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## Transgressive Maternities: political-affective resignifications of women activists in the Chilean post-dictatorship

### Maternidades Transgresoras: resignificaciones político-afectivas de mujeres activistas en la postdictadura chilena

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#### Abstract

In the post-dictatorship Chilean context there are certain memory practices that associate women's activism in anti-dictatorial struggles with an imaginary of motherhood that, from an androcentric logic, reduce the understanding of their political resistance to the relationship with a male other. However, these unders-

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tandings are tensioned with other subaltern memories, which -from a feminist analysis- allow us to rethink motherhood by situating it in complex and dynamic socio-political contexts, highlighting its possibilities of agency. Drawing on the findings of research on gender, memory and activism, the following article aims to analyze political-affective resignifications of women's resistances that refer to motherhood and that mobilize against dictatorial violence, challenging the patriarchal structure. From here, we argue the relevance of observing memory practices on women's activisms that allow for complexifying the understanding of historically subalternized political agencies, and conclude by pointing out some challenges of this line of research around the current critical debates in Social Work.

## Resumen

En el contexto chileno de postdictadura existen ciertas prácticas de memoria que asocian los activismos de mujeres en luchas anti-dictatoriales con un imaginario de maternidad que, desde una lógica androcéntrica, reducen la comprensión de sus resistencias políticas a la relación con un otro masculino. Sin embargo, estos entendimientos se tensionan con otras memorias subalternas, las cuales -desde un análisis feminista- permiten repensar la maternidad situándola en contextos sociopolíticos complejos y dinámicos, relevando sus posibilidades de agencias. Analizando los hallazgos de una investigación sobre género, memoria y activismos, el siguiente artículo tiene por objetivo analizar resignificaciones político-afectivas de resistencias de mujeres que refieren a la maternidad y que se movilizaron en contra de las violencias dictatoriales, desafiando la estructura patriarcal. Desde aquí, sostenemos la relevancia de observar prácticas de memoria sobre activismos de mujeres que permiten complejizar el entendimiento de agencias políticas históricamente subalternizadas, para concluir señalando algunos desafíos de esta línea de investigación en torno a los debates críticos actuales en Trabajo Social.

### Palabras Clave:

Género;  
memoria;  
activismo;  
maternidades;  
afectividad

## Introduction

In this article we propose to problematize the ways in which women's activisms carried out in the post-dictatorial context in Chile are associated to a masculine other, highli-



ghting the figure of the “mother-activist”. From a feminist analysis, we are interested in questioning the assumptions from which the ideal of motherhood is constituted, in the multiple contexts in which this category makes sense. However, we emphasize the need to consider the resistances that are possible in these memories and that can mean escapes to androcentric memory practices, seeking to analyze the narratives of activists as complex, dynamic and situated experiences, which allow us to reread historically subalternized agencies.

During the civil-military dictatorship in Chile, between 1973 and 1990, the deployment of the authoritarian regime, socioeconomic reorganization, and state terrorism promoted conservative discourses and practices that reinforced the values of public order, homeland, family and religion (Maravall, 2012). Here the role of women was associated with reproductive frameworks in the private space, safeguarding housework and the positions of housewives, wives and mothers (Isla, 2017).

Despite the generalized forms of implementation of the repressive regime, opposition organizations articulated resistances where the feminine and feminist contribution would stand out, questioning the patriarchal subordination and challenging the occupation of public spaces (Palestro, 1991). Just as there was an active and important participation of women in political parties and revolutionary/armed organizations (Vidaurrázaga, 2015) and in human rights defense groups (Yáñez, 2008), various feminist groups sustained their demands articulating the struggle against the dictatorship and against patriarchy (Largo, 2014), highlighting agencies and resistances of settler, peasant, indigenous, lesbian or trans women who escaped the traditional frameworks of political participation and who are still in ignorance and invisible (Hiner, 2016).

With the end of the dictatorship in 1990, the beginning of the transitional process to democracy configured a type of political rationality that, through pacts and consensus, continued to administer the dictatorial legacy and deepened the installation of the neoliberal project (Follegati, 2011; 2013). In relation to gender issues, policies and programs focused on women were implemented, where the new administrations reconfigured a conservative discourse that linked the category of women with private space, family and motherhood (Richard, 2001). Institutionalizing the role of the welfare state and in articulation with the logic of democratic “reconciliation”, the association of women in victimizing and paternalistic figures was deepened, where the maintenance of the nuclear family continued to be a priority for the socioeconomic model (Hiner, 2013; Hiner and Azócar, 2015).



