatorship. Owing to this expectation, *Mano de obra*'s narrative technique rather (re-)creates instead of challenging that legacy, that is, it may become a cultural barrier for the novel's political implications to reach wider, less learned and more diverse audiences.

The above debate is an example of the significant and dynamic relationship, or dialogue, between the social imaginary and literature. It shows us the way in which fiction may not only *reflect* a certain socio-historical context, but also how it can contribute to its *creation*. Eagleton, with his idea of 'objective partisanship', helps expand the views in which we may consider a writer to be political, which goes beyond an overt declaration of a certain political standpoint and takes into account the literary choices an author makes to represent a certain social context; therefore, the analysis of the narrative technique is crucial. But Eagleton also states that partisanship, charged with a certain ideology, is *inherent* in reality (Eagleton, 2002: 44); that is, it is essential to the social reality that literature portrays. This assumption is reductionist and leaves us with what Calvino might call an 'ornamental' view of literature (Calvino, 1986: 95-97). If ideology is *inherent* to the social reality reflected by literature, then there is no room for literature to contribute to the creation of that social imaginary. Literature would thus be ornamental and could not be considered to have a political function; there would not be any relationship between discourse, effects and power relations involved in literature. But narrative fiction is not a factual

document about social reality and, although it may project, question or perpetuate it, fiction, through various creative mechanisms, also creates, (re-)creates, retells and re-arranges its worlds, which may be or not inspired in real-life contexts.

Narrative fiction, precisely because of its fictional nature, creates worlds composed of varied values and beliefs that are fed by and feed a given social imaginary. In this given social imaginary, such values and beliefs emerge, for there is a relationship between ideology, discourse, effects and power relations. But precisely because of this relationship, ideologies, views, beliefs and values continue to fuel such an imaginary. In this respect, the worlds created and disseminated by narrative fiction become of enormous political significance. So far the analysis demonstrates that *Mano de obra*'s narrative technique on the one hand projects, denounces and criticizes a certain social reality, but on the other, it (re-)creates a cultural barrier. And this characteristic of the novel is not a contribution to *obrero* resistance –the workers resistance that the *obrero* newspapers once encouraged, for example–, as it hinders the interpretation of its most important political messages by less erudite readers. In the Chilean context of a society *que no lee*, this is relevant to note, especially in the writing project of an author who is also a leftist, feminist and public educator. By (re-)creating this cultural barrier, the novel cannot progress towards the elimination of a form of cultural inequality: the social barrier –and often socio-cultural stigma– that access to literature (and thus its commitments) currently implies in Chile.

C. Female Domestic Labour in *Mano de obra*'s Contemporary Forms of Community Relationships

Commentators have noted that *Mano de obra* portrays the way in which, in Chile, the enforcement of the free-market economy has meant 'la máxima desarticulación de los mínimos vínculos comunitarios' (Olea, 2002: para. 9 of 11).[40] Nevertheless, the novel provides the readers with a view of contemporary forms of community relations. This is clear in section II, which has different characters that share a house and a workplace. It is also evident in the way in which the novel goes from a narration that takes the singular form of the protagonist's interior monologue in part I, to a first-person plural narration in section II, which includes both indirect and direct speech. This section will analyze the novel's community patterns from the perspective of Gloria. Although there are two other female characters in *Mano de obra* who do paid work at the supermarket, these have less of a presence in the novel, whereas the depictions of Gloria evidence the novel's focus on female unpaid domestic work and its relationship to the community and to the more general labour force. According to Nikki Craske, women's burdens of reproductive labour have increased due to shifts in state responsibilities as a consequence of the neoliberal economic restructuring. This has resulted in women's heavy workload with a double or even triple burden (Craske, 2003: 58-68). By 2015, women in Chile still devoted more time to unpaid domestic tasks and less to paid work than men. For example, women were charged with 68% of unpaid domestic labour and, in an average day of heterosexual couples living together when both have a paid job, women's overall workload (paid and unpaid) was 11.6 hours versus 9.7 of men, (ComunidadMujer, 2017: 4). By 2013, the gender pay gap in Chile was 17.2% (Brega et.al, 2015: 27)

[40] See also Fornicito, 2010: 91-92 and Llanos, 2009: 184.

and the undervaluing of women's productive capacities in the labour market reached 21.4% (Ibid.: 27). These factors also have an impact on women's post-labour quality of life, with 93% of women having pensions of less than net CLP 147.763, by 2014.[41] This is a patriarchal social context that finds an echo in *Mano de obra*, as the analysis will show.

Gloria loses her job and stays at home in charge of unpaid domestic tasks; in return, she is afforded the right to live at the back in the smallest room of the house (67-68). The narrator tells us that Gloria:

> Sencillamente no logró conservar ningún empleo. Fracasó de manera irreversible [...] Enrique comentó que no era su asunto cuánto ganaban o dejaban de ganar los demás. Ella le rebatió. "Todo es igualmente importante", le contestó [...] Compareció a no sabemos cuántas entrevistas. Llenó cantidades de solicitudes, anexó certificados, sus fotografías. Adjuntó cartas de recomendación. Se arregló bastante para cada cita. Se vistió con su mejor ropa.
> Finalmente resultó lo del supermercado. Pero solo resistió unos pocos días [...] Su obligación consistía en freír unas pequeñas salchichas y ofrecerlas a la clientela que se desplazaba por los pasillos del súper. "El olor es repugnante porque el aceite está pasado. Es un aceite de mierda", dijo. Ese día Enrique se puso notoriamente furioso. Nosotros hicimos todo lo posible por calmarlo [...].
> Ella, entonces, decidió permanecer en la casa. Se ocuparía de limpiar, cocinar, ordenar, lavar, planchar, coser, comprar, realizar nuestros trámites. No logramos oponernos (67-68).

This example has Gloria as main reflector, that is, it has a significant combination of a 'character-centred perception' (Keen, 2015: 46) and the narrator's point of view (Ibid.: 33-40; 46-47). The narrator lets us know with a judgmental tone that, in his opinion, Gloria did not have the capacity to keep her job and irremediably failed –the tone is evident in words such as, 'no logró', 'fracasó', 'irreversible' and 'solo resistió unos pocos días'. Such a failure again reminds us of the previously discussed idea

[41] Approximately USD 230 by November 2017 (Banco Central de Chile).

that the characters are portrayed as people whose only role in society is that of a worker and thus they fail as human beings if they do not have paid employment. The judgemental tone is further stressed by the use of a word like ‘comparecer’, which is linked to judicial contexts rather than to the idea of simply *going* somewhere. This word provides a strong image of what a worker may face when attending a job interview, connecting these instances to judicial proceedings, interrogations and trials. The word ‘resistir’ again reminds us of the idea of the workplace being a battlefield where workers fight, resist, survive or are deadly hurt, and there is again a judgement in Gloria not being strong enough to put up with the novel’s labour context.

The narrator’s judgemental tone introduces suspicion about the way he views Gloria and alerts readers about his reliability, or lack thereof. Suspicion on the actual way he regards Gloria is also created by the prominent enumeration of things and activities used to describe all she does to get a new job, how she prepares her appearance to attend work interviews and the domestic tasks she is meant to perform. As in previous examples, one can read enumeration as accentuating the monotony of the activities carried out by the characters, but it may also be linked to the objectification of the labour force and, in this example, to Gloria’s objectified status both as a salaried worker and as an unpaid domestic cleaner. One can interpret this objectification ambiguously as a sign of the undermined view that the narrator has of Gloria or as a criticism of her invisibilized labour status. Suspicion about the narrator’s reliability is also created by the doubts left by words such as, ‘no sabemos a cuántas entrevistas’, that is, he has a limited point of view, which makes us wonder about the actual level of awareness that he has of the facts involved in Gloria’s

acceptance to perform unpaid domestic tasks. And as noted earlier, the use of the first-person plural narration in the novel may produce confusion regarding who is speaking and on behalf of who exactly, which invites the readers to think that this voice may represent an extended group. Therefore, one could read this judgemental tone used to relate Gloria's transition from the paid labour market to the domestic sphere as a critique of the way in which women who dedicate their lives to unpaid domestic labour are undervalued and invisibilized by this male 'nosotros' narrator, or perhaps patriarchal society more broadly.

The narrator also provides clues about Gloria's behaviour as a salaried worker. She apparently had a defiant and rebellious personality. This personality is also highlighted by Gloria's own voice, through the use of the direct speech employed to show her refutations and her alleged complaints for labour injustices and abuses against customers. Suspicion of the narrator's reliability is further created by the way in which he tells us that Gloria decided to stay at home and work for free, and that the group could not oppose such a decision. Gloria's apparent decision and the group's negotiation regarding her new domestic tasks are mediated by the word 'entonces', which implies an evaluation and a conclusion by the narrator. Furthermore, these are a decision and a negotiation about which the readers do not learn from Gloria's own voice. Significantly, this instance is not narrated through direct speech, like the examples of Gloria's defiant personality at work, and it also contradicts the overall message of the passage.

A certain distrust of the information provided by the narrator is a consequence of the narrative situation of this example: the combination of narrator and reflector, and the

narrator's judgemental opinion. These technical elements make us question the narrator's reliability and suspect that Gloria's apparent decision was not unconstrained, but rather influenced by the circumstances that led her to accept such a fate. After closer inspection of this example, it is clear that she did as much as she could to get another paid job. What is more, the example suggests that Gloria's rebellious personality at work was what prevented her from keeping her jobs. This is significantly combined with an apparently violent reaction by Enrique, the group leader, when Gloria is unable to cope with the abuses of her new workplace. Therefore, one can argue that the novel's labour system, which requires permanent submissiveness from workers, somehow forces Gloria to be relegated to the domestic sphere due to her insurgent personality. This example leaves us with a message that foregrounds on the one hand that women are expected to be obsequious both at work and at home, and on the other, that when they are unwilling to comply with such a behaviour in the labour market, then some leader –or the forces in power– has the authority to violently relegate them to the subjugated space of the unpaid domestic labour.

Gloria's domestic responsibilities also include sexual abuse against her, abuse in which the narrator also takes part (69). In terms of Gloria's requirement of the necessary materials to work, the narrator tells us:

> También nos solicitó un delantal más. "Para cuando lave el que tengo puesto", dijo. Confeccionó una extensa lista. Pidió arroz, tallarines, salsa de tomates [...] Enrique le dijo que ya estaba bueno. Que se dejara de joder. Agregó que si seguía molestándonos con peticiones tontas, la íbamos a despedir. Isabel le comentó a Enrique que había sido demasiado descortés. Que finalmente no le pagábamos un peso a Gloria. "Tiene casa y comida gratis", contestó Enrique. "¿Te parece poco?". Permanecimos en silencio. Gloria se limpió nerviosamente las manos en el delantal y caminó arrastrando los pies hasta la cocina. Isabel se recluyó en su pieza (68).

This example shows Gloria's basic demands to perform her new role in a relatively decent way, but it also shows the refusal of the leader to meet these basic requirements. Thus, the supermarket's oppressive mechanisms extend to the house. Especially through the use of the word 'despedir', this example is significant evidence of the novel's suggestion of a link between female domestic unpaid work and the broader wage-earning labour force. Gloria has not actually been hired by these people and although her work plays a core role in the functioning of this small community, she is mistreated and her work is invisibilized by the leader. The only one who is aware of the fact that Gloria is working for free is another female character, Isabel. Isabel's comment provides some hints of potential female solidarity. However, none of the group is actually able to refute the leader, who has despotic tendencies and a stronger voice, as the use of direct speech to present his words suggests. He has an aggressive and non-empathetic voice that dominates the group and in the end also inhibits Isabel and her attempt to do some justice to Gloria's work. Thus, Gloria represents the lowest rank of vulnerability within the broader labour force. She symbolizes the vulnerable status of unpaid female labour and the way in which it is not valued as actual work; and even worse, she is a homemaker who has no blood relation with any of the other housemates, therefore, she can, unlike a wife or a mother, be sacked. Such a devaluation is similar to the way in which most governments do not recognize the contribution of unpaid domestic labour to their Gross Domestic Product, whereas, actually, the care tasks provided by women contribute not only with the family budget, but they save many financial resources to the state and are central to national economies, particularly in Latin America, where the family still plays a key role as the most predominant social and cultural institution (Esquivel, 2011: 25-26).

Through Gloria, the novel also suggests a link between domestic work and abuse, which again points to the sexual division of labour and the idea that women are still abusively charged with the responsibility of providing domestic unpaid care. But the sexual nature of the abuse suffered by Gloria also implies denigration, the violation of human rights, the savage destroying of a woman's character and female self-confidence, and the breaking of her will. Those are the cruel notions surrounding the question of women having to perform unpaid domestic labour, which leave us with a strong sense of possession, of women as property. This refers to women's bodies and destinies as belonging to someone other than themselves, to the patriarchal forces in power or institutions represented by the group leader and the other male characters who also abuse her. Gloria's case is also a reference to the popular belief that women's domestic work may be 'paid for' by housing and food. This archaic form of recompense reminds us of the Chilean *inquilinaje* of the *latifundio*, the social and economic system that ruled the organization of the agricultural activity and land ownership in Chile until the 1960s. Under this system, workers were given the right to live on the owner's land, a daily portion of food and if paid a salary, it was a very small one –sometimes the workers were given tokens to be spent at the owner's *pulpería* or market. José Bengoa states that 'Para "asentarse", el peón debía reconocer autoridad, "aceptar el señorío". Con ello se convertía en inquilino o en "allegado" a algún pueblo, caserío o villorrio cercano a una hacienda' (Bengoa, 1990: 9). This system is nowadays considered a form of slavery that kept *inquilinos* living in extremely precarious conditions (Ibid.: 17-20). The successful Chilean *movimiento obrero* that part I's sub-section titles refer to, influenced the 1960s-1970s Reforma Agraria that, under the motto *La tierra para el que la trabaja*, led to the modernization of the agricultural labour system, salary increases, land re-distribution

and a more stable *mano de obra asalariada* (Ibid.: 212-217; Memoria Chilena, 'La reforma...').

However, Gloria's case shows that those kinds of labour achievements have not reached the domestic female labour force. Furthermore, this is a labour force with no connection to land, as in the novel it is urban work force. *Mano de obra* suggests that the struggle for women's social and labour rights, which includes unpaid domestic labour rights and women's access to land, is still pending. In fact, although women actively participated in the *Norte Grande*'s *salitreras* of the beginning of the twentieth century, their participation mainly consisted of tasks related to the provision of food, and the political discourses around women were still based on the abnegation of 'women-mothers', without recognition of their status as workers (Kirkwood, 1986: 53-54). Heidi Tinsman shows that although women got actively involved in the agrarian reform and enjoyed better standards of living due to the changes introduced, these still empowered men more than women and left the principle of men's authority over women unchanged. In particular, the supposedly harmonious patriarchal family remained the basis of the new rural society, which was a characteristic of both, the Christian Democrat's reforms and the Popular Unity's socialism (Tinsman, 2002: 4-6). The paid agricultural labour force during this period was overwhelmingly male and by 1964, 99% of Chile's 46,961 *inquilinos* were male heads of households (Ibid.: 26). But they also depended on the labour of family members, which was unpaid and unrecognized. The practice of paying in-kind stressed the men's ability to provide for families and, thus, women were subjected to both men's authority and that of the *patrón*. In this scenario, Tinsman argues that women's exchange of sex for material security, which entailed men's stewardship of

both women's sexuality and labour, was not uncommon and was understood as mutually beneficial (Ibid.: 80-81). This situation finds a clear echo in Gloria's sexual and domestic labour abuse. Thus, *Mano de obra* suggests that the situation that Gloria faces may be considered a long-standing story; the novel offers insights into the idea that for certain women the present is not necessarily better than the past.

Gloria is mostly portrayed as a submissive person, by allowing others to take advantage of her but, at moments, one can also read her as having a critical voice. For example: 'Nos irritaba. Decía que éramos unos fracasados [...] Que se iba a buscar una casa decente. En cuanto pudiera' (69). These words show a very practical woman aware of the people she lives with and of her situation of disadvantage. She wishes for a change of context, but knows that she does not have access to such a change yet. But the idea of her wishing to find 'una casa decente' suggests that she has interiorized her role as maid, as a result, perhaps, of the overall abuse the has suffered, which has been able to annul her confidence as a former salaried worker. Another example of Gloria's cleverness is provided by the narrator in:

> Que nos impusieran el deber de bailar cueca el 18, de bailar jota el 12 de octubre, que amenazaran con denunciarnos, que nos recortaran el sueldo, que nos llamaran a gritos por los altoparlantes [...] Sí, pero afortunadamente estaba Gloria. Ella nos esperaba y nos apaciguaba con sus agudos comentarios cuando ingresábamos a la casa demolidos por la fuerza del día. Gloria llevaba la cuenta de los supervisores. Nosotros le presentábamos una descripción somera de cada uno de ellos y ella adivinaba de inmediato cuál era el más peligroso [...] Gloria era inteligente, contaba con una inteligencia doméstica. Le gustaba la casa. Para ella trabajar en la casa era infinitamente mejor que trabajar en el súper. Parecía feliz de aguardarnos, de escuchar lo que teníamos que contarle, de planificar los siguientes movimientos con nosotros (93).

This example also has Gloria as main reflector, which is combined with the narrator's point of view. In its first words and through the rhythm of the prose, it

shows the sense of tiredness and monotony of the characters as a consequence of the way in which they are treated at work. But the example also shows that such a monotony is broken by Gloria's care for them. It shows, with a calmer rhythm, Gloria's care for the group to the point of leaving the impression that the narrator is referring to a quasi-mother who waits at home for the working family members to arrive. The group also seems to recognize Gloria's intelligence and her support to their work at the supermarket. But the narrative situation of this example again poses the question of the narrator's reliability. The narrator tempers Gloria's strategic and planning skills when he says that her intelligence is 'domestic'. Such a view contrasts with the actual way in which she is said to contribute with labour surviving strategies, which suggests that her cleverness actually goes beyond pure domestic matters. The example also provides a comparison between unpaid and paid work. Both the house and the supermarket are spaces of enclosure or oppression to Gloria; however, according to the narrator, she apparently prefers the house. Thus, again, the narrator's opinion creates distrust or scepticism, since the readers are not presented with Gloria's own view on whether she actually prefers the house or not, even though her voice sometimes can be heard elsewhere, including through direct speech. For example, when the members of the group talk about the sexual abuse that Isabel has to put up with in order to keep her job, the narrator tells that, 'Opinamos, sin reservas, que la única manera de conseguirlo era lamiendo el culo. Gloria añadió: "Claro, porque si no, vean no más lo que me pasó a mí". Volvimos a asentir' (64). These words from Gloria herself, along with the confirmation of the group, inform us of the way in which she once resisted abuse at work, and provide a sense of her integrity and self-respect, reasons for which she presumably lost her previous job at the supermarket. Later in the novel, although she is frequently sexually abused at the

house, one can sometimes read her as resisting the abuse of the drunk male characters (111).

Those examples nevertheless show that, in the end, Gloria perpetuates the oppressive labour system by helping the other workers avoid the mistakes that she previously made, making them more submissive. In the above example, the question of the narrator's reliability is significant and suggests two main things. First, that the female voice is not allowed to speak on important matters that regulate women's work and thus such significant issues, their preferences, remain viewed through the lens of other voices, of masculine voices that take part in the abuse and exploitation of an unheard female voice. And second, it also suggests that beyond a change of setting, in practical terms, there is no difference between Gloria's paid work and unpaid work, except for a salary, as she is equally abused in both scenarios. This insurmountable link between paid and unpaid domestic labour and abuse leaves us with the sense of a suffocating enclosure that Gloria cannot escape from, which provides further clues on the pessimistic perspective of the novel and its focus on denunciation rather than on a suggestion of a model for resistance.

One can read another example of Gloria's practical and determined attitude when the group suspects that Alberto is attempting to organize a workers union. The narrator tells us: '"Culiado envidioso", añadió Gloria' (72); and actually she is the one that reports Alberto, who is made redundant (73). This incident ambiguously shows both lack of solidarity and a curious version of it, as the whole group fears dismissal because of Alberto's plan and it is Gloria who takes action to protect the jobs of the majority. Gloria could be read as both a traitor and a practical woman who favours

the wellbeing (the jobs) of the majority, which is also what provides her with a place to live. The incident also suggests that in the novel's contemporary social context, individual actions are more powerful than collective ones, which contrast with the more comprehensive *obrero* resistance of the past. On this occasion, the narrator also tells us that 'Gloria dijo que no iba a soportar que se la montara nunca más. Aseguró que si Alberto tenía tantas ganas, pues que se fuera y culiara a su mamá' (74). These words suggest again a link between Gloria and the maternal role that she plays in this small community, as they mention Alberto's mother, and not any other woman, as the figurative alternative to satisfy the sexual needs that Gloria used to meet. They are also sexist, insulting words that suggest women's sexual subjugation and show that in this contemporary setting, the female body is another product that is accessible via the financial resources provided by a job.

Similarly related to Gloria's strengths and the significance of her work for this community, as opposed to all the other characters who are actually given fewer hours to work, Gloria becomes increasingly tired because of the amount of domestic work she does unpaid. As the narrator tells us, 'Casi desplomada por el cansancio. Pobrecita Gloria. Atrapada en el rigor de la casa o corriendo detrás de las ofertas, con lengua afuera detrás de las ofertas. Pálida, provista de unos gestos que nos parecían insoportables y terminaban por hacernos la vida imposible' (116). These words remind us of part I's customers who run to get the supermarket offers and contribute to the protagonist's fatigue. Such a link leaves the impression of a vicious circle in which the requirements of the market result in the oppression of both workers and consumers. And importantly, although at first sight these words seem to provide an empathic view of Gloria's work and exhaustion, phrases such as 'nos parecían

insoportables' and 'hacernos la vida imposible' warn the readers to question the reliability of the narrator, and reveal his animosity towards Gloria as well as his devaluation of the domestic work done by her. The insensitivity of this male first-person plural narrator to Gloria's work again provides insights into the novel's concern with the way in which female domestic labour is undervalued by this 'nosotros' narrator, by a voice that represents an extended group formed of characters not always clearly identified, a voice that might represent broader patriarchal society.

As the novel progresses, Gloria's work is even less appreciated by the other characters, both male and female (116), and one can read her as subjugated and not responding to the aggressiveness of others, in the narrator's words: 'lo escuchaba, pálida, agotada, con un destello de ira en la mirada. El brillo de una furia tan consistente que la obligaba a bajar la cabeza para no responder' (116). These words suggest that Gloria's rebellious, critical and strong personality has not vanished, but has been so oppressed that she has perhaps accepted that she needs to hide her voice in order to keep her place in the house. This reminds us of the oppression that the other characters suffer at the supermarket and their accepting attitude. These similarities provide further evidence of the novel's link between the supermarket and the house, and between paid and unpaid domestic labour.

Gloria's submissiveness may be influenced by an episode of mistrust against her by the other characters, which results in the violent reaction of Enrique, the group leader. Enrique and Gabriel do not like Andrés (95-96) and perhaps in an attempt to gain the leader's acceptance, Andrés tells Enrique that Gloria asked him to do

whatever is necessary for them to be fired from work (97). The group apparently believes Andrés. Then, as the narrator relates, Enrique 'sin decirle una palabra, le mandó de inmediato un tremendo puñete en la cara. "En el hocico de mierda que ni siquiera se le hinchó como se lo merecía", comentó Sonia. "La hija de puta, la culiada, la maricona", dijo Isabel' (98). This episode is a good example of the type of community that the novel portrays. Various human feelings are not absent from this community; however, it is distrust, jealousy and fear which prevail over affective bonds and solidarity, particularly on the side of those who work at the supermarket. The readers are never presented with the true facts about this plot apparently planned by Gloria, but only with some doubts about its veracity. Also, as opposed to an earlier example, this event provides a striking image of the lack of female solidarity, which suggests that the most important thing for these people is, above all, their permanence at work. In the complexity of the human relationships shown by the novel, what prevails is the sense that when Gloria dares to resist abuse, she may suffer the consequences both at home and at the supermarket. In other words, what is stressed by this episode is the violence that surrounds female labour, which may constitute a permanent inhibition of their affective and technical qualities. This episode shows a complex, labyrinthine set of social relations that blurs the limits between people's inner human nature and their roles as workers; and it significantly shows that social mistrust and abuse find a meeting point in the violence against female bodies.

Later in the novel Enrique, the patriarchal, surly and violent leader is also abusive with Isabel. She is portrayed as depressive and indifferent to work: 'No saludaba, no se bañaba, ni siquiera se lavaba los dientes' (107), the narrator recounts. But one

does not learn the reasons for Isabel's feelings, as the novel does not go further into her personal life, which contrasts with the focus that the novel shows on her beauty and work as a promoter (77). This contrast again underscores the objectification of people, who are merely reduced to their work roles. The narrator's focus on Isabel's beauty, her work as a product promoter and her need to become sexually involved with her supervisors in order to keep her job highlight the underestimated and objectified status of working women. It suggests that their intentions and acts in the labour environment are always linked to their bodies; that they are supposedly meant to use their bodies and sexuality to gain favours from superiors; and that women's bodies are exploited by this labour system for marketing purposes. The combined portrayal of Isabel and Gloria, both sexually abused, suggests that women are meant to be willing to satisfy masculine sexual desires in the private and the public spheres.

The group asks Enrique to take action against Isabel's attitude and leave them alone for him to do so. When they return home, in the narrator's words: 'Allí estaban. "Todavía parece que no entiende bien esta concha de su madre", nos dijo Enrique. "Te entendió. Ya te entendió", dijo Gloria. Le creímos a Gloria. Isabel, ovillada, permaneció silenciosa' (109). This event shows, through Gloria's own words, hints of female solidarity and female shared experience. Gloria's compassionate attitude towards Isabel is evident when Enrique intends to continue his aggression against Isabel, for he thinks that she has not yet understood the message. This message has to do with the idea that working women are meant to capitalize on their bodies in the labour context and that women are expected to be submissive both at home and at work. In the cases of Isabel and Gloria, Enrique has reacted violently when they apparently do not meet their expected roles. In other words, if they show themselves

unwilling to stick to the patriarchal patterns of female objectification and subjugation both at home and work, the patriarchal forces in power have the capacity and authority to violently repress them or relegate them to the home sphere, which includes physical violence. Gloria intervenes and subtly manages to stop the aggression against Isabel. This scene shows Gloria's generosity and empathy with other people's suffering –even when she was not treated in such a way by Isabel when Enrique hit her. The exact type of physical punishment that Isabel receives from Enrique is not clarified, which focuses the readers' attention rather on Gloria's empathy with Isabel; empathy that, perhaps, comes from the fact that Gloria has also lived a life marked by violence and abuse. Thus, this violent incident suggests the potential for female solidarity, female difference and women's shared experience.

Those notions were also suggested by the previously discussed case of Isabel's awareness of Gloria's domestic labour. But in comparison to that previous case, there is a greater emphasis on Gloria's display of compassion, since it comes in direct speech and takes the last words of a sub-section. This emphasis, along with the fact that the compassion comes from the person who does not work at the supermarket, speak of the capacity of this labour system portrayed to annul potential feelings of empathy among people. This system also specifically annuls female self-confidence, solidarity, leadership, independence and insurgency, and has the capacity to break their will, including through violence. On the contrary, it fosters female subjugation in the private and public spheres; it foregrounds women's abilities as linked to either domestic tasks or their supposed capacity and willingness to profit from their bodies; and it promotes submissive attitudes in all the characters, which has however, more cruel manifestations and consequences in the case of women.

One can also read the positive female difference made by Gloria and the despotic nature of the patriarchal and abusive leader Enrique towards the end of the novel. Enrique is fully identifiable with the supermarket; he is the voice that promotes the supermarket offers on the microphone (127) and he is made a supervisor. As the new supervisor, he puts all the group in the list of dismissals and makes them leave the house (138-139). The narrator reflects:

> Nosotros, los últimos sobrevivientes, sólo habíamos servido a Enrique como un campo humano para una cruel experimentación [...] Y Gloria, con un bulto insignificante entre las manos, que contenía el conjunto apretado de su ropa, parecía, sin embargo, poseedora de una lucidez severamente perturbada [...] Incluso, dejó su bolso en el suelo y se volcó a eliminar los restos de polvo que dejaban nuestras últimas pisadas. La observábamos sorprendidos. Pero alcanzábamos a entender la distancia que nos separaba, porque entre Gloria y nosotros se interponía el súper y una violencia que siempre resultó desconocida para ella (137).

This example shows the different natures of Enrique and Gloria. He is the despotic ambitious, selfish and patriarchal leader, who represents the cruel labour system that the novel portrays, a system that, as much as Enrique, regards people as usable objects. On the contrary, Gloria is portrayed as generous, humble and peaceful. However, her qualities do not seem to be a completely positive factor, which is suggested by the use of word 'pero' to temper the admiration of the group. Although Gloria owns few possessions, she has what no other character has: 'lucidez'. Nevertheless, this is also a damaged form of lucidity –by patriarchal oppression, perhaps–, as it is 'perturbada' and not *perturbadora*. In other words, Gloria's particular form of intelligence and sensitivity does not, in the view of others, lead to agency. The group itself and the whole system they are inserted in have been shown to be sexist, therefore, it is no wonder that the group relegates Gloria to domestic tasks and that, in the end, she also relegates herself. It seems that, despite her many

positive qualities, still she does not have the necessary characteristics required for leadership in this contemporary community.

The potential of female difference, solidarity and women's shared experience is never actually realized by the characters. This is another pessimistic aspect of the novel, reflected in the inescapability of the oppressive dynamics that it portrays, and particularly of the inescapability for female characters, since, as the novel shows, this system oppresses and abuses them in particular ways. The group finds a new leader in the young Gabriel, who may be thought to represent the perspective of a new generation. Gabriel is a confident young man, who predicts Enrique's intentions (137-139), to which the group reacts with admiration, as the narrator tells us:

> El estallido de su ira callejera nos devolvió una inesperada plenitud. Gabriel dijo que teníamos que querernos, lo ordenó con un tono parco, duro, mirándonos con un grado de reconocible inquina. Aseguró que iba a implementar con urgencia una nueva organización. Sin entender del todo sus palabras, pero muy avergonzados de nosotros mismos, le contestamos que sí, que sí. Estábamos fascinados por la seguridad que destilaba Gabriel (139).

These words introduce Gabriel's speech on the group's way out of the house. At first sight, the phrase 'la ira callejera' may remind us of the past *obrero* resistance, which took place mainly on the streets, and may therefore provide expectations of the hope of an escape. But this example shows the group's lack of agency and is a strong image of a group of people in extreme need of a guide and instructions. They are portrayed as so used to having a leader that although they do not understand what he says to them, they are still willing to accept any potential plan about their destiny set by the leader. This reminds us of the idea of Chile as *un país que no lee*, of people's lack of reading comprehension, which is linked to their lack of interest in political affairs. The example also introduces the new leader's personality. Gabriel demands

care and affection, but such a demand is perceived by the narrator not in affective terms, as he uses words such as ‘parco’, ‘duro’ and ‘inquina’, which actually denote lack of affection or even aversion. This contradiction between the demands and what the narrator perceives, reveals the new leader’s disaffection and lack of positive feeling for the group. Therefore, Gabriel perpetuates what was formerly represented by Enrique and what the leaders demand in the novel is rather associated with the submissiveness required by the labour system. But the narrator, although able to perceive the tone of the leader’s words, shows that the group accepts them without questioning. As such, what is most significant from this example is the attitude of the group, who in the end react with admiration. This attitude is an overwhelmingly pessimistic view of the rhetorical capacities of those in power to persuade people.

In a similar vein, Gabriel at times represents the image of a technocrat. His ambition to move up at work and his technical focus is revealed by the narrator with words such as, ‘Gabriel, mucho más que iracundo, ensayaba, en las noches, múltiples maneras de envolver [...] Unos envoltorios con los que buscaba incrementar su precisión en el súper’ (111-112). Such technocracy contrasts with, on the one side, Gloria’s qualities based on care, cleverness and a critical voice, and, on the other side, with the grassroots nature of the *movimiento obrero* that the newspaper titles allude to. Gabriel’s technical focus seems to echo the political influence of Chile’s neoliberal technocracy. Similarly effective, in the above scene the new leader’s apparent technical attributes and rhetorical capacity have the convincing power to move the group in the direction that he pleases with no questioning from them. The scene also shows that the *estallido de la ira callejera*, which in the past was a background to the vigorous *obrero* resistance, in the contemporary setting of the

novel, is no longer linked to socio-political goals from the grassroots, but is in the end an impulse to technocracy. This may be read as a critique of the way in which people are willing to get carried away by the forces in power, who can easily take control of their destiny without any resistance, and reminds us of the question of the depolitization of the Chilean population discussed in the Introduction.

At the end of the novel Gabriel exhorts the group saying, '"Vamos a cagar a los maricones que nos miran como si nosotros no fuéramos chilenos. Sí, como si no fuéramos chilenos igual que todos los demás culiados chuchas de su madre. Ya pues huevones, caminen. Caminemos. Demos vuelta la página"' (140). Here, the voice of this new leader is presented by the narrator using direct speech, which may contribute to the scene's verisimilitude, as it purports to relay Gabriel's words directly. One can also read Gabriel as *blanqueado*, as the characters at the end of the novel start to perceive him as having white western physical characteristics (139-140). And although the new leader seems to actually dislike the supermarket (112, 127) and his last words are spoken on the streets, which might have provided some hopes to the characters in terms of where they will be headed to in the future, Gabriel's voice can still be heard as oppressive and aggressive. The rhythm of the prose in 'Ya pues huevones, caminen. Caminemos. Demos vuelta la página' resembles the style of military training exercises. The phrase 'Demos vuelta la página' may be self-referential and reminds us of the words 'Hay que poner fin a este capítulo' (60) with which Part I ends. But in Chile, the idea of *dar vuelta la página* is widely associated with the right-wing politics and its attempts to block the investigation and prosecution of the crimes committed by the military dictatorship. Gabriel's words also carry an emphasis on nationalism when he stresses the group's

condition of *chilenos*. And these are the final words of the novel in the part entitled 'Puro Chile 1970', a title that, as stated earlier, reminds us of a significant contemporary Chilean symbol of nationalism: the national anthem.

The group's need for a leader, who quickly adopts his new role and articulates a speech encouraging his people to move on, suggests a form of right-wing technocracy and the way in which such a technocracy influences people's submissiveness. And importantly, the new leader Gabriel shows no gender awareness at all. This is evident in his employment of a sexist language with words like 'maricones' and 'chuchas de su madre', insults that emerge from the patriarchal heterosexist division of gender roles. He does not value female domestic labour either, as revealed previously when he says of an exhausted Gloria: '"Esta concha de su madre cocina puras huevadas"' (116), the narrator relates through direct speech that, again, stresses the realistic nature of Gabriel's view and uses a sexist insult as 'concha de su madre'. Therefore, the new leader, though young, is just a new version of a despotic, violent and patriarchal leader, which leaves the readers with a hopeless expectation for younger generations. Avelar characterizes Latin America post-dictatorship literature as linked to the use of allegorical portrayals to account for the catastrophe of dictatorships (Avelar, 2000: 97-110). One can argue that allegorical figures can also be found in the Chilean post-transition to democracy literature as a way of accounting for the economic, political and cultural legacies that Chilean society inherits from the dictatorship, which have been greatly endorsed by the subsequent transition to democracy. In *Mano de obra*, the leaders Gabriel and Enrique can be read as a combined allegorical figure, a kind of fascist-populist leader, for they embody a sense of the specific historical and political circumstances

and influences that frame Chile's contemporary neoliberal and patriarchal labour system.

The analysis presented in this section has demonstrated that *Mano de obra* conveys a pessimistic point of view in the way in which the characters relate to each other, in the community patterns portrayed by the novel, as well as in the portrayal of the political status of the female domestic labour. *Mano de obra* highlights a social imaginary in which community relations are framed by a contemporary neoliberal context. In this context, the female labour force is inhibited by the violence of patriarchal leaders, who represent a system that leaves no room for particular forms of female leadership. The analysis of the portraits of the female domestic labour has unveiled the way in which contemporary neoliberal systems do not encourage and significantly suffocate female potentialities, eventually positive female difference and female solidarity. But even more important in this part it is the use of a first-person plural narrator, which, as already stated, might be representative of a broader group, perhaps, patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the main significance of this type of narrator relies on the effect it can have on the readers.

This 'nosotros' narrator alludes to peripheral characters: they are members of the *lumpen*, they seem to be unimportant people, they are badly abused at work (and women at home as well), and do not enjoy the most basic labour rights. Some of them have names, but the readers never fully identify who these people are; and the plural narrator has no name. It is a narrator that may be representative of a wider social group but does not include Gloria. She is not part of this 'nosotros' narrator composed of supermarket workers. This separation creates a focus which is not on

the *nosotros*, but on Gloria. The first-person plural narrator comes to emphasize the narration about Gloria, about the observed. And readers observe Gloria through this 'nosotros' narrator, through his –or rather their– patriarchal subjective voice. Gloria is the *other*,[42] that is, she is outside this mainstream male voice represented by the narrator; she represents otherness and the overlooked. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines otherness as 'The quality or fact of being other; difference, esp. from an expected norm; separateness from or oppositeness to a (frequently specified) thing, or from or to an observer; diversity' (Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary*).[43] It is certainly also a term used in some postcolonial debates to address issues around the politics of representation, gender, race, ethnicity and identity, especially from the view of the relationship between the self and the other as linked to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Al-Saidi, 2014: 96).[44]

Nevertheless, viewing Gloria's otherness through such a postcolonial lens is problematic, since in the novel there is not any focus on her ethnic origins or past. The readers only learn that she represents a kind of unpaid female labour force that is urban and shows no connection to land, race or even history. Her needs are invisibilized, she is abused by her community and discriminated, but shows no awareness of the subversive past of the generations that, some readers might presume, preceded her. Even more, she can be read as sometimes perpetuating the *status quo*. The novel's references to the socio-historical background in which

[42] For the seminal philosophical discussion of men as the universal and women as the particular or the 'other', see Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1983).
[43] I provide this definition, since, as Silvana Rabinovich points out, it is not possible to consider one specific concept of otherness but instead various debates around the idea and treatment of the Other in different disciplines such as philosophy, cultural and postcolonial studies (Rabinovich, 2009: 44).
[44] For further approaches to the concept of otherness from postcolonial debates, see, for example, Bhabha, 1994; Shkilev, 2015; and Spivak, 1989.

Gloria's portrayal is set are somehow connected to contemporary Chilean history, the twentieth-century specifically, but are also significantly framed by an overwhelming lack of memory. Although with some historical references, the novel's focus on Gloria's otherness is clearly framed by a neoliberal patriarchal labour system. Though the implementation of such a system in Chile was influenced by a foreign world power, the U.S., through the policies of the 'Chicago Boys', it is a legacy of a brutal dictatorship conducted by the Chilean armed forces, which was planned by and agreed between them and important sectors of Chile's economic and political elites; as much as many Chileans have been victims (of a cruel dictatorship and the working system it implemented), other Chileans have been perpetrators as well. Furthermore, for an important sector of the military in power and the civilian elite, the initial economic project of the *junta* was not aimed at implementing an economic system dictated by a foreign power, but reinstalling the nationalist-corporatist one centred on the aforementioned *latifundio* (Moulian, 2002: 216-221). Nonetheless, later the neoliberal model was adopted by the dictatorial regime and remained mostly unquestioned by Chile's democratic institutions of the transition. In this way, *Mano de obra* clearly represents the challenges of reading Chile's post-transition to democracy literature and the complexity of its particular legacies in a current globalized context.

