

Girl protagonists of Chilean dictatorship novels for the young

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Abstract (159)

Narratives for children about Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (1973–89) written by the sons and daughters of that era constitute a recognised genre. For the most part the genre features boy characters who not only have voice and choice, but also unrealistically win the fight against the oppressors. This paper examines two of the rare works with girl protagonists, paying attention to how their voices are constructed: Mariana Osorio Gumá's *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros* [*Maybe the birds will return*] (Mexico, 2013) and *Matilde* by Carola Martínez Arroyo (Argentina, 2016). I apply Deleuze's (2004) theoretical lens of the girl's gaze to identify patterns that afford the construction of lucid protagonists in terms of recurring modes of language production (silence, ordered discourse, invention), giving rise to inquisitive girls. Through the construction of a girl's lucid gaze, which can withstand and narrate the horrors of the dictatorship, these novels offer young audiences a powerful space for historic and collective memory.

Introduction

I was born in Chile and grew up during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-89), which meant that lockdowns, repression, exile and losing your life for thinking differently, were part of everyday life. Most of my primary school classmates were the daughters and sons of Pinochet's supporters. They had sophisticated knowledge about weapons, and recurrent games at the playground evolved around military strategies for

capturing and killing enemies. Similarly to the narrative functions of play identified in picture books about the First World War analysed by Higonnet (1998), Chilean children were so mobilized by the dictatorship that it was impossible to remain politically neutral, even in the playground. Violence modelled our games to such an extent that once I ended up in Hospital unconscious. Games such as 'La Ruma' [The pile] consisting in building a human pyramid on top of the opposing band, or 'Sol' [Sun] which was about running and getting kicked once you run out of breath, were recurrent. Violence along with discipline marked the day. Each morning we marched in sepulchral silence and impeccable uniforms on the school's concrete yard, singing the national anthem while raising the country and school flags. I always felt anxious, thinking that if I were chosen to raise the flag, I would do it either too quickly or not quickly enough; in any case, not as required. I attribute this constant sense of inadequacy and fear to the background presence of dictatorship, along with the ability I developed to pay attention to details or daydream, two opposing defence mechanisms to zone out of reality. These strategies helped me navigate the tensions of my childhood and planted the seeds for becoming a writer.

But I was never chosen. Not coming from a military family was seen as a weakness. While each day my classmates' parents were promoted and driven about in the luxury of new shiny cars by chauffeurs and security guards carrying guns, my father lost his job for not taking part in a supposedly voluntary demonstration supporting Pinochet. From those memories and experiences I wrote *El diario de Noelia* [Noelia's diary] (2016). As an adult, while pursuing a PhD and raising my children in a different country, the distance from my context and extended family allowed me to remember and reflect on my childhood. More precisely, I felt the need to write about how growing up in a dictatorship differed from growing up in a democracy. Beyond biographical reasons, I crafted a girl protagonist because her voice afforded the possibility to create a new world that could provide alternative universes to describe and question oppression.

The corpus

I am aware of eight girl protagonists of Chilean dictatorship novels for the young: four published in Chile and four outside (see Table 1). Although this corpus might be larger, finding these novels is difficult as they tend to be published in small numbers with restricted promotion and circulation. In the case of Chile, editors also tend to add vague descriptions by referring to the 80s in general instead of spelling out the key word 'dictatorship'. This strategy needs to be understood in the context of the market forces that regulate local children literature's publishing. The main buyer of children's books is usually the State, which selects what seems suitable to be distributed in schools and public libraries. If a book is perceived to be 'politically radical' or openly criticises the dictatorship, it still tends to be censored, ignored or questioned regarding its educational quality. Therefore, some editors try to smuggle the content by avoiding referring directly to it. The relative invisibility of this corpus is then a telling symptom of the local ongoing difficulty of dealing with the troubled past.