Within this historical period, the tensions between the role of many women activists with the normative gender system, administered both in dictatorship and transition, continue to be a relevant area of study and a fundamental space in addressing memories of the recent past, as we consider that hegemonic memory exercises have been marked by an androcentric and masculinizing character (Luongo, 2013; Troncoso, 2020).

Returning to some of the findings of recent research, we present a discursive analysis of interviews conducted with activists, participants of social organizations, and workers of public sites on human rights and memory, where we explore memory practices around women's activism and forms of invisibilization and recognition of these experiences. This project was carried out in collaboration with the Gender and Diversity Research Cluster of the Department of Social Work at the University of Chile, a space that is committed to the development of research from contemporary critical approaches to Social Work. In this sense, as social workers, we are especially interested in contributing to current critical debates, recognizing the historical legacy of our discipline in various areas of study and social intervention related to memories and human rights, disputing meanings and constituting work proposals with emancipatory horizons. From here, we would like to contribute to critical reflections of Social Work around collective memory studies, positioning ourselves disciplinarily from intersectional feminist approaches in dialogue with our profession.

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The following sections are structured as follows: first, a conceptual section presenting the main theoretical guidelines on the articulation of gender and memory, and the notions of affectivity and motherhood. Secondly, we point out methodological tools used in the research and a synthetic review of the main findings. Subsequently, we develop in depth the analytical discussion around the interview material, observing the possibilities of rethinking the role of "mother-activists" and the heterogeneity of experiences of this figure. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on the central ideas reviewed, and some implications and challenges for Social Work.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Gender and memory: Resignifying affects as political practices***

For the purpose of our analysis, we understand memory as a contextually situated social process and product, where the understanding and re-signification of the past is carried



out as a function of the present (Halbwachs, 1995) and diverse forms of memory are in constant dispute (Jelin, 2001; Vásquez, 2001), framed in power relations whose world-views promote and reproduce a particular social order (Calveiro, 2006). We approach memory from its social and political character, as it allows us to problematize and destabilize totalizing versions of the past, paying attention to the space of conflict and subalternized narratives (Piper et al., 2013).

Returning to the contributions of feminist theories, we are especially interested in understanding memory in articulation with gender as an analytical category (Troncoso and Piper, 2015), betting on a critical gaze that reflects on the power relations that are instituted in the ways of remembering, asking about gendered ways in which subjects are understood in memory practices, and questioning heterosexist elements of narratives of the past (López, 2018; Reading, 2014; Troncoso, 2020).

Following Troncoso and Piper (2015), we understand memory as gendered, in that memories produce gender relations and subjects, but are also constituted from processual, dynamic, complex, and situated gender positions. Therefore, memory exercises establish positions that can (re)produce the dominant gendered social order, but can also enhance the denaturalization and destabilization of that heterosexist normative coercion (Galaz et al., 2019).

Positioning ourselves from feminist perspectives, we are interested in analyzing activist memory practices and their link to gender, paying attention to affective and experiential spheres, situated in historical and political contexts. From here, we emphasize the importance of reflecting on embodied locations to re-signify political-activist action frameworks, thinking of affects as contingent social practices (Ahmed, 2015; Macon, 2014) linked to the materiality of bodies and based on complex and contradictory frames of intelligibility (Butler, 2010).

To conceptualize these political-affective resignifications, we will take up the contributions of some feminist authors who have participated in the debates around the emotional/affective turn<sup>2</sup>, such as Sara Ahmed (2015; 2018; 2018; 2019), Lauren Berlant

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<sup>2</sup> Although several debates in this field of study have problematized the differentiated understanding between affects, emotions, sensations and feelings, for the purposes of this research we will not conceptually define a distinction between emotion and affect. This decision is related to the theoretical positions from which we are going to think of the affective and the emotional as categories of critical analysis, particularly based on the contributions of feminist thinkers in the so-called emotional turn. Theorists such as Helena López, Cecilia Macón and Sara Ahmed have referred to the distinction between affect and emotion, pointing out the ways in which this separation can reproduce dichotomies between the individual/social, the bodily/cognitive or culture and nature; while other authors to whom we will refer do not explicitly refer to this distinction either (such as the work of Eve Segdwick). Taking up these proposals, a more flexible understanding of both terms is advocated, in order to address the political effects of emotions and to question the way in which the affective circulates socially.

