

Writing (in) Prison: The Discourse of Confinement in Lidia Falcón's *En el infierno*

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“One written word in the political cell
is a more serious matter than having a pistol.”
(Nawal El Sa'adawi)

Lidia Falcón, born in 1935, belongs to the generation that grew up during the post-war period and spent the first half of its life under Francisco Franco's dictatorship. She was one of *Los hijos de los vencidos*, as she narrates in her homonymous book, and, as such, she grew up in an environment of poverty and constant fear of reprisals. Falcón engaged in social activism when she was still a teenager and studied law, journalism, and drama in order to apply her revolutionary impulses to her professional life. She took part in various oppositional movements since the 1950s, such as the Partido Comunista de España (PCE), through which she tried to implement a feminist agenda.¹ Spain's political climate of the 50s, 60s, and 70s did not encourage opposition of any kind, and even less a feminist reform of the patriarchal structures generated by Franco's regime. Although the numbers of political prisoners were reduced during the 50s and 60s, as late as in 1975, 160,000 prisoners of conscience were asking for amnesty (Suárez 287). Indeed, the repression during the last five years of the dictatorship became stronger due to, among other causes, the open opposition to the regime by nationalists and leftist radical groups. In 1972, when Franco was eighty years old, he named Admiral Carrero Blanco—his loyal right hand—President of the Executive Power; however, as is well known, on December 20, 1973, a bomb was placed under Carrero Blanco's car by ETA, killing the Admiral. On

September 13, 1973, this same terrorist group bombed a cafeteria frequented by policemen, killing eleven people and injuring sixty-two. After these two events, the regime intensified the repression, and on September 15, 1975, Franco, who in two months would be dead, ordered the execution of five people related to ETA.

Lidia Falcón's *En el infierno: Ser mujer en las cárceles de España* corresponds to these final years of Franco's dictatorship, and in fact the carceral experiences narrated in this book are related to these violent events. Even though Falcón did not have any association with ETA, she was detained in the Yserías prison on charges of having ties to the events of September 13. Falcón was incriminated in the process by Eva Forest, the main accomplice in the terrorist act, who also implicated twenty-two other intellectuals and activists from the opposition to Franco.² After nine months of incarceration, Falcón was released free of charges.³ Falcón's *En el infierno* was published in 1977, although she wrote this text while confined in the Yserías prison in Madrid from September 1974 to July 1975. The book was written clandestinely during her nine month stint and she smuggled it out with the intention of exposing the conditions of imprisoned women under Franco's regime. In it, she analyzes the life of both non-political and political women prisoners and denounces the horrible conditions of the Spanish penitentiary system. Falcón's feminist agenda informs her interpretation of the carceral space where the unequal relations of power and gender oppression are maximized. Her reconstruction of that space as an active entity of repression and her appropriation and subversion of it in her writing are the focus of this essay.

In *En el infierno*, Falcón walks the reader through her personal impressions of and reflections on the institutions that

formed the Francoist penitentiary system. The author opens the doors of *En el infierno* with a "Nota de la autora a la Primera edición" written in 1977, two and a half years after her ordeal was over. In this note, Falcón describes her book as a "recopilación de apuntes sobre mi experiencia en las prisiones y mis conversaciones con otras presas" and reveals some of the details about the production of her book that will be essential for my analysis (5). Following this introduction, Falcón takes her reader to the "Pórtico," in which she ponders both the sacrifices that women political activists have made for the anti-fascist cause in Spain and how they have been forgotten. She also dwells on how the double standards of Franco's regime pushed unprivileged women to misery, delinquency, and prostitution. Falcón dedicates the book to them: to the women who have fought against the dictatorship and those who suffered prison under Franco. After the reader passes through the "Pórtico," s/he enters into Falcón's hell: a set of vignettes portraying Spain's carceral system. Even though Falcón makes herself present in the text as a witness and denouncer, she chooses to focus not so much on her own experiences, but rather on those of her fellow prisoners. In these vignettes, Falcón as an embodied narrative voice almost disappears. Through a method of shifting focalizations, she centers on those to whom she dedicates the book. Almost every vignette is narrated in the third person in a journalistic style. In certain vignettes, since Falcón's accounts of prison are mainly based on the experiences of other prisoners, she transcribes directly their first-person stories, opening a textual window and giving voice to those who are condemned to silence in prison. Thus *En el infierno* is a text both personal and collective, for it bears witness to the suffering of a collectivity of women

through the mediation of Falcón as intellectual, witness, and participant. After the last vignette, the narrative voice shifts to Carmen Alcalde, another feminist activist and Falcón's friend, who writes the epilogue of the book. She receives, transcribes, and orders the vignettes that Falcón writes clandestinely in prison.