[Insert Table 1]

All the female protagonists of this corpus appear in novels written by women. Although female authors have created male protagonists when writing fiction about the Chilean dictatorship for the young (see for example *La Luna Noche* (2013) [The Long Night], by Sofia Gallo), it is striking that no male authors have included girl protagonists in their novels. Acclaimed work such as *La Composición* (2000) [The Composition] by Antonio Skármeta, Roberto Ampuero's *La Guerra de los Duraznos* (2001) [The Peach War] or *La Bicicleta Mágica de Sergio Krumm* (2013) [Sergio Krumm's Magical Bicycle] by Marcelo Guajardo, are all male dominated. What is more, these writers have tended to reproduce rather than confront traditional gender stereotypes by not only constructing fearless, active and brave male protagonists, but also by minimising and relegating females to the background (Munoz-Chereau, 2017). That said, depictions of girl protagonists in novels by females are not necessarily exempt from the structural binds that diminish creative imagination and reproduce gender stereotypes (Fette, 2017). In fact, Troncoso Araya's (2017) analysis of *September* argues that the storyline reproduces gender clichés through its use of a protagonist who is submissive, superficial, and in need of a man for political awakening.

The body of literature portraying girl protagonists as a whole is significant, but space prohibits discussing all of them. Therefore, I focus on two novels that create girl protagonists written by ‘insiders’, meaning authors who draw on their direct experience of growing up during the dictatorship. Focusing on ‘insider’ writers is a way for Chileans to reclaim ‘our’ story, as the dictatorship has been told to international readers for far too long by Anglo-American authors. Bringing attention to the way in which insider female authors construct girl protagonists in novels for the young on Chilean dictatorship counterbalances this cultural appropriation.

I focus my analysis on *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros* (2013) [Maybe the birds will return] by Mariana Osorio Gumá, published in Mexico after receiving the Lipp award, the Mexican version of the Lipp la brasserie award for manuscripts for the young; and Carola Martínez Arroyo’s *Matilde* (2016), published in Argentina, which received in 2019 the Colibrí Medal from the Chilean section of the International Board on Books for Young People [IBBY].

[insert image 1]

[insert image Image 2]

The literature of sons and daughters

Within the Chilean post-dictatorship, the so-called ‘literatura de los hijos’ [literature of sons and daughters] proposed by Alejandro Zambra (in his novel *Formas de volver a casa* (2011) [Ways of going home]) ‘establish[es] an aesthetic and discursive link between shared memory and the development [of] imaginaries [by] those who were children during the dictatorial past and that are writers in the post-dictatorial present’ (Franken Osorio, 2017 187-8). These narratives have common elements, such as telling the story from the perspective of children growing up during the dictatorship, belonging to the literatures of the self, being a hybrid between autobiography and memoir, and being strongly reflexive (Franken Osorio, 2017). While many scholars have engaged with this corpus when dealing with adult audiences (Carreño, 2009; Jeftanovich, 2011; Alvarez, 2013; Amaro, 2014; Rojas, 2015; Botinnelli, 2016, in Franken Osorio, 2017), the parallel emergence

of narratives for children has received relatively less critical engagement. When the children's literature branch of this scholarship has been undertaken, the theoretical standpoints have developed in complementary ways; specifically, the accuracy of narrated events has been contrasted to both historic and remembered accounts of life under the dictatorship (Troncoso Araya, 2015; 2017). Munoz-Chereau (2017) paid critical attention to how the tension between telling and protecting young audiences from the troubled past is navigated and ultimately how credible these accounts are. Recently, García-González (2018) scrutinised the extent to which the intensities that these narratives' materiality (through the impact on audiences' bodies and senses) affords the possibility to elaborate the affect of traumatic experiences. Thus, this article adds to this emerging field by paying attention to the construction of the gaze of girl protagonists in the chosen texts, and by extension within the genre more widely.

