



# The desire was placed in the militancy. Paradoxes and gender reappropriations in the experience of revolutionary women (Argentina, 1970)<sup>1</sup>

El deseo estaba puesto en la militancia. Paradojas y reapropiaciones de género en la experiencia de mujeres revolucionarias (Argentina, 1970)

María Florencia Actis\*

*National University of Mar del Plata*

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\* PhD in Communication (School of Journalism and Social Communication, National University of La Plata). Group of Studies on Family, Gender, and Subjectivities, National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina/National Scientific and Technical Research Council, Argentina. [florenciaactis@gmail.com](mailto:florenciaactis@gmail.com), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7266-7838>, <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=1e6MzQMAAAAJGhl=esGoi=ao>

## Resumen

**Introducción:** el trabajo surge de la inquietud hacia las experiencias y formas de subjetivación de género de mujeres militantes de organizaciones armadas en la Argentina de los años 70. Se entiende que sus singulares derivas en mujeres-militantes constituyen procesos de interpelación crítica a las construcciones victimizantes presentes en las tecnologías (generizadas) de memorialización. **Método:** para su indagación y análisis, se realizaron entrevistas biográfico-narrativas con dos mujeres que ocuparon puestos de responsabilidad dentro de la organización político-militar Montoneros, en las que se hace hincapié en el entrecruce de sus experiencias políticas y personales. **Resultados:** si bien no eran todavía mujeres permeadas por la teoría de género, sus narrativas revelan una “actitud feminista ante la vida” y una radicalización performática de la premisa “lo personal es político”, en tanto las prácticas de militancia funcionaban —y hasta la actualidad— como lugares nodales, y privilegiados, de producción de deseo. **Conclusión:** las informantes, a través de su “hacer experiencia” militante, rearticulaban formas novedosas de ser-mujeres, problematizando la ideación femenina como grupo identitario homogéneo y despolitizado.

## Palabras clave

Mujer; Participación política; Montoneros; Historia argentina; Memoria colectiva; Género; Feminismo.

## Abstract

**Introduction:** This article arises from a concern towards the experiences and forms of gender subjectivation of women belonging to armed organizations in Argentina in the 1970s. It is conceived that their unique drifts in women-militants constitute processes of critical interpellation to victimizing constructions of (gendered) memorialization technologies. **Method:** For this, biographical-narrative interviews were conducted with two women who held positions of responsibility within the Montoneros political-military organization, emphasizing the intersection of their political and personal experiences. **Results:** Although they were not permeated by gender theory yet, their narratives reveal a “feminist attitude towards life”, and a performatic radicalization of the premise “the personal is political”, while the militancy practices functioned —and until today— as nodal and privileged places of desire production. **Conclusion:** The informants, through their militant “doing experience”, rearticulated new forms of being-women, problematizing feminine ideation as a homogeneous and depoliticized identity group.

## Keywords

Woman; Political participation; Montoneros; Argentine history; Collective memory; Gender; Feminism.

## Introduction

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This paper articulates gender studies with memory studies by exploring the militant experiences of Argentine women in the 1970s, seeking to retrace the ways of doing politics as a woman and, simultaneously, the ways of “doing gender” through the militant practice. It is also part of a field of debate that has set out to look at the exercise of power within political-military organizations from a gender perspective, particularly the roles played by women, but also at the everyday life sphere, their interpersonal relationships, and the militant subjectivity.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to point out among its consensuses the male chauvinism of the revolutionary projects given by the traditionalist bias of the militant family, the androgyny of its political subject (the New Man), as well as the deliberate rejection of the feminist demands considered as petty-bourgeois deviations, that is, not only were gender issues not addressed, but an almost exclusive relationship of mutual distrust prevailed between the left and feminism.

Likewise, these new historiographical “truths” give rise to imaginaries of militants, whether as masculinized women or self-sacrificing victims, which converge in a conflictive representation of politics, violence, and power as essentially patriarchal practices. Throughout the paper and based on two in-depth interviews with militants of the Montoneros organization, these conceptions of the recent past will be problematized, considering the limitations of the corpus, the biases imposed by the socio-political context in which the interviews take place and their subsequent analysis.

We start from the hypothesis that the experiences of militant women, even today, destabilize (even subvert) the cultural meanings of gender and, particularly, the gendered (and victimizing) constructions of memory policies, where the symbols of pain and suffering were embodied in women (Jelin, 2002). In addition, the masculinized representations of war, in which women are almost invariably reduced to “territories” to be conquered and bodies to be appropriated and sacrificed, are also considered. (Medina García, 2018). In this sense, the insertion and participation of women in political-military spaces is a contradiction to the hegemonic and sweetened notion of “Woman” as a subject of nonviolence, fear, and defenselessness (Marcus & Olivares, 2002) but also to the versions that interpret their violent actions as a fact that is always passionate and therefore depoliticized.

If memory implies a selective exercise that seeks to maintain the social order with its clearly defined gender roles, “the memorable” will be that which fits into it and does not interrupt it (Troncoso Pérez, 2020). Symbolic or factually marginalized populations will always maintain a challenging and “disengaged” relationship with technologies of memorialization (Coker, 2017). The current work aims to incorporate women as combatants and political subjects, from an anti-essentialist critique, into the fields of gender and memory, to the extent that its purpose is less to broaden and pluralize the concept of female identity, or to “add voices” to memory, than to dispute the economy of words and images of Argentina’s recent past, making visible the androcentric paradigm of history and memory and their performative effects in the construction of gendered subjects (Troncoso Pérez, 2020).

It is about producing a story, always partial, which, necessarily, is woven by putting in tension other existing stories (Tarducci, 2019). Finally, according to Alejandra Ciriza (2006), it is expected to contribute to the tracing of a Latin American feminist genealogy and to a critical reflection on the memories/oblivion, discontinuities, and silent prolongations that cross the relations between the present and the past.

## Historical background

The fieldwork is specifically inscribed in the experiences of militancy within the armed organization Montoneros, officialized in 1970. It was an organization of the Peronist Left, whose members mostly came from the Catholic student militancy and rearticulated matrixes of Catholicism and nationalism to the Peronist movement, understanding the latter as a vehicle to initiate a revolutionary process of national liberation.

In order to understand the emergence of armed organizations in Argentina between the late 1960s and early 1970s and the growing politicization and radicalization of young women, it is necessary to begin by outlining some political and social conditions of the international and national context.

In the first place, it is inevitable to point out the emergence of emancipatory processes in countries of the global South, which functioned as “beacons” or revolutionary paradigms inspiring local groups: the struggle for the liberation and unification of the Vietnamese people, the war of independence in Algeria, the Maoist experience in China, and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. It is worth mentioning that, beyond the place of referentiality of these historical processes, in the young militant sectors of Argentina, violence had another political origin (internal) and drastically different social, cultural, and economic configurations (Aronskind, 2011).