Falcón writes her book as her everyday life in prison unfolds, providing the reader with an ongoing denunciation of the conditions of women in prison made from the very core of the repressive apparatus itself. Thus, carceral space permeates *En el infierno*. As I will argue in this essay, Falcón's textual strategies for representing the conditions of the imprisoned women of Spain are inextricably linked to the representation of carceral space as a repressive and active force. Prison and metaphors of prison space have formed the substratum of Western conceptions of confinement. As Pérez and Pérez have pointed out, "literary prisons may be metaphorical, philosophical or very real" (12). Even though Falcón's text deals with the very real experiences of women in Francoist prisons, the author appeals to a literary and popular tradition that presents carceral spaces as metaphors: prison as hell. From Plato's "Myth of the Cave" to Foucault's "carceral city," prison has been established in the collective Western imagination as a space of suffering, deprivation of freedom, darkness, and melancholy. Real and metaphorical prison spaces have nurtured the histories of repression and literary imagination; present in our societies and literary traditions, carceral representations are part of our collective memory. Prison space is then full of significations, a palimpsest upon which the pain of the confined body has been inscribed.

At the same time, carceral space not only refers to the bars, the stone walls, the electric fence, or the armed guards, but also

to the ideological and discursive formations that are intrinsic to any space. In this sense, the conceptualization of space as an active entity, as constant performance, as a mechanism of repression, control and discipline, as well as a practice of resistance, is integral to the interpretation of texts written in prison.⁴ In this way, space, then, is no longer conceived of as a fixed, immobile entity, as a receptacle where objects and/or beings exist or are inserted, but as a strategy within the discourses of power and knowledge. This more complex and fruitful interpretation of space will be very useful for the analysis of the multiple levels of spatial production that converge in Lidia Falcón's *En el infierno*.⁵

In the pages that follow, I analyze the representation of prison space in *En el infierno* and also identify several ways in which power relations can be covertly, but nonetheless effectively, subverted within that very space. In the first part of this essay I explore how Falcón construes the carceral space in *En el infierno* as a representational space of repression towards women, and how her interpretation of space decodes the discourse of the dictatorship as fascist and male chauvinist. In the second, I examine Falcón's act of writing as a set of strategies that allow her to convert the space of repression into a space of resistance.

The title of Falcón's book—*En el infierno*—sets up the metaphorical mapping of the space of prison. The intertextual reference to Dante's *Inferno* highlights the need for literary discourse to disclose the space of captivity and make intelligible its horrors. Falcón's first chapter, which serves as an introduction to the dictatorship's carceral system, situates the detainee and the reader at the threshold of this metaphorical hell: "Uno a uno [la detenida] deberá recorrer todos los círculos de este infierno moderno" (37). This "modern hell" is constituted by

the spaces the author portrays in the text: Barcelona's Trinidad prison, the cellar at the Dirección General de Seguridad in Madrid, her prison cell at Yererías, the nursery at the same prison, and the penitentiary hospital in Madrid. In addition to these spaces the author knew from personal experiences, she also includes a psychiatric hospital and a juvenile reformatory through the testimonies of other detainees who had been there. Falcón makes all these different locations of confinement converge into one metaphorical—yet horribly real—space of hell.

This constructed space of hell is indelibly marked by gender in Falcón's narrative, as the subtitle of her book—*Ser mujer en las cárceles de España*—indicates. The relationship between carceral space and women's confined bodies is crucial in *En el infierno*. In order to understand this relationship, I turn to one of the critics who most emphasizes the relationship between space and the body, Henri Lefebvre.⁶ In his work, *The Production of Space*, he highlights that it is through the body that the self relates to space:

When 'Ego' arrives in an unknown country or city, he first experiences it through every part of his body—through his senses of smell and taste, as [...] through his legs and feet. His hearing picks up the noises and the quality of the voices; his eyes are assailed by new impressions. For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived—and produced. (162)

New places always provoke a reaction in our bodies and senses, whether positive or negative, since it is through the body that we feel and locate ourselves in space. When Lidia Falcón first arrived at the Dirección General de Seguridad (from now on, DGS), and then at Yererías prison, she narrates

how she smelled the vomit and dried blood of the tortured in her mattress, tasted the rotten food, walked down the steps to the cellar's hell, heard the screams of the ill and the cries of the children born in prison. Through her body she perceived the space of prison, lived that space, and produced her own in order to survive the experience. In *En el infierno* she attempts to convert her perception, living, and creation of space into discourse. Falcón contributes to the corpus of knowledge on the Franco regime's repressive tactics from the perspective of a woman, interpreting and communicating her perception of this space through her writing. Her text is beset by spatial tropes that emphasize the feeling of confinement and gender oppression, giving shape to what I would like to call an "anti-topophilia." For Bachelard "topophilia" "seek[s] to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love, [the] eulogized space." In Falcón's, narrative, however, the carceral system is presented as what Bachelard envisions as the opposite, "the space of hatred and combat," a space that "can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images" (xxxii-ii). In this sense, this text may be read as an anti-topophilia that apprehends, through the reproduction of hellish and apocalyptic images, the magnitude of the horrors of everyday life in a women's prison during Franco's regime. In this section I analyze *En el infierno* as an anti-topophilia that reveals Falcón's reading of the carceral system as a representational space of repression. I will focus on the study of the representation of the spaces of the DGS first, and second of Yererías prison.