(2012), Eve Segdwick (2018), Clare Hemmings (2005; 2012), Cecilia Macón (2014; 2020) and Helena López (2014). Based on these proposals, we will not understand affectivity as an individual/psychological expression, but as a relational framework (López, 2014), where emotions are produced as effects of circulation and contact, framed in social ties and mediated by cultural and historical interpretations and meanings (Ahmed, 2015). In this sense, our position seeks to highlight the role of affect in the construction of meanings, without dichotomizing emotion and reason, dismantling the assumption that there are good and bad affects, and that certain feelings would be pre-determined to specific and normatively delimited objects (López, 2014; Macon, 2014; Segdwick, 2018).

We believe that thinking “the affective” as a category of analysis does not imply idealizing the place of emotions. Affects constitute values and symbolic representations according to the contexts in which they emerge, and emotional practices also operate in interrelation with political orders. This may involve the reproduction of hegemonic imaginaries, legitimizing and generating racial and patriarchal violences (Berlant, 2012), allowing the invisibilization of subaltern experiences under the overrepresentation of other stories (Butler, 2010) and operating as techniques of orientation towards sexist and heteronormative ways of life (Ahmed, 2018).

Now, challenging these social norms entails the possibility of relating affectively in other ways to these norms, thinking of their effects as collective harms (Ahmed, 2015). This is not to say that emotions should become the target of anti-oppressive struggles, but rather that: “they can question the assumed character of these frameworks and thereby supply affective conditions for social critique” (Butler, 2010, p. 59). Analyzing affect in activism potentially constitutes a political and epistemological engine (Lorde in Lopez, 2014), enabling a critical understanding of activist experiences as practices that are not oriented solely under the ends-means calculus (Berlant in Macon, 2014).

Given that emotions are not inherently a starting point for the political, nor are all affects inherently revolutionary (Ahmed, 2015), what conditions the political potential of affects is the possibility of moving from personal experience to collective capacity (Hemmings, 2012). These affects emerge as politically positioned practices, where



affective solidarities represent forms of mobilization as a gesture of political will and not as a natural condition that is shared identitarily (Hemmings, 2012); that is, the ability to be affected not only by what affects us individually, but also by that which points out our precariousness and claims our constant interdependence, highlighting the need for collective political action (Butler, 2020).

### ***Motherhood as a category of critical and feminist analysis***

For our study, motherhood emerges as a relevant axis in the understanding of activists' gendered memories. Although in this article we will not delve into its various forms of theorization from feminist studies, we will take up some important elements to analyze motherhood as a social and political category.

We understand the concept of motherhood as a Western cultural institution closely linked to the construction of the feminine prototype restricted to the private space (Vidaurázaga, 2005). Historically, motherhood has been installed as a social prescription for many women, relating to being a mother with intrinsic and natural characteristics of femininity within a heteropatriarchal system (Rich, 2019). Motherhood as an economic, social and political category, operates according to its relationship with scientific, political and religious discourses and institutions, which promote a hegemonic figure of mother associated with a natural instinct of love, unconditionality and self-sacrifice (Esteban, 2011; Lagarde, 2005). This implies questioning the naturalization of the maternal function of all women, and observing it as a relational construction crossed by power relations, where the correct ways of being a mother are regulated and modes of subjectivation are regulated (Sánchez, 2016).

We observe motherhood in its forms of articulation with other institutions such as capitalist organization - highlighting the relationship between capitalist economic institutions and the invisibilization of domestic work and its corresponding feminization (Carrasco, 2001; Federici, 2018; Pérez-Orozco, 2019; Rodríguez, 2015) - and with racism, religion or heterosexuality (Yáñez, 2017).

However, and retaking the critical contributions of feminist studies, it is essential to understand its multiple, dynamic and contradictory character (Yáñez, 2017). In this sense, we opt for a feminist positioning that does not stagnate motherhood in an oppressive essentialism, but rather bets on complex and intersectional readings of motherhood as a



plural, contextual and relational practice, giving visibility and relevance to the diversity of experiences and implications of maternal care (Takševa, 2018).