Importantly, however, in this complex play between fiction and a real-world setting, and between past, present and the lack of memory, the novel, as fiction, contributes to the questioning of the depicted patriarchal *status quo*. Through its narrative technique, *Mano de obra* on the one hand creates a focus on and foregrounds the overlooked, the one who is on the lowest rank of discrimination: an unpaid *obrera*

with no possessions, no career, no family, no friends, no past and no ownership of or connection to land. In this way, the novel subverts prevailing patriarchal and class domination. And on the other hand, it creates significant suspicion that surrounds the words, comments and views of this plural narrator, or broader patriarchal society perhaps, and thus obliges the readers to distrust the reliability of his, or rather their, discourses. Although not offering any clear solution to the issue and with a prevailing sense of pessimism and hopelessness, by placing the focus on a character like Gloria as well as suspicion around the 'nosotros' narrator, the novel (re-)creates a fictional world in which the relationship between discourse, a patriarchal ideology and existing power relations feeds a sexist and biased social imaginary, a patriarchal social context that badly abuses and benefits from female domestic labour. But, in the interrelated dynamics between literature and a given social imaginary, precisely because of the combination of the aforementioned elements, this patriarchal social imaginary is denounced, questioned and potentially subverted, since the discourses, ideology and power relations that form it can in the end be regarded by the readers as *unreliable*. This is a clear example of how fiction may not only project a certain social imaginary, but also contributes to its formation through the creativity of narrative technique. The social imaginary that feeds gender difference and inequality is not a fixed category, but a construct permanently (re-)created by a society's forms of cultural expression. And *Mano de obra* is an example of how fiction's narrative technique may contribute to build distrust around such a patriarchal social construct.

Conclusions

Mano de obra may be classified as a more realist novel in comparison to other works by Eltit, such as *Lumpérica* or *Los vigilantes*. It is a novel with a less hermetic language, somehow more accessible to readers, and depicts a recognizable contemporary setting and human relationships that contribute to the smoother reading of the story. But *Mano de obra* also has a rich narrative technique that allows the novel to portray a complex social context and ambiguous human relationships in a community always demarcated by people's capacity as workers.

A significant aspect of the narrative technique is the transition from a first-person singular to a first-person plural narrator, both implicitly male. In part I, the first-person plural narrator is linked to the apparent lack of communal ties, the protagonist's process of thinking and his interior monologue. It is associated with concerns such as the potentially necessary process of reflection about the past in order to develop awareness of the human nature of workers and their decadent status in a labour system based on consumerism. Such a process of reflection also includes some awareness by the narrator of his own position within this system, which is *al margen*: disconnected from the spheres of power, undervalued and objectified. Therefore, this type of narrator foregrounds a perspective somewhat more critical of the system in which he is inserted, as he can also be read as progressively more uncomfortable with the suffocating demands of his labour environment.

The novel stresses the objectification of the labour force through the use of enumeration and repetition, but also highlights the human nature of the contemporary

worker particularly through the use of the parenthesis, which reveal the process of awareness of part I's narrator. This process foregrounds the existence of inescapable feelings and sensations. Such unavoidable human nature contrasts with the emotionlessness of an oppressive labour system that regards workers as machines and demands that they tolerate its requirements beyond human limits. Nonetheless, in this play between dehumanization and humanization, there is no suggestion of any form of escape from the oppressive context, but only of an extreme exhaustion of the worker that may lead to the acceptance of dismissal. But the potential of dismissal is not presented as a form of liberation realized by the characters, which contributes to the pessimistic nature of the novel.

Although different from those communal ties presumed as predominant during the successful past of the Chilean *movimiento obrero*, in part II, the novel does portray a form of contemporary community. This is evident in the depiction of various characters who live and work together, in the narration that takes the first-person plural and in the use of direct and indirect speech. Importantly, part II's first-person plural narrator leaves us with an effect of assimilation and confusion regarding who speaks and on behalf of who, that is, who are the actual members of this labour system. His voice may thus be considered as representative of a broader social group. This type of narrator also generates instances of criticism, which emerge from the question of his reliability. At some points of the story, particularly, regarding issues of female unpaid domestic labour, the narrative situation and narrator's reliability allow a critique of the way in which the status of women is undervalued and invisibilized by this 'nosotros' narrator, or by society in more general terms. This narrator also frames the idea of the objectification and underestimation of female

salaried workers and the undermining of their capacities by a violent system of patriarchal leadership. The use of this type of narrator to precisely convey these messages can be read again as the concern of the novel with the way in which the broader female labour force (paid and unpaid) is regarded by the wider society.

The transition from a singular to a plural narrator leaves us with two different senses. In the case of the singular one, a more positive view of a personal process of reflection that may lead to awareness, which is supported by the inclusion of *prensa obrera* newspapers' titles in this section. However, this remains at the level of interpretation, since no actual escape from the oppressive system is given to the characters, none of them is aware of this subversive past and they remain submissive throughout the novel. And in the case of the plural narrator, it leaves us with a sense of the above all pessimistic view of a subjugated, insensitive and unreliable community currently unable to undertake any processes of reflection and awareness. The novel's first-person plural narrator helps readers remain focused on Gloria, through whom the contemporary gender inequalities that surround unpaid female domestic labour are depicted. In a novel with a complex play between references to the past and the lack of memory, and framed by overall pessimism, one may understand Gloria's otherness and separateness from the 'nosotros' narrator as connected to the neoliberal labour policies of the dictatorship, but also to the perpetuation of such *status quo* –of the labour force in general and the unpaid domestic labour in particular– by the neoliberal Chilean state of the transition. Thus, this type of narrator also denounces that in a free-market labour system, workers are still badly abused and women's potentialities are strikingly and violently subjugated, undervalued, objectified and invisibilized both at work and at home.

The novel shows a particular relationship between the contemporary social context and history, but this is an ambiguous and disconnected relationship. The *prensa obrera* newspaper titles remind us of the successful past of the Chilean *movimiento obrero* that was able to achieve the first social and work security legislation, at the risk of many people's lives. However, the lack of clear links between these references and the lives of the contemporary characters of the novel has the effect of hopelessness and disillusion. The novel leaves us with the impression of a striking lack of dialogue between the past and the present and, therefore, the mentions of *prensa obrera* newspaper titles seem to be there to tell the readers what *Mano de obra* is *not* about, what this contemporary community is *not* doing, rather than to provide signs of hope on the potential revival of past forms of political struggles in general and of feminist ones in particular. This suggests that the novel rather denounces the cruelty of a labour system based on a free-market economy that does not respect workers, and a patriarchal society that undervalues women's contribution in any sphere –underestimation that has historical roots. The novel does not present the characters' with potential ways of an escape from such a system.

Tracing the pessimism that predominates throughout the novel, the analysis of this chapter demonstrates that *Mano de obra*'s effect can be summarized as a focus on two main issues: firstly, the brutality of a contemporary labour system that does not leave any space for resistance in general and for female liberation and leadership in particular and, secondly, the human nature of workers and with it the catastrophic influence of such cruel system on people. In very simple words, through a complex narrative technique, the novel denounces the cruelty with which the contemporary free-market labour system exploits people in general and women in particular.

Chapter II

Portraits of a Marginalized Community and Female Agency in *Fuerzas especiales* by Diamela Eltit

A. Introduction

Fuerzas especiales was published in Santiago, Chile in 2013 by Editorial Planeta. The novel is divided into 26 brief sections and has one epigraph, a verse from the Cuban writer Severo Sarduy (1937-1993). This reference again reminds us of Eltit's closeness to Barroque literature noted in the Introduction, as Sarduy is associated with the movement and theory of the *neobarroco* (Eltit, 1998: 108). The epigraph reads: *Soy una Juana de Arco electrónica, actual* (emphasis in the original). By alluding to Joan of Arc (1412-1431), the epigraph introduces us to the idea of female-led resistance; it also shows hints of a non-traditional femininity, of a woman playing a leader's role traditionally thought to be a masculine one. This is suggested by the protagonist's words too, when she relates what she believes her father thinks of her: 'Sé que yo soy para él lo más parecido a un hijo. Sé que me teme' (116). The title of the novel is an obvious reference to the police forces who are a permanent presence in the lives of the families from the *población* in which the novel is set. However, in an interview, Eltit stated that she meant the title not only as related to police repression, but also to the inner strength that people who live in a Chilean *población* need to survive in such an environment (Eltit, 2013b: para. 5 of 17).

The novel has a female first-person narrator, who is also the protagonist, and deploys internal monologues and free indirect style narration. The novel employs a formal language register with only few expressions representative of the Chilean lower-class sociolect. The story is set in an unnamed Chilean *población* composed of blocks of very small apartments that have all an internal area of 30 square metres (112) and are inhabited by families of around four to six people. The *población* is besieged by the

police forces, the *pacos* (the Chilean national uniformed police) and the *tiras* (the Chilean civilian police). The residents are permanently harried by the police, who forcefully break into the apartments to take people away on a regular basis. These people sometimes never return, some are killed, others are taken prisoner or have preferred to escape to other areas. There is an obvious echo of repression during the Chilean dictatorship and to those disappeared, killed, tortured and exiled by the military and the police forces during this time, though the dictatorship is never overtly mentioned in the novel.

Although throughout the story there are many mentions of events typical of modern life, such as familiarity with the use of multimedia and technology in the form of PCs, mobile phones and access to internet, the similarity between repression faced in this *población* and that experienced during the dictatorship blurs the borders between past, present and future. Thus, the novel is dystopian fiction and not a mimetic one about a Chilean *población*. It describes recognizable characteristics from past and present, but also has futuristic elements. *Fuerzas especiales* shows a setting easily recognized as a typical Chilean *población*, but also introduces certain elements of estrangement that provide some distance between this presumed context and the fictional nature of the story. The combination of these factors forms a kind of 'present future' in which the *pobladores* live surrounded by fear and state repression in blocks permanently enclosed by fences (44, 85).

The novel's protagonist lives in the fourth floor of a block with her sister, mother and father, who are confined to their apartment, waiting for the police to come and take them. The absence of *los niños*, who have been taken away by the police, has left

permanent marks on the family and the protagonist takes care of them, as her sister and mother some days are unable to get out of bed (11-13). The protagonist is also the only one who goes out of the apartment to work; she rents a cubicle in a cyber café administered by her friend El Lucho and prostitutes herself at a very cheap rate, an activity that her friend El Omar also does for a living. It not always clear whether they engage in real or cybernetic prostitution, or both (11-12, 86, 99, 100). These three characters share not only a friendship and a context of violence; they were also born the very same day (87). They show an enthusiasm for technology, particularly PCs and computer games that they find in the cyber café.

An important characteristic of the novel is its recurrent mentions of police and military armament. The arms are mentioned several times and are very varied in type, quantity and destructive capacity, including references to biological weapons (141). These are real arms currently or previously used by armies around the world, but not necessarily all of them have been used by the Chilean police forces. With regard to armament and the novel's setting, the author revealed in an interview that she was inspired by the permanent police intervention in the Población La Legua in Santiago, (Eltit, 2013b: para. 13 of 32). La Legua, located in southern Santiago, was occupied by workers who firstly came from the Chilean *Norte Grande*, the *pampinos*, after the decline of the saltpetre industry in the 1930s and, later, it was also occupied by people from other shantytowns in Santiago (Álvarez Bravo, 2010: 70-75). La Legua's first residents had strong links with the Chilean Communist Party and with the *ácratas*, the Chilean anarchist movement that influenced the social

struggles of *La Pampa Salitrera.*[45] During the dictatorship, La Legua was also an emblematic place of resistance; there used to be regularly violent and deadly raids by the military to the point that it is believed that they intended to bomb it (Ibid.: 97-98). As such, this *población* is a neighbourhood well-known for a history of social struggles and leftist political activism. However, nowadays it is highly stigmatized by the media not only for being a lower class area, but also for alleged delinquency and drug trafficking, the latter being the official reason for the current permanent police intervention, which started in 2001 (Ibid.: 8-10; 44-48).

The impact of crime and drug addiction in the *poblaciones* is in one sense a legacy of the dictatorship. In many *poblaciones,* drug trafficking started during the dictatorship and it is believed that there was a close link between Pinochet and the drug business (Ibid.: 98-99). In 2006, the former Head of the Chilean Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional DINA during the dictatorship and leader of the *Operación Cóndor,* Manuel Contreras, declared that the Pinochet family became rich from drug trafficking (Cooperativa, 'Manuel Contreras afirmó...'). This system introduced by the dictatorship and mostly preserved by the transition to democracy maintains *poblaciones* besieged, perpetuates poverty and allows the proliferation of organized crime and corruption. Moreover, it is the news from crime-related events which put *poblaciones* in the public eye, while it is at other times invisible for the rest of society. This is also portrayed in *Fuerzas especiales*, when the traumatic episode of the children being taken away by the police places family in the public gaze, as the protagonist reveals: 'Los niños existían ante una parte del mundo y existía también

[45] For an account of the influence of anarchism in *La Pampa Salitrera*, see Grez Toso, 2007, chapter III.

mi hermana y, por fin, a lo largo de cuarenta y ocho horas la vida de todos nosotros adquiría un merecido relieve' (18). It is, then, this context, rooted in a history of both social resistance and state repression, which Eltit chooses to frame the unnamed *población* of *Fuerzas especiales*. Nonetheless, although the author has openly explained the contextual influence of the novel's setting, the recurrent intrusion of the mentions of weapons comes to break the singularity of the first-person narrator, as these mentions are impersonal. Thus, the significance of these references has to do with the effect that they have on the readers. This effect is linked to two main ideas; first, to the armament's overwhelming presence in the lives of the characters, symbolizing a repressive system that suffocates and annuls them, and second, to the way in which these references contribute to the novel's dystopian nature (the Chilean police forces have never possessed nuclear weapons, for instance), as they break any potentially mimetic voice that one might at moments intuit from the familiarity of the novel's setting.

This chapter will first analyze the novel's use of form and style to depict a particular social context and secondly, it will explore the model of female leadership and agency that the novel portrays. Both objects of analysis are significant lines of inquiry to read the post-transition to democracy literature of an author who has openly declared herself a leftist feminist.

B. Form and Style in the Portraits of a *Población* and the Potential for Resistance

1. Sameness and Difference

A first impression that the novel leaves in the readers is the notion of sameness. At first sight, all of the sections follow a very similar pattern: one long paragraph, on several occasions opened and/or closed by a mention of police and military armament, with sentences separated by full stops. The uniformity of the sections may emphasize the sameness of modern life in a besieged *población.* Curiously, there is also sameness in the idea that the police officers are somehow like some people from the *población*. They are overweight as are most of the characters (65) and work for small salaries, which frustrates them and makes them release their anger on the *pobladores* (49-50; 71, 74, 78); they also enjoy El Cojo Pancho's *frica* bread (79) and are drug addicts and corrupt (51; 139; 150-151). These similarities make us conclude that the police are just another part of the same environment and that they are both oppressed and oppressors. Eltit herself has stated that 'La historia ha demostrado que existe de manera bien poderosa un fascismo popular, un sujeto que internaliza las voces de los dominadores y actúa como dominador, de esa manera se fuga de su condición de subalterno' (Eltit, 2013b: para. 7 of 32). Other examples of sameness are the blocks having apartments with similar measurements (26; 112); the Cyber café's PCs (63), children (48), dogs (118), years (160) and days (139), all described as *bloques*; the idea of four people remaining in the fourth floor of the protagonist's block (119); and women who are described as overweight, which turns them into blocks (56).

In the link between human beings and objects (the blocks), the novel highlights the objectification of human beings. Another example of such objectification is the link between people and animals. There are recurrent images of starving cats and dogs with curved backs (15, 77, 117, 121, 141) that wander around the *población*. This link is also highlighted in words from the protagonist such as 'o me consumiré en un ladrido anémico con la columna doblada sobre mis débiles patas' (150). But the dogs also have the capacity of growling and attacking, as they howl at and bite the police officers (118). This seems to echo the popular image of dogs accompanying students to demonstrations in the context of the 2011 Chilean student movement. Some dogs were brought by their owners, but most were abandoned dogs. In the documentary *Matapaco* (2013) directed by Víctor Ramírez, students say that dogs only howl at the police, are never affected by the tear gas or the water cannon, and that they have never seen any dog defending the police, not even police dogs.[46] In the novel, the image of the starving abandoned animals and its link to people contributes to the portrayal of a desolate world of fantasy, neglect and despair, but also to the way in which the novel suggests a potential for resistance that may emerge from people's oppression, marginalization and objectification.

The novel shows both a formal use of sameness and a thematic depiction of similar things and sometimes repetitive or near repetitive ideas. These two dimensions, formal and thematic, highlight people's similarities but also differences and potentialities. The protagonist relates, 'El Omar, el Lucho y yo tenemos la misma edad: mismo mes, mismo día, mismo año. Lo que nos diferencia es el bloque y esa distancia nos da otras perspectivas. Nos separan tres cuadras. Juntos sumamos tres

[46] To see the full documentary, visit < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiEFhAAWCiw>.

bloques' (61), which she repeats next page with 'Los tres, el Lucho, el Omar y yo, nacimos el mismo mes, el mismo día y el mismo año' (62). But importantly, given that all the blocks are very similar, there is a paradox in the idea that precisely the specific block in which they live makes them different. Thus, sameness, with its repetition or near repetition, foregrounds actually the opposite. Deleuze argues that '*Difference lies between two repetitions*' (Deleuze, 2001: 76, emphasis in the original). He explains that, on the one hand, the repetitive cycles of the organic being form the habits of the living present, which both retain the past and anticipate the future (Ibid: chapter 2). However, on the other hand, difference inhabits such cyclical repetition, for substances also perform contradictions and a new cycle may not be exactly the same as the previous or the future one; in his words, 'In every way, material or bare repetition, so-called repetition of the same, is like a skin which unravels, the external husk of a kernel of difference and more complicated internal repetitions' (Ibid.: 76). Furthermore, difference found in repetition is discoverable by a potentially creative spectator, since 'The role of the imagination, or the mind which contemplates in its multiple and fragmented states, is to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it' (Ibid.).

Deleuze's ideas regarding repetition and difference are relevant to the analysis of sameness and difference in *Fuerzas especiales*, as they provide us with a theoretical approach to understand some of the novel's most prominent narrative techniques and demonstrate that a close analysis of the literary choices an author makes to represent a certain social context can be productively combined with certain theoretical insights for a political reading of a text (Keen, 2015: xii; 50-52). This exemplifies the potential connections between narrative technique, context and theory. Following

Deleuze, from *Fuerzas especiales*' focus on sameness, the readers' mind, or the imagination, has the capacity to extract the novel's central political messages. The message conveyed by this technique is the idea that although these *pobladores* may at first sight look the same, their sameness also foregrounds their difference. The novel's focus on sameness is paradoxically a focus on difference and through this paradox the novel tells us that these friends have different views of the issues that surround them. This paradox helps concentrate the readers' attention on the idea that despite looking almost identical, the very location of each block makes the characters differ from each other, giving them a particular distance from and different perspective on the circumstances they face, which might provide room for resistance as 'juntos sumamos' suggests. Even more, still following Deleuze's approach, one may conclude that, although inspired by a real-world setting and with references to Chile's recent history of state repression, the fictional world created by this novel suggests that these *pobladores*' repetition of the 'cycle', or history perhaps, does not have to necessarily be exactly the same as the previous one. It thus provides insights into the way in which the novel conveys some rays of hope. What unites the characters is not an identical appearance or life story, but rather what connects them is the setting of this besieged *población*, that is, social and cultural ties given by a specific context, which might provide spaces for resistance, based on shared characteristics but also difference, from the margins of society.

Later in the novel, the protagonist reflects, 'sin duda que pronto vamos a pensar en nosotros tres y resolveremos por qué compartimos las fechas' (87) and she highlights that 'yo no soy como el Omar, no soy' (87). This contradictory idea of sharing many characteristics, without being the same, suggests a sense of community ties, of shared

conditions, rather than literal sameness. And such ties are emphasized by the fact that what the three friends share is a date and an environment, that is, they share particular historical and political circumstances. The protagonist also states the need to think about these common issues, which suggests their awareness or, one might interpret, consciousness of their own socio-political status and its implications. These *pobladores* are away from the centres of the city, 'no sé cómo hemos resistido la marginación' (162), the protagonist tells us. They seem to have been forgotten about, which is also implied in their enclosure, sameness and objectification. Therefore, one can argue that both the formal and thematic use of sameness in the novel speaks of a community sharing this repressive context to the point of objectification or dehumanization at first sight, but, at a closer look, it also speaks of the uniqueness of human beings, highlighted by the thought capacity of the protagonist and her friends, and by the different perspectives that they have. Such a thought process suggests awareness, which, one might imagine, could eventually lead to resistance.

Such potential resistance could emerge from the characters' objectification, from their distancing, invisibility and enclosure. In the image of the blocks there is also a sense of protection, in the protagonist's words, 'después del bloque no hay nada más, nada más que la policía llevándonos (47); here, there is also symmetry in the repetition of 'nada más', but asymmetry in the contrast between 'nada' and 'más'. The novel's play between symmetry and asymmetry has the effect of, on the one hand, stressing the notion of an oppressive society that regards the vulnerable population as distant objects with no particularities, and on the other hand, it leaves an impression of these people being not identical but bonded by something, in the protagonist's words: 'Pero la simetría también nos une' (62). Sameness has a

strategic dimension, as the protagonist explains, ‘mi hermana, mi madre y yo tenemos un tipo humano tan común que no somos recordadas por nadie. Pero eso me permite asegurar que mi tipo común es en realidad excepcional por el conjunto de beneficios que porta’ (78). These words give us an idea about the political system in which the characters are immersed. It is a system that favours the invisibilization of those who are in the margins of society, an insensitive system in which the vulnerable population is not taken into consideration by the elite and is oppressed by the repressive forces in power, who regard them as distant objects or even quasi-animals. Furthermore, these words suggest that such a system particularly ignores women, which, however, might turn out to be somehow beneficial and perhaps provide spaces of organization and resistance, as will be further explored later. This play between sameness and difference is also present in the way in which the novel’s sections are presented. They at first sight follow a similar pattern, but also show some subtle variation. For example, there are sections composed of single paragraphs only; some are introduced by mentions of armament; others end with such references; and a few are both introduced and concluded with those mentions. One may relate these subtle differences between the sections to the differences shown by the characters, at first sight so objectified that it is difficult to separate them from the blocks, but on closer inspection, different.

2. The Blurring of Specific Relationships and Women’s Vulnerability

A recurrent theme of the novel is that of the missing children. In the section entitled ‘Los nombres prohibidos’, the protagonist relates ‘cuando mi mamá me dice Pedro, Leandro o papá, ella y yo nos miramos con terror porque [...] sé que la noticia de una

desgracia inminente o de una felonía doméstica o una palpitación nerviosa nos va a demoler' (23). These names are supposed to refer to the missing children (25), but it is actually unclear whether these are or are not their names. There is no clarity over the children's destiny either (11, 21) or whether the children are the protagonist's nephews or brothers (17, 21). This lack of clarity about the missing children blurs the identity of these victims, which may be linked to the idea of sameness discussed above. The novel also mentions a 'felonía doméstica', which hints at a potential crime or disloyalty among family members. By using the word 'felonía', which is not a frequent word in everyday Chilean Spanish, the protagonist may also remind us of President Salvador Allende's last speech that ended with the words: 'Tengo la certeza de que, por lo menos, habrá una lección moral que castigará la felonía, la cobardía y la traición'.[47]

The idea of the missing children is present throughout the novel in phrases such as, 'la ausencia de sus niños' (11); 'sus hijos hombres [...], los que vivían con nosotros, nuestros hermanos verídicos' (11); 'sus hijos, los hermanos que teníamos' (81); 'los que ya no están. Los nombra y los repasa' (104); and 'sus hijos hombres, los hermanos que tenía' (116). The title of the section 'Los nombres prohibidos' and the idea of the missing children, whose identities are blurred and who cannot be named, seem to echo the song 'Yo te nombro' (1971) by the Italian singer and songwriter Gian Franco Pagliaro (1941-2012). Pagliaro lived most of his life in Argentina and was representative of the leftist *Nueva Canción Latinoamericana* popular in Argentina and Chile during the 1960s and 1970s. The lyrics of 'Yo te nombro' (also known as 'Yo te nombro libertad') read:

[47] To listen to the full speech, visit <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-82594.html>.

por tu nombre tan prohibido
yo te nombro libertad
te nombro en nombre de todos
por tu nombre verdadero
[...]
tu nombre verdadero
tu nombre y otros nombres
que no nombro
por temor
[...]
por tus pasos que vigilan
por el déspota de turno
por los hijos que te matan
yo te nombro libertad[48]

These similarities between one of the novel's main themes and a popular song of leftist resistance are particularly interesting to note in the case of an author whose narrative has been characterized by some scholars as elitist (Palaversich, 2005: 99). On the contrary, one might consider this socio-cultural reference as, for example, a more popular version of the newspaper titles in *Mano de obra*.

Linked to the idea of a *felonía doméstica*, the section 'Los nombres prohibidos' also suggests the theme of incest. One example is found in the protagonist's own family, as she mentions that *los niños* are the sons of both her sister (17) and her father as well (21), which supports the idea that the novel attempts to blur the identity of the missing children. Also, the protagonist reflects, 'Mi papá es distinto, único, eso lo saben mi hermana y mi mamá, lo sabe bien la guatona Pepa' (78) and the novel reveals later that the father used to molest her friend La Guatona Pepa when she was a minor (154-155). However, the topic of incest is not openly treated, which leaves the impression that the protagonist either does not realize it or, if she does, she is not

[48] To listen to Gian Franco Pagliaro's song, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqqFrEVA bcQ>.

surprised or scandalized. One may read this ambiguous or rather neutral way to relate incest and sexual abuse as an attempt to describe a common and unsurprising situation of abuse against women in the kind of setting that the novel portrays, which is a typical upper-class stereotype about the poor: they are sexually out of control. But it may also be a critique of a vulnerability that seems to have been normalized in the eyes of society as a potentially intrinsic role of women from this setting. The narrator also tells us, 'Pensé en los niños, en la súbita radicalidad que adquiría la familia, en los matices irreales que adquiría la noticia, en la abierta desaprobación que generaba mi hermana. Me irritó la malévola comprensión de su cuerpo (19). These words at first sight may suggest that people wrongly believed that *los niños* were the result of incest between her father and her sister. But they may also be a critique of the reaction of a society in front of sexual abuse against women and girls. Words such as 'los matices irreales', meaning that what is not real are the *matices* and not the specific fact (abuse presumably), linked to 'la malévola comprensión de su cuerpo' point to the idea that abused women and girls are socially blamed and stigmatized, and their own bodies are deemed to instigate the sexual abuse suffered.

The lack of clarity about incest, linked to the ideas of sameness and difference, further stresses the notion of people's objectification. There are varied relationships uniting the novel's characters, which may sometimes look immoral to the eyes of a distant society that stigmatizes these vulnerable contexts. But on closer reading, one may find particular stories of human relationships, whose complexity is informed by varied feelings of love, care, solitude, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Through ambiguity, the novel mixes these relationships up and at moments makes us, and society by analogy, forget about individualities. Such an effect of forgetfulness

speaks of an indifferent society that overlooks, casts aside and discriminates those who live in unprivileged contexts, and ignores the particular vulnerability that women face in the setting portrayed by the novel. Nevertheless, the lack of clarity about the question of incest also creates a veil of suspicion around it, through which the novel does not only portray or denounce, but also challenges traditional social prejudices about the experiences that women may face in a context like a Chilean *población*.

3. The Narrator's Voice: Repression and Potential

As previously noted, the narrator and protagonist's language is mostly formal, with a register that resembles that of a learned person. This may have to do with the fact that the protagonist, along with her friends, is a frequent visitor to websites of various kinds and also watches programmes that provide her with various sorts of information (30, 42, 89). The different registers employed by the protagonist and the police also present an interesting contrast. In indirect speech retold by the protagonist, in her imagination the police forces address her with words such as '¿cómo te llamái?, ¿cómo te llamái?' (53). These words show a colloquial register evident in the use of the Chilean Spanish *voseo*, as well as an aggressive tone and accelerated rhythm that she feels would scare her so much that 'yo no pueda contestar por la invasión de un extenso blanco cerebral que me doble la lengua en un espasmo a causa de un pánico incontrolable (53). These linguistic contrasts, added to the fact that the novel employs mostly a formal register, seem to tell us that people from the *población* are not ignorant –as *pobladores* are commonly stigmatized by the media– and that they also have thirst for knowledge, or at least that their interior

voices are eloquent. Moreover, the characters could be eventually seen as more than mere passive victims who easily accept their destiny. In the light of their lack of opportunities, they have found alternative and contemporary ways to educate themselves, such as online reading, which is in the novel a sign of resistance against state violence. Online reading is an active task towards self-education. It implies agency and decision-making; it involves searching for and selecting information, and it somehow distances itself from the more traditional forms of education in which the learner might be considered a passive recipient of knowledge. Such a notion of agency in relation to the acquisition of knowledge is a strong form of resistance against oppression in a context framed by the lack of socio-economic privileges. This particular sign of resistance again reminds us of the political content that Eltit attributes to reading and writing; it also opens the paths for thinking of new possible forms of self-education in an era marked by the influence of multimedia and communication technology, social potentialities that will be further discussed later.

State violence is reflected by the type of language used by the novel to portray the intimidation of the police forces. It is marked by the use of the Chilean *voseo*, which helps us focus on the particular history of Chilean Spanish.[49] This contextual and historical focus and the aggressive tone of the police forces frame an emphasis on the institutionalized repression that the characters must face. However, in a complex social environment they do not necessarily show lack of awareness of the context that surrounds them and one may argue that they are just obtrusively oppressed and traumatized by state violence, which has historical and institutional roots. And in contrast to the specificities of the language used by the police forces, the

[49] For a study of the history of Chilean Spanish, including the Chilean *voseo*, see Rojas, 2015.

protagonist's language register contributes to the novel's literariness, by breaking any potentially mimetic characteristic. It contributes to the dystopian nature of the novel and functions as an element of estrangement and timelessness.

The voice of the narrator on occasions leaves an effect of doubt with regard to its singularity and there are a few instances when it may be regarded as representative of a broader group; for example, 'Soy multitudinaria, estoy en todas partes, me proyecto como Dios y me amplifico dotada de una esquirla de divinidad. Pero no soy yo, somos el yo bloque que habita genéticamente en cada uno de nosotros' (78). Eltit has also stated that 'la primera persona, "yo", siempre la he considerado social, histórica, filiada a una genealogía individual y colectiva' (Eltit, 2003: para. 32 of 38). In *Fuerzas especiales*, the experiences faced by the novel's first-person narrator and protagonist might be regarded as not necessarily limited to only one specific individual. She may be representative of a wider group, that is, the particular social and historical circumstances that she faces may be shared by many more who live in similar settings. At moments, the narrator also seems to have a different voice than that of the other female characters. For example, La Guatona Pepa asks 'y si me aturden, me vai a arrastrar voh acaso' (80); the mother asks her sister, '¿te sentís bien?' (131); and the sister answeres, '¿Cómo creís que me siento?' (131). These examples show that the other female voices use a significantly more colloquial language, which contrasts with that of the protagonist, who is mostly portrayed as using a more formal register. This again suggests a narrator who, beyond the expected characteristics of the voice of a woman who lives in a *población*, could at moments be read as representing a more extensive and varied group. Therefore, the narrator's voice above all stresses state repression, whereas it also suggests the

potential that contemporary and alternatives forms of self-education may have for the wider socially vulnerable group that she represents.

4. References to Armament: Oppression and Potential for Resistance

The most prominent characteristic of the novel's narrative technique is the mention of police and military armament. These references can be found at the beginning of sections or at the end of them, and a few sections have them both at the beginning and at the end. This distribution stresses the idea that state violence is the context that surrounds the story that each section relates. Also, all of the sections have the references inserted in the text. These unsubtle and impersonal insertions, which contrast with the first-person narrator, seem to tell us that state violence does not only surround this *población*, that it does not only stay on the outside, but is also inserted in the routine of the people who live there, as an invasive and crude disruption of their daily lives. The mentions of armament are always separated by full stops and those put at the beginning and end of the sections form the only separate paragraphs of these sections, which otherwise would be composed of one single paragraph. Therefore, the references to armament come to break the unity of the paragraph and the smooth reading of the story, just as state violence comes to break the unity of the *pobladores* and the smooth running of their daily routines. The varied distribution of these unsubtle references reminds us that the *población* is under siege. It is a symbol of permanent vigilance and enclosure by the state repressive bodies that, normally, stay threateningly outside homes, but from time to time also break into them violently, just as mentions of armament unsubtly impose themselves in the narration. This sense of enclosure and intrusion reaches its peak in

the sections that start and end with mentions of weapons, and also have them inserted in the text. In these sections, one may read the omnipresence of the armament as a sign of pessimism, framing the impossibility of an escape of the *pobladores* from the repressive forces. The intrusion of the armament is also a technical effect that contributes to the novel's fictionality and, again, disrupts its potentially mimetic elements.

a) Sections Fully Enclosed by Weapons

The themes dealt with in the sections surrounded from beginning to end by mentions of armament emphasize permanent oppression, so present in people's lives that the chaos and violence seem to come also from within the *población*. For example, the section entitled 'Los gritos en las calles' reveals that, although the police do not go to the *población* on a Saturday, bullets can still be heard in the neighbourhood. As the protagonist lets us know, 'Escucho risas y música y balas. Gritos. La policía se ha retirado. Descansa los sábados y abandona los bloques. Permite cada sábado que se expresen la música, las risas, las balas y los gritos. Escucho lágrimas' (41) and 'Los bloques, volcados a aspirar, deberían amplificar la música neoprenera del amanecer mezclada con una serie ordenada de brillantes jeringas de alcohol y de lágrimas hasta alcanzar el éxtasis mítico' (42). These two examples highlight toxic vices of modern life in a *población* such as drugs, arms and violence. In the first one, this is done through a chiastic structure in:

A: Escucho risas
B: y música y balas. Gritos
[...]
B: la música, las risas, las balas y los gritos
A: Escucho lágrimas

This pattern shows a significant contradiction in what the protagonist hears: 'risas' versus 'lágrimas', all of which hints at the confusion and chaos of the desolated environment in which the characters live. The second example shows a curious reference to *neoprén* in 'música neoprenera'; *neoprén* is a strong glue used as a drug that is inhaled using a plastic bag. In Chile, it is commonly known as the cheapest drug used mostly by abandoned children, teenagers and homeless people living on the streets. But the novel does not inform us of any people living on the streets and the cheapest drug normally seen in a *población* is *pasta base*, or cocaine paste, rather than *neoprén*. Therefore, the choice of this kind of drug linked to the idea of enjoyment and music leaves the impression of an exaggeratedly stereotyped view of a depraved *población*, which stresses the view of the novel as dystopian fiction. The novel also shows that these vices are rooted in the community, that they turn people into a new version of slaves, stuck to a system that creates and oppresses them. And accordingly, the section also provides a reference to slavery in the protagonist remembering a Brazilian website that she previously visited, where she watched experts talking about slavery; in her words:

> este insomnio que me impulsa a recordar el baile del sitio brasileño que celebraba la música y las lágrimas impresas en los movimientos de los antiguos esclavos. Los mismos esclavos que viajaron por barco, posiblemente encadenados. Así lo aseguraron, con una imperdonable rigidez ante las cámaras, los numerosos especialistas que definían las rutas. Un viaje esclavo que, según ellos, los testigos, había traído la música que se extendió junto con las epidemias por el nuevo mundo (41-42)

This example is characterized by an impulse to remember and a link between past and contemporary forms of slavery in phrases such as, 'los antiguos esclavos' in contrast to 'los mismos esclavos'. One may read this reference to slavery as a critique of the common view that regards the aforementioned vices of modern life as the free-choice of the oppressed rather than created and implemented by the

oppressive system. This critique is also evident in the reference to the 'numerosos especialistas', who in front of the cameras state that the slaves brought 'epidemias' to America. This supposedly expert opinion unsubtly contradicts the widely-known fact that the colonizers brought and expanded the *epidemias* in America, which is emphasized by the protagonist's words indicating suspicion 'según ellos'. This contradiction leads to the idea that the *epidemias* –or perhaps by analogy the vices of modern life– are not necessarily the free-choice of the oppressed, but brought and implemented by the oppressor, as it may be the case of the vices expanded in the *poblaciones*.

The example shows a sceptical protagonist, who does not entirely believe the opinion of the experts; in this way, it clearly reflects Eltit's view of technology and the media. She has stated that technology may be strategically used by those in power to 'desestabilizar el pensamiento crítico' (Eltit, 2008c: 108). However, she also thinks that the question lies 'en la unilateralidad de su apropiación, en la falta de diversidad, que produce –con una claridad indesmentible– la conformación de un pensamiento único' (Ibid.: 109). The wide access to technology, information and the media, which tend to be in the hands of those in power, may serve to install certain discourses in the population and as an attempt to affect negatively people's critical thinking; but the question still remains of interpretation. As *Fuerzas especiales*' protagonist shows, individuals have the capacity to question those in power, relying precisely on a possibility to educate themselves through the various sources of information currently available thanks to the wide access to technology.

However, the novel is ambiguous regarding the protagonist's actual capacity to make such political choices or subvert the dominant discourses, and in the same section, she can be seen, in her own imagination, presumably drugged. In her words, 'Pero nada puede destruirme porque bailo como los dioses o puteo como los dioses, como me dice el Omar, o me muevo delicadamente mientras la jeringa que sostiene mi pelo relumbra a la manera de un láser que prueba en mi cabeza su última tecnología de facturación china' (42); and 'durante unas horas la policía desaparece y deja los bloques huérfanos [...] ya no sabemos cómo vivir o cómo dormir sin la ira de la policía' (43). From the image of 'la jeringa que sostiene mi pelo', one may again read the hints of a slave in the form of a subject dependent on drugs and moved by a 'jeringa', or arguably a powerful and oppressive system. At the same time, such a system is the meticulous creator of this dependent subject (as much as drugs create dependency), who is left with no alternative, for the system fabricated the syringe –and its substance– with 'technología de facturación china'. In these words, one also finds a reference to the capitalism of a contemporary communist world-power. This reference can be linked to the idea that the protagonist and her friends are all workers who provide services as well as consumers of services and goods such as technology, food, drugs and alcohol. They are immersed in a complex system of work that involves both exploitation and consumerism and that keeps them dependent in what could be seen as a modern system of slavery. Thus, one may understand that, in a complex contemporary network of economic and political relations, the modern forms of social domination, repression and people's dependency go beyond the traditional divisions of the left and the right politics. To give one example, the Chinese market-driven producer and exporter benefits from neoliberal globalization, which relies on western consumers.