The reader crosses the entrance into Falcón's hell through the doors to the cellars of the DGS. In this first chapter, entitled

“Carne de represión,” Falcón describes the gloomy basement where the detainees were tortured and held incommunicado prior to being judged and sent to prison. Of all the vignettes in *En el infierno*, this one is the most personal. It is the only chapter in which the narrative voice shifts between “yo,” or “nosotras,” and “la detenida,” or “la mujer presa,” and in which Falcón’s personal account of the detention is narrated. Because of the practice of political repression, the DGS was a space well known by those engaged in the fight against Franco’s regime. It was the legendary place of torture that haunted the opposition movement during the forty years of dictatorship. The narrative voice that accounts for “la detenida” focuses on the effects on the female body of this new (although at the same time well known) space, perceived as an oppressive setting and a cruel scenario for the display of hegemonic discourse. In Falcón’s hell, the DGS is the lowest region. Here, it is not only a feared, imagined, actual physical space, but also a representational space produced by the agents of the dictatorship as a setting for repression where the discourses of masculinity, violence, and total domination are enacted.⁷ Describing the physical site and the relations of power within it, Falcón depicts the DGS as a space that makes symbolic use of its architecture and objects for repressive aims:

Los calabozos de la Dirección General de Seguridad son particularmente siniestros. [...] Sótanos interiores de pasillos alargados, en penumbra rota de trecho en trecho por una bombilla con rejilla de metal. Celdas separadas del pasillo por puertas de hierro, por rejas de barrotes gruesos y redondos. (26-27)

Falcón’s use of the word “calabozo” brings into view the image of the medieval gaols, with the obvious connotations that the word has in the Western imagination: inhuman, subterranean, dark, dirty, humid zones where arbitrary punishment and torture are performed.⁸ The depiction of the space stresses a sense of enclosure and abandonment. Not only is the detainee confined in the gloomy basement, but also everything that surrounds her highlights the idea of imprisonment—the narrow corridors, the lack of daylight, the iron doors, the bars. Even the light, “una bombilla con rejilla de metal,” is inside a metal cage. That which decipheres and illuminates, the light that brings the object to the eye and is the symbol of knowledge, is also held encaged.

Moreover, Falcón represents the use of architecture as a mechanism of power at the DGS.⁹ Architecture (the cells, the corridor, the interrogation room) is used to inflict terror and pain. Falcón carefully describes how the lights in the chambers are oriented towards the detainee’s eyes to damage their sight, how the doors of the bathrooms are never closed so the prisoner is deprived of privacy, how the guards walk up and down the long, dark corridor screaming the detainee’s names, taking advantage of the echo produced by the high ceilings. Likewise, objects are used to create panic: the guards bang their keys against the iron bars to produce loud noises and disturb the prisoners, and the bolts of the doors are continually opened and closed to scare the inmates and make them believe they are going to be taken into interrogation.¹⁰ Accordingly, Falcón’s understanding of the DGS reveals that torture is a practice that reproduces, every time it is performed, the DGS as a representational space of repression, for it converts its objects into symbolic and deathly weapons, creating a methodology of fear and pain.

Falcón's depiction of the performance of torture reveals a painful connection between the female body and the creation of a space for its domination. Not only is torture itself used as both a symbolic and real exercise of power that contributes to the production of the representational space of repression—the DGS, but also the body of the tortured is written as the space where intense pain is inflicted and suffered. According to Elaine Scarry, torture has a structure based on:

the nature of pain, the nature of power, the interaction between the two, and the interaction between the ultimate source of each—the body, the locus of pain, and the voice, the locus of power. (51)

Similarly, Falcón's portrayal of torture reveals the relation between male torturer and female tortured, how the female body is transformed into the space of pain and abjection, and how the male voice exudes the power of domination.

First, I will address Falcón's representation of the female body as the locus of pain. The title of *En el infierno's* first chapter—"Carne de represión"—underscores the effects of repressive practices of power on the female body. Falcón's reading of the objectification of the body and, therefore, its conversion into a space for sexual torture is exposed in the following description:

Muchos pechos han sido quemados con colillas ardiendo y las miradas de los hombres, los especialistas, brillaban viendo la blanca carne donde nunca da el aire ni el sol, chamuscada y olorosa—a cauterio, a tormento medieval, a fantasía del Marqués de Sade—en una modalidad de violación, de masturbación colectiva. (34)

Falcón's description of the torture of women reveals the creation of a setting where the relations between male torturer and female tortured, the performance of power, and the strategic theatrics of pain are enacted. The female body is represented as fragmented and objectified in the ritual of pain through the use of the synecdoche "pechos," which eliminates the whole and focuses on the part of the female body that is suitable for a torture beset by sexual connotations. The torturers' erotic satisfaction, the "masturbación colectiva," derives from the sadistic ritual that Falcón describes as a variation of rape: the torturer lights up the cigarette that penetrates the breast of the woman, becoming a phallic symbol, a symbolic object of power that metonymically represents the torturer's desire for total domination.¹¹ The specialists of repression penetrate with their gaze the eroticized and hidden part of the female body—"blanca carne donde nunca da el aire y el sol"—and smell the burning flesh, reaching this way a synesthetic enactment of their fantasies. Thus, Falcón's description of sexual torture emphasizes the creation of a theatrical setting where the torture and consequent domination of the female body provides the means for spectacle and feed the fantasies of the repressors. Falcón reveals that the imposition of an absolute power is made real during torture and provokes an erotic reaction through the domination of the female body. Furthermore, Falcón's depiction of the performance of power through torture uncovers the paradox of this representational space: the very bodily connection I highlighted above between the torturer and the tortured nonetheless represents the abyss between the two, as "the pain is a physical measure of the colossal discrepancy between the person tortured and the torturer" (Scarry 46). Finally, this description of the performance of ritual

torture echoes the images of hell present in the collective Western imagination: the burning of the naked flesh, sexual objectification through pain, and the collective sadistic orgy. In this sense, Falcón's strategies of representation of the scenario of torture refer to a fantasy nurtured by a literary text—“fantasía del Marqués de Sade”—and, again, the images of hell embedded in our imagination through Dante's *Inferno*.

