

LASTESIS in conversation: Art, rights and resistance for the 21st century, 17 November 2023

On Thursday 17 November the University of Sheffield hosted colectivo LASTESIS, an artistic, interdisciplinary and feminist collective from Valparaíso, Chile, featuring Daffne Valdés Vargas, Paula Cometa Stange and Sibila Sotomayor Van Rysseghem. The event, supported by *Gender & History* and the University of Sheffield, drew over 70 attendees.

LASTESIS is dedicated to spreading feminist theses and demands through performance and video performance, combining performing, sound, graphic and textile arts with history, philosophy and social sciences. They shot to global prominence in late 2019, when their street intervention, [*Un violador en tu camino \(a rapist in your path\)*](#) went viral worldwide, replicated by women in more than fifty countries. The song and dance address rape culture and victim shaming, and while the work was inspired by the experiences of the collective and other women and members of the LGBTQ+ community in Valparaíso, Chile, its message resonated worldwide. In fact, several of those in the audience at the Sheffield event had themselves participated in a rendition in front of City Hall in late 2019.

Besides *Un violador en tu camino*, LASTESIS's performances include Patriarchy and Capital is a Criminal Alliance (2018); the rapist is you (2020); RESISTANCE or the vindication of a collective right (2021), The city of the future alongside Delight Lab (2022), Songs for cooking (2023) and, most recently, *TANTA IMPUNIDAD* (so much impunity), addressing the fiftieth anniversary of the military coup that brought the Pinochet dictatorship to power in September 1973. In addition to their stage work, they have published several books, including *Polifonías Feministas* (Random House, 2022), *Antología Feminista* (Debate, 2021); and *Quemar el miedo* (Planeta, 2021) which has been translated into German (S. Fisher, 2021), Italian (Capovolte, 2022) and English, the latter as *Set Fear on Fire: The Feminist Call That Set the Americas Ablaze* (Verso, 2023).

The event in Sheffield formed part of a series of events across the UK this year to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the military coup of 11 September 1973, which overthrew Salvador Allende's elected government and led to 17 years of dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. In this context, LASTESIS reflected on how their own activism has been fundamentally shaped by Chile's contemporary history. *Un violador en tu camino* was first

performed in the context of Chile's 2019 *estallido social* (social explosion or uprising), when over a million Chileans took to the streets in frustration at the lack of progress and meaningful change, particularly in tackling social and economic inequality, since Chile's transition back to democracy in 1990. To this day, Chile is governed by a constitution dating from 1980, the peak of the military dictatorship. LASTESIS discussed how this context has shaped their work, emphasising the importance of feminism and the wider feminist movement to the ongoing struggle for social justice in Chile. In particular, they highlighted the ongoing impunity enjoyed by many of those who perpetrated human rights abuses, and particularly acts of gendered and sexual violence, during Chile's 17-year dictatorship, drawing a line of continuity between these acts and the ways in which sex discrimination coloured the Carabineros' (armed police) repression of the 2019 protests.

More broadly, LASTESIS made a forceful case for the importance of putting feminist theory into practice. As they put it in their most recent book, *Set Fear on Fire*, 'no one will ever be able to absorb all the information in the world before they die. What we need is to do something with the information available to us now, to stimulate other minds and unleash an unstoppable domino effect'.¹ In the book they argue that 'academic feminism taken to the streets' can have a transformative effect on social justice struggles, and at the event in Sheffield the collective elaborated on this point, underscoring the need to turn words into concrete actions, as they have done in their numerous performances. Besides this, LASTESIS discussed their experiences as a collective from the Global South and why it is important to them to take their work and their activism to the Global North and inform global debates.

LASTESIS received questions from the audience covering a large range of topics, and several women shared their own reflections on what LASTESIS's work has meant to them. The event ended with a question relating to what men should do to avoid being merely 'observers' of gender inequality and patriarchal violence. LASTESIS responded with a rallying cry for an inclusive feminist movement, underscoring that it is only with the active participation of those who benefit from existing intersectional inequalities that can we achieve a more just and equitable world.

I'd like to express my gratitude to *Gender & History* and the University of Sheffield for supporting this event, to Paula Cometa Stange, Sibila Sotomayor Van Rysseghem and Daffne Valdes Vargas (collectively, LASTESIS) for coming to Sheffield, and to Professor

¹ LASTESIS. *Set Fear on Fire: The Feminist Call That Set the Americas Ablaze*. Translated by Camila Valle, Verso Books, 2023.

Lauren Rea and Maria Vasquez-Aguilar (both of the University of Sheffield) for providing interpretation on the day.