The significance of girl protagonists

In the fields of cultural studies in general and children's literature specifically, the potential of children and young people to produce their own cultural representations is a contested arena. The debate has been summarised as an argument between the opposing aims of telling versus protecting children from the horrors of the past. As it is impossible to 'write about the horrific episodes in history if we believe that children are innocent beings in need of protection' (Munoz-Chereau, 2017, 236), writers addressing the Chilean dictatorship need to recognize children as capable of (re)producing their own political representations. Regarding the figure of the girl in particular, it encodes both an effective symbol of hope against public anxieties, but also a traditionally harmless figure, which can be inspirational as well as demobilising (Taft, 2020). However, Giles Deleuze's discussion of the protagonist of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's books' in *The Logic of Sense* (2004) is empowering, as he reserves to the figure of the girl the most formidable power: the ability to slide along the edge of words and things, the realisation of becoming. 'This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present (...) causing future and past, more and less, too much and not enough to coincide in the simultaneity of a rebellious matter' (Deleuze, 2004, 3). Deleuze conceives the girl as

a figure in a state of perpetual becoming, between words and things, where sense is produced and the adults' present and allegedly deep understanding is viewed as a mere compromise among language and being. 'It is not therefore a question of the *adventurers of Alice*, but of *Alice's adventure*: her climb to the surface, her disavowal of false depth and her discovery that everything happens at the border' (Deleuze, 2004, 12). By extension, by being positioned at the edge, girls are often imperceptible, and in that way, powerful. Thus, following Deleuze, the power of the girl derives paradoxically from her multiplicity and capacity to question discourses by examining the given power structures from the margins, like a small fly on a wall in a room where an important meeting is happening. As both children and females, girls are intersectionally positioned at the margins, acquiring the power to act invisibly and question the apparent order. From this position hierarchies can be questioned and even disrupted. As they are distant from the centre, girls can interrogate discourses and examine the given power structures. Thus, girl's gaze offers a different point of view from which to explore the story of the country's political struggle.

However, when comparing male and female protagonists of my corpus, a power differential against girls remains. Applying Roberta Seelinger Trites' (2018) critical markers of voice, choice and community, girls remain disempowered particularly in their limited choices and encounters with communities located beyond the private space. By contrast, boys protagonists have been represented as 'superheroes whose actions counteract repression' (Munoz-Chereau, 2017, 243). For example, boys save the life of an activist wounded in Ampuero's *La Guerra de los Duraznos* [The Peach War], or avoid a trap set by the military through creating a fictitious essay of what the protagonist's family did in the evenings in Skármeta's *La Composición* [The Composition]. As argued before (Munoz-Chereau, 2017), these stories fabricate unrealistic representations of children successfully winning the battle against the oppressive regime, a feat that is far removed from historic and memory accounts.

Meanwhile the girl's gaze is not exclusive to fictional characters. Rather, it has been identified in diaries produced by real and fictional girls during the post-dictatorship in Chile. *El Diario de Francisca* [Francisca's Diary], similar to Ana Frank's (1947) and Zlata Filipovic's (1993) diary, consists of the personal

account written by twelve-year-old Chilean girl Francisca Marquez during the dictatorship. Jara (2017) argues that 'La mirada de la niña deambula por el mundo que ella habita y del que se va apropiando cada vez que lo (d)escribe. El mundo de las niñas se sitúa en este espacio de lucidez, en este imitar y registrar, entre lo que es percibido (que le es nuevo pero que se le promete como potencialmente propio) y lo dado por sentado' (21). [The girl's gaze wanders through the world that she inhabits and which she appropriates every time she writes it. The world of girls is situated in this lucid space, in this imitating and recording, between what is perceived (which is new to them but is promised as potentially their own) and what is taken for granted]. Therefore, in real and fictional diaries, the lucid girl's gaze is constructed from a discursive position that oscillates between, on the one hand, perceiving the violence, conflict and danger that alters ordinary life, and, on the other, maintaining a sense of normality by describing the everyday routine of intimate family life. The lucidity of this gaze derives, as argued by Deleuze (2004) not from taking reality for granted. By contrast, girl's lucid gaze approaches and reconstructs reality as a mystery that needs to be resolved. I draw on Jara's articulation of the girl's lucid gaze as it appears to be exclusive to girl protagonists when (re)constructing meanings surrounding the dictatorship. Therefore wide-opened girls situated at the edge of events constitute a new voice to tell the dictatorship story.