In consideration of the above, we are interested in observing motherhood in contexts of activism, where the maternal role is transformed, adapted and resignified in various forms of resistance and transformation projects (Vidaurrázaga, 2005). Recently, several memory studies in Latin America have contributed to analyze the spaces of activism in dictatorship and transition, and their implications from the present, focusing on gender relations and women's experience, analyzing motherhood as a relevant factor to observe in contexts of political mobilization. From here, we are interested in questioning the understanding of essentialized hegemonic motherhood, and observing the disruption of the maternal stereotype in spaces of political activism (Ramírez, 2011), highlighting the questioning of activist-militant women who moved away from the ideal of motherhood (Sapriza, 2018; Vidaurrázaga, 2018), but also, emphasizing the forms of resignification of motherhood inscribed in other political horizons of companionship and solidarity (Sepúlveda, 2014).

## Methodology

We discuss part of a study that explored the articulations between the notions of gender, activism and social interventions of memory, aiming at understanding the ways in which state interventions in the Chilean post-dictatorship (re)produced hegemonic memories in relation to the category of gender, in connection with subalternized memories of political activism. As part of this study, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews, in a sample that included people from public institutions working on memory issues, members of civil human rights organizations and activists who participated in anti-dictatorial struggles and who are still part of organizational spaces.

We carried out a discursive analysis, reflecting on forms of enunciation that allow for concrete patterns of relationality (Campos, 2012). We analyzed the discourses of the interviewees as social practices constitutive of social relations that have truth effects (Foucault, 1979; Hernández, 2010; Iñiguez, 2003), and we wondered about the political positions that defend the enunciations and the power relations that traverse them, obser-





ving the historical conditions of production that allow a discourse to be constituted as such (Emiliozzi, 2017). We study the discourses in their productive conditions, in order to understand the forms of normalization/regularization that these discourses institute, but also the possibilities of resistance around these practices of memory. Thus, the enunciations present dispersions and heterogeneities, which account for complex and contradictory speech positions among themselves (Deleuze, 1987).

## Results

We asked the interviewees about women's activism and the ways in which they were remembered, appealing to elements such as invisibilization and forms of oppression of women during the dictatorship and transition. The main findings were divided into three central axes: the tensions in the discourses on political transition in the post-dictatorship period; the overrepresentation and invisibilization present in discourses on human rights; and finally, the gender relations promoted in the narratives. Regarding this last point, we addressed elements such as androcentrism in the narratives, the understandings of the subject "activist woman" in the discourses and the articulations between memory practices and feminism.

The results show that many women activists occupy subaltern places in the memories of anti-dictatorial social struggles, and it is recognized that traditionally there has been a male overrepresentation in the narratives of the past. In several of the interviews, memory practices about activism during the dictatorship are associated with a prototypical male leftist militant, or women are included in a universal and apparently neutral political subject. However, these interpretations are in tension with gender-based experiences and inequalities that operated within political militancy, where women's participation was made invisible and sexist roles were reproduced among its members. Here, motherhood and family ties emerge as experiences portrayed through figurations of unconditionality and sacrifice. Nevertheless, many activist discourses manage to account for the complexity of gender-based relationships, on many occasions making memory from a present marked by the contingencies of the feminist tide of 2018.

We analyze these memory practices on women's activism during the dictatorship and the transition period, tensioning this recurrent discourse of association of the woman-activist category with that of mother, axes that we will deepen below based on the conceptual elements proposed in previous sections.

## Discussion

### *Rethinking the role of “mother-activist”: Critical readings and possibilities for resistance*

One of the most relevant findings that we analyzed from the interviews is the overrepresentation of a hegemonic male figure in memory practices, as an imaginary that made other experiences of anti-dictatorial activist struggles invisible. However, when we asked about women’s political participation in this historical context, the discourses highlighted that, in the demands for the defense of human rights, truth, justice and reparation, there was a scenario in which women were leading agents:

*There is, for example, in Concepción a movement of the mothers of the students, but you say how are the mothers of the university students going to form an organization, when the students by definition do not have guardians, they do not have mothers or fathers to speak for them? And this was done because of the enormous number of arrests, so, curiously, being mothers was something that gave them a certain legitimacy to go to the police stations and regiments to plead.*

*(Interview 4, Participant, Public Institution, Female).*

*The female comrade who was fighting at that time was also the mother, she was also someone’s companion and probably fulfilled three or four other roles apart from that, unlike the gentleman, right? So, in that sense I would say that it is even more remarkable, this ability to fight on different fronts. (Interview 3, Participant, Public Institution, Male)*

As illustrated in the excerpts, many of the responses recognize women’s activism only in their condition as relatives and mothers of disappeared detainees, prisoners or politically executed. The role of motherhood is reiterated and recognized as a socially permitted place of activism for women, which could be associated with a role inherent to their gendered position. In many cases, the legitimacy of these struggles is associated with the acceptable stereotype of motherhood, which enhances family values and thinks of the woman-mother as the caretaker par excellence of the home. Here, the value of women who transcended the private space to demand the restitution of their family nucleus fragmented by State terrorism is highlighted. In this sense, the experience of motherhood defines a naturalized political place, understood as a superior experience, where the bonds between mother and child become irrevocable even for the military-patriarchal regime.

