Lisa DiGiovanni. *Militarized Masculinity in Spain and Chile: Remembering Violence through Film and Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2025.

Ana Ros
Binghamton University
aros@binghamton.edu
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Lisa DiGiovanni's monograph represents a timely and valuable effort to raise awareness of the processes that have contributed to the weakening of inclusivity, plurality, and the protection of human rights in democratic contexts around the world today. Equally important, the book provides a necessary framework for understanding how oppressive gender relations continue to play a central role in these developments.

In her study, DiGiovanni looks to the past to build bridges to the present, focusing on the right-wing dictatorial regimes that governed Spain and Chile for extended periods during the twentieth century. The author's central concern lies in the fact that, as part of broader practices of state terrorism, both regimes systematically resorted to torture in general—and sexual torture in particular—to suppress political opposition. From the introduction onward, DiGiovanni identifies two key elements that facilitated the implementation of regimes characterized by such shared repressive features: entrenched patriarchy and militarization. As she notes, "[b]oth regimes emerged from societies that were steeped in military culture and shaped by egregious inequalities between men and women of different classes, races, and sexual orientations" (4).

At moments when social order was challenged through economic and social reforms—in Spain during the Second Republic and in Chile under the Popular Unity government—the armed forces presented patriarchy and militarization as solutions to what they framed as the weakness and inefficacy of civilian leaders and political actors. Because political tensions were interpreted through gendered lenses and repression targeted gender and sexual identities through torture, DiGiovanni argues that feminist theory is essential to understanding "the belief system that entails the adherence to hierarchical order and the suppression of opposition" (5). In developing this argument, she builds on the concept of "militarized masculinities," originally articulated by political scientist Cynthia Enloe in the context of the United States. Throughout the book, DiGiovanni explores the complexity of this notion as both a foundation for popular adherence to strongman rule and a component of genocidal behaviors linked to "nationalism, religious fanaticism, and territorial expansionism" (7).

Although the author focuses on Spain and Chile, her observations extend well beyond these two cases. As DiGiovanni demonstrates, violence and

repression have transcended national boundaries, forming constellations of influence across different regions. The repressive methods, strategies, and ideologies developed in European colonial wars and authoritarian military regimes served as models for Latin American dictatorial forces. This transnational connection is particularly evident between Chile and Spain, as conservative parties in the former, along with Pinochet himself, regarded the Spanish Civil War as an admirable anticommunist crusade and Franco's regime as a "model authoritarian corporatist state" (17). As DiGiovanni further observes, this relationship extended into post-dictatorial periods, during which both countries influenced one another in obstructing and advancing transitional justice, as well as in sustaining and reshaping right-wing ideology and patriarchy within democratic frameworks. As she explains, "The Spain–Chile juxtaposition encourages reflection on [...] the paradox between developments in human rights after the dictatorships and the persistence of social policing, rape, and the tacit approval of violence" (24).

Accordingly, the aim of DiGiovanni's study is twofold. On the one hand, she demonstrates how the logic of militarized masculinity has structured state violence and social oppression while simultaneously limiting the possibilities for more equitable, dignifying, and ultimately peaceful forms of social interaction and organization. On the other hand, she foregrounds the role of art—literature, cinema, visual narrative, performance, and other cultural practices—in disrupting militarized masculinities and opening creative possibilities for alternative ways of relating to others and addressing conflict, divisiveness, and polarization.

The first chapter therefore delves more deeply into the concept of militarized masculinity, examining how it is constructed through language, processes of rationalization, and the veneration of war as its ultimate expression, while also attending to its shifting meanings across different historical and political contexts.

Throughout the remaining chapters, DiGeiovanni takes the reader on an impressive journey through literary, visual, and audiovisual works from Spain and Chile produced over the last several decades. In her analysis of these works, the author engages in a sustained and insightful dialogue with philosophers, political scientists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, a multidisciplinary approach that helps the reader fully grasp the scope and complexity of the issues at stake.