Secondly, the climate of political violence in the Argentine scenario worsened after the overthrow of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, which led to the proscription of Peronism and the establishment of a particularly repressive military dictatorship, self-proclaimed as the Liberating Revolution. Since then, there was a rise of militarism that made possible a new coup d'état by the Argentine Revolution in 1966, led by Juan Carlos Onganía, seeking to dissuade any probability of legalization of Peronism, that is, the national politics was experienced, at that time, as a synonym of confrontation, antinomy, violence, persecution, and proscription, marked by the division Peronism/anti-Peronism (Guglielmucci, 2008).

In this context, the national universities—and their main subject, the students—represented, for the dictatorial governments, spaces of “subversive” tendency, and their ideological control became one of the central objectives of the government (Jacovkis, 2011). Moreover, the period 1960-1970 coincided with a massive entry of young people into universities, particularly of a large number of women, and thus, a path to revolutionary and social militancy.

In those years, the historical experience of being young was marked by a social impulse that stimulated participation in all spheres. The epochal climate was built by several phenomena with multiple characteristics (emergence of youth cultures, sexual revolution, student participation) and became the basis from which a strong generational identity emerged: a particular way of being in the world, of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Alzogaray & Noguera, 2010, p. 24).

In this context, militant women of all political orientations were attracted to alternatives that advocated violent and radical change over a reality perceived as unjust and suffocating (Guglielmucci, 2008). Studies that have inquired into the situation of revolutionary women in Argentina between 1960-1970 (Jelin, 2002; Guglielmucci, 2008; Oberti, 2015; Sepúlveda, 2016) coincide in pointing out that their presence was transversal to the political organizations of the period and that they came to represent a significant number of them, that is, they became active participants in the growing politicization and mobilization process, channeling their concerns through militancy in political parties, unions, armed organizations, student groups, and other forms of social militancy (Sepúlveda, 2016).

In cultural terms, the new paradigm of young women contradicted the gender interpellations of the conservative military regimes, where women were essentially conceived as mothers, guarantors of care, control, and control over all members of the family group, especially the children. The dictatorship of 1976-1983 widely publicized the woman-mother equation, and the conjunction between militarism and patriarchy was shown as the correct path and restoring space for order (Sonderéguer, 2020, p. 3). The visible, exacerbated, and even publicized nature of this governmental discourse simultaneously produced an effective re-articulation of a series of

feminized equivalences and metaphors (woman = mother, home = Nation) and a radical exclusion embodied in the figure of the “subversives,” insofar as it implied the social, political, and moral-sexual deconstruction of women.

## Method

This is a qualitative research since the focus is on the women’s perspective and perception of their ways of narrating and signifying their own experiences. It works from the technique of the life story, or biographical interview, insofar as the focus is placed on the experiences or ways in which they re-signify facts (social, political, personal) through their own biographical memory (Meccia, 2019). The period covered is not “the entire life,” but rather a spatiotemporal stretch of their biographies is prioritized, that of their militant experiences in the 1970s and, for contextualization, their earlier family and educational experiences.

At the same time, their stories are significant because they allow us to interrogate power relations from a differential perspective, linked to the female condition of the interviewees, but also to other markers such as class distinction, (hetero)sexuality, age, etc. In this sense, these are unfailingly partial accounts based on singular feminine experiences where social structures are overlapped in specific ways (Crenshaw, 1991; Lamas, 2022) and delimit forms, conditioning factors, and possibilities of being recognized as women.

Two main axes or dimensions of analysis are identified, which, in turn, organize and structure the development of the work in two subsections. The first, focused on the “militant universe,” aims to rethink the political-militant exercise in terms of gender. To this end, it asks about their political concerns and social sensitivities, the vectors that have energized them; how they entered the militancy; the composition, dynamics of distribution of tasks/roles, and decision-making processes within Montoneros; conceptions and permeability to feminism; and the unique ways of feeling, living, and carrying out the “militant role”. The second, aimed at the “personal universe,” seeks to recognize the processes of being/becoming women within the framework of their militant practices. In this instance, we inquire into the relationships with their partners, their experiences with motherhood, etc. It is understood that both dimensions or “universes” in daily life are intimately linked. Thus, this division responds to a strategy of presenting and analyzing the results that allow disaggregating the interdependence in being a woman-militant (or militant-woman) in order to make it visible.

The corpus consists of two interviews with women from the Montoneros organization who have played different roles with varying levels of responsibility. One of the interviews was conducted in the city of Mar del Plata, province of Buenos Aires, under the face-to-face modality, divided into two meetings, 10/01/2021 and 10/08/2021, the second one, under the remote modality, 10/29/2021. At this point, different enunciative possibilities are identified between one interaction context and the other. The conditions of the face-to-face interview (setting up a specific time and space for us to meet) established certain thresholds of enunciability that allowed us to address the predefined axes, exchange opinions and reflections on the past/present, and even talk about our jobs, families, etc. As for the virtual interview, the absence of corporeality, or its mediation, has resulted in greater difficulty in creating an atmosphere of trust between interviewer and interviewee and, thus, in a more significant limitation to “deconstruct” the conversation, to cross-examine or deepen certain aspects.

Finally, regarding the work with life stories, it is necessary to mention that the corpus is not made of historical events but of constructions and mediations that the informants have elaborated from the present and in light of the new enunciative contexts and socio-political climates (Jelin, 2014). In recent years, the feminist discourse has restructured definitions/perceptions of politics and the political. It has displaced/produced moralities that nourish new interpretive-narrative frameworks of the past. In this context, the questioning (and listening) about the differential exercise of political violence was enabled, from a gender perspective, on the forms of distribution of power within the armed organizations or the couple-militant, that is, predisposing the interviewees to talk about gender in the organizations and address, from a gender perspective, dimensions of the revolutionary youth overlooked from the broader public sphere, such as militarism, the use of weapons, etc.

At the same time, a selective mechanism of memory comes into play that leads the informants to remember or forget certain facts or to adjust their interpretations to the purposes of the research, proposed from the beginning of the interviews as “a research with a gender perspective.” What is said is not taken as the “truth of the event” but as a narrative constructed at the moment of the interaction, made of multiple temporalities or “layers of memory” (Jelin, 2014): the record of the facts, the memory of the feelings of that time, which are intermingled with those generated in the practice of remembering itself (Jelin, 2014). However, it also implies re-signifying one’s own listening side as an “active reservoir” of (co)production of the story (Cruz Contreras, 2018). The knowledge that circulates there emerges as a result of a practice of articulation that reconstructs both the researcher and the researched (Cruz Contreras, 2018).



## Results

The first interviewee was Graciela Iturraspe. She is 70 years old and has three children. She was born in the Buenos Aires city of Dolores but lived as and was a militant until she was 40 years old in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (hereinafter, ACBA). She is the only daughter of a marriage that she defines as “typical of the Argentine middle class.” Her father was a merchant, and her mother a teacher. She studied at a Catholic school and then entered the International Relations program at the Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE). Currently, and since the early 1990s, she has been living in the coastal city of Mar del Plata, where the interview took place. She is a militant of the Asociación Trabajadores del Estado (AT) of the Argentine Workers’ Central Union (CTA) and served as a national deputy for the political party Unidad Popular<sup>2</sup> (UP) between 2009 and 2013.

