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Mon Laferte: Retro-Feminist Future Pop from Post-Dictatorship Chile

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Abstract

Born in 1983, at the tail end of Chile's dictatorship (1973-1990), and becoming prominent as an artist in Chile in 2003 and later well-known across Latin America and worldwide, Mon Laferte's career has been marked by its dynamic relationship with retro-futuristic aesthetics. Covering a range of genres, from futuristic Latin-Pop, the retro-Latin ballads of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, to Latin America's folkloric traditions including Mexican regional music, bolero and even *salsa*, Laferte's work combines the nostalgic sounds of the popular music of Latin America's recent past with a set of intensely personal narratives. Utilizing Mark Fisher's and Bifo Berardi's theorizations of hauntology and lost futures, Simon Reynolds' insights into the retro, and combining these with Ahmed's insights on feminism, this article proposes that Mon Laferte's work as a musician, lyricist, cover-artist, and producer of visual media, functions towards overcoming the dual traumas of Chile's dictatorship and Latin America's *machismo*, by producing an aesthetic territory that privileges feminine and traditionally feminized spaces, experiences, affects and discourses. In this way social traumas are enmeshed with personal ones, and a retro-futurist voice emerges, which side-steps masculine visions of the social and the political, proposing instead an introspective vision that is filtered through the feminine experience.

Keywords: Mon Laferte, Retro-futurism, Feminist Pop, Pain/Trauma, Chilean Pop Music

1. Introduction

Mon Laferte (Norma Monserrat Bustamante Laferte) is one of Chile's most successful contemporary popular musical artists. From 2015 onwards, she has enjoyed a high degree of success as a recording artist and performer across the Spanish-speaking world and globally. She has won two Latin Grammy awards (2019, 2021), and in 2024 she was the subject of the Netflix documentary, *Mon Laferte: te amo*. Yet, however successful in the last decade, Laferte's story has humble origins: born in the regional city of Viña del Mar in 1983, ten years into Chile's military dictatorship (1973-1990), Laferte began her career as a singer/composer in her early life, dropping out of school in order to perform in the streets, night clubs and local festivals of her hometown, earning $1500 Chilean pesos a day (approximately USD $1.50) until 2002.

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In 2002, her luck changed when she was selected to participate in the popular national television talent show *Rojo: Fama Contrafama* (*Red: Fame Against Fame*). Under the name of Montserrat Bustamente, she took part in the show from 2002 until 2007, nurturing a public profile, and professionalizing her career as a performer. While still in the show, Bustamante released her 2003 debut album, *La chica de rojo* (*The Girl from Red*), receiving Gold and Platinum Album awards in Chile within its first month of release. This album marked the beginning of her career as a recording artist, while it also highlighted her ambiguous relationship to pre-existing genres of popular music, most notably the romantic ballad and bolero genres, an ambiguity which, as we shall see in the pages that follow, would prove central to the later retro-futurist pop she would release under the name of Mon Laferte, where she would develop her sound around genres traditionally associated with feminine audiences, yet which were traditionally controlled, in the sense of composition and production, by men, reverting completely the power dynamic in the genres by emphasizing intimately lived experiences, from the perspective of feminine lived experience.

Despite her successful first album, Laferte later declared that *La chica de rojo* did not faithfully represent her artistic identity, as the show producers did not allow her to include her original compositions. Many of the songs on the album spoke of themes of love and romance from the position of a naive female speaker, distant from her musical and personal interests, which lay, at the time, more strongly in alternative-rock music and singer-songwriter compositions ("La vida antes de Mon Laferte", 2017, paragraph 18) with lyrics based around themes of personal experience, and which later developed to include public statements on feminism and solidarity with topical social struggles in Chile. Nevertheless, given Laferte's background, the exposure from the album allowed her to earn a living as a performer, alongside her work on the television show until, in 2007, she moved permanently to Mexico, where she changed her artistic name to Mon Laferte and started performing covers in nightclubs again, before eventually performing her own repertoire.

In 2011, she released the independent album *Desechable* (*Disposable*) – her first album under the name Mon Laferte – and in 2013, *Tornasol* (*Iridiscence*), also independently produced. These albums represent a dramatic contrast to her prior work. The songs in these albums are much more varied, owing much to various pop-rock styles, and are characterized by their confronting lyrics that mark her departure from the naive image fabricated by her former producers. Visually, Laferte adopts a striking image, comprised of long dark hair, bold make up, and sleeveless short dresses that accentuate her retro-styled tattoos. Lyrically, these albums touch on themes of self-empowerment, on romantic experiences articulated from Laferte's own perspective (rather than from the stereotypes of the masculine songwriter of romantic ballads), and on the expression of the interiority of intimate lived experiences.