Another section that is introduced and concluded by mentions of armament is the one entitled ‘El lulo’, in which the social magnitude of the abuse that the protagonist suffers each time she prostitutes herself is expressed. She relates, ‘Llevo diez minutos exactos sentada arriba de un lulo que se clava adentro de mí como si recibiera el impacto de una sucesión de balas de alto calibre, una y otra, una detrás de otra [...] me duele, me molesta, me amenaza el lulo’ (100). The word *lulo* in Chilean Spanish is one of the many infantile names commonly used to name the male organ. It is a word with a colloquial and lower-class register but not a swearword, as opposed to the word *pico* that the protagonist frequently uses to refer to El Omar when she says that he is a ‘chupapico’ (15). The choice of this less vulgar word tempers its sexual connotation and therefore the *lulo* may represent more than the male organ. It is a social symbol that points to the totality of the abuse, to the idea that the abuse that the characters suffer is both physical and social, since there is a relationship between sexual abuse, social oppression and state repression emphasized throughout the story. For example, ‘tenía la boca amarga como si hubiera chupado un montón de pistolas oxidadas’ (97), which clearly shows the relationship between the physical abuse and state violence. Also in, ‘Es la hora del lulo./ El sonido rrrrr del cierre’ (105), the protagonist relates, reflecting a ‘rrrrr’ sound that resembles that of submachine guns. Similarly, she says, ‘En medio de un paisaje nos penetran enjambres de cascos, de armas de servicio y el caos ante la posición amenazante de las lumas‘ (111), image in which the police helmets that penetrate and the ‘lumas’ (the police truncheon) in a threatening position seem to have both sexual and social connotations.

The novel also shows that the damage is both on people's bodies and dignity. For example, the protagonist explains that 'Las lumas también dañaron la cabeza dura del Lucho que no puede sacar las cuentas en el cíber' (47) and that the 'daño se fue para adentro' (50). In these words, one can read the idea that the damage provoked by state violence is more than physical, it is internal and has annulled his critical thinking capacities. Similarly, about her other friend El Omar, she lets us know that he 'Está cansado de los dolores en el cuello por la obligación de doblar su cabeza' (150), which may refer not only to the oral sex he provides to different men, including police officers, but also to humiliation and permanent subjugation. Furthermore, even a character who does not prostitute himself, the computer technician, suffers from pain in his mouth (123). There is also a link between the rhythm and the pronunciation of liquid sounds in the words 'lulo' and 'luma'. One can read this link also in the protagonist's words, 'Me aguanto mientras el lulo sube y baja, sube y baja en medio de un ritmo rígido, pero no marcial, sino más bien obediente, sumiso' (126). The rhythm of this prose resembles the action of a police *lumazo*, the hit of a *luma*, with its up-and-down movements. As such, for the characters, the damage left by this abuse is so painful that they need to take pills and apply creams in order to put up with the injuries left on their bodies, but the pain and damage never end (100-104; 163). These portrayals that relate sex, violence, subjugation and exploitation as intimately linked, and the omnipresence of the references to armament, especially in the section fully enclosed by it, highlight the pessimistic inescapability from a social context created by an oppressive system to be maintained as such, to create dependency, and therefore presents the characters with no way out.

b) Sections Without References to Weapons at the Beginning and End

Most of the sections mention armament either at the beginning or at the end, and furthermore, many are not enclosed by those mentions at all, having them only within the text. One may interpret such opening of the enclosure as hints of some hope and signs of human relationships and feelings. For example, in the section entitled 'Las cosas como son', in the protagonist's words:

> ¿Qué haría yo si el bloque se despeña con toda la familia adentro mientras yo estoy en el cíber? Muertos o gravemente heridos o terminales. Y después, cuando devuelvan a los niños de mi hermana, cuando por fin aparezcan de nuevo los niños, ¿qué haría yo con ellos?, ¿cómo podría encargarme? O tal vez nunca los devolverían porque ellos son niños bloques y devendría un caos. Yo me debo a la familia que me queda. Me debo también a los que no podemos nombrar (48).

These words show the feelings of the protagonist for her family, either love or dependency. They demonstrate the care and concern she has for her family and the hope that the children come back home. But her hope that the missing return is ambiguous. The narrator, on the one hand, seems to be waiting for their return, however, on the other hand, she thinks they may never come back, as they have tuned into 'niños bloque', or dehumanized children. She also suggests that she might not feel capable of taking care of the children by herself on their return and feels that she will need her family to do so. These feelings of care and dependency towards her family may imply a potential source of succour in the form of family ties and joint work. The notion of family ties is also emphasized elsewhere in the novel, for example, 'Sé que somos una familia porque con una concentrada sincronía mido sus respiraciones siguiendo los latidos de mi corazón. Estoy segura de que estamos vivos pues el aullido de las balizas de los autos policiales nos obliga a taparnos la cabeza con la almohada' (35). Especially in contrast to a difficult context framed by new

forms of slavery, repression and exploitation, these words showing human relationships and affections might be interpreted as a potential way out, one based on community ties and shared experiences (of repression). In this regard, the idea of joint work is distant from the notions of the selfish individual that one may find in the contemporary neoliberal free-market context in which the characters are apparently immersed.

The presence of these emotions, though ambiguous, is a potential respite from the emotionless impersonality of the threatening weaponry, emphasized by the fact that this section is not enclosed by mentions of it. Moreover, this section also has references to water, both in the form of rain and commercialized water. The protagonist's family have been left with no running water, as their water meter was taken away, presumably for not paying the bill, but the presence of nature is more powerful and the rain has freely entered through the walls and flooded their apartment (47-49). This ironic image given by, on the one hand, the lack of natural resources privatized by the neoliberal state and, on the other hand, the rain that freely and naturally falls, may also speak of a desire for liberation and escape from the oppression of a free-market economy that commercializes human bodies and natural resources. This image frames the protagonist's sense of loyalty to her family. She says that she owes herself to her family and 'a los que no podemos nombrar'. This phrase again reminds us of Pagliaro's song 'Yo te nombro [libertad]' and therefore, one could infer that those whom the protagonist cannot openly name, the missing children who may one day return, might be a symbol of the desire for freedom.

Another section not enclosed by mentions of armament is entitled 'El operativo blando'. The title of this section is an obvious reference to Pinochet's *dictablanda*, a portmanteau word uniting *dicta(dura)* with *blanda* that he used in 1983 to mockingly refer to his government as, in his view, not constituting a dictatorship.[50] In a similar reference to the dictatorship, this section mentions 'autos espías' (65) and 'un operativo blando [...] porque así lo pactaron' (66) . The word 'pacto' in this example may also be a reference to the Chilean democratic transition, which was based on political consensus that frames Chile's current *democracia protegida* (Moulian, 2002: 42-59). This section of the novel is related in a fast rhythm, it has one single paragraph and few full stops. This rhythm gives the effect of acceleration and hurry which, linked to the references to the dictatorship, can remind us of the agitation of the days of the resistance against the dictatorship. In this section, in the light of a new police repressive operation, people whistling appears to have a special strength to confront the police, in the words of the protagonist:

> Los silbidos son completamente humanos, vienen de los pulmones de los especialistas en analizar las acciones de la policía cuando nos invaden. Ellos silban la magnitud de la operación. Silban y silban. Los pacos y los tiras no saben cómo reprimir los silbidos. Miran babosamente hacia arriba como si los sonidos cayeran del cielo (67).

In the protests against the Chilean dictatorship in the 1980s, whistling was a famous tactic used by the population as a way of protection and warning. These protests had an international echo and, along with other political and economic factors, in part led to the end of the dictatorship.[51] Therefore, with its emphasis on the human nature of the whistling and the images that take us back to the scenario of the massive protests

[50] Cited in Diario *La Nación*, 'Las frases para el bronce de Pinochet'. To watch Pinochet's speech referring to his *dictablanda*, visit, 'Agusto Pinochet: Esto no es una dictadura señores es una dictablanda', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTlxKBpFA2c>.

[51] For a review of the different stages of the social movements and protests that in Chile contributed to the end of the dictatorship, see Moulian, 2002, part three, chapters two and three.

of the 1980s, this section seems to show the possibility of way out, which has to be prominently led by humans, by the people. This emphasis shows a significant contrast between human and inhuman weapons, between human whistling and the omnipresent but impersonal mentions of armament. There is also, again, a sense of joint work and community, as the 'silbidos completamente humanos' have the potential to resist the police forces and to make them look like slugs admiring a much stronger force that comes down from heaven.

The residents believe that this particular police operation is 'un allanamiento blando' and that, therefore, nothing bad will happen to them. As the narrator states:

> ¿Cómo lo sabemos? Por los números de tanquetas, las balizas, las bombas de gas, los cascos, los garrotes, los garrotes, los gritos, los carros lanzaguas, el ritmo corporal que le imprimen a esta operación. Pero especialmente por los silbidos de advertencia que cruzan el cemento y que nos señalan el grado de intensidad del allanamiento. Había ochenta proyectiles de artillería de 280 mm (66).

This description still looks like a significant repressive operation, one that is well prepared and equipped. The protagonist's view contradicts the impersonal mention of armament in the fact that there are very powerful cannons such as 'ochenta proyectiles de artillería de 280 mm'. Therefore, one can argue that the effectiveness of the resident's tactic of resistance, the *silbidos*, did not come from the idea that they are facing a, supposedly, *operación blanda* –as Pinochet's government was not a *dictablanda* either–, but from the idea that by working together and trusting their capacity to resist, the residents provided their own tactic with the necessary special force needed to defend themselves and eventually 'conservar un número importante de vecinos' (67), as the protagonist reveals. Although not all the neighbours share a desire for resistance, as the protagonist informs us that some of them are, apparently,

allied with the police forces (120), this section seems to suggest that the success of the community resistance tactic is given by two main factors. Firstly, having leaders that the neighbours can, apparently, trust; in the protagonist's words, 'Los expertos del bloque. Sus silbidos marcan la pauta para nuestros corazones y la frecuencia de los silbidos nos recorren todo el cuerpo' (66). Especially if one remembers the protagonist's suspicion about the experts' opinion in the previously analyzed case of slavery, these words might echo the extended influence of the Chilean neoliberal technocrats or experts. As seen in the Introduction, such influence transcends the boundaries of the leftist and right-wing politics, for many of those who fought against the dictatorship became the current technocrat leaders of Chile's spheres of economic and political power. But still, the existence of this leadership and its link to the result of the whistling tactic, in a section that is not enclosed by police armament, form a significant image of resistance against the repressive forces.

The second factor is joint work, community solidarity, affection and care. Accordingly, in this section of the novel, even the unfriendly Guatona Pepa joins the protagonist and her friends on the fourth floor to watch the police operation, to agreeably talk to them and ask them about their families, which makes the protagonist feel happy (69). Furthermore, the height of the fourth floor allows the characters to watch the repressive forces from a distance. It permits a view of the *pacos* as minimized and consequently, the protagonist tells us that 'miramos nuestro propio espectáculo con frialdad' (68) or, one may read, with no fear. This strategic perspective, product of a planned tactic involving other people from the block and added to the existence of some feelings among these people, may have the potential to resist in such a tough context as a besieged *población*. The section ends with the

protagonist's reflection about the families still left, 'una familia que come, que respira y que nos hace la misma pregunta al Lucho y a mí en los momentos más cruciales del sonido de las balas: Adónde vai, y tú, dime, adónde, adónde vai' (69). Here, the colloquial *voseo*, accelerated rhythm and inquisitive tone that in other parts of the novel symbolize aggression, in these words clearly show human desperation and fear of loss of human beings, not objects, who have the capacity to care for each other even at the most critical moments.

A thought of resistance by the protagonist may also be read at the end of the novel, in the section entitled 'Nos quedaremos adentro', which is also free from the enclosure of the mentions of armament. Here, the protagonist speaks of 'un horizonte de esperanza, no un horizonte, no, una rendija pequeña de esperanza en la solidez de los bloques, en la verticalidad del cuarto piso, en la resistencia de las escaleras. No sé cómo definir lo que veo. No hay un sitio que me convenza totalmente' (162-163). These words are ambiguous, as they speak of hope and resistance, but also of disappointment and disbelief. However, a future of hope can still be read in 'un horizonte de esperanza', although it is only a small sign of hope, as 'una rendija pequeña de esperanza' clarifies. It is, perhaps, slight and inexplicable optimism that exists despite the cruel context in which the protagonist lives, and the following image of the novel comes to emphasize this idea. The narrator relates:

> Los pacos y los tiras se vienen con todo. Es parte de nuestra vida. Un avión comercial cruza el cielo. El dios de mentira nos dio vuelta la espalda y se subió al avión sin decir una sola palabra acerca de la resurrección y la vida eterna para los cuerpos bloques. Pero entiendo con un optimismo demente que tenemos otra oportunidad (163).

This example also provides us with an ambiguous image. It introduces the view of a horizon or, perhaps, a form of hope or escape, which is not, however, available to the

protagonist, as she is left behind after the plane flies away. And she accepts it, as her words ‘es parte de nuestra vida’ reflect. The one who leaves is ‘el dios de mentira’ who ‘nos dio vuelta la espalda’. These words remind us of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Chile in 1987. His visit was eagerly awaited, since Chile was going through an extremely agitated period of the dictatorship with high levels of social mobilization and also state repression. The Pope visited the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, the human rights agency of the Chilean Catholic Church, but he also had a long meeting with Pinochet, was seen greeting people from the presidential palace’s balcony along with him and was strongly criticized by social organizations for not adopting an overtly strong position against the dictatorship. Nevertheless, as Chile was going through a turbulent period of massive protests and repression, which also took place during the functions carried out by the Pope, his visit –added to the various demonstrations of people’s resistance during it– ended up helping attract international attention and create a feeling in society of hope that the end of the dictatorship was near. Similarly, words from the protagonist such as ‘optimismo demente’ and ‘otra oportunidad’ suggest a hope that will not emerge from any divinity *per se*, but from within the community, from the people who are suffering the atrocities of a system that steps on the most vulnerable population or, perhaps, from people’s own special force.

As the analysis shows, although the context in which the *pobladores* live is suffocating and perverse and there is pessimism in the novel, on closer inspection, there still may be some rays of hope: ‘O el miedo algunas veces se repliega y entonces pienso que existe una vida problable’ (88), the protagonist states. Such potential hope may be said to emerge from the conscious and strategic organization

and union of a community of people who show respect and care for one another. Nevertheless, she also says that 'súbitamente entiendo que el miedo se había replegado como el mar, igual que las olas del mar para volver con más fuerza, una inconmensurable ola que se introduce con una violencia líquida por mi boca hasta atravesar mis pulmones' (89). These words again show a link between physical and social abuse, which gives a sense of pessimism. As such, at moments, the novel provides us with notions of spaces for eventual resistance and liberation, but it is ambiguous on the plausibility of these, as the characters are too suffocated by the repressive forces and their own submissiveness. As shown by the statement that fear only 'algunas veces se repliega' –which is what permits the protagonist to dream of a new life–, the novel is not emphatic about the idea that the suggested forms of resistance and escape are at all realizable by the characters.

However, one may argue that decisions about the plausibility of resistance and liberation is left on the readers' side. One can say that *Fuerzas especiales*' implied reader may not be as erudite as *Mano de obra*'s. *Fuerzas especiales* provides its readers with more easily identifiable socio-political references from the recent historical circumstances that feed the portrayal of this Chilean *población*; for instance, popular anecdotes, events and music that takes us back to recent times of resistance from the grassroots, which mostly allude to the dictatorship. Thus, as the novel does not actually portray a *población* from the times of the dictatorship, but one under siege by modern forms of oppression and influenced by the use of information technology, on the one hand, the novel highlights the social imaginary of a contemporary community heavily influenced by the legacy of the dictatorship's repression, which can be understood as extending beyond the period of the military

regime. Nonetheless, on the other hand, *Fuerzas especiales*'s narrative fiction also contributes to the creation of a certain social imaginary, of how human beings may organize and represent their ways of living together. And as the analysis demonstrates, such a way is permeated by the hope for resistance from the heavily oppressed, from the grassroots, from those who live in the margins of society and have been overlooked and repressed by post-dictatorship institutions like Chile's national uniformed and civilian police, the *pacos* and *tiras*. Such stifling oppression exerted by state institutions comes up throughout the whole story and is emphasized in phrases from the narrator-protagonist such as 'Llegaron corriendo con sus bototos estatales, entregados a los lumazos que nos debían...' (49) as well as by the presence of weaponry that constantly interrupts the narration. In this way, the novel subverts the social imaginary of a post-transition community that has been heavily suffocated by the repression exerted from the dictatorship and transition to democracy's institutions.

5. Multimedia and Communication Technology in the Margins of Society

In *Fuerzas especiales*, the presence of technology may be read as both a form of escape and a source of information. For example, in one of the moments when the protagonist attempts to reflect on the situation of her sister:

> Cómo complacerla o cómo ayudarla, pienso, pero me distraigo en uno de mis sitios preferidos que da inicio a la nueva temporada de zapatos manufacturados con la piel de una serpiente que habita el norte argentino, la lampalagua. Estos diseños, los más elegantes que he visto, ya se han apoderado de las superlativas vitrinas francesas (29).

This example shows the linguistic register used by the protagonist, which is formal and permeated by information that she gets from the various sources online available

to her. It shows that in modern life, as a result of globalization, technology is available in a context of social vulnerability too, and may be regarded as having contradictory purposes. Technology may be used as banal entertainment and a distraction that interferes with the protagonist's process of thinking about the decadent situation she and her family face. In this example, such a distraction is linked to the exploitation of South American natural species for commercial purposes in a globalized world, without, however, any further reflection on this phenomenon by the speaker, which leaves the impression of technology and media as distracting elements. But, in a context of poverty and vulnerability, the access to technology may also be seen as having social potential, as it is a significant eventual source of information. For example, in relation to her father being hit by the police, the protagonist reflects, 'Tengo que buscar en alguno de los sitios de huesos para comprender cómo reaccionaron sus costillas al lumazo o en qué lugar se incrustó la quebradura' (50). These words show an intellectually curious protagonist with an interest in finding explanations. In a context of abuse and repression, access to information through technology might eventually lead the characters to reflect about their own situation, to an alternative form of self-education. And as already stated, online reading (to which the protagonist normally dedicates her spare time) can be regarded as a sign of resistance against an unprivileged background.

Another clue about the novel's use of multimedia and communication technology is given at the end of the story. Then, the protagonist, along with her friends, can be seen digitalized as a character of a computer game that she and her friends created. The game is about fighting against the police forces, in the protagonist's words, 'Y entonces aparecemos en la pantalla con el título que diseñamos: <<Pacos Kuliaos>>'

(165). This is a virtual but striking attempt of resistance evident in the game's theme and title, and in the alternative spelling of the insult *culeados*. In the virtual space of a computer game, the narrator uses a colloquial aggressive and defiant spoken language, and the novel finishes making the readers reproduce in their minds the eternal insult against the police in Chile: 'Pakos Kuliaos'. This computer game may be said to have some social connotations when it alludes to resistance and it is innovation created by characters living in the oppressed margins of society. It is, in the words of the protagonist, 'el primer video juego chileno. Un veloz juego de defensa diseñado por el Lucho, musicalizado por el Omar y perfeccionado por mí' (165). This digital innovation seems to nod to another well-known Chilean rare invention in information technology, the Cybersyn project.[52]

A cybernetic project implemented during Allende's government in the early 1970s, the Cybersyn aimed at building a system to support government decisions in order to administer in a cooperative and coordinated manner the country's new socialist economy. Using innovative technology for its time and despite the fact that Chile was then one of the countries with the less technological means in Latin America, the project consisted of four complex modules: an economic simulator to forecast the possible impact of economic decisions; software to check factory performance; an operation room in the government's headquarters in Santiago that looked like the set of a science fiction movie; and a national network of telex machines in state-run companies that was connected to a mainfraim computer to transmit and receive information to and from the headquarters (Ortiz Osorio and Díaz Nafría, 2016: 12-

[52] This project has also been the subject of free-to-air television programmes on prime time, see for example, episode four of the popular show 'Chile Sectreto' on Chilevisión, <http://www.chilevision.cl/chile-secreto/capitulos-completos/chile-secreto-capitulo-4-de-junio/2017-06-04/204012.html>.

14).[53] The participation of the people and workers was considered in the whole running of the project. Allende's government wanted to make structural changes without threatening the stability of existing democratic institutions and they did not want to impose such changes on the people from above; in Eden Medina's words, 'Chilean democratic socialism, like management cybernetics, thus wanted to find a balance between centralized control and individual freedom' (Medina, 2011: 30). For example, as part of Cybersyn, the Cyberfolk experiment offered people real-time distance connection with politicians and municipal administrators who discussed decisions affecting their communities. Through a special device, people even had the possibility of voting agreement or disagreement during municipal sessions in some part of the country (Ibid.: 91-98). Also, due to the Cybersyn technology and the cooperation of loyal workers, the government could successfully manage the maintenance of production during the 1972 *Paro de los patrones* (Ibid.: chapter 5).

In the novel, this reference to the use of technology by an emerging socialist country with limited means, for democratic and political purposes is connected to the social potential of the use of multimedia and communication technology in the hands of the people. Both Allende's Cybersyn project and the computer game created by these three *poblador* characters have in common a view of technology as a people's tool, potentially useful and powerful. Both cases show that technology made available to the grass-roots, to those from the margins of society, may become a source for democratic community participation and organization as well as a space for new creative forms of agency and resistance against the oppression of those in power. The novel's use of technology is thus another example of the way in which this piece of

[53] For a more detailed approach to this project, see also Medina, 2011.

narrative fiction contributes towards a subversive social imaginary that challenges traditional views of *pobladores*, particularly in terms of their thinking, organizational and revolutionary potentials, including when they are heavily oppressed and repressed by the institutions of a democratic state such as the national uniformed and civilian police.

C. Women's Agency: Female Difference and Public Involvement

1. Prostitution and Gender Inequality

Fuerzas especiales suggests female agency and public involvement, with the idea of the protagonist being the one who supports her family by prostituting herself; in her own words:

> Voy al cíber como mujer a buscar entre las pantallas mi comida. Todos se comen. Me comen a mí también, me bajan los calzones frente a las pantallas. O yo misma me bajo mis calzones en el cíber, me los bajo atravesada por el resplandor magnético de las computadoras. En cambio, el Omar o el Lucho solamente se lo sacan, es más fácil, más limpio, más sano, provistos de la cómoda seguridad de que nada les resulte destructivo o verdaderamente insalvable (11-12).

The protagonist's financial responsibilities and the fact that she is the only one in the family who leaves the home to do paid work may carry, at first sight, a notion of gender equality in terms of participation in the labour market. This is though a perverse type of equality, awful for everyone, as both men and women are forced to put up with abuse in order to survive economically. The protagonist tells us 'me bajan los calzones', which one may read as stressing female subjugation and sexual exploitation, but her words 'o yo misma me bajo mis calzones' might be ambiguously read as both the acceptance of her vulnerable status and fate, and a notion of potential female agency in a vulnerable context. But the protagonist's

words also underline gender inequalities. Both male and female characters are oppressed and need to prostitute themselves, but there is still a difference in the abuse suffered by the female protagonist in contrast to that of her male friends. There is a stronger sense of nakedness and therefore of greater vulnerability in the idea of the protagonist having to take off all her underwear in order to prostitute herself in contrast to her male friends, who do not need to be left in such a physical exposure. Such a varying degree of nakedness is also linked to the idea of protection in the case of men. They are all subjugated but, in this particular labour market, there is still an emphasis on men's greater safety, as the male characters do what they do for a living 'provistos de la cómoda seguridad de que nada les resulte destructivo' (12).

Following the idea that prostitution occurs in a virtual environment and that, as discussed above, the male organ that the characters encounter in the abuse can be interpreted as bearing a social significance, prostitution in *Fuerzas especiales* may be read not only as actual prostitution but as a symbol. About the protagonist, Eltit has stated that:

> yo sé que se ha visto como prostituta, pero como prostituta del siglo XIX, sin embargo, es una mujer que maneja sus horarios, no es solo prostituta. Eso quise mostrar también, no es tampoco prostituta porque la palabra prostituta es muy invasiva, globaliza y captura el cuerpo de la mujer como si no fuera nada más que prostituta (Eltit, 2016 : 86-87).

Also emphasizing more complex portrayals of female prostitution and the diverse roles that these women may play, Paula Bianchi points out that current representations of female protagonists that prostitute themselves are particularly ambiguous in the Latin American literature produced after the 1990s, in a globalized region marked by capitalist economic development and social inequality (Bianchi, 2013: 8-10). She notes that although many times still framed by violence, abuse and

marginalization, current depictions of prostitution also incorporate notions of the prostitute's sexual pleasure, agency and lack of guilt, especially due to the influence of capitalist societies, since 'ante la culpa impuesta por la concepción judeocristiana, se superpone la concepción del placer, un placer que además cotiza y genera ganancias en esta sociedad capitalista.' (Ibid.: 14). She concludes that these characters may be read as 'víctimas no victimizadas que se asumen como mujeres, prostitutas, hijas, amigas, hermanas y que disfrutan plenamente de aquello que eligen, incluso las que se prostituyen porque no encuentran otra salida mejor' (Ibid.: 16). Two examples are novels like Eltit's *Vaca Sagrada* (1991) and *Demasiado amor* (1990) by Sara Sefchovich (1949-).[54] Similarly, although *Fuerzas especiales* shows the protagonist as having to prostitute herself in a context of vulnerability and oppression, and it could not be said that she enjoys such abuse, as the author notes, her portrayal is also complex in the sense that she is not merely a prostitute and there is in the novel a significant focus on her role as a bread-winning woman and member of a certain family and community circle, influenced by specific historical and political circumstances. This focus of the representation of prostitution inherits community and social preoccupations from the Chilean literary tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the image of the prostitute was used to foreground social and political circumstances. Andrea Kottow notes that representations of prostitutes in the Chilean literature from that period 'sirve[n] de emblema para una reflexión sobre la comunidad' (Kottow, 2015: 146), by denouncing social inequalities and the decadence of the upper-classes. Examples may include the characters Juana in *Juana Lucero* (1902) by Augusto d'Halmar

[54] For a more detailed discussion of these novels, see Bianchi, 2010.

(1882-1950); Violeta in *El roto* (1920) by Joaquín Edwards Bello (1887-1968); and La Manuela in Donoso's *El lugar sin límites* (1966) (Ibid.: 144-151).

Similarly foregrounding social preoccupations in the image of the prostitute, prostitution in *Fuerzas especiales* may be read as an allegory or a symbol for the status of the novel's contemporary *pobladores* and workers within their socio-economic and labour context. The idea of prostitution as a symbol of the degradation of workers in a neoliberal context is also suggested in *Mano de obra*. But, as discussed in Chapter I, there is an irony in representing 'the worker' with the image of a female prostitute, as in political philosophy the worker has historically been male (Pateman, 1988: 201-202). This irony seems to point again to Pateman's idea of the sexual contract, that is, the relationship between sex, slavery and capitalism, in which prostitution is a core representation of the way in which men can buy sexual access to women's bodies in a capitalist era (Ibid.:189). Similarly, of the protagonist prostituting herself in a cyber café, Eltit has stated that 'Básicamente, lo que importa en esta realidad virtual es el consumo. Me interesó el ciber como espacio de información, por un lado, pero también de intercambio sexual, por otro, las nuevas formas donde también lo sexual ocurre' (Eltit, 2016: 86).

Therefore, *Fuerzas especiales* suggests that the sexual contract, which is the basis for all gender inequalities, still gets reproduced in the current modern, urban and digital era. Although prostitution may be said to represent, in broader terms, the generalized decadent status of contemporary workers, significantly, the novel's protagonist and narrator is a woman who has to put up with sexual abuse in order to earn a living for her and her family. The novel depicts prostitution as a type of abuse faced by male

and female characters, but which also differentiates their degree of vulnerability. As suggested both in *Mano de obra* and *Fuerzas especiales*, the emphasis on female prostitution, or sexual abuse, linked to women's labour, echoes Chile's contemporary free-market work system, in which women face greater levels of vulnerability and inequality by being exploited at work and charged with unpaid care tasks at home. Nonetheless, though abused and exploited, the complex portrayal of *Fuerzas especiales*' protagonist shows that she also has at least some potential paths to resistance, especially in terms of alternative ways of self-education open to her due to contemporary access to multimedia and communication technology, which, as noted earlier, can be regarded as at least some hope of agency.

2. Women's Difference and Political Participation

The novel offers a view of male-female difference that leaves a more positive perspective in the case of women. Female strength in contrast to male weakness is emphasized in phrases from the narrator such as 'Pienso en las costillas de mi padre y me invade la tristeza, pero cuando pienso en las costillas impecables de la guatona Pepa me disipo' (77). La Guatona Pepa is lonely and unfriendly, since her mother is dead and her father is in hiding (124-125). Also, the protagonist's mother and sister are sick and housebound since the children were taken away, and the mother also suffers from panic attacks (157), but they are 'Más jóvenes y mucho más sólidas que mi padre' (16), the narrator tells us. These female characters are presented as stronger than the father, and in the case of La Guatona Pepa, this is done by subverting a traditional religious image that, in the Christian creation myth, present women as created from a man's rib. The belief in this myth is a primary source for

women's subjugation in societies that follow the views of Abrahamic religions, like Chilean society, since it implies women's dependency on men. But the novel contributes to changing this gender relation and, precisely through the father's broken ribs, suggests that women are physically and emotionally stronger than men; perhaps, they carry the special force in this story.

In the protagonist's words from another example:

> Pero nuestra gordura, provocada siempre por infames circunstancias, era necesaria porque así nos parecíamos como mujeres y sabíamos que ese exceso, esa grasa y esa precisa azúcar nos iba a proteger ante los pacos y los tiras pues nos volvíamos indistinguibles. Nos convenía ser un bloque. Mi padre no, él tiene una figura distinta. Elocuente. Su aspecto nos pone los nervios de punta porque se puede destacar mientras baja las escaleras del bloque (56).

On the one hand, this extract leaves us with an impression of women as indistinguishable entities, but strong and cooperative on the other. Through the image of fatness, women are at first sight presented as oppressed, as the narration informs us that their fatness is caused by 'infames circunstancias'. However, these women also understand the potential of their sameness and size, as the emphasis in 'nos convenía ser un bloque' shows. Furthermore, as already stated, the image of the blocks also has to do with protection (47) and, potentially, hope. The recognition of resemblances among women is presented in a positive way as such mutual understanding provides them with protection against the state violence of the police forces. In the above example, there are also notions of female solidarity and gender awareness in the idea of these women knowing that their fatness was necessary for them to stay camouflaged by making them indistinguishable and thus providing some protection from police repression and oppression; actually, such fatness has rescued La Guatona Pepa from prostitution, as there is not enough room in the cyber café

cubicles for her and she lost her space there (125). This somehow positive view of fatness, one that many indigenous groups and contemporary feminists hold, contrasts to current standards of female beauty that highly value thinness.

Female solidarity and sisterhood are suggested elsewhere in the novel, particularly in an episode when the protagonist defends her sister from the insults of a neighbour whom she respects, for he is 'el que mejor resiste la ocupación' (113). But although she feels that her sister provoked the insults by making fun of him, she takes her sister's side because 'si no lo hacía nos volveríamos más débiles' (113). This episode reminds us of the complex relationship that feminists have historically had with the left. Catherine MacKinnon points out that both Marxism and Liberalism coincide on questions of sexual politics, that is, in terms of the attitudes governing the relationship between men and women. Both trends maintain the separation between the private and the public; they both fail to adequately address intimacy, to regard the private as a political sphere, as:

> a sphere of battery, marital rape, and women's exploited labor; of the central social institutions whereby women are deprived of (as men are granted) identity, autonomy, control, and self determination; and of the primary activity through which male supremacy is expressed and enforced (MacKinnon, 1993: 657).

Molyneux also argues that Marxists link gender oppression to class oppression with a view that women's emancipation can only be achieved by the creation of a new socialist society (Molyneux, 1985: 239; also Tinsman, 2002; 126-127). But socialist countries have interpreted socialism as merely the socialization of the economy and have failed to implement the democratization of political power (Ibid.: 243). At the Latin American level Molyneux realizes that leftist revolutions have also tended to view women's emancipation as ultimately subordinated to class struggle. She

exemplifies this by stating that although women were an important component of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and that the Sandinista government was sympathetic towards women's emancipation, when economic problems, counterrevolution and military threat put at risk the Sandinista ideals, discourses encouraging women's emancipation were tempered within the government and women's movements themselves. Strategic gender interests tended to be replaced by a focus on policies that rather targeted at practical ones, which implies that gender interests are not viewed as an independent political cause, but as subordinated to the broader one: the defence of the revolution (Ibid: 237-251). In Chile, women's emancipation and liberation have historically been linked to political movements of the left, but not without a troubled relationship between feminists and political parties (Agosin, 1996: 139; Frohmann and Valdés, 1995: 281). Women in Chile have also questioned the assumption that social class would be the only determinant to female political mobilization (Kirkwood, 1986: 33). Kirkwood points out that:

> Las formulaciones más combativas en el discurso izquierdista-progresista radican en la disputa, con la derecha, de la condición de adalid de la defensa de la familia –léase la familia proletaria– que es definida como "núcleo revolucionario básico", pero dejando intocadas las redes interiores jerárquicas y disciplinarias que conforman históricamente a la familia (Ibid.: 51).

An example is given by Karin Rosemblatt in her study of political cultures in Chile between 1920-1950. She explores the relationship between feminists and the left in the period of the Frente Popular, a coalition that united middle-class reformers and the labouring classes. It was composed of the Radical, Socialist and Communist parties, who ruled Chile under Pedro Aguirre Cerda's government between 1938 and 1941, and was also supported by many feminists (Rosemblatt, 2000: 4-6). During this period, a core reform was the family wage system, which provided men with

wages that allowed them to support dependent family members. But this reform was challenged by feminists, since it excluded women from the labour market; it subordinated women by identifying them with the home and defining them as non-workers and dependent to men (Ibid.: chapter 2). Following this historically troubled relationship between women and the left to the goal of women's emancipation, one can argue that the episode in which the protagonist clearly understands that not staying by her sister's side in the case of conflict with a resistant neighbour debilitates them even further, the novel contributes to considering that female solidarity and sisterhood are above all core determinants to female liberation. The protagonist does not approve of her sister's treatment of the neighbour, but still, strategically, she takes her side. This episode thus contributes to understanding female solidarity and sisterhood from a feminist and not a feminine perspective; that is, not in sentimental terms, not as an essential characteristic of women who are, presumably, a source of succour and protection for other women, but in strategic terms instead, as potentially leading towards women's emancipation.

The notions of belonging and communal support do not include the father. In the above example, the protagonist lets us know that her father is different, 'elocuente' and 'se puede destacar', which contrasts with women shown as blocks and camouflaged. But, although the father's individuality and voice may at first sight seem positive, they may not be such in this particular repressive context. She thinks that the father's singular appearance 'nos pone los nervios de punta', as he is clearly distinguishable when coming down the staircases to leave the home. But such individuality is not positive in this context of repression, where leaving the protection of the family home means going into streets full of police awaiting people to

violently take them away. In contrast to the strategic invisibility of women, the father looks weak and unprotected. Such weakness is emphasized elsewhere in the novel by statements such as 'Mi padre es considerablemente delgado y tiene un determinado tipo distinto a nosotras' (115). The father's physical weakness contrast with the protagonist's courage, size and inner strength when, in a context of repression and police violence, she takes the risk to leave the protection of the family home in order to look for food for her and her family, which also includes submitting herself to sexual abuse.

Although the father is apparently 'elocuente', his voice in particular and the male voice in general are not much heard throughout the novel; and when the male voice is heard, it shows a colloquial register. For example:

> Tai loca tú, no te dai cuenta que se me perdió un kilo de carne molida, que me la robaron los pacos o los tiras o los perros que andan de un lado a otro o acaso no sabís cuánto gasto en gas. Y justo ahora me venís a pedir descuento. Tai loca. Cuánto tenís. A ver, cuánto tenís. Inmersos en la ceremonia de los lunes. El rito de las monedas. No puedo, no, empezar el día sin mi frica (80).

Through imagined indirect speech, this example shows what the protagonist expects El Cojo Pancho will answer to her request for a discount on the *frica* bread that she regularly buys from him. The words carry a colloquial register evident in the use of the Chilean Spanish *voseo* and therefore the protagonist is the receiver of a type of language that she almost never employs. The words that she imagines hearing have an aggressive and somehow offensive tone as well as an accelerated rhythm. But when she presents her own thoughts towards the end of the example, she does not adopt the same tone and register as El Cojo Pancho. Her words carry a more formal register and a calmer rhythm, or perhaps a more pacific tone. Those words also show

the protagonist's self-awareness of her own dependency on the bread she eats daily. Although other female characters employ the same colloquial register and aggressive tone as the male characters, the linguistic contrast between these words by the protagonist-narrator and those of El Cojo Pancho emphasizes female difference in a positive way as well as the potential of a female, educated, self-aware and pacific voice.

The fact that she does not reply to her interlocutor using a similar tone does not imply that she does not have the strength or words to do so, and actually throughout the novel she can be read as mastering language and employing a wide range of vocabulary. Rather, it has to do with the omnipotence of the repression and violence that surround her. Furthermore, El Cojo Pancho's tone and rhythm also remind us of the colloquial, aggressive and accelerated language used by the police forces to address the protagonist in her imagination (53) discussed earlier. The violence reflected in these voices is both male and institutional, and as an omnipresent force, it seems to paralyze the protagonist at diverse moments, from the specific situation of having to deal with police forces to the annulment of her capacity to contest everyday interactions. This is the same violence that ruined the protagonist's affair with El Omar, for he was very much affected when the police forces violently took his family away (136), and the same violence that made La Guatona Pepa take distance from her friends, as she was emotionally destroyed by losing her family (148). The similarities between the violent male language of El Cojo Pancho and the police forces, as well as the contrasts between the narrator's voice and the male ones, stress female difference in a positive way and suggest the male forces in power that the novel portrays in the form of a link between gender inequalities, male violence and state forces.

Another example of the male voice is found in the protagonist's words about her father:

> Este papá que tengo y que cuando entre al departamento me dirá con una voz desgastada, cruzado por un matiz de desorden y de confusión: y tú, qué andái haciendo en la calle, que no te dai cuenta que tenimos hambre. Había doscientas treinta bombas W71. O no te dai cuenta que te estamos esperando pa que hagái la comida. Había mil bombas W79. O acaso no entendís que tu mamá está enferma, tiritando, más perdida que nunca (27).