The second interviewee was Nina Brugo. She is 78 years old, has two children, and is a labor lawyer. She was born in Paraná, the capital city of the province of Entre Ríos. She belongs to a family of the provincial aristocracy, in her words: “well-to-do,” “very well-off people.” She attended primary and secondary school at a Catholic school and higher education at the National University of Córdoba and the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina. She is a referent of the feminist movement in Argentina, co-founder of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion and is a member of the political party UP.

### Militant universe

#### First approaches

Although there are multiple factors that have influenced the politicization of young women, and they vary according to class conditions, age, degree of politicization of the family, etc., we highlight, from the informants’ accounts, the experience of the religious-social work in the slums, and, in particular, the influence of some members of the Catholic institution, linked to the ideological “new waves” within it. Regarding their first political concerns, they do not refer to a concern for the national political context (proscription, repression, coups d’état) but to the fact of facing structural social inequalities, the “clash” with poverty during the territorial work. In the case of Graciela, she began to participate in the “missions” of her school in the slums of ACBA.

<sup>2</sup> The UP party was created in 2010 as an electoral tool of the CTA Autonomous (CTA-A), a political strand “autonomous from the governments in power” within the main trade union structure of the country, the CTA. However, since 2019, and until today, it integrates the government coalition Frente de Todos.



In the case of Nina, eight years older than Graciela, the first contact with the “new debates” and the work of “social promotion” in the neighborhoods took place during her time at the Catholic University.

When I was 15 years old, I learned about the priests more committed to the Liberation Theory. I remember a nun who was really cool and started talking to us about the social situation. We lived inside a jar, so to speak, almost like we were born with a silver spoon in our mouths. In my case, I began to be permeated by what was going on in society through these nuns and priests. And in the fourth year, when I was 16 years old, those of us who wanted to, were taken by a priest to teach literacy to the poor children in the Retiro slum with Father Mugica<sup>3</sup>. It was shocking for me to see people living like that (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

The Santa María University was more open. There were even debates because it was the time of the SECOND Vatican Council, which was very progressive, and I adhered to that doctrine very quickly. And I made contact with sectors that went to work in neighborhoods doing social promotion, and not only religious. That introduced me to the work of militancy (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021)

For many young women, educational-religious spaces began to emerge, with the help of teachers or specific institutional referents, as places for critical thinking and social action, acquiring even a political dimension that was not present in other spaces of socialization, such as the family. Nevertheless, in Graciela’s case, the very hierarchical and classist configuration of the school institution began to be questioned.

I come from a very exclusive Catholic school in Buenos Aires. The Jesús María, in Barrio Norte. And in general, the nuns were terrible. My first notions of injustice were at school. I remember coming home from school one day and asking my mother, “Why are there nuns in school who are ‘sisters’ and nuns who are ‘mothers’?” She answered me, “And the sisters are the ones who clean, cook, and set the table. And the mothers are the director, the one who teaches religion.” And that had to do with the one who paid and the other one who had to clean. Those were the first injustice feelings I identified (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

In these stories, the Catholic Church becomes, within the framework of a broader political and social context, a space of contradictory discourses, agents, and practices that acted in Graciela as a condition of possibility for the deployment of a “restless” and questioning subjectivity. As for the formal entry into political organizations, the university represented a fundamental place to become a militant or make contacts. As Pablo Buchbinder (2005) points out, the guerrilla organizations had large contingents of students and professionals among their militants, and some faculties, given the clandestine conditions, were recruiting grounds for these groups.

In Graciela’s particular case, although she attended a private university, she had friends outside that environment with whom she shared political concerns. Her connection to the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), in particular to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, was mediated by her boyfriend, who became her first husband, a sociology student: “And also, that is how I gained

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Francisco Sergio Mugica Echagüe was an Argentine priest and professor, a leader of the Movement of Priests for the Third World. He was assassinated by the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (“Triple A”) in May 1974.

access to that world ... he was in other small groups and debates, which resonated with what I saw in the slum.” She was 20 years old at the time. She first became a member of the Peronist organization called Descamisados, which soon merged with Montoneros.

The public university was a hive of people. It was wonderful. You can imagine how I felt when I first went to Philosophy and Letters. I came from a world where everything was neat and tidy. At that time, it was a peculiar thing to want to participate in an organization. It took us a year and a half of debate with this ‘little group’ of classmates, but also with me. I had been in a Catholic school for thirteen years, and it was hard for me to take on the issue of violence. And finally, we decided that we wanted to join the Peronist Armed Forces (FAP), but of course, there were no basic units, so we had to find a way to join. There was a small group that gave classes on Frantz Fanon. It was said that they were from the FAP. It was all like, “The rumor is...” So, yes, we took the course, and when it ended, the teachers asked us if we wanted to do some kind of social or neighborhood militancy. We agreed (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

In Nina’s case, her time at the Catholic university was what allowed her to join the social militancy group that would later consolidate into the Revolutionary Group for Study, Work, and Action (GRETA).

It was a large group of university students ... That is where I began my great militancy. Then, that ended, and each one of us took different paths. I went to Tucumán, and that is where I got involved in political militancy. I joined the organization. We could say that I was part of “Monto” [Montoneros], but at the same time, it was more about political work and working with union sectors (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021)

Although her first contact with the Montoneros was through her involvement with the Catholic Workers Youth, led by José Sabino Navarro and the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentine Republic (CGT), her political awakening and what she calls “the beginning of her great militancy” occurred during her university experience and, like Graciela, in the context of Catholic institutions, where “the first feelings of injustice” were forged and transmitted.

At the same time, it is striking the distant way in which Nina identifies herself as part of the organization, “*we could say that I was part of ‘Monto’*” and how she insistently clarifies that her main work was political and union-related, as a way to dissociate herself (and avoid talking about) the military side. In fact, her differences regarding the militarization of politics are what lead her to distance herself from Montoneros. On the contrary, Graciela identifies herself as a member of the FAP, and although she talks about the difficulties of dealing with violence, her joining the organization was the result of a deliberate, personal, and collective decision that took more than a year and a half.

## Gender and feminism

Regarding the tasks and roles assigned, the interviewees agreed that there was no gendered distribution and that it was “quite egalitarian.” Graciela began her militancy in 1971 in the low-income neighborhoods of the metropolitan area, north of the ACBA, until she became a leader of the northern column of Montoneros. She worked in the Documentation Service after going underground in 1974 and until her imprisonment in 1975. Upon her release six months later, she joined the Intelligence Service. As for Nina, she was known (and persecuted) as “the lawyer of Montoneros.” However, she denies playing that role and says that her work was focused on political-territorial work and union articulation tasks. She was one of the co-founders of the Evita Group<sup>4</sup> and led the northern zone of Greater Buenos Aires.

