

**GUATEMALAN FEMALE ARTIVISTS ENVISAGE
VIOLENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO, ROSA CHÁVEZ, AND DENISE PHÉ-FUNCHAL**

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This dissertation is the first systematic critical study that examines the language of violence against women as is produced by machista discourse vis-à-vis the language expressed in the works of Regina José Galindo, Rosa Chávez and Denise Phé-Funchal. Following Mary Louise Pratt and Judith Butler's speech act theories, I argue that Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal redistribute the power that the discourse on violence attempts to have over women's bodies and social existence *in language*. Across seven chapters I analyze how *Machistañol*, a term I coined to define the language spoken by machistas, who commit acts of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them, has intentionally made feminicide an unintelligible phenomenon. By producing insurrectionary speech acts, the artists in this study respond to the current violent reality of Guatemalan women. They meticulously clarify the nuances of violence and the actors and systems that function by violence, to ultimately disarticulate *Machistañol*. In chapter one, two and three, I set the historical background of Guatemala as well as the theoretical tools that frame my analysis. In the fourth chapter I analyze how Rosa Chávez's poetry presents a Maya woman in a constant process of transformation that defies the discriminatory predominant discourse today. In chapter five and six, I examine a selection of Regina José Galindo's performances and poetry which shows us how both her body and word contest the power dynamics of *Machistañol*. In the seventh chapter, I trace how in Denise Phé-Funchal's poetry and short stories, woman speaks up in patriarchal spaces that attempt to invisibilize her.

In the context of the emerging scholarship on feminicides and violence against women, my dissertation contributes to a reflection on literature and art's relationship to these broader sociopolitical processes. If the male-dominated language used to talk about violence against women was meant to be understood and spoken only amongst men, the activists in this study *are* intervening, visibilizing, and bringing a sense of justice to a phenomenon the State is incapable or unwilling to provide for women.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE ARTIVISTS THEORIZE VIOLENCE

*Para la intervención del feminismo moderno
en la esfera de la discusión pública, es menester una reflexión
crítica sobre las diferencias entre las culturas y sobre las distintas
configuraciones de la lucha por el poder interpretativo.*
Jean Franco *Las conspiradoras*

In Guatemala, art has become a tool to heal the past. In a society where some prefer to ignore their situation, or eventually become desensitized to violence, others choose to create. It is in the act of creating where one can confront, understand, and build a different future away from violence. This dissertation examines the works of three contemporary Guatemalan artists, Regina José Galindo, Rosa Chávez and Denise Phé-Funchal, who were born during one of Latin America's most brutal civil wars.¹ Guatemala's Civil War lasted thirty-six years, from 1960 to 1996, and more than 200,000 bodies were tortured and/or disappeared (CEH 1999).² The primary target of what in later years became a racially-motivated war was the Indigenous community. Since then, in a transition to "peace and democracy," the victim has changed; it is no longer only a matter of race but also of gender. If in the twentieth century the term for violence in Guatemala

¹ A thorough and detailed account of the violations during the war can be found in Greg Grandin's book, *The Last Colonial Massacre*.

² As part of the Peace Accords in 1996, the Historical Clarification Commission (Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico CEH—I will use the Spanish acronym because that's where I extract my references) was established in Guatemala to disclose human rights violations and acts of violence against the people of Guatemala.

was “genocide,” in the twenty-first century it is “feminicide.”³ Today it is women who are the primary victims of violence at the hands of a democratic State. The dissemination of information on the increase in feminicides has been gravely dismissed or ignored, both in Guatemala and internationally, until recently. In a situation similar to the feminicide phenomenon in Ciudad Juarez during the 1990’s, where no one understood why there was an increase of violence against female bodies, or who was committing these acts, today, Guatemala has the world’s third highest rate of feminicide.

This dissertation examines the language of violence against women as is produced by machista discourse⁴ vis-à-vis the language expressed in the works of Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal. *Machistañol*, a term I use to define the language spoken by machistas, who commit acts of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them, has intentionally made feminicide an unintelligible phenomenon. The lack of investigation of these cases and unwillingness to apply the law to find justice and answers for the victims of violence has allowed for feminicide to become an unsolved mystery. The artists included in this study are offering alternative interpretations of violence and are unmaking machista meanings about 1) how a State functions because of and for violence, 2) about Guatemala’s inherently sexist, racist and classist social construct, and most importantly, 3) about what it is to be a woman inhabiting a violent state. By situating Woman in various contexts of violence to speak from those spaces, the artists are using

³ From an anthropological perspective, Victoria Sanford, analyzes this transition in her article “From Genocide to Feminicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala,” understanding it as “contemporary social cleansing.”

⁴ *Machismo* is an overarching cultural concept, and *machista*, are the actions, thoughts or speech that resonate with this masculine-driven cultural belief. Machistas express their power over others, especially women, in family relationships, love, work, friendships and politics, and show disdain over everything feminine. Moreover, machistas express their virility whenever necessary, the most recent form of expression being feminicide.

their interpretive power *a la* Jean Franco (*Las conspiradoras*).⁵ Only inside of violence can one question it and more importantly, decipher what has been labeled “unintelligible,” and ultimately deauthorizing its power.

Following Mary Louise Pratt and Judith Butler’s speech act theories, I argue that Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal redistribute the power that the discourse on violence attempts to have over women’s bodies and social existence *in language*. According to Pratt, a “speech act approach to literature offers the important possibility of integrating literary discourse into the same basic model of language as all our other communicative activities” (Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act* 88). Interpreting the artists’ literary activities (and performances in the case of Galindo) as speech acts allows us to set them against the violent speech acts produced by a Machista State and society. If, as Butler explains, “the speech act is a bodily act” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 11), then, to rape, kill, assault and ignore women’s rights are all machista speech acts that threaten women’s sociolinguistic existence. By re-citing these violent acts in their works, the artists carry out what Butler calls “insurrectionary speech acts.” Insurrectionary speech has a performative power which grants possibilities for agency and resignification of language so that when injurious speech acts are re-cited, they no longer overpower the intended addressee. Rather, the addressed attains power in the reiteration of a machista speech act.

Furthermore, Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal challenge machista language, or *Machistañol*, when they reiterate injurious speech acts in their works. Regina José Galindo, for instance, performs acts of violence upon her own body to interpret violence more corporally. In her poetry, she interpellates the Machista State to question its sociolinguistic power. Rosa

⁵ According to Jean Franco’s main argument in *Las conspiradoras: La representación de la mujer en México*, an alternate discourse has the capacity to question and debunk the dominant discourse. For language offers women a space to contest and attain power through their own interpretations of the world.

Chávez on the other hand, interpellates a machista and racist society when she cites the hate speech used against the Maya. Finally, in her short stories, Denise Phé-Funchal highlights the inconspicuous ways in which women object to machismo in daily life. By naming examples of violence against women in their works, the artists succeed in presenting a woman that is no longer defined by violence. They change the narrative from one of victimhood to present a woman with agency.

Through language these artists are designing lives and emitting actions that were once censored by Guatemala's repressive worldmaking and today, have taken new forms. The censorship we see today occurs when the only voices that can speak about violence are male, official and legal—all patriarchally orchestrated. Women are excluded from the conversation; and that is a form of censorship. The fact that the artists in this study are joining the conversation, makes their work more significant. Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal find in their interpretative power a way to theorize about violence against women. What the following chapters present are three different ways contemporary Guatemalan artists construct different realities through the use of speech acts, performativity, and ultimately, language.

The discourse on violence *against women* has been acted out and spoken about from a male perspective. As a response to a social life that has put women at the center of violence, female artists in particular are chiming in to challenge and change the current discourse about violence. For this dissertation, I chose artists that impacted me the most after reading and viewing their works. What they say and what they do with language is provocative, inspirational and utterly bold. The three artists are: Regina José Galindo (1974), a poet and performance artist; Rosa Chávez (1980), a K'iche'-Kaqchikel Maya poet; and Denise Phé-Funchal (1977), a

sociologist and prose and poetry writer. I examine how their works display and theorize about the many forms of violence against women in the 21st century in such a way as to challenge machista ways of understanding violence.

Either unknowingly or reluctantly, the artists in this study are *activists*. Following Diana Taylor's definition: an *activist* is one who is an artist and an activist at the same time (*Performance* ch 7). Some artists are activists due to the outright political aspect in their art, while others are activists and artists because of the aesthetics in their politics. In *Performance*, Taylor asks Regina José Galindo about what she considers to be the difference between an activist and an artist, and whether she'd consider herself an *activist*:

For Galindo, the difference between artists and activists is that activists protest specific issues, and they evaluate the efficacy of the act by whether or not it can change the outcome of the cause. As an artist, she claims the right to reflect on these issues in a more personal, idiosyncratic manner. She has no illusions that she can change the political situation, but she does everything in her power to make the situation known in the most forceful way possible. [...] Unlike activists, she does not believe that it's crucial for her to change the system of power. That expectation might paralyze her, and make her to resign herself to the attitude that nothing can be done. (*Performance* ch 7)

Although, as this quote demonstrates, the artists we examine may not consider themselves activists, the inherently political messages and images in their works, are, in fact, contesting systems of power. My objective is to highlight the communicative quality in the works of the artists as political counterpoints to the discourse produced by institutions of power. Their aesthetic productions are important political messages that need to be included in today's discussion about violence against women in Guatemala. If we elucidate the social potential of

their works to impact the systems of power, we can find answers and theories that can help us understand violence, Guatemala's current feminicide situation, and how to *think* about a different future.

When artists take it upon themselves to speak so candidly about sociopolitical issues, art becomes a tool for others to understand the politics at work in their social world. Some artists become activists by bringing these issues to light.⁶ It is not to say that they necessarily had that intention, nor can all art be called political. However, Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal's works are contesting a system of power that has been in place for centuries—machismo. One of the many duties we have as academics is to bring light to these “artivistic” expressions that have so much to offer if considered at the same level of official discourse— in them exists possibilities for change. By shedding light on the literary and corporal knowledges produced by Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal, we can create new notions and beliefs, and consequently, a different world(view) for Guatemalans from the current machista sociopolitical order. A collection that includes an array of female perspectives about Guatemala's violent situation is just as necessary as the extensive work that has been done in regards to the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez.⁷ To analyze the “real” situations some women face from an artistic perspective may not be new for prolific Latin American countries like Mexico and Chile, but for Guatemala, it is a country that deserves more attention.

⁶ This reminds me of musician Nina Simone's question: “How can you be an artist and not reflect the times?” (What Happened, Miss Simone? Documentary). She posed this question at the peak of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Music became her tool for thinking about or dealing with the injustices that were happening in the South.

⁷ Scholars who have studied feminicide in Ciudad Juárez include: Laura Rita Segato, *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez* (2006); Fregoso, Rosa Linda, and Cynthia L. Bejarano. *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (2010); Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera* (2010) and Salvador B. Albert, *El feminicidio de Ciudad Juarez* (2012) to mention a few.

This project is very much interdisciplinary at heart. For the sake of dialogue, I incorporate other disciplines such as law, sociology and history. In other words, I intend to facilitate a conversation that rarely takes place in “real” life by combining fields such as the law and sciences, with history, performance and literature. I invite the reader to partake in the words and images these artists produce that make visible and speakable the nuances of violence affecting women. Let us listen and consider their creation just as necessary and important as discussions taking place in sociology, journalism, forensic science, the law and other fields. These artists intentionally avoid becoming desensitized as so many people in environments of extreme violence become, using art as their tool to attempt to understand the perennial nature of the violence in Guatemala. This dissertation does not aim to be an exhaustive study of the complete work of these three artists; rather it focuses on their expressions concerning violence against women in postwar Guatemala.

Although my goal is not about “proving” the guilt or innocence of perpetrators, or necessarily finding who is responsible for the surge in feminicides, we will take on a careful examination of how a State functions by perpetuating violence. Hopefully, such an examination along with what the artists of this study have to say will allow us to see how repetitive histories *can* be broken to find new realities. Where is the rupture point within this violent chaos? If the machista State has been telling the same story, who is telling a different one? Are we even willing to listen to an “unofficial” story? I suggest that the literature and performance art examples in this study are telling these different stories about violence. They are “stories” about transgression and opportunity; attempts at breaking with the past through art. Within so much violence, Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal find a way to contradict a machista State and Society—they create a world where differences are respected, a space where women are valued,

a society driven by compassion instead of hatred. Their creative expressions design a new discourse on violence that does not focus solely on what violence does, but how we can move away from violence in order to heal.

Art has the capacity to heal a people from a harrowing past that lingers in the present. Whether it is theater, literature, performance, or film, various artistic genres have begun to take on an important role in Guatemala, especially for those who continue living in constant fear and terror. An internationally known example is Rigoberta Menchú, who published her *testimonio* in 1983, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. As a Maya woman, her testimony served as a form of redress not only for herself but also for her community. What began as a form of literature soon took the shape of a protest of the inhumane ways the Guatemalan government was treating its own people. With her book, the world found out, especially through the realms of academia, that a horrifying civil war was taking place in a small country in Central America. Menchu's *testimonio* is an example of limitless possibilities of what art and language can achieve, including acting as a manifestation of hope and above all, a clear example of the importance of speaking up.

A few years after Menchú's *testimonio*, in the 1990's, theater productions in Guatemala were trying to "grapple with atrocity" as the title of the anthology *Grappling with Atrocity: Guatemalan Theater in the 1990's* states on its cover. Theater production during this time became a way of forging a path towards forgiveness for survivors of the civil war. While playwrights like Jorge Ramírez and Douglas González chose to produce political satires to make people laugh at the government, there are others who confronted the violence more candidly in their works. Some of the artists who spoke more candidly about the situation were Luz Méndez de la Vega (*Toque de queda: poesía bajo el terror* 1999), Nora Murillo (*Eterno desencanto*

2005), Maurice Echeverría (*Diccionario esotérico* 2006), and Rodrigo Rey Rosa (*El material humano* 2009), as well as the three female artists examined in this study: Regina José Galindo, Rosa Chávez and Denise Phé-Funchal. Regina José Galindo participated in the creative space that painter José Osorio and curator Rosina Cazali established as the Bizarre House (La Casa Bizarra) in 1997. This art hub invited youth to create and express something about the immediate cruel situation they were living. They were imagining *another* world: “Un mundo donde quepamos los que no cabemos.” Osorio and Cazali’s intention was to propagate a variety of artistic genres by artists from different social classes to show another Guatemala to the world. In a newspaper clipping from their early years, they mention that their project aimed to defend art and society from the indifference, arrogance and boredom that was happening in the City of Guatemala.⁸

The works by Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal continue this fight against indifference and the silencing of voices. By speaking up during the current war against women in Guatemala, the artists are defying a history of censorship. One of the many ways the Guatemalan State implemented censorship amongst the entire country during the war, was when in 1982, Ríos Montt declared political censorship,⁹ so that he could “erase” history, preventing the war from being discussed as a public matter. He also attempted to shut down news outlets, national and international, from publishing information regarding the war. Under his command, violence

⁸ They have a blog that explains how they came about: <http://bizarroguate.blogspot.com/>.

⁹ These are known facts, as demonstrated in the NY Times on July 7, 1982 “GUATEMALA, July 6— Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt's military Government today banned political activity and ordered censorship of all news about leftist guerrillas fighting for power here. A Government decree prohibited 'the publication of news and commentaries related to subversive activities occurring in the country, be it news that originates in the country or comes from abroad. The Government declared a state of siege last Thursday, giving it wide powers to search homes and make arrests without warrants.' This also highlights the consistent communication and corruption between the U.S. and Guatemala in regard to land.

against the Maya reached its peak.¹⁰ Another common form of censorship, besides limiting verbal communication, was installed under Ríos Montt's mandate: the censoring of bodies. In this instance, the case of Bishop Juan Gerardi is emblematic. In 1998, he released a four-volume report, *Guatemala: Nunca Más*, in which he disclosed the crimes against humanity in Guatemala during the Civil War. Two days later he was found dead.

During the civil war, words and images were censored with the intention to secure hierarchies within structures of power. More than a decade after the Peace Accords, in 2009, Rodrigo Rosenberg Marzano was investigating the murders of the Musa Family. He believed that the State was involved in the murder of 74-year-old industrialist Khalil Musa and that the State did everything in its power to not be implicated. Rosenberg Marzano became a victim of what has been called a “political assassination.”¹¹ As these examples demonstrate, those who publicly display the State's “dirty laundry” become victims of a corrupt system and another statistic in those escalating charts of homicides. The silencing of those who speak up, the censorship of bodies, has continued into the twenty-first century. Today, censorship takes effect in multifaceted ways, for example, violent acts are performed upon people in order to prevent them from speaking freely or exist in certain spaces at specific times. Censorship occurs through a legal/official order or through invisible methods of control that determine who can speak and

¹⁰ On May 10, 2013 [...] José Efraín Ríos Montt, a former military general and de facto president from 1982–83, was judged guilty of orchestrating the massacre of 1,771 Mayan Ixils and the forcible displacement of 29,000, as well as sexual violations and torture (Open Society Justice Initiative 2013). With this monumental court decision, Guatemala became the first country in the world to try and convict its own former head of state for genocide and crimes against humanity (Stuesse “Anthropologists and the Genocide Trial of Guatemala's Ríos Montt” 658).

¹¹ Rosenberg made a video four days before his death stating, “If you are listening to this, it's because I was murdered by President Alvaro Colom, with the help of [the president's private secretary] Gustavo Alejos and [businessman] Gregorio Valdez.” Video link: http://youtu.be/mC_ODpxMA10 There is no way to be certain of the reasoning behind this story, but we can say that because the State was involved in the murder of 74-year-old industrialist Khalil Musa, one of Rosenberg's clients, he had to be eliminated.

when or who can walk home safely at night. Censorship is an act of violence because it restricts someone from what is considered a universal right to be.

Almost any attempt to seek justice, reconciliation, and peace has been censored via official and unofficial threats and violent actions. People fear talking about their experiences and their realities because those in power will do anything to maintain their hegemony. People are silenced by fear in various ways: politically, emotionally, and psychologically. It is in this crude reality that some respond to such censorship by other means. To be able to constitute their bodies in a space that rejects them, many have used art as their means to an end. Art, in Guatemala, has a history of not alarming the State like a riot would, for example. Yet, art can be a threat to the system. That is why in times of peril, art becomes an outlet for some; it becomes a way of sharing with the world that which is not meant to be spoken, thought, or felt. Hence, the significance of these artists' works lies in their artistic practices that fend off new ways of censoring bodies and voices.

1.1 FRAMING GUATEMALA'S HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE

To fully understand the depth of Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal's works and the history of violence in Guatemala, we need to understand the context from which their writings and performances emerged. Our brief presentation of Guatemala's sociopolitical and violent history begins around the years of the Cold War (1950's onward) due to it being a time in history where a "savage hysteria," to use Jean Franco's words, commenced in Guatemala (*Cruel Modernity* 80). During a time when the U.S. was purportedly trying to prevent the Western Hemisphere from becoming communist, or rather, when the U.S. was furthering its control over the Americas

by ruthless means, Guatemala became the first country where President Eisenhower's domino theory took effect. In short, "Guatemala had the distinction of suffering the United States' first Latin American Cold War intervention" (Grandin *Last Colonial Massacre* 4). Guatemala had come out of Jorge Ubico's authoritarian regime (1931-1944) to experience a decade-long time of peace, freedom, and justice, often referred to as Ten Years of Spring (1944-1954). This period had given Guatemalans courage and hope with Guatemala's first ever democratically elected president, Juan José Arévalo (1945-1951). His presidency was the result of the popular uprising known as the October Revolution of 1944. Some of the gains of this revolution were: creation of labor unions, labor reforms, education reforms, and the creation of the Social Security Administration.¹²

In the next presidential elections, Juan Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán was elected president (1951-1954). He continued Arévalo's program of social and economic transformation for the people, encouraging Guatemalans to believe that long-lasting change was underway. Árbenz's presidency was going to create real change by eliminating colonial legislative structures and beginning the construction of the necessary infrastructure to move from a feudal economy to a modern capitalist economy. This would have the effect of enabling a reduction in Guatemala's dependency on foreign markets (especially the U.S.). An even more important change on Arbenz's agenda was to implement the land reform that Arévalo had not been able to initiate during his years as president. Admittedly, this posed a threat to the Guatemalan oligarchy and the United States' United Fruit Company.¹³ An American company, the United Fruit Company

¹² In regard to women's political participation, only literate women were conceded the right to vote in 1945. It isn't until 1965, twenty years later, when all Guatemala women are given this universal right.

¹³ See Greg Grandin and Stephen Schlesinger's book *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*.

owned lands all over the Americas to trade a variety of goods from each country. The company has been criticized for its proven violation of human rights in all aspects: economic, political and social. In the case of Guatemala, there were many “laws” that justified a modern form of slavery from the late nineteenth century, where indigenous people usually worked the land and did not receive compensation for their labor. Thus, as President Árbenz began redistributing lands to the indigenous people who made up more than 51% of the population, the elites who made up two percent of the population and cooperated with the United Fruit Co. expressed opposition to Árbenz’s reform. Fear arose amongst the elite that they would no longer be able to control the economy, politics or society. This fear of losing control over “their” territory was enough for the oligarchy to call Árbenz and his supporters “communists.”

During these years, the Cold War was in its initial stages, so a tremendous number of atrocious acts were permissible against anyone identified as a communist. Therefore, under the justification that Árbenz was following a communist agenda, the CIA orchestrated a coup d’état against him in 1954. However, as many scholars have pointed out, communism wasn’t the only fear; the U.S. had economic interests that would be jeopardized if Árbenz’s “socialist” program remained in power.¹⁴ During this time, it was essential to have complete control over both politics and the economy. In order to keep their economic interests intact, more specifically the United Fruit Company, the U.S. couldn’t allow the land they owned to disappear due to a reform that would benefit a majority—the indigenous people and working class. The sociopolitical

¹⁴ “For most of Guatemalan history indigenous and Hispanic society articulated through the mediations of their respective elites. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, a radically transformed national and international context undercut the ability of elites to play this role. Faced with an unprecedented challenge to their authority, the state, the military, and the oligarchy, supported by the United States, identified Indians as the collective enemy and launched a wave of repression that the United Nations–administered Truth Commission has characterized as genocide” (Grandin *The Blood of Guatemala* 233).

implications this halt had on indigenous people was that, once again, they were to be excluded due to economic, political and social inequalities. Yet, what came next went *beyond* exclusion. The new leader in power, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, and his army acted as vice-president Nixon's puppet to make sure that the lands were re-allocated to the United Fruit Company. Moreover, what started as "saving Guatemala from communism" turned into the violent annihilation of a specific ethnic group, the Mayas.

While economics has certainly played a central role in the extermination of Mayas, it is also true that race was also of great importance. We can't say that the Civil War was only about politics or economics. It was about eliminating what the State deemed subaltern subjects because they didn't fit into its modernization program.¹⁵ As Rebecca Caissie puts it, "the oppressive and militarized Guatemalan government has been used as an instrument to protect the economic interests of the privileged minority with violence fundamentally directed at the excluded class, principally the poor and above all the Maya people, as well as any groups that arose to fight for social justice and equality" (Caissie 11). While Caissie sheds light on the role that social class played during the war, Victoria Sanford¹⁶ brings in race and ethnicity by reminding us that "the Commission [for Historical Clarification] found the state responsible for 93 percent of the acts of violence and the guerrillas for 3 percent. All told, 83 percent of the victims were Maya and 17

¹⁵ According to McAllister & Nelson, "The military regimes ruling Guatemala almost continuously since 1954 responded to grassroots challenges by directing counterinsurgent violence not only against the bodies of those they perceived as enemies but at the integrity of subaltern forms of life and at the hearts and minds of the population as a whole" (*War by Other Means* 5). Moreover, Franco corroborates the fact that the Indigenous subject was deemed "alien to modernity" given that they made up the majority of the casualties during the civil war (*Cruel Modernity* 7).

¹⁶ Sanford is an anthropologist who has accomplished an extraordinary amount of research on violence, politics and gender issues in Guatemala.

percent were ladino” (Sanford *Buried Secrets* 148). These statistics demonstrate how the killing of people of Maya descent was an act of ethnic cleansing.

This war was far from “civil”; it was genocide. Over 200,000 people disappeared or were massacred during the war; 1.5 million were displaced and 150,000 were driven to seek refuge in México (Sanford *Buried Secrets* 148). The type of violence against Maya bodies was diverse. Killing them wasn’t enough; they had to literally suffer in every way possible. Men and women were tortured, dismembered, raped, electrocuted, decapitated and then made to disappear. The most devastating years for the Maya were in the early 80’s under the dictatorships of Romeo Lucas García and Efraín Ríos Montt. Extermination was not a means but a goal, so that between 1982 and 1983, 3,180 Maya were victims of eighty-five massacres in El Quiché, a neighborhood northwest of Guatemala City (Sanford *Buried Secrets* 158). The “justification” for these killings as stated by the Genocide Convention was that “the Guatemalan citizens who had communist beliefs or who simply exercised their rights and demanded better living conditions, these were considered [by the army] to be ‘subversive’” (Sanford *Buried Secrets* 152). Protesting or asking for basic human rights, to plead for respect, made someone a subversive. It was not until 1994 when the Guatemalan government signed an accord establishing a “truth commission,” to be called the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), when peace discussions took place. In 1996, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan Government officially signed the Peace Accords.

Probably one of the most important gain of the Peace Accords, besides admitting an understanding of Guatemala as a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation, was to end violence (Peace Accords). But now, more than twenty years later, peace has yet to come. In fact, a lack of security reform in Guatemala’s transition after the war, has led to what some scholars

call a “post-peace” environment of insecurity and impunity (Weld *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* Ch 5). Since the Peace Accords signing, the rules have changed; it is no longer *just* indigenous people who are being victimized by the State, but women in general. In the last fifteen years, the escalating number of feminicides in Guatemala speaks to this ongoing reality. Whereas the perpetrators of violence during the war were known –the army, who were simply following State orders– today there are many aggressors who are *allowed* (rather than ordered) by the State to propagate violence without punishment.