In chapter two, she brings into dialogue the Spanish memoir *Ardor guerrero* (1995) and the Chilean documentary *El mocito* (2011) to explore the connections between "militarism, gender norms, and the use of violent force" during military conscription and beyond, through the experiences of civilians who worked for the armed forces in subordinate roles during the dictatorship (24). Chapter three turns to the internal world of the perpetrator through a comparative analysis of the Chilean novel *La dimensión desconocida* (2017) and the Spanish films *El lápiz del carpintero* (1998) and *Los girasoles ciegos* (2004). Centered on perpetrators who acknowledge their participation in violence and reflect on the consequences of their actions, this chapter examines how the forms of hostile masculinity imposed within armed institutions deeply affect those expected to embody them, both emotionally and psychologically.

Chapters four and five shed light on the role of education and religion during the Spanish and Chilean regimes as mechanisms for conditioning children to accept authority and norms—particularly gender norms—without question, often through violent punishment and threats. While chapter four focuses on Spanish visual narratives such as *Todo Paracuellos* and *Todo Barrio* (1981) and the Chilean non-fiction narrative *Space Invaders* (2013), all of which evoke oppressive childhood experiences, chapter five examines the perspective of Catholic collaborators to analyze the role of religious, military, and patriarchal discourse, as well as misogyny, in shaping dictatorial violence. In this chapter, DiGiovanni returns to *Los girasoles ciegos* (2004), placing it in

dialogue with the Chilean novel *Nocturno de Chile* (2000).

Chapters six and seven address persecution and torture in Spain and Chile, respectively, and constitute a crucial component of DiGiovanni's overall argument. Through close readings of three narrative films—*Crimen en Cuenca* (1981), *La voz dormida* (2011), and *La trinchera infinita* (2019)—the author traces the use of repressive violence as a response to political conflict to periods predating the Spanish Civil War. She compellingly demonstrates how the ideologies and practices associated with militarized masculinity shaped interrogation methods and forms of violence, particularly against women. At the same time, these chapters foreground resistance, highlighting both the extreme measures adopted by male fighters to evade persecution and women's sustained struggles and resilience during the war and within prison spaces, which function as ongoing challenges to patriarchy and militarized masculinity.

In chapter seven, DiGiovanni turns to four Chilean documentaries that reinforce and extend the Spanish case studies. These films not only corroborate earlier findings regarding torture and repression but also illuminate the persistence of bellicose masculinity across generations in the post-dictatorship period. Particularly significant is the chapter's demonstration that gendered and sexualized violence against women remains a recurrent tool for suppressing dissent when popular mobilization disrupts the status quo, as seen during the 2019 social uprising.

Finally, in chapter eight, the author analyzes a Chilean and a Spanish film—*Los perros* (2017) and *Pa negre* (2010)—to demonstrate how civilian complicity was crucial to the endurance of authoritarian regimes over decades, as well as to the persistence of structures that sustain the subordination of women in all its forms, including violence and rape, into the present day. DiGiovanni further shows that acts of patriarchal violence have long-lasting consequences that extend across time and therefore require sustained and collective forms

of resistance to dismantle the internalization of hierarchical and oppressive relations and to enable the emergence of new meanings.

In the conclusion, DiGiovanni invites the reader to actively participate in this process of meaning-making. A crucial step, she argues, is recognizing how the oppressive structures informed by—and operating in the service of—militarized masculinity, as examined throughout the book (education, religion, armed institutions), continue to hinder the development of social relations that move beyond dominance and violence based on gender and sexual identity, as well as on social class, ethnicity, place of origin, and other divisive categories. As DiGiovanni herself observes, "Until we tune into patterns of gender socialization and imagine alternative notions of bravery, our understanding of the continuum of violence will remain incomplete" (261).

Taken as a whole, DiGiovanni's monograph offers a rigorous, original, and urgently relevant contribution to the study of authoritarianism, gender violence, and memory. By combining feminist theory, transnational analysis, and close readings of literary and audiovisual works, the book deepens our understanding of how militarized masculinities structure repression and social control while foregrounding the ethical and political necessity of imagining alternatives. At a moment when authoritarian discourses and gendered violence are once again gaining legitimacy within democratic societies, DiGiovanni's study stands out for its analytical clarity, interdisciplinary scope, and commitment to cultural critique as a form of resistance.

Militarized Masculinity in Spain and Chile is not only a work of erudition and rigorous analysis, but also an act of intellectual courage—one that feels especially urgent at a time when such bravery is needed not only in academia, but across all spaces capable of inspiring action, imagination, and collective transformation.