According to Scarry, the counterpart of the body as the locus of pain is the voice as the locus of power. Falcón portrays how the male voice becomes a weapon during the episodes of psychological and/or physical torture in various moments of her first chapter. The unequal relations of power between male guard and female detainee are emphasized when referring to the power invested in the male voice. The guards' shouts to call the detainees to interrogation and the insults during torture are reproduced throughout the chapter as part of the methods of torture of women in the “mundo masculino” that is the DGS (23). The fear that this voice awakens is represented through the description of a detainee's distressed attentiveness when waiting for interrogation: “Se espera con espanto la llamada” (30), “se escucha con angustiosa atención” (30), “la detenida escucha [...] las llamadas, los gritos, las exclamaciones de impaciencia del vigilante” (31). The call “¡A interrogatorio!” (32) condenses, on the one hand, all the fear and helplessness the prisoner feels while waiting in the cell, and, on the other, the power of the repressors to dominate the reactions of her body. Moreover, during the episodes of torture, Falcón emphasizes how the male voice is used as another instrument of torment. Not only do the shouting and the continuous interrogations destroy the nerves of the prisoner, but also the vocal embodiment of the physical

repression aims to devastate her sense of self. The more that physical pain is inflicted on the body, the more power is invested in the voice of the torturer:

En el interrogatorio de una política de veintitrés años, el policía especializado en lo social y lo político, añadió a los golpes, a los tirones del pelo—el pelo femenino se presta mucho a ello—a las patadas y a los puñetazos, a la tortura del *pato* y de la *cigüeña*, su deseo de destrucción anímica: *¡Cuánto me gustaría que te viniera la regla para verte sangrar pierna abajo hecha una mierda...no creas que íbamos a darte compresa, asquerosa...!* (29, original emphasis)

Here Falcón transcribes the voice of the torturer as an essential weapon in an episode of physical and psychological torture during which gender differences are emphasized. The voice of the torturer, his powerful insult, is gender specific. Indeed, the insult is aimed at that which traditionally identifies a woman as such—her menstrual cycle—and tries to provoke her abjection, her displacement beyond the realm of the acceptable, by presenting her intimacy as something dirty and repulsive. Even though here the narrative voice distinguishes between physical and psychological torture, she notes that both are gender-based. The physical torture consists of multiple forms of aggression, but one, the pulling of hair, is especially easy to perform on women. Falcón's interruption of the description of torture with her ironic comment—“el pelo femenino se presta mucho a ello”—emphasizes the gender-oriented performance of physical torture. Also, she highlights that the torturer fulfills his desire not only by physically destroying the woman, but also by reminding her of her “impurity” as a woman.

Thus far, I have analyzed both Falcón's descriptions of the space of the DGS and her crude accounts of torture as narratives that convey the production of a representational space of violence embedded in a physical space of confinement. It is precisely via these depictions of forces of repression that this space of violence is created. However, Falcón also decodes the discourse of the dictatorial regime through spatial metaphors reminding us that, as Foucault pointed out,

Endeavoring [...] to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power. ("Questions" 70)

The metaphor of the DGS as a "mundo masculino," as a universe of repression where the hegemonic discourse of the regime is reproduced in large scale is constant in this first chapter.¹² The repetition of the word "mundo" throughout reiterates the idea of a microcosm with its own logic, one based on the oppression that "reflects the same dichotomized view of gender on which all authoritative social structures are founded" in Franco's Spain (Gabriele 101). Falcón creates her metaphor of the DGS as follows:

En un mundo masculino, botas, pistolas, rejas, voces, broncas, risas desencajadas, chistes obscenos, retretes malolientes horadados en el suelo y en la pared, de puertas batientes que nunca se cierran. (23)

"[B]otas" and "pistolas" are the phallic components of the police uniform that represent the violence and masculinity of the men who wear them, "rejas"—also phal-

lic in form—embody the part of the cell that separates the inside from the outside; "voces," "broncas," "risas desencajadas," and "chistes obscenos" become the reification of power through the voice of the guards. With this description, Falcón unravels both the space that surrounds her and the ideology that permeates it, that is, a space filled with violence and masculinity in constant performance, where the panoptic gaze of the guards follows her everywhere. Here all the doors that have bars permit the gaze to penetrate, and the only doors that lack bars are never closed, facilitating the violation of the detainee's space.¹³ In conclusion, Falcón's textual strategies create spatial metaphors that emphasize the perception of the DGS as a microcosm of repression that violently reiterates the official rhetoric of gender dichotomy in Franco's Spain.