These discourses can continue to reproduce androcentric logics by reinforcing the imaginary of women as subjects whose political motivations are particular and are always in function of a male other. These narratives present motherhood from a homogeneous vision that can make invisible the complexities of these activisms, as well as their collective capacity and the political convictions and anti-dictatorial ideals that emerged from them.

However, it is important to recognize that the activisms constituted from the place of mother also allowed them to strategically challenge the dictatorial discourse that promoted a social order that relegated women to the private sphere, by inserting themselves into the space of social mobilizations in a consistent manner. As can be seen in the following quote:

*The other time I was talking about it with a gentleman who is a father, and who has been participating for a long time, and he said that for him this destroyed him as a person and immobilized him, and he was not able to do anything. But not so the mother, because the mother... had to be at 6, 5 in the morning, outside the national stadium, she did it, but to him? he said in his own words 'I consider myself a coward, an emotional coward, because I thought and the only thing I did was to cry and not be able to move and not do anything, but my wife, my wife was the opposite, that is, she had to live that mourning but also to be permanently going to the places where they said my son could be, and asking and consulting and traveling and making all that effort, but not me'. So, it is as if the woman has played a very important role here.*

*(Interview 5, Participant Civil Organization, Male).*

A reading of the quote could be understanding the mother's pain as an emotion whose natural response would be mobilization, that is, the linking of the loss with a desire for the restitution of the family. The mother emerges as a subject whose response would be action-oriented thanks to supposedly feminine affective experiences that result in her constant inclination to protect her children unconditionally in any scenario. From this point of view, the willingness to sacrifice would be based on a biological condition inherent to women, a maternal instinct impossible to associate with the paternal figure.

Our analysis offers a critical reading of these discourses, although it also recognizes that many activists may have embraced the place of motherhood as a position through which to justify their activism. We highlight the political potential of these activist practices, overcoming notions where motherhood is understood as a naturalized and

identitarian place of being a woman, to think of it as a political, affective, and situated construction. As Ahmed (2015) argues, the emergence of affects responds to contingent social relations and bonds, and not to determined objects, and in this sense, feelings such as the bravery enunciated in the story do not intrinsically respond to motherhood, nor does dispossession naturally translate into political action. This means that the experience of that mother whose pain was the object of mobilization is contingent and is not determined by an essence, as it may have been based on an ethical reflection, a desire for transformation and a deliberate search for social justice in a scenario that could have been otherwise. The mobilizing affects have to be so only insofar as there are conditions for the construction of a political place that becomes agency.

Many of these women not only transcended the frameworks of the political sphere for a limited period of time and as a function of individual interests. They also occupied a transcendental place in the struggles and resistance to the dictatorship, making demands and making visible systematic human rights violations from ethical-political places committed to truth and justice:

*I mean, I believe that, for example, the women of the group of relatives of the disappeared, of the group of the executed, that is to say, they were key, they were key. They had, they could say, they could speak publicly about many things that others could not speak about. The hunger strikes, the first hunger strike in '77, in the middle of the dictatorship with all that it meant. Look, my mother did not participate in the hunger strike, but she was in the support team, because the first strike took place at CEPAL. My mother was not a political militant, that is, she was the wife of a communist. She worked outside the home, anyway. And when the comrades were on hunger strike and the CNI, which at that time was the DINA, came to our house and went to intimidate my mother and us, and they followed us and we went to the radio, we went to the newspaper to leave communiqués, the old women chained themselves, they went to the embassies (...) We did those things. Nowadays that is nothing, but at that time it meant exposing our lives. (Interview 8, Human Rights Activist, Female)*

This quotation takes up similar elements to those analyzed above: the sacrifice and struggle involved in political actions framed in the denunciation of human rights violations and the search for social justice. However, collectivity and political organization stand out as important elements in these memories, presenting a framework of action that does not have to do with personal objectives but with a horizon shared by the community.