Since 2013's *Tornasol*, Mon Laferte, who became a Mexican citizen in 2022, has released six albums on major label, Universal Music. In 2024, she embarked on a tour of the Americas and Europe and signed to US-label Sony Music Latin. Although Laferte's career is still developing and underway, the albums released in the period spanning from 2013 until present are considered her mature work, where her own interests and influences are most developed and distilled in terms of their musical, lyrical and visual content. Laferte's work over this last decade has continued to explore the sonic and songwriting possibilities offered by different genres, mixing her own futuristic-sounding Latin-pop sensibilities, with the retro-sonic imprints of distinctly Latin American popular music genres from the mid-20th century onwards, including bolero, *salsa*, *cumbia*, as well as more distinctly folkloric traditions from Chile and from Mexico's regional music genres. During the same period of time, Laferte has also largely eschewed the alternative-rock and heavy rock influences

of her independently produced 2011 and 2013 albums, embracing instead the intimacy offered by her dialogue with popular music genres from the recent past. As an artist, Laferte has focused on her own compositions, largely articulated around themes of lived experiences, underscoring the effects of emotion and affect in response to personal experiences, including childhood, romantic encounters, social commentary and reflections on the past, as well as her own experience of celebrity.

This article proposes that Mon Laferte's work as a musician, lyricist, cover-artist, and producer of visual media, functions towards the overcoming of the dual traumas of Chile's dictatorship and Latin America's patriarchal *machismo*, by creating, via her retro-aesthetics, an expressive territory that hijacks past genres of music, intervening in their discourses and sonorities to privilege traditionally feminized spaces, experiences, affects and discourses. By intervening in older genres, Laferte articulates her femininity from a first-person perspective, creating a saturating effect which de-centers the patriarchal original bent of the genres that she re-works (Benisz, 2021, 3). In this way social traumas are enmeshed with personal ones, and a retro-futurist voice emerges, which side-steps masculine visions of the social and the political, proposing instead an introspective vision that is filtered through an embodied or lived feminine experience, first based in Chile, and then in Mexico.

2. Retro-Feminist Future-Pop: Memory between the Past and Future in a Post-Dictatorship Society

Numerous scholars have signaled the paradoxical role that popular music plays in the opening decades of the 21st century, with respect to its relationship to the past, the present and to the future. Throughout the 20th century, popular music in the Western world had been "the herald of the future" (Attali, 1985, 11), intimately linked to the production of the new, and deeply tied to social changes because of the plasticity and adaptability of its aesthetic textures and its status as economic vanguard of the culture industries. Because of its ties to the counterculture of the 1960s, for the rest of the 20th century music held a special status, whereby

> music culture was a probe that played a major role in preparing the population to *enjoy* a future that was no longer white, male or heterosexual, a future in which the relinquishing of identities that were in any case poor fictions would be a blessed relief. (Fisher, 2014, 28)

In contrast, at the turn of the new century, popular music and popular culture had, for many scholars, become characterized by its "retromania" and an "addiction to its own past" (Reynolds, 2011). Popular culture was questioned for its inability to face up to the present moment,

> as though we had become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience. […] an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history. (Jameson, 1998, 9)

For Fisher, Reynolds, Jameson and other scholars working on the politics of memory, this was a sign of popular culture's connections to a generalized sense of nostalgia expressed in the face of the profound economic, social and political transformations of the early 21st century:

> Nostalgia for the past also intensified because the world was changing faster. Economic transformations, technological innovations and sociocultural shifts all meant that for the first time there were increasingly stark differences between the world that you grew up in and the world in which you grew old. (Reynolds, 2011, xxvi)

For scholar Franco "Bifo" Berardi, however, the turn towards the retro-nostalgic is also profoundly linked to the cultural horizons and material expectations produced by the political movements of the twentieth century, which

> were shaped in the conceptual frameworks of an ever progressing development, albeit through different methodologies: the Hegelo-Marxist mythology of *Aufhebung* and instauration of the new totality of Communism; the bourgeois mythology of a linear development of welfare and democracy; the technocratic mythology of the all-encompassing power of scientific knowledge, and so on. (Berardi, 2011, 19)

In the present, the defeat of alternative political projects by the drive to embrace neoliberal rationality in all spheres of life, a process in which Chile was at the global vanguard (Klein, 2007), has eviscerated all this horizon of utopian thinking:

> The idea of the future is central in the ideology and in the energy of the twentieth century, and in many ways it is mixed with the idea of utopia. […] In the last three decades of the century the utopian imagination was slowly overturned, and has been replaced by the dystopian imagination. (Berardi, 2011, 17)

Thus, instead of horizons of solidarity, and political projects built on class struggle, in the twenty-first century, life is thought of as competition: "Captured in the dynamics of war, everyday life is ready to be subjected to the unlimited rule of the commodity" (Berardi, 2011, 36). In response, popular culture has stopped looking toward the future, and instead, remains frozen in a retrospective gaze contemplating the past traumas that have created the present moment.

From a hauntological perspective, Holas Allimant (2024) argues that Chile's popular music remains haunted by the ghosts of its recent past, particularly with respect to the utopic horizon represented by the Chilean Popular Unity project of democratic socialism (1970-1973), which was violently interrupted by a 17 year-long military dictatorship (1973-1990), in which Chile underwent a radical counter-revolution, and a profound social and economic set of transformations (Klein, 2007). As a result of this trauma, Holas Allimant (2024, 9) identifies three retro-nostalgic tendencies in Chile's contemporary popular music: firstly, a "nostalgia" that has been reterritorialized by capital (represented for example, in the reunion tours of famous bands from the late 20th century); secondly, that of a pop-depressive phase (represented, for instance, in Chile's neo-psychedelic scene), where the nostalgic is expressed as a subtle form of resistance against capital's individualist discourses of entrepreneurship; and thirdly, a retro-combative tendency that through nostalgia reactivates symbols from Chile's past political history in the face of present social struggles (represented in the work of activist-musicians like Ana Tijoux). In what follows, we situate Mon Laferte's work in a fourth space that branches out from the "retro combative" (Holas Allimant, 2024, 9) and its rekindling of the past in order to change the present: in Laferte's nostalgic dialogue with genres of music from Chile's and Latin America's recent pasts, she creates new aesthetic and political possibilities, reinscribing older musical genres with new potential in an intimate and personal expression of feminism that speaks back to the past, in order to create a new horizon of possibility in the present.

Laferte's critical dialogue with the popular music of the recent past begins to become apparent in the 2015 album *Mon Laferte Vol. 1*, where she starts to fuse traditional musical styles with intimate, autobiographical storytelling. In this work, Laferte unveils her interest in older musical styles, such as bolero, romantic ballad, Mexican and Andean folk music. Laferte dialogues with these genres in a gesture that echoes the work of one of her main influences: Chilean singer and folklorist, Violeta Parra (1917-1967). As scholars have noted (Torres, 2004; Vilches, 2004; Kim, 2018; Valdebenito, 2019), in the 1950s and 1960s, Parra, who was a major figure in Chile's folk-music scene (as performer and singer/songwriter), was also engaged in the documentation of the musical traditions of Chile's countryside,

which were endangered due to mass migration from the country to the capital city, Santiago. Parra's work aimed to vindicate the "difference" of such unique peripheral sounds, which she reinterpreted, and made her own (Torres, 2004, paragraph 77). Parra, like Laferte, used these references as a starting point in her own artistic practice, adding a personal touch as she would incorporate influences into her own authorial perspective, innovating and creating novelty within an established and highly codified musical tradition. Laferte also identifies with Parra in their shared lack of formal musical training, as both artists developed their musical skills by observing family members at home: Parra learned from her parents, while Laferte was taught by her grandmother, Norma. In both cases, musical techniques are not as important as their artistic honesty and sensitivity. Hence, Laferte states: "Violeta was not formally trained in the arts, but she had a unique expression, and that is what I take from her. I am her daughter. If you really want to express yourself, you must listen to your heart"[3] ("Mon Laferte homenajea el legado de Violeta Parra," 2025, paragraph 9). Thus, in this statement, we can clearly see Laferte's two-fold engagement with tradition: her work is characterized by its dialogue with older musical styles, which in turn, is personalized in her retrieval of personal memories within the context of family tradition, and these experiences are expressed in lyrics that narrate intimate stories of her own lived experience.