This example shows the way in which the protagonist expects her father will approach her when she comes back home from work. As the previously discussed cases of the police forces and El Cojo Pancho's voices do, these expected words from the father also carry a colloquial register evident in the use of the Chilean Spanish *voseo*, an accelerated rhythm and a crude tone. They also reveal an inquisitive, recriminating, manipulative and demanding approach with an attempt to make the protagonist feel guilt for, supposedly, neglecting her family and her sick mother. A core characteristic of this example is that the father's imagined speech is interrupted by two impersonal mentions of nuclear weapons that unsubtly interfere with this inquisitive, demanding and accusing male voice, adding overt signs of violence to it. The example shows a mix of the protagonist's and the supposed father's voices, but when the father comes to speak and gives orders in a domestic context, the impersonality and power of the mentions of weapons interpose themselves and link arms to this domestic voice of the father. This alternation makes the rhythm of the father's voice resemble the repetitiveness and crudeness of a bombardment and this bombardment frames the burden of women's workload composed of both paid work and unpaid domestic labour. One may also infer this female double burden from the contrast between the phrases 'qué andái haciendo en la calle' and 'que hagái la comida'. The protagonist does both paid and unpaid caring

work; she is the only one who goes out to the streets to make money to feed her family, but at the same time in the novel she is ordered by the father to stay at home to take care of sick family members. This example clearly highlights women's workload and their double burden in contemporary modern Chilean society, as discussed in previous chapters. Furthermore, the mentions of police armament that help shape the male voice, provide hints of a relationship between gender, domestic and state violence, suggesting the structural-institutional basis of the sexual division of labour that forces women into exploitation both at work and at home.

The novel also suggests female awareness and reflection, which, however, drifts from acceptance to questioning. The protagonist thinks 'No puedo rebatir la importancia de sus mil pesos [...] su vaho influye hasta en el impulso mecánico de mi pierna cuando subo la escalera con la bolsa. La misma bolsa que llevo hasta el cíber y que después lleno hasta la mitad con el pan que compro en el almacén' (105). These words reveal that the protagonist is aware that she has to accept sexual abuse in order to survive economically and therefore, at first sight, she seems to recognize the value that the money provided by this abuse has for her and her family. But she is also trying to persuade herself in order to admit such a value. One can read this self-persuasion in the phrase 'no puedo rebatir' and in the fact that she needs to remind herself of such a value when she returns home with 'la bolsa' containing the family food. The reflective character of the protagonist is emphasized elsewhere in the novel, when she wonders, '¿Por qué acertamos el lulo y yo? o ¿cuándo aprendimos a acertar el lulo y yo? O más bien ¿acertamos el lulo y yo? Estas son las preguntas importantes o tontas o estériles que me hago' (108) and 'no sé bien qué es lo que vale mil pesos, si el lulo o yo. Porque podría ser posible que el lulo costara mil pesos, no

yo, no yo. Que yo costara menos de mil pesos' (109). The protagonist shows notions of awareness of her own disadvantaged position, however, there are also hints of misery and an understanding of the futile nature of her thinking and questioning. Nevertheless, she can still be read as a clever, informed and reflective woman. Her capacity for quiet thinking in dealing with her cruel context is further evidence that *Fuerzas especiales* portrays female difference in a positive way. The novel shows the potential of a female voice that is self-aware and pacific through this capacity of women to survive in the complex and harsh context portrayed.

Another example of the way in which the novel suggests a positive female difference is found in the following reflection by the protagonist:

> Toso y pienso en las extraordinarias faldas asimétricas que vi ayer en el portal. No estoy segura si podrían acomodarme. No sé cómo luciría la falda en el bloque ahora que la policía hace lo que quiere o dice lo que quiere o se deja caer sobre nosotros como quiere [...] Mientras me remece la tos vienen a mi mente, a la manera de una sucesión de cascadas, las faldas armadas mediante unos cortes insólitos que no termino de comprender. Las faldas mostraron una intensa renovación de la moda porque la asimetría terminó por anular el prolongado dominio de la simetría (111-112).

This example is from the section entitled 'Las rejas no son todas iguales'. This title reminds us of the idea of the enclosure taking varied forms and that asymmetry might eventually provide space for escape. The protagonist is physically affected by the permanent damage caused by the chemical weapons used by the police; but, in the image of a typically feminine piece of clothing, the skirt, *Fuerzas especiales* suggests the potential for resistance of female difference. As discussed earlier, in the novel the image of symmetry is linked to oppression, however, in this example, the skirts are not described in the same way; they are 'extraordinarias faldas asimétricas'. Thus, one can understand that they, metaphorically, have the capacity to break the

symmetry and consequently, the oppression. Even though at the beginning of this example the protagonist shows some doubts, these doubts nonetheless emphasize her process of thinking and, as the consequences of police repression (her cough) become more damaging and [la] 'remece[n]', she visualizes more and more skirts. There are also particularities in the voice that describes the skirts. This voice shows knowledge of fashion history, art and aesthetics, which contrasts with the brutality of the violent social context portrayed by the novel. In the mention of fashion there is again a nod to a form of mass and pop culture. This reference reminds us of the references to popular culture discussed earlier and it is, again, interesting to note in the case of an author whose narrative has previously been characterized as elitist. These references to mass and pop culture might suggest the idea of opening up to other forms of resistance from an aesthetics that could perhaps reach a wider audience.

In the above example the novel again plays with sameness and difference. Although linked to mass culture, these skirts are unique, as they are 'faldas armadas' that have 'cortes insólitos'. They might potentially be armed and cutting, and metaphorically linked to female strength and potentialities. In this way, the novel contributes to a social imaginary in which women's eventual ways to escape from oppression are significantly linked to knowledge, awareness, a more massive aesthetics and thus comprehensiveness and inclusion. However, towards the end of the novel, the protagonist also tells us, 'La moda no avanza sino más bien vuelve a los mismos giros de siempre [...] Los vestidos de novia de las últimas colecciones son fastuosos y deslavados porque no pueden salir del blanco y eso cansa. Cansa' (163). Here, the potentialities of new forms of femininity, in the image of original asymmetric skirts,

give way to a traditional piece of female clothing, a white wedding dress, an image that highlights traditional gender roles. But the protagonist is also emphatic in saying that she, and perhaps other people by analogy, are bored of this traditional image. Therefore, although this potentially female way of an escape is not actually realized and remains a reflection in the protagonist's imagination, it is still a significant example of the way in which the novel suggests the positive potential of female leadership and opens the question of possible ways out of oppression led by female difference. This female portrayal framed by potentialities contrasts with the weak and fearful nature of the portrayals of male characters, particularly that of the father, who finally disappears and apparently dies (155-158).

Nonetheless, although the novel clearly portrays female agency through an active protagonist who, besides being in a position of vulnerability, is the only breadwinner of the family, one may argue that her public involvement takes a maternal position based on her caring responsibilities. It is framed by the politics of motherhood that has historically been a key approach of women's political participation in Chile and beyond, which however, does not necessarily target at strategic gender interests; that is, interests that entail goals towards women's emancipation, for they derive from 'the analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist' (Molyneux, 1985: 232). Chilean women's movements were crucial to the overthrow of the dictatorship, however, during the transition to democracy they used discourses rooted on a militant motherhood that were based on the idea of women's 'difference', a strategy that makes it more difficult for women to argue for and gain political power (Franceschet, 2001: 209). For these women, demands for power were seen as 'too

narrow and also as conforming to the masculine-defined model of politics, which the Chilean women's movement rejected through its style of 'difference' feminism and politicized motherhood' (Ibid.: 213). The consequence of this strategy was the lack, for several years, of fundamental conditions for women's empowerment such as: the lack of a divorce law, which was finally passed just in 2004; the lack of a gender quota law for parliamentary elections until 2015; and the penalization of abortion under any circumstances until 2017.[55]

Similarly, the agency and public involvement of *Fuerzas especiales*' protagonist, based on politicized motherhood and female difference, though portrayed positively, does not necessarily lead to political equality. This impression is given by the ambiguous portrayal of the protagonist's public involvement. She is a female breadwinner, but she is also the only member of her family required to take care of the sick members of her family. Despite the complex and oppressive context she is immersed in, the protagonist shows hints of leadership and strength to face her own vulnerable situation and to put up with the abuse she suffers each time she must bring food home. Moreover, she shows awareness of the disadvantages of her own political status and at moments she provides hints of the potential that female difference has for resistance. However, such a potential is never actually realized in the novel and in some passages she can be also read as depressed and doubtful as to the viability of resistance.

[55] Only in September 2017, was an abortion law passed in Chile. However, it offers women access to abortion limited to three cases: i) when the mother's life is at risk; ii) in case of foetus inviability; and iii) in the case of rape (Gobierno de Chile, '#YoApoyo3Causales').

In such an ambiguous portrayal, the protagonist's public involvement and agency are not inspired by an overt desire for mobilization and political equality, but by her sense of responsibilities towards her family. Her participation in an abusive labour market follows a pattern inherited from the traditional division of gender roles that dictates that women primarily provide caring work, but in the context of social and political conflict or in the case of the lack of a male breadwinner, they may also have duties as providers, which is still based on their maternal responsibilities. One can read this pattern towards the end of the novel when the protagonist relates 'el Omar y yo somos cíber, no calle, no. Calle no. Había cincuenta mil sistemas de defensa antiaérea Tor M-1. Odiamos las veredas y los recodos' (156). These words emphasize the difference between the protagonist's place of work, 'el cíber', and 'la calle'. They let us know that the characters hate 'las veredas' and 'los recodos' or, one may interpret, the public space and the tricky roles they need to play there in order to survive. These roles derive from the overall symbol of prostitution discussed earlier, as real and virtual, occurring inside and outside the cyber. In simple words, in order to survive, these characters need to put up with both individual physical and systemic social abuse. There is also the presence of violence in the obtrusive mention of missiles. All these features stress that, although the protagonist is, apparently, free to go out onto the streets to do some kind of paid work, she is still trapped by the only kind of role she is left with in the repressive context of the sexual division of labour: that of providing pleasure and welfare to others. And therefore, her workplace is just another space of oppression and abuse.

Heidi Tinsman and Rachel Schurman argue that in Chile, neoliberalism has had a complex impact on women. They note that women, on the one hand, have been

exploited in the workplace for the sake of profit, but on the other, they have been offered spaces to participate in the labour market and gained greater levels of economic independence (Tinsman, 2004; Schurman, 2004). However, *Fuerzas especiales* questions the emancipatory potential of such participation. The novel portrays an ambiguous female agency, which may, by analogy, be indicative of the difficulties for women of true public engagement. One can understand this portrayal of an ambiguous and never fully realizable female leadership and potential for resistance, as related to the in-between stage of women in contemporary Chilean society of the post-transition to democracy; a context in which women might enjoy the possibility of participating in the labour market (which in principle may be thought to be liberating), but still cannot abandon their domestic responsibilities. The novel poses the question of women not having reached emancipation yet, though they are part of the economically active population. Consequently, women are still trapped by a double burden, which is just another modern form of abuse, exploitation and oppression.

Nonetheless, the novel provides us with clear notions of positive female difference, which contribute to the creation of an alternative social imaginary in which traditional views of gender difference are altered. Through the fictional nature of its protagonist –by breaking any potential mimetic relationship between the erudite voice of the narrator and a real *pobladora*–, in *Fuerzas especiales*' fictional world women are the stronger sex and breadwinners; and they have a reflective nature with a clear capacity to develop thinking, awareness and questioning. The novel denounces social and sexual abuse against women, but also creates suspicion about how society might view such abuse as the responsibility of women themselves. The

novel also disrupts traditional views of female body and leaves us with an insurgent sense that emerges from the potential of resistance that results from bodily characteristics traditionally though as negative in women, such as being overweight. And importantly, female solidarity and sisterhood are not posed from the perspective of an alleged essentially-female sensitivity and a view of women as source of succour, but from the perspective of their strategic and subversive potential to lead towards female liberation. Therefore, this piece of narrative fiction creates a social imaginary in which patriarchal stereotypes are clearly denounced, questioned and, importantly, subverted.

Conclusions

Although not light reading, *Fuerzas especiales* does present a story with a less hermetic language than Eltit's earlier narrative fiction such as *Por la patria* or *El cuarto mundo*. It depicts a recognizable setting and various types of human relations and interactions that allow us to, at least, follow a plot. It also nods to popular and mass forms of culture like pop music and fashion, and has something like hope of resistance against an oppressive and violent context.

The invasiveness of repression is clearly represented by the intrusion of the mentions of police and military armament. Also through this narrative device, the novel permanently reminds us that what it portrays is a world of fantasy, of hyperbole. As dystopian fiction, *Fuerzas especiales* portrays recognizable characteristics from a besieged Chilean *población* and may be identified as a plausible story inspired by Chile's recent past or present, but it also has a futuristic pessimistic element framed by the use of multimedia and technology in an extremely violent context. This

futuristic element contributes, at the same time, to understanding the social context portrayed by the novel as inheriting the repressive, oppressive and violent legacies of the Chilean dictatorship, although this is never openly mentioned in the story.

The novel plays with the contrast between sameness and difference, and between objectified people and individuals with different stories, personalities and attitudes towards the repressive context they face. Such a play is emphasized in the way the novel's sections are presented. At first sight, they follow a similar pattern composed of one long paragraph opened and/or closed by a mention of weapons separated by full stops. However, on closer inspection, one may also identify some differences such as sections that are not enclosed by armament, as they do not start or end with these being mentioned at all. This sense of difference and, at moments, the retreat of the weaponry has the effect of offering an ambiguous potential for escape and resistance and as such, the novel also alternates between pessimism and hope.

One finds an informed protagonist-narrator aware of the vulnerable and dangerous situation she is immersed in, but the novel is not emphatic in terms of the political potential of such an informed and self-educated protagonist and in her actual possibilities to make political choices that would allow her to subvert the dominant forces. Consequently, through the play between pessimism and hope, the novel suggests potential ways of escaping from oppression, which rely especially on female difference, awareness, solidarity and communal ties, but which are nevertheless not fully accomplished by the characters. The novel's constant drift between potentialities and impossibilities, leaves the impression of the supremacy of the oppressive forces in power, although there still are certain paths open to the

characters. In this respect the novel's use of multimedia and communication technology is central. *Fuerzas especiales* presents technological means as having multiple purposes, as a banal entertainment that distracts the protagonist's thought process, but also as having social potentials. Multimedia and communication technology in the novel are a potential source of information and self-education available to people in vulnerable situations, and also provide a space for creative forms of resistance in a digital era.

The novel portrays a non-traditional femininity and suggests the potential of female difference to resist the difficult environment depicted. It has a female protagonist who shows hints of agency. She is the main voice heard throughout the story, the one who takes care of her sick family members, the only provider for her family and the only one who is strong enough to face danger and abuse in order to do so. *Fuerzas especiales* stresses female difference in a positive way in contrast to male weakness, and suggests female strength as a way to break symmetry or oppression. There are also hints of female solidarity, strategy and resilience, all of which open the question of the potential capacity of female organization and, eventually, resistance. But the novel is also ambiguous in terms of this capacity, as such potential is never fully realized and remains only a suggestion. Also, the protagonist's public involvement is importantly linked to prostitution and it therefore leads anyway to abuse and exploitation.

The portrayal of female public involvement is ambiguous, as it is based on the politics of motherhood and female difference, which, according to commentators, in Chile were the typical approaches of the political involvement of women's

movements during the dictatorship and transition to democracy, and do not lead necessarily to political empowerment. The novel never completely abandons pessimism and through it, it comments on the Chilean contemporary in-between stage of women's political status. Nowadays, Chilean society may formally offer various possibilities to women, such as education and access to technology and the labour market. At the same time, however, as the story shows, although the female potential exists, the oppressive system has the arms, force and resources by its side and, consequently, the power to repress and annul such a potential.

Therefore, on the one hand, *Fuerzas especiales* depicts a social imaginary permeated by certain political and cultural ideologies, which are linked to social and gender inequality. Through the novel's narrative technique, one finds a critique of contemporary Chilean society, a society strongly influenced by the repressive legacy of the dictatorship. By representing the intrusive force of modern forms of social oppression in general and of gender inequalities in particular, it effectively foregrounds the political views of an author who has openly recognized herself as a leftist feminist writer. On the other hand, *Fuerzas especiales* challenges a traditional social imaginary that regards *pobladores* as ignorant and quasi-objects, and contributes with a view of them as capable of self-education and developing thinking and questioning, which might lead to resistance, even in the case of those heavily oppressed by the institutions of a democratic state. With clear and well-recognizable allusions to a recent resistance from the grassroots, this fiction creates and proposes a social imaginary in which there is still hope and room for resistance from the margins of society, from the overlooked; and importantly, this is an imaginary in which female solidarity and sisterhood may lead to women's emancipation.

Chapter III

Politico-Cultural Traces of Contemporary Chilean Society in *Missing (una investigación)* by Alberto Fuguet

A. Introduction

Missing (una investigación) was published in Santiago, Chile in 2009 by Alfaguara. It is set mainly in the U.S., where most of the characters have lived for many years. This is unusual in Fuguet's narrative, which is normally set amongst Santiago's upper classes. It has nine chapters and, in general, it is narrated in an informal tone, but without an excessively colloquial register. As usual in Fuguet's novels, the plot is mainly based on the exploration of personal trauma. It is centred on the story of Alberto Fuguet's uncle, Carlos Fuguet, who one day decides to disappear and have no contact with his family at all. Alberto Fuguet himself is portrayed as the author, narrator and one of the main characters and, therefore, the borders between author, narrator and character are frequently blurred by the novel. This reminds us of the so-called 'auto-fictional' narrative of writers such as the Spaniard Javier Marías (1951-) and his novel *Todas las almas* (1989), amongst many others.

The term auto-fiction was coined by the French writer Serge Doubrovsky (1928-2017) in 1977 to describe texts characterized by both an autobiographical and a fictional pact with the readers, in stories based on true events that have characters with real names, but which are still presented as novels (Blejmar, 2016: 6; Casas, 2014: 7-8). Commentators link auto-fiction to postmodern literature; for example, Valeria Possi places it 'en un terreno liminar entre obras que hacen referencia al pacto autobiográfico y otras al pacto novelesco [...] lo importante es el sujeto hablante [...] profundamente afectado por la atomización y la pluralización de la sociedad contemporánea' (Possi, 2014: 151). She also argues that in auto-fiction, the 'peculiaridad más distintiva reside en la correspondencia nominal entre autor,

narrador y personaje (Ibid.: 152; also, Pérez-Carbonell, 2016, chapter 2). Ana Casas points out the significance that auto-fiction currently has in Hispanic literature, as:

> asumida la imposibilidad de un referente estable –incluido el propio autor–, los creadores siguen afanándose en plasmar sus identidades (fragmentaria y precariamente), con más intensidad incluso que en otros periodos. Emprenden así una búsqueda que va del cauce introspectivo –en el que prima la representación de lo íntimo– a formulaciones que se vinculan a la memoria colectiva y el testimonio [...] La intensificación del giro subjetivo en las literaturas hispánicas se expresa, en suma, a través de las experiencias personales como objeto de las obras más allá de la mera inspiración, en la medida en que estas son asumidas como materia novelable o dramatizable (Casas, 2014: 13).

This is connected, she adds, to the processes of 'hibridación discursiva (convergencia de distintos géneros; diversificación de las formas de autorrepresentación; problematización de la dualidad factualidad-ficción; [and] inclusión de nuevos soportes y medios)' (Ibid.). Also noting a relationship between auto-fiction, memory and testimony, Jordana Blejmar, in her study of the work of a group of Argentinean post-dictatorship artists and writers, argues that auto-fiction is based on the premise that to bear witness to past events, especially traumatic ones, we need the obliqueness of fiction (Blejmar, 2016: 6; chapter 2). She notes that the possibility that auto-fictions give to the creators to imagine different versions of the past is a key element of the cultural memories of post-dictatorship art (Ibid.). This idea, as will be discussed later, is also relevant to the analysis of *Missing (una investigación).*

Although auto-fiction plays with the relationship between fact and fiction and with authors depicted as protagonists and narrators, commentators also emphasize its fictionality. Diana Klinger, in her study on the relationship between literature, anthropology and ethnography in contemporary Latin American literature highlights the fact that auto-fiction involves a questioning of the notions of truth (Klinger,

2007: 47), that is, a questioning of the truthfulness of the events told. Similarly, with regard to the relationship between truth and imagination, in terms of the ambiguity in the author's identity (the apparent correspondence between author and protagonist), using filmmaking as primary source, Javier Ignacio Alarcón concludes that 'todo relato sobre el yo, incluso el que pretende ser verdad, es una ficcionalización, una construcción de una identidad ilusoria: una mentira' (Alarcón, 2014: 123). All the above mentioned issues around auto-fiction can be traced in *Missing (una investigación)*, as will be analyzed in this chapter.

In the early 1960s, the young Carlos is sent from Santiago, Chile, to the U.S. by his father and his family follow him later. Once there, he has a difficult relationship with his family and particularly with his father; he is a problematic young man who is sent to prison twice (30-36). Alberto grows up very fond of his young and, in his eyes, cool uncle (34) and seventeen years after Carlos' disappearance, he becomes obsessed with both the idea of finding him –an expectation nobody else in the family has– and writing a book about the process (37). The novel has seven epigraphs, both in English and Spanish, taken from novels, a memoir and a song. These epigraphs make reference to family stories, missing people and the relationship between fact and fiction. For instance, from Ernest Hemingway's (1899-1961) memoir *A Moveable Feast*, published posthumously in 1964, the first epigraph reads: *Si el lector lo prefiere, puede considerar el libro como una obra de ficción. Pero cabe la posibilidad de que un libro de ficción arroje alguna luz sobre las cosas que fueron contadas como hechos* (emphasis in the original). This first epigraph, the only of the seven printed on a separate page, introduces us to the way the novel will play with

the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, suggesting that what it is written in the pages that follow could be considered a true story.

The title of the novel also suggests its connection to another artistic representation of true events. It is a reference to the film *Missing* (1982) by the Greek-French film director Costa-Gavras (1933-). This film, banned in Chile during the dictatorship, is about a father who travels to Chile to find out what has happened to his son, an American journalist disappeared by the military during the dictatorship. But rather, what the father discovers is the connection of his home country's government with the Chilean dictatorship responsible for the eventual death of his son. As in Fuguet's story, the film also states that the events in the movie are based on a true story. In the novel's title, the parenthesis '(una investigación)' also suggests that the novel is about factual issues; as such, the story is full of specific dates for the events it describes and the characters are the author's own relatives and friends. Moreover, Alberto Fuguet constantly refers to himself as the creator, narrator and one of the main characters of the story, sharing thoughts and anecdotes about his work and career (98, 127), which includes a transcription of a text from Fuguet's novel *Las películas de mi vida* (2003). In the acknowledgments, the author thanks fellow writers and collaborators as well as his own family, naming his father, mother and grandmother, who are also characters in the novel. The book's cover picture is a true photograph of Carlos Fuguet, taken in 1975 by Jaime Fuguet Jover, Alberto's grandfather and another character of the novel, and the book is dedicated to Alberto's sister Michelle Fuguet. All of the above accentuates the factual aura of the story, also emphasized in the narrator's words: 'Mi tío se perdió, pero se perdió de verdad./Nada de arte, nada de metáforas' (15-16).

The novel has mainly male characters and only a few female ones, such as Carlos' mother, Raquel, Carlos' ex wives, and a few female friends of Alberto, who are briefly mentioned in the story. The main male characters are Carlos Fuguet, the missing character of the title; Alberto Fuguet, character and narrator; and Jaime Fuguet Jover, Carlos' father and Alberto's grandfather. Alberto's disaffection for his grandfather is expressed throughout the novel (24, 27, 33). However, his negative portrayal is not always clear. Jaime is described by a first-person narrator, Alberto, as: 'no tuvo campo ni fundo pero logró imponerse como una suerte de patrón de fundo de pacotillas' (27), referring to the tyrannical and patronizing behaviour typical of the landowners of the Chilean *latifundio*. Alberto's words carry a mocking tone to refer to a parody or a pathetic version of a *patrón de fundo*, since his grandfather, in fact, did not have any land or pedigree, although until the 1960s, Jaime owned his own business in Chile and had a comfortable life (29). One can read Alberto's lack of affection for his grandfather also from his words when he learns that Jaime dies, 'Fui a contarle a mi madre, que estaba en su pieza. –Se murió el viejo de mierda –le dije–. Por fin' (27), he says. This phrase is accentuated, being the last words of a sub-section of the novel and it has a comic tone and perhaps a politico-cultural reference, since words such as *se murió el viejo de mierda* might remind some readers of Pinochet's death in 2006 and the massive celebrations that took place on the streets throughout the country and beyond.[56] But, as much as this phrase might carry such a reference, the potential image of a dictatorial grandfather is also moderated by what it precedes it: 'no le tenía afecto, respeto, simpatía, complicidad [...] tampoco era un demonio que me aprisionaba. Era simplemente un

[56] For example, the Argentinean singer and song-writer Liliana Felipe (1964-) dedicated her song 'Un viejo de mierda' to Pinochet. To listen to this reference, visit, 'Liliana Felipe - Un viejo de mierda (tema nuevo)' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4zfI7kGpfQ&feature=youtu.be>.

mal personaje secundario' (27), Alberto states. This is a meta-literary reference. It is a literary judgement and not the moral one that might be expected from the criticism of a family member. As much as Alberto regards Jaime as a *patrón de fundo*, he also tells us 'sin duda era un ser maldito, frágil, incompleto, lastimado' (27), fragility not commonly associated with *patrones de fundo*. Thus, beyond the negative image of Jaime that the narrator provides on the one hand –presumable compared to a dictator and *patrón de fundo* who 'aprisiona'–, there is also a more tempered and neutral tone in his words.

Two prominent aspects of *Missing (una investigación)* are the question of how fictional the story is and, despite its setting outside Chile, the idea that the novel deals with the particular politico-historical Chilean context of the twentieth century. This is interesting to study in a author like Fuguet, who has been mainly regarded as a postmodern author, apparently not interested in ideological and historical perspectives. This chapter will trace evidence of these aspects in the narrative technique employed by the novel and in the treatment of plot, characters and language. Specifically, the analysis will address the elements that the novel uses to cross the borders between fact and fiction, its flirtation with politically-loaded terms and its portrayal of gender roles with their significance in the development of the plot. All of these are important lines of enquiry to study, through literature, representations of society and the political status of women that feed the contemporary social imaginary, particularly significant in reading a kind of narrative fiction that blurs the limits between fiction and non-fiction.

B. Fact and Fiction

The novel's narrative techniques emphasize the relationship between fact and fiction. The story makes use of various literary devices and genres which are a combination of techniques to narrate both fiction and non-fiction. It uses first-person narration with Alberto both as narrator and character; third-person narration, which at moments is impersonal and objective as if mimicking a camera lens or a screenplay; short and long unattributed dialogues; interview transcriptions with answers in Spanish and English; a long monologue in lines from Carlos' viewpoint and based on the interview transcriptions; one chronicle written by Alberto Fuguet and published years earlier by a Peruvian magazine; diary entries that include some notes printed in a font designed to look like handwriting; autobiographical fragments; e-mails; letters; and fragments from Fuguet's previous books. In all of the above, there are specific references to dates, which underline the supposed veracity of the plot. The novel also describes its own process of creation. It refers, for instance, to the process of choosing its title and making the final decision to write the story. All of these elements contribute to blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality from inside the text. Although the above mentioned elements are traits of postmodern fiction, a postmodernist or related post-national approach is insufficient to a political reading of this novel. As discussed earlier, such approaches to reading Fuguet's narrative fiction do not account for the political position of a post-transition to democracy author and do not provide paths to observe and analyze the ideology behind an apparently apolitical writing; consequently, they cannot unveil, for example, the political value that the analysis of more recent readings of the past may have, as will be analyzed in this chapter.

Another interesting characteristic of the story is that it makes reference not only to U.S. popular culture, as usual in Fuguet's narrative, but also to Chilean literature from different periods, which contributes to the more national perspective of the novel. It mentions writers such as Jorge Inostroza (1919-1975), Marcela Paz (1902-1985), Alejandro Jodorowsky (1929-), Patricia Politzer (1952-), Francisco Mouat (1962-) and Sergio Paz (1967-). It also mentions Fuguet's participation in José Donoso and Antonio Skármeta's literary workshops. And, despite the fact that the novel is mainly set in the U.S., the plot is constructed around emblematic socio-cultural issues of the twentieth-century Chilean history that this chapter will analyze.

Paratextually, the author has also emphasized the reality of *Missing (una investigación)*, but in a more ambiguous way. In an interview from 2011, although the author states that the novel is based on family events, he is also ambiguous about how genuine the events inspired in his own life are. He explains that he decided to write some parts of his life story in the third-person rather than in the first to emphasize the temporal distance of those facts (Fuguet, 2011: para. 18 of 28). He says, 'esa parte es 100% verdadera' (Ibid.), but the novel, 'No es 100% real, pero sí 98 o 97,5%. Es la parte que más le gusta a la gente, la que más llama la atención' (Ibid.: para. 16 of 28).[57] From his words, one can read an author aware of what his readers apparently wish to read: true stories. And, in order to publish an, apparently, true story, Fuguet says that he took the necessary legal precautions: 'Le llevé también un documento redactado por un abogado, con un montón de cláusulas. Al firmarlo, mi tío perdía el derecho a arrepentirse, me daba, por así decirlo, los

[57] It is curious that, although supposedly almost entirely real, in the story, there is not any reference to Fuguet as a gay man, homosexuality that he recognized publicly just in 2015.

derechos de su vida, no podía cambiar de opinión, sacar el libro de las librerías o pedir que saquen su foto de la portada' (Ibid.: para. 24 of 28). Nevertheless, one cannot take this author's declaration at face value; it is just another way of playing with the novel's relationship between fact and fiction. One may also consider this statement as symbolizing power relations between creator and object and as reaffirming the fictional nature of the story, as it basically says that the creator had the freedom to do with the story what he wanted, to (re-)create it, changing and re-arranging it as he pleases.

The novel's relationship between fact and fiction remains apparently ambiguous from inside the text as well, and one could not take for granted that the story is not fictional. In part I, which is a sort of preface entitled 'Escondido a pleno sol. Escribir la historia', the narrator explains, 'Por primera vez estoy escribiendo un libro *para* la familia más que *acerca* de la familia' (17, emphasis in the original). From the emphasis on the distinction between 'para' and 'acerca', one understands that the intention of the author was to write a story inspired in some family experiences as a gift for his family, and accordingly the book is dedicated to Fuguet's sister. Similarly, when referring to his lack of affection for his grandfather, Alberto reflects: 'ahora que tengo más años, puedo entender pero no por eso perdonarlo ([...] este odio es, en rigor, más literario que nada)' (27). This phrase shows Alberto's interest in this family history from a fictional point of view. Additionally, at first, Alberto feels that Carlos is a kind of alternative version of himself, as he thinks he and Carlos have similar life stories because they both, at different stages of their lives, were obliged to adapt to a new culture and language (89). But Alberto also recognizes that 'Mi vida, en rigor, no tiene nada que ver con la de Carlos' (91).

Other clues are found in chapter VIII entitled originally in English ‘The Echoes of his Mind. Carlos talks’, which is Carlos’ monologue in broken line verse that tells his life story, based on interview transcriptions. This monologue forms a long chapter divided into sub-sections that narrate Carlos’ life story in his own voice, mostly in Spanish but with some phrases in English as well. This is a curious choice of language, since Carlos has spent most of his life in an English-speaking environment and many times during the interviews it seems easier for him to answer in English (148). Although written in a form that looks like long poems, when read, these lines rather sound like a prose that has just been cut. They show the traditional punctuation used in prose, but also some deviation from the norm such as phrases that begin with a lower-case word after a full stop. And mostly, the lines do not show any rhyme or a pattern of rhythm either. According to the Spanish writer Antonio Colinas (1946-), ‘A cualquier verso, incluso al más libre de los versos, lo podemos desproveer de todo –de métrica, de rima, de imágenes–, pero nunca podremos, ni debemos, librarlo de su *ritmo*, pues automáticamente ese verso se convertiría en prosa. El verso no acabaría siendo sino prosa cortada cuidadosamente en trozos’ (Colinas, 2008: 90, emphasis in the original). The use of this technique denotes a testimony that does not follow a strict pattern and therefore may not be faithful to its real-life counterpart, as it speaks of the creativity of a fictional piece of work. It represents a re-written story, cut and re-arranged as its creator pleases, and distant from the original.

In a similar vein, towards the end of the novel, one reads Carlos’ willingness to accept any conditions set by Alberto on the perspectives of his own disappearance:

> –Te perdiste [A]
> –Me perdí [C]
> –Bueno saberlo –le digo sonriendo [A] (382, characters’ initials added).

Alberto's smile suggests victory because the conflict between Carlos and Alberto's perspectives on Carlos' disappearance is clear throughout the novel. The transcriptions show that Carlos is not willing to admit that he ran away from his family, was lost, disappeared and unreachable by them (132, 138, 145, 150), as Alberto insists. Most of the novel, Carlos does not agree with his nephew's view of his story and defends his own perspective of it. Carlos tells Alberto, '¿Qué mierda más quieres saber? No me escapé, por la puta' (138). And later, in the lines Carlos relates: 'nunca estuve perdido/me parece casi insultante'(310). From Alberto's insistence, one may argue that he already had an well-formed idea of what story he wanted to tell, which did not coincide with Carlos' view of it. This disagreement explains why, as the narrator admits, Alberto is not satisfied with the interviews: 'A los dos días supe que este sistema no iba a funcionar. Carlos se transformaba en otro y no me gustaban sus respuestas. No me servían' (131). Alberto decides to stop recording the interviews and let Carlos talk. He just listens in order to later attempt to remember and write the story, having to, as he says, 'inventar y mentir para llegar a alguna verdad' (131). Thus, inevitably, Carlos' story is mediated by Alberto's mind, words and memory. The uselessness of the interview transcription technique implies that, if based purely on real events, the plot could not be further developed the way Alberto wished, and, accordingly, he felt Carlos was 'otro', not his protagonist and therefore his answers were not useful. On the contrary, in the scope of fiction, in the lines, the prose, the dialogues and, towards the end of the novel, after the protagonist admits the supremacy of his creator as well as the turns Alberto wanted the story to take, then the novel is finally written, as shown by the dialogue between Alberto and Carlos:

–¿Entiendes lo que me está cediendo? [A]

–Mi vida [C]
–Tu historia [A] (381, characters' initials added).

This dialogue underscores the distinction Alberto makes between Carlos' words 'mi vida' and Alberto's 'tu historia'. Therefore, *Missing (una investigación)* combines facts and fiction at the level of its narrative techniques, but at the level of its plot, what Alberto Fuguet has written is not necessarily Carlos' true life story (his 'vida'), but one 'historia' that attempts to play with the boundaries between facts and fiction. As such, the novel is both Carlos' private account and Alberto's external view of it. In other words, it is the particular way Alberto wishes this story to be viewed by his audience. He is retelling a story based on some factual family events.

Retelling a story from fiction, but also from the emphasis on apparently factual events retold from temporal distance is a narrative technique that provides us with important insights to read, or perhaps, re-read, Chile's contemporary social imaginary. As this narrative technique contributes to (re-)creating a social imaginary somehow connected to real-life events but from temporal distance and as fiction, it provides a fruitful perspective for reading Chile's post-transition to democracy literature, which has inherited a vast legacy from the dictatorship. *Missing (una investigación)* is a story apparently based on true family events which are framed by certain Chilean politico-historical circumstances of the second half of the twentieth century. This standpoint is particularly significant in terms of the relationship between the novel and memory. In this novel, such a relationship echoes the premise that, as Blejmar (2016) argues, to bear witness to past events (especially collectively traumatic ones), we need the obliqueness of fiction, including the possibility that fiction gives us to imagine a different version of the past, as will be explored below.

C. Social Versus Political Connotations of Disappearance and Exile: Retelling a Story

Some commentators have argued that Fuguet's narrative avoids references to contemporary political issues and national history (Palaversich, 2005: 40; Paz Soldán, 2002: 44-48). However, this section will explore the way in which *Missing (una investigación)*, though elusive, is permeated by references to the political context and social changes that occurred in Chile in the second half of the twentieth century. In the first instance, the novel does so through the profound treatment of its male protagonist and his life story, providing references to some of the most prominent socio-political questions of his era: exile and disappearance. The novel portrays these not only as a mark of the seventeen years of military dictatorship, but also as a more extended social consequence of the political convulsions of the periods that surrounded the coup. An example of these references is found in the chronicle entitled 'Se busca tío', when the first-person narrator tells us:

> Desde entonces no hemos vuelto a saber de él.
> Desde entonces está desaparecido.
> Missing.
> Nadie sabe dónde está.
> Algunos en mi familia lo dan por muerto, tirado en la morgue de un hospital público y que el NN (el John Doe) en el que se convirtió fue cremado o lanzado a una fosa común (¿eso es lo que hacen en USA?, ¿qué sucede allá con los cadáveres que no son retirados?). Otros sostienen que está en el fondo de un río que pasa por un barrio malo de una ciudad grande (23).

Although strictly referring to something that apparently happened in the U.S., this example reminds us of the rhetoric of the disappeared by the military during the Chilean dictatorship. It uses terms such as 'desaparecido', 'perdido', 'dónde está' and 'saber', which in Chile are strongly linked to the disappearance and absence of those who were tortured, killed or exiled by the military. Terms like 'NN' and its English equivalent 'John Doe' to refer to people whose identity is unknown, 'dar por

muerto', 'en la morgue', 'cremado', 'lanzado a una fosa común', 'en el fondo de un río' and 'barrio malo' are all references to what is commonly believed to be the final destiny of the disappeared in Chile, even though many cases have not been clarified yet. For example, the Chilean singer Víctor Jara was recognized by a morgue worker in 1973; in 1978, some remains were found at the Hornos de Lonquén; many were anonymously buried in the *Patio 29*, a mass grave in Santiago's General Cemetery; the communist teacher Marta Ugarte was thrown into the ocean and later found by the sea in 1976; and the *Degollados*, a teacher, a painter and a sociologist, were found on the streets of a lower-class neighbourhood in Santiago in 1985.[58]

Moreover, references to a non-Chilean context, the U.S., are separated by parenthesis and certainty about such foreign context is unclear, as it comes in question marks, which emphasizes the local connotation of the terms used. Although there is a contradiction in the reference to these events, since none of these things occurred to Carlos, they still foreground a cultural legacy of the dictatorship. Therefore, in this example the Chilean experience is overlaid on U.S. reality, which is significant, as it shows us that the focus of the novel is on Chilean political and historical issues. Nonetheless, the narrator is ambiguous and does not take full authority over the use of the term 'desaparecido' to refer to his uncle and he later codifies it by using the English word 'missing', which is not common in Chilean Spanish and has no political content except for Costa-Gavras' film. On the next page, he again tempers the political connotation of the reference by using the word 'perdido', as in 'Mi tío

[58] For a detailed description of these cases, see, Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, 1996: 113; 130-131; 209-211; 823; 1010-1011.

desapareció –o se perdió– justo antes de que mi abuelo muriera de cáncer al esófago' (24), to clarify, perhaps, that he is not talking about political disappearance.