In the face of this, the exposure of life, bravery and political impetus that are pointed out as affective characteristics of these organizations -even when the consequences with



which the forces of repression threatened were latent- are not necessarily reduced to the stereotype of heroism of the mothers. Courage in these scenarios can be understood inter-relationally as an ethical-political sense based on the construction of alliances. It is possible to fight even in the face of fear because one is part of something, because the relational ties that are instituted in collective frameworks can give meaning to loss, but also to transformation (Butler, 2020).

### ***Heterogeneous maternities: political positions and affective resignifications in the memories of the activists***

Under the questioning of the hegemonic figure of “the mother”, an important element that emerges in the interviews analyzed is the appearance of very diverse experiences of motherhood while fighting against the dictatorship. Some of the women interviewed recalled the complex material conditions they experienced as mothers and activists, and the difficulties they had to face:

*Especially the fear... because it seemed like a nightmare. I remember, I cried, I cried..... My classmates told me “why are you crying? you don’t have to cry, my girl, if they kill you, you have to replace your comrade”. I found it so atrocious, it was like a tunnel that you were never going to get out of, that dark black tunnel and years went by and it kept getting worse, it kept getting worse, then... when they wanted to they would come to the town and shoot, suddenly the bullets would go through the shelters and one would hide the kids. ... my daughter remembers, my daughter is 39 years old and she remembers that... she remembers everything, that she used to throw herself under the bed, little kids... so that the bullets wouldn’t reach them. So it was an atrocious nightmare... It was terrible what we experienced. And even though some people are not very critically aware of the reality we lived through, but if you make them remember... they can still say yes... yes, that’s what we all lived through, that’s what the violence was like.*

*(Interview 10, Human Rights Activist, Female)*

Based on this quote, it is essential to destabilize the idealized image of the mother-activist, where certain conditions of life are taken for granted when carrying out tasks of upbringing and care from a heroic motherhood. On the contrary, these experiences were heterogeneous, intersecting with territorial, gender and class inequalities. The testimony of the interviewee gives an account of the events that constantly put the lives of the inhabitants of an impoverished population at risk, emphasizing the fact that they had to protect their children from gunshots. Motherhood in this story is framed in the denunciation of a structurally unjust system that affected her experience in a specific



way, where the interviewee positions herself politically from a “critical conscience”, recognizing what she experienced as violence. Thus, she highlights the importance given to memory by pointing out that it is the practices of memory that allow us to recognize this violence in the present, observing the implications of these experiences in their trajectories.

In addition to this, the narrative emphasizes the affective spheres that crossed their experience. We highlight how the care of children is not only remembered from emotions such as love and happiness, but also refers to feelings of fear and sadness in a risky context. We do not interpret these emotions as good or bad a priori, but rather observe their complex forms of articulation in the memories, which also make agency possible. Along these lines, it is interesting to problematize the idea that one should not mourn for one’s lost comrade, reproducing the association of grief and pain with victimization and the limitation of political action. We reinterpret this framework by highlighting how fear and grief complexify the victim/agency dichotomy (Berlant, 2012; Macon, 2014), and do not turn out to be exclusionary elements of the interviewees’ activist experience, but rather constitutive of their political mobilizations.

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Just as some accounts denounce the difficulties experienced, there are also resignifications of the past that specifically problematize the patriarchal order, referring to the ways in which the traditional dichotomy between public/private space was challenged:

*So I had to put up with it, I was a militant, I was a mother, I was a worker because I had to go out to work, because none of my parents would give me any money and in that sense, I felt guilty, I felt that I deserved that, like I deserved that, society made me feel, or because it always happened within my family... Since my grandmother was too “machista”, my grandmother constantly told my mother, you have to put up with your husband and you have to listen to your husband and all the rest of it. And my mom somehow wanted to do that too, although she wasn’t as strict with me as my grandmother was with her. Because at the same time I was also rebellious, I was rebellious in that sense and I didn’t accept that they imposed on me that I had to go back to my husband, and I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to.*

*(Interview 1, HRD Activist, Female)*

This memory exercise recalls the nexus between women, domestic space, submission and motherhood, which was promoted in a deeply conservative era, where the female role associated with childcare is exalted, with recriminations for escaping from those



normative frameworks. The interviewee refers to guilt as the main feeling associated with her insertion into the labor and political world, however, she emphasizes that this was due to social demands, problematizing the understanding of her role as something natural and rather denouncing the sexist norms that forced her to live motherhood in a certain way.