After the accounts of the conditions of confinement at the DGS, Falcón's narrative moves to the Yeserías prison. The narration now focuses on the physical and psychological transformations that the change of space from the DGS to a regular prison provokes in the detainee: "La tranquilizadora visión de cuatro paredes desnudas, de una silla y una mesilla de noche, resulta tan confortadora como la del propio hogar" (36). Here we see that, as Bachelard pointed out, "we comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection" (6). The vision of such everyday objects as a chair and a nightstand, or "las camas de sábanas limpias y las duchas de agua caliente," evokes an immediate association with the space to which these objects belong: home (36). Bachelard explains this idea of the house as a synonym of tranquility: "a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). Indeed, the reassuring vision of a clean and organized place is first represented as a "nuevo paraíso" (36).

However, the feeling of tranquility is nothing but an illusion; the narrative voice will uncover the metaphor of the new paradise as a mirage that will soon be exposed as another circle of hell, a more refined and longer lasting torture than the DGS:

Harán falta algunos días para que comprenda que la tortura que le está destinada [a la presa] es mucho más refinada que la de la detención policíaca. Que aunque ha ascendido algunos peldaños en la consideración humana, ha llegado al lugar del penar sordo, lento y obscurecido por un sufrimiento sin grandeza ni martirio, ignorado por la mayoría, sin interés para los demás. (37)

“Lugar del penar sordo” is another spatial metaphor that echoes Dante’s hell, where all the sinners exist, forever, without a shred of hope. It is, as Foucault would call it, one of the “heterotopias of deviation,” where “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed,” and, I would add, forgotten (“Of Other” 25). The “sinners” who inhabit this hellish space are women marginalized from Franco’s vision of a heavenly Spain. They are lesbians, illegal immigrants, political activists, prostitutes, suicidal women, thieves, women who have had or performed abortions, etc. In short, they are women who confronted either the politics or the morals of the regime. This other circle of hell is depicted as:

un inframundo [...] peor que la mendicidad y la prostitución. [...] La cárcel es el imperio de la mentira y del engaño y de la miseria, la absoluta miseria. (43)

According to Falcón, the carceral space then does not bring redemption; it is not represented as a limbo where the sinners wait to be exonerated, but rather a space beneath the underworld where there is no hope, only misery.

After reading these different spaces—the DGS and the Yererías prison—it is fair to say that Falcón’s text emphasizes the use of prison space to destroy the female self: “la cárcel degrada a la presa, la hace descender los últimos peldaños que le queda en la escala civilizada” (103). Furthermore, the representational space is endlessly reproduced through the constant repression of the female body, as it is portrayed in the following extract:

Encierro sobre encierro. Cárcel y rejas, y guardias y fusiles. Botas, ametralladora, garitas, uniforme. No basta. Aislamiento, frío, incomunicación. No basta. Censura, temor, silencio. No basta. Encierro sobre encierro. No hay libros, no hay revistas, no hay cine, no hay rostro amigo. No basta. Encierro sobre encierro. El director es un hombre, el subdirector es un hombre. El cura es un hombre, el médico es un hombre. Los guardias civiles, los policías armados son hombres. Las mujeres encerradas, custodiadas por la super [sic] represión: el hombre fascista. (49)

In this powerful paragraph, Falcón conveys every aspect of confinement that she portrays throughout the book. By repeating the sentence “encierro sobre encierro” three times, she delimits the three manifestations of repression that work together to destroy the female inmate. The first form is represented as physical and psychological repression:

the architecture (“cárcel” and “rejas”) and the violence of surveillance (“guardias,” “fusiles,” “botas,” “ametralladoras,” “garitas,” “uniforme”) depict physical repression, but since this is not enough to destroy the female self (“no basta”), the psychological tortures of isolation (“aislamiento,” “frío,” “incomunicación”) and of silence (“censura,” “temor,” “silencio”) are added. The second form of repression is alienation, expressed by the negation—through the anaphoric repetition of “no”—of stimulus for the inmate (entertainment or friendship). And yet, both physical and psychological repression, as well as alienation, are not enough. Thus, the third “encierro sobre encierro” adds gender oppression and reveals the agents of the repressive apparatus, from those who symbolize power and violence in the carceral system (“director,” “subdirector,” “guardias civiles,” “policías armados”) to those who contribute with their profession to the repression of women (“cura” and “médico”). The last sentence condenses both the ideas of the paragraph and the thrust of Falcón’s text: the transformation of “encierro” into “encerradas” converges all the three forms of repression onto the female subjects—“las mujeres.” Likewise, the different forms of repression converge in one “super represión” that is equated to “el hombre fascista,” the agent of the double violence (*machista* and fascist) that Falcón denounces throughout the text. The feeling of oppression imposed by the carceral system is also portrayed through the repetition of “encierro sobre encierro” and “no basta” as well as through the lack of verbs of action, a strategy that emphasizes the immobility and stagnation of prison space.