The name of the novel itself is a codification, or disguise, of the term 'desaparecido'. As said before, it makes reference to the film *Missing* (1982). As the narrator tells us, the title of this film was translated as *Desaparecido* in Hispanic countries (358), but the author preferred a title in English for his novel. He also chooses a reference to a foreign film that was, as he relates (358), banned in Chile instead of referring to some of the abundant cultural production and materials on the topic that have been produced in Chile. The narrator explains that the choice of the title of his book is the result of a dialogue with a male Chilean literary scholar. The original title of the novel, he lets us know, was *Desaparecido* and by the time he is writing it, he tells the plot to this scholar using such a word to explain the story of his uncle. The scholar is surprised to learn that Alberto Fuguet has a disappeared relative and Alberto clarifies the issue (357-358). The scholar then replies:

> –Entonces no digas que desapareció. [S]
> –Pero lo hizo. [A]
> –Esa palabra es nuestra. Con los desaparecidos no hay incertidumbre. Están muertos. Lo que no se sabe bien es dónde o cuándo, pero se sabe. Lo que no se sabe siempre es quién lo hizo, aunque ya se sabe bastante. [S]
> –Vale –le dije. [A]
> Carlos estaba perdido.
> Carlos estaba missing (357-358, characters' initials added).

The scholar's perspective projects the tension between the appropriation of ideas following strict socio-cultural patterns and the use of language free from political constraints. One can relate this episode to the way in which the novel permanently makes reference to Fuguet's own position as both a commercially successful author from a particular period and a member of an upper-class Chilean family who felt the

need to emigrate to the U.S. when Chile was going through a particular social crisis; and thus in this example, the scholar is surprised to learn that Alberto might have a disappeared relative. Therefore, Alberto Fuguet –who has been many times classified as an apolitical author representing neoliberal ideals– would not have, in the eyes of this scholar, the right to use the term 'desaparecido' to refer to his uncle. The example underlines the conflict between the scholar and the author's perspectives on a story, but it also represents the appropriation ('esa palabra es nuestra') and generalization of a history that does not pay attention to nuances. The scholar represents the generalization of the experience of disappearance as being of one single nature. That experience is, in the eyes of the scholar, limited to that of those physically tortured and then killed during the dictatorship, as his question to Alberto '–¿Desapareció para el golpe o después?' (357) reveals.

The episode with the scholar is also a significant critique of the academics' role. The scholar's perspective seems to be problematic and he is not able to support well his own argument. He states that in terms of the disappeared, there is no 'incertidumbre', therefore, there is one single pattern that these cases, apparently, follow: 'están muertos'. Such an assertion is in itself problematic and makes invisible those disappeared who have not been found yet, as they cannot be strictly regarded as 'dead'. The scholar goes from 'no hay incertidumbre' to 'no se sabe bien' and from 'no se sabe siempre' to 'ya se sabe bastante'. The scholar's generalization and his contradictions highlight the idea of uncertainty, and may be a criticism of unified and invisibilized stories. Not all the disappeared went through the same experience. Most of them were certainly tortured and many were killed, but others became exiles. Some of them came back to Chile, others did not. Some people are still disappeared

but not dead, like kidnapped children or those babies born to pregnant prisoners and illegally offered for adoption by and to the military. There are different stories, including in the case of those who could be called the 'political disappeared'. And such a label is still problematic. Many disappeared and people tortured and killed by the military did not have any actual political engagement, like the aforementioned children, for instance, or the young people who got caught by the military or the police as *sospechosos*, due to their *obrero* look; or those taken prisoner or hurt at random during the protests, or the hippies and rock music fans, just to name a few examples. In fact, such universal risk was one of the main strategies of the Chilean military to spread terror among the population. As Moulian puts it, 'Su brutal eficacia estaba en el azar. No estaba dirigida a los líderes de las cúpulas. Su objetivo era sembrar el temor entre la masa' (Moulian, 2002: 275). The episode with the scholar shows the way in which radical and politically oppositional actions and discourses might be stabilized or neutralized by academics. It represents a tension between the idea of perpetuating intrinsic and generalized characteristics of a political history –as the scholar seems to be doing– versus admitting variations that might end up in the banal whitewashing of a complex and brutal history –as Fuguet's apparent depoliticized use of the term *desaparecido* might imply.

Alberto briefly attempts to refute the scholar's prohibition of the use of the word with a naïve and practical 'pero lo hizo', as if he did not know that, in Chile, the word 'desaparecido' is strongly linked to the disappeared by the dictatorship. But as much as he, at first, does not acknowledge the semantic charge of the word, Alberto also, apparently, gives in to the scholar's authoritative definition of the use of the term, as his word 'vale' could show. And he also recognizes, 'En ese instante sentí

que me habían arrebatado mi título original: *Desaparecido*' (358, emphasis in the original). This failed attempt to refute the semantic charge of the word can be read as both the recognition of its traditional meaning –its political reference linked to the dictatorship– and the speaker's expectation for such a word to open up to further meanings. However, Alberto's word 'vale' also has an ironic tone that implies indifference and a desire to just end the conversation. One can read it as discomfort and a desire not to, at that particular moment, argue further. The novel, however, does. It challenges the traditional use of the term 'desaparecido' and attempts to neutralize it by the interchangeable use of 'desaparecido' and 'perdido' as well as by the codification of those terms into the English word 'missing'.

The novel attempts to link the meanings of disappearance and exile for political reasons to those due to social ones, connecting them by a common origin: the socio-political events that took place in Chile during the second half of the twentieth century. Carlos Fuguet is not one of the exiles of the dictatorship, who, according to different estimates, range from 200,000 to 400,000 (Rebolledo, 2008: 544, note 1). But one may argue that his emigration to the U.S. is somehow linked to the political events surrounding the dictatorship. The narrator does not provide a clear and firm view of the reasons for sending Carlos abroad (and for his family to follow). On the one hand, he considers that this is explained by the loss of the family's higher socio-economic status: 'Se acabaron los lujos. Mi abuelo manejaba un taxi, mi abuela cosía' (30). But on the other hand, he also makes allusive questions and references that link Carlos' socially-motivated exile –in opposition to exile due to political militancy– to the political events of the time, such as '¿Qué hubiera pasado con Carlos Fuguet en Chile? ¿Habría terminado como un profesor?, ¿como un

guerrillero?, ¿habría desaparecido en manos del ejército de Pinochet?' (31). At first sight, both views can allude to socio-economic factors, since by mentioning Carlos' prospective teaching career, the narrator makes a reference to a profession which is commonly regarded in Chile as one with poor economic prospects. But later, the tone of Alberto's questions gets more incisive, going towards 'guerrillero', 'desaparecido' and the role of Pinochet's army. Carlos was politically active in Chile during the 1960s and he was studying to become a school teacher at an emblematic site of leftist militancy, the Universidad de Chile's Instituto Pedagógico.[59] These two different views of the reasons behind Carlos' socially-motivated exile underline the novel's ambiguous intention neither to openly treat the political aspect of the Fuguet family history nor to completely forget it. But, if the narrator does not definitely agree on Carlos' militancy as the reason behind his exile, Carlos explains it in a clearer way:

> mi padre estaba asustado
> de lo que yo estaba haciendo,
> sabía que estaba metido en política,
> para él ese era un camino peligroso,
> venían las elecciones del 64,
> sabía que yo estaba empezando a trabajar
> por la campaña de allende,
> que me iba a meter y estaba en lo cierto:
> si hubiera estado en chile
> me habría metido de frentón (176).

These lines, or rather 'cut prose', show that Carlos, at the age of 18, is becoming more and more involved with leftist politics. He is active and is determined to participate in Allende's campaign 'de frentón', that is, with no fear. The word 'frentón' also reminds us of *El Frente* (Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez), the Chilean leftist nationalist paramilitary organization founded in the 1980s. This

[59] Even nowadays, as the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación (UMCE), this place is still known as *El piedra*, a wordplay that combines 'peda[gógico]' and 'piedra'. This nickname makes reference to the protests of its students, who still engage regularly in fights with the police throwing things –typically stones– at them. It is also widely-known that many professors and teachers were detained, exiled or are still disappeared.

potential reference is curious, as the foundation of the *Frente* happened many years after the events told by the above lines, which suggests that a younger perspective is also involved in those words. The example also mentions the fear of Carlos' father in a separate line; such fear did not have to do with the physical safety of his son. Jaime sends his sons to a country which in 1964 also had particular social convulsions. It was the post-Kennedy era with civil rights conflicts and the start of the Vietnam War. Jaime shows no concerns when Carlos along with his younger brother travel to the U.S. without even speaking English or when they are recruited to fight in the Vietnam War by the U.S. government (32). Therefore, one can infer that Jaime's apprehension was about upcoming social and political changes in Chile. Consequently, Carlos' father, as a powerful observer who does not like the new politically-committed Carlos, uses the authority he has over his son and makes him move to a country that is the antithesis of Chile in the time of the Popular Unity. Such a capacity to predict Carlos' potential behaviour is reflected and confirmed by Carlos' words 'y estaba en lo cierto'.

Carlos' political involvement was thus a core factor for his father in making the decision of sending him abroad, occasioning his exile. Nonetheless, the contradiction that makes the treatment of this question frivolous, is that, unlike the position of the political exiles, whose life depended on their leaving the country, the Fuguet family had actually no obligation to leave (32). Jaime loses his business because of his and his partner's bad management and not because it was expropriated, as some were in those years (29-30). Even though they lose it all and have to move to a slightly lower-class neighbourhood, they are unable to deal with the mix of social classes: '(<<era chinero>>, me dijo una vez mi padrino)' (30), Alberto tells us, echoing the

disdainful way the family used to talk about the love affairs Carlos supposedly had with lower-class women who worked as domestic cleaners in their new neighbourhood. Later, in the U.S., Jaime works part-time as a driver and accountant (31, 79, 209, 210); he does not own a business as in Chile, but still voluntarily prefers to stay forever in the U.S. He does so, not to primarily satisfy some socio-economic expectations, but presumably to avoid social disgrace (182-183) and, possibly, to prevent his son from becoming more involved in leftist politics. Relocating abroad was not however a matter of life and death for the Fuguet family.

Following Darko Suvin, Carlos is strictly classified as an expatriate rather than an exile, as one may understand that he leaves the country voluntarily and does not lose the right to citizenship there. Expatriates can return to their home country and their 'physical and metaphoric alienation from their mother-country is therefore not so thoroughgoing as to be permanent' (Suvin, 2005: 109). But, such a classification does not account for the emotional and personal forces that make Carlos leave Chile. Carlos is a very young man when he is sent to the U.S., and in the following lines, one can read from his viewpoint the emotional trauma that the sense of alienation associated with exile meant to him:

> era como el paraíso,
> así lo veo a la distancia al menos,
> como que me expulsaron del lugar
> donde estaba cómodo,
> de donde era,
> donde entendía todos los códigos,
> donde era uno más
> pero eso te lo cuento ahora,
> ahora que ha pasado tanto tiempo,
> que han pasado tantas cosas (160)

A certain poetic quality emerges in the rhythm of these lines. Unlike most of the text in Carlos' mologue, these lines carry an elegiac tone that briefly conveys Carlos' emotions rather than merely narrating events in his life, as most of the cut prose does. The emotions about Carlos being made to leave his home country expressed in these lines, at moments also remind us of the social poetry of exile. For example, from the poetry of the Argentine Juan Gelman (1930-2014):

> donde nací/morí/tuve sustancia/
> huesitos que junté para encender/
> tierra que me entierraba para siempre. 'Nota XXII' (Juan Gelman, 2011: Tomo I, 399-400).

> me echaron del palacio/
> no me importó/
> me desterraron de mi tierra/
> caminé por la tierra/
> me deportaron de mi lengua. 'El expulsado' (Ibid.: Tomo II, 68-69).

And from the verses by the Chilean poet Gonzalo Millán (1947-2006):

> El avión acaba de aterrizar
> me depositó en un sobre aéreo
> tamaño aeropuerto.
> No traigo dirección ni remitente.
> Carezco de nombre y equipaje. 'Apátrida', (Gonzalo Millán; in Bianchi, 1990: 144)

In Carlos' lines, the repetition of the word 'donde' forms an anaphora that refers to Carlos' sense of belonging, which is linked to his past years in Chile. Carlos feels that he was thrown out of his own place, but his words 'era como' and 'como que me expulsaron del lugar' reveal some degree of insecurity about his own personal history. His words also show a sense of 'coming to a conclusion' and self-realization. This can be read from his emphasis on the phrase '[d]el lugar' at the end of a line and his words 'donde estaba cómodo', 'de donde era', and 'así lo veo a la distancia'. The lines suggest that he is just now –after many years of having left Chile– going

through a process of reflection about what happened to him. This process of evaluation and thinking about his story from the distance given by the time passed is also evident from his word ‘distancia’ and ‘pero eso te lo cuento ahora,/ahora que ha pasado tanto tiempo,/que han pasado tantas cosas’(160). Perhaps he did not make conclusions about his story earlier because he was too young to do so and because his case is a complex one that goes beyond the traditionally-thought borders of exile. In other words, he is now retelling the story, for which he needed a lot of time in order to be able to analyze what happened to him with some degree of clarity, which he still has not done with full certainty yet. This can be associated with the idea that the evaluation of a complex history needs many years to start to be told and understood, and needs distance from the real facts. It reminds us of the fact discussed in the Introduction that in Chile, only in 2009, the teaching of the historical period of the dictatorship and the return to democracy was incorporated into the education curriculum, since the objective evaluation of such complex issues supposedly needed time and distance. And Carlos’ tone also acknowledges such necessary distance.

Adding nuances to Suvin’s classification, it can be said that there are different ways to be forced to leave one’s own country other than by the decree of some authority and yet they are no less political. Just to name a few examples, people may be forced to emigrate by economic conditions, education prospects not found in one’s own country due to socio-economic barriers, or by gender, religious and racial oppression. There are also many children who cannot decide by themselves whether or not they wish to be taken away from their home and family environment. All of these experiences of socially-motivated exile are painful at some point, even if there is no actual prohibition of return, as Carlos himself represents:

creo que nunca,
nunca
me he sentido peor,
he sufrido más,
he sentido que la carne se me abre de dolor (190)

These lines again remind us of the poetry of exile. For example, from Gelman's verses:

y se me pegan los huesos/
me abrasan llamas vivas/
estoy expulsado de mí. 'El expulsado' (Gelman, 2011: Tomo II, 68-69).

In Carlos' lines, although the speaker is remembering how he felt during his first months in the U.S., through the particular use of grammar and the intonation of current colloquial Chilean Spanish, these lines give the impression that the speaker is still suffering. In Chilean Spanish, the present perfect tense is commonly used to refer to non-finished, or potentially non-finished, actions, but not past and finished actions as in other varieties of Spanish. The use of this tense highlights the continuity of the suffering, which is also stressed by repeating 'nunca'.

The continuation of the speaker's process of reflection about the issue is highlighted on a different line as well, with the expression 'he sufrido más'. This phrase also adds some drama, as it expresses the past action the speaker is remembering and, spoken with the colloquial tone of current Chilean Spanish, it can be translated as 'how I have suffered', with a dramatic semantic charge that leaves, again, the impression of a sudden realization. And such was the sorrow he felt, that he needs to show the corporeality of his pain through the phrase 'la carne se me abre de dolor'. This phrase reminds us of the physical atrocities that many exiles experienced while they were in prison. Carlos did not go through such a terrible experience, but in the end, paradoxically, although his father presumably intended to save him from those

kinds of life events, he did go to prison in the U.S. and his socially-motivated exile ended up in a particular form of disappearance. And, although at some point in the novel –as in the incident with the scholar–, the narrator is reluctant to firmly declare the link between political as opposed to voluntary or social forms of exile and disappearance, he finally takes full authorial control over the issue. At the end of the novel in his authorial voice, as a creator and narrator, Alberto declares his uncle a 'desaparecido', in his words: 'el libro de mi tío desaparecido, ya está escrito' (386). Nevertheless, in fact, Carlos' disappearance did not share the implications of the political disappearances carried out by the dictatorship. This makes the treatment of the issue uncomfortably superficial, despite the novel's attempt at questioning traditional political debates. One can thus state that the novel blurs the limits between a personal and a national history in order to challenge the traditional discourses of exile and disappearance as involving a single cause, opening them up to further nuances. But this blurring ends up tempering the cruel nature of the experience of exile and disappearance during the Chilean dictatorship.

Another core issue of the plot is that Alberto acknowledges his failed attempt to narrate Carlos' story using the non-fictional writing technique of interview transcriptions. Initially, he wants Carlos himself to tell his story, 'hacer un testimonio'(125), 'Un libro-entrevista' (127), as he tells us. Even more, he compares such an attempt to the book *Altamirano* (1989) by the Chilean journalist Patricia Politzer, which is based on the transcriptions of Politzer's interviews with Carlos Altamirano (1922-) while he was living in exile. This is an ambitious comparison, as Altamirano was one of the most influential leaders of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity and Carlos Fuguet was no more than Alberto Fuguet's uncle. On the literary

side, Alberto also uses a loaded term, *testimonio*, which is strongly associated with the Latin American revolutionary left and Latin American literary studies in the U.S. According to John Beverly, the *testimonio* aims not only to represent or interpret the world, but also to change it (Beverly, 2004: xvi). It is therefore a genre that entails 'a model for a new form of politics, which also means a new way of imagining the identity of the nation' (Ibid: xvii). But Fuguet's writing has often been classified as a postmodern project distant from the idea that leftist political ideologies have the power to transform societies (Palaversich, 2005: 43; Paz Soldán, 2002: 43-45). Accordingly, Alberto does not write, for example, a *testimonio* on Carlos' leftist militancy in the 1960s, but he rather creates a more personal account of his uncle's life, as he admits that he decided just to listen to what Carlos had to say in order to later remember and (re-)write his story (131).

As a result, the literary technique used to convey Carlos' life story is a long cut prose that ends up telling a story from Carlos' viewpoint but mediated by the words, memories and the tone of the younger Alberto. An example of this combination is found in the comparison between U.S. and Chilean girls made by Carlos' voice in the cut prose, which seems to be charged with Alberto's point of view: 'y eran loquillas,/locas,/no eran como las chicas chilenas,/ni siquiera las niñeras que iban al santa lucía.'(236). The family, as Alberto tells us at the beginning of the novel, thought that the teenage Carlos used to go to the Santa Lucía hill to, seemingly, have sex with domestic workers he met from his neighbourhood (39). However, in the lines, Carlos also tells us that he used to go there to study and read, and that when he did engage in some sexual exploration with one of these domestic cleaners, it was not outdoors, but in the girl's own bedroom (179). Therefore, the characterization of the

Santa Lucía girls as somehow ‘loquillas’ or ‘locas’ rather seems to come from the perspective of Alberto, inherited from that of his family members.

The novel’s tempered and sometimes frivolous tone in references to the dictatorship, remind us of Chilean contemporary right-wing rhetoric. For example, from Carlos’ perspective in the cut prose, the lines say:

> somos muchos, sí,
> debe haber mucha gente como yo,
> hay mucha gente como yo,
> gente que se equivocó,
> que manejó mal su rabia y su energía,
> tampoco soy el único (161).

These words belong to the poem entitled originally in English ‘my own country’ and although they do not openly relate political events occurred in Chile, one still finds a link between these words and the contemporary right-wing discourse that attempts to evaluate the dictatorship as the result of the mistakes made by all the political sectors. For example, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the coup, the leader of the Chilean right-wing party coalition and then Chilean president, Sebastián Piñera, stated that, ‘Definitivamente no es que los militares enloquecieron el 11 de septiembre y decidieron súbitamente tomarse La Moneda [...] la sensatez fue dejando lugar a las pasiones; el respeto, a la intolerancia; el diálogo, a la violencia; la amistad cívica, al odio de clases’ (Piñera, 2013b: para. 7 of 29). Similarly, in Chile, the ambiguous discourse of *seguir adelante*, *mirar al futuro* and *unidad nacional*, without delving into the political past, is recurrent in the rhetoric of Chilean right-wing politics, a sector that supported the dictatorship and is firmly against the investigation and judgement of the atrocities committed by the military. For example, the *Ley de Amnistía* passed by the military in 1978 has been a main barrier to

investigating human rights violations during Pinochet's dictatorship and to condemning those who committed them (Memoria Chilena, 'Ley de...'). As Piñera states: 'Tampoco es bueno hurgar permanentemente' (Piñera, 2013a: 4-5 of 47).

In a similar tone, implying the idea of not delving into complex stories, when Alberto doubts on writing the book, he reflects: '¿Para qué dañar, escarbar, seguir con el cuento?' (343) and 'No todos desean o pueden o simplemente quieren recordar'(353). This latter example again reminds us of the right-wing discourse of not obliging those who participated in the dictatorship to ask for forgiveness; in Piñera's words, 'El perdón es un acto libre e individual, que surge de la iniciativa y conciencia de cada uno y, por lo tanto, yo respeto a los que piden perdón y a los que sienten que no tienen necesidad de pedirlo' (Piñera, 2013a: 5 of 29). These similarities also remind us that one may understand that Fuguet has suggested that he voted for Piñera's right-wing coalition. This might indicate some political standpoint, though still ambiguous because he also recognizes having voted for the centre-left *Concertación*. Ambiguity is also expressed by the right-wing rhetoric that wanders between promoting forgetfulness and memory. Such an ambivalence is highly controversial in Chile due to concerns about the potential whitewash and oblivion of Chile's dictatorial past, as much as it is the novel's attempt to blur the limits between socially-motivated versus political exile and disappearance.

To sum up, through its references to disappearance, exile and its winks at exile poetry and the *testimonio* as genres typically linked to the traditional left intelligentsia, the novel attempts to subvert fixed political terms and classifications. However, such an attempt remains ambiguous and even frivolous in the case of exile

and disappearance. These features, added to the combination of perspectives in the cut prose and the large space this occupies in the novel, leave the impression of the existence of an alternative version of a history; a version that may be told, or rather retold and re-viewed, from the angle, or words, of younger generations. This also reminds us of Alberto's more tempered view of his grandfather after the years have passed (27). As the analysis shows, although *Missing (una investigación)* is a novel written by an author with an ambiguous political standpoint, its narrative technique –including its blurring of the limits between fact and fiction– highlights and (re-) create important aspects of the Chilean post-transition social imaginary and the political issues and debates that this society has inherited from the dictatorship.

A political reading and interpretation of the narrative fiction of an apparently apolitical author is proven by the analysis so far conducted. Such a possibility could not have been unveiled by a postmodernist approach centred on a post-national perspective and the more mainstream assumption that Fuguet shows no interest in ideological and national debates.[60] But the approach proposed in this thesis reveals that there are various ways for an apparently apolitical author to be political. It does so by recognizing the various socio-historical factors that influence Chile's narrative fiction of the post-transition to democracy and by conducting a close reading of its narrative technique. In the case of *Missing (una investigación)*, such an approach has allowed us to appreciate the dynamic relationship between this novel and memory.

[60] For some commentators who have asserted so, see, Cárcamo-Huechunante, 2007: second part, chapter three; Forttes-Zalaquett, 2010: 18-22; Palaversich, 2005: 40-43; Paz Soldán, 2002: 44-48; Robbins, 2014; and Summers, 2006.

By retelling a story apparently based on fact and framed by politico-historical events, *Missing (una investigación)* implies a re-arrangement of the social imaginary around the disappeared and exile that conveys a new version of the past. This is the possibility that fiction gives to imagine and (re-)create a differently arranged version of history from the perspective given as years pass by. However, as demonstrated, the blurring of history and fiction proposed by this novel tempers a brutal dictatorial past. Implying that history and fiction are interchangeable categories, as the novel does, means that history can be permanently changed and re-arranged by fictional, invented, imagined accounts, as the novel does. And in the context of post-dictatorship Chile, such an interchange has significant political consequences. It contributes to the cultural whitewashing of the political memory that maintains alive in the social imaginary the atrocities committed by the dictatorship. This important position of memory within the social imaginary contributes to a fairer evaluation of crimes against humanity and to the necessary moral judgment of these by the society; it contributes to the *para que nunca más*. This is particularly important in Chile, with a society in which judgement remains mostly at the socio-cultural level, for there has been very few trials of military. Cultural expressions have been precisely the main spaces in which memory has been kept alive and in which the brutality of the dictatorship is judged. Democratic institutions have been unable to force the military to inform where the disappeared are and have proven incapable of judging and condemning those who exerted state terror and violated human rights for so many years. Thus, by blurring the limits between fact and fiction, between history and fiction, *Missing (una investigación)* (re-)creates a fictional world in which the atrocities of torture, disappearance and exile are tempered and not judged to its full extent in Chile's contemporary social imaginary.

D. The Portrayal of the Novel's Main Female Character

1. Generational Perceptions of Motherhood

For Alberto, in principle, Carlos' father, Jaime, is responsible for his disappearance because of the bad relationship they had (25, 26). In relation to a phone call between Carlos and Jaime, Alberto relates:

> En la familia estaban aburridos de socorrer a Carlos una y otra vez. Mi padre cogió el teléfono y lo insultó, creo [...]. Después mi abuelo, casi sin voz, o sin voz, porque ya no tenía voz –tenía un aparato en la tráquea–, le dijo algo que alguna vez me comentó mi abuela entre culposa y avergonzada:
> –Deja de molestarnos, deja de existir. No existes para mí. Sólo me has traído problemas. No queremos verte nunca más. No me interesa que seas mi hijo (25).

In this extract, the narrator significantly intervenes to let us know that he perceives his grandmother as 'culposa y avergonzada'. He uses such adjectives as an introduction to explain that 'Mi abuela cree que ese *nosotros*, ese *plural*, fue la palabra decisiva, la que alteró algo en Carlos y lo hizo desaparecer' (25, emphasis in the original). From this, one reads hints of an alternative person to be blamed for Carlos' disappearance, which start to be suggested by the voice of the narrator early in the novel. The words 'culposa y avergonzada' are not directly spoken by Raquel; the narrator uses them to introduce us to the idea that his grandmother may believe, from his viewpoint, that she has some responsibility in Carlos' disappearance. These words are the narrator's interpretation of Raquel's tone and attitude when she, apparently, told him that Carlos might suspect that he no longer had the support of his mother either. Such words and the ambiguity of the way in which the narrator presents Jaime throughout the story, introduce the idea that there might be more than

just one guilty parent. And further insights regarding this alternative guilt are found in the character Raquel, particularly as viewed by other characters.

In a long novel, Raquel is a diminished character with few and brief parts, but still she is criticized by some characters for her passivity and for not acting as a proper grieving mother. One of the strongest criticisms comes from the more scientific and expert perspective of Alberto's female psychologist friend:

> –Me parece un monstruo. Eso. Me parece una mujer muy fuerte, pero a la vez, tan, tan débil que, creo, se escindió ciento por ciento. Creo que la verdadera perdida del cuento es ella. [P]
> –Pero no tiene dinero, no sabe inglés, no sabe manejar. ¿Qué podría hacer? [A]
> –Volverse loca. Ser obsesiva. No parar de hablar del tema. Obligar a sus hijos a no parar hasta tener una información. Si tú me dijeras que tu abuela vive con calmantes, no come, no existe, te diría que es una mujer que sufre, me daría pena, sentiría empatía. Pero me impacta todo lo que me cuentas. Que vive su vida como si nada hubiera pasado [P] (96, characters' initials added).

As the conversation between Alberto and the psychologist progresses, it turns into a clear criticism of Raquel with judgemental adjectives that describe her as 'monstruo', 'débil' and 'perdida'. Despite the fact that throughout the novel there is mostly silence about Raquel in comparison to the development of the other male characters, in this part of the novel the silence is broken to give way to the image of Carlos' mother as unmoved by his disappearance, as viewed by the female psychologist. Her argument is validated by language with a pseudo-scientific and psychoanalytical tone, in contrast to the more informal overall tone of the rest of the novel. The psychologist's intervention is a rather formal description or, perhaps, a simplified diagnosis of Raquel's behaviour. This diagnosis uses expressions which are not frequent in the colloquial language that Fuguet's novels normally deploy, such as 'escindir', 'empatía' or 'ciento por ciento' instead of 'dividirse', 'entender' or 'cien

por ciento', which are much more common in everyday Chilean Spanish. The psychologist refers to Raquel as a 'monstruo', that is, a deformed creature, apparently divided into two personalities: 'fuerte' and 'débil'. She emphasizes this view with 'eso' between full stops, as if she double-checks and confirms her analysis. Additionally, in the novel, in contrast to the detailed description of Jaime's Catalan origin and life story, there is no information about Raquel's family background. There is only one brief mention by Carlos, who tells us that Raquel was a Christian believer and her mother, a *campesina* (169). Although the novel does not state that Raquel does or does not have *mestizo* origins, her unknown background reminds us of Montecino's idea that, in the specific Chilean cultural and historical context, unknown origin is a main feature of *mestizos* (Montecino, 2012: 128). Thus, one may state that Raquel's unknown life story and reference to her *campesino* origin place her in a lower hierarchy in relation to the detailed narration of her husband's Spanish origin, which highlights Raquel alleged anomaly. Raquel's possible *mestizo* origins may not be unusual in the more general context of Chilean society, but in this piece of fiction, the evident erasure of her background leaves us with a sense of her as an anomaly, for it contrasts with the clearly stated Spanish origin of the Fuguets, which is presented in detail throughout the story.

For the psychologist, Raquel seems to be an unemotional woman who passively accepts her son's disappearance. But the psychologist's pseudo diagnosis fails to consider that emotional attachment has not been always a central characteristic of the social imaginary around the relationship between mother and children. María Elisa Molina notes that attachment theory, which places great emphasis in the relationship between children and one primary caregiver (traditionally the mother) came to

prominence only in the second half of the twentieth century with the influential works of John Bowlby (1962, 1988). Only then, was emotional attachment given a central focus in the role of the idealized mother as a key influence on a person's healthy long-term conduct (Molina, 2006: 98; also Flórez-Estrada Pimentel, 2014: 267). Before that, including in Latin America, the common view of the relationship between mothers and children was not based on such a strong emotional connection, with generalized practices such as the use of nursemaids who fed and raised newborns and children, especially among the upper classes (Ibid: 96-97; Ibid.: 263-266). From a psychological perspective, Molina argues that a consequence of this assumed emotional attachment between mother and children is that:

> se establecen criterios de "buena" y "mala" madre, dando inicio a la "maternidad como patología". Se genera la ideología de la *madre omnipotente*. Esta es la madre idealizada y perfecta, la que puede lograr resultados perfectos para el desarrollo del hijo y la proveedora del cuidado de la familia, de todo lo bueno y deseable para el niño (Molina, 2006: 98, emphasis in the original).

She adds that in the cultural beliefs around the idealized mother, 'La maternidad es el objetivo central en la vida de las mujeres y la naturaleza femenina es condición de la maternidad. Las mujeres son consideradas con una capacidad natural de amor, de estar conectadas y empatizar con otros' (Ibid.). Thus, it may be no wonder that Raquel's apparent indifferent maternal behaviour transforms her, in the view of Alberto's friend, into a monster and the 'verdadera perdida' of this 'cuento'. The use of the word 'cuento' shows a brief shift of tone, from the formal quasi scientific one that the psychologist has used so far, to a colloquial tone. In Chilean Spanish the word 'cuento', in the context of an event or incident, means a tricky or a fake story. This word may also be a self-referential term, which is noticeable in a novel that attempts to blur the borders between fiction and non-fiction.

At the beginning of her intervention, the psychologist controls and tempers the delivery of her diagnosis with expressions like ‘me parece’ and ‘creo’, as if she did not wish to hurt Alberto. And he briefly attempts to defend Raquel. He does so via three weak, badly articulated and disconnected arguments that he does not develop further: Raquel’s lack of access to money, her lack of English proficiency and her inability to drive a car. This is a curiously badly articulated attempt, bearing in mind that Alberto is a character portrayed as a successful professional writer and one may understand that he knows well how to use words with a certain purpose (support his grandmother’s position) and that he has, at least, a good command of language and discourse. The result of Alberto’s weak defence of Raquel is the psychologist’s counter-attack with the last and longest part of her judgement. Such a judgement is authorized by Alberto’s question ‘¿Qué podría hacer?’. In this question, Alberto uses the conditional tense and not its past tense equivalent ‘¿qué podía hacer?’. The conditional option chosen by Alberto carries a more speculative and pitiful tone that opens the path to any sort of response by the receiver. On the other hand, the past tense option is a more concrete expression, almost a mere rhetorical question that deserves no answer. It implies more security and support by the speaker to Raquel’s position, and as such, it leaves little room for speculation by the receiver, particularly that in the form of strong criticism. Alberto prefers to use the less supportive option and consequently he gives way to an answer from the psychologist that consists of a recrimination based on the role she expects Raquel should have played following Carlos’ disappearance. The psychologist is aware of the few available roles for women and she accepts them, since, for her, Raquel has the obligation either to actively do something to hear from her son or have the attitude of the suffering mother, behaving like a woman that ‘no existe’.

The psychologist is an educated professional therapist and, one could expect, is familiarized with various types of personal stories and traumas, but still she is 'impacta[da]' to learn that Raquel lives as if nothing happened. She also recognizes, 'Me dan muchas ganas de tratarla, te digo. Me parece un caso fascinante, mucho más fascinante que Carlos. ¿Qué oculta esa mujer? ¿Cuál es su pasado?' (96-97). In her view, an apparently indifferent mother is a case that needs to be psychologically studied and treated with therapy. Here, one can read, again, that the lack of information on Raquel's background accentuates her alleged anomaly. At this point, Alberto does not clarify this lack of information or refute his friend. And in a previous passage, to emphasize the monstrous image of the unmoved Raquel, the psychologist compares her position to that of the mothers of the disappeared during the Argentinean dictatorship (1976-1983): 'Mira no más las madres de los detenidos-desaparecidos chilenos. O las Madres de Mayo. Yo he atendido mujeres que nunca se han recuperado de la muerte de un hijo' (95-96). The psychologist assumes Carlos is dead and that Raquel assumes so as well. But the comparison of Raquel to the mothers of the disappeared is exaggerated. Carlos was 41 when he disappeared and lived an independent life, whereas, for example, the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* were generally looking for younger people in their teens or twenties. Also, strictly speaking, many of the relatives of the disappeared do not consider their relatives to be dead if bodies or further evidence have not been found. And Raquel actually thinks Carlos is doing well, as she explains to Alberto:

–¿Usted cree que aparecerá? [A]
–¿Quién sabe? Lo bueno es que está bien. O está vivo, que es lo importante [R]
–¿Cómo lo sabe? [A]
–Cada tanto me llama [R]
–¿Qué? [A]

> –No contesta, no dice nada, escucha. Y yo le digo: Carlos, ¿cómo estás? Vuelve. Después cuelga [R] (348, characters' initials added).

This conversation between Alberto and Raquel is revealed towards the end of the novel, but, in the chronological events, it happens before the one that he has with the psychologist. Therefore, although Alberto knows that his grandmother thinks Carlos phones her, he does not bring into light the fact that Raquel indeed does not think that Carlos is dead. Carlos denies he used to phone his mother (139), but this dialogue between Raquel and Alberto is still significant as it shows that when allowed a voice, Raquel looks different, and that her voice is hidden behind that of other characters. This dialogue at least shows that Carlos is in Raquel's thoughts, as revealed by the fact that she believes that he phones her, whether true or not. It also shows that Raquel indeed never thought something bad had happened to Carlos. Raquel hopes to see him again, as her affectionate 'vuelve' shows. All of what the others see in Raquel's attitude is mere speculation based on fixed gender roles. Furthermore, the narrator also lets us know that for years the family asked Raquel to go back to Chile, but she did not want to because, as she responds: '–Acá está tu Yayo, acá están mis hijos, mis nietos' (347); this includes Carlos, one may infer. Thus, grounded on speculations, the psychologist exaggeratedly and frivolously compares the suffering of a mother who can cope with her son's decision to live his own life miles away from her, to the position of the relatives of the disappeared, whose family members were kidnapped, tortured and often killed by the Argentinean and the Chilean states during the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. The psychologist, who is a professional woman of the twenty-first century has, paradoxically, a very conservative view of motherhood: no matter the reason, proper mothers who lose children 'nunca se han recuperado', they are lost for good.

Later in the novel, the narrator tells us that once Carlos comes back home to visit his family –after being easily found by his nephew– and Raquel meets him at his welcoming party, 'algo raro pasó. Lo raro es que no pasó mucho: ni llantos, ni desmayos ni reproches ni ojos llenos de agua. Eso es lo raro. ¿Lo es?' (345). Although this statement has a doubtful tone, one can still read the narrator's disappointment, for he expected more melodrama. This is evident in his sceptical 'raro' and ironic 'desmayos' and 'ojos llenos de agua'. The ambiguity, scepticism and irony of this statement by the narrator carry a judgemental tone on the expected role of a mother. But Raquel does not have any especially effusive reaction, at least not as the narrator expected. Alberto's disappointment and the psychologist's judgement have to do with the encounter of two different generations brought together by the incident of Carlos' disappearance. Raquel belongs to a much older generation, literally to another century, and one could understand that not having permanent communication with her son was not a heartbreaking thing for an older woman not used to current ways of living that demand that people always be connected. The psychologist herself seems to believe that being alive means being connected, 'La vida es una mierda para casi todos y así y todo la gente sigue viva, conectada, circulando' (92), she states.

Furthermore, the narrator tells us that at the end of the welcoming party, when Carlos promises to come back for Christmas, Raquel says to Carlos: 'Algo así como <<tanto que te demoraste>> Todo en un tono muy menor' (346, emphasis in the original) and he adds 'Pero quizás algo sí pasó ese día. A lo mejor todo fue por dentro' (346). These are ambiguous interventions that show, again, scepticism. With his judgemental intervention 'un tono muy menor', the narrator tells us that Raquel's

reaction was not appropriate, for him at least. But the narrator also doubts and is open to the possibility that Raquel did feel something but just kept it to herself, which still implies that the narrator expected something else from her. Nevertheless, one can argue that Raquel was not unmoved by Carlos' disappearance because for her Carlos had not disappeared but was only temporarily absent, as he had been more than once before (36). Raquel was waiting for him to come back, as she once unequivocally said to Alberto, 'Espero que aparezca un día' (348). The word 'aparecer' may refer to Raquel's desire for her son to come back, for he is 'desaparecido'. But in a less dramatic tone, in Chilean Spanish this word has also the colloquial connotation of visiting somebody unexpectedly after a time of absence. It also carries a sense of recrimination by the speaker, for not being visited more frequently by somebody the speaker cares for. Even more, 'aparecer' implies agency, in other words, Carlos has the capacity to 'aparecer' as much as he had once the capacity –or freedom– to *esconderse*. Therefore, perhaps, the 'tono muy menor' shown by Raquel in the eyes of the narrator, has to do just with the less dramatic view she has of Carlos' absence and the generosity of a mother who respects her son's decision to live away from her, without much recrimination, even though he left at a sensitive family moment and did not attend his father's funeral (24-27).