Today’s aggressor ranges from a domestic partner or a family member to former army men who find themselves jobless and have joined *pandillas* (gangs) or private security forces. In their 2007 report titled “Gender Savagery in Guatemala,” Michael Parenti and Lucia Muñoz confirm this by stating that, “independent investigators charge that the vast majority of present-day atrocities against women have been committed by current or former members of the Guatemalan intelligence services” (Parenti & Muñoz 2). In 2005, 518 women were murdered, 600 in 2006, an average of two a day in 2007, and in 2013 there were more than 700 women who suffered from femicide (Sanford “From Genocide to Femicide” 105). To understand the level of violence against women in Guatemala, let’s compare it with the violence in Ciudad Juarez, a city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, in the 1990’s, when feminicides were at their peak. Let’s keep in mind that this information corresponds to “reported” statistics, because as Suárez and Jordan warn us in their report “Three thousand and counting: A Report on Violence Against Women in Guatemala,” as soon as “organizations beg[i]n to publicize the increasing murders of women, the official numbers beg[i]n to decrease” (Suárez & Jordan 8). Between 1993 and 2003, there were 370 registered murders of women in Ciudad Juarez and in 2003 alone there were 383

registered murders of women in Guatemala; by 2006 there were 603 murders of women (Sanford “From Genocides to Feminicides” 113).

This culture of violence that abuses power and utilizes terror to eliminate and control women was programmed into these men’s psyches: “they were trained to rape, dismember, and torture in the past, [so] they continue to use the same tactics now” (Suárez & Jordan 2). The transition from genocide to femicide is one of uninterrupted violence. The training these men received during the Civil War is now being applied towards women in the 21st century. Referring to the Civil War, in *Cruel Modernity* Franco explains: “As a result of military service, men become machista and disrespectful [...] wartime rape can be understood as a mark of sovereignty acted out on the body of women” (Franco 80); however, these violent expressions against women’s subjectivity and bodies did not end in the Civil War. Today there is what I call a misogynist war taking place. At the core of this “new” war we find an increased sense of hatred against women represented in the way their mutilated bodies are left in public spaces. Whether it be due to their gender, sexuality, race or class, and their intersections, the fact is that the murderers and abusers enjoy the liberty to roam around public spaces due to the culture of impunity. Only a small group of women have the luxury to protect themselves by either traveling in public spaces with hired security or living in protected communities.

Perpetrators have been allowed to walk free after committing such atrocities, and since the legal system in Guatemala is practically obsolete, they keep instigating violence, knowing that they won’t face any consequences. Members of the National Civil Police (PNC) have been accused of raping and murdering numerous women, yet, have not been charged (Suárez & Jordan 6). Fear becomes the most accessible and dominant weapon. What these violent acts say to the Guatemalan people is that impunity and the State’s incapacity to protect their female citizens,

this misogynist patriarchal order, is an acceptable manner in which to run a country. If during the Civil War racism drove the Guatemalan army to eliminate the Mayas, in postwar Guatemala sexism and patriarchal structures continue to drive men to eliminate women. In accordance with a well-known researcher and activist in Guatemala, Luz Méndez Gutiérrez, “the structural causes of violence against women function within a patriarchal system in which values, social norms and practices assigned to women are viewed as inferior and subordinate...one of its main characteristics being, its social legitimation” (Méndez Gutiérrez 19).

Guatemala continues to function in a strictly gender-binarized social construction where women are expected to stay in the private space and men are allowed to roam freely in the public space. Put differently, to enter the public sphere women must “pay the price.” While women have not given up so easily or succumbed to these machista societal rules, it is apparent that a “mafia order,” to use scholar Rita Laura Segato’s term, is operating at all levels of society.¹⁷ A recent example of this took place in the Constitutional Court. In 2013 two women in the judicial system, Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz and Judge Iris Yassmín Barrios Aguilar were dismissed during their attempts to convict former dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt.¹⁸ Barrios Aguilar was dismissed due to a “formal” complaint against her by a lawyer who was representing Ríos Montt; Paz y Paz was ousted due to a technical error (Lakhani 1). It was a timely (in)appropriate coincidence. Two empowered women—Barrios and Paz y Paz—who formed part of the judiciary branch and were trying to bring justice to the country were removed from the *patriarchal system*. As if this wasn’t enough, public shame went along with the removal of these

¹⁷ Rita Laura Segato is a feminist anthropologist who has done illuminating work and research on the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez.

¹⁸ The documentary, *Granito de arena: cómo atrapar a un dictador* by Pamela Yates, proves that these men were responsible for the genocide in the 80’s, yet the “State” refuses to convict them: <http://youtu.be/n3P6zBcLTjE>.

women. Ríos Montt's trial, which began in 2013, was televised across various networks worldwide. In other words, there was a global audience that would witness whether two women were going to send a former dictator to prison, or whether impunity would continue full force. When Francisco García Gudiel, the attorney representing Ríos Montt, *publicly* humiliates and disrespects "the court" and threatens to place them behind bars, he is really attacking a judge who occupies a distinguished position in the Supreme Court, Yassmín Barrios, because of her gender.¹⁹

The fact that Otto Pérez Molina,²⁰ a former militant and torturer under Efraín Ríos Montt's dictatorship, was the president of Guatemala from 2012 to 2015, shows us how "patriarchal traditions [...] have set the stage for the current epidemic of violence against women" (Cházaro and Casey iii). Furthermore, Ríos Montt's failed genocide trial, which lasted from May 2013 to January 2015, proves that even when there is more than substantial evidence to convict him, the machista State of Guatemala did everything it could to protect "one of their own." The people of Guatemala and those who have taken a genuine interest in helping Guatemalans have *not been passive* in dealing with this harrowing past that resurfaces in the present. There have been manifestations denouncing "Sí hubo genocidio;" social media support through the hashtag #NiUnaMenos; excavations and investigations of large grave sites pioneered by Guatemalan forensic anthropologist Fredy Peccerelli; film documentation during the war by Pamela Yates; the serendipitous finding of the National Police's old case files in an abandoned hospital building; testimonies by Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú and the women of

¹⁹ This video demonstrates the violent and machista manner in which Ríos Montt's attorney addresses the Court: <http://youtu.be/gkxxQXRNTC4>.

²⁰ This video explains the corruption and inhumane actions that occurred during the Civil War, and supports the fact that these men continue to use this "ideology" of violence today, http://youtu.be/-hK_UQN51Zg

Sepur Zarco, who recently in 2011 won the first case denouncing sexual violence during the war;²¹ and numerous creative expressions decrying what happened during the war.²²

²¹ This was the first trial addressing sexual violence taking place in the same country where the sexual crimes were committed, unlike those of Rwanda and Yugoslavia, which were held at international courts. The fact that they are indigenous women pleading for justice is important. In sentencing, Judge Yassmin Barrios said: "We firmly believe in recognising the truth: it helps to heal the wounds of the past, to raise consciousness that such incidents must not be repeated" (<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/guatemala-justice-sepur-zarco-sex-slavery-victims-160303072107762.html>)

²² Some of these creative expressions include writers like: Nora Murillo, Carolina Sarti, Julia Esquivel, Arturo Arias, Mario Roberto Morales, Maurice Echeverría, Francisco Goldman and many others.

2.0 FEMINICIDE, A MACHISMO THAT KILLS²³

*There is an unleashed quality about contemporary machismo
that has burst forth exactly at the moment
when more women are acquiring power.
Jean Franco Cruel Modernity*

Caught between an old-fashioned machista State and Modernity,²⁴ *woman* is the chosen subject of violence in 21st century Guatemala. The increasing number of femicide cases at the turn of the century alerted the State that a legal measure must be set in place to: 1) find justice for the victims of violence, 2) find out why there is such an increase, 3) begin a dialogue about violence against women. With the help of Guatemalan activists and international courts, Congress finally passed a law that aims to make visible the many forms of violence that women endure under a Machista State. In 2008, Guatemala “became the first Latin American country to declare femi[ni]cide a punishable crime” (Hastings *NY Daily News*).²⁵ Under the *Law against femicide and other forms of violence against women* in 2008, it is made clear that physical violence is not the only form of violence, with other forms that are intersectional based (gender, sex, class, race) power roles in society that prevent women from receiving the same opportunities as men also

²³ This title is in honor of a day that is commemorated every November 25th—International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women—where women all over the world take to the streets protesting the dire violence against them.

²⁴ Jean Franco carefully explains the nuances of modernity across countries and histories which take up the pages of her book, *Cruel Modernity*. One distinct feature that characterizes modernity today is “the acceptance and justification of cruelty and the rationale for cruel acts” (*Cruel Modernity* 2).

²⁵ México is actually the first Latin American country to pass a Federal Law against femicide in 2007, with the title of *Ley general de acceso de las mujeres a una vida libre de violencia*. Mexico too has had a difficult time applying such law.

being included (*Decreto Ley N° 22, 2008*). This law recognizes that some women are at an economic disadvantage due to their gender and that social and familial forms of domination propel patterns of submission and discrimination against girls and women alike.

As much as this law is a great start to opening the conversation about how women can attain basic human rights and live with the liberties sanctified in the Political Constitution of Republic of Guatemala, it must be pointed out that Culture—as a socially powerful institution—is another factor that needs to act with the law in order to see effective transformation. Thus, we cannot limit the conversation on violence against women to simply legal measures; we need to examine and change the cultural aspects that have made such violence durable. We must find answers to the questions: Does violence have its own language? Who can(not) speak Violence? Who do we listen to when Violence is acted out or spoken?

Two dominant aspects of Guatemalan culture are *Machismo*, an overarching concept, and *machista*, the actions, thoughts or speech that resonate with this masculine-driven cultural belief. Mexican writer and psychologist Marina Castañeda explains that *machismo* entails the following:

constituye toda una constelación de valores y patrones de conducta que afecta todas las relaciones interpersonales, el amor y el sexo, la amistad y el trabajo, el tiempo libre y la política... Este conjunto incluye la pretensión del *dominio sobre los demás, especialmente sobre las mujeres*; la rivalidad entre los hombres; la búsqueda de múltiples conquistas sexuales; la necesidad constante de exhibir ciertos rasgos supuestamente viriles —valor, indiferencia al dolor, etc.— y *un desprecio más o menos abierto hacia los valores considerados femeninos*. (Castañeda *El machismo invisible* Intro, emphasis added)

In her book, *El machismo invisible regresa*, Castañeda emphasizes that machismo overtly continues to play a large role economically, socially and psychologically in the lives of Guatemalans. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the invisible forms of machismo that take place in daily life, the media, health and sexuality (Intro). Some of the nuances of machismo which are impacting daily life are comments like “She was asking for it” or “Boys will be boys.” These examples have trickled down from an old-fashioned patriarchy that is still very much in effect. As we dive into the works of the three artists in this study, we will use Castañeda to provide a more thorough understanding of how a State exercises violence on behalf of Machismo and demonstrate how these artists have been creating a dialogue with the Machista State all along.

A truth that resonates across Guatemala is that anything or anyone who puts into question a Machista State becomes a target for destruction. This was the case during the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996) when the Indigenous body was tagged as “asexual” or “feminine” and therefore, not “manly” enough to form part of the new nation (Franco). Today, because women are making themselves visible in spaces usually dominated by men, they are putting at risk *his* manliness (Segato). Understanding how powerful machismo is as a sociopolitical concept and then connecting it to the increase in feminicides and other forms of violence against women permits us to say without hesitation that the violence we see today in Guatemala is inspired and propagated by a machista culture.

Either because the male race is finding itself emasculated economically, socially, and psychologically, or because men in the police and military force continue to function with the same violent *modus operandi* used during the civil war, *woman* has become the body of choice upon which their frustrations take place. As Franco asserts, this is a combination of a fear of emasculation and the continuation of male killing machines. Both explanations though, have the

same goal in mind: to reestablish a patriarchal order through the dehumanization of women. Dehumanization can be understood in at least three forms: discursive (erasure or omission of her voice), physical (use of violence to kill or abuse) and individual (objectification or questioning her worthiness). Hence, if machismo is the dominant cultural system upon which a State is built, anyone or anything that attempts to jeopardize such a system is exposing him/herself to violence. Since violence is the preferred form of expressing Machismo, violence is masculine. In her essay titled: “Tres incendios y dos mujeres extraviadas: el imaginario novelístico frente al nuevo contrato social” (2002), Mary Louise Pratt explores how violence functions in its various facets, such as physically, socially and linguistically (this last is especially important in the Spanish language) in the works of three Mexican male writers. For our purposes, we extract her insight on violence:

¿La violencia tiene sexo? Definitivamente sí. Tanto en la estadística como en el imaginario social, los agresores normativos son masculinos, los agredidos: masculinos y femeninos. Y entre los agredidos, la categoría de víctima se reserva, como indica su género gramatical, prioritariamente para las mujeres, es decir los cuerpos hembras. Las jóvenes trabajadoras de maquila que, desde hace unos cinco años aparecen muertas y violadas en las afueras de Tijuana no se pueden concebir sino como víctimas de la violencia (una violencia que se supone masculina), mientras que el descriptor de víctima no se atribuye con igual claridad a los cadáveres masculinos encontrados unos meses atrás en una hacienda narco en la frontera de Sonora. Por otro lado, los protectores contra la violencia también, dentro de la normatividad, son hombres. La violencia es un panorama radicalmente definido por el género, y en el cual los cuerpos hembras tienen estrecha definición. (Pratt “Tres incendios y dos mujeres extraviadas” 91)

In this excerpt, Pratt highlights how for men, violence subjugates women quite effortlessly in at least two ways simultaneously: physically and linguistically. In the example she uses, she juxtaposes the women's bodies found dead near Tijuana and the male cadavers found in Sonora, pointing out that only the women were tagged as "victims." In Spanish, the word "victim" is a feminine noun; thus, using it only towards female victims of violence and not male victims emphasizes that it is used to categorize one gender specifically and not the other. In other words, the idea of victimhood belongs to women because they are *injureable* or rapable; men are not rapable or *injureable* because violence between men is not about sexual subjugation but about power, territory, economics, and such matters. (Of course, this is true when violence occurs amongst heterosexual men; the story changes when there is sexual violence between a heterosexual man and homosexuals, trans people or other gender nonconforming individuals). Moreover, because *víctima* carries a feminine connotation, it adds the idea of inferiority that historically comes along with anything feminine or not masculine enough. Pratt goes a step further by explaining that the fact that those who are commonly known to provide safety are men spreads the idea that men can *injure and protect* while women are subjected to the role of being *injured* or *protected*. The application of such definitive roles, thus, takes away any agency women could possibly have or embody. Pratt continues:

Para empezar, la violencia entre hombres se lee lógicamente como ruptura del contrato social, o como evidencia de la erosión del contrato social. La violencia entre hombre y mujer, por contraste, se lee como afirmación o actuación del contrato sexual, o como evidencia de su poder excesivo. A menos que uno haga un esfuerzo especial para evitarlo, pensar la violencia es a menudo pensar desde la agencia masculina. El resultado,

lógicamente, es una masculinización de la agencia. (Pratt “Tres incendios y dos mujeres extraviadas” 93)

Briefly put, she says that violence gives men agency or power over women; and agency is a male concept. Without a doubt, the concept of agency has been taken up by many feminist philosophers and activists, all trying to find ways in which women have demonstrated the ability to be agents of their own lives, even in the most oppressive environments.²⁶ But in the case of some Latin American countries, the possibility of women’s agency is still up for debate, and Pratt’s statement is still valid today: to think about violence is to think from a masculine perspective, and to talk about agency is to talk about male agency. Then how do we counter these truths? How do we think about violence from a feminine perspective, and, more importantly, how do we understand agency as something associated with women in the context of Guatemala?

In her earlier work, Pratt proposed (1977) equating literature with dominant discourses. Since literature is political, literature is a type of discourse that needs to be considered just as important as official discourses. Pertinent to this study, we *can* counter the idea that the discourse of violence belongs to men, or that agency only exists as something men can obtain, especially through violence. Violence comes down to being a matter of language. If we follow this idea, then, we can read the works by Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal as feminine responses to the discourses that have proliferated about women as victims and about violence; they are feminist interpretations of violence. This alludes to Jean Franco’s concept of

²⁶ More on the concept of agency see: Catharine MacKinnon in "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" and Sara Mahmood's "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival."

interpretative power.²⁷ These artists unapologetically insert themselves in an era of violence against women—through the mediums of performance and literature— so that their interpretations of violence and Woman are made visible. Their method to obtain power is by interpreting the social world that surrounds them in their writings. We have sufficient understandings about violence from either male thinkers or phallogocentric institutions. What we need is to pay close attention to those discourses that go unseen or are somehow hidden knowingly or not, even in academia. In Sayak Valencia's words:

Basta de admirar las técnicas de la violencia sobreespecializada y de idolatrar en el imaginario colectivo a los asesinos a sueldo, a los psicópatas, a los gobernantes tiranos y a los mafiosos que se enriquecen destruyendo cuerpos. Basta de deificar este nuevo orden necrofalologocéntrico. (Valencia *Capitalismo gore* 197)

It is time to turn our attention to the women who are thinking and embodying theories of violence. It is feasible to understand violence through a woman's eye, position Woman at the center of the discourse, bring *her* critique forward, and start a dialogue between scholars and specific artists who share a similar goal: a world where respect and equality exists for *everyone* and where differences are cherished rather than feared. Many of the theorists, artists, bloggers, and examples included in this dissertation are women who aim to move away from a phallogocentric understanding of today's violence. From their situated positions as women who live through the violent world today, they candidly offer their knowledge about violence. To quote Donna Haraway, "feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledge*" (Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 188). From a scientific feminist approach, Haraway's concept of

²⁷ This concept stems from her book, *Las Conspiradoras: La representación de la mujer en México*, where she explains, "la lucha de la mujer por el poder de interpretar, una lucha que se capta no en el nivel abstracto de la teoría, sino, muchas veces, en géneros no canónicos de la escritura--en cartas, historias de vida o en denuncias--." (Franco *Conspiradoras* 11).

situated knowledge explains that the knowledge producer and the object of study have objective agency over their knowledge. In other words, precisely because they are limited to their specific context (socioeconomic, local, intellectual, artistic, cultural, political, etc.), these women's knowledge is in fact richer and their situated objectivity grants them agency. What they all say about violence (against women), then, creates a sense of a transbordered community. If, currently, machismo governs the social world of Guatemalans, my hope is that by the end of this dissertation we can see what a de-machista world would look like.

Now, before we comment the situated knowledges of select scholars, we need to understand the difference between the terms *femicide* and *feminicide* as they are often misunderstood and because some prefer one over the other. When inquiring about the term “femicide,” one will notice that “femicide” and “Latin America” are often adjacent terms. In other words, femicide appears to be an issue that predominantly exists in a specific place: Latin America. Bejarano and Fregoso explain that, “In the Latin American setting, the first documented use of the concept *feminicidio* is in the Dominican Republic where, during the 1980's, feminist activists and women's groups used the term in their campaigns to end violence against women in the region” (Fregoso & Bejarano *Terrorizing Women* 5).

In her essay, “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala,” Guatemalan lawyer and women's rights activist Hilda Morales Trujillo²⁸ gives us a good historical background of these terms. As she explains:

Jill Radford and Diana Russell (1992) were the first to advance the term *femicide* theoretically based on concrete acts, especially the massacre of fourteen female students by an individual in Canada. They systematically laid out the acts that constitute femicide,

²⁸ In 2004, Morales Trujillo received the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award.

defining it as an act of killing a woman because she is a woman. [...] In studying cases in Ciudad Juárez, México, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos (2004) named these acts *feminicide*, which for her means a repeated violation of women's human rights that culminates in assassination and constitutes genocide against women that is characterized most of all by impunity. (Morales Trujillo *Terrorizing Women* 131)

More specific to Guatemala, Morales Trujillo, who cites the Guatemalan Congress says:

According to research done in Guatemala, “*femicide* is a political term that not only includes individual aggressors but the state and legal structure, given that since femicide does not exist in the statutes as a crime, it does not receive the legal and sociological treatment appropriate for cases that characterize it: when a person is assassinated and is a woman. On the other hand, the state, through its inability to fulfill its duties, contributes to impunity, silence and social indifference.” (Congreso de la República de Guatemala 2005, 16; Morales Trujillo *Terrorizing Women* 131)

The concept of impunity is a recurrent term that appears in all attempts to define femicide/feminicide, and it refers to a specific group of people which are exempt from punishment. In Guatemala, this means that ex-military and high-level officials are able to roam freely as their acts of violence were performed under “State orders” or for benefit of “the people.” Victoria Sanford, an anthropologist who has accomplished an extraordinary amount of research on violence, politics and gender issues in Guatemala, best defines the difference between *femicide* and *feminicide* in the following manner:

Conceptually, [feminicide] encompasses more than femicide because it holds responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny. Impunity, silence, and indifference each play a role in feminicide.

The concept of feminicide helps to disarticulate belief systems that place violence based on gender inequality within the private sphere (Maldonado Guevara 2005) and reveals the very social character of the killing of women as a product of relations of power between men and women. It also allows for an interrogation of legal, political, and cultural analyses of institutional and societal responses to the phenomena. Feminicide leads us back to the structures of power and implicates the state as a responsible party, whether by commission, toleration, or omission. In Guatemala, feminicide is a crime that exists because of the absence of guarantees to protect the rights of women. (Sanford “From Genocide to Feminicide” 112-3)

Sanford’s comprehensive definition goes beyond the common gender binary form of violence, “men against women,” by including the State’s actions (or inactions) in feminicide. Furthermore, it is not only a *one* person or *one* structure issue. Sanford’s concept of feminicide interpellates men, the State, *and* the law, culture, society, and other structures of power.²⁹ Now, although femi(ni)cide is usually considered to mean the act of killing a woman, others include other forms of violence within this term. For example, the Women’s Association of Guatemala (AMG in its Spanish acronym, Asociación de Mujeres de Guatemala), define the term *feminicide* as:

Un término relativamente nuevo que surgió de la traducción del concepto inglés *femicide*, el cual se refiere al homicidio evitable de mujeres por cuestiones vinculadas estrictamente al género. Incluye no solamente los casos que tienen que ver con la violencia física contra las mujeres, sino también todas aquellas otras cuestiones que atentan contra la moral y la salud de las mujeres como la falta o la deficiente asistencia médica para atender problemas sanitarios típicamente femeninos y que por tanto derivan en el aumento de la

²⁹ As I use the term feminicide throughout this dissertation, I’d like us to remember Sanford’s definition.

mortalidad de las mujeres y/o afectan gravemente su calidad de vida. (Macías *Entremundo*).³⁰

Sometimes these terms are interchangeable and sometimes *feminicide* is a more expansive term than femicide. To sum up, *feminicide* with the “ni” embedded in the term, means that the State is responsible, whether by commission, toleration, or omission, for the violent death of a woman. The violent actions preceding their preventable deaths I call *machista expressions of violence*.

Identifying the various expressions and forms of violence in these artists’ works can better contextualize a performance, a poem or a narrative within the frameworks machista institutions have created. These artists are pointing to specific machista structures in their works precisely to *reflect* about their reality, refusing to leave these matters as socially acceptable. As women artists, they make it their prerogative to confront the cycle of violence Guatemala has endured for centuries. In the long history of violence, moving from the Invasion, to the Independence revolutions, World Wars, Cold War, Drug War and so on, one of the main spurs of violence against women has been a machista mentality and a State that has allowed women to go from rapable to killable subjects. We approach such a history of violence from a feminist approach to acknowledge these women’s perspectives as political contributions made while

³⁰ In the case of Mexico, it was Julia Monárrez Fragoso, who created and defined the term “feminicidio sexual sistémico” or “systemic sexual femicide” as: “El asesinato de mujeres que son secuestradas, torturadas y violadas. Sus cadáveres, semidesnudos o desnudos son arrojados en las zonas desérticas, los lotes baldíos, en los tubos de desagüe, en los tiraderos de basura y en las vías del tren. Los asesinos por medio de estos actos crueles fortalecen las relaciones sociales inequitativas de género que distinguen los sexos: otredad, diferencia y desigualdad. Al mismo tiempo, el Estado, secundado por los grupos hegemónicos, refuerza el dominio patriarcal y sujeta a familiares de víctimas y a todas las mujeres a una inseguridad permanente e intensa, a través de un período continuo e ilimitado de impunidad y complicidades al no sancionar a los culpables y otorgar justicia a las víctimas” (“Feminicidio sexual sistémico, víctimas y familiares 1993–2005” 54).

exercising their interpretative and critical power to the discussion of violence and ultimately, as manifestations in support of an anti-patriarchal world.

A careful study of the nuances of violence is necessary to better understand 1) the violent experiences endured by women,³¹ 2) the key players that reproduce violence and, 3) the power structures that function by violence. If we are to move away from accepting violence as part of human nature,³² then we need to question specific instances of violence within specific social frameworks. Recent scholars who study and write about violence have taken on an intersectional methodology to discuss violence by discussing the meeting point between violence, space and place.³³ By looking at all the components that come into play when violence occurs, we can dissect the underlying factors that caused the violence and find out how such violence is able to repeat itself. Let us take for example feminicides, acts of violence that have occurred more than once, twice or a thousand times. Who makes it possible for these acts to repeat themselves? If we insist that Machismo is still a governing force in Guatemala, then we have to understand that anyone who seeks to extract power from such a system will face consequences. In other words, when a Machista government or society sees its power in jeopardy, they take the necessary actions to prevent that from happening. Since we are talking about a male-dominated institution,

³¹ Some examples are: psychological violence; poverty; domestic work; sexual oppression; alcoholism; family separation due to immigration; domestic violence; rape; gossip within a machista community which causes the victim to feel ashamed, fear, or guilty; inaccessibility to proper healthcare; language barriers; religious-based impositions (virginity; patriarchal family structure); lack of investigation of cases of violence, including feminicides; and many other expressions of violence.