Both interviewees share the perspective that, despite the absence of formal feminist training within the organization, it operated under the principles of a “feminist practice.” The organizational structure was based on acknowledging equitable physical and executive capabilities among both men and women. Consequently, it promoted equal opportunities for accessing positions of authority. Graciela points out that the key to this “equality” resided in the “multidirectional” method of evaluating personal performance.

I would be lying if I told you that I felt gender discrimination at that time. I felt it less than in almost all other aspects of life. I think there was one thing that weighed a lot, and it is something that I always defend, and that is the evaluation system that we had. Every six months, each of our comrades was evaluated to see if they were promoted, de-promoted, or left in the same position. And it was an evaluation among peers, below you and above you, so it was very hard to mess up with that. I always defend this evaluation method because the truth is that it built a very accurate picture of people (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

In this way, Graciela became a “first officer,” which meant having several groups of senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) under her command. In turn, the senior NCOs were responsible for the candidates, generally members of the grassroots/territorial organizations that were part of Montoneros. At the top were the senior officers, “column chiefs” (or zone chiefs), provincial chiefs, and the National Leadership.

That is insane because there was a lot of parity. In the National Leadership, the only woman included was Norma Arrostito. But then, in the regional leaderships and in the columns, the women and men were appointed according to their abilities. That was outrageous for the time. Our column had a female chief, and at that time, I was chief of three [NCOs] units, two of which had female chiefs. So those below, mostly men, said it was a “matriarchy.” On the contrary, they complained about the number of women above them (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> The Evita Group was created by Montoneros in 1973, and dissolved in 1974, after the death of General Juan Domingo Perón, and the organization went underground. Structured as a mass front of national scope, it was dedicated to the political work with women in the low-income neighborhoods and constituted a form of territorial anchorage of Montoneros. It also served as a tool for power dispute within Peronism, in this specific case, the Women’s Branch of the Justicialist Party (Grammático, 2012). At the same time, it should be clarified that the Evita Group has no relation with the current Evita Movement, created between 2004-2006, whose main political subjects are young people and workers of the low-income economy.

In this sense, what Graciela describes as a “neutral” evaluation system stands out, and the effective positive opinion of women and their performance allowed them to achieve and maintain relative gender parity. Nina, who had been in contact with feminist groups since the 1970s, states that, although the treatment was egalitarian, there were prejudices against women: “In the fight, we were considered almost as equals, but very few women reached the leadership positions. A woman was not trusted as much to be a leader”. Graciela’s perception of “a lot of parity” contrasts with Nina’s opinion on the minority representation of women in the National Leadership. In agreement with Nina, Alejandra Oberti’s book (2015), *Las revolucionarias*, gathers testimonies of militants who state that the women’s efforts were not sufficiently reflected in the hierarchies of the organization and that the hegemonic imaginary of what is a man and a woman weighed decisively. In fact, the author understands that the valorization of the military aspect (a world barely known to women) over the political work did not inhibit their contribution, but it did limit it: When they were just appropriating the space of politics, they had to take on the armed struggle (Oberti, 2015, p. 207).

In this way, it is worth relativizing the notion of equality insofar as the (numerical) advance of women in the spaces of participation is neither synonymous with nor a consequence of the conditions of parity. On the contrary, it is the female occupation that drives the internal processes of redistribution of power. Even in Graciela’s account, this confusion between hyper-visibility and the exoticization of her positions of power is expressed. The male perceptions, in terms of a patriarchy, present a vision of female power that is associated with excess, with the exercise of practices and positions that, it is assumed, are not natural to them. As Graciela expresses it: “There were no feminist currents within the organizations as such, nor were there debates about feminism. There were debates that had to do with being a woman in this or that situation, but not about the vindication of feminism.”

Feminism in Argentina in the 1970s consisted mainly of the Argentine Feminist Union (UFA), founded in 1970, and the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM), founded in 1972. Their proposals were associated with discussing and distributing power within the family and, in broader terms, with the cultural revolution, the modernization of certain moral standards, and the “liberation of women.” As noted by Catalina Trebisacce (2019), the leftist militancy conceptualized modernization as a mode of imperialist deployment. They aimed to distance themselves from this process and guard against bourgeois deviations within their revolutionary ranks (p. 15). On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the feminist groups of that time had no territorial anchorage, nor did their conceptual categories take into account the realities, problems, and perceptions of the women outside the universe of middle-class, professional, and university women.

I met some colleagues who were feminists at that time, and they questioned why I was in an organization that rejected feminism. I would say to them: First, the economic and social revolution, then, we will see about women's problems. ¿What is the problem with that? (she laughs). Evidently, it was not clear to me. But I considered them far from the fight for social change, so I did not respect them (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021)

Throughout her account, we can glimpse the tensions and rebukes between autonomous “pure feminists,” whose militancy was neither inscribed nor detached from political-partisan structures, and “political feminists” (Trebisacce, 2019), who were part of broader political spaces and, from there, explored or rearticulated the feminist militancy. Beyond Nina's current gender self-criticism and criticism of what has been her organization, she, who has become a referent of the women's movement in Argentina, still argues that the feminism of the time was erring on the side of theorization and was disconnected from the “real-life experiences. Her first realizations on the feminist issue came from her political-territorial work.

At that time, I did not question patriarchy. It seemed “natural” to me. I questioned it afterward. I had begun to feel that there were things out of place regarding gender. Above all, it struck me when the women in the neighborhood meetings said that they enjoyed participating in that space because their husbands were not there. That is, women's participation and opinions on politics were questioned. That made me realize that women needed our own space. Something clicked within me and stayed with me forever. Later, they [feminists] said that Eva Perón was not a feminist. For me, her actions demonstrated a feminist attitude. There were many female comrades, I met many, whose attitudes and outlook on life were feminist, even if they did not understand what feminism was (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021)

Gender ceased to be natural and became visible as a political/personal issue when she came into contact with women's experiences distant from her own. That is when she became aware not only of the specific gender-based violence suffered by women in poor neighborhoods but, above all, of their forms of organization, their feminist praxis, or, in her words, their feminist attitude toward life. In a way, this statement condenses a critical reappropriation of the term “feminist,” which served as a situated experience of gender, inseparable from experiences of poverty, and allowed her to question the sexual politics of her organization and the classist and anti-popular bias of feminism.

Finally, what she identifies at one point as the “need to have their own space” for women confronts the vision of Montoneros described by Graciela, where, paradoxically, the non-problematization of gender and female specificity, according to her, produced real parity, a “neutral” system. In fact, as Karin Grammatico (2012) points out in her research on the women in Montoneros and the Evita Group, for many female militants, the assignment to this new political space represented a discredit, an underhanded form of punishment or de-promotion. Thus, the work with women was seen as something minor and not as an expression of true revolutionary politics (p. 58).

Beyond the political-strategic discussion that is still going on in feminism about whether or not the construction of women-only spaces is superfluous in their “encapsulation” and in a particularization of the gender struggle, in Nina’s experience, the encounter with/among women had positive political effects. She described it as the trigger of a process of qualitative transformation in her militancy, as the birth of her own feminist attitude. However, judging by the importance she gives in her account to the social condition and awareness of these women, the richness of the space seems to lie less in its purely feminine composition than in the possibilities it opened up for considering gender as a variable that traversed them unequally.