Raquel's loving nature, honesty and cleverness are also revealed elsewhere in the novel. The third-person narration that, from the viewpoint of the teenage Alberto, relates his visit to his family in the U.S., tells us, 'La abuela se pone a llorar y lo abraza y lo aprieta y le gusta eso, le sorprende que alguien de la familia sea tan buena para abrazar y querer' (72). And later, in another conversation between Raquel and Alberto on his doubts about his grandfather's love for him, she answers, '–Sí, es

cierto. Nunca te quiso. Eso siempre me dolió porque tú siempre fuiste mi favorito. El primero, el mayor...Yo me volvía loca contigo [...] No entendía. Nunca te quiso, es cierto. Para qué negarlo [...] Es una espina que nunca me podré sacar' (350). These examples show again that at moments, particularly when allowed to speak, Raquel can be seen differently. One can read her as a deeply loving, caring and honest mother and grandmother. Moreover, one may infer that Raquel does react after the reencounter with her son; not in an melodramatic manner as Alberto expected, but she has a significant and definite reaction: she dies in peace (351). After Carlos' welcoming party, Raquel starts to feel unwell and she is taken back to Chile (346-351). Thus, according to this alternative version, Raquel respected and dealt well with her son's decision to live his own life and one can understand that after the reunion with him, she started the process of her own death.

In the novel, it is the expertise of the psychologist which provides a clearer and slightly longer first image of Raquel and this is a negative one saturated with prejudices about the presumed behaviour of a mother. However, this image fails to take into account the fact that Raquel went from being an upper-class housewife in Santiago's 1950s to an immigrant domestic cleaner in the U.S., because her husband lost his business and could not face the disgrace of becoming a taxi driver (182-183). This implies that she was resilient and that after a life of movement and significant personal, cultural and social changes, Raquel developed as an honest, strong, but also loving woman. But Alberto, both main character and narrator, is not able to convincingly refute his friend's judgement. As a first-person narrator, at the beginning of the novel, he provides the first hints that introduce a suspicious and judgemental view of Raquel's responsibility in Carlos' disappearance; and as a

character, he does not defend her accurately when he has the opportunity to and he shows himself sceptical about Raquel's actions until the end of the novel. Nonetheless, though limited, the novel opens some space for Raquel to speak, although with few lines in a long novel. At moments, it allows another story to be told and thus might be considered a critique of contemporary attitudes in Chile. But if a critique, it is highly ambiguous in terms of gender relations, since above all Raquel's voice is very limited and the alternative image of her is hidden behind the views of the others.

The analysis demonstrates that the novel mostly silences Raquel's voice and life experience. Although a character from the beginning of the novel and significant to the family history, Raquel is hidden behind the shadow of the male characters, the judgement of the younger ones and the scepticism of the first-person narrator. This does not allow Raquel's strengths to fully emerge and develop. This reading is significant as it has to do with the way in which the novel portrays Raquel's political position in her socio-cultural context through a narrative technique that plays with the different points of view. Also significant it is the idea that silence, or a weak and blurred voice, may be taken as a narrative device in the study of the representation of women's political status through literature. Feminist criticism has explored the question of women's voice and silence. The French philosopher Lucy Irigaray developed the idea of a specific woman's language, 'womanspeak' or 'speaking (as) woman' that emerges spontaneously when women speak together but disappears in the presence of men, which suggests both female solidarity and women's oppression (Moi, 2002: 143-148; Irigaray, 1985: Chapter 7). Further contributions to the question of women's voice, particularly of non-western women, come from feminist

postcolonial criticism, such as Spivak's seminal work 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) and her reading of the Narcissus and Echo myth in 'Echo' (1993). Focused on the economically dispossessed and the relationship between gender, race and ethnicity, these contributions have discussed the question of the plausibility for women to speak for themselves and therefore regard silence as a strong sign of depolitization, passivity and subjugation. In the case of Raquel, the analysis demonstrates that her weak or blurred voice hints at a political status framed by the judgemental view that other characters (especially younger ones) have of the role she has played as a mother. Thus, by analogy, the novel's silencing of Raquel's voice and the fact that a conservative image of motherhood emerges from the perspective of the young female psychologist allude to the contradictory political status of women in contemporary Chilean society. The novel (re-)creates a social imaginary in which women are still expected –or expect– to fit conservative models of motherhood, an expectation that may be even endorsed by contemporary modern and educated women. Nonetheless, the analysis also shows us that such silenced voice may not be necessarily a unique experience of economically dispossessed women, but that patriarchy and its sexual division of roles can be extended across social classes, races and ages.

2. Female Strength and Obedience

Raquel is portrayed by the novel in ambiguous ways. The following example shows that Alberto, as first-person narrator, describes her as a strong woman, but at the same time infantilized:

> Mi abuela no fue una mujer educada y su letra manuscrita tenía algo de niña aplicada de diez años, pero no me cabe duda que era brillante en muchas

> cosas y me impresiona ver cómo pudo arreglárselas por tanto años, sin auto ni una gota de inglés, sin que le pasara nada. Mi abuela era terca y se negó a aceptar que necesitaba lo que otros considerarían básico. Mi abuela era capaz de tomar <<dos *bases*>> para llegar a Laguna Beach y pedir un *cofi*, que se tomaba sola, sin un libro, sin una persona, sin nada (348, emphasis in the original).

In the eyes of her grandson, Raquel was not an educated woman, but she was not illiterate. Given the *campesino* origins of Raquel's mother, she might have attended a rural state school. Here, it is worth noticing that in Chile, a low education level was not an uncommon issue in Raquel's formative years. The *Ley de Instrucción Primaria Obligatoria* was passed in Chile in 1920 and established four years of compulsory education. In 1929, the compulsory years of education were increased to six and in 1965 to eight (INE, 2006: 4; Villalón y Vera, 2012: 43). By 1940, 26.5% of the population did not have approved any year of schooling at all and 56.8% had incomplete primary instruction (INE, 2006: 5). By 1960, the average educational level of the population was 5.4 years of schooling (Villalón y Vera, 2012: 42).

Alberto sees Raquel as a girl, but independent. In the view of the narrator, Raquel's handwriting reveals both the infantilism typical of a 'niña', but also the discipline and responsibility of an 'aplicada' student, as the latter is a word commonly used in Chilean Spanish to refer to an obedient student willing to work hard and follow instructions, without rebelling. There is, apparently, a contradiction between Raquel's childish characteristics ('niña aplicada') and her potential strength and intelligence ('brillante'). This contradiction is shown by the words 'pero' and 'no me cabe duda', which paradoxically do carry a doubtful tone. However, obedience and submissiveness were the traditional skills taught to girls by the Chilean educational system in Raquel's formative years during the first half of the twentieth century

(Egaña et al., 2003). The system did not encourage critical thinking, self-esteem or independence. Moreover, punishment by the teacher, including corporal punishment, was a core part of the education process, extended until near the end of the twentieth century. According to Egaña et al., the education system taught girls 'desde pequeñas, la naturaleza de la necesidad del deber; la inseguridad y la dependencia [...] Todo eso se conseguía administrando muy bien el castigo y el perdón' (Ibid.: 81-82). Even more, 'Las niñas no debían parecer seguras de sí mismas; sin embargo, debían estar preparadas para afrontar cualquier responsabilidad o peligro' (Ibid.: 82). Thus, there is not necessarily a contradiction between Raquel being 'niña aplicada' and 'brillante', between the infantilism that the narrator perceives on the one hand and the cleverness and adaptability he also perceives on the other. In Raquel's formative years, submissiveness was not viewed as a defect, but rather as a virtue of good students, and particularly of good female students.

From his view of Raquel as an infantile and dependent woman, Alberto is 'impresionado' by her capacity to live on her own in the U.S. 'sin que le pasara nada' after her husband dies. The narrator uses the indirect question word 'cómo' and the word 'arreglárselas', which carries a sense of survival, to allude to Raquel's capacity to live well on her own. This reveals that the narration assumes a prototypical image of the dependency, weakness and vulnerability of an old woman. In the eyes of Alberto, Raquel's independence is an unusual characteristic in an old woman and therefore he thinks that she was 'terca'. But Alberto exaggerates Raquel's ignorance and dependence, as his words '[sin] ni una gota de inglés' show. Raquel did know enough English to work and live in the U.S. as a married woman and later on her own. As Alberto himself tells us in a imitative tone, probably alluding to Raquel's

Spanish accent, she could by herself take ‘bases’ and ask for ‘cofi’. However, when remembering Raquel’s abilities, Alberto also takes the position of the admiring grandson and his tone carries affection and admiration (‘Mi abuela era capaz de...’), which contrasts to his implicit idea of her vulnerability. Alberto’s contradictory and ambiguous views of Raquel, make him alternate between a passive attitude in front of other characters who criticize her and a sense of admiration when he is alone with her and when he reflects on how intelligent and strong she has been throughout her difficult life. She is a resilient woman, for whom socio-cultural changes and the movement to a new country did not cause the trauma that affected other characters.

Nonetheless, despite evidence of Raquel’s independence, stoicism and intellectual strength, she is still described by other characters as ultimately influenced and highly dependent on one person: her husband. In several sections of the novel, it is clear that the characters view Raquel as a traitor to her children. For example, the psychologist wonders, ‘¿Seguirá pensando que su marido está vivo y que, por lealtad a él, no corresponde querer a su hijo?’ (97). Here, the psychologist also assumes that Raquel does not love Carlos, whereas the analysis demonstrates that she was a loving mother and grandmother. Also, in the interview with Alberto, Carlos relates, ‘Mi mamá, además, optó por mi padre [...] Hay madres que abandonan a sus maridos por sus hijos. Mi madre tenía sus prioridades claras’ (139). This recrimination shows Carlos’ disappointment and presuppositions. The use of the phrase ‘prioridades claras’ shows Raquel as a very pragmatic person, but it also has a sarcastic and recriminating tone that suggests that the mother had a particular interest in not leaving her husband. Carlos assumes that there exists a conflict Raquel is also aware of, and that she had the freedom to choose between two positions. That conflict is, presumably, given by

the bad relationship he had with his father. Carlos concludes that she 'optó' and preferred her husband over her son. And, apparently, he cannot cope with the fact that 'hay' –he knows with the certainty of such a word– other mothers who do abandon their husbands in favour of their children. Carlos assumes his rebellious personality and problematic behaviour created such an extreme family conflict that the mother must choose between him and his father. But, on the other hand, Raquel says to Alberto about Carlos '–Ay, mi hijo. Le dimos todo y mira cómo nos salió' (348) and 'Siempre fue el más cariñoso de los tres. Está lejos pero se preocupa' (349). From her words, one reads that she does not see two sides she must choose between. Rather, she is aware of her son's strengths and weaknesses. She views Carlos as a loving but problematic son who chose to live his life in his own way. She feels no guilt for Carlos' disappearance, since she considers herself a good mother who, along with her husband, did as much as she could for her son ('le dimos todo'). Carlos himself recognizes elsewhere in the novel the permanent support of his mother. For example, her support with his university studies: 'mi mamá sacrificó muchas cosas por mí,/cuando empecé a ir al pedagógico' (167), he admits in the monologue; and the money that he permanently owed to her: 'No...a la Yayi siempre le debía' (145), Carlos tells Alberto in the interviews.

Raquel's position of disempowerment does not have to do with her non-dramatic attitude towards her son's disappearance, but with the reasons she succumbed to her husband's domination in the first place. Carlos tells us in the lines:

> no quería pasar una semana en ese departamento,
> con mi mamá todo el día ahí,
> porque mi padre no quería que trabajara,
> o que estudiara inglés porque una vez la vio
> conversando con un hombre a la salida de su clase,

mi padre armó un escándalo y le dijo:
tu sitio es tu casa,
yo aprenderé inglés por los dos.
los ángeles no era santiago,
mi madre no tenía dónde ir,
no conocía a nadie,
no entendía,
todo era lejos,
ahí estaba, stranded,
atrapada en inglewood,
sola con mi padre
que llegaba de vuelta como a las cinco
y luego mi hermano con su vickie.
seguí en el auto,
rumbo al desierto (220)

These lines belong to the second part of an eleven-page poem entitled, originally in English, 'the latin girl-next-door', about the first years of the family in the U.S. They relate Raquel's subjugation, but they do it in an indifferent manner. They seem to be the mere enumeration of some characteristics of Raquel's life told by chance when the speaker is describing another personal situation (the reasons the speaker did not like to be at home). The lines show distance from Raquel's life experience and lack of emotions with regard to her submissiveness. They rather emphasize a sense of generalization, monotony and coldness.[61] These characteristics may speak of the monotony that Carlos felt when he was at his parents' home, and thus leave the impression that transmitting the oppression suffered by Raquel is not a core aim of these lines. This impression reminds us of the effect of distance created by the cut prose, as previously discussed.

The lines above are a re-arranged and rather simplified view of Raquel's relationship with her husband that somehow moves away from the true content and emotions of

[61] Following Colinas, an important difference between verse and cut prose is that 'El verso, como el poema, debe *turbarnos*. El lenguaje poético se distingue de la prosa porque tiene, a la vez, un fulgor y una verdad que nos perturba' (Colinas, 2008: 137, emphasis in the original).

the ‘original’ story. This perception is accentuated by the fact that throughout the novel, Raquel is presented by the narrator as a working woman in the U.S. (25, 31, 79), who therefore had the level of English that at least allowed her to work and move around the city by herself. And, in the interviews, Carlos himself thinks ‘no me cabe duda de que ella lo amaba a él y él a ella. Quizás era una relación enferma, dependiente, no sé, pero era una relación. Yo nunca he tenido ni tendré una relación como la de ellos. Es quizás la relación más intensa que he conocido’ (140). Although this is said with a reluctant tone, it also shows a more complex relationship between Jaime and Raquel, a relationship of dependence but love as well. These examples show again the way in which the novel plays with the different points of view through varied literary devices that combine fiction and non-fiction writing techniques. They show that at the fictional level of the cut prose, Carlos simply views Raquel as an object to her husband, who limited her freedom and right to access public spaces, denying her a voice in English. But in the non-fiction technique of the interview transcriptions, one can read in Carlos’ eyes a slightly more complex relationship between Raquel and Jaime, which seems to be based, apparently, on love. And when Raquel speaks, one finds an even more complex picture, for she does seem aware of her husband’s defects, as she states to Alberto:

> —No te quiso por tu madre. Odiaba a tu madre, no la toleraba. Te odió por ser hijo de quien eras. No podía ser grosero con ella pero contigo sí. Le molestaba que tuvieras tanto que ver con tus abuelos, con toda esa familia que él envidiaba tanto. Mi marido fue un gran marido pero tenía su personalidad, sus cosas, lo sé. Fue duro con Carlos, fue duro contigo. Para qué te lo voy a negar. Nunca te quiso pero yo te quise por los dos (350).

These words show a clever woman aware of the difficult personality of her husband. In Raquel’s eyes, the situation with regard to her husband’s nature is less serious than it is in the eyes of other characters, to the extent that she takes the drama out of it

with a clichéd but affectionate and practical 'pero yo te quise por los dos'. This example, again, shows her honesty and loving nature. But the question remains. Why, apparently, does Raquel not see Jaime as the other characters do? One reason could be that she just denies the real sexist and despotic character of her husband because she is so subjugated to him. However, another reading can be connected with an idea of determinism. Raquel's view of her husband is a strong sign of acceptance of her fate, which might have come from an awareness of her own disempowered position. In her own words:

> –Tu abuelo –continuó la Yayi– fue un gran, gran hombre. Generoso, cariñoso, ardiente, leal, trabajador. Un hombre maravilloso con quien yo tuve la fortuna de convivir tantos, tantos años. Me sacó de un mundo feo, pobre, sin futuro; atroz. Me salvó. Él me hizo prometerle varias cosas y todas las he cumplido y las cumpliré: no salir con otro hombre, quedarme acá en California para siempre, al lado de él (349).

This extract provides an image of Raquel as a woman who needs a man to save her and the savour is a prototypical man, who fits well in the traditional patterns of masculinity, especially those of Latin American societies. Her repetition of 'gran' to characterize the word 'hombre' emphasizes the husband's virility: 'generoso', 'cariñoso', 'ardiente', 'leal', 'trabajador'. This perception of Jaime contrasts to the complementary traditional female values found in Raquel, when viewed by some characters, as dependent, emotionless and a traitor to her children. Such a contrast clearly reflects the binary social construction of male and female sexuality in Latin American and other Western cultures, men being active and dominant, and women passive and submissive; men seen as aggressive and powerful, and women as powerless, submissive and receptive.[62]

[62] Chant and Craske, 2003: 141; Olavarría, 2000: 11-12; and Zapata Galindo, 2001: 231-233. See also a study about Central American men's perceptions of masculinity (Ortega Hegg et. al, 2005, especially chapter VI), which shows that the image of the breadwinner father without a tendency to show emotions to their children still prevails.

Raquel also uses the word ‘fortuna’ to talk about their years of marriage, which shows that she feels lucky to have been chosen by her husband. But the word ‘fortuna’ can also mean a fate one cannot escape from. Although the novel does not provide further details about Raquel’s past and the concrete negative experiences she goes through before getting married, she tells us [me] ‘sacó’, that is, Jaime picks her out of her world and provides a better life for her. But Raquel’s overtly positive description of her husband also has a clichéd tone, as if it were an attempt to veil her subjugation. In Raquel’s view, Jaime (the one who has the capacity to choose) rescues her from a ‘mundo’ ‘feo’, ‘pobre’ and ‘sin futuro’. However, one can also say that, the totality of the word ‘mundo’ reveals that Raquel could see no other alternative for a better life. In other words, in the conservative Chilean context of the first half of the twentieth century, with few available roles for women, particularly for those from *campesino* origins, Raquel may have felt that Jaime offers the only path available for her to leave an obscure and hopeless world; such a world is emphasized by her word ‘atroz’, isolated between a semicolon and a full stop. And, if any doubts remain, she highlights her husband’s goodness –or perhaps the inescapable fate he means for her– with ‘me salvó’ between full stops; a word that may also be connected with Raquel’s Christian beliefs.

Nevertheless, the exaggeratedly positive description made by Raquel, added to the image of a possessive and coercive man given by the same description, raises doubts about how benevolent Jaime truly was, since as much as the man saves the woman, he also educates her and teaches her to be the way he expects her to behave. ‘Me hizo prometerle’ Raquel lets us know, which expresses coercion. But Raquel does not know any alternative and, actually, her words ‘todas las he cumplido y las

cumpliré' carry a tone of pride for doing what she had committed to, as the *aplicada* girl she was. Thus, Raquel does not necessarily see her husband in too different a way to how the other characters do. She perhaps just tempers such a negative image in order to tolerate him, accepting in this way her own fate. Raquel does not rebel against her husband as Carlos did when he decided to live away from his family. She is a clever woman and it can be concluded that she is aware of and accepts the disempowered position she has had throughout her life: as a child of *campesino* origin and later as an adult woman, who was educated by the Chilean education system's parameters for girls of the first half of the twentieth century discussed above. Such parameters may remind us of the fact that, as seen earlier, since the beginning of the twentieth century, education has traditionally been a main political goal for feminists in Chile, as it is what may allow for women's independence and autonomy, especially when they come from unprivileged contexts (Kirkwood, 1986: 86). Raquel came from a generation familiarized with punishment, where women were taught to be good students and good girls at a cost, that of submissiveness –or, presumably, some degree of silence. *Missing (una investigación)* echoes such a fate.

The novel is an attempt to tell a complex family history of which Raquel's life is an important part, but she is given little voice; her voice tends to remain vague and suffocated; and the topics the novel uses to portray her are always judgementally related to motherhood. Furthermore, Raquel's presence, love and care seem to be damaging to Carlos: 'El amor de mi mamá, por ejemplo, terminó trayéndome más problemas' (384), he concludes at the end of the novel. Emilie Bergmann points out that in Castilian literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when representations of motherhood are, rarely, found, the love of a mother is portrayed as

'un exceso inherente a la naturaleza femenina, que amenazaba la crianza de jóvenes bien formados, capaces de integrarse en el servicio del estado moderno' (Bergmann, 1995: 35). She exemplifies with the depictions of motherhood in *Reloj de príncipes* (1539) by Antonio de Guevara (1480-1545) and *Comentarios reales* (1609) by Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616). Cándida Vivero Marín notes that representations of motherhood in Latin American literature have more presence towards the second half of the nineteenth century and in twentieth-century literature. However, they still mostly tend to emerge from male perspectives that maintain a traditional view of mothers, which comply with the patriarchal stereotype of love and dedication to the family as women's main goal (Vivero Marín, 2014: 76-77). Nevertheless, she also observes that towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first one, new representations of motherhood emerge, which are 'alejadas del ideal de la Madre Tierra o la Madre Terrible, de la buena madre o mala madre, de la mujer-matriz o receptáculo' (Ibid.: 85). She exemplifies with the novels *El cuerpo en que nací* (2011) by Guadalupe Nettel (1973) and *Una no habla de esto* (2007) by Sylvia Aguilar Zéleny (1973-). In these novels, non-conventional representations of motherhood include independent mothers who prefer to meet intellectual and professional goals instead of affective needs linked to the family (Ibid.: 86). Therefore, one can argue that *Missing (una investigación)*'s view of motherhood aligns with the most traditional literary representations of motherhood, which date back many centuries.

All the aforementioned elements that the novel uses to represent its main female character are particularly important to the study of the political status of women through the social imaginary portrayed and created by literature. In a dynamic

relationship between narrative fiction and the social imaginary, those elements are especially relevant in the case of a novel that attempts to blur the limits between fact and fiction, and which is, as the analysis has proved, significantly framed by the particular Chilean political, cultural and social context of the twentieth century. *Missing (una investigación)* (re-)creates a silenced, or overlooked, female political status through the ambiguous treatment of its female main character, whose depictions are marked by a diminished and blurred voice as well as by the importance of the view that others have of her over her own voice.

Conclusions

Fuguet's narrative is often said to be based on the individual, to show a lack of interest in the history of Chile, without overt references to local politico-historical influences and more centred on the context of globalization in which its characters are immersed.[63] However, as analyzed in this chapter, *Missing (una investigación)* may be regarded as a representative of post-transition to democracy Chilean literature, in which cultural referents inherited from the political process that took place in Chile during the twentieth century can be traced. It is significant to the study of the social imaginary portrayed by Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, especially in terms of its blurring of the borders between fact and fiction. The novel does so through the use of fictional and non-fictional narrative techniques and the play of viewpoints that do not always agree with each other. Such play has to do with the idea that every person can have a different view of a story. But still, Carlos' voice is the most present throughout the novel, although this is a version of Carlos' words

[63] See for example, Alonso (2004: 9-8), Opazo (2009: 81) and Paz Soldán (2002: 44-48).

as seen through Alberto's memories. This means that a story that mainly occurs in the twentieth century is re-written from the future and from the language of a younger male generation.

The recognition by the author-character-narrator that he decided not to write a *testimonio* on Carlos Fuguet, which could have been eventually based on Carlos' leftist militancy, is central to understanding the relationship between the novel and the socio-historical context in which it is inserted. Instead of a *testimonio*, there are moderation, ambiguity and frivolity in the references to the dictatorship. The novel flirts with emblematic issues and events linked to this period of Chilean history, but it does not allow an allegorical reading of the story. The idea of a dictatorial and tyrannical father who sends his son to a socially-motivated exile, as initially suggested by the novel, in the end, does not have a central presence. Jaime never turns into the significant character who might have represented the key cruel political events of his era. Because of the ambiguity with which the narrator presents him, this character ends up offering a neutralized and tempered view of the potential tyrant. Although some lines, particularly those that relate Carlos' feelings about being sent abroad, briefly remind us of the social poetry of exile, those lines significantly lack the political content of the latter and they do not reflect nor question the cruelty and devastation of dictatorship, exile and disappearance that the poetry of exile does transmit. On the contrary, the novel's cut prose provides mostly an objective, emotionless, easy and quick to read text that mainly enumerates a set of life events. It also provides a very simplified view of female submissiveness and a sense of remoteness and coldness with regard to this. As such, it represents the re-writing of a story influenced by politico-cultural legacies, but away from the direct voice of those

who experienced it. This is emphasized by another particular characteristic of this cut prose, which is that when emotion and rhythm are transmitted, they rely mostly on the tone of current colloquial Chilean Spanish.

Missing (una investigación) is a family story contextualized by socio-political events, but ambiguous in the treatment of these; a story that rather attempts to open traditional discourses up to alternative views from the mediating eyes of a younger generation represented by Alberto. Thus, the novel projects Fuguet's method to reconfigure and codify a story in order to make it more tempered, ambiguous and not committed to any point of view in particular. It is a story retold from both geographical and generational remoteness, from those who have greater distance with true facts and may, eventually, remember less or may pay more attention to general issues. At moments, it even resembles Chilean right-wing rhetoric. This resemblance reminds us, as seen in the Introduction, that Fuguet insinuates that he might have voted for Piñera's right-wing coalition, which was formed by those who supported the military coup and Pinochet's dictatorship. This might be taken to some extent as a certain political tendency, even though Fuguet normally refers to his own political position with ambiguity. One might argue that after having, eventually, voted for those who always supported Pinochet, he could hardly be considered a leftist sympathizer. It is hard to imagine somebody aware of the atrocities of the Chilean dictatorship who, not being a supporter, would be willing to bring those loyal to Pinochet back to the government. This somehow suggests a political standpoint, either support, lack of acceptance of the cruelty of the dictatorship or, at least, if aware and not a supporter, a cold separation from such a catastrophe and a frivolous consideration of the issue. And importantly, such ambiguity, frivolity,

indifference and distance are the same shown by the novel with regard to the questions related to the dictatorship. The analysis reveals that the novel projects the political standpoint of his, supposedly apolitical, author. It flirts with politically loaded terms and images linked to the Chilean left-wing politics, such as *exilio*, *desaparecido* and *testimonio*, the poetry of exile, dictatorship, oblivion and memory. However, it leaves us with the impression that it does so in order to recuperate and use them to rewrite a story without the political content they normally convey. In its particular attempt to retell a family story that is framed by Chile's controversial recent political history and cruel dictatorial past, *Missing (una investigación)* ends up blurring such a history, particularly its more brutal side. In this way, by implying that history and fiction may be interchangeable categories, the novel contributes to the creation of a post-transition social imaginary in which memory is also blurred and tempered, and cannot meet its most basic goals: avoid the whitewash of a dictatorial past and permit the social judgement of crimes against humanity.

In terms of the representations of female political status, the novel highlights and (re-)creates the gender inequality of the context in which it is set. It does not have a balanced presence of the female and male perspectives. Despite the significance of Raquel in the family story that the novel portrays, it is noticeable that the male characters occupy most of the story and that Raquel's voice is suffocated. And although by imposing his will, Jaime might represent the patriarchal system, such representation is not sufficiently clear or questioned in order to be considered a critique of patriarchy. As already said, although potentially a tyrant and despotic husband, Jaime actually ends up as a neutral or ambiguous character, who, although with a tricky personality, is portrayed as a family man, with no overt mistreatment of

women, and openly loved and respected by his wife and somehow enjoying the understanding of the narrator. Even if compared to Jaime (the main male character from her same generation), Raquel is depicted in a more judgemental and negative way than him. The themes that the novel uses to represent her are always judgementally linked to her role as a wife and mother, in contrast to the complex political issues that the combined viewpoints of Carlos and Alberto convey. And importantly significant to notice in a novel that attempts to blur the limits between fact and fiction, what seems to be an attempt to retell a personal story with politico-historical touches from the voice and language of a younger generation, still finds no female voice to represent such history.

Chapter IV

Society, Female Sexuality and the Search for Emotional Stability in *Aeropuertos* by Alberto Fuguet

A. Introduction

Aeropuertos was published by Alfaguara in Santiago, Chile in 2010. It is divided into six sections that cover a period that ranges from 1992 to 2009. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator presents the three protagonists, all born in Santiago: Álvaro Celis Fernández and Francisca Infante Gallo both born in 1976, and Pablo Celis Infante, born in 1993. *Aeropuertos* deploys the colloquial sociolect of young upper-class Chileans from Santiago in the 1990s and 2000s. Its language is characterized by idioms, swearing, a comic tone and irony. The novel is written mostly in the third-person and in different parts it incorporates very long unattributed dialogues, which reminds us of Fuguet's self-declared admiration for Manuel Puig (1932-1990) (Hargrave and Smith Seminet, 1998: 19). There are more cultural references in the epigraphs, the acknowledgments and the format of the text as well. The first epigraph is an extract of a dialogue from Puig's *Maldición eterna a quien lea estas páginas* (1980) and the second is an extract from *Airport* (1968) by the British-Canadian writer Arthur Hailey (1920-2004). The novel also includes two transcriptions of monologues from videos recorded and saved in a purportedly USB Pen Drive by the youngest protagonist. Finally, in the acknowledgments at the end of the book, Fuguet explains that *Aeropuertos* has its origins in and is influenced by his short-film *Dos horas* (2008) and his film *Velódromo* (2010). There are also mentions of Ariel Roth, *Velódromos'* protagonist, as being a character and friend of the novel's protagonist Álvaro.

Aeropuertos is a more typical work by Fuguet than *Missing (una investigación)* and shares various characteristics with his earlier narrative, such as references to popular

culture, pop music, the mass media and cinema as well as his use of troubled upper-class young characters. However, it presents the particularity of having a female protagonist. Fuguet has been criticized for the lack of a female perspective or significant female characters in his work since the times of *McOndo*.[64] Therefore, the social imaginary projected and (re-)created by *Aeropuertos* is significant from the point of view of the ideology and worldviews about the status and roles of women that the narrative fiction of a male perspective helps create and disseminates. The portrayal of a female protagonist for the first time in a novel written by Fuguet is interesting also in terms of the large audience that he reaches and the impact that his literature may have in such large readership; for example, within one year of its publication, *Aeropuertos* had already reached its fourth edition. This opens an important path to enquire about the social imaginary about women that his narrative portrays and widely disseminates.

In terms of its female protagonist, *Aeropuertos* shows the life and viewpoint of an urban and modern upper-class young Chilean woman in the 1990s-2000s. Francisca and Álvaro are two upper-class young people from Santiago, who after having a one-month affair become the parents of Pablo at the ages of sixteen and seventeen respectively. The novel tells the story of how Francisca, Álvaro and Pablo relate to each other from the premise that neither of the parents wanted to have a child and the child did not wish to have been born, 'y me pediste que si me preguntaban, les contara a mis amiguitos (que nunca tuve) que tú eras mi hermana mayor y no mi madre' (148-149), Pablo reminds his mother in one of the videos that he left for his mother as a sort of suicide letter. The obligation that Francisca feels to continue with

[64] See, Gundermann, 2001; Hargrave and Smith Seminet, 1998; Opazo, 2009; Palaversich, 2005.

her pregnancy at such a young age and the decision made ultimately by herself mark the destiny of the three characters. They are unhappy, psychologically unstable and troubled people, who depend on drugs and alcohol to live and socialize.

In order to analyze the way in which *Aeropuertos* depicts Chile's contemporary neoliberal society and women's political status in that context, this chapter will explore the narrative techniques that frame the novel's societal portraits as well as representations of female sexuality and the search for traditional family love and care.

B. Notions of Personal Fulfilment in Contemporary Neoliberal Chilean Society

Aeropuertos offers a critical view of contemporary notions of success in Chilean society, as seen in the following phrase from the transcription of Pablo's second suicide video:

> Regálale mi ropa a gente que lo necesite: quizás a los sobrinos de la Vanessa, no sé, pero que sea alguien que estudie o que quiera lograr cosas y que no tuvo las oportunidades que yo tuve (<<cuico culeado, ABC1 concha de su madre>>) y, lo que es más triste, no aproveché (<<chico rico triste>>) (151).

In this example, the speaker uses comic and ironic language that both shows traces of social stratification and is self-critical of what he has done with his own life. Irony is present in the idea that Pablo apparently has everything needed to be happy but still intends to kill himself. The example shows the contradictions of the internal emptiness of a boy who has everything in economic terms but is not able to take advantage of his privileged position. The parenthesis also shows self-criticism though strong, but colloquial and comical phrases directed against himself; *cuico* is the pejorative term used to refer to the upper-class population in the Chilean

sociolect, and *ABC1* is the upper classification of socio-economic groups as used in market research in Chile. The use of this market research classification, very common in everyday language in Chile, also provides insights into the market-driven and consumerist society that *Aeropuertos* portrays to such an extent that a teenage boy knows and uses the term as a cruel joke about himself. Therefore, one reads that having it all in terms of economic privileges does not provide emotional stability to the young protagonist and is not necessarily a positive impulse to 'lograr cosas'. With a paternalistic attitude, Pablo also talks in clichés that recreate the stereotype of the worthy poor; somewhere, in another social stratum, in another world, there may be someone who, despite the lack of opportunities, works hard and deserves success, which is, moreover, achieved through education, by studying. This vision of education as the basis for social progress might also be read as criticism of the contemporary Chilean socio-economic system, which has a highly privatized education system.

Another example of the use of irony and contradiction to show the baseless lives of characters who seem to feel the need to conform with Chile's contemporary consumerist expectations of success is found in the acquisition of an apartment by Álvaro that occurs towards the end of the novel. The narrator tells us:

> Casi todos los departamentos de esta torre con gimnasio y lavandería y sala multiuso son para gente sola o parejas que se llevan muy bien y pueden vivir en muy pocos metros cuadrados. La habitación de Álvaro está en el límite de lo confinante. Es pequeña, avara, la cama king reduce el espacio aún más, pero al menos es *su* departamento. Terminará de pagarlo cuando cumpla cincuenta y cuatro años (160, emphasis in the original).

The long description of Álvaro's apartment and building facilities by the narrator highlights Chile's contemporary consumer society where, as commentators claim,

current notions of citizenship and social expectations are strongly linked to consumerism.[65] Moulian notes that consumerism is a massive phenomenon across social classes, being an extended mechanism of social domination and discipline (Moulian, 2002: 103-107). A recent study shows that in a country of around 17 million inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 'Según...'), almost 5 million are in debt (Superintendencia de Bancos e Instituciones Financieras de Chile: 8). And economic reports inform that by the end of 2017, the level of indebtedness of households in Chile is around 70% of their available income (Banco Central de Chile, 'Cuentas nacionales...'; Emol, 'Deuda de...'). Thus, consumerism is a practice and expectation frequently met through the means of bank loans and retail credit. As such, consumerism has also been instrumental in contributing to workers' obsequiousness. As discussed earlier, contemporary workers in Chile need to submissively accept being part of a free-market labour system with unfavourable working conditions in order to earn a living and meet their financial obligations (Moulian, 2002: 103-107). This, added to the de-collectivization of the labour environment and the overall depolitization of the population has favoured the emergence of an markedly individualist society (Ibid.: 100; Gómez Leyton, 2007: 60-67).

In the case of *Aeropuertos*, although Álvaro is a professional from the upper-classes, in the novel there is still a focus on his complying with some of these notions of contemporary Chilean society. It is evident toward the end of the story when he is portrayed as having a permanent job, social security, a new and modern apartment, and a mortgage, as opposed to earlier in the novel when he could be read as more

[65] See, Fazio Vengoa, 2004; Moulian, 2002; Paley, 2001; and Tironi, 2002.

reluctant to settle down within such parameters (81). Despite his privileged origins, Álvaro has also been somehow caught by the kind of social, or labour, discipline that allows him to meet some of Chile's contemporary neoliberal notions of success, framed by consumerism. This is, however, presented by the novel from a sceptical view. For example, when the narrator tells us: 'Álvaro no se imagina de esa edad ni desea vivir a esas alturas' (160) and 'cree que es mejor que botar su dinero en arriendo' (160). This combination of interior monologue and third person narration, with its contradictory and ironic tone, suggests that Álvaro thinks in clichés to, at least, try to internalize the contemporary Chilean neoliberal notion of success.

However, there is a contrast between the narrator's description of Álvaro's apartment and Álvaro's thoughts. The narrator is more critical than Álvaro, who tries to persuade himself that he is moving upwards. For instance, he thinks that having a small and mortgaged apartment is at least 'mejor que botar su dinero en arriendo. Ahora tiene sueldo, contrato, beneficios, previsión, todo' (160), as if this 'todo' means all that he is supposed to need. Using free indirect discourse, evident precisely in 'todo', the tone of these words leaves us with a sense of scepticism and reminds us of the above discussed example where Pablo, although having it all in economic terms apparently wishes to kill himself. Although the example shows that Álvaro, a once indifferent young professional who used to live in a shared rented apartment (76-79), is starting to perform within the Chilean market-driven conditions of success, the narration also warns us about the reality behind this expectation of success. It does so through contradictory elements, by describing a building with many facilities, but an apartment with a small internal space, a king-size bed in a small studio apartment and the emphasis in 'su' apartment, when it is actually still

the bank's. One may therefore argue that, by contemporary Chilean standards, Álvaro is doing well; nevertheless, he does not seem completely satisfied by this. This may reveal a criticism of the wider problems of consumerism as a socio-political model, problems that in *Aeropuertos* are linked to an emotionally troubled existence that is severely marked by loneliness, as will be discussed in this chapter.

The use of irony and contradiction to describe precisely the seemingly superficial lives of upper-class characters may be thought to offer a critique of contemporary consumerist Chilean society, particularly in terms of emotional versus economic stability. However, in terms of gender relations, although incorporating a female perspective, *Aeropuertos* leaves unquestioned specifically contemporary Chilean (neo)conservative values, as will be analyzed in the next section.

C. The Portrayal of Female Sexuality

1. A Young Woman's Sexuality in Contemporary Chilean Society

Chant and Craske highlight the social construction of sexuality (Chant and Craske, 2003: 129-130), which they define as 'a spectrum of behaviour that extends from the procreative to the erotic, and encompasses ideals, desires, practices, preferences and identities' (128). That is, sexuality is not free from socio-cultural determinants, as *Aeropuertos* also portrays.

In the novel, Francisca witnesses how her decision to carry on with her pregnancy does not provide her with the respect from her peers (49), as she is immersed in a

hypocritical cultural context where pretending is the norm. Montecino points out that in contemporary Chilean society, el *culto a la apariencia* regarding sexual behaviours has its origins in the colonial costumes of *amancebamiento* and *barraganía*, which, although publicly condemned, were the usual forms of romantic relationships and family context (Montecino, 2012: 50-56). *Amancebamiento* refers to couples living together without being legally married and *barraganía* were families composed of the legally married couple and the sexual partners of the husband, who many times lived in the same household. Children born from this extramarital unions were usually admitted to the main family, but they used to have a lower status (Ibid.: 50-51). And showing a hypocritical society in term of sexual practices, in *Aeropuertos* Francisca relates, 'Me cambié de ginecólogo porque el primer huevón al que fui me dijo que conocía a un tío mío y... Me enredé' (38). Similarly projecting the ideas of pretending and keeping up appearances, Francisca also feels that she has nothing in common with her former friends, for her sexual behaviour is no longer a secret as is that of theirs, 'Ella les conocía sus secretos, sus caídas y excesos y sobregiros, pero éste, el suyo, ya no lo era' (49), the narrator tells us. Francisca's sexual behaviour is now evident to anyone due to her pregnancy. By the age of fifteen, Francisca has already had various sexual experiences but she still can be seen as a hypocrite in terms of her sexual life. When she discovers that she is pregnant, she states, 'Me voy a transformar en todas esas minas que he pelado y de las que me he reído detrás de sus espaldas' (33), meaning that she herself has gossiped about and possibly judged the sexual behaviour of other girls.