³² In his book, *Violence and Society*, Larry Ray states: “violence nearly always has a ‘sense’, that is, social meaning, to both perpetrators and victims. The targets of violence are rarely chosen randomly, and victims and perpetrators are often already known to each other [...] Even if some violent perpetrators act because of a pathology, the specific timing and nature of their actions will have meaning” (6). In other words, violence is not part of human nature, or it is not “senseless” as some opt to see. Rather, it is “logical” to a certain degree. More on this later.

³³ Loyd, 2012; Springer, 2011, 2012; Tyner, 2012; Woon, 2011, 2013; Wright, 2011. Get biblio from James Tyner & Joshua Inwood article.

Hannah Arendt illuminates us by explaining how power functions within an exclusive group of people:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; *it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together*. When we say of somebody that he is “in power” we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. (Arendt *On Violence* 44, emphasis added).

In Guatemala, power belongs to a machista group that exists and dominates spaces such as government, the economy, society, family structure, etc. Hence, when men act out violent scenes upon women’s bodies, they are doing so in the name of Machismo. However, a State that utilizes violence to establish or justify its power is, in essence, powerless. Fearing a loss of power during Jacobo Arbenz’s government, the Guatemalan upper class along with the United States relied on violence to reestablish its power. And today, fearing the loss of the Patriarchy, the State murders women, directly and indirectly, to maintain its male power. Recognizing how power and violence function together, Arendt explains:

Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And *what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything*. [...] Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. *What never can grow out of it is power*. [...] Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost... (Arendt *On Violence* 51, 53, emphasis added)

Violence as an instrument to attempt to establish power is nothing new, yet it is something that continues to be believed as true, as something that *can* give someone or an entity the power it believes to be losing. In Guatemala, machistas believe they are losing something, whether it be their masculinity, jobs, role in the family, protection, etc., and they are killing the one “person” they are blaming for such losses: women. The truth is that violence has been demonstrated to be the answer for the weak in thought, for those who have not come up with new and improved ways to manage and accept differences (racial, sexual, gender, class, etc.) or change when it arises.

To continue to use violence to handle adversity or difference begs the question: how have our *theoria*, *poesis* and *praxis* changed or progressed from the 16th to the 21st century? If we have not changed our ways from those brought over by the colonizers, which were highly based on force and terror, if we are still trapped in antiquated ways of thinking and creating our social world, then how can we call ourselves “modern” or “independent”? Certainly, we have seen some changes, but for those at the bottom, positive change does not seem to be consistent. As Greg Grandin tells us: “Victims of the genocide didn't feel history as transcendent, of course, but rather as the accumulated weight of what many had begun to call, around the time the civil war was drawing to a close, ‘five hundred years of repression’” (Grandin *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* 69). Violence continues to be a perennial issue for Guatemalans. And although in the past, violence provided the select few with territory, money, and power, today that is not exactly the case. In her essay titled “Labor Contractors to Military Specialists to Development Experts: Marginal Elites and Postwar State Formation,” Matilde González-Izás explains:

Now that even the most enthusiastic theorists of neoliberalism have begun to recognize that current levels of violence in Guatemala and other postwar societies are intimately related to the state's reduced capacity and limited room for action under neoliberal policy, the time has come to rethink our impoverished discourses of state reform to include a more robust account of how structural, political, symbolic, and gendered formations of violence work together to produce and reproduce elite rule in particular places. (González-Izás *War by Other Means* 261)

Neoliberal policies brought new ways to undermine the State's power or control of society.³⁴ Seeing itself challenged, the State has opted to affirm its power through other means. And although we have established that violence does not equate with power, violence has taken on new forms and spread in new spaces so that the State can attempt to reclaim its power. Therefore, we need to delve into the truths about the violence that a Machista State continues to champion. I am advocating for new understandings – not definitions – of violence to expand the dialectics of violence that have gone unquestioned or taken “as is” in Guatemala. Definitions of violence tell us what violence is, its physical and non-physical forms, its institutional and human forms, yet we must primarily focus on the social conditions that allow the violence to continue. Although our discourse on violence is narrow as it concentrates on violence against women specifically, as McAllister and Nelson state, “Perhaps femicidio [...] is the key to identifying the demons still at large” in Guatemala (McAllister & Nelson *War by Other Means* 7).

³⁴ One such neoliberal industry that took over in Guatemala were the pharmaceutical maquiladoras: “While Guatemala is the largest maquila drug producer in Central America, medicine prices are among the highest, unlike Nicaragua and Honduras, where the governments legally limit price increases” (McAllister & Nelson 2 *War by Other Means* 6). Seeing itself powerless, the State takes out its anger on the actual maquila workers.

By carefully studying the unrelenting institutionalization of Machismo within the specific time and space that is 21st century Guatemala, I argue that these artists effect a dialectic of violence in art and literature. By situating their writings or performances in specific violent contexts, not only do they offer us raw feminist interpretations of these violent contexts, but more importantly, they are able to access the “secret” language of violence as *women*; a language men have dangerously kept to themselves. This last point is important. When a woman attempts to access the male-dominated language that is read through all the violence, she either risks becoming a victim or trapped in machista territory.³⁵ As Pratt previously warned us, “pensar la violencia es a menudo pensar desde la agencia masculina” (“Tres incendios” 93). Thus, this study attempts to move away from a machista way of thought and towards a feminist one, which can tell us something new and different about violence to debunk old and restrictive notions of violence.

In the academic realm, many women scholars have already moved away from machista notions of violence. Probably the most diverse study there is about feminicides in Latin America is Cynthia L. Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso’s collection of essays titled *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (2009). In this anthology, the authors examine feminicide from the perspectives of “feminist researchers, witness-survivors, women's rights and human rights advocates, and legal theorists working on and from regions in Latin America” (Bejarano & Fregoso *Terrorizing Women* 3). The essays in this compilation expand the current machista discourse on violence by carefully delineating its complexities; delving into the ramifications of patriarchy; understanding the intersections of gender, class and race; and clarifying how political and economic factors occurring in one nation are part of a global problem. We give attention to

³⁵ I will elaborate on this matter in the next section.

those essays that are useful to better understanding and combatting violence against women in Guatemala. One such example is an essay by Mexican academic, author, researcher, anthropologist, feminist activist and politician Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos. She elucidates:

In the cause to eradicate violence against women and girls and to construct their human rights, legislating is part of an all-encompassing process that involves social movements, activism, study, and awareness-building, as well as the possibility of theoretically naming, from a feminist gender perspective, those facts that are made invisible, irrelevant, or considered normal; of making them visible; of creating knowledge; and then of having the capacity to introduce into law guidelines, mechanisms, and policies configured as a binding legal framework. (Lagarde y de los Ríos *Terrorizing women* xxiv)

Along with the idea that legislation can effect sociopolitical change for women, probably most important is the championing of the visibilization of what for centuries has been considered normal: thinking of Woman as a second-class citizen, as territory/object/other. It is imperative to listen to women's experiences of abuse, poverty, injustice and other experiences to enlighten legislation. To avoid "one size fits all" laws, close attention must be given to what *each woman* experiences in the public and private space. To continue to think about the law from a phallogentric perspective is dangerous.

In their essay "Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala's Failure to Protect Women, and Rodi Alvarado's Quest for Safety," legal scholars Angélica Cházaro, Jennifer Casey, and Katherine Ruhl explain that the lack of investigation and impunity of recent murders, makes it almost impossible to find who is responsible. Furthermore,

While gang violence may be a factor, the authorities tend to categorize all of the feminicides as gang-related without having carried out proper investigations. According to the Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala (Center for Informative Reports on Guatemala; CERIGUA), inadequate investigations leave the government with no real knowledge of who is committing the crimes and why (“Femicides on the Rise” 2006, *Terrorizing Women* 98)³⁶

Blaming one sole entity for all the violence, such as gangs, tells society that no one else is responsible but gang members; therefore, if a woman is murdered: 1) she must have belonged to a gang, 2) she deserves it for being a trouble-maker,³⁷ 3) she is an unruly citizen and thus her death is one gang member less, and at the same time, 4) not investigating her murder leads to the normalization of gang violence, and 5) not investigating allows the true criminals to get away with murder.

Purposely misinforming people is another effective tactic utilized by those in power to enable the violence to continue. Let us remember when indigenous people were labeled “communists” during the civil war to purposefully and rather quickly eliminate an entire ethnic group. Currently, mass media (journalism, social media, television, radio, and so forth) focuses on one culprit and repeat it day after day for every incident of feminicide in an attempt to brainwash an entire country. As Cházaro, Casey and Ruhl explain: “the disproportionate focus placed on the gangs may ‘result from an intention to cover up the responsibility of those in

³⁶ This idea of leaving the government with “no real knowledge” is further developed when I discuss the unintelligibility of violence along with Rita Laura Segato’s work.

³⁷ Cházaro, Casey and Ruhl state: “Investigation by the police and the prosecutors have focused on the ‘character’ of the victims rather than on the motives for their murderers (Amnesty International 2005, 21-22). Blaming the victim for her own death is a persistent practice in the investigation of feminicides. By linking the victims to gang violence, officials place responsibility for the murders on the victims themselves, in effect blaming the women’s presumed choice of acquaintances for their deaths” (Chazaro, Casey, & Ruhl 99).

power in these acts”³⁸ (Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos 2006, 28; *Terrorizing Women* 98). To blame the gangs is to find a culprit outside of those whom committed genocide: the government, military, National Police and the members of the Legislative Branch.³⁹ Legal scholar and winner of the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award, Guatemalan Hilda Morales Trujillo, states: “The difference in the current violence lies in the great number of women who have been assassinated without knowledge of who killed them and without any meaningful response from the state” (Morale Trujillo *Terrorizing Women* 134). In other words, while the Commission of Historical Clarification (CEH) was able to give us some answers as to the culprits of the Civil War, today, the (supposed) anonymity of the criminals makes it seem almost impossible to find any sort of justice or amelioration for the feminicides.

Therefore, regardless of whether it is “a lack of resources, a lack of will on the part of investigators,” or “the poor investigation of Guatemala's feminicides, as shown by the persistent practice of blaming the victim and the reported hostility toward family members” the fact is that the country has transitioned from genocide to femicide (Cházaro, Casey, Ruhl 105). The same criminals from the end of the twentieth century are now killing women more rapidly and excessively: “neither the police nor the military have ever proved effective at targeting violence against women, particularly that rooted in intrafamily violence. Rather, government actors were themselves responsible for a majority of the violence against women during the war and have been implicated as perpetrators of some of the feminicides” (Cházaro, Casey, Ruhl 106). If

³⁸ Those referred to as “those in power” I will later call the “mafia order,” following Segato’s theory.

³⁹ Cházaro, Casey and Ruhl remind us: “With 93 percent of the war violence attributed to the state, the wartime massacres remain the greatest symbol of government impunity. Three democratically elected presidential administrations later, the war crimes continue unpunished, and those responsible for the killing remain active in the state's affairs” (*Terrorizing Women* 107).

indigenous people were being targeted due to their supposed ideology (communism) before, why are women the new target? Culture again comes to the forefront, as Hilda Morales Trujillo asserts that:

[First,] [w]omen's contributions to economic, social, and cultural development are more visible in this century than in other eras, which makes us think that contemporary assassinations of women are an attempt to restrict the autonomy that we have been able to achieve and build with great effort, obstacles, and sacrifices. (Morales Trujillo 134)

As women form part of spaces once reserved for men, as they are capable of renting their own apartment, capable of making their own decisions without the approval of a father, male-relative, or partner and attempt to question and change the machista culture that permeates Guatemala, they have become the new threat. Inside the machista mentality, a woman's success is a man's failure to provide, protect and keep her in "her place."

Another important factor which can bring light to these feminicides is the age of the women whose lives are being taken under the trembling patriarchy. As women gain more autonomy over their lives and bodies, Morales Trujillo tells us that: "It is worth noting that the majority of the victims of femicide are women of reproductive age—that is, from sixteen to thirty-two. *It is in this age range that women often obtain middle and high levels of education*, although young girls, adult women, and seniors are also on the lists of femicide victims" (Morales Trujillo *Terrorizing Women* 135, emphasis added). The idea of targeting fertile women takes us back to the past when indigenous women's bodies were sliced in half to prevent more indigenous individuals from populating the country. Moreover, class plays a large role as well since they are preventing women from achieving socioeconomic success during their formative

years. And by suppressing women's potential prior to their college years, the machista society is confessing their fear. They target women as a response to them becoming their rivals in society.

However, to assert murder as the end-product of misogynistic hatred is not sufficient. Another theory as to why a father, husband, brother, or lover, would want to kill a woman today, is offered by Jean Franco, a scholar who pioneered the field of Latin American cultural studies in the U.S., with much attention to women's writings. In her book *Cruel Modernity* Franco argues that Modernity is in essence the use of cruelty by those in power against bodies considered less than human. Those in power include: governments, para/anti-governments, criminal organizations, military, guerrillas, and all who form part of these structures either willingly or by force. Those considered less than human in Guatemala are: the Indigenous individual, women, black, poor, LGBTQ communities, and anyone who does not correspond to the prototype citizen constructed by the Nation State. Concerning violence against women in Guatemala, Franco traces today's feminicides back to the savagery during the Civil War: "The disturbing truth to the genocide in Guatemala is that 'there was no tactical advantage in sadism, therefore one can only conclude that hatred of the indigenous combined with the perpetrator's absolute freedom to do his worse were contributing factors'" (Franco 54). She strongly believes that hatred allowed for such atrocities against the Indigenous individual. Although hatred continues to be a reason for the escalating killing of women today, what really developed from such sadistic behavior during the war was the dissemination and acceptance of a new type of "male behavior"—one that allows men to resort to violence when difficult situations arise or when things do not go *his way*. As Franco explains:

As a result of military service, men become machista and disrespectful, with the result that they violate all the cultural norms of family and community: they always say, 'Here

you are going to be a man.’Thus wartime rape can be understood as a mark of sovereignty acted out on the body of women, a sovereignty that demands the degradation not only of the woman but also of her family and offspring, who were often forced to witness the rape. (Franco 80)

Put differently, “to be a man” during the civil war meant to be violent towards women, children, families and anyone who stood in their way. What this tells us then, throughout Latin America not just Guatemala, either due to civil wars or dictatorships, or both, male subjectivity makes a drastic change.⁴⁰ Being the “head of the household” no longer means safeguarding the family, rather, “what it meant to be a man was demonstrated in the savagery of the Guatemalan massacres” (Franco 80). Any man who did not and does not fit into this new masculine subjectivity risks his manhood being questioned.

Today, to be a man is to use violence against anyone considered inferior. This is in fact the new male subject in Guatemala. This is what Franco allows us to understand and which gives us another insight into this new culture of violence in the 21st century. What is also important to consider is the fact that, “Cruelty on the massive scale described [...] is not a spontaneous and individual act, committed by deviants. It requires sanction from the state or from the rogue organization, as well as a process of dehumanization” (Franco 247). Thus, a violent masculinity is championed by the state or criminal organizations that have arisen to be even more powerful today. There are two understandings here: 1) the State supports men expressing their masculinity through violence and 2) in consequence, the investigation of cases of violence against women continues to be insufficient and outright inhumane.

⁴⁰ Franco reminds us about this in her Afterword: “An equally tantalizing question that recurs in nearly every chapter of this book and is often ignored is the formation of subjectivities whose very identity requires violence” (249).

If during the civil war “The ground was prepared by the state of exception that allowed the army to operate outside any guarantees of juridical rights, and certainly outside any covenant of human rights,” Guatemala today, then, is a State where people do in fact get away with murder (Franco 82).⁴¹ If during the civil war, rape was “a ‘gift’ from the commanders who announced ‘here’s meat for you’ [‘Hay carne muchá’],” in postwar there is no “one” state appointed commander to give orders, rather, (m)any person(s) can make his/their own orders and execute them (Franco 81). The usual structures of power (Government, the Law, Military, etc.) have begun to deteriorate in postwar Guatemala. They have begun to function in a state of exception, where their power is now allied to “unofficial” structures who take command. These “unofficial” structures are the anti-governments and criminal organizations. As Franco warns us: “The temptation to term ‘ironic’ the recent election of Perez Molina, a former general in the civil war, as president of Guatemala because he is expected to fight the cartels must be resisted. The election of a participant in a brutal war is an act of despair” (Franco 55).⁴² His election is not a coincidence; rather, it serves to remind the people that the way to lead a country will continue to be through violence.

Furthermore, Perez Molina’s presidency is a constant reminder that although genocide occurred, justice has not been served. While the genocide is a painful fact that indigenous people and families of the disappeared endure every day, it has been forgotten by others (especially by those in positions of power). This situation is a red flag for women who seek for justice today. What remedies can women expect if the State has not recognized the atrocities of a recent past?

⁴¹ By *state of exception* I understand, “[...] a threshold at which *logic and praxis* blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference” (Agamben 40).

⁴² Otto Perez Molina was President of Guatemala during 2012-2015 and was ousted due to his involvement in corruption. <http://www.americasquarterly.org/content/amazing-case-proved-latin-americas-crackdown-corruption-real>

If “rape was an act of conquest designed first to debase and then to exterminate the enemy” during the civil war, what can be said about a society to whom rape has become “unsatisfactory,” to whom the murder of the enemy is now a preferred course of action (Franco 80)? The facts state that, “In Guatemala 5,300 [women] were killed between 2001-2010” (Franco 224). Moreover, “There is no telling how many of these deaths could be attributed to ‘domestic violence’” (Franco 225). Are the feminicides part of a national (or global) war against women, or are they merely a “family affair”?⁴³

To answer the question as to whether feminicide is a national or a global war, or whether it is something that just happens within families or violent societies, we have to understand the language used to address it. Many scholars point to the significance of language when talking about violence against women because, *the body speaks*; the body produces language. Rita Laura Segato, Jean Franco, and Judith Butler privilege corporal language. When examining feminicide, we need to “read” the mutilation, dismemberment and disposal of women’s bodies in public spaces as the language of Machismo and a *new* language, which I will call *Machistañol*.

2.1 BEFORE THE LAW: *MACHISTAÑOL*

What follows, then, are important languages we need to lay out before we can listen to the bodies that speak in the works by Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal. The first one is the legal jargon used in Guatemala through the ratification of a law for violence against women. The second

⁴³ We have no well-defined answers as to why women have become the new target of choice for machista societies. When one *first* encounters the term feminicide, one is taken to a specific place and time in history—Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Fast-forward ten years later, Guatemala has become the place to where these crimes trickle down.

language, *Machistañol*, is one that uses women's bodies as canvases to write, think about, represent, create and oppress women in the twenty-first century. About feminicides in Ciudad Juarez, Franco affirms:

The Juarez killings were performances of sovereignty that required the psychological and moral defeat of the other and an exhibition of the power of death that required an audience. These were expressive crimes: that is, the bodies constituted a language that expressed the power of the *fratres* over life and death and consolidated them as a group. All who witnessed the event were accomplices whose silence was guaranteed. (Franco 222)

What Franco calls “expressive crimes” I call *Machistañol*. By using women's bodies, machistas create a new language. This language is not to be shared with anyone outside of the group of machistas because it is meant to be understood *only* amongst themselves. That is what keeps them in power. This exclusivity prevents women from understanding *their* language and from solving the epidemic of feminicides—up until now, when women like the artists in this dissertation have come forth to speak out quite candidly about such machista language, actions and behavior.

First, we give attention to the legal language emerging from the rising rate of femicide since 2000 in Guatemala. Along with making femicide a punishable crime, the law also includes as punishable other forms of violence. The *Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women*⁴⁴ includes seven chapters and twenty-eight articles that detail the many ways violence is performed against women and the consequences for such actions. The main objective of the law is the following:

⁴⁴ Although legally speaking, the Guatemalan Legislative branch uses the term “femicide” I stand by Victoria Sanford's inclusive definition of these acts against women.

Artículo 1. Objeto y fin de la ley. La presente ley tiene como objeto garantizar la vida, la libertad, la integridad, la dignidad, la protección y la igualdad de todas las mujeres ante la ley, y de la ley, particularmente cuando por condición de género, en las relaciones de poder o confianza, en el ámbito público o privado quien agrede, cometa en contra de ellas prácticas discriminatorias, de violencia física, psicológica, económica o de menosprecio a sus derechos. El fin es promover e implementar disposiciones orientadas a la erradicación de la violencia física, psicológica, sexual, económica o cualquier tipo de coacción en contra de las mujeres, garantizándoles una vida libre de violencia, según lo estipulado en la Constitución Política de la República e instrumentos internacionales sobre derechos humanos de las mujeres ratificado por Guatemala.

This introductory article is intriguing as it demonstrates that the legal system itself confirms the fact that women are mistreated and abused in society, as well as suggests an urgency to punish it. In Articles 6 and 7 specific punishable crimes for femi(ni)cide and violence against women are listed. As defined in the law,

Artículo 6. Femicidio. Comete el delito de femicidio quien, en el marco de las relaciones desiguales de poder entre hombres y mujeres, diere muerte a una mujer, por su condición de mujer, valiéndose de cualquiera de las siguientes circunstancias:

- a. Haber pretendido infructuosamente establecer o restablecer una relación de pareja o de intimidad con la víctima.
- b. Mantener en la época en que se perpetre el hecho, o haber mantenido con la víctima relaciones familiares, conyugales, de convivencia, de intimidad o noviazgo, amistad, compañerismo o relación laboral.

- c. Como resultado de la reiterada manifestación de violencia en contra de la víctima.
- d. Como resultado de ritos grupales usando o no armas de cualquier tipo.
- e. En menosprecio del cuerpo de la víctima para satisfacción de instintos sexuales, o cometiendo actos de mutilación genital o cualquier otro tipo de mutilación.
- f. Por misoginia.
- g. Cuando el hecho se cometa en presencia de las hijas o hijos de la víctima.
- h. Concurriendo cualquiera de las circunstancias de calificación contempladas en el artículo 132 del Código Penal.

La persona responsable de este delito será sancionada con pena de prisión de veinticinco a cincuenta años, y no podrá concedérsele la reducción de la pena por ningún motivo. Las personas procesadas por la comisión de este delito no podrán gozar de ninguna medida sustitutiva.

(Ley contra femicidio Decreto 22-2008)

Briefly put, anyone who performs actions (a) through (h) that result in the death of a woman, faces a prison sentence of twenty-five to fifty years. This is a relatively high sentence when compared to that of homicide, which according to article 123, Chapter 1 is imprisonment between 15-40 years (*Penal Code*). However, Parricide is treated differently. Article 131, Chapter II of Parricide indicates the following:

Artículo 131. Quien conociendo el vínculo, matare a cualquier ascendiente o descendiente, a su cónyuge o a la persona con quien hace vida marital, será castigado como parricida con prisión de 25 a 50 años. Se le impondrá pena de muerte, en lugar del

máximo de prisión, si por las circunstancias del hecho, la manera de realizarlo y los móviles determinantes, se revelare una mayor y particular peligrosidad en el agente.

A quienes no se les aplique la pena de muerte por este delito, no podrá concedérseles rebaja de pena por ninguna causa. (*Código Penal* Decreto 17-1973)

The lack of identification of who “cualquier” refers to begs the question: does it refer to the killing of a father *and* a mother? A son *and* a daughter? Or what about a husband *and* a wife?⁴⁵ In Spanish, there is no difference between parricide and patricide like there is in English; thus, this article leaves a lot to interpretation. The vagueness of an important article within the *Penal Code* is quite frankly, irresponsible. The article could have included the term matricide to elucidate that female family relatives are also included. What is more, if we compare the consequences a criminal faces when committing femicide versus parricide, we can notice a stark difference. The prison sentence of twenty-five to fifty years remains the same in both cases, yet the person who commits parricide can face the death penalty. This makes us question whether parricide actually includes wife, mother and sister, or whether it is only referring to the males in the family. It comes down to a matter of language, of noticing the gender differences, especially in Spanish. Why not have the death penalty for the crime of femicide as well? Could it be that only the males in the family are of interest under this law –in other words, those who make up the fraternity or *fratres*, to refer back to Franco’s choice of words? I ask these questions because we are dealing with a Machista State that seeks to undermine women’s role in society in every context.

⁴⁵ To ask about same-sex unions where a woman would be murdering her wife or a male murdering his husband is regrettably inappropriate, for Guatemala continues to leave that conversation in the abyss.

Another important article to mention within the *Law Against Femicide* is that which includes the various forms of violence that are committed against women. According to Article 7, whether it be in a public or private space, if one exercises physical, sexual or psychological violence against a woman, one can face a prison sentence of five to twelve years. The article reads as follows:

Artículo 7. Violencia contra la mujer. Comete el delito de violencia contra la mujer quien, en el ámbito público o privado, ejerza violencia física, sexual o psicológica, valiéndose de las siguientes circunstancias:

- a. Haber pretendido, en forma reiterada o continua, infructuosamente, establecer o restablecer una relación de pareja o de intimidad con la víctima.
- b. Mantener en la época en que se perpetre el hecho, o haber mantenido con la víctima relaciones familiares, conyugales, de convivencia, de intimidad o noviazgo, amistad, compañerismo o relación laboral, educativa o religiosa.
- c. Como resultado de ritos grupales usando o no armas de cualquier tipo.
- d. En menosprecio del cuerpo de la víctima para satisfacción de instintos sexuales, o cometiendo actos de mutilación genital.
- e. Por misoginia.

La persona responsable del delito de violencia física o sexual contra la mujer será sancionada con prisión de cinco a doce años, de acuerdo a la gravedad del delito, sin perjuicio de que los hechos constituyan otros delitos estipulados en leyes ordinarias.

(Ley contra femicidio Decreto 22-2008)

Including this article within the *Law Against Femicide* points to how critical it is to act as witness to the violent actions that come before a woman's lethal fate. In many cases, women are

found dead because the police, family or neighbors did not pay attention to their cries for help. Violence against her occurs in both the private sphere and (especially) in the public sphere, where exists the pervasive fear of being cat-called or harassed as she walks the streets.⁴⁶ If these forms of violence have been normalized by society, now that they are in the law as illegal or sanctionable, there is hope that legal measures will lead to cultural changes.