Patterns in girl protagonists dictatorship novels for the young

When female writers who were children during the dictatorship have transformed their memories into novels for the young, their resulting narratives are similar. I identify comparable aesthetic and discursive patterns by paying close attention to the construction of the girl protagonist's perspective. More precisely, following Deleuze (2004) I identify patterns that afford the construction of inquisitive girl protagonists with a lucid gaze through recurring modes of language production. Before devoting the next section to explore these, I highlight the main similarities in the storylines of my corpus.

Similar storylines

Matilde and *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros*'s storylines are analogous. Matilde and Mar are the 8 years-old daughters of 'disappeared' fathers. After these are taken away by the military, both girls live in Santiago with

their broken families. Both families struggle psychologically since the fathers are taken away. Both protagonists access the discourses of dictatorship supporters through relationships with people outside their homes, such as teachers, neighbours, and members of their extended families. These discourses clash with their own sense of identity and truth. In both novels, the girls are positioned in their own parallel universe, as adults are too occupied with their own struggles resulting from the political situation, to care for them emotionally. Particularly their maternal absence -who devote their time to find their disappeared husbands- open spaces for building tight relationships with significant others. In the case of *Matilde*, it is the grandmother who, while mourning her son's disappearance, raises her grandchild. In the absence of her parents' emotional availability, Mar also builds a strong bond with the maid, Celia. Since their fathers' disappearances, the girls are aware that life is not safe anymore and suffer the aftermath of psychological trauma. When political violence and persecution threat to destroy the remaining family, both protagonists go to exile to Mexico. However, there are also some important differences. Matilde's family struggle financially, whereas Mar comes from a well-to-do family where money does not represent a daily issue. Whilst after a decade Matilde goes back to Chile coinciding with the restoration of democracy, Mar makes a home in the new country and never returns. Also, Matilde's dad is murdered by the police while Mar's dad survives, though the painful effects of torture on him prevail.

Recurring modes of language production

A recent discourse analysis conducted by Kohl (2020) of *La Composición* [The Composition] by Antonio Skármenta, identified three modes of language production –the languages of order, silence and invention– when examining the way in which the book's protagonist navigates the violence perpetrated by the Chilean military dictatorship. As this is allegedly the most influential text on the Chilean dictatorship for the young, and the modes of language identified resonate with the linguistic turns identified by Deleuze in Alice as previously described, I draw on these modes of language to analyse my corpus. First, the language of order emerges through the use of intransitive imperatives issued by soldiers and other figures of authority such as teachers and priests. This language truncates the possibility of dialogue and imposes authority through

hierarchical relationships. Drawing an example from *Alice*, the language of order is represented by Humpty Dumpty's remark when saying 'When I use a word'- Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose to mean-neither more, nor less' (Carroll, 2005, 128). The language of order is patent in both novels by the use of 'black lists' with the names of 'extremists' that needed to be persecuted and through the constant use of oppositions to describe reality as binary, creating an artificial 'us' and 'them' view of society where citizens are positioned either with or against each other. In *Matilde's* case, this language is used to state and summarise the latest facts resulting from the concrete irruption of the dictatorship in her life. In order to cope with the traumatic events that alter her existence, Matilde creates lists using the mechanism of rationalisation, which corresponds with typical strategies of trauma fiction in their avoidance of the emotional response of events.

Matilde se queda sola y mentalmente hace una lista de las cosas que sabe:

- A su papá se lo llevaron los militares ese día que ellas se escaparon.
- A su papá lo tienen en un lugar del que no lo dejan salir.
- Su mamá tampoco lo vio nunca más. Ella fue un montón de veces a preguntar a un lugar, pero nadie, nunca, le contestó.
- Su papá no es el único: hay muchos otros (51-2).

[Matilde is left alone and mentally makes a list of the things she knows:

- His dad was taken away by the military that day they ran away.
- They have their dad in a place where they don't allow him leave.
- Her mum never saw him again either. She has been to the place to ask lots of times, but nobody ever replied.
- Her dad is not the only one: there are many others].