## Violence against women

In accordance with “practical feminism” and the inscription of women in certain mechanisms, practices, and social relations that symbolize a gender disruption, their link with violence and their eventual participation in military operations is analyzed; their subjective and bodily ways of living this type of experiences.

In Graciela’s case, she said that she received political-military formation and participated actively in various operations, even as the person in charge of them.

*When I was 20 years old, I started the training. First, I had to steal a car. Then, I remember it was a more complex operation, and I had to intercept some people who were coming in a pickup truck. They said: ‘You have to put up with it. You cannot hesitate right now.’ I had to hit them head-on, and my first instinct was not to do it. And the instructor explained to me that in the army, this is called “code red” or something like that, which means that even though you can get hurt, you have to do it. And the level of complexity that you faced increased progressively before participating in an operation (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).*

It is interesting to note the notions of “putting up” and “bearing with,” repeated throughout the training, as a performative statement that sought to produce courage and to regulate and strengthen the accumulated courage: as a way to dissuade fear, the possibility of backing down and surrendering. In turn, endurance is a symbolic good, a manifestation of group and individual honor (Garriga Zucal, 2016, p. 28). In this sense, enduring, resisting, and not hesitating become ways of being recognized as loyal and capable by peers and superiors and, thus, of being promoted within the system of hierarchies and honors already described. Moreover, building that belief and displaying that attitude implied a resignification of violence. As Graciela pointed out, “it was necessary to cause harm when your instinct was not to do it.” In turn, from a subjectivity that was not only feminine but also marked by a moral-religious trajectory, violence was configured as an inherently foreign bodily possibility, as a specifically repressed emotionality. To exert violence implies deconstructing “cultural scripts” imposed on us as women (Marcus & Olivares, 2002, p. 65).



It was very hard for me. I was more afraid to use violence than to suffer it. And that was a burden from the thirteen years of Catholic school. Although Montoneros also had a very important Catholic root. It took me many years of subsequent therapy to get rid of the guilt ... I wondered if I would be able to ... that decision took me about a year and a half of what was almost an internal debate (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

In other words, if the process of legitimizing violence was presented as a challenge to be addressed in the training phase for the militants as a whole, the challenge for women was twofold since they have historically been configured as subjects of fear and suffering and whose violence is still culturally denied today. It is worth noting that although Graciela participated in acts of violence and confrontations on several occasions and even led operations, she states that she had some difficulty dealing with the subjective impact of practicing violence and causing harm and that it was the collective nature of the activity that helped her to dilute the guilt.

She also emphasizes the need to understand this violence as the result of relations and correlations of forces that legitimize practices inhibited in other historical and social contexts. In this context, violence as a methodology and as a form of political communication acquired a positive value as a necessary and just action, which also imposed a resignification of death itself. In terms of María Soledad Cattogio (2011), the condition of “victim” is reworked as a form of heroism and martyrdom, where death was accepted (and processed) as a symbol of victory, even as a privilege. New meanings of life and death, a “sacrificial ethic,” and “endurance” had to be constructed by deconstructing other meanings, other rationalities, and, above all, other sensibilities. In this way, far from its instrumental representation, violence becomes a language that produces subjectivity, forms of identification, sociability, community, otherness, and belonging (Guglielmucci, 2019).

Finally, as for Nina, she directly rejected the methodology of violence, which is why she was gradually removed from the organization until she was expelled. Like Graciela, she recognizes that her religious background influenced her difficulties in exercising and legitimizing violence.

Regarding Montoneros, I cannot speak about military matters because I did not participate much. I was not comfortable with the militarization. Me, as a Christian, I had not fully accepted it ... I still had a hard time with the political issues of that time. It was such a vicious time. Although I was there a lot, I always had an attitude ... I prioritized union and territorial work (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021).

Beyond the variable degree of participation of the interviewees in the military operations, it is possible to identify in both accounts a record of their own vulnerability, fragilization, impossibility, guilt, and fear, dimensions that had to be worked on and inhibited by the militants with the aim of modeling and forging the revolutionary body as a weapon of war. Héctor Schmucler (1980) argues that the transformation of politics (and violence) into a technique and its basis in abstract, model-based, and ideal categories have led to the oblivion or omission of this type of experience in the testimonies of survivors, the experiences of the “real men,” and in this case, of the real women. However, in the recollections of Graciela and Nina, as Jelin



says (2014), there is a predominance of the emotional and physical register of that moment: “I was not comfortable,” “I had a hard time” (Nina); “I was more afraid to use violence than to suffer it” (Graciela), enabled in a different way in women by their alienating relationship with violence, and articulated in Graciela’s case in a reflective register where such emotions seek to be rationalized, contextualized, and legitimized.

## Meanings of militancy

Some of the meanings associated with the exercise of militancy, which emerged during the interviews, were dedication, “completeness,” “giving one’s life,” “the collective,” and “happiness.”

First of all, it is worth mentioning again that the interviewees continue to participate, from the democratic opening to the present day, in various political fronts and spaces, most of them with union and human rights roots. In Nina’s particular case, she is engaged in a transversal dialog with feminist collectives.

I cannot compare the militancy of before and now and say that it is different because *the center of my life is militancy*. It was the center of my life when I started to visit the neighborhoods to worry and to look for social change in every sense. I think that is my life. I cannot imagine it any other way (N. Brugo, remote interview, October 29, 2021).

Militancy is a *continuum* that weaves together trajectories, a living memory that gives meaning to the present and the various orders of life: work, love, and bonds in general. This offering of life to militancy is also linked to sacrificial ethics since what takes precedence, for the martyr and the devotee, is “the message”: one gives one’s life for their cause, or else, one justifies one’s survival for its propagation (Cattogio, 2011, p. 109).

In Graciela’s particular case, she recognizes an idea of deep and almost stubborn political conviction, which she attributes, in part, to age, to the way of living militancy from the perceptive and behavioral parameters of youth. She also links this degree of dedication to the growth of Montoneros and, therefore, to the increase of responsibilities they assumed.

I had a deep conviction, and it was crazy for the age we were. Because when you think about the organizations’ slogans of that time, you see how this age-old quality was present, “we will win in one, we will win in ten, but we will win.” There was this arrogance of the youth where the possibility of defeat did not exist, and that was nonsense (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 1, 2021).

First, there is a contrast between Nina’s and Graciela’s answers to the question about the meaning of militancy and their self-perceptions in those years. In Nina’s case, she avoids talking about a specific period, of its “vicious” politics and the use of weapons to define herself on the

basis of the broad concept of “militant” as opposed to “guerrilla member” (Diana, 1997), which refers to her long trajectory and diverse political activities. In Graciela’s case, she responds in the past tense, and her account openly refers to the “deep conviction” characteristic of the young people of the seventies. Even with a critical view of the implications of this form of militancy, she defines her political identity as “revolutionary militant.”