The fact that Guatemala, a “country [which] still has one of the world’s highest rates of femicide” established an important legal instrument to combat violence against women, is a big victory (Warren *The Guardian* 2017). Most certainly, the legal recognition and implementations have allowed Guatemalans to talk about violence against women more openly. They now recognize the term feminicide as something that happens in Guatemala. As social justice scholar Pascha Bueno-Hansen tells us: “In the struggle to find justice for gender-based violence against women, whether in wartime or peacetime, law is a central pillar of the patriarchal apparatus that must be fundamentally reconfigured to recognize women as subjects and enshrine women’s rights” (*Terrorizing Women* 291). Hence, while to recognize a woman as a subject worthy of protection under the Law is a win, is such acknowledgement or protection sufficient?

In short, as various scholars, attorneys, activists and others have demonstrated, the application of the *Law against Femicide* has been poor, and impunity continues to reign in Guatemala. One reason is that other necessary areas or tools that can help the legal system to

⁴⁶ This legal article reminds me of an Opinion entry from September 2017 in an online magazine run and funded by Universidad Rafael Landívar in Guatemala, *Plaza Pública*. The name of the story was “Doce horas siendo mujer,” written by Evelyn Price, which told the story of what a young lady faces as soon as she leaves her home in the city of Guatemala: “me amarro bien los zapatos por si tengo que correr, me pongo las llaves entre los dedos con la mano empuñada, comienzo a caminar, un grupo de hombres, un hombre, dos hombres, policías, albañiles, taxistas, brochas, adolescentes, borrachos, vagabundos, tres hombres, un hombre, me subo a la banqueta, me bajo de la banqueta, cruzo la calle, camino más rápido, camino más despacio, me cubro la cara con el pelo, me subo a la banqueta, me bajo de la banqueta” (Price *Plaza Pública*). <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/12-horas-siendo-mujer>

bring justice are not receiving sufficient support and attention. According to the attorney for the Human Rights Law in Guatemala, Hilda Morales Trujillo,

Another significant action that was first put forward by the Network of Non-violence against Women and that has also been advanced by CONAPREVI⁴⁷ is the need to have a single statistical registry to be able to reliably track statistics of domestic violence and violence against women. [...] Some administrators of justice have argued that filing such statistics will not aid in resolving cases. This shows us that a culture of statistical record keeping does not exist in state institutions and that this issue is also affected by a desire to hide the reality of violence against women. (Morales Trujillo *Terrorizing Women* 137)⁴⁸

As she elucidates, there is a desire to “hide” the reality of violence against women. More importantly, it demonstrates that State institutions do not understand that instances of violence against women precede the final act of femicide. In other words, women endure an array of violences that are not necessarily mortal before they eventually become victims of femicide.

Naturally the machista culture is also an influence that prevents the law from proving itself as a resource for women as effectively as it could. Morales Trujillo explains that many times the victims do not report incidents of violence committed against them because they feel

⁴⁷ CONAPREVI: Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y Contra las Mujeres; National Coordinator for the Prevention of Intrafamiliar Violence and Violence against Women.

⁴⁸ When the *Law Against Femicide* was instituted in Guatemala in 2008, one of its major components was to establish a National Institute of Statistics (INE) which would be responsible for: “El Instituto Nacional de Estadística -INE- está obligado a generar, con la información que deben remitirle, [...] indicadores e información estadística, debiendo crear un Sistema Nacional de Información sobre Violencia contra la Mujer.” After searching on their website, I could not find reports or statistics on cases of violence against women. The two years that were listed were 2013 and 2015, yet such reports were not available. What I did find was a report that indicated the number of complaints of intrafamiliar violence due to the victim’s sex. In 2013 alone, there were 32,918 complaints by women and 3,252 by men.

embarrassed to express that they are being mistreated (Cerigua).⁴⁹ In other words, to be injured is looked down upon; a machista society makes a woman feel ashamed for the violence committed against her, rather than supporting her to denounce such violence.⁵⁰ It makes her question if she is worthy of justice. These are real questions that run through a woman's mind.⁵¹ Jean Franco sheds light on this point: "the rape victim suffers twice: first by being raped and second by being condemned by a patriarchal community" (Franco 78).

Legal scholars Karen Musalo and Blain Bookey explain that, "[in] 2011 more than 20,000 cases were filed with the courts under Guatemala's 2008 *Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women*, including cases of femicide and other physical, sexual, economical and emotional violence against women. Less than three percent of the cases that reached the courts resulted in a judgement" (106). What this information tells us is first, the Law is ineffective; second, women who denounce cases of violence do in fact suffer twice; third, such statistics may definitely demoralize women from resorting to the legal system for justice; and fourth, the machista fraternity is so strong that 20,000 women who voiced injustice were not able

⁴⁹ CERIGUA is the Center for Informative Reports about Guatemala, and this quote is from an article published on March 8th, 2014—International Women's Day—titled, "Sistema patriarcal de valores incide en desigualdad de poder entre hombres y mujeres." Translation mine.

⁵⁰ Probably a worse scenario is that of women in Ciudad Juárez who are considered "antisocial" if they denounce these crimes: "In the most hegemonic sectors of society (the political class, some entrepreneurial groups, the media, intellectuals, and academe), the prevailing opinion is that the victims of the violence are less of a priority than the city's image and economic development. For this reason, mentioning or denouncing these crimes is considered antisocial and unethical behavior" (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas *Terrorizing women* 185).

⁵¹ In her comparative approach to understanding the "empowered term" feminicide in Mexico, Guatemala and Perú, Bueno-Hansen reminds us that: "[to] assume that the only respectable decision a victim of gender-based violence against women or the family of a victim of feminicidio can make is to publicly denounce the crime and proceed with the case through the judicial system [is] an assumption [that] erases the complicated social, cultural, intrafamilial, communal, psychological and emotional negotiations the survivor or survivors must make. Moreover, in an ongoing context of impunity, the survivor or survivors must first consider their immediate safety and security" (Bueno-Hansen *Terrorizing Women* 291).

to disrupt their hold. Catherine Mackinnon poignantly illustrates the consequences of an inefficient legal system as: “women who charge rape say they were raped twice, the second time in court. If the state is male, this is more than a figure of speech” (Mackinnon 291). The *Ley contra el femicidio* was created precisely to “protect” women from various structural forms of violence, but in being unable to do so, it is in fact adding to the violence.

Prior to the passing of *Law Against Femicide*, women were experiencing similar outcomes when filing cases of violence under the Penal Code. Cházaro, Casey and Ruhl report the following:

Among the gaps in the Guatemalan Criminal Code are provisions to effectively prevent and punish domestic violence [...] [P]erpetrators can be charged with assault only if signs of physical injury from the abuse persist for ten days [...] This approach requires the violence to be particularly grisly, ignoring other forms of violence, including psychological violence. Moreover, it decreases the possibility for criminal or judicial intervention at a time when it could actually prevent a woman from being murdered by her partner. (Chazaro, Casey, Ruhl *Terrorizing Women* 102)

Is there a difference between *before* and *after* the *Law Against Femicide*? What is the purpose of a law if it doesn’t work? Who actually benefits, if it is not the victims who plead for justice? Can we expect a culture to really change with legal measures? If the “cultivation of sadism and the deliberate defiance of all taboos challenges any notion of the state as the guardian of the human rights of its population,” then what is the purpose of having a State (Franco 55)? Put differently, why do we continue to hold the State responsible when we have dire results as the ones mentioned above? On this point, a well-known Central-Americanist, subaltern studies, and feminist theory scholar Ileana Rodríguez indirectly remarks: “cultural analysts interrogate the

nature of the state by denouncing its indifference to *feminicidio*, yet they simultaneously demand that justice be served to the bereaved families of these women and that protection be given to all the nation's citizens. Thus, while they rebuff the state, they hold it accountable to the well-being of the community” (Rodriguez *Liberalism at Its Limits* 178). Why do we, as cultural analysts, academics and “outsiders,” continue to ask or expect an incompetent State to “save” women?⁵²

As turn of the century statistics have demonstrated, it is a fact that a lack of awareness and prosecution of crimes committed against female bodies in Guatemala is a result of a complicit society with a deep *machista* heritage. Guatemalan researcher and activist Luz Méndez Gutiérrez adds: “the structural causes of violence against women function within a patriarchal system in which values, social norms and practices assigned to women are viewed as inferior and subordinate...one of its main characteristics being, its social legitimation” (Méndez *La erradicación de la violencia contra las mujeres* 19). Let us take for instance, the infamous statement by former president Oscar Berger. In 2005, his second year as president of Guatemala, he was asked what he thought would be a solution to mitigate the increasing rates of femicide. His response was: “For their own safety, women would do best to stay at home.” That statement is exacerbated by machismo. The antiquated idea of men inhabiting the public space while women remain in the private enclosed space is very much prevalent in this century. What’s more, here it is being dictated by a national figure, the father of the fathers—the President. Hence, it is not to be taken lightly, rather, it is to be comprehended meticulously. First, it reinforces man’s position in civil society and second, it threatens those women who do not

⁵² In addition, others say that the state is not only incompetent, but that it is not the sole protector of human rights: “The state is no longer the sole sovereign power responsible for abuses against its inhabitants, for it is also beholden to the transnational forces that rule the global economy, including the globalized network of organized crime” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas *Terrorizing women* 194).

follow the order—stay at home if you want to live. Yet, this statement does at least one more thing. It clearly exposes the fact that the President is not informed about the femicide epidemic, since the home is precisely the space where most of the sexist violence is committed against women.

Whether Berger was well informed or not, the truth of the matter is that his words resonated with an entire nation. Language is how we create our social world. Language has the power to motivate, scare, enlighten or confuse a society. Thus, we need to give much attention to the language that is used when discussing femicide and sexist violence. Words like Oscar Berger's, as senseless and ignorant as they may be, have power because he is (was) a powerful figure. Such is the case for other machista institutions that claim to be helping Guatemala's femicide situation, i.e. the Law and its apparent inadequate process, the Newspapers that deceive readers rather than inform them, Forensic Science services that do not properly investigate femicide cases, and other male-dominated systems we will later examine.

What I am suggesting is that those who are able to clarify why women are the new favored victim, what caused their deaths, why there is so much violence, and how we can bring about changes, are in fact operating against women and for men. They operate through humans' most basic form of communication, language. However, because their language is spoken within a closed community that functions on violence, most of us are not familiar with its "secret" jargon. I propose that to understand today's feminicides, we must learn how to speak *Machistañol*, the secret language of this closed community of machistas.⁵³ The scholars previously mentioned take on the legal and academic task of exposing the high rates of

⁵³ What makes this language secretive is the fact that the femicide epidemic has not stopped. Thus, if we learn or access the language used to "solve" or discuss cases of violence against women, we can point to the real reasons as to why the violence has not ended.

feminicides, machista societies, and other forms of injustices performed upon women's bodies to somehow understand *Machistañol*. My pitch to you, reader, is to think about Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal's artistic expressions as another primary source of female knowledges about violence which can also help us understand the language that inflicts sociolinguistic power over women's lives.

2.2 *MACHISTAÑOL*, A LANGUAGE FOUNDED ON VIOLENCE

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands,
that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his language,
that goes to his heart.*
Nelson Mandela

*Language is power,
life and the instrument of culture,
the instrument of domination and liberation.*
Angela Carter

Does violence have its own language? Who can(not) speak it? Today's acts of violence against women and the rising feminicides are more than acts; they are *expressions of violence*. There is a linguistic component to them which is not always verbal or literal; rather, it is predominantly corporal. These expressions of violence have established a language upon the violation⁵⁴ of the (female) human body; I call this language *Machistañol*. It is a language spoken by machistas, who commit acts of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them: primarily women, but also indigenous people, Afro-descendants, poor communities, uneducated people, children,

⁵⁴ By "violation" I mean "the harm of and the rape of a body", per its Spanish twofold connotation. According to the *Real Academia Española* "violar" is defined as: 1) Infringir o quebrantar una ley, un tratado, un precepto, una promesa, etc.; 2) Tener acceso carnal con alguien en contra de su voluntad o cuando se halla privado de sentido o discernimiento.

and all those who do not fit in with those at the top of the social hierarchy. The sealed nature of this language and the fact that few have attempted to learn and understand it both have contributed to the continuation of feminicide in “peacetime” Guatemala. However, by closely analyzing cases of feminicide and violence against women, I believe one can learn and decipher *Machistañol*, which answers the questions: Who is killing these women? Why are they killing them? Who benefits from their deaths? And why have they not stopped? What I do in this dissertation is analyze the expressions of violence within the works of Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal, along with those that take place in “real life,” to decipher *Machistañol* and offer answers to these questions. I hope to contribute a type of lexicon for *Machistañol* as it is spoken and acted out in Guatemala.

A scholar who studies feminicide in Mexico, Rossana Reguillo, came up with a different name for what I call *Machistañol*. She calls it *Narcoñol*. It is clear that this term best fits the context of Mexico. *Narcoñol* she says, is:

Language as a Device of the Narco-Machine; [...] the speech that is derived from narcos, is more of an appendix of the narco-machine rather than its epicenter. [...] *Narcoñol* is, then, an exercise that claims to produce a certain intelligibility about the logistics, modes, strategies, values, figures, and especially, impacts of the narco-machine. (“The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence: Notes Toward its Decodification” 7-8).

The difference between these terms is that while Reguillo identifies the Narco industry as the primary actors for propagating violence in Mexico, I find that it is a larger machista group that has allowed violence to become so penetrating and pervasive in Guatemala. Location is of the essence. Violence must always first be contextualized within its specific time and space if we are to attempt to understand it as thoroughly as possible, so this distinction is necessary.

Earlier I mentioned that one risks their own life if one attempts to understand the language of the male order, *Machistañol*. There is no better example that speaks truth to that statement than Argentine anthropologist Rita Laura Segato's personal story as well as her stimulating work. In her book, *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado*, Segato shares that when she was in Mexico in 2004, she was going to answer the "why" of the crimes in Ciudad Juárez on live TV. She was going to give her own interpretation of the crimes and possibly expose the machinations of those who commit them. As soon as she spoke her first word, the television network signal failed. She left the next day. As she recounts the event: "La asustadora precisión cronométrica con que coincidieron la caída de la señal y la primera palabra con que iría a dar inicio a mi respuesta sobre el porqué de los crímenes hizo que decidiéramos partir, dejando Ciudad Juárez la mañana siguiente" (Segato 12). This incident communicated two facts: 1) her life was literally at risk if she spoke another word; hence, she was violently silenced; 2) she was getting close to accessing or deciphering the secret language of violence. As a result of her attempt to expose them,⁵⁵ they initiated a brief conversation: "El siniestro "diálogo" parecía confirmar que estábamos dentro del código y que la huella que seguíamos llevaba a destino" (Segato 14). The failed signal was the male-order *demanding* that she stop talking.

Segato is not the only case in point. There have been numerous journalists and reporters whom have been silenced directly and indirectly in their attempts to expose the machista language of violence.⁵⁶ What would have happened if Segato stayed to explain *their* language of

⁵⁵ By "them" I mean the male order, fraternal groups, machistas, phallogocentric (un)official organizations and others. To avoid repetition, I alternate the use of these terms.

⁵⁶ Recently in 2016, Mexico and Guatemala held the highest number of journalists murdered in Latin America, 9 and 6, respectively: "La organización [Reporteros Sin Fronteras (RSF)], explicó que esas muertes suelen darse en regiones alejadas de las grandes ciudades y en

violence to the world? Or, what would have happened if she had continued the “dialogue” with them? We do not have answers to these questions, but in her book, we have answers as to how *they* speak and act out violence. Segato astutely delineates how a patriarchal State functions by violence in the case of Mexico. She considers machismo to be at the forefront of so much violence, especially against women.

According to her, from the end of the twentieth century and since the beginning of the twenty-first century, violence has become the primary language of Latin America as opposed to Spanish, the many indigenous languages, and the other spoken languages throughout the region. A concept that allows us to enter the language of violence, what I call *Machistañol*, is what Segato calls a *mafia order*:

En América Latina, desde Centroamérica hasta la Argentina, hay un proceso de mafialización de la nación y un escenario bélico en expansión. [...] Todo esto de las mafias que está pasando es muy nuevo. Este tipo de crueldad, por ejemplo, con el cuerpo de la mujer, es propio de las nuevas formas de la guerra, inauguradas en nuestras dictaduras militares y guerras sucias contra la gente, en Guatemala, en las guerras internas, en la guerra de la Antigua Yugoslavia, de Ruanda, y ahora en el universo de los sicariatos. (Segato 63-4, 75).

The increase of violence against women and impunity that permeates Latin American countries, is made possible by a mafia order that indulges with impunity and takes whatever measures necessary to protect this fraternal group. For Segato, a machista state functions so well by using violence due to the unintelligibility of the language of violence the new *mafia order* has created. Put differently, because no one outside of the mafia order understands the murders, i.e., the mafia

periodistas que cubren temas locales judiciales, sociales o relacionados con el crimen organizado y la corrupción” (*Prensa Libre* 2016).

order's language as seen on the bodies of women, those in the mafia order can keep their power untouched. As Pratt once expressed, violence is a male dominated concept, and it continues to be so. Segato takes this idea a step further by suggesting that not only is it a concept or tool for and by men, but it has developed into a language created *only for men*. The mafia order makes certain that such language is not made accessible to anyone that is not part of the brotherhood. As Segato elucidates:

If the violent act is understood as a message, and the crimes are seen as orchestrated in a clear call-and-response style we find ourselves in a scene where the acts of violence communicate efficiently with those who “know” the code, the well informed, those who speak the language, *even when they are not taking part directly in the enunciative action*. This is why once a communication system with a violent alphabet is installed it is very difficult to de-install and eliminate it. Violence, constituted and crystallized within a communication system, is transformed into a stable language and comes to behave in the nearly automatic fashion of any language. (Segato *Terrorizing Women* 81)⁵⁷

Violence has indeed become an established language spoken amongst a very limited group of people throughout Latin American (and global) societies: men. Therefore, we, as women, need to learn “their” language in order to understand how society is functioning today. To carry out this mission, I build upon Segato's linguistic formula for deciphering violence, *Machistañol*, as it pertains to Guatemala's current situation. I hope to contribute to conversations

⁵⁷ Original is in Spanish from her book: “Si el acto violento es entendido como mensaje y los crímenes se perciben orquestados en claro estilo responsorial, nos encontramos con una escena donde los actos de violencia se comportan como una lengua capaz de funcionar eficazmente para los entendidos, los avisados, los que la hablan, aun cuando no participen directamente en la acción enunciativa. Es por eso que, cuando un sistema de comunicación con un alfabeto violento se instala, es muy difícil desinstalarlo, eliminarlo. La violencia constituida y cristalizada en forma de sistema de comunicación se transforma en un lenguaje estable y pasa a comportarse con el casi-automatismo de cualquier idioma” (*La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres* 31-2).

that have to do with feminicides, patriarchal and machista notions that continue to permeate Guatemalan society, feminist notions that attempt to debunk the Patriarchy, aesthetic conversations about violence, and conversations about the power of language.

At the core of Segato's linguistic formula is her interpretation of feminicide; thus, I lay it out here in detail:

I tend not to understand the feminicides in Ciudad Juarez as crimes in which hatred toward the victim is the dominant factor (Radford and Russell 1992). I do not doubt that misogyny, in the strict sense of intense hatred of women, is common in the environment in which the crimes take place and constitute a precondition for their occurrence. Yet I am convinced that the victim is the waste product of the process, a discardable piece, and that extreme conditions and requirements for being accepted into a group of peers are behind the enigma of Ciudad Juarez. *Those who give meaning to the scene are other men, not the victim*, whose role is to be consumed to satisfy a group's demands to become and remain cohesive as a group. (Segato *Terrorizing Women* 77, emphasis added)⁵⁸

I have presented others' definitions of femicide and feminicide and illustrated various forms of violence; what Segato clarifies for us here, is that women inherently do not exist at the time of the act of violence nor after the fact. Certainly, a woman's body is necessary to carry out the

⁵⁸ This is the translated version from the original in Spanish, which appears in *La escritura sobre el cuerpo de la mujer*: "Inspirada en este modelo que tiene en cuenta y enfatiza el papel de la coordenada horizontal de interlocución entre miembros de la fratría, tiendo a no entender los feminicidios de Juárez como crímenes en los que el odio hacia la víctima es el factor predominante.¹² No discuto que la misoginia, en el sentido estricto de desprecio a la mujer, sea generalizada en el ambiente donde los crímenes tienen lugar. Pero estoy convencida de que la víctima es el desecho del proceso, una pieza descartable, y de que condicionamientos y exigencias extremas para atravesar el umbral de la pertenencia al grupo de pares se encuentran por detrás del enigma de Ciudad Juárez. Quienes dominan la escena son los otros hombres y no la víctima, cuyo papel es ser consumida para satisfacer la demanda del grupo de pares" (25).

crime itself, but her *as subject* is not possible. Woman, as subject, is invisible, obsolete from the equation. A woman is the sacrificial object of choice. And women may not attempt to make sense of the body found laying on the public streets in the City of Guatemala. It is only men who can kill women and talk about them after they have been dehumanized to the maximum. This is what makes today's violence an "enigma" as Segato describes. For the entire planning of the crime, the crime itself and the aftermath of the violent act, man is at the center of the conversation. Furthermore, *he* is demystifying the enigma called feminicide, for these acts of violence and the language they produce to remain within a male-dominated group of peers only allows these expressions of violence to continue.

Placing Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal at the center of the conversation on feminicide, breaks away from *Machistañol*. I chose female artists from different backgrounds who speak about the violence endured by women, to offer an "aesthetic/political" perspective. I analyze the language in their literary and corporal expressions of violence to decipher the *Machistañol* that is spoken nowadays in Guatemala. By incorporating these artists' expressions of violence within Segato's axes of communication, I intend to show how a woman *can* speak from those sites of violence. When we see examples of women *speaking* where they are not allowed and when they are meant to be kept invisible, these examples break the sociopolitical order imposed upon women today. By carefully listening to *her voice*, we can demystify, and then, invalidate *Machistañol*.

So, what do these axes of communication entail? For our purposes, they provide a linguistic formula that helps us highlight how language produces actions (*do*) and how actions become language (*say*) in the context of violence against women. We will first explain Segato's axes of communication, which entail a vertical and horizontal axis, and we will present the

theoretical tools that enable us to take Segato's formula further. Altogether, the theoretical and practical components explained here will later show how these artists *are* intervening, visibilizing, and bringing a sense of justice to a phenomenon the State is incapable of or unwilling to provide for women.

3.0 REBELLIOUS SPEECH ACTS: THE ARTIVISTS' AXES OF ALLOCUTIONS

*Los feminicidios son mensajes emanados de un sujeto autor
que sólo puede ser identificado, localizado, perfilado,
mediante una “escucha” rigurosa de estos crímenes
como actos comunicativos.*

Rita Laura Segato *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres*

*La lengua del feminicidio utiliza el significante cuerpo femenino
para indicar la posición de lo que puede ser sacrificado
en aras de un bien mayor, de un bien colectivo,
como es la constitución de una fratría mafiosa.*

Rita Laura Segato

The activists in this study are women who have chosen to take a stand against violence, femicide, and patriarchy, including its many institutions. Through literature and the body, they are producing a language that challenges *Machistañol*. They have created, written, performed and spoken out loud about the dire situation of women in Guatemala at the turn of the century, automatically inserting themselves in the linguistic formula presented by Segato, whose main claim is that the language inscribed on the bodies of victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez is unintelligible to a foreigner or someone unfamiliar with femicides, and it is precisely in this unintelligibility that the assassins take refuge as if it were a special war code, a jargon composed entirely by *acting outs* (Segato 12-3).⁵⁹ Here, we aim to make sense of this “unintelligible” language in the context of violence against women in Guatemala. One way to take on this task is

⁵⁹ I have paraphrased and translated the Spanish version: “el primer problema que los horrendos crímenes de Ciudad Juárez presentan al forastero, a las audiencias distantes, es un problema de inteligibilidad. Y es justamente en su ininteligibilidad que los asesinos se refugian, como en un tenebroso código de guerra, un argot compuesto enteramente de *acting outs*” (Segato 12-3).

by looking at the axes of communication as tools to access “a jargon composed entirely by *acting outs*.” Segato explains that the context of a rape (or execution), the rapist transmits his messages within two axes of interlocution: a *vertical* axis where the aggressor speaks down to the female victim, and a *horizontal* axis where he speaks with his fellow men. In the vertical axis the aggressor believes himself to be a sovereign subject and his victim his subordinate; in the horizontal axis we see a sort of initiation ritual amongst a male order:

El violador emite sus mensajes a lo largo de dos ejes de interlocución: eje vertical y horizontal. Eje vertical: él habla, sí, a la víctima, y su discurso adquiere un cariz punitivo y el agresor un perfil de moralizador, de paladín de la moral social porque, en ese imaginario compartido, el destino de la mujer es ser contenida, censurada, disciplinada, reducida, por el gesto violento de quien reencarna, por medio de este acto, la función soberana. El eje horizontal: el agresor se dirige a sus pares (o socios), y lo hace de varias formas: les solicita ingreso en su sociedad y, desde esta perspectiva, la mujer violada se comporta como una víctima sacrificial inmolada en un ritual iniciático; compite con ellos, mostrando que merece, por su agresividad y poder de muerte, ocupar un lugar en la hermandad viril y hasta adquirir una posición destacada en una fratría que solo reconoce un lenguaje jerárquico y una organización piramidal. (Segato 22-3)⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The English version appears in *Terrorizing Women*: “It turns out that the rapist sends his messages along two axes of dialogue [...] On the vertical axis he does speak, indeed, to the victim: His discourse acquires a punitive aspect, and the aggressor takes on a moralizing profile as a safeguard of social morality, because in that shared imaginary woman’s destiny is to be contained, censored, disciplined, and reduced by the violent gesture of he who reincarnates the sovereign function through this act. However, it is the discovery of a horizontal axis of dialogue that potentially represents the most interesting contribution of my research with convicted rapists in Brasilia. The aggressor addresses himself to his peers, and he does so in several ways” He petitions to be accepted into their society, and from this perspective, the raped woman becomes the immolated sacrificial victim of a ritual of initiation; he competes with his peers, showing that, because of his aggressiveness and power of death, he deserves to be part of the virile

Through the use of extreme violence against a woman, both physical and linguistic, a man can enter the machista brotherhood. The more gruesome the violence, the higher the position he is awarded within the *fratría*. The repetition of this type of violence establishes a particular language necessary for a misogynist and patriarchal “secret society” to function in the context of Latin America. These violent actions have become a norm in Guatemala, “a way in” for men to participate in the mafia order of violence.