Indeed, Falcón portrays the carceral system (detention center and prison) as a representational space where the power of the oppressors is constantly (re)generated through the subjugation of the female

body. As we have seen, this oppression is performed by means of physical and psychological torture and alienation, and the repressive power is reified in the agents of the *machista* and fascist dictatorship. The text also suggests, however, that this may become a space of resistance. That is, the same space that Falcón represents as repressive is also portrayed as appropriated to counteract repression. Falcón’s creation of resistance depends on the representation of “spatial practices,” a concept that Lefebvre and Michel De Certeau develop in their theories of space. Based on his study of these authors, Rob Shields defines spatial practices as follows:

A range of activities from individual routines to the creation of zones and regions for specific purposes, [...] [i]ndividualised performance or enactment of spatialisation by individuals in their daily habits and minute gestures and mannerisms. (52-53)

In Falcón’s narrative, spatial practices are represented as appropriations of the carceral space that allow, first, a buffer zone during the first days of detention at the DGS and, second, the possibility of writing at Yeserías prison.

Even though the DGS is where the mechanisms of surveillance are most thorough, Falcón’s text reveals the possibility of creating an alternate space in order to survive. According to Falcón’s account, the prisoner tries to learn how to become “invisible” to the guardians’ panoptic gaze. She feels that:

En el silencio [...] existe para ella una relativa seguridad. [Siente] el deseo más allá de toda reacción humana lógica de que nunca se interrumpa la

soledad y el abandono del calabozo.
[...] Mejor sobrevivir en el *in pace*
subterráneo sin que su persona sea
recordada. (32, original emphasis)

Here, being forgotten in the solitude of the cell is the best way to survive; the way to inhabit that space is by being unnoticed. Even though it is an individual and solitary practice that almost annihilates her agency completely, it also permits a sort of relief from the constant atmosphere of violence. Furthermore, Falcón's desire for solitude and abandonment at the cell is one of her tactics of resistance to overcome desperation. As she explains in the introduction to *En el infierno*, the solitude of the cell allows her to exercise her imagination and to mentally write the first pages of the book, "para liberar mi angustia, olvidar las condiciones en que me encontraba" (5-6). That is, during these first days of detention, Falcón did not have the means to write and had to inscribe in her memory everything she would write days later. Writing "mentally" becomes, using Ross Chambers's expression, a "sign of life" (208), that is to say, a way to overcome the fear of death at the DGS. Solitude, then, is represented in Falcón's account as a tactic of repression that is effectively subverted and used to formulate—writing mentally—resistance and survival.

As mentioned above, when Falcón is transferred to Yaserías, she moves to another circle of hell. There, she incorporates her writing into her prison routine. Falcón creates her own space in order to be able to write the stories of imprisoned women. She creates, in Lefebvre's terms, a "counter-space," one produced by the body,

a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space (either the space of a

counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real space')." (Lefebvre 349)

She establishes her own space as a tactic of resistance, her own counter-space in the real space of prison. However, it is very difficult to know from her accounts of everyday life in prison what tactics she uses to create this counter-space that allows her to write clandestinely. This difficulty resides in the fact that the enunciative focalizations in the text do not reveal her personal practices, but the collective ones. To describe how she created her own space would be focusing on her own identity as a subject, something that, as I have argued, Falcón avoids during the entire account. In order to understand how this counter-space was produced, it is helpful to consult her book *Viernes y 13 en la Calle del Correo*, written seven years after her release from prison, where Falcón chooses the autobiographical form to give a detailed account about her personal experiences at Yaserías, including the spatial practices that allowed her to write her text. I believe the following quote is crucial to understanding her process of writing:

[R]edactaba todas las tardes, prefiriendo la glacial temperatura de una sala enorme, vacía y sin calefacción, al fatigante bullicio de las treinta y cuatro animadas presencias de mis compañeras, carta tras carta, lo que más tarde se convertiría en la crónica detallada de aquel infierno. (213)

Falcón discovered that the huge, empty room was supposed to be a classroom for the inmates, but it was in fact a completely abandoned part of the prison into which she could sneak during allowed free time. It is quite ironic that she appropriates a space

destined to be a school, but forgotten by the prison authorities, to convert it into a counter-space where she produces a clandestine text that teaches the abuses of that very same institution. Falcón thus writes “outside the reach of panoptic power” (De Certeau 95), but using the space provided by it. She even uses her cell and the cell of other prisoners as a space of enunciation, another counter-space where every night she reads out loud whatever she wrote in the evening (6). Falcón adds in *Viernes y 13* that every morning she talked to the other prisoners, especially the non-political ones, and in the evening she wrote their stories, as well as the ones of her fellow political prisoners which she already knew (213). Her performance of spatial practices creates a combinatory system of spaces: spaces of appropriation (the school transformed into a room of her own) and successive displacements (going from cell to cell in the morning to hear the testimonies of her fellow prisoners, and reading for others in her cell at night). Every night she added another step in the cycle of story-telling: the oral stories heard in the morning from her fellow prisoners were transformed into written text in the solitude of the school, and then performed orally again at night in one of the prisoners’s cells:

[Y]o leía a mis compañeras por la noche, reunidas en una de las celdas, cada uno de los que serían después capítulos de este libro. Nos servía de distracción de nuestras veladas, y puesto que de momento a nadie más podía comunicar mis sensaciones, ellas por más conocedoras del tema, eran mi mejor público. (6)

Here Falcón establishes both the need to communicate as well as to find an empathetic witness to whom to read her stories,

an addressee who would recognize the veracity of her stories and the feelings invested in them. Also, she emphasizes that her writing process, this cycle of story-telling, creates a space—the cell where the stories are told—of solidarity, sharing, and survival.