Matilde's list connects her loss ('his dad was taken away') with the country's ('there are many others'). Matilde reflects the extent to which she is a product of her social world by describing her life using

the binary distinctions that have come to frame the nation's experience, where security and belonging can only be found in the private sphere of family. By contrast, the public space appears as a threat full of enemies.

De a poco van dejando de recibir visitas, solo van a verlas Andrea y el padrino. Pero es mejor, así no hay que seguir tantas reglas de lo que se puede decir y de lo que no.

De personas a las que se puede saludar y a las que no. De lugares a los que se puede ir y a los que no.

De la gente a la que siguen viendo y los que les dan la espalda.

Y de todos esos amigos a los que van a despedir al aeropuerto y que no ven más y ni pueden volver a hablar de ellos (63).

[Little by little they stop receiving visits, they only see Andrea and Matilde's godfather. But that way is better, so you don't have to follow so many rules of what can and cannot be said.

Of people who can be greeted and those who cannot.

Of places where you can go and where you can't.

Of the people they continue to see and those who have turned their backs on you.

And of all those friends who are going to the airport to say goodbye and they won't see you any more and they can't speak to you again].

For Mar in *Maybe the birds will return*, Kohl's language of order reaches her unconscious, finding a place in her recurring dreams about a bird that falls after losing its feathers, which can be interpreted as a way of unconsciously processing the lack of freedom and impossibility to get out of the oppressive situation. These dreams include examples of proclamations, frequently heard at the beginning of the dictatorship: 'Los comandos militares patrullarán distintas zonas de la ciudad para reestablecer la seguridad y el orden' (9).

[Military troops will patrol different areas of the city, in order to restore order]. These proclamations also become present through a radio voice Mar hears from the kitchen. 'Las personas que no lleven consigo el carnet de identidad serán consignadas a las autoridades castrenses (10). [People who do not carry their identity card will be consigned to the military authorities]. Mar, like Matilde, also uses lists to describe what is left after soldiers violently break into her home.

Celia está terminando de recoger las cuestiones rotas, destrozadas, botadas por el suelo.

Pedazos de cojines.

Libros rotos.

Greda rota.

Los discos de la Violeta pisoteados (81).

[Celia is finishing picking up the bits that are broken, shattered, thrown on the ground.

Pieces of cushions

Broken books

Broken clay

Violeta's records, trampled].

Second, the language of silence is imposed when adults try to put an end to the child's questioning by being evasive because they recognise the dangers of knowing. Ellipses replace dialogues as 'characters deliberately grow silent to elude surveillance. The unsayable is, therefore, imposition, suffering, inaction, gesture, resistance, utopia, cunning, and survival strategy' (Kohl, 2020, 9).

Although Matilde plays in the way girls growing up in 1980s Chile used to play –for instance, collecting Sara Kay's album stickers and dreaming about Care Bears– her awareness of what is happening in the country fills her with preoccupations, thwarting the needs of tranquillity and expression typically ascribed to childhood. Silence is used as a mechanism to navigate the political tensions derived from the dictatorship. At school, she lies to her teacher and classmates about her father's absence. Instead of saying that he has 'disappeared', she claims that he is away travelling.

'Qué suerte que tienes, Mati, que tu papá viaje tanto.

Matilde se siente aliviada, pero también un poco triste.

Hay cosas que nunca le puede contar a nadie. Ni siquiera a su mejor amiga' (11).

[How lucky you are, Mati, to have a dad who travels so much.

Matilde is relieved, but also a little sad.

There are things she can never tell anyone. Not even her best friend].

This awareness of the need for silence derives from home, where her grandmother openly explains what is happening; for example, by referring to dangerous words that can only be used in the intimacy of their house.

Matilde aprovecha y le hace a la abuela todas las preguntas que tiene. Le pregunta por qué mataron a su padrino, quién lo mató, si su padrino era malo, si su papá está muerto, si la van a matar a su mamá, si alguna vez van a vivir felices sin estas cosas. La abuela se toma el tiempo para contestar cada cosa, Con absoluta sinceridad, le dice que no sabe si su papá está muerto. Que su padrino era una buena persona. Que los que mataron a su padrino son los mismos que se llevaron a su papá. Y que no tiene idea de cómo va a seguir todo (91-2).