Musically, Laferte's work is characterized by its amalgamation of the retro-nostalgic elements, expressed in the employment of old-fashioned rhythms, styles and aesthetics of genres like the romantic ballad, bolero, *cumbia, salsa*, and other regional and folkloric musical traditions, with the sounds of contemporary pop. Her songwriting is characterized by its articulation of emotionally loaded lyrics, often based on biographical experience, which strongly highlights the feminine voice and perspective, sharing them with her audience. This notion of sharing the intimate experience through song is central to her artistic production and to the political potential implicit in it, for as Patrick Hogan (2010, 185) explains, emotions are not directly transferred but are mediated and represented through narratives. These narratives reach an audience who interpret the emotions through their own sensory and cognitive frameworks. Thus, it is notable that Laferte decides to materialize her own traumatic experiences in her song lyrics, sharing them with her listeners through the language of music. In doing this, Laferte enmeshes her own personal, embodied and lived experience as feminine subject in a patriarchal society, with the public domain, in an act of solidarity and activism that brings catharsis to a society that is also dealing with its own process of healing: Chile, with respect to the trauma of the 1973-1990 Pinochet dictatorship, and more broadly Latin America, with respect to the way patriarchal values are embedded in popular culture.

Having established here the basic coordinates of Laferte's retro-nostalgic musical topography and noted the importance of her highly personal lyrical and emotive themes, and how these nevertheless extend beyond the realm of her own individual experience, in the following section we will contextualize Laferte's work as part of a new movement of Chilean feminist singers and songwriters that exercise activism by voicing their pains and traumas throughout their artistic compositions. The following section contextualizes the emergence of feminism in Chilean music since the 1973-1990 dictatorship until the present day, providing examples of activism in popular song.

[3] All translations are ours unless otherwise stated.

3. Feminism in Chilean Song Today

The representation of a feminine/feminist voice in Chilean popular music can be traced back to Violeta Parra. Chilean musicologist Lorena Valdebenito (2019) notes that, although songs explicitly addressing womanhood are rare in Parra's corpus, two standout pieces in her canon are "Versos por despedida a Gabriela Mistral" ("Farewell verses to Gabriela Mistral") (1957) and "Qué vamos a hacer (Ayúdame Valentina)" ("What are we going to do! [Help me Valentina]") (1963), dedicated respectively to the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral and the Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova. In each of these songs, Parra establishes a fictional dialogue with these women, an action that serves as homage to their contribution to world history. In one, Parra concentrates on Mistral's pedagogical and literary contributions, which resulted in her Nobel Prize in literature award in 1945, in the other, she highlights Tereshknova's intelligence and scientific achievements, positioning her as an exemplary woman from whom Parra can learn about complex scientific and political topics (Valdebenito, 2019, 5). If explicitly addressing the social and scientific contribution of women in her songs positions Violeta Parra as a pioneering feminist, as is argued by Valdebenito, Parra's songs can also be interpreted as feminist interventions in the folk tradition, as they foreground her own experiences and subjectivity, giving voice to the feminine exposure to reality in a time in which this was uncommon, at least in popular and folk music traditions. As a result, Parra would prove a central influence in the Chilean New Song movement[4] which came to prominence in the 1960s and in the lead up to the 1970 elections, and which was intimately linked to the political program of the *Vía chilena al socialismo* (*The Chilean Road to Socialism*). Despite Parra's artistic influence and eminent work as a folklorist and singer-songwriter, the New Song movement was mostly made up of male singers and bands, who eschewed the personal themes explored in Parra's music for more explicitly political themes. Musicologist Pablo Rojas argues that, given the powerful image associated with manhood during this period, expressed in the idea of the socialist "new man," discussions about gender roles were not considered a priority for New Song artists at the time (2022, 2), who were focused on class struggle. If gender relations would prove to be a blind-spot during the transition to the Democratic Socialist government (1970-1973), gender inequality would be radically entrenched in the 1973-1990 dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1915-2006).

Beyond the patriarchal logic that underlies authoritarian regimes in the Spanish-speaking world (Zamora Garrao, 2008), the Pinochet dictatorship ensured that traditional patriarchal gender roles were clearly defined in the 1981 constitution which contained an explicit prohibition against supporting ideologies that undermined the patriarchal, traditional family, by enshrining gendered norms in the national educational system and reinforcing these in state-controlled mass media (Kirkwood, 1986, 46). This focus on traditional gender roles had a counterproductive effect, triggering women to voice their demands and create alliances against patriarchy.