Secondly, it is remarkable that political commitment, in addition to sacrifice, physical effort, and exhaustion, actively produce a sense of happiness and even of completeness. The political project becomes a chosen and deliberate life project, perhaps much more so than those culturally imposed or naturalized.

It had nothing to do with the individual, and I think that is the big difference with today. Everything had to do with the collective. We conceived ourselves *from* the collective. And then there was the richness of those groups so heterogeneous in social extraction, age, and life stories. There was an incredible richness, and it could be seen in every meeting. Therefore, there is something very crazy, which I discussed with many comrades who lived through that period. It seems terrible to say it, but it was the happiest period of my life. Many years before the massacre, between 1970 and 1976, and even after that, the collective aspect, the richness and learning of this collectivity, and the issue of completeness, which psychologists say does not exist, were the most important things. Well, during those years, what I felt was a matter of completeness. Beyond all those differences, we were solidly united in a common project with the same parameters.

The meaning of happiness then has to do with the construction of a collective subject, “being solidly united,” which becomes problematic when speaking of the personal universe, as will be seen below. At this moment of the interview, Graciela gives an account of a particular way of “being together” that produces happiness insofar as it resituates the individual subject in new parameters, practices, and socialization environments where “the individual” is experienced through “the collective.” Nevertheless, it also brings into play the diversity aspect, the knowledge of different life experiences as instances that challenge and enrich the individual, offer alternative perspectives of oneself, and that, according to Nina, can make something “click” for the rest of one’s life.

## Personal universe

Children are needed for the sunrise.  
—Mario Benedetti, *Gurisito*

In this section, it is of interest to know how the daily life of the women militants went on, how they synthesized “the personal” and “the political,” and what “the personal” included/excluded for them.

To begin with, it is pertinent to emphasize that the informants became involved in social and political activities from a very young age. Militancy was gaining space in their lives, inadvertently transforming the parameters, horizons, and, therefore, the naturalized meanings of being a woman. In both cases, the primary nucleus of institutions (family and school) was permeated by a religious and traditionalist matrix, with special emphasis on Nina's environment.

*My mother wanted me to find a husband and get married. Her only goal was for me to get a husband. She considered studying at university a danger for women. ... For me, studying was freedom and the way to become independent and not dependent on anyone. That was a very strong feeling in me. And so it happened. And I only formed a couple much later, at the age of 31 (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).*

Almost as a way of defying the patriarchal view of her environment, and of her mother in particular, she chose what she defined as the path of freedom, prioritizing university education first and later militancy. The construction of a couple was not the center or the axis of her life, and it became long after a project integrated into the political sphere. Her partner, a Third-World former priest and one of the founders of the Third Worldist movement in Argentina, shared with Nina the questioning of the militarization of leftist organizations. She married him and had two children. Due to political persecution, they moved to the city of La Plata, the capital of the province of Buenos Aires, and although they did not formally change their identity, they lived clandestinely for more than five years. In 1982, they went into exile in Brazil (only for a few days), then to Canada and finally, to Mexico. They returned to Argentina in 1984.

As for Graciela's partner, as already mentioned, he was also a young man with political concerns. From the beginning, the relationship was crossed/permeated by these common interests, then by their affiliation with Montoneros. According to her, they were not a "normal couple." They did not spend time as a couple. In the beginning, they did not even share the time and space of militancy on a daily basis since they operated in different districts. Eventually, they got married and went to live together, a period that coincided with the numerical growth of Montoneros.

*Militancy was everything: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 30 days a month, 365 days a year. We were a collective with objectives superior to any objective that had to do with our personal lives. The desire was placed in the militancy, basically (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).*

In relation to the daily life of each one, to their daily life as women-militants, the personal universe is configured in both on the basis of the militant universe, although different descriptions and emotions appear. As Melina Alzogaray and Ana Laura Noguera (2010) note, within political organizations, the idea of the "capsule couple" has been challenged, that is, the one that is closed in and concentrates all its activities on that bond. On the contrary, there was a struggle for the identity of the couple based on the collective, on the organization.

Daily life was hell. And so was life as a couple. When we were arrested, we were in a total crisis. A few months earlier, I had said to Jorge, “What am I sharing with you that I don’t share with any other comrade if the only thing we share is ‘the project’? ... we don’t share anything,” because it was madness and a maelstrom. We did not have a normal life, so it was very difficult ... We would leave the house at 6 in the morning with our son, with the bags, with the kid’s things, with the bags with other things, and we would return at 12 o’clock at night, so we shared very little as a couple. Everything was about the militancy (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).

Family life and the upbringing of children were considered political-military activities in themselves since it was through them that the principles and moral values of the revolutionary project were to be transmitted. In other words, for the armed organizations, the family was a fundamental political cell and the only legitimate space for exercising sexuality (Oberti, 2015). However, Graciela’s account reveals the difficulties of synthesizing militant and parental responsibilities, the lack of time devoted to the family, and her inability to embrace it as a meaningful life project. In this sense, Alejandra Oberti (2015) emphasizes this contradiction: the politicization of everyday life and interpersonal relations, far from reevaluating private spaces, entailed their subordination to armed politics.

By the end of 1975, we all had such a level of stress that we did not work on Sundays; we had to save it for the family, for the couple, because there had to be some space for a break. But we never complied because we could not. There were always other things that needed you. Besides, the reality was ... *the children were outgrowing you. It had nothing to do with what you had decided ...* Today, I am very self-critical about that. At the beginning of the 70s, there was a discussion in organizations about whether to have children or not. There were differences between those who said no because we were committed to the revolution and those who said yes because we were part of the people and we had to have children ... a much more romantic vision. Like Benedetti’s poem, Gurisito, “children are needed for the sunrise.” Today, I would say that we should not have had children. I remember when Nico was born, and they put him in my arms, and I said, “What do I do? How does it work?” (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).

In this way, the moral values of the militant family did not lead to a greater agency for women and an expansion of their reproductive autonomy but to a strengthening of the maternal mandate. Giving birth to the *new man* (Oberti, 2015) entailed a new form of instrumentalization/subordination of the militant women’s bodies. In addition, the child-rearing conditions, characterized by clandestinity, isolation from their families, and loneliness, created forms of motherhood that were particularly distant from desire. In 1975, Graciela and Jorge were arrested and imprisoned. He was released in 1982, and she was released after six months, which meant that all the “burden” of child-rearing fell on Graciela. Motherhood is mentioned as a factor that, far from affirming her self-perception as a militant, produced insecurities and increased her exhaustion.

As for Nina, her years of active militancy were spent without men, and forming a couple was a crucial event that marked her distance from the organization. However, the daily life as a couple and the experience of motherhood were marked by the clandestinity condition, which, in her words, entailed “permanent fear.” They rented the back of a house in a peripheral area of the city of La Plata.