The language these actions have produced, is steadfastly spreading amongst men in Guatemala; it needs to be disarticulated. To achieve this goal, I approach these artists’ works as interjections in the vertical/horizontal axes of allocutions. They (and the women in their texts) are not participants in the misogynist fraternity (horizontal axis) nor victims (vertical axis), but instead, producers of speech acts that cross “diagonally” on the same axis as their aggressor. What these women are speaking up about in regards to violence allows us to fit their words and actions into the linguistic formula where until now only men have been allowed to speak. It is important to keep them on the same playing field (axes) as the mafia order, because it is within this context that they can demystify it. Locating their speech acts within the contexts of violence where the aggressors perform their “acting outs” allows these artists to question and decipher what has been labeled “unintelligible,” ultimately deauthorizing its power.

I position Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal as entering a dialogue with those who are committing acts of violence, femicide and attempting to devalue women’s identity in society. By directly speaking about these matters in their works, they can be seen as engaging with the brotherhood, the *fratres*, mafia order and all those organizations founded on machismo. It is

brotherhood and even to acquire a distinguished position in a fraternity that recognizes only a hierarchical language and a pyramidal organization” (75-6).

important to consider their art works as contributions to the discourse on violence, because it has the capacity to influence culture, politics, society, and the economy. Pertaining to Ciudad Juarez, scholars Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas affirm:

Organized crime must be recognized as an economic force that transforms culture and politics. The dialogue about the violence in Ciudad Juarez needs to convene with and engage the criminal agents (the mafia bosses and the police officers who protect and work for them), the economic sectors that finance them, the politicians and officials who are mixed up in the networks of organized crime, and other sectors that are involved.

(Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas *Terrorizing women* 194)

These scholars argue for a conversation, a dialogue with the actual beneficiaries of this violence, those who commit the act, those who conceal it, and those who reveal it in such a way that a woman today is considered disposable. The dialogue Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas are asking for occurs in this dissertation. By keeping the male acting-outs and these artists' speech acts on the same axes of communication, we can create a dialogue between those who kill women and those who defend her. Such a linguistic formula offers us the ability to transform the politics around such conversation. Since these artists' speech acts break with the notions of Woman as victim (physically) and object (linguistically), the language that is imposed on women by these male-orders becomes resignified in their works. By clarifying the nuances of violence, the actors and systems that function by violence, and the position and identity society gives Woman, they are able to disarticulate *Machistañol* and debunk machista notions of what it is to be a woman in 21st century Guatemala. In sum, these artists can be (re)situated in the conversation that previously belonged only to a male mafia order.

To fully challenge the machista language about violence that has proliferated in Guatemala, Woman must be *in* language. To argue that Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal demystify, contest and debunk *Machistañol* by intervening in such language, we must take into account the sociopolitical structures that speak *Machistañol* or function by violence. In their conversation with the speakers of *Machistañol*, they are interpellating all those institutions which originated in machismo. The fact that machismo has a cultural historicity that lingers until today allows the artists to transcend time as well. Conversations which interpellate machista institutions that date as far back as the Invasion, i.e. the Church, are as relevant today as they were then.

If in “real” political life today, there is a mystifying notion about violence against women, in these artists’ production, we find possible answers to this unintelligible phenomenon of femicide. Through the mediums of literature and performance art they offer new possibilities for women to *exist*. Their emphasis on speaking about gender-specific forms of violence not only endorses the female experience, but also produces new knowledges about female bodies that differs from the one that is played out in real life. Ultimately, they make visible new ways of being a woman in an environment that attempts to eliminate them.

To approach violence from a perspective that is not *machista* breaks with the heteronormativity of the concept of violence. In these artists’ works, they speak from and about the violated female body to add to such violent reality a dimension that is missing—female agency. As long as a male order pretends to hold power over a woman’s identity, they create the power dynamic by presenting woman as Subject. These artists change the discourse by presenting Woman not solely as a victim, but as a “real” *Woman*, who oftentimes gets erased in contexts of violence; she is a mother, daughter, student; she is indigenous, *Ladina*, poor, abused,

independent, or well-off *before* becoming a victim. The various female expressions present here help us understand the dialectic of violence through the eyes of female artists. Their art is the truest expressions we have of what it feels like to be a woman in Guatemala.

Through the mediums of literature and performance art, these artists are expressing the sociopolitical reality they live in. The common denominator for these artists' works and the machista language used to talk about women, *Machistañol*, is violence. However, what each says and does with violence is entirely different. These artists provide us with female notions of what violence is, no longer influenced by a male perspective. This is what we want to extract in their works. I am aware that literature and performance art are different from real acts of violence. We have those who commit "real" expressions of violence and those who speak about them. In order for the following theoretical tools to assist us in taking on the task of deciphering *Machistañol*, a language which originated on the violation of a woman's body, I propose to understand these various expressions of/about violence under an overarching umbrella –*language*. They all produce language about feminicide. While *Machistañol* aims to keep feminicide a mystery, these artists' writings and performance art (Galindo), attempt to explain feminicide.

Furthermore, because these artists are intervening in what a male order wants to keep hidden, their language productions transcend aesthetic purposes; they are *taking action* against such violence through art. To support this idea, I rely on the work of Mary Louise Pratt and Judith Butler, which focuses on how *speech acts* do more than what they say and say more than what they do. In addition, to demonstrate how their *speech acts* can create change in the discourse on violence and more importantly in political life, I refer to Jacques Ranciere's notion of "the distribution of the sensible." Words and discourse are a way to organize, normalize and

control the political world we live in.⁶¹ Thus, the language these artists' use and the language used to talk about female violence in official patriarchal systems have the potential to not only speak about violence, but *do* something with that speech. Whether it is through literature or public speeches, body art or political protests, these verbal and non-verbal actions are language productions that have the potential to convey something about the political life that surrounds their speakers. To say that one supersedes the other, or to deny art's potential for political action, is to not understand the authors, artists and speakers of such aesthetic practices. At the same time, to say that those who hold political positions of power are the only ones who can speak about the sociopolitical world is to deny citizens as worthy of being listened. What I aim to do is give each of these diverse forms of language the same attention so that by conjoining them in a sort of dialogue, we can dismantle the enigma of feminicide.

3.1 HOW SPEECH ACTS (RE)DISTRIBUTE THE SENSIBLE

Introducing the work of two Speech Act theoreticians, Mary Louise Pratt and Judith Butler, who foster the idea that literature and (body) performativity have the potential for political praxis, I elaborate on the impact their theories can have in examining the power women's interlocution can have on violent language. The literary and corporal expressions by Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal need to be studied as knowledges that contribute to the construction of the social

⁶¹ By discourse I understand Michel Foucault's notion as: "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon 108).

world that moves away from violence. To transform a word, a poem, a story, or a performance into a powerful statement that can affect social life, we must find a common denominator between these different aesthetic expressions. It is more effective to find similarities than differences when studying their works, since it is not necessarily important what artistic genre they chose; rather, what is of the essence is the fact that they are *speaking up* and their different artistic expressions are unified under the concept of their speech acts.

In her book *Toward a Speech Act Theory*, Pratt finds a way to think about literary discourse as a *speech act*, by considering “literary discourse in terms of its similarities to other verbal activities rather than in terms of its differences from them” (Pratt xii). Her approach allows us to incorporate literature in the discourse about violence against women at the same level of, for example, presidential speeches and other official discourses that currently dominate or regulate the flow of the conversation. According to Pratt, a “speech act approach to literature offers the important possibility of integrating literary discourse into the same basic model of language as all our other communicative activities” (Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act* 88). If speech acts are context-dependent, meaning that they only take full effect if the listener/addressee understands the utterance made by the speaker, then literature too can be analyzed as a speech context. Pratt elaborates:

There are enormous advantages to talking about literature in this way, too, for literary works, like all our communicative activities, are context-dependent. Literature itself is a speech context. And as with any utterance, the way people produce and understand literary works depends enormously on unspoken, culturally-shared knowledge of the rules, conventions, and expectations that are in play when language is used in that context. (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act Theory* 86)

By positioning literary discourse on the same playing field as other verbal or non-verbal communicative activities, it “enables and indeed requires us to describe and define literature *in the same terms* used to describe and define all other kinds of discourse. It thus, does away with the distortive and misleading concepts of ‘poetic’ and ‘ordinary’ language” (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act* 88). This idea is appropriate since we are dealing with various kinds of discourse which are also diverse speech acts: literary, corporal, verbal, non-verbal, official (the State and the Law), personal, autobiographical, sociological, anthropological, and journalistic. Generally speaking, a speech act is an utterance aiming to cause an effect upon the listener/reader. When reading a sociology or anthropology report about the rising numbers of femicide or the current state of women’s lives, does it not scare us or anger us? When we listen to speeches given by government officials who appear to want to solve the “femicide situation,” do their words not have a bigger societal effect? Or the contrary, what does it say when these same government officials say/do nothing to assuage the situation women are facing? Their silence effectuates *something* upon Guatemalans—they insinuate that women’s lives are unworthy of attention or investigation.

We aim to carefully consider the “action” aspect of language. By considering literature, performance art, and official discourses as carrying the potential to cause a physical, psychological, or emotional reaction upon someone, we can uncover an array of effects these actions have on a person’s political life. When analyzing performance art, the body is transformed into an instrument of language and becomes the canvas upon which language takes place. As explained by Pratt:

To make an utterance is to perform an act. A person who performs a speech act does at least two and possibly three things. First, he performs a locutionary act, the act of

producing a recognizable grammatical utterance in the given language. Second, he performs an illocutionary act of a certain type. "Promising," "warning," "greeting," "reminding," "informing," or "commanding" are all kinds of illocutionary acts [...]. Finally, a speaker who performs an illocutionary act may also be performing a *perlocutionary act*; that is, by saying what he says, he may be achieving certain intended effects in his hearer in addition to those achieved by the illocutionary act. By warning a person one may frighten him, by arguing one may convince, and so on. (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act* 80-81)

The various components of a speech act have different intentions and effects regarding the speaker and the addressee.

As an example, in regards to the political life of Guatemalan women, over a decade ago in 2005 former Guatemalan president Oscar Berger stated: "Women would do best to stay at home," as his response to calm concerns about the rising statistics of femicide. Let us break down this speech act to reveal the machista power behind words that were meant to "help" women's lives. The locutionary act in this phrase is the fact that his message was said in a language shared by most of the Guatemalan community—Spanish.⁶² For the illocutionary act to take place, the president's utterance does not only say, it also *does* something. His statement can be interpreted as a "warning" towards women; if they do not want to become the next victim, they must stay at home; women have been ordered about what they should or should not *do*; they have been instructed about what space they can inhabit freely (private), and in what space they'd be putting their lives at risk (public).

⁶² One can argue that by using Spanish he is not recognizing the twenty-two plus indigenous Maya languages that are spoken in Guatemala. Is he not speaking to or referring to Maya women? Such questions will be taken into account when analyzing *Machistañol* more thoroughly.

By examining Berger's political discourse as a *speech act*, we can see that there was an intended *effect* behind his words—to terrify (ladina) women while they roam the public space. Politically speaking, his words aimed to control the movement and space where the female population *can* exist. For Berger's speech act to have been successful, women must have *felt something* upon hearing it: fear, insecurity, anger, vulnerability, and so forth. Women, indeed, *felt* his words; I myself *feel* something upon re-reading such words. Such is the last component of a speech act –the perlocutionary act. If the locutionary act's purpose is to make one *understand* a statement, and the illocutionary act informs us about what we need *to do*, then the perlocutionary act comes in to make us *feel* something. Now, the speech act's power relies on us *feeling* the words that were uttered by another in order to act accordingly. This last component occurs under what Pratt calls *appropriateness conditions* or *felicity conditions*, which she explains with the example, “the sentence ‘You must have another piece of cake,’ uttered by our hostess at a tea party, is an invitation and not a command” (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act Theory* 83). In the context of the Berger speech, the context of the speech act allows us to better understand the difference between a recommendation and a threat.

Given the machista culture that predominates in Guatemala, as outlined in the previous section, we can confirm that former president Berger's speech act had the intention to manipulate a woman's sense of *being* in the world. Furthermore, it was uttered in the specific context of feminicides, so to tell a woman to “stay at home,” knowing that the home is the space where most acts of violence and death occur against women, is either politically careless or he is deliberately *sentencing* them to death with such words. This example shows us the force of *Machistañol*, and when we compare it to how the artists in this study *respond*, we can: 1) identify whether the artists comply or not with the illocutionary force and, 2) discover the

perlocutionary acts (effects; emotions)⁶³ that go unnoticed or are easily dismissed by society (i.e. writing, protests, social media activism, hashtags, performance, music, and so forth are all examples of the *effects* such machista discourse has on women and society in general).

How do we perform an analysis of literary texts by using speech act theory, or how do we interpret literature as speech acts? And later, how do we read the body, as in the case of Galindo's performances, as a speech act? Most certainly, the body has its own language, it too *says* and *does* something. From a hand gesture to a facial expression, we can decipher multiple meanings. It is important to know that I am giving prominence to the social aspect of speech acts, as opposed to their linguistic component. My interest lies in how these artists' writings and performances affect political life. By comparing the speech acts produced by those who speak *Machistañol* vis-à-vis these artists' works, we can pragmatically comprehend the sociopolitical impact of language today in Guatemala, and more importantly, expose the power structures that are in play in the context of feminicides.

One scholar whose work allows us to go further into the perlocutionary effects of speech acts and their sociopolitical implications is Judith Butler. In her book, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), Butler makes key arguments that have to do with subject formation, the violence of words, and performativity as a space to effectuate agency. One of her main claims is to consider speech acts as social performatives since the body is the site where the linguistic and social dimensions of speech acts converge and are produced.⁶⁴ For example, when

⁶³ We take into account Sara Ahmed's work on how "emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way they move us" (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 195). Ahmed helps us understand how some bodies can be grieved while others are not grieved—queer, black and, in our case, women—, in the context of a nationally based politics.

⁶⁴ Butler takes on from Pierre Bourdieu's work to question whether the social and linguistic aspects of speech acts can be kept theoretically separate at all, when in fact, they occur through

a physician pronounces the gender of a newborn “it’s a girl,” at least two actions occur. First, the physician’s speech act performs all three components we outlined previously: locutionary (gender meaning), illocutionary (act like a girl), and perlocutionary (feel like a girl). Second, by giving her a gender identity at birth, the physician (authority figure) is also constructing her position in society through such interpellation. Butler states: “To be hailed or addressed by a social interpellation is to be constituted discursively and socially at once” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 153). In a *machista* country like Guatemala, to be called a girl positions one as inferior and at risk of sexual or deadly acts being performed upon the body. Hence, Butler impels us to understand speech acts as performatives that determine how certain bodies act in social life. Simply put, the speech act establishes one’s identity both linguistically and socially.

While Mary Louise Pratt called for the integration of literary discourse into speech act theory, Judith Butler emphasizes the performativity aspect of speech acts. Both scholars affirm that their respective emphases have more to do with social life than acting as purely theoretical or linguistic matters. Literature as well as performativity impact the political life of individuals. When extrapolating language from spaces they tend to be confined in, we allow opportunities for creating of new knowledges and possibilities. This is precisely why Pratt and Butler’s work is intriguing; they respectively find literature and performativity as avenues that can help us better understand and change the sociopolitical order we live in. The following is Butler’s approach to speech acts: “The speech act, however, is performed bodily, and though it does not instate the absolute or immediate presence of the body, the simultaneity of the production and delivery of the expression communicates not merely what is said, but the bearing of the body as the rhetorical instrument of expression” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 152). What she means is that the

and on because of the body, or *habitus*. See: “Performativity’s Social Magic” in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* and *Excitable Speech*.

body not only produces and receives that which is uttered; the speech act has a body. Only a body can produce a speech act; thus, we know the body is present as soon as we hear/read a speech act. Butler explains this a little further:

That speech is not the same as writing seems clear, not because the body is present in speech in a way that it is not in writing but because the oblique relation of the body to speech is itself performed by the utterance, deflected yet carried by the performance itself. To argue that the body is equally absent in speech and writing is true only to the extent that neither speech nor writing makes the body immediately present. But the way in which the body obliquely appears in speech is, of necessity, different from the way it appears in writing. Although both are bodily acts, it is the mark of the body, as it were, that is read in the written text. Whose body it is can remain permanently unclear. (Butler *Excitable Speech* 152)

The *body*, then, becomes more visible in the speech act according to the force behind such utterance/writing. While I rely on Pratt's work to further analyze literature as speech acts, Butler's emphasis on the body will allow me to interpret what the body is saying in Galindo's performances. In the literary works by the artists in this dissertation, we rather quickly read a body and identify that such a speaking body is telling us something either in response to machista speech acts (or bodies) or to counter the social performatives assigned to women by a patriarchal society.

Moreover, if the "social life of the body is produced through an interpellation that is at once linguistic and productive" then we need to pay close attention to the words that are used to talk about victims of feminicide. As we have previously explained, *Machistañol*, the language used by machistas, is not necessarily made up of "official" subjects or people in power; it is most

commonly disseminated by society at large. Therefore, what is society saying when female bodies freely roam the streets or when we hear or read about another woman being sexually assaulted or even killed? Are they just words used to “describe” violent situations? Butler would argue that they are not just descriptive; they are performative. How the performative takes place in speech acts is important because it can resignify and contest established norms and language, especially norms that attempt to attack a specific gender entirely—women in Guatemala. Butler elucidates: “Performatives do not merely reflect prior social conditions, but produce a set of social effects, and though they are not always the effects of ‘official’ discourse, they nevertheless work their social power not only to regulate bodies, but to form them as well” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 158-9). In other words, speech acts are not solely utterances that disappear after they have been spoken, they contain (*perlocutionary*) effects that contribute to the (re)creation of the social world.

Furthermore, the social effects that speech acts produce affect social bodies in different ways: bodies become *actioned* by words. For instance, speech acts can regulate bodies for specific purposes that have to do with social hierarchies defined by race, gender, sexuality, language and class. Butler makes a noteworthy contribution to speech act theory through her examination of injurious speech. Butler argues that ‘hate speech’ not only ‘injures’ as a perlocutionary act, but it also constructs one’s social position, automatically inserting someone in the process of social interpellation. Words *injure* socially and linguistically. To the success of the felicity condition of a speech act, as Pratt calls it, Butler adds:

It is not simply that the speech act takes place within a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice. What this means, then, is that a performative “works” to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In

this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force. (Butler *Excitable Speech* 51, emphasis in original).

If words did not carry a history of force, or specific connotations, they would have different social effects upon the formation of subjects. Yet, they in fact carry a specific historicity, which permits certain words to injure and position a body according to that historicity of force. In the case of the Maya indigenous body, words like “less-than, asexual, and unclean” as descriptors have carried a racist and classist historicity of force since the Invasion. This language made the Maya believe themselves to be inferior. In Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio* we learn how she is treated less than her Ladino master’s dog and often referred to as “dirty” due to her ethnicity.⁶⁵ Butler adds, “the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 159-60). If the force behind speech acts bring about a body, then that force needs to be challenged so that a new (Maya) body can exist. In the case of injurious speech acts, when the injurious speech is usurped, a new agent speaks.

To understand the performative aspect of a speech act this way allows us to think about subject formation as something that is always changing rather than static. The performative force of a speech act has the power to reformulate subjects from what they have been interpellated as either at birth or later in society. More importantly, a speech act from a subject who has been

⁶⁵ In *I, Rigoberta Menchú an Indian Woman in Guatemala* she describes how the house dog was fed meat and rice while they gave her hard tortillas and beans, “that hurt me very much. The dog had a good meal and I didn’t deserve as good a meal as the dog. Anyway, I ate it, I was used to it. [...] I felt rejected. I was lower than the animals in the house” (92) and “she always said I was dirty” (96).

socially marginalized has the power to contest such a formulation. This challenges the idea that only “authorized” subjects can speak or construct the social world. To the contrary, one has the power to undo what society has said cannot be undone. This change occurs in language’s various forms: oral, corporal, written, etc. Thus, to *speak up* is the most powerful choice a person can make.

If speech acts can influence someone’s sense of being in the world, then the addressee’s choice of how to respond to the speech act allows the addressee to grasp some sort of agency. In other words, the perlocutionary effect of a speech act can incite one to take action or it can confirm the initial speech act’s intention. If “To be hailed or addressed by a social interpellation is to be constituted discursively and socially at once,” then to *not* respond *accordingly* is one way to contest such social interpellation (Butler *Excitable Speech* 153). To call a woman a “perra” in public, for example, affects how she sees herself in society and how society sees her in return. As Butler explains, “Just as physical injury implicates the psyche, so psychic injury effects the bodily *doxa*, that lived and corporeally registered set of beliefs that constitute social reality. [...] how it can or cannot negotiate space, its ‘location’ in terms of prevailing cultural coordinates” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 159-60). By responding or feeling something due to such name calling, one has allowed the speech act to accomplish its goal: to cause *something* upon the addressee.

Speech acts like “Esa era una perra, se lo merecía” or “Ha de haber sido una cualquiera” propagate the idea that women in general can be called and thought of as bitches or whores, which then degrades them socially as unworthy beings. In the case of Guatemala, words like these have drastic effects. The use of such derogatory speech towards women has allowed certain women to be considered undeserving of an investigation when they become victims of violence, or worse, feminicide. Calling a woman “perra” in public or carving such a word on a dead

woman's body carries the historicity of force Butler mentions. The crucial repercussion of the use of such language is the social positioning of women as subjects who can be violently dehumanized. What would happen if women begin to resignify or appropriate the word perra/bitch, and use it for different purposes, or, give it a different meaning from its machista origin? Can it only exist as a word that injures? Does pronouncing the word "perra" *automatically* give a (male or female) speaker some sense of power over the female addressee when he/she is using it against her? In what ways can the addressee contest the way a speaker gains power over her?

One way to contest the language used by the speaker/aggressor is to *claim that language as one's own and give it a new meaning*, both linguistically and socially. This though, must happen in a space where there is an audience, whether it be listeners, readers or viewers. The social or political space is such a shared space of action. On this issue, Butler proposes a few questions/answers that have to do with the championing of resignifying words and challenging the power of those who use them:

If the performative must compel collective recognition in order to work, must it compel only those kinds of recognition that are *already* institutionalized, or can it also compel a critical perspective on existing institutions? [...] What is the performative power of calling for freedom or the end to racism precisely in order to counter the effects of that group's marginalization? Or, equally important, what is the performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused in order to deplete the term of its degradation or to derive an affirmation from that degradation, rallying under the sign of "queer" or revaluing affirmatively the category of "black" or of "women"? The question here is whether the improper use of the performative can succeed in producing

the effect of authority where there is no recourse to a prior authorization. (Butler *Excitable Speech* 158).

Butler is proposing to take our power back, and by “our” I mean all those who are not commonly thought as authority figures or having power in sociopolitical life. At the same time, Butler is questioning those authorized institutions that have charged words with a specific connotation. She asks us if the speech acts authority figures use to fight racism, sexism, inequality such as the words black, women and queer, are as powerful as they aim to be when these authority figures do not exactly use them to create change? This question jeopardizes the power and efficiency of “official” speech acts by questioning the felicity conditions and perlocutionary effects they actually have on an audience. More importantly, this question offers us the opportunity to challenge official speech acts with speech acts produced by “unofficial” subjects. One can challenge such language by either contesting it, rejecting it, resignifying it, or appropriating it. And sometimes such transgressionary attempts turn out to be more effective than those made by institutions who inherently hold power.

The example of the word *perra* in the context of feminicides and violence against women is pertinent. If one were to “improperly” use the word *perra*⁶⁶ to mean something not so degrading, but a word for women to affirm their sexual behavior, is that speaker effectuating authority? I would affirm yes. That is precisely what Butler is asking us to do. To deplete or resignify what a word means and does, to create space for *agency* and power. The performative power of the speech acts Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal produce in their works, then, are examples of performing agency. These artists use language to make other forms of collective life possible, where to be a “woman” does not pertain to a marginalized group but to one holding

⁶⁶ When used in the context of feminicides or sexual violence, the most common connotation for the word “perra” is to mean a prostitute; a loose woman; a woman without morals; a bitch.

authority, both linguistically and politically. This means that an “unauthorized” subject appropriating what does not belong to such a subject, or what tends to be used against him/her, offers this subject an opportunity to gain power. This is to experience what Butler calls the *performativity of power*. This occurs in the following manner:

The argument that a speech act exercises authority to the extent that it is *already* authorized suggests that the authorizing contexts for such acts are already in place, and that speech acts do not work to transform the contexts by which they are or are not authorized. [...] Within the political sphere, performativity can work in precisely such counter-hegemonic ways. That moment in which a speech act without prior authorization nevertheless assumes authorization in the course of its performance may anticipate and instate altered contexts for its future reception. (Butler *Excitable Speech* 160)

Performativity, then, serves as the catalyst to transform normalized contexts *and* their authorized subjects and institutions. In such transformation lies the power of the performative. As Butler states: “The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with the past” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 158-9). The key moment she mentions is what she later calls the *insurrectionary act*. In an insurrectionary act, the author of such an act transforms a conventional speech act into one that has a new futurity. To give something a new future gives one the power to break with a (violent) linguistic past. Yet, at the same time, this new space and unknown future of a term can “produce anxiety in those who seek to patrol its conventional boundaries” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 161). When a marginalized/unauthorized subject produces an effect upon an authorized subject, or, when the tables turn and the unauthorized is the one producing illocutionary and perlocutionary effects, such as anxiety, towards those who once used

that same speech act for different (overpowering) purposes, this is the exact moment the game changes.