Following the return to democracy in 1990, Chilean feminism experienced a decline, largely due to the absence of a common adversary and a unified political agenda. Many feminist political groups sought to position the newly established democratic government as an ally, particularly after the creation of the National Women's Service (SERNAM). In contrast, the popular wing of the feminist movement sought to preserve an autonomous and critical stance, remaining dissident. As a result, Chilean feminism became divided between those

[4] "New Song began as a fusion of traditional musical forms with socially relevant lyrics [...]. Beginning in the mid-1960s, [this movement] grew and consolidated throughout the rest of the decade and flourished during the 1970–73 presidency of Salvador Allende. The music of the Nueva Canción was outlawed after the military coup d'état of 1973" (Morris, 1986, 118).

who pursued institutional alliances and those who defended independence and dissent (Feliú, 2009, 703). The institutional sector, closely aligned with the political establishment and enjoying greater visibility, came to represent a hegemonic form of feminism. Their proximity to governmental discourse led them to embrace a more conciliatory approach, emphasizing women's roles within the family rather than advocating for rights related to still politically contentious issues such as divorce or abortion. This moderation was influenced by the Catholic Church and the prevailing conservative values of the political right (Richard, 2001, 230). Within this context, the notion of "gender" was often condemned and portrayed as a threat to moral and social conventions. Instead, so-called "natural" female traits – such as emotionality, delicacy, intuition, and practicality – were associated with traditionally feminine domains like healthcare, education, and domestic life. This essentialist framing reinforced binary gender distinctions and contributed to the perception of femininity as inherently subordinate to masculinity (Richard, 2001, 235). Toward the end of the 20th century the gender discussion in Chile shifted to sexual and reproductive rights. Demands for the legalization of abortion, the incorporation of secular sex education in schools, access to safe contraceptive methods, the right to non-discrimination based on gender or sexuality, and the shaping of sexual policies that are not founded on compulsory heterosexuality, became the main topics of debate (Morán, 2013, 486). In this scenario, feminist movements lose their capacity to mobilize, being undermined by a generalized devaluation of collective action, within a context where political decisions were increasingly shaped through inter-elite dialogues (Morán, 2013, 501).

Providing an alternative vision of the role of women in Chilean society – disconnected from largely institutionalized debates about gender-relations in Chile –, in the early 2000s, feminist singers and bands like *Venus*, *Mamma Soul* and *Corrosivas* emerge with compositions that criticize patriarchy. Their songs spoke about a different type of woman: corrosive, independent, incisive, lascivious and sexual, fearless and determined to say who they were and what they wanted, thus inverting the roles of masculinity and femininity imposed by the establishment (Becker, 2011, 57). This contrasted sharply with the submissive image projected at the time by Anglo singers – such as Whitney Houston and Celine Dion –, and even that of popular local singers like Myriam Hernández, who performed songs centered on emotional suffering and heartbreak caused by male neglect and indifference (Becker, 2011, 56).

The arrival of the Internet in Chilean households marked a turning point for female musicians, who were empowered by the availability of the home studio and the internet as a means of production and distribution of music, side-stepping the censorship and processes of the major labels. Additionally, due to the growth in the number of music schools during the 2000s, there was a notable increase in the number of female instrumentalists and, consequently, in women's bands (Becker, 2011, 58). Among Chilean young women there was a proliferation of bands that revisit themes such as gender, lesbianism, segregation, and machismo, adopting a stance that is less about reclamation and more about provocation and playfulness, characteristic of post-feminism. Among young rock musicians, a new vision of femininity emerges – one centered on the empowerment of individual capacities, with live performances emphasizing a critical interrogation of gender (Becker, 2011, 58).

A key figure in the voicing of feminist values in popular music is that of Chilean hip-hop musician Ana Tijoux. Her 2014 song "Antipatriarca" ("Antipatriarch") – among multiple others in a musical career that began in the 1990s with the groundbreaking Chilean hip-hop group *Makiza* – functions as an artifact of feminist activism that advocates for women's autonomy, freedom and empowerment, while rejecting patriarchal violence. The

song urges its recipients to reject and transform the condition of subordination and discrimination that affects women (Barros, 2020, 60). "Antipatriarca" is notable because it highlights the links between popular music and social movements in Chile and Latin America in the contemporary moment: the song's 2015 film clip connects to the Zeitgeist of the #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneLess) movement, a feminist campaign that began in Argentina in response to rising femicide rates and gender-based violence, which quickly spread across the region, strongly resonating in Chile, a country with an alarming history of gender violence. In 2016, as women marched on the streets of Santiago, student leaders called on protesters to bring photocopies of the lyrics to the song "Antipatriarca", which became a manifesto for the thousands of women mobilized against sexual violence (Barros, 2020, 59).