The story provides us with a particularly prudish view of female roles with the sexual experiences of a female teenager strongly framed by guilt and recrimination, a view transmitted from mother to child, as the following example shows:

> ¬¿Sabes lo que me va a decir mi vieja? *Te cagaste la vida por caliente, por puta*. Eso me va a decir. Y va a agregar: *Y todo por un polvo*. Va a usar esa palabra, *polvo*. *No te gustó el polvo; ahora te vas a acordar de ese polvo por el resto de tu vida, ojalá haya valido la pena tu polvito*. Y si está muy enojada, y seguro que lo va a estar, quizás incluso sea vulgar, como lo fue con mi hermana cuando le pasó, y me diga: *Que al menos lo que te metieron haya sido grueso, que te haya hecho gemir como una chula de la tele, porque de que te gusta, te gusta; no creo que sea tu primera vez, suelta de mierda* (33, emphasis in the original).

This is an extract from the dialogue where Francisca starts to tell Álvaro that she is pregnant, in the section set in 1992. In this speech, Francisca tries to think as she believes her mother would and the result is a desperate statement, full of (self-) recrimination, to the point of almost psychological self-torture. Words such as 'ahora te vas a acordar de ese polvo por el resto de tu vida', with its aggressiveness and crudeness show the blame that Francisca thinks will be attributed to her and also a sense that she deserves to be pregnant as a form of punishment for being promiscuous at a young age, when still unmarried. An interesting point in this extract is the idea that although it shows (neo)conservative values of female sexuality, such values do not carry with them a genuine desire for upper-class women to procreate in the first place. The phrase 'cagarse la vida' refers to having a child when very young and unmarried, but it also denotes that even though young women may end up accepting their maternal fate, maternity is rather a punishment and a socio-cultural imposition, not a positive result of promiscuity. This may be influenced by the socio-maternal imaginary predominant in Chilean society. According to Montecino, in terms of the image of the single mother, this social imaginary dictates the purification of a woman's *cuerpo libre* by having the child under any circumstances,

by linking that body to the conception of a child; since otherwise, such a body would be no more than *libertino* or *prostituido* (Montecino, 2012: 40). Chant and Craske also point out that although in Latin American societies virginity may be less important as a female credential than in the past, sexual promiscuity is still less accepted in the case of women than in the case of men, and that men in many parts of the region would not consider marrying a obviously promiscuous woman (Chant and Craske, 2003: 145). Francisca's imagined rant suggests such a cultural context in which women are neither eager to become mothers nor able to renounce maternity. They, one can read, are caught between two contradictory impulses, one being the unwillingness to become a mother, which they cannot openly express, and the other one being a genuine desire to become one, which also may risk the social stigma of promiscuity.

A noticeable issue about this speech by Francisca is the fact that she is both the receiver and the speaker of the verbal insults, being both the victim and the offender; and actually, in the end, her mother does not criticize her in the manner that she expected. In this regard, there is a significant imbalance between the level of detail that the novel deploys on Francisca's sense of guilt and the presumed reaction of her mother, and the explanation provided by the narrator about the mother's actual reaction. It takes several pages and a change of section for the narrator to briefly tell us that 'Su madre no le pegó, no la trató de puta, no se fue en su contra ni la obligó a abortar' (58). The level of attention that Francisca's self-recrimination receives in the story shows that it is Francisca, from a younger generation, who has problems coming to terms with her sexual life and early pregnancy, and therefore, she is the

author and the receiver of such crude insults. At the same time, she re-validates them as she creates them in her own mind.

Although Francisca is just a fifteen-year old girl at that moment, she finds strong and vulgar words to rebuke and punish herself. The phrase '[que] lo que te metieron haya sido grueso' exemplifies both the vulgar linguistic register and a sexist focus on the male organ and its size. Also, unlike in other varieties of Spanish, in Chile, the term 'chula' carries a negative connotation to refer to a lower-class woman. Therefore, the (neo)conservative view projected by Francisca's speech is composed of both gender and socio-economic prejudices. The reference to television also speaks of the way in which female sexuality is exposed and promoted in Chilean mass media in the 1990s as a lower-class phenomenon. It also emphasizes the hypocrisy of a society that condemns sex, while profiting from it and making a spectacle of sexual enjoyment. The example shows that, in Francisca's mind, only 'common' women enjoy sexual intercourse and this is what decent women are meant to think. And as these are the imagined words of the mother, the example also echoes the popular belief, widely-spread in the Hispanic world, that women are, mistakenly, to be blamed for sexism, since they raise and educate their children into machismo (Cercas, 2017). For example, Chant points out that in Latin America, in the complex perpetuation of sexism, the expectation and aspiration of many women are that their men should 'act like men' and thus they foment aggressive behaviour among their spouses and sons (Chant, 2003: 16). This view of women perpetuating sexism is also present in the idea of Francisca and Álvaro's mothers agreeing on the particular arrangement for parental visits, which allow Álvaro to see Pablo only for a couple of hours every two Sundays, as he was, in their eyes, too young to take on more parental responsibilities

(61-62). However, Francisca is apparently not too young to do so and Pablo is finally raised by her with the support of her mother during Pablo's childhood.

In Francisca's words there is evidence of the view that young women should be sexually submissive. For example, in the phrase 'porque de que te gusta, te gusta', one can read the recrimination against a teenager who has failed to pretend she does not enjoy sexual intercourse; Francisca regards herself as socially expected not to like having sex. This view may be also influenced by Catholic beliefs (that Chilean society widely adheres to), which punish recreational sex, especially in the case of women. From the phrase 'no creo que sea tu primera vez', one reads recrimination, for the mother is expected to suspect that the girl became pregnant not as result of her first and only sexual intercourse. In other words, if she were to become pregnant, it would be expected that, at least, the impregnation had happened as result of her first sexual experience; an attempt, perhaps, to whitewash the promiscuous behaviour of a young woman. And accordingly, the words 'suelta de mierda' are the final repudiating label for the fact that she has not obeyed social conventions on women's sexual submission when acting free from constraints of home and family, as claimed by her mother (in Francisca's imagination) and re-validated by Francisca herself. They represent two generations prescribing, in Francisca's view, (neo)conservative values in relation to female roles.

However, despite Francisca's fears, her mother supports her and Álvaro proposes an abortion. As Álvaro puts it in another dialogue, 'Hay que eliminarlo. Aborto, término, *raspaje*' (41, emphasis in the original) and 'terminemos lo que está recién partiendo allá dentro. Esa cosa... Yo me hago cargo de todo. De todo. Todo. Si

quieres te pago, te pago todo, te tomo la mano, te acompaño' (43). In these words, Álvaro shows no sentimentalism to talk about the unborn child. With expressions such as 'te tomo la mano' and 'te acompaño', Alvaro adopts a childish, comical and clichéd tone, trying to move Francisca emotionally so she accepts the decision to abort. But he also very lucidly argues with Francisca that 'esa cosa' is not life, 'No es ni un feto' (44), since Francisca is only four weeks pregnant and in medical terms it is an embryo. Álvaro's lucidity reveals his level of sex education, as he seems to understand reproduction, which is however ironic, as he did not use any contraception. Nevertheless, Álvaro's role in most of the dialogue in question is a passive one. He does not reply immediately, neither to openly confirm or deny the recrimination by and against his girlfriend. Francisca's interventions are followed by successive silences from Álvaro. He needs other further interventions from Francisca to finally understand that he is going to become a father. But most importantly, one reads Álvaro's childish slowness to understand as a form of innocence, the innocence of a boy who has difficulties internalizing the idea of his girlfriend being pregnant, which suggests that boys of Álvaro's social class can have sex without having to think of the consequences. This naivety contrasts with Francisca's crude thoughts and speech. Moreover, towards the end of this section of the novel, when Álvaro finally realizes what is going on, he hurtfully and desperately responds to Francisca's view of the embryo as 'life' with: '–Muchas cosas justifican un asesinato. Es legal, además. Asesinato en legítima defensa. Puta madre, crece. Atina. Desde cuándo tan beata, huevona' (44). By relating 'asesinato en legítima defensa' to potential abortion, Álvaro, again, shows a childish and comical attitude in his rejection of fatherhood, in contrast to Francisca's realization and acceptance of her upcoming role as a young mother.

2. Women's Sex Education in Chilean Upper-Class Society

Throughout the novel there are traces of a *Chile progre*, or of a contemporary Chilean society full of modern urban people for whom the use of drugs, information technology, mass media and profanity are common. However, such references get merged with a conservative and traditional view of a young woman's sexuality, as the following example shows:

> –...me acuerdo que pensé: acabó a la entrada, por suerte no tan adentro, y me urgí y pensé: puta que tenía harto acumulado, como un litro, y me dio como asco y te miré así desnudo, nunca te había visto así, en pelotas, me pareciste tan, no sé, tan poco romántico y anatómico y grotesco, y todo me pareció lamentable *de una*, un error, y me dieron ganas de vomitar, así que me fui al baño chico y vi un jabón Lux rosado, y me lavé y me metí los dedos bien adentro, como nunca lo había hecho, y luego sentí el pisco, y los pitos, y la raya que me convenciste que probara, y ahí sí vomité, con trozos y todo...(35, emphasis in the original).

This example consists of Francisca's description of the moment right after she realizes she has had unsafe sex with Álvaro and might therefore fall pregnant. Francisca's speech is again characterized by her sense of guilt and by the idea that she did not enjoy the first sexual experience she had with her new boyfriend, as 'me urgí', 'lamentable de una' (that is, right after she did it) and 'un error' show. It is written in a colloquial linguistic register but does not have the desperate tone of the main example analyzed in the previous section or its self-offensive language. On the contrary, it shows a more offensive tone against Álvaro rather than to herself. At some points, Francisca also creates humour with phrases like 'puta que tenía harto acumulado, como un litro' to refer to her boyfriend's ejaculation, and 'nunca te había visto así, en pelotas' to allude to her boyfriend's nudity.

The memory Francisca recounts is set in El Colorado in the middle of a trip with friends to this Chilean upper-class ski resort.[66] One can also learn from this passage that the place where these young people were staying was a large chalet with several rooms and certainly more than one bathroom, as Francisca states that she visited the 'baño chico'. This provides us with an impression of the consumerist upper-class Chilean society of the early 1990s, where young people had easy access to such entertainments. Furthermore, in another reference to popular culture, mass media and consumerism, Francisca recalls –at the moment of such an important revelation– the specific trade mark and colour of the soap that she used to wash her genitalia in an attempt to prevent pregnancy. The 'Lux rosado', produced by the British-Dutch multinational company Unilever, was a popular soap in Chile in the 1980s and 1990s with very appealing television adverts starring popular national and international celebrities of the time. The use of this product is a symbol of the globalized consumerist Chilean society, which yet gets mingled with the use of the same soap product as a popular old-fashioned form of contraception.

The example is also charged with implicit socio-cultural references to the sex education of upper-class young women in Chile in the 1990s. As demonstrated by Francisca's words, after having sex for the first time with Álvaro, she does not have a positive idea of what it used to be to have fun with him. She thinks of the naked Álvaro as 'tan poco romántico y anatómico y grotesco', which reveals her expectation that women look for romance or a particular notion of beauty when having sexual intercourse, beyond pure anatomical facts like orgasms or a real rather

[66] In Santiago, skiing is an upper-class sport; there is, for instance, no public transport to get to resorts and the cost of lift passes, ski hire, lessons and accommodation is very high.

than idealized human body. Francisca's actions reveal her ignorance in terms of sex education in general and contraceptive methods in particular, which contrasts to Álvaro's awareness of female biology, as shown earlier. In Francisca, on the one hand, there is the image of a liberated girl who can have various experiences with sex, alcohol and drugs, and on the other hand, the same girl as a disempowered and fearful young woman to whom no proper sex education has been provided despite her privileged upper-class origins.

In the above example, one can witness the contradictory behaviour of an upper-class, modern, yet repressed and easily influenced girl. Francisca represents the repressed within the dominant class. She, at the age of fifteen, has access to alcohol, to expensive drugs like cocaine and visits an exclusive resort like El Colorado, but at the same time she is contradictory and insecure. She does not freely enjoy her sexual life and does not dare to stop pregnancy from occurring, as her boyfriend proposes, because she is convinced that an embryo '–Es vida' (44). This seems to echo the view of the Catholic doctrine that emphatically rejects abortion. The influence of the Catholic Church in the social context in which the novel is set is also evidenced when Álvaro comically complains that God 'no sólo es cartucho sino Opus' (40), which reveals the conservatism that surrounds these teenagers from the upper-classes. The Catholic Church's view of sex as only allowed in the context of monogamous and heterosexual marriage –especially expected in the case of women though– is of great influence not only in Chile, but in the whole Latin American region (Chant and Craske, 2003: 134-142). It has also had an impact on the view of women's identity, which in Latin American societies is strongly linked to motherhood. In this socio-cultural construction of sexuality, women are taught to be

receptive and passive, while men are allowed to be sexually active. Furthermore, the socialization of sexual behaviours starts early when boys are given more freedom to go out of the home than girls. Nonetheless, sexual conservatism among girls is formed not only at home, but at school and through the mass media as well (Ibid.: 135-144).

Francisca's view and ignorance in terms of her own sexuality foregrounds the conservative education given to upper-class children and teenagers in Chile, where most private schools have links with the Catholic Church and provide a Catholic religious education (Ramírez et.al, 2013). The influence of the Opus Dei in Chile's right-wing economic and political elites, especially from the dictatorship onwards, has also been remarkable; for instance, many of the 'Chicago Boys' were also members of the Opus Dei and this organization has strong links with private education institutions.[67] The conservative view of sex influenced by religion was also especially evident during the dictatorship. Earlier, Allende's government had implemented measures in favour of women's health and wellbeing and provided sex education to couples (Herrera, 2008: 600-605; Valdivia, 2010: 94). But during the dictatorship, in 1979, all activities intended to inform and educate on contraception were suspended in public health centres as was the information campaign in the media. The requirements for female sterilization changed and women needed the authorization of their husbands or partners as well as to meet certain requirements in terms of age and minimum number of children (Ibid.: 601-603; Ibid.: 95-994).

[67] For two studies on the connections of the Opus Dei with the Chilean upper-classes and their influence on private education, see Mönckeberg, 2013 and 2016.

Importantly, the influence of the Catholic Church did not stop with the end of the dictatorship. In 1996, for example, the Ministry of Education launched the pioneering 'Programas de Capacitación en Afectividad y Sexualidad', popularly known as the JOCAS. They were instances of dialogue in which health professionals, university students and parents were invited to schools to discuss issues around sexuality and to answer the questions from students. The idea of the JOCAS was to promote debate to, at a later stage, implement a comprehensive programme of sex education at schools. However, the JOCAS caused great controversy and attracted the attention of right-wing sectors, the media and the Catholic Church, who opposed the initiative –the right-wing parties, for example, introduced a bill into congress aimed at stopping the JOCAS. Although the then president Eduardo Frei publicly defended the programme, it was finally cancelled a few years later and the plan to implement a full programme of sexual education at schools was abandoned (Salas, 2016; Shepard, 2006: 152-155). Currently, there is only an official document published by the Ministry of Education that provides some guidelines for schools to meet their obligation (required to them by law) to inform on matters of fertility (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 'Sexualidad...'). Such is the (neo)conservative socio-cultural context that frames Francisca's contradictory behaviour in terms of her sexuality: active from an early age, but also heavily marked by guilt and the lack of appropriate sex education, with motherhood as a consequence even for those women who belong to the upper classes and may have had privileged access to good quality private education.

3. Abortion Seen as Murder and the Moral Obligations of Motherhood

Francisca struggles to deal with the guilt caused by the social rhetoric of abortion which is, in her view, equated to murder: '–No voy a interrumpir o matar una vida humana. Un error no justifica un asesinato' (44), she says. This phrase portrays the cultural clichés surrounding abortion as Francisca's language goes from a medical register to a moral one and shows Francisca's failure to deal with such guilt. She goes from 'interrumpir', which is a neutral concept frequently used in medical reports disseminated in the media to refer to abortion, to 'matar una vida humana', which is charged with moral values about the right to life of unborn human beings. She also uses the word 'asesinato', which is even more judgemental. This phrase provides insights into the ideology that influences Francisca not to stop her pregnancy even though she is not prepared and does not want to have the baby, as the following example shows:

> –Me da lo mismo lo que pienses. Lo voy a tener. [F]
> –No puedes tenerlo. Si tanto te interesa la vida, piensa en la mía. [A]
> –No te metas en lo que no te corresponde. ¿Quieres ser papá acaso? [F]
> –Ni cagando. [A]
> –Entonces [F]
> –¿Te quieres casar conmigo? [A]
> –No. [F]
> –¿Quieres que sigamos juntos? [A]
> –No creo que estemos juntos. La dura: ¿lo estuvimos? [F]
> Callan. Hay un solo 747 en la pista. Las nubes han tapado la luna. El avión está ahí, a oscuras.
> –¿Tú quieres tenerlo, Fran? [A]
> –No sé. O sea, no pero sí; es lo que me toca. Tengo. [F]
> –¿*Tengo*? [A]
> –Tengo, sí [F]
> –... [A]
> –... [F] (41, emphasis in the original, characters' initials added).

From early in the novel, one learns that Francisca has internalized the fact that parental responsibility is hers alone, as shown by her words: 'Vamos a ser padres. O

sea, yo' (36) and, from the main example above, 'No te metas en lo que no te corresponde. ¿Quieres ser papá acaso'. But the above example deploys a tone of language that shows a shift in the speaker's position from full certainty to hesitation. Francisca is sure she will have the child at the beginning of it and Álvaro is convinced he cannot become a father. However, later they both become more open to each other's position and one can read less rigid answers and even doubts. They doubt not only the future of their relationship but also the profundity of the one they have had so far.

In the example, Francisca and Álvaro are at the airport waiting for their flight that will take them back home to arrive. Commentators have noted that the settings of Fuguet's narrative can be characterized as 'non-places' (Augé, 1995): airports, hotels and motorways, among others. They are places of transit in which the absence of human relations or at least, significant ones, predominates. These typical places of transition provide a notion of the solitude and confusion of the characters, who, in the case of Fuguet's stories, are usually going through a process of personal development (Forttes-Zalaquett, 2009: 145). Similarly in this part of the novel, it is clear that Francisca and Álvaro are in an in-between position in terms of their relationship and their development processes. It is a moment that marks a definite change in their lives and relationship, which goes from being that of two teenagers who have fun together to a long-standing one, by becoming the parents of a child. This stage of change occurs precisely at an airport, a stereotypical place of transition. The moment of change can also be read from the shift of point of view that goes from the perspective of the protagonists to that of the narrator and provides a brief moment of honesty, as Álvaro and Francisca open to each other's perspective. It is

the voice of the narrator, which describes what the characters see on the landing strip, that opens the path to doubt. It introduces a brief demand for honesty marked by Alvaro's question '¿Tú quieres tenerlo, Fran?' that leads to Francisca's hesitation. This hesitation is, nevertheless, framed by a striking sense of duty and determinism in Francisca's response 'es lo que me toca. Tengo'. In this way, after this brief but significant moment of doubt, Francisca ends up insisting on her maternal duty and she reaffirms this position with the words 'Tengo, sí', which is followed by two elisions that one can read at least as 'non-disagreement'.

Nonetheless, despite the events in the novel and that in Chile abortion was illegal under any circumstances until near the end of 2017, it was precisely women from the upper classes who had the resources to afford access to abortion illegally or abroad (Molina, 2014; Carmona López, 2015). Statistics on abortion in Chile are unclear because of its criminalization, but estimates state that in Chile, approximately 100,000 to 160,000 abortions are carried out each year (Molina-Cartes et.al, 2013: 737; Herrera, 2008: 600-605). The popularly known fact that in Chile private health centres carry out clandestine abortions regularly was publicly asserted in 2014 by the then Minister of Health, Helia Molina, causing a controversy that resulted in her resignation (Molina, 2014). This event also revealed Chile's hypocritical political institutions, which were for decades unwilling to recognize that the penalization of abortion did not prevent it from occurring and that, in practice, it was a matter of social class: abortion was inaccessible only for those who could not pay for it. This clear possibility of abortion open particularly to the Chilean upper classes is supported by Álvaro proposing it to his girlfriend straight away, without hesitation.

A significant contradiction in *Aeropuertos* is the fact that Francisca's mother, coming from an earlier generation, does not disapprove of abortion and actually has undergone the procedure, including as a married woman (34), but *Aeropuertos*' protagonist, a modern girl from the end of the twentieth century, in the end does not. This sexual conservatism that emerges from a younger generation may remind us of a similar standpoint that one reads in *Missing (una investigación)*, where the contemporary and educated perspective of the psychologist foregrounds a conservative view of motherhood and the presumed emotions of a mother. One can argue that Francisca's view of her own sexuality, as portrayed in the novel, is influenced by a national politico-cultural context that, by the years in which the novel is set, penalizes abortion, does not provide appropriate sex education and commercializes women's bodies. Such a context is a legacy of the military dictatorship. In 1989, only one week before the end of the dictatorship, the military government made abortion illegal under any circumstances, including therapeutic abortion, which had been legal in Chile since the 1930s (Herrera, 2008: 601-603; Valdivia, 2010: 95-99).

Verónica Valdivia highlights the contradictions that arose during the dictatorship in relation to the traditional military view of women and sex. On the one hand, the military government disseminated a conservative view of women's roles based on their responsibilities as mothers and within the home, but on the other hand, the neoliberal free-market economy implemented in this period allowed the exploitation of women's sexuality with commercial purposes (Valdivia, 2010: 100-114). This is evidenced by the proliferation in the 1980s and 1990s of a whole market-driven sex industry that used women as sexual objects. The period witnessed the flourishing of

'topless' bars or night clubs, often clandestine spaces for prostitution; *cafés con piernas*, which are coffee shops in which clients are served by scantily clad women; *casas de masaje* that also include prostitution, pornographic cinema and erotic magazines. Also, the use of women and their sexualized bodies for marketing and entertainment purposes in the media started in this period (Ibid.). This could be the cultural influence on Francisca's contrasting views of her own sexuality, enjoying a free sex life on the one hand, but recriminating herself for doing so on the other. This context may also explain why Francisca's view of abortion and sexual freedom is more rigid than that of her mother, coming both from different generations. Francisca herself presumes that her mother will suggest an abortion, justifying it, in Francisca's imagined dialogue, with the words '*¿vida?, ¿qué vida?, ¿qué vida importa más: una que no existe o la tuya o la mía?*' (34, emphasis in the original). This phrase also provides insights into the individualist society in which the characters are immersed.

At the Latin American level, scholarship on literary representations of abortion does not abound. Some recent approaches from Argentinean literature include the work of Julieta Astorino et.al (2017) about representations of motherhood and abortion in the novels *Elena sabe* (2007) by Claudia Piñeiro (1960-) and *El curandero del amor* (2006) by Washington Cucurto (1973-), and the short-story 'Conservas' from the collection *Pájaros en la boca* (2009) by Samantha Schweblin (1978-). These commentators assert that portrayals of abortion tend to focus on the social stigma that it carries for women, with female characters conveying varying views of it that include acceptance, rejection, pro-life discourses and subjection to decisions taken by others (Astorino et.al, 2017: 48). But above all, due to the contemporary intertwining of political, ideological, religious, legal and sanitary factors involved in the question

of abortion, such representations echo and are framed by certain prevailing social and cultural ideals about motherhood and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy (Ibid.: 55-56). In *Aeropuertos*, actually, no abortion is carried out, but, as analyzed, the novel is charged with certain (neo-)conservative discourses on abortion and on a young woman's sexuality in a contemporary, urban and upper-class setting.

Sol Pérez Corti presents an alternative analysis related to the issue of abortion in her idea of 'aborto viviente'. She analyzes literary representations of what she considers characters who have survived abortion, either intended or not, namely, Yuna from *Las primas* (2008) by Aurora Venturini (1922-2015); Esperanza from *La asesina de Lady Di* (2001) by Alejandro López (1964-); and El Gauchito from *Yo era una chica moderna* (2004) by César Aira (1949-). Pérez Corti characterizes these protagonists as monsters, abnormal and incomplete adults, who struggle to fit in the socially-accepted parameters of a physically normal person (Pérez Corti, 2017: 79-103). Although she does not analyze literary representations of actual abortion, but characters who seem to be crossed in one way or another by questions around it, it is interested to note the link between potential or near abortion and the impact it may have on the emotional development of the characters as adults; they develop as incomplete human beings, even when abortion is no more than a suspected intention (Ibid.: 103-104). In a similar vein in *Aeropuertos*, even though there is not any abortion conducted, Pablo also seems to have been impacted by the shadow of it, by the idea that his parents in principle did not want to have him, which along with his troubled relationship with them have consequences for his personal development. He is an incomplete young man, surrounded by loneliness and a troubled existence, as will be analyzed in the next section.

In the novel, Francisca shows a strong personality, but such strength ends up highlighting the maternal role of women, the conservative view of female sexuality and the notion of abortion as the murder of a child. Her portrayal demonstrates that subject positions may be multiple and women can also take a masculine subject position that defends the patriarchal *status quo*, for it is the social experience and not biology which informs literary and social perceptions (Moi, 2002: 52-65). But such a defence of the *status quo* is no less fruitful to the study, from a gender perspective, of women's portraits by a male perspective. It illuminates for us the socio-cultural intertwining behind the literary portrayals of women, which demonstrates that ideology involves a link between worldviews, discourses, effects and political power, relationship that feeds the social imaginary that lies at the heart of literary creation.

D. Traditional Family Values in Chile's Contemporary Society

1. Hybrid Narrative Technique and Values about Family and Women

In *Aeropuertos*, crucial moments usually take the form of a long unattributed dialogue and transcribed monologue. Therefore, the general perspective of the novel seems to aim to be an impersonal and objective one, often mimicking a camera lens; and actually this story started out as filmcript, having its origin in Fuguet's films *Dos horas* and *Velódromo*. But core passages also incorporate some interventions or commentaries by the narrator that allow us to learn more about the protagonists' points of view. For example, at the end of the key moment when Francisca tells Álvaro about her pregnancy, the narrator intervenes to describe Álvaro's viewpoint with phrases such as, 'Álvaro mira la pista. Ya no quedan aviones' (46) and

'Entonces Álvaro se quiebra, se pone a llorar de adentro, se apodera de él un terror, una pena, un pánico y una sensación de desgracia y de que algo muy grande lo está aplastando' (46). These interventions go from the objective description through a cinematic technique (a type of close up) of what Álvaro does and sees to the subjective depiction of his innermost feelings of desperation, through words that emphasize how real his feelings are. Those words suggest Álvaro's innocence and despair: he is a sensitive adolescent, truly affected, shocked and emotionally destroyed by the news he just heard from his girlfriend.

In the case of Francisca, interventions by the narrator that allow us to learn about her subjectivity are not found in this core part of the story. Some examples, however, are found in other sections, such as:

> ¿Le gustaría ser libre, sin atados, tener una vida sin Pablo?
> No, eso está claro: no. No le gusta su vida, a veces la supera, nada ha salido como imaginó, pero no se puede imaginar nada, nada, nada, sin Pablo.
> Para bien o para mal, Pablo.
> Pablo, Pablo, Pablo (51)

But, Pablo 'tampoco es capaz de salvarla' (52), the narrator tells us. In these examples, the narrator goes in and out the character's subjectivity to, in a more ambiguous way, show Francisca's reluctant attitude to motherhood. In the first example, the narrator shows Francisca's viewpoint of doubts and her attempts to convince herself that she made the right decision when she decided to have Pablo, by repeating her son's name. But in the example from the next page, the narrator also unequivocally lets us know that having the child does not fulfil her. Examples from other sections of the novel are found in statements such as, 'Y quizás por eso, porque Pablo sabía más de sí mismo que ella de ella, no era capaz de tocar el tema' (155); this example shows some ambiguity in the way the narrator goes in and out from the

character's subjectivity to show Francisca's hesitation to openly talk to her son about a difficult subject like his frustrated suicide attempt. Also, 'La gente envía señales. Sutiles o directas, pero las envía. Francisca no las captó' (131), in relation to –and perhaps criticism of– Francisca's slowness to perceive her son's indirect cry for help when she finds him lying in bed with wet hair after his frustrated suicide attempt in the river, an event unknown to her at that moment. And, 'Pablo no necesitó decir una palabra para que Francisca reconociera a su hijo, para que supiera que era él y no otra persona' (155), in reference to, presumably, a woman's innate capacity to recognize her child, even without seeing him directly or at least hearing his own voice (she just hears movements in the pool).

Therefore, in the case of Álvaro, the interventions of the third-person narrator at key moments emphatically let the readers know the sincerity of his feelings. In the case of Francisca, the narration is more ambiguous in order to highlight her contradictory feelings about her role as a mother, with an arguably more judgemental tone about such a role. This raises the question of the long-standing debate on the relationship between literary form and ideological function;[68] specifically in this analysis, the question of the extent to which the narrator's interventions can be taken as obtrusive commentary or intentionality that may convey the ideological notions that influence the social imaginary highlighted and created by the novel. In *Aeropuertos*, in key episodes, the interventions by the narrator show the way in which the novel slips from the more objective portrayal of the characters through long dialogues to something more direct, more judgemental and clichéd, particularly on the presumed

[68] See, for example, Booth, 1961: chapter I, II, III and VIII; Eagleton, 2002: chapter 2 and 3; Moretti, 1988: chapters 1 and 5; Wellek and Austin, 1949: chapter 1 and 4.

behaviour of a mother. As such, these commentaries by the narrator provide clues about the novel's view of gender relations.

Obtrusive commentary by a third-person narrator is a narrative technique that can also be found in the more traditional realist novel (Booth, 1961: chapter I). Examples from Chilean literature might include novels such as *Martín Rivas* (1862) by Alberto Blest Gana (1830-1920) and *Hijo de ladrón* (1951) by Manuel Rojas (1896-1973) –and critics have already paid attention to the literary legacy that Fuguet has inherited from these authors (Alonso, 2004). This legacy is important as it provides insights into Fuguet's place within Chile's literary canon. It demonstrates that his literature inherits and develops from a certain tradition, which allows us to question how rebellious his alleged rupture with previous literary generations indeed is. It is also important because it shows in this novel the relationship between traditional narrative technique and traditional or (neo)conservative views of gender roles. It exposes for us the contradiction of a kind of literature that focuses on contemporary modern elements such as multimedia technology and globalization, but remains traditional in terms of gender relations. At its heart, it does so not only at the level of plot, but also by turning to traditional narrative techniques to portray women judgementally. This combination of modern and traditional elements supports the same contradictions in the society portrayed in the novel: at once progressive and modern, yet traditional, conservative and judgemental. Francisca is caught in a paradox typical of Chile's stalled modernity of the transition to democracy: the paradox of a country neoliberal in economic policy but (neo)conservative in cultural values, particularly those on women's roles. Thus, this literary legacy provides further clues about the relationship between narrative fiction and a certain social

imaginary, since *Aeropuertos*, through the use of some traditional narrative technique (re-)creates a (neo)conservative social imaginary on women's roles.

The novel's overall technique can be characterized as 'hybrid', or mixed, since *Aeropuertos* also uses what could be described as ultra-modern prose, namely, the transcription of monologues from videos saved in a USB Pen Drive, which itself has a hybrid format and cinematic touches. Pablo leaves two suicide videos to his mother, entitled, 'despedida1_ciber.mov' and '2_pablo good-bye pieza.mov'. These videos are presented by the novel (136-153) in an invented hybrid format, as a computer file on the page, which is a combination of a text file with an audiovisual one. By leaving a suicide video rather than a letter or an e-mail, Pablo seems to prefer to show the realism of a screen image rather than words which would have been mediated by the mother's own reading tone and rhythm, and the mental image she would have formed in her mind. In this way, then, Pablo carefully controls what he transmits to his mother and performs for her the specific act he wants her to watch. Pablo's performance results in the spectacle of a fourteen-year old teenager, partly drugged and partly drunk, as at moments he stops speaking in order to consume drugs and alcohol 'in front' of his mother, but he is in fact alone in a room and separated from her by the screen. Here, communication technology signals the individualist society in which the characters are immersed. It paradoxically shows the severe disconnection between mother and son, despite that they belong to close generations and have always lived together. This use of digital resources stresses the teenager's solitude and his coping with his troubled existence by his own. It provides insights into a family context of indifference in which a teenager has to recur to technology to reach his mother and communicate strong emotions to her. This

episode also reminds us of the earlier discussed idea that Fuguet's settings can be characterized as 'non-places' in which the absence of significant human relationships is remarkable; similarly, the settings of Pablo's videos are a cyber café and the loneliness of his bedroom.

In the videos, although Pablo refers to his suicidal intention, he also says to his mother, 'Sígueme. Tómate tu tiempo, ahora o después, analízalo' (152). The words 'sígueme' and 'analízalo' leave us with the sense that Pablo attempts to make his mother focus on him, accompany him, be by his side and analyze the complexity of the situation. That is, in a context of individualist indifference, Pablo claims the attention and comprehension of his mother. Thus, Pablo is performing a plea; he is not necessarily attempting to bring about his own physical death, but that of the form of life he used to know, which so far consisted of him as a 'huevón loser fracasado' (139). Perhaps, this is why he leaves not just a simple USB Pen Drive for his mother to find. He leaves a white one tied by a black satin ribbon, with a post-it note that reads: 'ÁBRELO! Urgente! P.'(135). From the emphasis of the upper case letters and the exclamation marks, one can infer that Pablo is crying for attention and that for some reason, for him, it is urgent that Francisca finds those videos. Although the black satin ribbon may in principle be a sign of mourning, the contrast between the white USB Pen Drive and the ribbon could make reference to hope. One may think that the content of the white USB Pen Drive bears some light, or hope, versus the despair of the colour of what covers it. The ribbon, though black, is also made of satin, that is, it still shines somehow. Thus, the USB Pen Drive could also be read as a present to his mother that warns her about Pablo's emotional instability.

Furthermore, in the explanatory Word document saved in the USB Pen Drive, Pablo writes 'El video habla –creo– por sí solo' (135). Here, in the emphasis of the isolated word 'creo' one may again infer Pablo's hope. One reads that he expects Francisca's discovery of the videos to be enough for her to understand the urgency of the situation. Such urgency has to do with his wish to be stopped and it may be therefore said that he has hopes for his mother's interpretation of the content of the videos. In the idea of the urgency and importance of the video, in its capacity to speak for itself, one again reads information technology as symbolizing an individualist society in which significant interactions among people are absent: technological means are more important in reaching others than human relationships, including family ties. It also provides insights into the consumerist society in which the novel is set, with technological devices being fundamental in the approach among people. But although leaving us, on the one hand, with a pessimistic sense of the individualism of contemporary society, on the other, the novel also suggests that information technology might in the end serve to connect people and transmit important messages and emotions, as Pablo has turned to it to reach his mother for help. As previously seen, this idea of information technology as potentially having double purposes is present in *Fuerzas especiales* too, a novel that also shows that in modern societies the use of multimedia and communication technology may have both negative and positive implications according to what it is used for.

Pablo has contradictory feelings about the family love he has grown up with, as the following words to his mother show: 'A mí nadie me quiere, de verdad' (147) but 'Sí, sí sé, tú me quieres' (147); 'me paraliza tu cariño' (146); and 'Si además de todo me odiaras o no me pescaras como my father, the Álvaro, mal, todo mal' (147).

Pablo's contradictory attitudes suggest that he just needs Francisca's comprehension and approval so he can grow up as a man, since, presumably, his mother's love and presence on their own are not enough any longer: 'Ojalá nunca hubiera crecido, ojalá nunca me hubiera llegado la asquerosa y frankensteiniana pubertad que me hizo mutar, ser otro, dejar de ser tuyo para transformarme en alguien que terminó siendo de nadie' (149), he relates. Pablo is starting to feel that he is not his mother's child any longer, for he is physically becoming a man. This feeling in addition to his father's indifference left him in an in-between stage, as a pseudo orphan. Thus, the ambiguities portrayed by the episode of Pablo's videos, such as his contradictory feelings for his family context, whether he truly intends to commit suicide, and the invented hybrid form that the novel uses to narrate the episode frame the portrayal of the also 'hybrid' or in-between stage social context in which the characters are inserted; that is, the novel's narrative technique supports the paradox that in *Aeropuertos*' social context for a non-traditional and modern twenty-first century family, traditional values still predominate.

Pablo's life, although with a permanent presence of his mother, is also a life of solitude marked by the impact of the absence of his father, which seemingly does not allow him to develop. Pablo tells us on one of his suicide videos that 'el amor de madre es como incondicional y casi imposible no tenerlo. Uno no lo gana: te llega de manera automática' (147). As such, maternal love does not challenge him to evolve emotionally as the absence of the father though does. Pablo has a troubled but close relationship with Francisca, which has implications for his development and the novel shows the process by which she realizes that for Pablo to develop, he has to put some distance between them. After the transcription of Pablo's monologue, the

narrator lets us know, with a language similar to that of self-help manuals, that Francisca realizes that what Pablo needs is to travel, to spend some time on his own 'conociendo, asumiendo desafíos y [que] dejara de pensar en él y, lo que más le dolía, en ella' (155). From the mother's emotional pain regarding the idea of putting some distance between her and Pablo, one can argue that the mother's omnipresence needs to be sacrificed for the son to grow up as a man and to attempt to reencounter the image of the distant father.

The novel also conveys the idea of women as the means for life and the fulfilment of others. From the very moment she learns she is pregnant, Francisca always views her unborn child as a human being whose right to life must be guaranteed. She argues that she would not kill a human life (44) and, as the narrator explains, she 'prolongó las cosas para que el tiempo y la biología y la culpa funcionaran a su favor' (58), so her mother would not oblige her to abort. Later in the novel, Francisca continues to feel that she is the one who preserves Pablo's life, as the following example shows:

> Sólo los vivos hacen ruido y nadan. Salpicar y cruzar una piscina requiere energía, ganas, un deseo de goce, y eso era positivo. Nadar es una lucha por sobrevivir, pensó. Si no nadas, te ahogas, y eso en sí ya era algo bueno. Con cada brazada, Pablo demostraba que quería vivir. O eso quería meterse en la cabeza Francisca. No importa dónde había estado todas estas horas o qué había estado haciendo o con quién; ahora estaba en el agua y se estaba moviendo (155-156).

This section's narration goes back and forward in the description of events and in and out of characters' minds. Francisca revisits various moments of her life with Pablo, from when he was a baby to more recent times. She and Pablo are in the countryside spending some time together, but they do not get along and argue. After this, Pablo runs away from home and disappears for more than a day. As the narrator tells us, Francisca is very worried but she does not do anything to find him. She does

not go to the police to report Pablo's disappearance. Instead, she just waits for him to come back home (121-122). The example contains subtle hints to the decision made by Francisca at the beginning of the novel not to stop her pregnancy, which are framed by her memories. These hints are given by the image of the boy swimming in water and are founded on the assumption of movement as proof of life. This assumption, and the image of the teenage Pablo swimming, lead to the idea that, as an embryo, Pablo was also a living person, meant to be born, beyond any potential questioning or action by the mother. Neither the teenage Pablo in the swimming pool nor the embryo in the mother's womb are inanimate objects, as they move and make noises, and so they are both assumed to have *vida*, to be human beings. This can be, however, a problematic assumption, since, for example, spermatozoa move actively, but cannot be considered to be human beings just because they have movement. But, although there has always been the threat of death surrounding Pablo, from the possibility of abortion to his own suicide attempt, in the opinion of Francisca, he has always wanted to live. He is a positively energetic person, he has 'un deseo de goce', 'hace ruido' and 'lucha por sobrevivir'.