The cycle continues when the stories transcend the prison walls. In order to avoid censorship and punishment, Falcón smuggled her text the best way she could, as she explains in the introduction to *En el infierno*:

Aquellas páginas escritas primero en papel cebolla, con letra menuda para ocupar menos espacio, [...] salieron clandestinamente de la prisión. (6)

Converting enunciation into *énoncé* (oral testimonies, thoughts, and feelings into text) becomes a spatial practice that requires from her a set of tactics in order to keep the text “alive.” First, she needs to use very thin paper and a penmanship that will allow her to write as much as possible in the least amount of space. Second, the texts need to be hidden, and, through a chain of messengers, sent to their addressee Carmen Alcalde. The way by which these onionskin sheets laden with stories leave prison is explained in the introduction by Falcón:

[C]apítulo tras capítulo, plegado en mil dobleces, salía periódicamente de prisión, para ser enviado por manos amigas, a mi domicilio en Barcelona. [...] En el último eslabón de solidaridades, se encontraba Carmen Alcalde. De las manos de mis hijos el manuscrito pasaba a las suyas. (8)¹⁴

En el infierno is born, then, as a collaborative project among the author, the women who gave testimony, all the hands and pockets

through which the text passed, and Carmen Alcalde's decoding and typing of the manuscript. It is a "walking text" that, thanks to solidarity, gains agency and traverses the space of prison and beyond. Prison walls are transformed from the architecture that delimits a space of repression, the frontier between the inside and the outside, to "a space in-between," a space that has a mediating role (De Certeau 127). In this case, the mediating role is that prison walls permit Falcón to write her book. Indeed, the spatial practices of both Falcón and the text she creates turn the space of repression into one where some degree of freedom is possible, where, as Ross Chambers would say, there is "room for maneuver." Paradoxically, Falcón depicts writing clandestinely and creating the mechanisms that allowed the text to navigate out of prison, as permitting her "la maravillosa experiencia de escribir sin represiones, después de tantas sufridas en mi difícil trayectoria de escritora" (6). In other words, writing clandestinely allows her to cut across the limits of censorship that have always limited her, even prior incarceration.

Is it possible, however, to write in prison without feeling any repressions? Ross Chambers has eloquently answered this question:

In a prison society, where there is no 'freedom of speech,' it is the incarcerated prisoner who paradoxically becomes free, albeit free only to inscribe graffiti on a cell wall; so the graffiti that are the signs of freedom are simultaneously the signs of an imprisoned consciousness. (177)

Falcón's text of prison demonstrates that, indeed, there is room for maneuver when writing under domination:

[T]he voices that rise in the dark of an actual prison cell enjoy more freedom—freedom of witness, freedom of denunciation—than those on the outside, whose oppositionality is inextricably compromised with the working of the system. (Chambers 208)

In fact, Lidia Falcón's *En el infierno* is the crudest and most detailed denunciation of the Francoist carceral system written in Spain during the dictatorship and published during the transition to democracy. This thorough condemnation of the regime and its repressive apparatus may be possible because it was made from its very core. Indeed, carceral space both provides the substance for Falcón's critique as well as the physical means to write an abrasive denunciatory text. Consequently, Falcón's analysis of the conditions of imprisoned women in Spain is imprinted by her confinement. Her perception of the carceral system is marked by an analysis of the space that surrounds her and the relations of power within it. Falcón's understanding of space reveals the creation, within the DGS and the Yserías prison, of a representational space of repression focused on the physical and psychological obliteration of women who dared to confront Franco's regime. *En el infierno* also exposes, however, how the space of repression can be transformed through spatial tactics into a counter-space for resistance, and how the act of writing can create its own space in order to shake the very walls of that prison. Thus, the formation of Falcón's discourse of resistance is twofold: on the one hand, it reproduces the violence embedded in the carceral system (as in the case of the mimic fragmentation and objectification of the female tortured body); on the other, the text is inscribed upon that very violence,

and, through its writing as a practice of resistance, represents the possibilities of challenging repression.

En el infierno is a rather exceptional text, in that one rarely encounters narratives of political detainees written from behind prison walls. Since Falcón wrote *En el infierno* while in prison, spatial metaphors depicting the state of confinement permeate the narrative. When comparing the text to the aforementioned *Viernes y 13 en la Calle del Correo* or her *Memorias Políticas*, one sees the uniqueness of *En el infierno* emerge even more clearly. While, as we have seen, *En el infierno* conveys a profound analysis of prison space and the dictatorship's structures of repression, *Viernes y 13* and *Memorias políticas* offer autobiographical accounts that diverge from the representation of carceral space and focus on the description of the events surrounding the author's imprisonment. Even though the latter two texts are also narratives of denunciation, they lack the former's strength, urgency, and revealing interpretation of the penal system. Furthermore, in *En el infierno*, writing (in) prison becomes a tool of survival and a strategy of resistance and reveals that, where there is extreme repression, there is also room for dissent. In conclusion, Lidia Falcón's *En el infierno* demonstrates that, indeed, as Nawal El Sa'adawi suggests in her *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, writing in confinement is a powerful form of struggle (49). The discourse of the incarcerated author exposes both the mechanisms of the repressive apparatus as well as the prisoners' tactics of resistance with a distinct perspective that emerges in defiance of confinement.