[Matilde takes advantage and asks her grandma all the questions she has. She asks why her godfather was killed, who killed him, whether her godfather was bad, whether her dad is dead, and if they are going to kill her mother, if they are ever going to live happily again. Grandma takes time to answer each of her questions, with absolute sincerity and says she doesn't know if her dad is dead. That her godfather was a good person. That those who killed her godfather are the same ones who took her dad. And that she doesn't know how things are going to end up].

Knowing what is happening in her country profoundly disrupts Matilde's childhood, as she bears the heavy weight of truth. Whilst she is constantly reminded that silence is a refuge for oppression, the lack of trust in the external world leaves her with the need to become an impostor in order to survive. These tensions exhaust her; she thinks that 'a veces llevar secretos guardados es como andar con un montón de bolsos pesados, que cansan y que lo peor de todo es que no sabes muy bien dónde esconderlos' (16). [...carrying secrets is like walking around with a bunch of heavy bags, it's tiring and worst of all, you don't know very well where to hide them.]

Eventually Matilde's weariness and silence explode in anger: 'Todo le da rabia. Le da rabia la escuela, donde nadie dice nada y todo el mundo parece que ni se entera de lo que pasa. ¿Cómo no se van a dar cuenta si se da cuenta ella, que es chica?' (85). [Everything makes her angry. She is angry at school, where nobody says anything and everyone seems not to know what is happening. How can they not realize if she realizes, even though she is a small girl?]. However, Matilde and her family mobilise their anger, pain and fear by taking part in collective protests about human rights violations in Chile. Matilde takes part in 'casserole protests' (banging pots whilst the electric light is cut off protecting their identities), singing and yelling for justice, producing flyers at home with anti-Pinochet propaganda.

Although Mar's parents and uncles try to evade her inquisitive questions, they end up openly explaining what is happening.

-Mar, oíste, ¿verdad? ¿Te das cuenta cómo está la cuestión?

-Sí, ya sé, mamá. La cuestión está negra, pero muy negra.

-Sí, Mar. Como tú quieras decirlo, pero tienes que saberlo: si llegan los milicos a buscar a papá o a este cabro, o lo que sea, ni una palabra. No puedes decir que estuvimos quemando cosas, ni que vino el tío Andrés, ni nada de lo que hayas oído o visto. ¿Te queda claro? Tienes que portarte como grande, Mar- y me da un abrazo que me saca el aire (57).

[Mar, you heard, right? Do you realise how the situation is?

-Yes, I know, mum. The situation is dark, very dark.

Yes, Mar. However you want to say it, but you have to know this: if the soldiers come looking for your father or this kid, or whatever, not a word. You can't say we were burning things, or that Uncle Andrés came, or anything you've heard or seen. Is that clear? You have to behave like a grown up, Mar, - and she gives me a hug that takes my breath away].

Mar's mum explains the scary situation but warns her that she needs to remain silent. She explicitly asks her daughter 'to behave like a grown up', which is paradoxically an impossible task for a child. Mar consequently feels that her breath is taken away, as that demand is beyond her possibilities.

After experiencing traumatic military violence, Mar stops talking. Her selective mutism is another symptom of post-traumatic stress. While she ceases to speak to the outside world, internally Mar is full of words, giving way to the emergence of an internal voice, populated with invented language. When she experiences sad events, –such as watching her father burning the family books for fear that they will be regarded as evidence of their political activism, or when police break her beloved treasure box– she describes herself as being emptied of words. This silence also relates to a promise she keeps to herself to save her father, conscious that words possess the power to alter and create reality. It is only when her father is reunited with the family in their exile in Mexico that Mar is able to talk again. Here she regains the sense of belonging, and steps out again into the world of spoken language.