For Chilean feminist and philosopher Olga Grau, this movement was characterized by the ways in which female bodies became a powerful symbol of political rebellion, used in novel, unexpected ways. Although critically questioned throughout feminist history as a univocal signifier, whether as a maternal body, a heteronormative sexual object, or as a corporeality confined to certain functions or domains, in the protests the body acquired a revolutionary role (Grau, 2019, paragraph 4): the actions of young women baring their breasts in public protests became a clear gesture of the female body's cultural resignification, signifying women's refusal to be seen as objects of masculine possession, and therefore, physically manipulated or violated (Grau, 2019, paragraph 4).

In October 2019, after a succession of events that accumulated "precariousness and structural inequality that neoliberal policies configured, materialised, and naturalised in Chilean society" (Garcés, 2019, 483), people spontaneously organized a "series of national-scale protests that placed Chile's postmillennial socio-political order [...] under structural crisis." A number

> of barricades became commonplace, and in the later months of 2019, seeing hooded individuals in streets next to flaming barricades had become routine, a basic element of protests that were being held multiple times a week by mobilized individuals. (Woods, 2022, 29)

This physically embodied intervention, which was widespread in the protests, gained international visibility in the cultural sphere, with the performance of "Un violador en tu camino" ("A Rapist in your Path") by the collective group LASTESIS. The overall discontent expressed in the street protests sought to demonstrate "that the State and its various representatives are equally rapists insofar as they enable gender-based civil violence by granting impunity to those exercising violence on women's bodies" (Woods, 2022, 104).

It is in this general context, laden with explicit links between popular music and feminist social mobilization, that we situate Laferte's career as a musical artist. In the pages that follow we relate how her retro-futurist aesthetic forms a novel link between the musical and the political that foregrounds a particularly reflexive feminist lived experience.

4. Laferte's Retro-Feminist Future Pop: between the Present and the Past

Despite her move to Mexico, Laferte used her public image to raise awareness on behalf of her fellow Chileans and their broadly socially progressive demands by condemning the police brutality and violence enforced against protesting civilians. This was demonstrated at the 2019 Latin Grammys award ceremony, where she appeared partially nude with a green bandana around her neck exposing her breasts to photographers with the text "En Chile torturan violan matan" ("In Chile, they torture, rape and kill"). Because of this

statement, publicized in mass-media across the globe, Laferte was charged by the Chilean public prosecutor's office, to which she publicly responded:

> When you are born poor and suffer from hunger you cannot keep silent when witnessing social injustices. I became a singer because of a matter of necessity as I needed to provide for my family. I said what I said because I thought it was the right thing. […] My preferred language to raise my voice is my songs. That is how I best speak. (Laferte in FESTIVALDEVINACHILE, 2020)

Although the charges were dropped, Laferte's statement demonstrates that, while her work as a singer-songwriter did not often explicitly deal with political positions, it nevertheless proposes a critical dialogue with social expectations about the role of women in Chilean society and politics. Inspired by the protests, in November 2019, she released the single "Plata Ta Tá" with Puerto Rican rapper Guaynna, with lyrics that allude to the Chilean social uprising. In this song she unveils her critique of the abuse of power and wealth accumulation in her homeland, signaling the power of the feminist movement in creating a popular voice in the lead up to the 2019 protests:

> Al final todo es porque quieren plata
> Los mismos huevones de siempre
> No están ni ahí con la gente
> Todo es plata, plata, plata
>
> Nos sacamos los sostenes
> Levantamos los pañuelos
> Verde como la marihuana
> Esa que vende la anciana...
>
> *In the end, it's all about the cash*
> *The same old bastards*
> *They couldn't care less for the people*
> *It's money, money, money*
>
> *We take off our bras*
> *Raise our scarves*
> *Green like weed*
> *Sold by grandma...*
>
> (Laferte & Guaynna, 2019)

However radicalized by the Chilean social uprising, this song also illustrates the strategies we have discussed over the last several pages as central to Laferte's art: the combination of the futuristic aesthetics of contemporary pop music with an intervention and dialogue with the regional, popular and historical folk music of the past; the articulation of demands from the perspective of the feminine lived experience, expressed in the first-person. This combination of the contemporary and futuristic is evidenced in the song's own musical composition as a contemporary reggaeton rhythm with a marked dembow beat, which is combined with varied instruments, such as the Andean *charango,* as well as woodwinds employed in a manner reminiscent of the *diabladas* (the marches and dance of the religious *La Tirana* festival in Chile's north, a notion which is reinforced by the carnival costumes used by the performers in the film clip). As if the artist were reflecting on her decision to embrace reggaeton, a musical statement that seems to depart from her more retro-nostalgic musical repertoire, Laferte's lyrics state "Le entré al reggaetón, y hasta el culo te muevo, pa' así mandarte el mensaje de nuevo" ("I got into reggaeton, and I'll even shake my butt, just to get the message through"). Where the song's musically incorporates the sounds of other genres, its lyrics refer to *cumbia* and reggaeton, and they allude to Shakira's 2005 hit "La Tortura" ("Torture"), before directly citing the now standard *ranchera* from 1971 "El Rey" ("The King"), composed by José Alfredo Jiménez, inverting its inherently masculine original message – articulated around the singer's position as "King" –, by placing its