When machista speech acts are circulated in society, they tend to felicitously subjugate women because they carry a historicity of force and are expressed in authorized contexts. By producing insurrectionary speech acts of their own and expressing them within machista contexts, the artists in this study are performing power; they are changing the power dynamics of language, linguistically and socially. More importantly, they grasp a sense of agency in a country that continues to dehumanize women. While *Machistañol* is dangerously effective when produced by patriarchal institutions that have supported one another century after century, these artists make visible *new* knowledges and *new* subjectivities for women to challenge this machista driven discourse on violence. They are exercising their prerogative to break with historical notions of being a woman in a machista social world, which takes us to the last theoretical tool of this study—Jacques Rancière’s concept of the “distribution of the sensible.” His concept allows us to add to Pratt and Butler’s notions on speech acts and performativity by emphasizing the politics that are at play in making visible *new* knowledges, bodies, identities and ways of being in the world.

Jacques Rancière has slightly different definitions to explain how the *distribution of the sensible* works in different contexts. From one of his earlier works we use in this study, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he defines this concept the following way:

The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a

common space, endowed with a common language, etc. (Rancière *Politics of Aesthetics* 12-13).

The emphasis in this definition is the person who exercises authority over what is “common” to a group of people, to society. To understand this further, we have to understand that for Rancière, human society is tied together by the “senses,” which tell us how to politically exist in the world. In his book *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière explains:

What is common is ‘sensation.’ Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and *politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric* of ‘being together.’ (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 56, emphasis added).

Let us take for example the Guatemalan State as the authority figure in the distribution of the sensible. The way the State has defined a way of “being together” is one that puts women’s lives at risk. To change this way of “being together,” one has to exercise politics. And what is politics if not performing power over others? However, it does not always have to be a violent performance, and that is what the artists in this study are showing us through their speech acts.

Rancière’s idea of a “sensory fabric” within the distribution of the sensible relates to the context portion of a speech act in that for a speech act to be effective, it must be understood so that the addressee *does* and *feels* something. Similarly, for a speech act to break with its historicity, it has to appropriate the norms and contexts in which it has existed in order to break free of them. This is done through an appropriation of power. In the case of breaking with the normalized distribution of the sensible, one has to *redistribute*, *reappropriate* and *redo* the way of “being together.” A *speech act* and a *sense*, both have the potential to transform what has been normalized or disseminated in society.

If for Butler to resignify and appropriate language is a way to get to that insurrectionary moment of agency, for Rancière, reappropriating places and subjectivities allows one to reappropriate a community, and hence, political life. Furthermore, while the former explains how one can gain power through the performative power of language, the latter incites us to use politics to destabilize the established ways of sensing the world. Rancière explains that art is one way of changing a community's way of sensing the world. He explains: "Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (Rancière *Politics of Aesthetics* 13).⁶⁷ Thus, it is our goal to demonstrate how these artists use their artistic practices to intervene in the machista distribution of ways of doing and making of the social world. Moreover, we champion the idea that sees their speech acts as political acts. If *Machistañol*, the language and speech acts used by machistas, had the capacity to make the 21st century a different world for women, a more violent one where the rates of femicide have continued to escalate since 1999, then the language used to respond and challenge that world also has the potential to change such reality.

Let us underscore that this comes down to a matter of language. The Guatemalan State has literally and figuratively spoken and supported a sexist language that has consequently altered the "sensory fabric" of Guatemalans. To challenge and *redo* the *machista* language of violence Woman must be *in* language. To *reorder* the senses, relations of power, and more importantly, to introduce new subjects and ways of belonging, Galindo, Chávez, and Phé-Funchal offer us their insurrectionary acts in these works, agreeing with Butler's last line:

⁶⁷ Diana Taylor will later agree with Rancière when interpreting performance as a way of knowing that *intervenes* in the world. More on this when we get into Galindo's chapter on performance.

“Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163). Their insurrectionary speeches, then, break with historicity, norms, and senses, but that is not all. To break with these repetitive social structures is to open up a new “common sense,” a new world entirely. To offer one last explanation to what it means to undo Rancière’s social/sensory fabric, in *The Emancipated Spectator* he explains:

A ‘common sense’ is, in the first instance, a community of sensible data: things whose visibility is supposed to be shareable by all, modes of perception of these things, and the equally shareable meanings that are conferred on them. Next it is the form of being together that binds individuals or groups on the basis of this initial community between words and things. The system of information is a ‘common sense’ of this kind: a spatiotemporal system in which words and visible forms are assembled into shared data, shared ways of perceiving, being affected and imparting meaning. The point is not to counter-pose reality to its appearances. It is to construct different realities, different forms of common sense - that is to say, different spatiotemporal systems, different communities of words and things, forms and meanings. (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 102)

What the following chapters present is an analysis of three different ways used by three contemporary Guatemalan artists to construct different realities and forms of common sense through the use of speech acts, performativity, and ultimately, language. As we conclude, we can see that both speech act theory and the concept of the distribution of the sensible provide the necessary tools to thoroughly examine how these women are performing power and politics in each speech act. While female artists in the past performed similar tasks, today’s context is different. To confront the topic of violence against women so openly in their works allows these

artists to enter a space and discourse that has long been primarily dominated by machista notions of violence. Taking this machista dominated discourse away from “them,” these artists interrupt the general distribution of ways of doing, making and sensing violence. Furthermore, inserting their discourse in a machista context where feminicide has been normalized “is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 161). To exist where one did not exist before, to act where one has not been authorized to act, is to offer something new, an unanticipated possibility or political future where power is reapportioned.

4.0 A MAYA WOMAN IN (RE)CONSTRUCTION IN ROSA CHÁVEZ'S POETICS

*Yo siempre he tenido mucha conciencia,
o mejor voy a usar otra palabra:
vivencia.*
Rosa Chávez

Awareness and experience allow for opportunities for change and transformation. Along with this awareness, experience comes to play an important role in what we do with our level of consciousness. While some experiences can incite us to change our surroundings, other experiences urge us to transform what we can control. Through her journey of self-discovery and healing, Rosa Chávez⁶⁸ presents a powerful way to sense the world differently in her poetry. To delineate such an empowering journey, we select poems from her poetry books *Casa solitaria* (2005), *Piedra* (2009), *Quitapenas* (2010), *El corazón de la Piedra* (2010), and her play *Awas* (2014) as well as poems published in online spaces. I will analyze her poems from the concept of injurious speech by Judith Butler and Mary Louise Pratt's speech act theory, within an indigenous woman's locus of enunciation. Speech awareness and experience guide the poetic voice to assume agency regarding the violent reality of the twenty-first century in Guatemala. Her poetic voice presents a constant process of transformation of her subjectivity and ladino interpellation, which defies the discriminatory predominant discourse today.

Rather than *being* in the world, this woman is in a continual state of *becoming* in the world. Her path of becoming is an exploration of a world free of violence, fear and

⁶⁸ Chávez was born in El Quiché, Guatemala, 1980.

discrimination, a sense that does not and cannot exist in a machista social construct. Rosa Chávez, the person, has been tainted by the effects of genocide and discrimination due to her gender, ethnicity and language. In her poetry we witness how these experiences fuel her creativity. The poetic voice we read in Chávez's poetry shifts from a Maya woman who is rejected by society to one that is accepted by herself. Amidst the violence that she knows too well, healing and self-acceptance become her *modus operandi* in order to overthrow violence and reconstruct how a Maya woman fits into a world that challenges her existence. In the pages that follow, we trace how a woman contests the vulnerable position violence has imposed on her by finding in her Maya culture the tools to resituate herself as a woman with power—both socially and linguistically.

Rosa Chávez is a poet, actress, performer and a cultural manager who has organized and participated in groups and associations that empower female artists and the Maya.⁶⁹ She has participated in numerous festivals in Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba, Ecuador, Chile, Venezuela, Central America, United States, Norway, Spain, amongst others. Her poetry has been included in digital and published collections such as *Revista La Ermita*, Guatemala; *Revista ANIDE*, Nicaragua; *La Cuerda*, Guatemala; *Memorias del Festival de Poesía de Medellín* (2006), Editorial Prometeo, Colombia; *Las Palabras del deseo*, Guatemala (2006); *El vértigo de los aires, poesía latinoamericana 1984-1985* (2007), Mexico; *Los cantos ocultos, poesía indígena contemporánea* (2007), Santiago de Chile; and *Sin casaca. Relato breve en Guatemala* (2008), Centro Cultural de España, Guatemala. More recently, she participated in the First

⁶⁹ Chávez founded Canela Fina, a group of female artists and writers; she forms part of Red Autónoma de Escritoras Indígenas y Afrodescendientes de Centroamérica y el Caribe where she independently manages poetry and literature activities in public spaces and cultural centers; and she has also participated in the Maya Uk'u'x Be Association, which focuses on highlighting and exercising the historical rights of the Maya Tinamit (*La escritura de poetas mayas* 70).

International Political, Artistic, Sports and Cultural Encounter for Women who Fight, organized by the women of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation in March of 2018.

Despite her prolific participation in the arts and literary realm, very little had been known about Chávez's life until recently. Born during one of the most petrifying years of the armed conflict, Chávez quite literally flourishes in violence. Of Maya descent, Maya Kaqchikel on her mother's side and Maya K'iche' on her father's side, she is raised in the municipality of El Quiché, the principal site of State terror during the civil war. In the first ever published book on contemporary female indigenous writers of Guatemala, *La escritura de poetas mayas contemporáneas producida desde excéntricos espacios identitarios / The writing of contemporary Maya poets produced from eccentric identitary spaces* (2015), Aida Toledo and Consuelo Márquez include an interview on Chávez. which gives us a more personal understanding of her upbringing. We come to find that Chávez grew up speaking Spanish at home due to the fear that was instilled upon the Indigenous individuals for speaking their own language, "en un contexto de guerra [...] en parte por ese temor tan arraigado en las familias de ser tomados como subversivos y por la discriminación" (Márquez, Toledo, Chávez *La escritura de poetas mayas contemporáneas* 170). Later as a teenager, she moved to Chimaltenango and soon after to the capital, City of Guatemala. In the capital, she is confronted with racism and a society that is hardly attempting to coexist in a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual nation. It should be recalled that the fifth agreement under the Peace Accords signed in 1996 was to recognize and respect the cultural and spiritual practices of the diverse Maya nations as well as permit them to exercise their political and economic rights.⁷⁰ So, as a woman, Chávez encounters

⁷⁰ "Recognition of the identity and rights of indigenous peoples is essential for building a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country of national unity. Respect for and the exercise of

the City of Guatemala in a moment of transition, where a people are learning to accept themselves as set forth in the Peace Agreements.

While for some the rejection and humiliation of their Maya culture and traditions by the Ladino people were common experiences when they moved from their towns to the capital, Chávez's experience was slightly different. Chávez grew up in a family who prided themselves in being Maya; therefore, she didn't have the identity conflict many Mayas have, "en realidad, no he tenido ese conflicto maya o indígena/ladino en mi ser, no lo he sentido [...] aun sabiendo también de la discriminación" (Márquez, Toledo, Chávez 167).⁷¹ She certainly was aware of the discrimination against the Maya, yet her acceptance and pride in being Maya shows us how she challenged the dominant culture at a young age. However, there is a different matter which has troubled Chávez—one which is reflected in her poetry—and that is her twofold Maya background: she is half K'iche' and half Kaqchikel.

Her fragmented nature, being from two cultures who during the Invasion were vicious rivals,⁷² has provoked inner conflicts of identity, language, culture and acceptance for Chávez. The most persistent issue of them all has been that of language, since she is not fluent in either K'iche' or Kaqchikel. She grew up with a grandmother who taught her K'iche' at a young age, since her parents did not want to teach Chávez and her sister their native language. However, she shares how, "me sentía discriminada por no poder hablar o comunicarme totalmente en el idioma. He sido muy cuestionada por eso, tanto por artistas como por gente cercana" (Márquez,

the political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans is the foundation for a new coexistence reflecting the diversity of their nation" (*United Nations General Assembly*).

⁷¹ From here onward I omit the title of the source *La escritura de poetas mayas* when citing from Márquez and Toledo's text.

⁷² During the Invasion, the Spanish allied with the Kaqchikel "who had been battling against the more powerful K'iche' for decades, and this enabled the defeat of the K'iche' in their highland capital of Utatlán (present-day Santa Cruz del Quiché)" (Grandin, Levenson & Oglesby *Guatemala Reader* 39).

Toledo, Chávez 171).⁷³ Both the Maya and Ladino communities have expressed a sort of disdain towards her as a poet because she does not fluently speak an indigenous language, yet she is Maya.

Moreover, she also receives pressure from friends who demean the fame she has gained due to her indigenous background, stating that she writes certain poems because they were in style and “mi trabajo iba a ser más reconocido si yo escribía desde mi parte indígena” (Márquez, Toledo, Chávez 168).⁷⁴ Both, the “rejection and questioning by [her] people that [she] would listen to in the K’iche’ language, ridiculing [her] because [she] did not wear the *traje* or because [she] couldn’t speak the language well,” and by the Ladino community are the struggles Chávez encounters today. Matters that have to do with her subjectivity and an essentialist perspective regarding indigeneity are some of the obstacles that a contemporary Maya woman has to deal with in the twenty-first century. It is in writing that Chávez finds an avenue to fight this battle with an exterior world that questions her and tries to confine her.

For a Maya person to enter the literary realm, a space reserved for many centuries only for Ladinos, is by itself an act of agency. Guatemala, like other countries with a high population of indigenous people, is a country that has writers who write *about* and *for* their Maya communities. While it is true that amongst the Maya, orality is a favored form for transmitting

⁷³ “I felt discriminated against for not being able to speak or fully communicate in the [k’iche’] language. I have been questioned a lot due to this, both by artists as by people close to me.” My translation, and all translations here on after are mine.

⁷⁴ I paraphrase the following: “Rechazos y cuestionamientos de parte de mi pueblo que yo escuchaba en el idioma burlándose de que yo no traía traje o porque yo no podía hablar bien el idioma o de gente cercana del mundo del arte, amigos míos, mestizos, diciendo que yo estaba escribiendo ciertas cosas porque estaba de moda, y que mi trabajo iba a ser más reconocido si yo escribía desde mi parte indígena” (Márquez, Toledo, Chávez 168).

information and knowledge,⁷⁵ we see in the stelae in archeological sites throughout Guatemala—Tikal, Quiriguá, and Tak'alik A'baj—that the Maya did have a written language in the form of glyphs. Therefore, when we learn about the Maya from the perspective of Ladino writers, it begs the question, “why are others speaking for the Maya?” or, “why is there a lack of support for the Maya to tell their own history?”⁷⁶ It is a fact that during the Invasion their books were burned by the Spanish so that they could impose their culture upon the Maya, and more importantly, their religion. However, centuries later, we begin to read about Mayas from anthropology scholars and literary authors. One literary case in particular proved to be problematic in the mid-twentieth century. A specialist in Guatemalan literature and cultural studies, Arturo Arias, takes on this case by critiquing Guatemala’s renowned writer Miguel Angel Asturias for preventing the Maya from taking part in their own identity-formation, as we see in his novel *Hombres de maíz* (1949), later translated as *Men of Maize* (1995). Arias states,

Given that the acquisition of agency implies control of one’s enunciations, [Asturias’] attitude wrestled agency away from the Mayas, keeping them from producing their own identity. Asturias named the Maya community, spoke for it, and also spoke in its defense. But he did not speak *with* it. [...] Thus, his discursivity not only stripped identity away from the Mayas but also attacked them symbolically, representing them as passive, suffering victims. (*Taking Their Word* 55)

⁷⁵ See Paul Worley’s, *Telling and Being Told: Storytelling and Cultural Control in Contemporary Yucatec Maya Literatures*.

⁷⁶ I recognize the fact that the illiteracy rates amongst the Maya is high when it comes to Spanish specifically, however, what interests me here is the power relations that are eminent in discursivity, in literary production. As the Guatemalan National Literacy Committee points, “*En Guatemala, las causas del analfabetismo se explican históricamente, en el marco de una estructura socioeconómica, política y cultural, desigual e injusta, que se manifiesta en el estado de pobreza, miseria y estancamiento en que vive el país, añadiéndose la ausencia de un alfabeto en lenguas indígenas*” (Comite Nacional de Alfabetización).

In short, this example elucidates how power is usurped *in* language from the Indigenous individual when literary discourse limits him/her from self-representation. For social subjects are created also through literary discourse and the effects it has on a people are visible in social life. Aware of the power of language, like the nineteenth-century intellectuals, the Indigenous individual learns that those who control “the pen [are] closely associated with the functions of power” (Rama 32). It is through the word then, that the Indigenous individual reclaims her/his identity, culture, and knowledges within the Ladino society.

To rewrite Maya indigeneity from what others had expressed previously, writers Luis de Li3n and Francisco Morales Santos pioneered the indigenous literature field in the 1970s in Guatemala. Luis de Li3n’s novel *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3* / *Time begins in Xibalb3*, written in 1972 but published posthumously in 1985, is probably the most recognized text to have presented an indigenous identity in the literary realm. It is during this time frame of the 70s and 80s that the Indigenous individuals began to think critically about the need to revise and rewrite what had been said before about them. Decades later in postwar times, Kaqchikel scholar Emilio del Valle Escalante affirms how “los escritores mayas contempor3neos han aprendido que el pasado no es una simple reserva de material, sino, m3s bien, el escenario de intensas luchas discursivas y conceptuales; luchas de reescrituras y reinterpretaciones” (Escalante *Uk’u’x kaj, uk’u’x ulew* 19).⁷⁷ Ch3vez inserts herself in a discursive battle to present what it is to be a Maya woman in the twenty-first century.

Ch3vez’s first poetry book, published in 2005 and titled *Casa solitaria* / *Solitary Home*, communicates the living conditions of a country that has just come out of the war. The remnants

⁷⁷ “the contemporary Maya writers have learned that the past is not a simple material reservation, but, rather, the stage of intense discursive and conceptual power struggles; struggles of rewritings and reinterpretations.”

of the war transpire to the present to create new struggles and inequalities that force some people to take on new subjectivities and live on the periphery of society. In the words of del Valle Escalante, “Casa solitaria está hilvanado por entornos urbanos donde las experiencias de los indígenas coinciden y coexisten con las de otros sujetos marginales: prostitutas, niños de la calle, travestis, drogadictos y homosexuales” (Escalante “Xib’alb’a como alegoría” 198).⁷⁸ These marginalized subjects have a voice in Chávez’s work as they too are sidelined by the conditions set forth by the aftermath of a harrowing war: poverty, displacement and exclusion. While in *Casa solitaria* we find a multitude of voices that appear after the war, in *Piedra /Ab’aj /Stone* the poet goes back in time to her ancestors, using her Maya cosmovision to speak from a space of courage, strength and knowledge.

In *Piedra*, we have a Maya subject who performs agency from the *locus* of Maya epistemologies.⁷⁹ The woman we read finds in both of her Maya cultures, K’iche’ and Kaqchikel, “de dos corazones salí al mundo” (56) the courage to speak her personal truth. With the strength of her ancestors, “Arcaicos ancestros me protegen” (20), she can express “filosas palabras” (58) given that her nahual⁸⁰ *Tijax* is made of obsidian stone.⁸¹ *Piedra/Ab’aj* is an

⁷⁸ “*Solitary Home* links together in an urban environment how the experiences of the indigenous people coincide and coexist along with that of other marginal subjects: prostitutes, kids in the streets, transvestites, drug addicts and homosexuals.”

⁷⁹ In an interview with Monte Ávila, Chávez revealed the meaning behind this poetry book: “La piedra es un elemento fundamental para los pueblos de nuestra cultura. A pesar de que la mayoría de nuestros libros y textos antiguos fueron quemados durante la colonia, el conocimiento y escritura siguen vigentes en piedra. También perduran las estructuras monumentales de lugares sagrados. Asocio este nombre a cómo ha resistido y sobrevivido nuestra raíz y nuestro pueblo ante la esclavitud, las masacres, el genocidio y el sistema que nos ha querido borrar. Esa piedra es nuestro corazón, nuestra cosmovisión y forma de ver el mundo. También representa la espiritualidad que es nuestra.” (Chávez y Monte Ávila 2011).

⁸⁰ A nahual is believed by Mayas to be a guardian spirit in the form of an animal or object, such as the *Tijax* which is an obsidian stone.

embodiment of the Maya philosophy of life for those whose nahual is the *Tijax*. According to *El libro del destino* or *The Book of Destiny*, one's nahual functions within a highly advanced system that teaches us how to navigate energies that will guide our future and awaken our inner knowledge (Barrios 111). To disclose one's nahual is to reveal very personal information about one self. If during the war Rigoberta Menchú found it necessary to keep her nahual a secret,⁸² Rosa Chávez “does not feel the need to protect *her* secret as she gives it a body and puts it on public display, no longer fearing the dominant culture” (Palacios “Scars that Run Deep” 154). In fact, Chávez wants the world to know her nahual, the *Tijax*, because it no longer causes her conflict nor makes her vulnerable, as Oswaldo Hernandez tells us in “Latir sin descanso.”⁸³ In this shift from vulnerability to security a new Maya woman is born. She finds in her Maya background the power and energy to live fearlessly in postwar Guatemala.

Ultimately *Piedra/Ab'aj* is a poetry book of empowerment, where the poetic voice declares and claims a life of her own. However, this life is not perfect or utopic. Poems like “Esta carretera también es tuya m'ija,” which speaks of indigenous enslavement, and “Me desato el corte,” which explores the cultural limitations of performing her indigeneity, present some of the cultural issues she has to confront. While in *Piedra* the poetic voice forthrightly confronts these matters, in *Quitapenas* (2010) we have a closer look at her intimate worries, memories and parts of herself that need healing. In Chávez's words, *Quitapenas* “trata de un poemario que

⁸¹ Del Valle Escalante says about *Piedra/Ab'aj*, “El libro es un precioso canto a los ancestros y a través de la metáfora de la ‘piedra’, Chávez entreteje su historia personal con su presente, pasado y futuro” (“Xib'alb'a como alegoría” 198).

⁸² Rita M. Palacios reminds us how Arturo Arias interpreted Menchu's nahual secret as a discursive strategy and Doris Sommer earlier found it to be an incommensurable cultural difference (Arias “Authorizing Ethnicized Subjects” 79-80; Sommer “Rigoberta's Secrets” 34; Palacios “Scars That Run Deep” 154).

⁸³ In a brief interview with the poet, Hernández explains, “para la poeta, a estas alturas, que todo el mundo se dé por enterado que el Tijax es su nahual, ya no es causa de conflicto, ni de vulnerabilidad” (*Magacín Siglo 21*).

reflexiona sobre la restauración de un estado emocional, de sanar, de quitar las penas... pero desde la perspectiva maya, donde acabar es iniciar un nuevo ciclo” (Hernández 2010).⁸⁴ The healing process is never ending; however, with the help of the *quitapenas*, or worry dolls, healing can take place both corporally and spiritually. About this, specialist in Contemporary Maya Literature and Culture, Rita Palacios explains,

The title of this book is significant, as it refers to the traditional small handcrafted dolls made of cloth, paper, and wire to which one can whisper one’s worries so that they can be taken away during the night, thus bringing peaceful sleep. The effect is performative: it consists of facing or naming the worry in order to begin to deal with it. (Palacios “Scars that run deep” 154)

Thus, *Quitapenas* offers us a poetic voice that speaks about resistance, the power of resignifying language, and that rids the violence by using a Maya epistemology. At times this poetic body is very much personal and individual, but it also speaks to a collective body of Mayas and the Maya woman.

Finally, in our analysis we also take poems from *El corazón de la piedra*, online blogs, journals, magazines and a play. *El corazón de la piedra* is a bilingual poetry book, in Spanish on one page and K’iche’ on the other, and it consists of two parts, “Piedra” and “En el corazón de las sombras.” In the first section, the poet embeds her previously published poetry book *Piedra*, and in the second section, she initiates a quest from the “heart.” Her most recently published work, *Awás* is a play or “poemas en escenas,” where Chávez and the theater director Camilla Camerlengo bring to life Chávez’s poetry. As stated in the opening pages which presents *Awás*,

⁸⁴ Translation by Rita M. Palacios, “it’s a poetry collection that reflects on the renewal of an emotional state, of healing, of doing away with worry ... but from a Maya perspective, in which to end is to begin a new cycle.”

their goal is to “create alternate worlds and vigorous aesthetic proposals, [to] contribute to a profound interpretation of the country’s reality” (*Awás* 7). Together, these women “could generate new poetic universes and be evidence of what already exists, in addition to setting up bridges that can help us think, converse and share urgent matters that we inhabit” (*Awás* 7). The way in which their proposal takes place is by performing *awas* or healing rituals in the play, “secretos para prevenir, secretos para curar distintas dolencias del cuerpo y del espíritu, consejos, precauciones, plantas sagradas, discurso ceremonial, encantos, mensajes en los sueños, el poder de las palabras” (*Awás* 11).⁸⁵

Through the power of her words, artistry and actions, we witness how Chávez survives the intricate ways that violence affects a country, and a people. While in the poems that follow, we trace the context of violence which she inhabits. However, we pay closer attention to how she comes out of such environment. Rather than solely focusing on the pain and suffering of a Maya woman, by changing the narrative, in other words, proposing a different starting place away from victimhood, we can highlight how a Maya woman deciphers and confronts violence. Put differently, violence does not passively happen to her, rather, she is in a constant battle with violence, as she challenges it discursively and corporally in her poetry. To place emphasis on action rather than passivity is not our proposal alone, for it should not surprise us that for the majority of contemporary Maya writers, to break with discursive mediations is necessary if they

⁸⁵ *Awás* are “secrets to anticipate, secrets to heal different corporal and spiritual ailments, advice, precautions, sacred plants, ceremonial discourse, spells, messages in our dreams, the power of words.” The healing rituals that take place throughout *Awás* inspired the idea of thinking of healing rituals as a way to redistribute the senses as we see in the second section of this chapter. In order to change the discourse of violence and the sensory fabric of a society founded on fear and violence, healing becomes the necessary insurrectionary act that can counter violence time and again.

are to present and establish an empowered Maya with authority (del Valle Escalante *Uk'u'x kaj, uk'u'x ulew* 18).⁸⁶ Moreover, del Valle Escalante reminds us that for contemporary Maya writers,

Ya no se trata de informantes nativos que dicen lo que el “especialista” desea escuchar, sino de autores que ahora más que antes están plenamente conscientes de su papel como mediadores de sus pueblos y del empleo de la palabra para interpelar a occidente y a sus propias comunidades. (Escalante *Teorizando las literaturas indígenas contemporáneas* 9)⁸⁷

Ever since Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio*, Maya writers in Guatemala have taken it upon themselves to speak up about political matters, their personal subjectivities and Maya communities, as we have seen expressed in poetry, short stories and blogs. Their active participation in language has founded what del Valle Escalante calls an “indigenous locus of enunciation.”⁸⁸

However, the place from which Chávez enunciates is slightly different than that of the male Maya writers preceding her, since in her writings we find a woman with agency over her identity, feelings and reality. Given that this study focuses on tackling *Machistañol*,⁸⁹ it is

⁸⁶ I paraphrase and translate del Valle Escalante when he says, “no debe sorprender entonces que una de las tareas que la mayoría de escritores mayas se ha dado es romper con cualquier mediación discursiva para establecer un empoderamiento y autoridad maya propia” (18).