Finally, the language of invention displays the ability of the protagonist not only to construct and narrate the story, but also by finding meanings in chaos, resisting reactively oppression and verbalising traumatic experiences. Linking this language with Deleuze's (2004) reading of Alice, Matilde and Mar, the three characters are inquisitive girls that pose critical questions about the meaning of words in particular and the world that surround them in general. According to Deleuze, Alice's questioning of meaning and signification of things, subverts official discourses and gives way to new senses. By playing with the literal dimension of words, the three girls discover that sense making entails power. Words mean what someone has defined, which makes meaning intractable and interchangeable. As they are aware that sense making is not a fixed matter, by questioning the way meaning is constructed, they disestablish the very core foundation of language.

In *Matilde* the language of invention is also evident in the protagonist's attempts at silencing or concealing truth discussed earlier. It is also a strategy to resist the order of dictatorship; for example, when singing the national anthem at school. Despite the strict discipline and control of the ceremony, the author plays with a pun derived on the anthem's first stanza: 'Se pone en la fila y empiezan los acordes del himno, todos los niños se paran derechitos con las manos atrás y cantan: 'Puro Chile, es tu cielo a su lado...'. (8). [She gets in line and the chords of the hymn begin, all the children stand still with their hands on their backs and sing: 'How pure, Chile, is your sky at her side' ...]. Instead of 'singing 'How pure, Chile, is your blue sky' as

the song goes. Thus, from the very beginning of the novel, Matilde's own take on reality and her capacity to create an alternative world through language, is constructed. This perspective allows the introduction of humorous stances relying largely on linguistic play, such as the one derived from the misunderstanding of the meaning of 'exile':

¿Y por qué vive en Suecia?

—Porque tuvieron que escapar y se fueron al exilio. —¿Exilio está en Suecia?

—No, ellas se fueron al exilio.

Matilde asiente con la cabeza, sin entender' (52).

[-And why do they live in Sweden?

-Because they had to escape and went into exile.

Is Toexile in Sweden?

-No, they went into exile.

Matilde nods, not understanding].

The language of invention is also distinctive in Mar, who finds words by paying attention to her parents' and other adults' conversations. Like a girl with a net catching butterflies, Mar listens attentively to adult discourses which she hears in conversations and on the radio. Like an explorer of the unknown, Mar collects new words, whose meanings she does not entirely comprehend, but repeats anyway and asks others about: new words are held out as keys to open mysteries. In this way she learns the meaning of 'disappeared' and 'raided'. As Mar encounters events derived from the dictatorship (violence, disappearance, exile), she creates her own private language by scrambling and playing with Spanish, Mapuzungún, Italian, and the literal dimension of words.

-Allanaron la editorial, quemaron todo: el material, las máquinas, todo.

Allanaron.

Junto con esa otra: desaparecidos.

-Allanaron su casa.

-Los milicos allanaron la oficina y quemaron los libros.

-Allanaron y se llevaron las cosas.

-Allanaron y le desaparecieron al marido.

-Desaparecieron al hijo.

-Al tío.

-A la hermana.

-*Allanaron y desaparecido*. Diría que son palabras fea. Aunque no sé si una palabra es fea de nacimiento o se hace fea. La cuestión es que cuando oigo *allanado*, trato de pensar en una piscina o en el mar: allá nado. Así intento hacerla linda, porque da pena por ella. Qué culpa tiene esa palabra de lo que hacen los milicos? (190).

[They raided the publishing house, burned everything: the material, the machines, everything.

Raided.

Another one of those words that are heard here from time to time.

Raided. Along with that other one: disappeared.

-They raided their house.

- The soldiers raided the office and burned the books.

-They raided and took things.

-They raided and disappeared her husband.

-They disappeared.

-The uncle.

-The sister.

-They raided and disappeared. I would say they are ugly words. Although I don't know if a word is ugly from birth or if it becomes ugly. The point is that when I hear them, I try to think of a swimming pool or the sea:

Rai ded. So I try to make it cute, because it is painful. What fault does the word have for the military doings?].

Mar reflects on the 'ugly words' that she hears from time to time such as 'allanado' [raided] by splitting it into two: *allá* (there) and *nado* (I swim). She calls this procedure to 'embellishing' words by keeping its sounds but altering its meaning. Mar concludes that words are not responsible themselves for the meanings they carry (What fault does the word have for the military doings?) so she makes justice by creatively altering their meaning.