Notes

¹ This information is available in Falcón's autobiographical works: *Los hijos de los vencidos*, *Rupturas*, *Viernes y 13 en la Calle del Correo*, and *Memorias políticas*.

² In her books, *Viernes y 13 en la Calle del Correo*, and *Memorias políticas*, Falcón explains her links with Eva Forest and her husband, the playwright Alfonso Sastre. Falcón bought an apartment in Madrid and while she was renovating it, Forest contacted her and asked her if she could build a small closet there to hide documents. Falcón agreed and while she was in Barcelona, Forest concealed members of ETA in the apartment. As soon as Forest was detained, she informed the police about this apartment and its owner.

³ This was not Falcón's first stay in prison. In 1972, she was detained at Barcelona's Trinidad penal colony for six months on charges of distributing propaganda against the regime.

⁴ This essay owes its theoretical foundations to several critics who have deconstructed and re-written the concept of space in the last fifty years, in particular Gaston Bachelard, Michel De Certeau, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Rob Shields, and Edward Soja. These writers have developed an understanding of spaces—always in relation to the body—as constantly evolving strategies, readable metaphors, palimpsests, mechanisms, productions of hegemony and power relations, and sites of social interactions (for complete critical reviews of theories of space, consult Edward W. Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* and Rob Shields's *Places on the Margin*). Likewise, feminist interpretations of space and the body by critics such as Elizabeth Grosz, Janet Price, Gillian Rose, and Margrit Shildrick, have contributed to the analysis of space's relation to the female body and the conceptualization of that body as a site for both colonization as well as resistance and subversion.

⁵ Several critical studies have been written on this work, but none addresses thoroughly the treatment of space. Nancy Vosburg and John Gabriele provide excellent analyses of Falcón's feminist positioning in *En el infierno*. Vosburg is particularly interested in analyzing how Falcón's text "offers a unique feminine, and feminist, perspective on Franco's penal universe, a perspective in which the inside/outside dichotomy literally disappears" (133). Vosburg understands *En el infierno* not only as a carceral

text, but also (and I completely agree with her) as a feminist text that criticizes the authoritarian system as a whole:

It is not enough that the 'fascist' structure of penal discipline be abolished in the new democratic Spain, if that reform doesn't take into account the sexist foundations of the authoritarian system that have yet to be 'officially' recognized and addressed. (133)

John Gabriele analyzes three main themes of the work from a feminist perspective: silence, space, and the body in the context of "how authoritarian social structures seek to strip woman of her personal dignity and sense of self" (95). Even though he analyzes space, he focuses on the "images of confinement [as reflection of] the physical conditions of women's prison reality" (101). His excellent analysis is a point of departure for this study, as I will develop the relationship between Falcón's representation of carceral space and the oppression of women under Franco's repressive apparatus.

⁶ Although Lefebvre's writing lacks a gender perspective, I believe his view is valid as a point of departure. I will emphasize later in the analysis how gender is a key issue in the relationship between repressive spaces and the female body.

⁷ By "representational space" I mean what Lefebvre defines as a space "directly lived through its associated images and symbols," a space that "overlaps physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (39).

⁸ During an interview with the author of this essay, Falcón stated that she still remembered the DGS as "calabozos medievales. Bajabas una escalera y te hundías en la edad media."

⁹ For an analysis of architecture as a mechanism of power, consult Spain's *Gendered Spaces*.

¹⁰ These practices were very common in Spain's centers of detention. Elaine Scarry notes in a 1975 Amnesty International report that:

Basques tortured by the Spanish describe 'el cerrojo,' the rapid and

repeated bolting and unbolting of the door in order to keep them at all times in immediate anticipation of further torture, as one of the most terrifying and damaging acts. (40)

¹¹ For a psychoanalytical interpretation of instruments of torture as phallus, consult Frank Graziano's chapter "In the Name of the Father."

¹² Nancy Vosburg highlights Falcón's idea that for women under Franco, prison:

is a reproduction and magnification of the hierarchy, authoritarianism, repressive mechanisms, and institutionalized violence operating in the social system as a whole. (126)

¹³ The male gaze:

la sigue cuando anda descalza por los pasillos, cuando se inclina sobre el lavabo, cuando se agacha en cuclillas en el agujero, cuando intenta dormir en el colchón agujereado del calabozo, cuando se viste para acudir a los interrogatorios. (29)

For a more complete study of this gaze and its ideological implications in Falcón's text, consult Vosburg.

¹⁴ The role of Carmen Alcalde in the edition of the book is rather enigmatic. Falcón appoints her as the addressee of the chapters, and she is the one who has to decipher them and put them in order following a complicated system of codes. In her epilogue, however, Alcalde does not provide any information about how she sorted out the stories or whether she somehow manipulated parts of the text when she transcribed it from the damaged onionskin paper where the text was almost "illegible" due to the multiple folding and exchanging of hands (8). Falcón explains that Alcalde structured the chapters according to the index that she sent through regular mail, an index coded in order to elude censorship. Thus, in the traveling and transcription of the text there are many agents and layers involved that could have affected the final product, but their particular roles are unclear.

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