To Francisca, the truly important thing is that Pablo is moving in the water, beyond any questions from her. It does not matter what Pablo has been doing with his life so far or, by analogy, what Francisca did at the beginning of this story 'o con quién'. All that is significant to her now, as much as back then, is the fact that Pablo is moving around, alive, either in the swimming pool or in mother's womb. The example suggests that Francisca is able to visualize and understand Pablo's desire to live. However, it also shows that Francisca is not free from doubts, as the narrator obtrusively lets us know with the phrase 'O eso quería meterse en la cabeza'. These

doubts have to do with Francisca's need to internalize the maternal model she is socially meant to perform. This comment also tells us about Francisca's desire for Pablo to want to live, as she tries to persuade herself that her son is a human being eager to be born, re-born or not to die. It shows the way in which the novel takes us into Francisca's innermost thoughts and feelings which are not openly declared by herself, and tells us what to think about her nature. She is presented by such commentaries as a doubtful mother who, however, has a strong sense of responsibility in terms of providing the means for her son to live and, hopefully, be happy. Accordingly, after Pablo's failed suicide attempt, Francisca ends up as a patient, quieter and less ever-present mother, a saintly or purified version of the once wild young girl and later reluctant young mother. As a form of sacrifice, she takes two main actions: she puts some distance between herself and Pablo by sending him abroad and she, at the end of the novel, asks Álvaro to meet up with Pablo once more. The example again demonstrates the relationship between traditional narrative technique and traditional views of gender roles. Despite its focus on multimedia and communication technology, and its cinematic, ultra-modern, hybrid prose, *Aeropuertos* deploys some traditional narrative technique that also frames the moment when Francisca decides to sacrifice herself for her son, which reveals the novel's view of gender roles in the (neo)conservative society that it portrays.

Molina points out that in current versions of the idealized mother, the paradox is that although society offers various possibilities to women beyond motherhood, the negative outcomes in a child's development, such as psychological disorders and traumas, are still seen as the responsibility of the mother (Molina, 2006: 102). This view, as discussed in the chapter about *Missing (una investigacción)*, has been

influenced by attachment theories that charge mothers, as primary caregivers, with a definite influence on a person's mental health and human development (Ibid: 98-102). These are theories that, therefore, link a woman's role to, above all, that of motherhood. The novel underlines this contemporary paradox by suggesting the implicit capacity of a mother to jeopardize the healthy personal development of her child, which, as discussed earlier, is a literary representation of motherhood that dates back to the Spanish literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Bergmann, 1995: 35). As Vivero Marín puts it, 'La figura de la madre tenía que ser, en consecuencia, relegada frente a la autoridad y soberanía del padre si se deseaba formar a auténticos ciudadanos libres y emancipados gracias a la razón' (Vivero Marín, 2014: 76).

Similarly, in the novel, the role that Francisca has played as a mother has had negative consequences in Pablo's personal development. Firstly, as a young, modern, single and working mother, she has failed to 'connect' with her child emotionally, so much so that in his extreme solitude Pablo needs to turn to alternative and creative ways to reach her and transmit to her his troubled existence. Secondly, in contrast to the absence of the father, the omnipresence of the mother, according to the novel, does not allow the child to grow as a man. The result is Francisca's silence and distance in order to attempt to give way to the presence of the father. In this way, the novel (re-)creates the impact that the love, attention and care of both a mother and a father have traditionally thought to have for the development of a child, including in the context of modern upper-class families. It does so by a combination of traditional and ultra-modern narrative devices; a hybrid narrative technique that nevertheless

leaves the novel's view of women's roles and family values in the traditional side of the spectrum.

2. Family and Personal Development in Chile's Consumerist and Individualist Society

In *Aeropuertos*, Pablo is not the only character who apparently has had a complex relationship with his father. Not much is revealed about Álvaro's father, but he himself expresses criticism in words such as, 'no seré el mejor padre pero no seré como el mío' (68). Elsewhere in the novel, one can read Álvaro as depressive (80, 81, 82); the once good-looking and lucid Álvaro has transformed into a careless, physically unfit and apathetic man. Further, in what may be another cause of his depressive mood, one can infer that Álvaro's mother dies at some point and, significantly, that he did not have a close relationship with her either (86). Therefore, like Pablo, Álvaro does not enjoy a significant attachment to his mother –despite living with her– and he also faces distance from his father. This again provides insights into the conservative view of family relations and the importance of traditional family values in the contemporary context in which the novel is set, which can be read as extended to both Pablo and Álvaro's generations and which the narration does nothing to question.

Nevertheless, in the novel there are many expressions of Álvaro's deep love for his son (66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72). For example, despite the distance between Álvaro and Pablo, even at the tensest moments between them, when Álvaro seems to act more as an older brother than as a father, he continues to show his joy for his son. For

example, Álvaro states '–Puta, Pablo Honey, mi ser favorito' (106). He does so in a way that may be read as too informal and with a forced contemporary musical reference, as he is still a careless father, even though he is 31 by this time. But at this point, the narrator intervenes and unequivocally accentuates the truthfulness of Álvaro's feelings for the teenage Pablo and tells us, 'Álvaro da dos pasos para atrás y lo mira y su cara se ilumina de forma genuina' (106). The narration goes from showing, again as a camera lens, what Álvaro is doing to telling us what to think about Álvaro by stating 'de forma genuina'. This is another example of how the novel slips from a cinematic technique that reinforces the objective description of the 'scene', to the more subjective depiction of the characters, which includes the narrator's obtrusive commentary. It is a clear example of the positive and supportive interventions made by the narrator to backup Álvaro's otherwise less credible statements. It tells us that the character's feelings are real and that Álvaro, despite his humorous and informal tone, is not feigning his joy and sincere love for his son.

Álvaro love for his son may be read as highlighting the in-between stage of contemporary Chilean society in terms of gender stereotypes, which traditionally have dictated that emotional attachment is rather given, or culturally permitted, between mother and son. But *Aeropuertos* shows some hints of changes in the ideals of masculinity that have traditionally influenced men's identity as linked to the physically and emotionally strong, active, dominant and heterosexual married, breadwinner father.[69] Álvaro's deep love for his son challenges some of these stereotypes, for expressing emotions is traditionally associated with women's alleged

[69] Chant, 2003: 2-4); Chant and Craske, 2003: 141; Olavarría, 2000: 11-12; Ortega Hegg et. al, 2005: chapter VI; and Zapata Galindo, 2001: 231-233.

'weaker' and sentimental nature (Ibid.). Also, as an adolescent, Álvaro declares 'No necesito ser un buen padre para ser una buena persona, una persona completa' (39). Thus, although his words have a somehow clichéd tone, they still project changing patterns of masculinity, as the traditional role of the heterosexual father does not seem to be a central expectation for a teenager of 1990s Chilean upper-class society. Olavarría summarizes the changing patterns of masculinity in the Chilean society of the beginning of the new millennium as follows:

> Los varones/padres han perdido en muchos casos su calidad de proveedores exclusivos, especialmente entre los sectores populares y medios. Sus parejas se han incorporado en proporciones crecientes al mercado de trabajo; se ha modificado la concepción de la jefatura del hogar; un porcentaje importante de mujeres la ejerce y en los hechos no requiere de un varón para mantener su núcleo familiar [...] Las tendencias demográficas indican también una disminución en la constitución de familias legales (matrimonios), incremento en las nulidades y en los hijos nacidos vivos fuera del matrimonio, generalmente por el no reconocimiento de los padres/varones de su paternidad (al menos al momento de nacer) (Olavarría, 2000: 25).

However, in the novel, the potential portrayal of a loving father that might challenge traditional stereotypes of masculinity is ambiguous. On the one hand, the novel does not firmly question the stereotype behind the idea of men not being (culturally) permitted to have a close affectionate relationship with their children because the love that Álvaro feels for Pablo is never actually realized by the teenager, as Álvaro was never present as a father. But on the other hand, the contradiction between Álvaro's declared love for his son throughout the novel and his neglect of him can be linked to the demographic changes in terms of family composition taking place in Chile towards the years in which the novel is set, as described by Olavarría. Thus, one can again argue that *Aeropuertos* portrays a society in transit, in the process of going through various socio-cultural changes that wander from (neo)conservative to modern ideals for values on gender roles within families.

By the end of the novel, Álvaro is keen for his reencounter with Pablo to go well. This is evident when the narrator suggests Álvaro's disappointment when he notices that he overslept the morning he was meeting Pablo: 'Álvaro abre los ojos, de una. Mira el reloj. Cara de espanto, cara de estoy atrasado por la puta' (161). This is another example that shows how the novel slips from an objective cinematic technique to the more subjective depiction of the characters, which in this case includes the narrator's commentary and free indirect discourse. The narrator objectively describes what Álvaro is doing but, suddenly, it moves towards Álvaro's subjectivity to tell us what he feels about being late to meet his son: 'espanto', 'por la puta'. By using free indirect discourse, the novel 'presents the character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse' (Keen, 2015: 62) in what could be considered a 'double-voiced kind of discourse' (Ibid.). In *Aeropuertos*, this technique is fruitful in the building of the characters; it provides the readers with further insights into the reliability of their inner natures, as one gets perceptions from both the narrator and the character's eyes. In the example, specifically, the use of free indirect discourse stresses the truthfulness of Álvaro's emotions by combining the third-person narration with access to the character's innermost thoughts. It thus produces an effect of intensification, reinforcing what the readers get about Álvaro's true nature. It emphasizes Álvaro's sincere upset with himself for being late to reencounter his son and, therefore, it leaves us with a profound sense of Álvaro's anxiety to see Pablo once more. Later, the narrator again uses commentary that goes from the objective to the subjective to tell us about Álvaro's relief when he realizes that he is not late, for he arrived right before Pablo's flight landing, and tells us that Álvaro 'Sonríe aliviado' (166).

By this moment of the story, Álvaro not only has a place of his own, which, although not perfect, does tell something about his desire for a change of lifestyle. Álvaro seems to care a bit more about himself and one infers that he is at least trying to recover his self-esteem, which is still linked to consumerism, as the narrator tells us: 'Ahora que está flaco se siente bien, se siente mejor, se siente joven. Ahora usa las cremas francesas que le recomendó Blas [...] ahora se lava el pelo con un champú japonés de algas que cuesta más que una botella de vino de exportación' (162). This example provides more insights into the consumerist society in which the novel is set, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, Álvaro also seems to be reacquainting himself with his own father (176). Therefore, although Álvaro and Pablo's lives are not perfect, the last section of the novel, and particularly their last dialogue, suggest that they are both at least willing to give their relationship another try. This may be the result of Álvaro's openness to a life change as well as Francisca's cooperation, for she is who asks Álvaro to meet Pablo once more, as stated by the latter (183). She thus provides the necessary conditions for a further attempt at building bridges, in Pablo and Álvaro's last meeting depicted in the novel.

The meeting has ambiguous moments (173), but it is significant as one can read it as, at least, an attempt at rapprochement between father and son. In the conversation, for example, Pablo suddenly takes a picture of them both, 'lo abraza y con su iPhone se toma una foto' (181), as the narrator tells us. However, this is a virtual rapprochement that again speaks of a society rather virtually united by consumerism than by significant human relationships. Moreover, an iPhone is an expensive mobile phone, especially for a teenager who is not independent financially, which provides further insights into the characters' socio-economic background and the consumerist

context they are inserted in. The meeting also makes clear that father and son have certain things in common, particularly their enthusiasm for popular and digital culture (170). This shared enthusiasm for popular culture and multimedia again leaves us with an ambiguous impression of communication technology as both a means to evade reality and a potentially useful tool to connect people and share not only information, but important emotions that might eventually unite them –which is significant in the case of an individualist de-collectivized society. These ambiguous effects of the wide access to communication technology remind us of the similar view that *Fuerzas especiales* suggests. As discussed in the chapter devoted to that novel, technological means can be read as both negatively affecting people's critical thinking on the oppressive context in which they are inserted and as a potential means for resistance and self-education.

Although Pablo is a very young man and still has contradictory feelings for both his parents, he seems to be clear on what he expects from Álvaro and this lucidity moves the father. Pablo makes clear that the only two things he would expect from Álvaro was his presence and good intentions, beyond his actual performance as a good or bad father (181-182), to which Álvaro reacts and responds '–Yo te quiero' (182). At this point, the narrator intervenes once more to let us know that Pablo: 'va al urinario pero no necesita hacer' (182). This intervention, again, goes from the objective to the subjective, from describing what Pablo is doing to suggesting that Pablo is somehow moved by Álvaro's recognition and honesty so much that he leaves to the bathroom just to escape from this sensitive moment. Thus, the importance of this intervention is that, from the narrator's perspective, it provides more insights into how significant and eventually positive is to Pablo the love and honesty of his father in contrast to

the problematic nature of his mother's love and presence. It is another intervention that provides clues about the novel's view of gender roles. This idea of the problematic nature of a mother's love for a son is not unique to *Aeropuertos*. It is also present in *Missing (una investigación)*, in which, as earlier analyzed, the protagonist admits that the love of his mother in the end caused him problems.

Neither Álvaro nor Pablo seem to be completely confident with what they are doing, but this final meeting –mostly depicted through dialogue– marks the beginning of a new attempt to incorporate the father figure into Pablo's family love and care circle (188); and in the meeting, Pablo calls Álvaro *papá* for the first time in the novel (188). The narrator, again linking the humorous tone to Álvaro's interventions, lets us know that Álvaro: 'Mira la cuenta, paga. Se demora en atinar pero de a poco procesa algo y comienza a sonreír' (188). Here, the narrator intervenes once more to let us know that Álvaro, despite his sometimes immature attitudes as a father, is not as indifferent as he may seem. Álvaro is quite shocked to hear the word 'papá' spoken for the first time by his son and as if he did not believe it, he explicitly confronts Pablo with the phrase 'me trataste de papá' (188), as if he requested a confirmation. And significantly the confirmation does not come in dialogue or from the characters; it is provided by an image in the voice of the narrator, who describes an attempt not to smile by Pablo, but in the end, 'Los dos sonríen' (188), the narrator tells us. This is an important intervention, since it reinforces the credibility of the situation by combining the narrator and the characters' perspectives. The novel does not finish the depiction of this last meeting through the use of dialogue as it had done it mostly; it suddenly turns to the narrator's voice to emphatically demonstrate the

innermost feelings of the characters, which are, after all, feelings of joy for such an accidentally declared paterno-filial relationship.

This new attempt at a relationship between father and son, at a time when they are both going through a new stage in their process towards emotional maturity, occurs in the airport hotel, but not inside the airport itself as the beginning of the novel does. Therefore, it could be said that Pablo and Álvaro are not quite in no-man's land anymore and their relationship may be starting to move towards a slightly more solid ground, though it has not completely left a space of transit yet. After this dialogue, the novel ends with the narrator's description of the moment when Álvaro receives a message from Pablo on his mobile phone after Pablo's flight takes off: it is the picture of them taken at the hotel restaurant. It is though an ambiguous image, as they are seen *abrazados* but the photo was still taken at a place of transit. It is also ambiguous because, although this picture may again remind us of the idea of communication technology as a potential tool to unite people and transmit important messages, the image also depicts a virtual kind of relationship between Álvaro and Pablo: although they are *abrazados*, they do not have such a close relationship yet. This again leaves us with the contradicting impression of communication technology as, on the one side, a means of perpetuating consumerism, individualism and evading reality by contributing to the keeping up of appearances and, on the other side, as a potentially useful tool to connect people in contemporary societies.

This ambiguous attempt at rapprochement frames Pablo's search and potential discovery of a traditional family with a modern lifestyle –living separated, but with the mother and the father paying attention to the child–, which presumably

contributes to Pablo's achieving of emotional stability in his development process. In *Aeropuertos*, emotional stability is linked to having a mother who is less present and a father who is more, and is framed by a modern version of traditional family. At the end of the story, the relationships between the characters are still at an in-between stage and the title of the novel alludes to this, to the idea of relationships in transit. As the analysis demonstrates, *Aeropuertos* portrays a society also in an in-between stage, which wanders from traditional family values to (neoliberal) modernity and vice-versa.

Significantly, however, in the end, the protagonist family is ultimately united by multimedia technology and Ravotril, an anxiolytic and sleeping pill that can be bought in Chile by medical prescription. This union paradoxically speaks of their solitude. As discussed earlier, the novel creates a social context that echoes Chile's individualist and consumerist society, and the characters seem to be faced with a significant lack of human relations, including among family members. What unites these people are things that can be bought, and they are incapable of forming relationships not mediated by consumerism. Although the novel does seem to be critical with aspects related to consumerism and individualism, these portraits also create a social context in which consumerism maintains its status as a new notion of citizenship, in which community goals have been replaced by a person's capacity to buy and relations among people are mediated by goods. The members of this modern Chilean family are united by legal drugs that maintain them 'quiet' and 'asleep', sedated. As such, the novel's societal portrayals, marked by consumerism and individualism, (re-)creates a social imaginary that witnesses a de-collectivized and

depoliticized society, providing views of Chile's contemporary forms of social control.

The novel shows the contradictory fact that certain modern freedoms, such as access to goods, communication technology, economic privileges, drugs and alcohol may be rather subtle forms of social domination. A similar idea can be read from *Fuerzas especiales*, a novel that, as already discussed, also suggests that drugs, alcohol, multimedia and communication technology are potential means of social control for the oppression of the lower-classes by the repressive forces in power. Also in a novel like *Mano de obra*, one can read Chile's de-collectivized population in which former forms of political ties have vanished in a community whose main objective seems to be to keep their jobs in order to consume. These novels clearly (re-)create a social imaginary that highlights Chile's contemporary broader means of social control and suggest that the depolitization and de-collectivization of the population are phenomena extended across different social classes. Such social domination is aimed at maintaining a consumerist and individualist market-driven society based on a neoliberal model in which profit is a central goal and the de-collectivization of the population is fundamental to meeting such a goal. Therefore, from the analysis of the use of multimedia technology and drugs in *Fuerzas especiales* and *Aeropuertos*, one can understand that these forces exerting social control are formed by a combination of national and multinational economic powers as well as the institutions of Chile's neoliberal democratic state. Thus, one can argue that in Chile's post-transition to democracy social imaginary, contemporary social control is exerted by the market and the state. This shows again why these novels are good representatives of Chilean

post-transition to democracy literature, as they demonstrate the overwhelming legacy of the dictatorship in the current democractic context of Chilean society and culture.

Conclusions

Although a quite typical novel by Fuguet, in terms of its strong influence from popular culture, pop music, the mass media, cinema and globalization as well as its treatment of themes related to young upper-class characters, *Aeropuertos* is also original, within Fuguet's narrative, in its portrayal of the perspective of a female protagonist. The novel depicts an upper-class, modern and urban young woman, who is however inserted in a neoliberal society, from which (neo)conservative values for gender roles emerge.

Aeropuertos offers a critique of Chile's contemporary neoliberal parameters of success in the troubled existence of its upper-class male characters. However, on issues regarding gender roles, it leaves unquestioned matters such as access to abortion, women's sex education, the roles of motherhood and fatherhood, and contemporary changing stereotypes of masculinity. The novel even suggests that women are to blame for perpetuating sexism. Additionally, *Aeropuertos* shows the relevance of traditional family love, of the attention, care and love of a family composed of the three traditional elements, father, mother and children –although not necessarily living together. This (re-)creates a contemporary social imaginary that still bears conservative ideals for women and the family, based on women's, primarily, maternal role. As such, it leaves us with the hopeless impression that these

conservative ideals for women may still prevent them from reaching political empowerment, even when they come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

The novel's technique goes from objective to subjective depictions. In a 'hybrid' narrative technique, it uses long unattributed dialogues, monologue transcriptions and third-person narration that many times presents cinematic touches to show what the characters do as if it were a camera lens. But the novel's hybrid prose also incorporates more traditional obtrusive commentary by the narrator that includes free indirect discourse. Such interventions provide insights into the characters' perspectives, but also into the different ways in which the narration presents its view of gender roles regarding the most relevant topics of the novel: sexuality, parenthood and the significance of paternal love to the development of a child. *Aeropuertos* employs traditional narrative technique to relate traditional roles for women. As demonstrated by the analysis, in the novel, the female and male viewpoints do not have equal significance and support from these narrator's commentaries, which are more positive, supportive and less judgemental with Álvaro than with Francisca. The different levels of importance that the love and care of a father have in contrast to those of a mother, and the more judgemental tone of the interventions linked to the female perspective are significant clues to argue that ideological grounds, or intentionality, emerge from the narrator's obtrusive commentary.

This 'hybrid' technique also reinforces the novel's portrayal of contemporary upper-class Chilean society, which can be read as an in-between society: modern, consumerist, globalized and individualist, but also conservative, hypocritical and judgemental, particularly on female sexuality and family values. The novel is

informed by these aspects of contemporary Chilean society and is marked by prejudices, especially in terms of gender bias. The analysis has revealed the portraits of a society that still bear a strong influence from traditional politico-cultural models inherited from the dictatorship and is, at the same time, in the middle of a process of social and cultural market-driven modernization. Thus, *Aeropuertos* is not distant from a political ideology which is informed by the neoliberal model implemented by the dictatorship that has been endorsed by the Chilean transition to democracy; it is therefore a good example of Chile's post-transition to democracy literature. The analysis conducted demonstrates how an apparently apolitical author may be political and the way in which the narrative fiction of a male perspective may (re-)create an ultra-modern but (neo)conservative, sexist social imaginary.

Final Conclusions

This thesis has dealt with the relationship between narrative fiction and politics in novels published by Diamela Eltit and Alberto Fuguet after the year 2000. In order to demonstrate that Chilean post-transition to democracy literature foregrounds the socio-cultural legacies inherited from the dictatorship, which have been to a great extent endorsed by the Chilean neoliberal transition to democracy, this work has addressed representations of contemporary Chilean society and the political status of women. In the reading of some of Eltit and Fuguet's recent work, this investigation has moved away from the mostly postcolonialist and postmodernist approaches with which Eltit and Fuguet have been studied. It has drawn a more contextualized framework that reveals the way in which their literature dialogues with a same socio-historical background. With a methodology that incorporates historical, political, cultural and literary perspectives, this thesis has approached Eltit and Fuguet's twenty-first century narrative as representative of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature. Such an approach reveals the ways in which these authors' writing projects represent different but related views of contemporary Chilean society, Eltit and Fuguet being semi-canonical representatives of Chile' twenty-first century literary sphere.

This study concludes that contemporary Chilean literature cannot be fully analyzed without taking into account its socio-historical connections; and that the question of literary commitment does not have to do necessarily with the overt political commitment of an author. Given the dynamic relationship between literature and a given social imaginary as well as the link between the latter, ideology, discourse and

power relations, there are exist various ways for an author to be political. Therefore, the values to which literature commits can be traced in the case of both the overtly politically committed author and the apparently apolitical one. This possibility has been demonstrated by studying an author like Eltit, who has openly declared her leftist and feminist political commitment, and another author like Fuguet, whose declarations about his political preferences are ambiguous and whose classification by critics varies from political neutrality to representing Chilean right-wing neoliberal ideals. The analysis in this study acknowledges both the socio-historical connections in the reading of narrative fiction and the specific literary devices it uses to portray its fictional universe. As such, this thesis conducted a close reading of the narrative techniques of the novels studied in order to delve into the way they create particular views of contemporary Chilean society and the political status of women.

The study of Eltit's novels *Mano de obra* (2002) and *Fuerzas especiales* (2013) has revealed that her narrative tends to move away from the more dense, hermetic and fragmented language typical of her earlier work, these novels being more straightforwardly realist than previous ones. Both novels depict recognizable contemporary settings and human relationships that contribute to the smoother reading of the stories. *Mano de obra* portrays a complex social context and ambiguous human relationships within a community always demarcated by people's capacity as workers. It depicts an amoral and oppressive labour system symbolized by prostitution, an idea that is however not unique to this novel, but also present in *Fuerzas especiales*. With an overwhelmingly pessimistic tone and disconnection between memory and the present, between a past of *obrero* resistance and a present of workers' submissiveness, the analysis has demonstrated that *Mano de obra*'s

political aim is the denunciation of the system's brutality rather than to suggest any particular way of escape. Such social criticism can also be read from the novel's transition from a first-person singular narrator to a first-person plural one, which foregrounds the lack of political goals of Chile's current labour context. But through its first-person plural narration, the novel contributes to the questioning of the *status quo* of a neoliberal patriarchal labour system. It does so by creating a focus on the female domestic labour that represents the overlooked and the most discriminated within such labour context, and by creating distrust that surrounds the discourses of this plural narrator that may be regarded as representing broader patriarchal society.

The case of *Fuerzas especiales* is slightly different. The novel shows a play between pessimism and hope to suggest potential modes of escape from the oppression of a violent social context framed by state repression. These potential ways of escape rely particularly on female difference, awareness, solidarity and communal ties, but are nevertheless not accomplished by the characters. However, easily identifiable recent socio-political references allow us to connect memory and resistance, and allow, at least the readers, to realize eventual paths for an escape. Therefore, one can argue that, as her oeuvre progresses, so far, Eltit's novels become somehow less hermetic, more realist and, as shown by *Fuerzas especiales*, somehow less pessimistic, projecting some rays of hope. Her work may be also said to become less elitist and more accessible for a slightly wider audience, alluding even to mass popular culture.

Both *Mano de obra* and *Fuerzas especiales* depict a contemporary patriarchal Chilean society in which women are badly abused both at work and at home. They are heavily charged with domestic responsibilities in a society where the goals of

recognizing female domestic labour and women's full access to political involvement are still pending. Nevertheless, there is a noticeably different pessimistic tone in the former novel versus a somehow more hopeful one in the latter. This might be a result of the post-transition to democracy socio-political context in which these novels are inserted. *Mano de obra* was published in 2002, in the hopeless socio-political atmosphere of a country ruled by a socialist president, Ricardo Lagos, who, however, worked to defend the interests of the private sector and to consolidate the neoliberal policies of the dictatorship. On the other hand, *Fuerzas especiales*, published in 2013, emerges from a national context that witnessed the significant re-engagement in politics of younger generations, as a consequence of the vigorous 2011 student movement. The process started by this generation of secondary and university students, mostly born in democracy, over the years has succeeded in placing various political debates to the public sphere, drawing attention to different social movements and promoting free education for all, which resulted in the government's commitment to legislate on the subject. Although not an ideal context, the post-2011, post-student movement era has undoubtedly witnessed some changes in the political commitments of a (for decades) strikingly depoliticized Chilean society.

Moreover, a legacy of this student movement is the left-wing Frente Amplio coalition founded in early 2017. In the November 2017 presidential election, the Frente Amplio candidate obtained 20% of the popular vote, only 2% away from the centre-left candidate who represented the current government (Servicio Electoral, 'Resultados...'). Although the Frente Amplio's candidate did not get enough votes to face the runoff with the right-wing candidate, since March 2018, this newly formed coalition controls around 12% of the parliament. It has been placed by the electorate

as the third partisan force in Chile's new political landscape, which is framed by an electoral reform that includes a gender quota. Therefore, as the narrative fiction of an openly leftist author, *Mano de obra* and *Fuerzas especiales* somehow echo and contribute to a social imaginary that highlights and might influence such political changes.

The analysis of Fuguet's narrative focused on the novels *Missing (una investigación)* and *Aeropuertos*. His literature has been normally regarded as based on the individual, not interested in national politico-historical debates and more influenced by globalization. However, a closer reading of the novels studied has revealed their ideological connections. *Missing (una investigación)* flirts with politically loaded terms and images linked to Chilean left-wing politics, such as *exilio, desaparecido* and *testimonio*, the poetry of exile, dictatorship, oblivion and memory in order to recuperate those terms and use them to rewrite a story without the political content these terms normally convey. The novel implies the idea that history and fiction are interchangeable categories, which in the context of post-dictatorship Chile has significant political consequences: it contributes to a social imaginary that whitewashes the necessary political memory that permits the social judgement of the brutality the Chilean dictatorship. Instead, the novel contributes with moderation, ambiguity and sometimes frivolity in the references to the dictatorship as well as a very simplified view of female subjugation. As fiction created around a family story but framed by Chile's controversial political history and cruel dictatorial past, the novel ends up blurring this history, particularly its more brutal side. In doing so, it turns to the voice of younger generations and, significant in a novel that attempts to blur the limits between fact and fiction, it finds no female voice to represent a story

that intertwines with the Chilean history of the second half of the twentieth century. The novel (re-)creates the gender inequality of the context in which it is set and suffocates the voice of its main female character, who is portrayed in a judgemental way with questions always related to the role of motherhood.

In the case of *Aeropuertos*, there is an interesting inclusion of the perspective of a female protagonist for the first time in a novel by Fuguet. But, although the protagonist's portrayal is that of a modern and urban upper-class young woman, it is also permeated by the neoliberal socio-cultural context of the Chilean transition to democracy and she can be read as trapped in (neo)conservative values for women and motherhood inherited from the dictatorship. *Aeropuertos* presents a critique of Chile's contemporary neoliberal parameters of success, but does not challenge traditional gender roles. The ambiguities of a (neo)conservative society are also supported by the novel's narrative technique. The novel employs hybrid, cinematic and ultra-modern narrative devices, but it also has traditional obtrusive commentaries by the narrator combined with free indirect discourse. This hybrid, or mixed, technique frames core aspects of the representation of contemporary Chilean society such as consumerism and individualism, and reinforces the portrayals of a contemporary in-between stage society that witnesses a combination of modern and conservative ideals of female sexuality, motherhood and family relations.

In *Missing (una investigación)* and *Aeropuertos*, one reads a judgemental view of motherhood, in which the love of a mother is potentially damaging and problematic to the future development of a son. From these novels one learns that the sole presence of a mother would not be enough for a son's healthy human development,

being also necessary a significant emotional attachment with her as well as the presence of the father. This leaves women in an unfavourable political position. They can be read as still identified, above all, with motherhood –including within the upper-classes–, which is a core factor that hinders women's political empowerment and public involvement. Further, the main female characters of these stories are in such a position that even their roles as mothers are judgementally portrayed by the novels. Additionally, another common view of these stories is that younger generations of women, despite being modern, upper-class and educated, can be read as very conservative in their views of motherhood and female sexuality. All of this leaves us with the impression that the expectations for traditional female roles are still predominant in Chile's contemporary social imaginary and might be unsurpassable even in the case of modern women that come from privileged socio-economic origins.

Although written by two seemingly different authors, common threads can be identified in the novels analyzed; this is further evidence that in conjunction Eltit and Fuguet are significant representatives of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature, with its particular socio-political legacies. The use of multimedia and communication technology is a common topic to *Fuerzas especiales* and *Aeropuertos*. Eltit's use of them highlights possibilities of resistance that may emerge from an oppressed lower-class society, whereas Fuguet's portrayals of technology are rather linked to the consumerism and individualism of Chile's upper-classes. However, both novels leave us with the impression of multimedia and technology as possibly having double purposes, according to the use made of them. They may have social potential: resistance against class oppression and

communication of important feelings and messages in a strikingly de-collectivized society. But they also may end up perpetuating oppression by contributing to maintaining people 'away' from reality, stuck in a virtual world that does not provide spaces for critical thinking and in which appearances are more important than true relationships.

Another topic common to *Fuerzas especiales* and *Aeropuertos*, which is related to the implications of the use of multimedia and technology, is that of drugs. In both novels the use of drugs, legal or illegal, and the negative view of the use of technology leave us with the pessimistic sense of the generalized consumerism and depolitization of contemporary Chilean society. The depictions of drugs and technology show us means for social domination and suggest that both the lower and upper classes are under control of the forces in power which are linked to the market and the state. In the social imaginary created by these novels, people from different social classes are symbolically silenced, sedated and kept away from reality. They are trapped in a virtual, imaginary world, invented by those in power for the sake of profit and social discipline. In this way, one can say, the population is kept less aware of their human condition, that is, of the conditions under which they live, work and relate to each other; they are less aware of the way in which their humanity is jeopardized, put at risk and disrespected by those in power in order to maintain the *status quo*. They are less aware thus of their deteriorated political status. They are therefore not prepared to fight back, to resist, which contributes to the de-collectivization and the lack of interest in political matters among members of contemporary Chilean society, as evidenced by the statistics quoted above (see Introduction). In the case of *Aeropuertos*, one clearly reads a social imaginary in

which technology contributes to domination, including of the upper-classes, whereas in *Fuerzas especiales* there is the possibility of subverting such an imaginary, which is challenged by the novel placing *pobladores* –and especially a *pobladora-narradora* with an erudite and eloquent voice– as the potential creators and users of technological means for the purpose of self-education and resistance against the suffocating repression of the democratic state's institutions.

In the case of *Mano de obra* and *Aeropuertos*, both novels highlight a hypocritical Chilean society in which keeping up appearances is important. From the study of these novels, it is also evident that in Chile's post-transition to democracy social imaginary, consumerism is a phenomenon expanded across social classes. And importantly, consumerism is a core element that contributes to labour discipline, whereas this discipline helps maintain social control. One reads that through discipline at work and submissiveness to a neoliberal labour system, the population may meet contemporary expectations of consumerism, their financial burdens and, thus, the current market-driven notions of success, which in Chile have been imposed by national and multinational economic powers as well as the institutions of a neoliberal state inaugurated by the dictatorship and consolidated in the transition to democracy.

As demonstrated by this study, Eltit and Fuguet's narrative fiction, although with their particularities, show a dialogue with the ideologies that feed the contemporary Chilean social imaginary. Their fictional worlds give views of a Chilean society that is still remarkably influenced by the dictatorship and the neoliberal transition to democracy; a society that is de-collectivized, consumerist, individualist and

patriarchal. Accordingly, Eltit and Fuguet's twenty-first century narrative fictions are significant representatives of Chilean post-transition to democracy literature and the compexities of embarking on a political reading of it. Eltit provides us with criticism, denunciation and to some extent subversion of the social imaginary, whereas Fuguet plays with political ambiguity, which, in the particular national context discussed in this thesis, may still be considered as having ideological grounds. Consequently, the analyzed pieces of narrative fiction also provide insights into the way in which literature dynamically interacts with a given social imaginary and how fiction may not only project but it also creates values, beliefs and roles for women and men.

Through a methodology that reads the novels studied as post-transition to democracy literature, by considering both socio-historical attachments and the close reading of the narrative technique, this thesis also contributes to start to draw new perspectives of post-dictatorship Chile. It demonstrates that in contemporary Chilean society, there are different ways for an author to be political, which leads us to the question of the position of the writer in this post-transition to democracy social context. This study reveals that such is a complex and sometimes paradoxical position, in which an attempt to write 'apolitically' (even by implying that history and fiction could be interchangeable categories) can still be charged with ideology. This is so not only because of the socio-historical determinants of Elitit and Fuguet's literature exposed in this thesis, but also because of the dynamic dialogue between literature and a certain social imaginary. Such a dialogue is framed by the relationship between ideology, discourse, effects and power relations, which feeds the social imaginary that resonates in a society's forms of cultural expressions. Demonstrating such a paradoxical position of the post-transition to democracy author has also been allowed

by the close attention that this methodology pays to the narrative technique as well as the importance that this approach gives to the study of more recent readings of the past, which enjoys greater perspective.

This thesis has also found that the separation of social classes in Chile, traditionally thought as insurmountable, may currently not be so much in cultural terms. Chile's social inequality and the separation of classes that it produces has been widely asserted by the social sciences.[70] Furthermore, it is a phenomenon that has also been represented in Chilean literature. Just to name a couple of examples, novels like Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* and Donoso' *Coronación* (1957) and *Este domingo* (1966) portray the profound gap between social classes not only in economic terms but in cultural ones as well. However, the analysis conducted in this study shows that different social classes are trapped in a similar socio-cultural context, that is Chile's current market-driven society, which is consumerist, globalized and individualist. This has politico-cultural consequences such as the fact that the lower and upper classes can be read to be under the social control of a combination of market and state forces, by means such as multimedia technology, legal and illegal drugs, and labour discipline. Although the legacy of this model comes from the dictatorship, in the contemporary post-transition to democracy social imaginary, the forces that exert power aimed at such levels of social discipline are importantly formed by both economic powers and the institutions of the democratic state. In summary, the pieces of post-transition to democracy literature analyzed here demonstrate that in Chile's contemporary social imaginary, current mechanisms of

[70] For example, Mac-Clure et.al, 2014: 169-170; Rivas, 2008; Salazar, 2012: 113-114; and Torche and Wormald, 2004: 9.

oppression aimed at social control and discipline have been influenced by the social, cultural and economic legacies of the dictatorship, were validated by the transition to democracy and are extended across social classes through the use of similar socio-cultural means. This study therefore demonstrates that Chilean post-transition to democracy literature foregrounds the socio-cultural legacies inherited from the dictatorship, which have been to a great extent endorsed by the neoliberal Chilean transition to democracy.

The final question may remain of the political effectiveness of narrative fiction; that is, to what extent the given values that literature commits to or the social imaginary that it helps create are disseminated and reach an audience, and what kind of audience is that. In this respect, it may be said that Eltit's post-transition to democracy narrative fiction, the mastery of her prose and the valuable denunciation, criticism and even subversion that provides, although progressing towards more readable texts, still reaches and seems to be created mostly for learned and critical audiences. In contrast, Fuguet's widely read narrative fiction from the same period has the capacity to more extensively disseminate a social imaginary in which tempered and ambiguous political values as well as patriarchal and (neo)conservative views of women predominate. In this sense, the study conducted here leaves us with a final reflection, namely, how new and more inclusive forms of feminisms may be reconsidered *desde las letras*. How literature can work towards a social imaginary permeated by values of female empowerment and the contribution of feminisms that are able to exhort and incorporate into their projects various kinds of women and men. Feminist writing projects that work towards the view of all women as political subjects –that is, the recognition of any woman's status as *ser política*, in

Kirkwood's terms– and contribute to the positioning of such a view in the broader social imaginary. In the context of Chile's post-transition to democracy society, this issue has to do with the idea of literature as recuperating its insurgent potential at all levels, including non-erudite circles. This reflection advocates new forms of feminisms that, from literature, are willing to share responsibility for a cultural and educational legacy that may not be the authors' fault but, still, hugely affects the effectiveness of their political messages. This means feminisms that from literature show solidarity with those most affected by the legacy of the social, cultural and educational barriers left by the dictatorship, with a view to building a strategic sisterhood that seeks to reach beyond the erudite left. This aim requires writing projects that are willing not only to write about the *lumpen*, but enter into dialogue with them; feminist writing projects that firmly embrace the political goal of conversing with *pobladoras* and *obreras* too, allowing them spaces to read and write as well. It is important to keep alive the political significance of this reflection, for avoiding it debilitates resistance against patriarchy.

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