Guilt is articulated with a critical reading of the established social order, emphasizing her political positioning at the moment of rebelling against what was demanded and deciding to carry out motherhood in a different way, taking charge of the economic support of the household and getting involved in militant spaces. The interviewee re-signifies this memory from the present, identifying in the lived experiences her forms of resistance, in the light of a political context marked by feminist mobilizations. These interpretations are key in the transformation of social relations, as they transgress the immediacy of the story and allow new understandings of the reproduction of gender norms in the present, transforming memory into a political tool that constitutes frameworks for action from the interrogation of the past. From here, affects allow us to think of mobilization as an active and contingent process, where emotions do not necessarily imply leaving the past behind, but rather mobilizing from the construction of different links with the world and with others (Ahmed, 2015).

## Conclusions

In this article we wanted to reflect on hegemonic memories that promote androcentric views of the past, thinking about the articulation between ways of remembering and our gendered ways of inhabiting the world (Troncoso and Piper, 2015). Positioning ourselves from feminist theories, we were interested in observing historically marginalized memory exercises, highlighting the need to destabilize hegemonic conceptions of the past, which have configured a masculinizing official truth (Faure, 2018; López, 2018; Reading, 2014).

We analyze discourses that may reproduce the idea that women activists in dictatorship were mobilized by the fact of being mothers, based on a biological and natural role of femininity. In the face of this, we seek to make visible the tensions and complexities in these narratives, seeking to de-essentialize motherhood as an intrinsically oppressive category, and observing the ways in which it operated in different contexts, highlighting the political-affective dimensions of memory practices as key elements for their critical

understanding. Likewise, it is possible to see that women activists re-signified their experiences in past mobilizations and militancy by critically observing the patriarchal/dictatorial normative context.

We consider that the proposed analysis can contribute to re-signify memory practices about women's activism in the Chilean dictatorship and post-dictatorship, questioning the reductionist ways in which these activism have been remembered, but also highlighting the critical exercises of memory that dispute androcentric and sexist narratives. With the intention of contributing to reread these memories from a feminist exercise, we are interested in rethinking these memory practices as collective exercises that make visible and name other subjectivities and struggles (Troncoso, 2020). Likewise, it seems relevant to us to emphasize that analyzing the effects of emotions on memories can allow us to interpret forms of mobilization and social bonding in different ways. Here the struggles narrated by the activists interviewed should not be understood as the individual expression of good or bad feelings, but rather as affective dimensions that mobilize a way of questioning the established and constituent processes of collective transformation (Ahmed, 2015).

Likewise, we highlight the importance of not relativizing the ethical and affective practices that many women develop around motherhood, and think of a feminist horizon that is not against affective family bonds, but rather resists the patriarchal power relations that materialize in these spaces (hooks, 2017). Therefore, this critique of motherhood as a sexist imperative does not imply discarding care and affective experiences, but rather resignifying them as a fundamental ethical model to rethink the organization of the societies we inhabit (Tronto, 2013).

We consider that research in this line presents challenges to revise the understandings around exercises of memory, opening new areas of research that continue to develop the potential of the affective turn in the analysis of these social phenomena, as a field of relevance for disciplinary studies in Social Work. Thus, it seems relevant to point out some theoretical and analytical possibilities that were not addressed in this article but that emerged as interesting points that could be explored in the future, such as: the resignifications of memory practices of activists who are questioned from feminism in the light of the present; the analysis of intergenerational links observed in these forms of memory as political-affective implications; and finally, some reflections situated around our position as researchers from the emotional turn, thinking of the research process as a complex field that institutes meanings and that is implied in the results and theoretical analyses.





From these reflections, we are interested in reiterating the relevance of carrying out research exercises within the framework of Social Work, contributing to current disciplinary debates. As social workers, the possibility of training ourselves through research constituted a key space to rethink our professional work and to carry out practices of situated reflexivity. From this point of view, we believe that positioning ourselves from intersectional feminist approaches is a potential way to develop lines of work committed to struggles and resistance movements, which take up legacies and horizons of social transformation. In this same line, this research project allowed us to approach these theoretical and ethical positions, in dialogue with the political perspectives that social memory studies can suggest to Social Work. Thinking about our work as social workers in a broader historical framework than the present, invites us to redefine the disciplinary horizons as intergenerational collective projects that emerge from past/present relationships.

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