In 1978 my oldest son was born, and in January 1980, my youngest, both premature. I had to stay in bed for five months because of my anxiety. Also, the deliveries I had were almost sitting down because I was scared ... because they had told me that ... I had heard that in a hospital [the military] had gone looking for a woman in labor and had gone into the delivery room. When I heard that, during the births, when the doctor said "relax," I could not ... I sat down, not because it was more comfortable but so I could see the door and see if they came to get me. I was always looking out the window almost every night. I lived in permanent fear. (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).

Nevertheless, loneliness also appears, not because of the absence of a partner but because of the absence of the organization. In this sense, the organizational dynamics of control over the lives of the militants did not take into account the dynamics of protection, security, and accompaniment of pregnant women during the process of childbirth (nor child-rearing), which, in times of clandestinity, entailed a situation of high exposure and isolation.

With regard to domestic and caregiving tasks, the women interviewed stated that they had developed egalitarian logics with their partners regarding the distribution of burdens. They report, for the time, novel bonds from the point of view of gender, which, as we mentioned at the beginning, do not arise spontaneously or voluntarily but are inscribed in a social context in which the conception of "the feminine" was questioned. For Graciela, they are part of a "hinge generation of women" who played a leading role in a political and cultural transition.

However, experiences are not unanimous, and Alejandra Oberti's (2015) research collects testimonies that also question the notion of equality within militant couples. For example, her female interviewees recall situations in which the organization prioritized the participation of the male partner in meetings so that the woman was left to care for the children, which reproduced subtle plots of authority and subordination similar to those of the society they criticized (Oberti, 2015).

The author defines the situation of the militant women as a paradoxical one since they tried to reconcile, in different ways, militancy and family life, often superimposing incompatible actions and creating a sort of "fragmentary subjectivity." Thus, although political participation implied for women the departure from traditionally assigned places, the family mandate set a limit to their liberalization process, which, among other issues, challenged them once again as gestating subjects.

## Discussion

### Practical feminism

First of all, it is considered that for women, the option of participating in politics was open in the context of a boiling international social scenario, in which women as political subjects were already on the scene along with feminism. It is understood that the advance of the women's movement and the feminist movement in the central countries and its articulation with other liberation movements represented a condition of possibility for the acceptance of young women in national political life. However, the politicization of "the personal" sphere, the liberalization of sexuality, and the "modernization of women" were shaping new female subjectivities and, therefore, new experiences and life options for them.

The decision to participate not only in politics but also in armed organizations, a universe especially alien to that of women, represented a political fact in itself that did not arise spontaneously but from an embryonic social and cultural change. Being and becoming militants implied a pragmatic definition of a feminist nature that inserted them into new symbolic repertoires, bodily practices, and places of enunciation far removed from the preconceived destiny for them, anchored in the domestic space. We could speak of a radicalization of the feminist premise: "the personal is political," to the point of sublimating the personal through the political, of placing all desire in militancy (Graciela) or, as Nina puts it, "making the political the axis of one's life."

However, as the accounts reveal, this decision to prioritize militancy came at a particularly high cost for them as women, as it was not fully compatible with the "revolutionary call" to start a family. In a way, the discursive overvaluation of the militant family by the organizations, and thus of the reproductive function of women, places them in structural positions of inequality with respect to their male counterparts since they had to be mothers in addition to being militants. Although they describe situations of parity with their male counterparts in terms of caregiving tasks, there is a gap that begins to open up as the repressive context intensifies and the conditions for raising children become increasingly unfavorable and lonely.

Regarding their insertion into military practices, the interviewees agreed they were treated as equals. In the particular case of Graciela, there is a conviction that her organization, Montoneros, was the most egalitarian environment in which she participated throughout her political career.



At this point, she points out the contradiction that, under the democratic system, despite the expansion of civil and social rights, discriminatory imaginaries and logics were reinstalled in the framework of political organizations and institutions.

In the game of formal democracy, in the drawing up of lists, in the participation in the parties and trade unions, being a woman had an enormous weight as a negative trait. That is to say, it was not a question of ability but of the fact that you were a woman. To this day, it is not mandatory in the trade unions. All the general secretaries are men. They do not even accept the fact that there is a woman who can speak, who has a voice, who can have a microphone in front of her. It is awful. In a democracy, with all these quota laws, with the Never Again ... and despite everything, everything still works the same (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).

It is worth mentioning that the so-called transitional democracy and the new political rationality of nonviolence also brought about a change in the epistemological approach to the situation of women. There was a shift from the concept of “gender oppression,” which is critical of the social/structural framework, to that of “gender-based violence,” which tends to individualize it and thus depoliticize it (Núñez Rebolledo, 2019). However, it also meant rereading violence in binary terms: victims-victimizers, innocent-guilty.

The increasing victimization of women in the 1980s and 1990s naturalized their vision as inferior subjects in need of protection without voice or agency. In this way, it is possible to understand the paradox pointed out by Graciela to the extent that, in times of formalization of equality, a sense of mistrust and suspicion of women’s aptitude for politics and an imaginary of female victims favorable to the increase of “real” inequality seems to have been established.

From the victimhood perspective, history is also reread (and constructed) in binary terms. This work prioritizes listening to the women’s perspectives, which, despite their contradictions and readings from the subjectivity of today, continue to reveal a remarkable component of “real equality” within the armed organizations. An equality understood not as a simple concession of men or a merit of women but as a type of political relationship that emerged in a given historical context and was never exempt from negotiation, tension, resistance, and power struggles. Likewise, given that the results are based on only two testimonies, it is necessary to contrast the perceptions of Graciela and Nina with those of other militants of the time, who deny the egalitarian politics of organizations and its correlation with the organization of everyday life (Diana, 1997; Oberti, 2015).

Finally, the accounts are in tension with the postulate that usually runs through studies of the memories of women militants in the 1970s, which states that within the guerrilla movement itself, there were difficulties in integrating *the femininity* of women (Jelin, 2002, p. 4) and their acceptance was always in doubt, to the extent that when they demonstrated their ability in armed operations, they were seen as “pseudo-men,” de-sexed or masculinized women. Contrary to these



interpretations, it is conceived that, beyond the genuine existence of this type of experience and treatment, they should not be taken as generalizations that can be extended to all women and organizations. At no point in this research did the informants indicate that they were deprived of the exercise of their femininity; instead, a new synthesis of femininity was glimpsed, folded into the collective, and defined by the political.

It is considered that the feminist revisionism of power contributes with an analytical dimension (gender) that is of utmost importance for understanding the political scenario, as long as gender does not become a static category that a priori transforms women into victims. On the other hand, to read the role of the female revolutionary militants as “masculine women,” that is, from the unique lens of masculinization, or the deviation of their gender, assumes the existence of a clear and stable system of differences between sexes (Forastelli, 2002). It is understood that far from “contaminating” their femininity, the identification of these women with practices, knowledge, and rituals historically practiced by cis men rearticulates it by fostering, to this day, unprecedented connections with the body and language.