⁸⁷ “It is no longer about native informants which say what the ‘specialist’ wishes to hear; rather, it is about authors that now more than ever are fully aware of their role as mediators of their people and of the use of the word to interpellate the west and their own communities” (9).

⁸⁸ Del Valle Escalante explains, a “locus de enunciación indígena en base a una identificación cultural, geográfica, lingüística (aun si estos no hablan un idioma indígena) y/o política” (*Teorizando las literaturas indígenas contemporáneas* 6).

⁸⁹ As explained in the introduction of the dissertation, *Machistañol* is a language spoken by machistas who commit acts of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them: primarily women, but also indigenous people, Afro-descendants, poor communities, uneducated people, children, and all those who do not fit in with those at the top of the social hierarchy.

pertinent to consider how machismo saturates literature written by indigenous male authors. On this topic, Arturo Arias points to problems in the early years of indigenous literature,

problems already evident in this emerging [Maya] corpus, notably the pervasive machismo that goes hand in hand with the weak representation of female subjects. So far, these female subjects [...] are clearly imagined as secondary to the male protagonists of their respective narratives. They also lack all forms of agency. (Arias *Taking Their Word* 81)

Although Arias is referring to indigenous literature, it can be argued that such fact applies to Guatemalan literature in general where it is women writers who come in to give themselves roles of authority and the agency they've previously lacked. By inserting themselves in the male-driven literary space, celebrated authors like Ana María Rodas, Rigoberta Menchú, Carolina Escobar Sarti, Nora Murillo, Maya Cu Choc, and the authors in this dissertation, create new narratives for women to exist and claim a place within the powerful space of discourse. To defy the predetermined and subaltern roles in literature is one way to refuse, linguistically and socially, machista representations of women.

What we see in Chávez specifically is a woman who confronts both a corporal and discursive form of violence. While in indigenous literature, not to mention Latin American literature in general, womanhood is controlled by male writers and perspectives, in the poems we analyze, we see a woman who is capable of liberating herself from machista and Maya constrictions by performing *woman* her own way. We find parallel experiences between the poet's life and that of the poetic voice, as well as common experiences of Maya women in general. These real-life experiences speak to the criticism Chávez and Maya women have received due to their *Mayaness*—dress, language, and culture. By presenting us a woman who is

not only aware of but willing to rise despite the obstacles set forth by her community and *Machistañol* she becomes the author and agent of a different narrative. In Chávez's poetry violence is shed off a layer at a time, word by word. Each poem we have selected disarticulates violence as intimately and bravely as possible. While the first few poems speak about the different manifestations of violence upon a Maya body, by the end of this chapter we see a reconstructed Maya woman unafraid to be herself. Her speech acts of fearlessness and freedom are "the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk," granting her the opportunity to seize power from *Machistañol* (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163).⁹⁰

If the war against women which is taking place in real-life and in language attempts to silence women, Chávez resists the silence. Let us remember Mary Louise Pratt's proposal to treat literature as another communicative activity, for to "define literature *in the same terms* used to describe and define all other kinds of discourse" ruptures with who has access to discursive power (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act* 88). Thus, in her poems, Chávez redistributes discursive power by introducing other voices, ideas and world makings. Moreover, in our analysis of her work we keep in mind that "the way people produce and understand literary works depends enormously on unspoken, culturally-shared knowledge of the rules, conventions, and expectations that are in play when language is used in that context" (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act Theory* 86). To highlight understandings about the Indigenous woman that move away from knowledges established since the Invasion, descriptions like "exotic," "weak," or "violable," we

⁹⁰ To recall Butler's concept of insurrectionary speech acts: "The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with the past" (Butler *Excitable Speech* 158-9).

will refer to Maya epistemologies as explained by the poet herself and other scholars of Maya philosophy to examine Rosa Chávez's poetic.⁹¹

The first part of our analysis presents the violent context of the City of Guatemala as seen through the eyes of the poetic voice. Her poems offer us multiple voices and experiences as these bodies roam through a country in transition from war to "peace." In some cases, the violence is particularly racist against the Maya like in the poem "Nos quitan la cabeza y el corazón sigue." In other poetic expressions, violence is palpable for anyone who roams the city streets at any time of the day, such as in "El hambre." There is a sort of poetic coalition that resists violence—albeit at different moments in history—where in some poems indigenous individuals unite and others where by taking on discursive and social existence, the new marginal subjects contest the State's attempt to obliterate them. In the second part, we read about a Maya woman who finds in her Maya ancestry the knowledge and tools to reconstruct herself away from the negative social attachments imposed by machista, racist and classist constructions, as in "Me escupiste." The technique of choice to fend off this form of violence presents us a body who is always in a process of transformation as we see in "Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo," "Dejo tirade esta piel que ya no me pertenece" and "Me desato el corte." While the body in these last poems carry violence from previous generations, by the end, in the poem "Soy una mujer morena," she is freed from the social attachments of violence. By undergoing constant bodily transformations, the poetic voice combats violence and is able to form a new imagined Maya woman in Guatemala.

⁹¹ For example, Rigoberta Menchú, Arturo Arias, Emilio del Valle Escalante, Rita M. Palacios, Emma Chirix, and others.

4.1 CHANGING THE SENSORY FABRIC OF SOCIETY

*Humans by nature are very sensitive beings.
We are so emotional because we perceive everything with the emotional body.
The emotional body is like a radio that can be tuned
to perceive certain frequencies or to react to certain frequencies.*
Don Miguel Ruiz

The experience of the Indigenous individual during the Civil War in Guatemala (1960-1996) and in post-war times has been one of racism, rejection and subordination. During the war, “racism nourished an attitude toward Indians as different, separate, inferior, almost less than human and outside of the universe of moral obligations, making their elimination less problematic” (Grandin *Guatemala Reader*). Later, the numbers confirmed this fact by showing how 83 percent of the victims were Maya and seventeen percent were Ladinos (Sanford *Buried Secrets* 148). The military committed utter atrocities against the Maya and in the aftermath, the country appeared to have forgotten all about it. Despite the thorough investigations by the Historical Clarification Commissions, Guatemalans lived uninformed of what had actually happened, especially towards the last years of the war—some by choice and others by censorship.⁹² It is a fact that during the civil war the Indigenous was the body of choice to act out the most inhumane acts of violence. Falsely accusing the Indigenous individual of being subversive or communist justified the kill. Shooting them was not enough; many underwent excruciating pain due to torture such as limbs being cut off while still alive, rape by multiple soldiers, and public shame by forcing family members to witness these heinous crimes.⁹³

Rather than a war against communism, this was a war against those considered inferior to the Ladino race. Emma Delfina Chirix García, a Maya Kaqchikel writer and scholar, explains

⁹² In the introduction I mentioned how Efraín Ríos Montt censored news outlets from disclosing what was happening in the country.

⁹³ See chapter 2 and 3 in Jean Franco’s *Cruel Modernity*.

that “El racismo representa la condición bajo la cual se puede ejercer el derecho a matar” (*Tejiendo de otro modo* 220).⁹⁴ The Guatemalan State thus becomes the not so “invisible” executor and its functionaries the accomplices that carry out the execution; in doing so, they serve the superior race by killing a supposedly inferior race (Chirix 220). Nearly two decades later, the State and its functionaries faced the justice system when the Genocide Trial opened in 2013. However, while military men were accused and convicted for their crimes committed during the war, the top officials, Efraín Ríos Montt and Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, were not. The trial finally came to a close in 2018 when the Court B of High-Risk cases stipulated that genocide was indeed committed.⁹⁵ This ruling was momentous for the Maya communities, as was the brief conviction of Ríos Montt, later overturned due to a technicality, by then presiding female Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz (Lakhani 1).

It is important to highlight another particular case brought forth by the Maya women who survived sexual slavery during the armed conflict in the community of Sepur Zarco; in this case, they won the “first case of conflict-related sexual violence challenged under Guatemala’s penal code” (“Sepur Zarco: In pursuit of truth, justice, and now reparations” *UN Women*). Those responsible were imprisoned and these brave women felt justice was served. This case is proof of the might of the female collective. Furthermore, it was not only their win, it was a win for all women across the globe who are fighting their own fight with sexual violence and other forms of violence against women. To witness national justice be served for women who endured gender-based violence gives hope to other women who experience violence today. These two legal

⁹⁴ “Racism represents the condition by which one can exercise the right to kill.”

⁹⁵ However, there was no conviction since Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez was not found responsible. By this time, Efraín Ríos Montt had already passed (*Prensa Libre* 2018).

successes—Genocide and Sepur Zarco trials—are testament to the strength and resistance of the Maya communities, whose speech pierced the silencing veil of the Machista State.

Keeping in mind this violent and judicial justice background, in this section we pay close attention to how violence affects the psyche of a people because psychological violence is a dialect of *Machistañol*. The speech acts we encounter in the poems are candid in their demeanor and express upon the reader the sensations of real-life experiences. Some of these experiences continue to be open wounds that have transitioned from the decades of the civil war to postwar times. The traumatic images and stories of the war have transformed from physical violence into psychological violence. In other words, the destruction of one's sense of corporality was just one component of the violence, for the war criminals also instilled the idea that being indigenous was the worst thing to be in Guatemala. To speak a Maya language, to dress and practice their culture, warranted exclusion and punishment.

We have stated that the escalating rates of feminicides have created a language that acts on women's bodies. This language is oppressive as it categorizes these murder cases as unworthy of investigation. It instills the idea that women are not worth the time or attention required to give them justice. The same is true for cases of sexual violence, domestic violence and psychological forms of violence imposed by a machista culture. There is a similarity between how the Indigenous individuals were treated during the war and later disregarded after the signing of the Peace Agreements and the reality of how women are treated today. The fact that it took nearly two decades to recognize that the killing of thousands of Maya people was in fact genocide signals to us that the Machista State is taking a similar route in regard to violence against women. The difference between violence against women and violence against the Maya is that while women are targeted due to their gender, the indigenous body is targeted due his/her

gender as well as race, class and sexuality. The severity of a violent act against a Maya body is quadrupled. Thus, our analysis encompasses the various forms of violence vis-à-vis the social markers that come to play—gender, race, sexuality, and class.

These nuanced forms of violence form part of *Machistañol*, a language spoken by specific actors who attempt to demean, oppress and violate specific bodies. In “Nos quitan la cabeza y el corazón sigue” violence is corporal and linguistic. The poetic voice refers to its speakers and actors during the war without having to name them, but we know it is those who acted out violence under Machista State orders. For that matter, the poetic voice switches the authority from “them” to “we.” By giving discursive agency to those who endured the expressions of violence during the civil war, Chávez rips power away from *Machistañol* speakers. From her poetry book *Quitapenas*, the second poem presents a “we” that resists violence by the fact that the heart continues to beat despite the savagery.

2⁹⁶

Nos quitan la cabeza y el corazón sigue
 latiendo
nos arrancan el pellejo y el corazón sigue
 latiendo
nos parten a la mitad y el corazón sigue
 latiendo
beben nuestra sangre y el corazón sigue
 latiendo
estamos criados para latir sin descanso.⁹⁷
 Quitapenas 12

These violent acts present the many layers of utter savagery—cannibalism in the form of the skinning, slicing and drinking of blood. These were violent acts performed by the *kaibiles*. As Guatemalan scholar Rita M. Palacios notes, “Each violent act named in these verses [...] is not

⁹⁶ Chávez’s poems in *Quitapenas* are numbered; however, I use the first verse as the title of the poem.

⁹⁷ English translation of poem by Rita M. Palacios can be found in Appendix.

attributed to any one group, but the reader can deduce, from the sadism that these actions require, that the perpetrators are the *kaibiles*, the Guatemalan counterinsurgency special forces” (“Scars that Run Deep” 160). The use of the present tense in these lines Palacios understands as an open wound waiting to be resolved (160). Furthermore, we can understand that the present tense transcends time; it refers to the *kaibiles* during the war, yet the relevance of the poem today allows it to speak to those who are responsible for acts of violence in the present—men who continue to act out violence in the same way they were trained to do during the war.⁹⁸ The way in which women’s bodies are currently found in dump sites is not very different from the abovementioned barbarity.

By connecting the past to the present, the repetition of the verse “el corazón sigue latiendo” becomes a powerful speech act of dissent. This verse counters the decapitation, skinning, slicing and drinking of blood time and again. It does not allow these acts to dehumanize the body with its focus on the heart, which continues beating amidst all.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the corporal force with which the women meet the violence ruptures with the discourse that positions the Maya as weak or easily eliminated. It should be noted that there is a collective voice in this poem, what I have called a poetic coalition, with the use of a first-person plural “nos” and “estamos,” but even more poignantly with the idea of one heart – “el corazón” – , a shared heart. The attacks are not just against one body but all bodies who endure the pain and trauma, because they share a heart. More importantly, the comeback is not just one person’s fight

⁹⁸ Let us not forget the connection between genocide and feminicide as pointed out by Jean Franco, “As a result of military service, men become machista and disrespectful” (*Cruel Modernity* 80) and Victoria Sanford in her article “From Genocide to Feminicide” published in *Journal of Human Rights* in 2008. Moreover, the way women’s bodies appear on the streets and abandoned lots, beheaded and mutilated, reveals similar tactics used during the war in Guatemala.

⁹⁹ Although this poem is from *Quitapenas*, it is worth mentioning that the relationship between the heart and stone is one that is present in Rosa Chávez’s poetry.

but a collective fight against injustice and violence. To finalize their defense, the poem ends with “estamos criados para latir sin descanso” (9). Mayas are raised to live, fight and win without rest.

The Genocide Trial and Sepur Zarco case speak to this ever-lasting might of the Maya.

While the poem “Nos quitan la cabeza y el corazón sigue” gave us a glimpse of the resilience of the Maya despite a war that aimed to eliminate them, in “El hambre sigue babeando”/ “Hunger continues drooling” from her poetry book *Casa solitaria*, Chávez gives us a postwar context. In this poem, the poetic voice is a first-hand witness to the violence that disrupts the City of Guatemala, the capital. “El hambre” makes us see that what Chávez wrote more than a decade ago eerily applies today.

El hambre
sigue babeando
las mujeres aparecen
como espejos en un baldío
la corrupción sigue
llenando sus bolsillos
los sin tierra
ahogándose en el lodo
el miedo gelatina
cuajando en las avenidas
la depresión chorreando
tinta sal desesperanza
el aullido de los niños
que inhalan en la estepa
las piedras sudan
nadie les limpia la frente
apesta a cadáver
somos los muertos
los libros sin dueño
los ojos sin letras
el asesino disfrazado de suicida
ladrón pastor político
artista marero filósofo
el invierno vomita
la mentira se rebalsa
a borbotones a ríos sucios espumosos
el sexo sin amor el amor,
sin amor y sin sexo

moñas de plástico
negras y blancas
adornando puertas y memorias
es cierto
yo lo vi todo.

Casa solitaria 18¹⁰⁰

The poetic voice desires to interrupt the Official Story as a witness in front of the court. She exposes the murderer that hides behind impunity; she unmasks the priest, who keeps religious allies for financial reasons, and she underlines the hypocrisy of the *marero*¹⁰¹ turned artist who attempts to justify the violence that he himself created. Besides denouncing the robbers acting out violence and corruption, she gives priority to those who disappeared without having a chance to tell their story. The women who are abandoned in wastelands, the children who suffer from hunger, the indigenous people sinking into infertile lands, an entire society that is asphyxiated in depression and fear due to the pestilence of so much violence, they become the protagonists. Rosa Chávez voices a reality the State prefers to omit or keep silent, so through poetry, she interrupts the official outlets that have given society a different story.

In contrast to the machista discourse that sees women, children and indigenous people as objects or another mere statistic, here, the poetic voice gives them a body, a voice, a *life* in language. In the verses “somos los muertos / los libros sin dueño / los ojos sin letras” (18-20) we have a collection of stories left untold. Through the verse, the poetic voice brings these often-forgotten subjects to life by narrating their experience and giving them sociolinguistic existence; an existence some could no longer claim for themselves. Moreover, the poetic voice introduces these subjects into the discourse of violence not as victims but as people with real-life experiences. Images that depict how women’s bodies are found in wastelands, the poor drowning

¹⁰⁰ All English translations of poems are mine unless otherwise indicated and can be found in Appendix from here forward.

¹⁰¹ A *marero* is a gang member.

in lands no longer fruitful and children howling due to excruciating hunger, are felt by the reader. While news outlets appear to decry these realities, the sensibility that Chávez creates in this poem is a different one of sensationalism, for she not only presents these victims' reality but also names those who are responsible. She gives us answers with verses like, "la corrupción sigue / llenando sus bolsillos" (verse 5-6), and "la mentira se rebalsa" (verse 25). Providing us with the injustices and inequalities that dominate society in postwar times, the poetic discourse breaks with the sensory fabric the nation tries to create. If the city-dwellers believe that the war is over and the State proclaims peace has arrived, this poem describes a different side of the story.

The poem "El hambre" introduces the new "sensory fabric" of a postwar community that has produced "new" subjects after the civil war. By the use of "sensory fabric," we are referring to Rancière's term when he explains that there is a "common sense" that either unites or separates a community, a way of sensing and understanding the world. As he explains, "human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, I would say a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together" (*The Emancipated Spectator* 56). Rancière proposes another unconventional sensory. The experience of "togetherness" is painstakingly machista, for the new subjects to be discarded from society are those who do not fit into the machista social fabric. Many ignore or join the corruption, others suffer its consequences, socially and very much corporally. While some celebrate the end of the war, many are experiencing poverty, hunger and death. The new "sensory fabric" then, is one where a country lives denying that a war took place, that genocide was committed and that women are being persecuted.

There is another moment in the poem that redistributes the linguistic power of the machista discourse. The last two verses "es cierto / yo lo vi todo" (verse 32-33) grant the poetic

subject political agency for being a direct witness to the “truth,” holding discursive power over the “official” story tellers. In addition, the fact that the poem speaks in the context of violence effectuates a rupture with *Machistañol*’s neatly organized axes of communication that deny woman the capacity of speech. Thus, the poetic voice gains discursive power not only to speak, but also to tell the story of other female and marginal subjects who are silenced and made inferior in the postwar social construct. In short, the last verses of this poem become the insurrectionary moment that break the power structure.

To exist where one is denied access to exist is to perform an insurrectionary act *à la* Butler. Moreover, to act in an already established network of communication dismantles the hold that the network claims is inaccessible to women.¹⁰² More specifically, we are referring to Laura Segato’s axes of communication where language only exists between men in the case of a rape scene. According to Segato, in the vertical axis, the aggressor speaks down to the female victim and in the horizontal axis he speaks with his fellow men (*La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres* 22-3). In this network of communication, women do not have a voice, much less agency. However, what happens when the context of a rape scene is substituted by that of injurious speech or racist speech acts? Can we apply the same linguistic formula? We argue that the vertical and horizontal axes of communication are also applicable when discussing discriminatory language since it too can be disabling to a person who is confronted with the psychological violence that racist and classist slurs impose. If in the case of a rape scene the vertical and horizontal axes of communication convert a woman into the object of sacrifice, in the case of injurious speech it turns her into an object of exploitation. In “Hace un mes”/ “A

¹⁰² In the introduction I argued that when we see examples of women *speaking* where they are not allowed and when they are meant to be kept invisible, these examples break the sociopolitical order imposed upon women today. By carefully listening to *her voice*, we can demystify, and then, invalidate *Machistañol*.

Month Ago” we apply Segato’s formula to a violent context of communication occurring between a Ladino and a Maya woman in daily life.

Hace un mes
vine a la capital
mi tata nos abandonó
y en la casa el hambre dolía,
yo trabajo en una casa (5)
(la señora dice que de doméstica)
aunque no entiendo muy bien que es eso,
me dieron un disfraz de tela,
ese día lloré mucho, lloré mucho
me daba vergüenza ponerlo (10)
y enseñar las piernas,
la señora dice que en mi pueblo
todos somos shucos
por eso me baño todos los días
mi pelo largo lo cortaron (15)
dice que por los piojos,
no puedo hablar bien castilla
y la gente se ríe de mí
mi corazón
se pone triste, (20)
ayer fui a ver a mi prima
voy contenta porque puse mi corte,
el chofer no quería parar
y cuando iba a bajar, rápido arrancó,
-apúrate india burra – me dijo (25)
yo me caí y me raspé la rodilla
risa y risa estaba la gente
mi corazón se puso triste
dice mi prima
que ya me voy a acostumbrar (30)
que el domingo vamos al parque central
que hay salones para bailar
con los grupos que llegan a la feria de allá,
de mi pueblo,
estoy en mi cuartito (35)
contando el dinero que me pagaron
menos el jabón y dos vasos que quebré
la señora dice que soy bien bruta
no entiendo por qué me tratan mal
¿acaso no soy gente pues? (40)

Casa solitaria 7

In “Hace un mes”¹⁰³ we read the experience of an indigenous woman who is confronted with insults, disdain, and mistreatment as she moves from her Maya community to the capital of Guatemala. Due to the war, many indigenous people were displaced; some sought refuge in Mexico and abroad while others moved from the highlands to the capital.¹⁰⁴ This entailed that many had to leave their communities and find a new life in the City of Guatemala, a place where only Spanish is officially spoken and where the Ladino people follow a western lifestyle. Due to the economic pressure at home, many Maya women often found themselves picking up jobs as live-in maids, selling crops at a local market, working in the rising maquiladora industry,¹⁰⁵ or selling their textiles to a slowly growing tourist industry.¹⁰⁶ Along with the unfair treatment they had to endure with these jobs, they were also forced to leave their traditional attire aside in these new spaces. Maya women are accustomed to proudly wear their *traje* in their respective communities; however, their ethnic attire is not well received in the urban life of Guatemala City. The urban atmosphere of the capital and its people –primarily Ladinos—quickly show intolerance towards ethnic differences.¹⁰⁷ Along with this intolerance comes racism and classism

¹⁰³ I use the first verse of each poem as the title of the poems from *Casa solitaria*.

¹⁰⁴ According to the Truth Commission Report, “Estimates of the number of displaced persons vary from 500,000 to a million and a half people in the most intense period from 1981 to 1983, including those who were displaced internally and those who were obliged to seek refuge abroad” (*Guatemala Memory of Silence* 30).

¹⁰⁵ See Manuela Camus’ *Ser indígena en la Ciudad de Guatemala / To be indigenous in the City of Guatemala*, the section on the ethnographies she conducted of indigenous men and women from the La Brigada colony who entered the maquila industry to make a living. Some express the feeling that their time in the maquilas was one of exploitation while others see it as an opportunity to learn about machinery (191-2).

¹⁰⁶ For more on the growing Maya textile industry, see Diane Nelson’s chapter “Global Biopolitical Economy” in *A Finger in the Wound*.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth mentioning that during national celebrations, Ladina women dress in Maya attire to represent the nation. The hypocrisy and cultural appropriation inherent in this act is still in effect today.

in Guatemala, for “lo étnico al fin se asimila a ser pobre” as Manuela Camus explains in her ethnographic study of the Indigenous body who lives in the City of Guatemala (Camus *Ser indígena en la Ciudad* 196). With this context in mind, the experience we read in the poem is one where the Maya woman undergoes a psychosomatic form of violence where words, forced assimilation and social rejection violate her sense of self, her subjectivity.

The sense of being seen as dirty and stupid and feeling unworthy is a feeling that the poetic voice carries on a daily basis. This harsh reality has turned indigenous women into objects that can be exploited in body and language. For example, the name-calling of an entire people as filthy, “la señora dice que en mi pueblo / todos somos shucos” (verses 12-13), and then personally interpellated as stupid “-apúrate india burra – me dijo” (verse 25) and brutish “la señora dice que soy bien bruta” (verse 39), positions this Maya woman in a social category of inferiority due to her attire and ethnic difference. The fact that the poetic subject cries with embarrassment due to her new set of clothes shows the violence in the assimilation tactics. Later, the insensibility of the city-dwellers who laugh at her for not speaking Spanish well or the bus driver who is both verbally and physically abusive towards her, since he intentionally makes her fall out of the bus, are examples of how language injures, and sometimes the injuries are not as visible as the scrape on her knee.