Discussion

Through their girl fictional characters, Martínez Arroyo and Osorio Gumá offer a new account of the Chilean dictatorship for the young. In line with the opposing aims of telling versus protection children identified earlier (Munoz-Chereau, 2017), these novels expose young audiences to the country's troubled past. In doing so, Matilde's and Mar's childhoods are profoundly disrupted; they are treated and behave in many ways like adults, able to navigate successfully the tensions that result from growing up in an oppressive regime. Focusing on the way in which each girl's lucid gaze (Jara, 2017) emerges whilst these characters try to make sense of their disrupted childhoods, reveals how Matilde's and Mar's positioning allows their deep observation and ability to pose questions, combined with their socialisation with significant adults. A characteristic that these girl protagonists share is their ability to wonder about the political context in the face of suppressed freedoms. Although both novels reflect a hierarchy in which girls are dominated by significant adults who in turn are dominated by the dictatorship, they are able to question the fairness of given situations, disclosing how things are not necessarily the way adults imply they are.

Mar and Matilde are rational, independent, brave and assertive. In line with other narratives by the sons and daughters of the dictatorship (Franken Osorio, 2017), they are reflexive and empowered in their quests for making sense of the political circumstances that have disrupted their daily lives. In this way, traditional gender stereotypes are to some extent confronted (Taylor, 2009) as the girls actively construct their own voices. Since both girls are aware of the importance of keeping secrets derived from the pact of silence they have been raised in, they become heroines able to avoid military traps, to understand the subtleties of censorship and political correctness, and crucially, to respect the boundaries between what can be said and

what needs to be silenced to avoid life threatening situations. This gives rise to a combination of the languages of order, silence and invention which enables each girl to construct a lucid gaze to access the meanings of dictatorship. At the same time, it takes away contested freedoms that tend to be associated with childhood, such as being innocent, vulnerable, transparent or living and moving carefree (Honeyman, 2018). However, these qualities can be seen as feminist anti-values such that by constructing girls as lucid and empowered, we run the risk of holding them accountable for telling the story, solving adult problems, and assuming the responsibility that in other areas (such as the law) remain restricted to adults.

Conclusion

The analysis of two Chilean dictatorship novels for the young featuring girl protagonists has focused on the way the girls' voices are constructed drawing on Deleuze's (2004) discussion of the protagonist of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's books' in *The Logic of Sense*. Constructing young female figures within a traditional patriarchal system such as Chile, opens up the possibility of making visible and reclaiming voices that are concealed from the public sphere. The social invisibility resulting from their disempowering markers of age and sex, paradoxically affords the protagonists the capacity to observe without being observed. In this way, Matilde and Mar enact the power identified by Deleuze that derives from being at the margins of reality. Therefore, their ability to penetrate the adult political world offers readers a powerful and new account of what it was like to grow up in a dictatorship.

Finally, Matilde and Mar are the result of recurring patterns shared by their authors which crystallise in the cultural production of the sons and daughters of the dictatorship (Franken Osorio, 2017). They also resonate with 'insider' works published earlier (Munoz-Chereau, 2017), in the sense that protagonists are politically aware but do not fight directly their parents' battle as the corpus featuring boys protagonists have tended to fabricate. Although this stance could appear at first sight as less radical or politically committed than depicting protagonists who risk their lives fighting their parents' cause, I argue that a lucid gaze is radical in its own way, as it offers a new perspective for seeing and representing the dictatorship. In this way, female authors inform their audience about the dictatorship whilst elaborating on what it meant for them to grow up

under this regime. Ultimately, through the inquisitive gazes of Mar and Matilde, young readers can access powerful spaces for memory and agency in the face of political oppression. As this corpus is still constructing the meanings of the dictatorship as well as providing tools for the imagination, exploration, and re-signification of the past for young audiences (Munoz-Chereau, 2017), their role is critical, especially in a country such as Chile, where many continue to support Pinochet's dictatorship, and victims are still waiting for justice to condemn human rights violations.

Author bio (75 words)

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