## Revolutionaries or victims?

In accordance with government policies, the study of historical memory has become the study of trauma and victims (Kaplan, 2010; Zenobi & Marentes, 2020) in which the emphasis on the stage of repression, political imprisonment, suffering, and psychological toll of survivors prevails over other types of experiences related to active political engagement. The victimization and the discursive construction of the militants based on traits of kindness, generosity, and almost childlike innocence were the flip side of the general suspicion that “there must be a reason” (Jelin, 2014). However, the field of memory is in itself a field of dispute of social meanings crossed by power relations (Montenegro, 2020), linked more to the interests of the present rather than the past.

*It was a struggle for the meaning and the version of history because we lived it, for our identity as revolutionary militants who wanted to transform reality and, at a certain historical moment, decided that violence was also valid. However, we did not do it inadvertently, we did it after much reflection (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).*

In particular, Graciela identifies the prosecution of the Military Juntas and the creation of the National Commission on Missing Persons, measures implemented by the interim government of President Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), as the mechanism that established the victim-centered narrative in Argentina.

With the trials, the “festival of horror” begins, and there appears the figure of the victim, “poor kids, the things they did to them.” And the relatives stated, “My child had nothing to do with it. My daughter was teaching catechism in the slum.” Because they believed it or because it was true. There were instances where that was the case, but that also gave a lighter version of our participation (G. Iturraspe, face-to-face interview, October 8, 2021).

In turn, given that the category of victim has no intrinsic content but is adapted to the social contexts of inscription (Guglielmucci, 2017), the generalized process of victimization produced differential, symbolic, and performative effects on women. They were questioned and recognized in the collective memory for their specificity as “victims of sexual torment,” contributing to the overrepresentation of women as victims, but also as sexual subjects who could only account for events related to their gender and sex, i.e., sexuality became particularly visible as a parameter from which to build intelligibility around women and their experiences. In contrast to the narrative of suffering, associated with sexual and gender-based violence, a narrative of desire emerges during this research, which is expressed in the feeling of completeness and “deep conviction” expressed by Graciela, and in Nina’s determination to place militancy at the center of her life.

This type of perception is present in other research on women militants in contexts of political violence. In the works of Ana Guglielmucci (2008) and Temma Kaplan (2010), the collected testimonies reveal anguish and fear but also the joy of having participated in events of historical relevance, of having been protagonists. On the other hand, Kimberly Theidon’s (2006) research on the armed conflict in Peru (1995) reports on the consequences for women, which are obviously destructive and transformative in regard to gender, particularly the acquisition of leadership opportunities.

In the same vein, Anabel Garrido Ortolá (2018), whose thesis analyzes the institutional narratives during the peace processes in Colombia from a gender perspective, also identifies a deletion of women’s memories as ex-combatants or political subjects in favor of their reification as victims. In this sense, Theidon (2006) recommends that truth commissions move beyond their victim-centered logic to open a narrative space for other women’s testimonies and warns that the emphasis on victimizing categories, combined with the highly feminized nature of the victimhood imaginary, may inadvertently construct other silences (p. 86).

## Conclusions

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The underestimation of women's participation in events of historical significance, as well as the absence of narratives that include dynamics of resistance and agency on the part of women, is summed up in what Hillary Hiner (2009) calls an "incomplete re-democratization process" (p. 51). That is the construction of a collective memory that oscillates between its direct invisibilization and its stereotyping. In order to "complete" the process to which Hiner alludes, it has been proposed not so much to include women's memories but rather to complexify how different discursive fields (memory and feminism) have produced a signifier and a signified of woman that is in many cases at odds with the narratives of its protagonists. It has sought to carry out an exercise of counter-memory, understood as the deployment of "minority memories" (Luongo, 2013) that are not intertwined with, but rather tension the "monumental majority memory" and its mechanisms of truth production.

Concerning the findings of the study, three critical points emerged from the accounts that allow us to continue revisiting the place of women in the period studied.

First, the notion of feminist stance, understood as a practical dimension of feminism inherent to its form of militancy, not only questions the (non) relationship of the militants with feminism but does so by decentering spaces, subjects, and imaginaries of feminism itself, questioning its contours and definitions. As Nina notes, "they did not fully understand women's problems," they did not receive specific theoretical-political training on gender, and their organization did not reaffirm the feminist demands, which were considered "minor contradictions" of capitalism. However, their life stories, including their young insertion into politics, the vital significance they acquired, the subordination of the domestic sphere to the political sphere, the occupation of places of hierarchy, and the learning of military codes, effectively altered the normative and universalizing definitions of womanhood (Oberti, 2015).

Second, and related to the above, these stories destabilize the idea of the militants as pseudo-men who had to surrender their femininity in order to imitate the masculinity of the soldier. Instead, a re-articulation of womanhood is observed, a novel form of gender performance that blurs the seemingly stable and clearly differentiable categories of feminine and masculine. The exercise of military practices is described as a process that is difficult to assimilate (even today in Nina's case), which involved a rethinking of the ways of being a woman learned within the framework of Catholicism and linked to the experience of fear, guilt, and weakness. Thus, their participation in the armed struggle and, more broadly, in the field of politics not only unbalances the meaning of woman and leaves open the question of what their bodies can do but also strains the meanings of man and the masculine legacy of violence, heroism, and sacrificial ethics.

Third, the interviewees state that there was an equal exercise of power between women and men both within the framework of the armed organization and in their daily lives, especially in the case of Graciela, who describes Montoneros as the most egalitarian environment of her entire political career. In principle, these perceptions are novel since they problematize the imaginary of women as secondary figures in the organizations, but also the overrepresentation of the militant woman as a victim established in the transitional language and the politics of memory. In fact, in Graciela's experience, the inferiority of women in politics materializes in the democratic context and leftist political and union spaces, which are considered the most suitable for addressing gender inequalities (Friedman & Tabbush, 2020).

Similarly, there are contradictions (from today's point of view) about the imperative of the organizations to have children, to "give birth to the New Man," and to form a family, when not only were the political conditions not the most favorable, but also the additional physical, emotional, and psychological burden for women to go through the process of pregnancy, childbirth, or the role of mothers as militants were not taken into account. Thus, the feelings of exhaustion, loneliness, and fear that creep into the stories have little to do with the scene of desired motherhood, which makes it possible to relativize the equality of the organization, de-idealize the militant couple, and dimension the differential gender effects produced, in the words of Schmucler (1980), by this "instrumentalized" way of doing politics.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that the situation of these militant women was not free of the tensions inherent in being, in Graciela's words, a "hinge generation of women" and in inhabiting the discursive/practical paradoxes that crossed the leftist organizations, but also that their participation in this type of space meant a double disruption that reconfigured, at the same time, the dynamics of both domestic and political life. Given that the findings refer to the experiences of only two militants, it is necessary to continue to engage in a dialog with research on the subject in order to ask new and better questions about the revolutionary project, but even more about the democratic paradigm and its complex forms of female inclusion in politics and memory.

## Conflict of interest

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The author declares that she has no conflict of interest with the institution or commercial association of any kind.

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