famous refrain "con dinero y sin dinero, yo hago siempre lo que quiero" ("with or without money, I always do as I please") in the mouth of an empowered feminine singer:

> Como chicle, la plata uno la estira
> Es una tortura como dijo Shakira
> Yo con dinero, o sin dinero
> Al final hago siempre lo que quiero
>
> *Like chewing gum, one stretches the out money*
> *Like Shakira said, it's torture*
> *With money, or without*
> *In the end I always do what I want.*
>
> (Laferte & Guaynna, 2019)

Even in songs that appear to be composed in contemporary idioms, like the apparent reggaeton of "Plata ta tá", Laferte engages in an active dialogue with music from Latin America's recent past, engaging a retro-nostalgic dimension in her pop music, where the musical forms of the past are transformed in a dialogue with the present. In the pages above we have contextualized Laferte's relationship to pre-existing forms of feminism in Chile, outlining through the analysis of "Plata ta tá" her intervention in politics and in the generic conventions of past music (expressed in the retro-nostalgic element of her otherwise contemporary pop); in the next section we focus on demonstrating that some of her musical work is the result of a reflective, introspective process that focuses on the intimacy of her own lived experience, but which nevertheless contributes to social and feminist activism in the Chilean and Latin American context.

5. Pain, Trauma and Embodied Experience in Laferte's Songwriting

The use of the body as an instrument of feminist demands in Chile's late protests – as Grau asserts – was a clear gesture of displacement of sexualized meanings. In what follows we argue that, distinct from the eloquent and explicit forms of feminist activism performed by other Chilean contemporary singers, Laferte's songs unveil a reflexive feminist poetics that is rooted in the artist's own memories, pains and traumas. Through Laferte's musical artistry these are transformed into cathartic narratives that function as messages of inspiration, hope and healing addressed to her female listeners, as evidenced in the song "Pa' dónde se fue" ("Where did he go?") from *La trenza* (*The Braid*, 2017), which is analyzed further below.

For feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, one of the drives of emotional responses in feminism is pain. Ahmed posits that pain is not to be forgotten in the exercise of identifying feminist demands. Rather, feminists' task is to remember how "embodied subjects come to be wounded in the first place, which requires that [they] learn to read that pain," interpret it, and transform it into a political action (Ahmed, 2004, 173). Although the experience of pain may be subjective – as it affects individuals differently –, Ahmed posits that the value of identifying pain as a feminist drive is to understand that one's pain may also be the pain of others. In that sense, sharing stories of pain allows women "to make connections" and move subjects into a process of "education for critical consciousness of collective political resistance" (hooks quoted in Ahmed, 2004, 174). A logical response to pain is anger, which is often loaded with information and energy regarding a past event. However, Ahmed argues that anger should also be used to open to the future. Thus, identifying anger and transforming it into a vehicle to heal past wounds can be a feminist exercise:

> [Anger] moves us by moving us outwards: while it creates an object, it also is not simply directed against an object, but becomes a response to the world as such. […] Feminist anger involves a reading of the world, a reading of how, for example, gender hierarchy is implicated

> in other forms of power relations, including race, class and sexuality, or how gender norms regulate bodies and spaces. Anger against objects or events, directed against this or that, moves feminism into a bigger critique of 'what is', as a critique that loses an object, and opens itself up to possibilities that cannot be simply located or found in the present. (Ahmed, 2004, 176)

These notions on emotions, pain and anger – as characteristics of feminism – are reflected throughout Laferte's compositions. In the song "Pa' dónde se fue," which is notable for its foregrounding of Andean folk rhythms with the characteristic sound of *charangos*, Andean-style drumming, with brass and wind instruments (including *quena* or Andean panpipes), Laferte acts as the song's lyric speaker, narrating the pain and consequences of her father's abandonment as a child, a traumatic episode she has elsewhere described as follows:

> My parents divorced when I was a child. After losing custody of my sister and me, my father vanished – both physically and financially. […] We knocked on countless doors, searching, hoping, but we never found him. I hated every moment of it. When I turned 17, I decided to try again – this time on my own terms. I managed to get his phone number and called him. He hung up. I called again. He hung up. (Laferte in Reposi & Grandi, 2024)

Laferte uses the first two stanzas of the song to narrate episodes of her childhood. In the first one, she remembers waiting for her father while she was accompanied by "shadows," a metaphor that alludes to the vanishing memory of his presence in her life. She also states that she used to play with "the waves," an idea that connects to her lived experience of her beach hometown. She asks the waves "where did he go?" hoping to get a response from the sea, lacking one from her family:

> Yo me acompañaba con las sombras
> Esperando, esperándote
> A veces yo jugaba con las olas
> Les preguntaba, pa' dónde se fue?
> *I kept myself company with the shadows*
> *Waiting, waiting for you*
> *Sometimes I played with the waves*
> *I asked them, where did he go?*
>
> (Laferte, 2017)

The second verse addresses the process of growing up and becoming a teenager. In a poetic register, Laferte states that while her "eyelashes danced," "spiders" were crawling up her body. We interpret the spiders as the threats that taunted her adolescence – violence and sexual abuse – and which she had to confront alone, without a father figure. Then, the verse "con el dedito tapaba el sol" ("I tried to block the sun with my little finger") – borrowed from the popular Spanish saying "tapar el sol con un dedo" ("to block the sun with one finger"), which means to try to deny or to hide something that is too big to cover up – demonstrates her attempt to carry on a normal life, although covering up the trauma of her father's abandonment was all too painful to ignore:

> Mientras me bailaban las pestañas
> Se me iban subiendo las arañas
> Con el dedito tapaba el sol
> Mientras se me ahogaba el corazón.
>
> *While my eyelashes danced,*
> *The spiders were crawling up me.*
> *I tried to block the sun with my little finger,*
> *While my heart was drowning.*

The song's chorus concentrates particularly on the idea of emptiness. The lyric speaker compares herself with a broken-off spring, unable to bloom. She also states that even today she feels the burden of her father's abandonment. Therefore, she keeps searching for his humanity, his fatherhood "through people, through men, through so many men...":

Como primavera entrecortá'
Yo me quedé a la mitad
Hasta hoy me siento en soledad
Buscando en miles, buscando en gente
Buscando en hombres, en tantos hombres
Tu humanidad, tu paternidad.

Like a broken-off spring,
I was left halfway.
To this day I feel alone,
Searching through thousands, searching through people,
Searching through men, through so many men,
For your humanity, your fatherhood.

Toward the second half of the song, aware that life can be unfair ("it sometimes gives, it sometimes takes") Laferte takes a reconciliatory approach. Her father had the opportunity to "make daisies grow" and not make them "wither," yet, he made his choices, and she no longer blames him, wishing to "fit him into her life," in an eloquent and unconditional gesture of generosity and love. Hence, she asks him: "Have you ever stopped to think what you're going to do? When you're old, who will take care of you?" Although the question is not answered in the song, it is assumed that Laferte keeps her door open should he want to return, demonstrating that she has been able to forgive, and most importantly, to heal. As we have seen, in this song, the object of thought is her father. His abandonment has had an impact on both her identity and her becoming. However, at the same time, it has allowed her to recognize her lacks and weaknesses and to find ways to heal, suggesting that her musical artistry and reflection is an act of both personal catharsis and feminist activism.

6. Conclusion

As we have shown in the above pages, Mon Laferte's artistic trajectory is characterized, sonically, by the interplay between the retro-nostalgic and the futuristic sounds of Latin America's musical past and present. Lyrically, her music is shaped by her personal lived experience, but by privileging in her songs an empowered, reflexive feminine first-person subject, it also dialogues with collective political horizons, particularly in light of the 2019 Chilean social uprising. Laferte's work creates an intimate, feminine space that counters dominant patriarchal attitudes and narratives by foregrounding personal and social traumas through emotionally charged music and visuals, giving voice to an intimate feminist expression. Laferte's songs transform anger and trauma into acts of healing and solidarity, fostering a shared space of connection where feminine experiences and emotions are expressed, validated, and charged with the potential for social change. Through this lens, her retro-futurist voice not only articulates an introspective feminist vision but also demonstrates music's capacity to bridge personal and political realms, enabling emotional and social transformation and healing.

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