The violence, as Márquez and Toledo mention,¹⁰⁸ is not just physical, it is significantly symbolic. Just as language is a system of communication, violence too has its system of symbols.

¹⁰⁸ “El poema “Hace un mes” expresa el desconocimiento, el rechazo y la discriminación de la que son objeto las mujeres mayas que se ven obligadas a emplearse como domésticas en la capital. La violencia física y simbólica que sufren y la manera en que se ven forzadas a dejar de lado sus costumbres y tradiciones y, sobre todo, el dolor por ser obligadas a comunicarse en español. (*La escritura de poetisas mayas contemporáneas* 71). “The poem ‘A Month Ago’ expresses the ignorance, rejection and discrimination that Maya women are subjected to, those who are obliged to find employment as domestic live-in maids in the capital. The physical and

While these symbolic acts which integrate the poetic subject in the City of Guatemala may not have been considered violent to an outsider, by seeing them through a Maya woman's perspective we can better understand the degree of injury they cast upon her. As we examine next, these nuances fit into the axes of communication of injurious speech acts.

As a live-in maid, the poetic subject endures the violent speech acts of her boss in the vertical axis of communication. There is no room for dialogue in this axis. In the horizontal axis, there is dialogue but amongst a consortium of people—primarily Ladinos—who see themselves as superior to the poetic subject and have agreed to act out violence together against her. We see this with the mention of “la gente” as they laugh at her Spanish and later when she falls out of the bus. To recognize her as a person is impossible for these fellow Guatemalans. Later, her cousin tells her that she'll get used to it “que ya me voy a acostumar” (verse 30), but the poetic subject refuses such violence. While the poem is filled with violence in its numerous forms, the poetic subject's question “¿acaso no soy gente pues?” (verse 40) ricochets the violent attacks. This question grants the poetic subject access to and exposes the Ladino's racist and classist discourse on violence. It breaks with the two previous axes of communication which silence (vertical) and objectify (horizontal) her, thus allowing her to speak up on her own axis. The poetic voice strikes back in her own axis of communication by citing *their* injurious speech to expropriate its effects.

By citing these injurious words, the poetic discourse exposes hate speech and a community of racists. According to Butler, “The racial slur is always cited from elsewhere, and in the speaking of it, one chimes in with a chorus of racists, producing at that moment the linguistic occasion for an imagined relation to an historically transmitted community of racists”

symbolic violence they suffer, and the way in which they are forced to leave aside their customs and traditions, especially, the pain of being forced to communicate in Spanish.”

(Butler 80). However, when the poetic voice cites the terms previously mentioned, the intention is different than that of joining a community of racists. Her use of words “doméstica” and “bruta” produces the possibility for agency. Referring to Anita Hill’s case against Supreme Court nominee, Clarence Thomas in 1991, where she accuses him of sexual misconduct and cites his words in open court, Butler adds,

Anita Hill’s speech must recite the words spoken to her in order to display their injurious power. They are not originally ‘her’ words, as it were, but their citation constitutes the condition of possibility for her agency in the law, even as [...] they were taken up precisely to discount her agency. The citationality of the performative produces that possibility for agency and expropriation at the same time. (Butler *Excitable Speech* 87)¹⁰⁹

“Hace un mes,” then, is a poem that in the reiteration of hate speech, produces the possibility for agency. Repeating these words is how the poetic voice defends her case; it is how she challenges racism in linguistic and political life. The poem strikes back at the community of racists as well as the power of their injurious language. The rhetorical question at the end, “¿acaso no soy gente pues?” culminates the confrontation.

The discursive power in this last verse brings back memories of Sojourner Truth’s question and influential speech “Ain’t I A Woman?” Considered one of the most famous abolitionist and women’s rights speeches in American history, Sojourner Truth questions the difference in treatment towards women, white women versus black women, when she says, “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. *Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-*

¹⁰⁹ Fast-forward nearly thirty years later, September 2018, Christine Blasey Ford, accuses current Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, in open court for sexual assault. Thomas and Kavanaugh assumed their positions as Justices despite these women’s political acts of courage against them.

puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?" at the Women's Convention in 1851 (Sojourner Truth "Ain't I A Woman?"). This simple yet powerful question puts into question the white man's previous statement during the convention as it highlighted the inequality between races and genders and at the same time, allowing her to bring such conversation to the table. In a similar fashion, Rosa Chávez's question "¿acaso no soy gente pues?" (verse 40) challenges the parameters of who is considered a person, or more specifically, who is worthy of respect.

The power of her illocution lies in her humanity and how she allows the reader to respond. The last verse counters the focus from her to the Ladino subject, placing him/her in an uncomfortable position. While the Ladino made her question her personhood—"aren't I a person too"—here, she is questioning *his/hers*. Furthermore, she is challenging the validity and authority of the vertical and horizontal speakers. Her seemingly naive question is her gateway to enter the axes of communication of racist and classist violence. However, she does not enter in the same axes of communication since that would entail she is subject to the lady of the house or excluded in the conversation between the people who laugh at her in unison—vertical and horizontal, respectively. Rather, she crosses through these axes diagonally, thus, creating a new axis of communication that has not existed before, one that speaks about violence through a Maya woman's eyes. In short, there is a new sovereign speaker in the discourse of violence because she produces her own axis of communication and surpasses the silence that was imposed on her; that is her insurrectionary moment. The final rhetorical question contests the entire *modus operandi* of Ladino society.

In addition to interfering in the system of communication set forth by a violent discourse, Chávez ruptures the common way of sensing the world because an emancipated indigenous subject's "common sense" is introduced. Remembering Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated*

Spectator, he gives us an example of how a laborer's diary entry ruptures with aesthetics, politics and the configuration of the sensible by the simple act of "taking a break" while on duty.

This is what the aesthetic rupture produced: the appropriation of the place of work and exploitation at the site of a free gaze. It does not involve an illusion but is a matter of shaping a new body and a new sensorium for oneself. [...] The divorce between the laboring arms and the distracted gaze introduces the body of a worker into a new configuration of the sensible; it overthrows the 'right' relationship between what a body 'can' do and what it cannot. (Rancière 71)

We have in Rancière's example a man who took time to enjoy the view while laying out floors in a home he most likely will never be able to afford to purchase. It is a space he cannot claim as his own; however, he takes time to observe the beauty before him, which is the aesthetic rupture Rancière is referring to. His gaze in a place he was meant only to *sense* work and not pleasure, is an example of how he redistributes the senses and produces a new body, since now a laborer's body *can* perform a distracted gaze. Moreover, this redistribution of the senses is what Butler calls the insurrectionary moment—an "appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect"—for here, a laborer's body opposes the historicity of what a laborer's body can or cannot do, when he "glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the [owners] of the neighboring residences" (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 71).

Now, the senses are also redistributed in Chávez's poetry. For the Ladino's "common sense" of the world, the Maya is just an object of labor, but the following poems introduce a new sensory fabric through the point of view of an Indigenous poetic subject. How she distributes the senses occurs in stages and through a few poems. First, the historically sedimented way of sensing the world for a Maya woman is stated in "Hace un mes," where her world is full of

discrimination and exploitation, corporal and linguistic, and confirmed as such by her cousin's disquieting verse "you will get used to it." The poem depicts how there is no room for her to be seen or treated with respect as an individual within the work space or in the public space.¹¹⁰ The "common" sensory fabric established by a Ladino society has assigned certain senses to the Indigenous subject. We find those senses in the poem, "Me siento triste y culpable"/ "I feel sad and guilty" from her poetry book *Piedra/Ab'aj/Stone*.

In the following poem, the economic, political and social institutions, such as patriarchy, modernity and globalization have effectuated emotions of suffering, sadness and anger upon a specific political body—an Indigenous one.

Me siento triste y culpable
Mi problema viene de afuera
No me da hambre
Me canso mucho
Me enojo rápido
Siento que estoy enferma
Como de susto
Estoy ojeada
Tengo mal de ojo
Pero no el de los patojitos
Sino el de la gente grande
Piedra 32

The poetic subject's problem, a grown-up's "evil eye," has provoked *something* in her body. In other words, these discriminating institutions have imposed a social identity upon the indigenous body. The poetic voice tells us that these emotions and ailments come from the outside; they have overpowered her sense of self. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed affirms that emotions function politically to designate certain groups of people within social spaces in a nation state. Put differently, the State and its institutions permit or cause *certain*

¹¹⁰ The experience narrated in this poem reminds us of Rigoberta Menchu's own experience as a maid when she tells us how the house dog received better treatment than her, in her testimonio *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*.

people to feel a *certain* way. The way a subject's identity and social stance is determined within a society marks him or her within a specific group. For example, in regards to queer subjects, Ahmed states that "queer lives have to be recognized as lives in order to be grieved [...] [otherwise] queer lives are not recognized as lives 'to be lost'" (156). While her example of queer lives continues to be relevant, her argument applies to all those subjects who are left at the margins of society—women, black lives, LGBTQIA communities, economic and socially underprivileged people, indigenous individuals and immigrants.

In the case of Guatemala, Indigenous people, those of African descent, and women in general continue to be the marginal subject, *par excellence*. The Maya has not been recognized as an individual to grieve for, nationally or socially speaking. Chávez reminds us in another poem that there are still many bodies that deserve justice and should be remembered: "El poema de las olvidadas / tiene filo / mala hierba / y aún duele" (*Piedra* 46). What we grasp from Ahmed's study on emotions is that there is a reason why bodies feel a certain way—they are assigned those feelings as part of a politics of emotions, of senses. Thus, the poetic subject in the poem "Me siento triste y culpable" is not mistaken when she clearly declares "mi problema viene de afuera." The verse "mi problema viene de afuera" along with the powerful question, — "am I not a person too?" — offers "a shift from a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance" (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 75). It places the blame on Ladinos. While in the Ladino sensible world it is "common" to treat a Maya woman as an inferior subject, in this Maya woman's sensible world, such politically predetermined treatment is not reasonable or tolerable. The poem is a powerful answer to discrimination.

The way of being together, Rancière's "sensory fabric" of a given society, is addressed in another poem from *Quitapenas*. Although to peacefully coexist in a pluricultural nation was a sought for goal in the Peace Agreements of 1996 – "Respect for and the exercise of the political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans is the foundation for a new coexistence reflecting the diversity of their nation" (*Peace Accords* 38) – decades later we come to find only a few of these elements are exercised. By incorporating and relying on her cultural and spiritual knowledge of her Maya heritage, Chávez's poetic subject in the poem "Me escupiste" exercises her political rights as a woman who can transform the sense of "being together." For as Rancière states, "*politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together'*" (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 56, emphasis added). What this poem highlights is that what a common practice for Ladinos –spit as a violent act– is not the same for the Maya.

15
 Me escupiste
 por placer y por desprecio
 vos ignorás que la saliva
 es una gran medicina.
Quitapenas 26

Chávez uses Maya epistemology to alter the western understandings of the world and this becomes her tool of defense. Her culture's knowledge gives her the impetus to transform the sensory fabric from one of violence to one of healing. Furthermore, in the process she also redistributes the power of the violent act and the Ladino subject's own power, socially and linguistically.

In the common sensory fabric, to spit on someone is an expression of anger or disgust and shows how one disrespects or hates another person. However, here, the poetic voice transforms the insult into a sort of healing ritual. The speaker and doer of the spitting intended to express disdain upon a Maya addressee. However, the addressee —the poetic voice—resigned

the injurious speech act according to Maya epistemology, where spit cures rather than causes injury. There are a few steps to this process of converting injury to wellness or injurious speech into insurrectionary speech which deserve close attention. The first step occurs within a Maya knowledge where saliva is used to mend an open wound and not injure the person who is spat on.¹¹¹ The lack of knowledge by the one who spits then changes when the poetic voice repositions his act from a stance of domination to subordination, intellectually, and arguably politically, speaking. For the one who spits was not aware of the context in which the poetic voice would interpret the act. Let us remember that for a successful speech act to take place, one needs to set up the felicity (right) conditions in order for the addressee to successfully understand the speech act. In other words, for a speech act to be successful, it must be understood in the same code.¹¹² Here, the Ladino speaker's intentions were not successful, for the poetic voice does not *feel* the intended insult. In addition, it comments upon it, inverting the act's meaning.

The poetic voice knew the Ladino's intentions, but objects to interpret them from his point of view, successfully inserting her knowledge as the dominant discourse. This is the second step towards an insurrectionary speech act. To elaborate, the context for the act of spitting to make sense is changed by the poetic voice; thus, Chávez neutralizes the offense. Rather, she laughs at the attempt as we can see in the assertive tone of "vos ignorás." The Ladino's belittling *Machistañol* intends to stay at the top of the hierarchy of discourse, deciding who can offend and who cannot. However, the poetic voice is the speaking authority when she cancels the effects of

¹¹¹ In his book *Maya History and Religion*, John Thompson tells us about a spitting technique practiced by the Chorti Maya, where the curer spits on the patient from head to toe, especially on the face as standard treatment for curing and warding off the evil eye (119).

¹¹² Refer to Pratt's example: "the sentence 'You must have another piece of cake,' uttered by our hostess at a tea party, is an invitation and not a command" (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act Theory* 83).

the Ladino's act. In addition to overturn the insult, the ironic address ("vos") enforces the difference. An insurrectionary speech act occurs when the poetic voice astutely uses "vos" to refer back to the speaker.

In Guatemala, the use of "vos" is a complex issue since it has a different connotation when used amongst Ladinos as opposed to the relation between Ladinos and Mayas. Between Ladinos, the use of "vos" in casual conversation is not deemed improper but is preferred as it expresses solidarity and trust between two or more people. Its use changes when a Ladino addresses an indigenous person with the pronoun "vos," especially when the indigenous speaker has previously addressed them with the formal "usted." Emma Chirix explains the palpable racism between a Ladino and a Maya, "En la comunicación entre indígenas y ladinos, estos utilizan unilateralmente el 'vos'. El voseo es otro indicador diferencial, desigual, histórico y es parte del lenguaje de sumisión que justifica la opresión y no las relaciones de respeto" (*Tejiendo de otro modo* 218).¹¹³ Furthermore, some Ladinos claim that they use "vos" as a term of endearment, just as they would amongst their own friends. However, this is not the case. Chirix denotes that the "voseo" has become natural, and thus the oppressive group uses it to deny or justify the discrimination (218). Whenever "vos" is used by a Ladino to address an Indigenous person, "va con la intención de recordarnos nuestra posición de inferioridad" (*Tejiendo de otro modo* 218).¹¹⁴

The referent in this poem acquires a new social existence when the poetic voice refers to him as "vos"—eliminating his possibility to injure her with language as well. If in resignifying spit the poetic voice challenged the speaker's authority and knowledge, by using "vos" the poetic

¹¹³ "In the communication between indigenous people and ladinos, the latter group unilaterally uses "vos." The "voseo" is another differential indicator; it is unequal and historic and is part of the language of submission that justifies oppression and not relationships of respect."

¹¹⁴ "it carries the intention to remind us of our inferior position."

voice removes the Ladino's right to obtain linguistic agency over her. In just four verses, the poetic voice interrupts the dominant discourse on racial and classist violence, challenges its speakers, redefines their speech acts and reapportions power back to herself. More importantly, Chávez creates a new historicity, one that does not rely on force to function. To recall Butler, a speech act functions performatively because of the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force (*Excitable Speech* 51). Therefore, when this accumulating historicity of force is denied by another performative, that of a healing ritual, since spit “es una gran medicina,” then a new future exists for that once violent speech act. In short, what occurs in this poem is a discursive erasure of violence, as the racist act no longer injures. It is a political shift in language that allows Chávez to transform the machista sensory fabric of “being together” based on exclusion and oppression into one where the Maya is included in such “togetherness” as a political subject of their own.

The poems studied set the context for a Maya agency in the sensory fabric of a society dominated by *Machistañol* speakers and actors. Given that *Machistañol* is a language founded on violence and acted out on specific bodies—women's and indigenous people in this case—the poetic enters in dialogue with its speakers and interferes their language, questioning their perspective, their tone and their discriminatory mode. In this poem, the poetic voice reveals the multiple layers of a physical, psychological, social and linguistic violence. In the following section Rosa Chávez makes it her prerogative to transform how the Maya woman fits into the social imaginary of Guatemala.

4.2 HOW A MAYA WOMAN SETS HERSELF FREE

In this section we offer a reading that centers on the (re)construction of the Maya female body in the asphyxiating space of the City of Guatemala in the twenty-first century. Violence has taken on new forms, created new victims and even created a language, as we have previously discussed. The violence encouraged by machista institutions has penetrated the bodies of those who are left at the margins of society, at the periphery of a capitalist and machista world that only furthers its vigor. The rate of unsolved feminicide cases and a lack of concern about changing the social fabric of a culture dominated by machismo have suppressed women's right to freedom. Fear has become the "common sense" for a Guatemalan woman. Violence, assuming the form of fear, further escalates when women are confined by additional oppressive social markers besides their gender, such as race, class, sexuality, and language.

Previously we analyzed how violence was embodied and questioned by an indigenous voice in poems like "Hace un mes," "Me siento triste," and "Me escupiste." These nuanced forms of violence left marks on the poetic subject's body and psyche. Following Butler's proposal that "the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well," we argue that the poems that follow contest and reconstruct the Maya woman in the social imaginary of a Machista State (Butler *Excitable Speech* 159-60). Aware of how insults or hateful speech injure the body, the selected poems exhibit how Rosa Chávez performs sociolinguistic healing rituals through her poetry. We see a woman reviewing her past and the nuanced forms of violence suffered, one layer at a time. We suggest that the poet ruptures the hold that *Machistañol* has over the woman by healing her body and thus presenting a new reconstructed, un-violated body.

The healing power in Rosa Chávez's poetry transcends the violent axes of communication of *Machistañol* by introducing Maya epistemology in the discourse of violence. According to Márquez and Toledo, the curative power in Chávez's poetry deconstructs and constructs simultaneously,

Este poder curativo de la poesía se muestra en esa recuperación de la visión del mundo maya para deconstruir la cosmovisión occidental. Esta es la salida del conflicto que propone Rosa Chávez, reapropiarse de los bienes simbólicos que permitan construir una auténtica ciudadanía como integrantes de grupos étnicos que representan la mayoría de la población en un país multiétnico como Guatemala. (Márquez and Toledo *La escritura de poetas mayas* 74)¹¹⁵

While the authors find in the healing power of Chávez's poetry an avenue to deconstruct the occidental cosmovision, we find in her poetic healing rituals an opportunity to deconstruct *Machistañol*. A machista knowledge explains that it is justifiable to abuse, discriminate against and even kill bodies that do not "fit" within their machinations of the world. Exercising violence whenever the social making process fails is how patriarchy continues governing society in Guatemala. Precisely because she lives in such a society, Rosa Chávez's self-identification as a Maya woman is the instrument used to counter the violence. Put differently, a Maya healing mechanism becomes her *modus operandi* to overthrow violence and reconstruct how a Maya woman functions in a machista world. Her *modus operandi* operates within language, on a woman's body, and privileges a Maya perspective over a western and machista one.

¹¹⁵ "This healing power of poetry can be seen in the recuperation of the vision of the Maya world to deconstruct the occidental cosmovision. This is the way out of the conflict that Rosa Chávez proposes, appropriate the symbolic goods that can permit her to construct an authentic citizenship as members of ethnic groups that represent the majority of the population in a multiethnic country like Guatemala."

Finding in her Maya ancestry her own way to sense the world, she creates a new axis of communication. For example, in the following poems, if in the case of hateful speech the addressee becomes a victim in the vertical axis or a commonly discriminated object in the horizontal axis, she presents a female body that does not fit within the violent sociolinguistic constructs of *Machistañol*. The poetic body finds ways to resist, heal and transcend these imposed social performatives executing an insurrectionary and felicitous speech act. In her insurrectionary speech acts, power is altered when instead of violence she posits transformation, resuscitation and woman empowerment. Language no longer injures her because she appropriates the injurious speech and transforms it. Similar to how the term “queer” or phrase “throw like a girl” were redefined to discard the demeaning value factor, we have a poetic body that achieves a similar task. The Maya female subject she enacts has the power to give birth to her own self, to resuscitate from the historical violence brought from her ancestors to finally display a fearless woman who can no longer be confined. Following the style of a spiritual cleansing ritual where the naming and acknowledgement of the ailment precedes release of it from the mind body, the poems, “Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo,” “Dejo tirada esta piel,” and “Me desato el corte,” perform the first part of the process. The last poem, “Soy una mujer morena,” seals the ritual by exclaiming affirmations that reverberate her newfound freedom.¹¹⁶

We begin this transformative process with a poem that names the pain, the violence and all the elements that need to be released from the body. From her play *Awás*, “Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo”/ “I survived the fire in my body” is a poem that speaks of a woman survivor. In the play, the character SER previously undergoes an *awás*, a spiritual cleansing

¹¹⁶ Her interviewers, Márquez and Toledo, recognize that healing is a distinct trait in Chávez’s poetic; there is a “preocupación por sanar las heridas producto de la explotación y la discriminación” (Márquez y Toledo 77).

where she is freed of fright, and the ailments of the body and soul. Those fears are mentioned in this poem, included in act VIII of the play.¹¹⁷ This is a “poem in action,” where words take on “real-life” form. In the theatrical space, SER becomes the body in motion of the poetic subject in “Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo.” The following verses are the lines read and acted out by SER,

Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo
Sobreviví el estallido de la carne
Sobreviví a las cadenas en los tobillos
Sobreviví al fierro en mis venas
Sobreviví a la ausencia de las letras (5)
Sobreviví al escarmiento del capataz
Sobreviví a la pira donde fueron quemados los
libros sagrados
Sobreviví al exilio redentor
Sobreviví al canto de las sirenas y las lloronas (10)
Sobreviví a la realidad nacional
Sobreviví a la persecución al calabozo
Sobreviví a las sequías del deseo
Sobreviví a la extrema dulzura
Sobreviví a la perforación de las palabras (15)
Sobreviví a la noche de la poesía en la garganta
Sobreviví a masacres
Sobreviví a la verdad que rebosaba de las lenguas
Sobreviví al drama de la carne y la pólvora
Sobreviví al amor que no cabe en una persona (20)
Sobreviví a la tormenta en el hueso derruido
Sobreviví a la miserable tumba abandonada
Sobreviví a la pérdida de mis huesos
florecidos
Sobreviví al salvajismo de la civilización (25)
Sobreviví a tu desnudez anclada en la memoria
Sobreviví a la bestialidad de un solo recuerdo
Sobreviví al exterminio del fuego sobre
la montaña
Sobreviví a la perforación (30)
Sobreviví a la aceptación del destino
Sobreviví a la inseguridad ancestral
Sobreviví a mí misma.

¹¹⁷ It should be noted that although *Awás* is technically considered a play, Chávez and Carmelengo remind us in the introduction that it is in fact Rosa Chávez’s poetry in action.

The structure of the poem is corporal, more specifically, it is the body of a woman who has survived the violence of thirty-three verses. The violence of the past and present is embodied by SER. However, although it begins as one body, her body transforms into a collective body as she distances herself from her own experience to recall the experiences endured by others: “cadenas en los tobillos,” “el exilio,” and “salvajismo de la civilización.” Thus, she is a larger “we.” The first verse begins with her own body caught in a fire and moves to the violence inflicted on other bodies, other histories, other times. The last verse closes the acts of violence when she survives herself. She is still alive. This collective body has survived. Amidst the many violations upon her body, mind and soul, her way out is to come to terms with these violences and see them as outside of her, not acts or histories that define her or the collective body. By stating “sobreviví a mí misma” a collective body is recuperated.

Another point worth mentioning is the non-chronological manner in which the events occur in the poem. There is no real “order” to naming the violent incidents that occurred to the Maya people and the poetic body. The “salvajismo de la civilización” (25) doesn’t occur until towards the end of the poem, although it refers to the Invasion. The years of slavery, as we see through the fettering of ankles and punishment by the foreperson, occur early in the poem. Rather than neatly organizing violence or rationalizing how one form of violence led to another, we have a collection of nuanced violence scattered throughout the poem. This chronological disruption concerning the order of events demonstrates the cycles of violence. Violence has the capacity to only aggravate its psychosomatic manifestations upon specific bodies—as history has made clear that the bodies who have endured the violence are Indigenous people. What the

poetic subject shows us, then, are the effects of a historicity of force, how the past continues to affect the present of a people in ways that are not always visible to the naked eye.

By naming the trauma inherent to the past and by recognizing the psychosomatic force, the poetic voice removes the painful attachments from her body. She recognizes that pain should not be carried on from generation to generation without it meaning something or doing something for the collective of Maya people. As history has taught the poetic voice, violence and its wounds have a way to socio-politically affect groups of people who are premeditatedly targeted to be injured as occurred during the armed conflict, and is occurring now with feminicides. Thus, by speaking about the pain of others, including herself, the verses in “Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo,” become speech acts that form a political “we.” Her body is a collective body entailing those who experienced the oppression of a “civilization,” the burning of their philosophical books, massacre after massacre. In short, the poetic body intentionally carries these different stories of pain to then discard them with the empowering word, “sobreviví.”

Rosa Chávez’s poetic subject transforms pain into a political matter in this poem. She recognizes that “In order to move away from attachments that are hurtful, we must act on them” (Ahmed *Cultural Politics* 173). By naming the pain of her ancestors and those she experienced herself, the poetic body is able to understand the politics of these nuanced forms of violence and liberate the body from being identified as a passive “wounded body.” To separate pain from the *present* body, or to bring “pain into politics requires that we give up the fetish of the wound through different kinds of remembrance. The past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present” (Ahmed *Cultural Politics* 33). In order to avoid seeing the Maya body as a wounded body in pain, Chávez speaks up and provides a critical

reflection on the politics of violence. As we initially stated, the poet performs a healing ritual by naming the violence that affects and injures the poetic body. However, this healing ritual is not just spiritual, for the survivor of the poem resisted the pain; her resistance is political. To heal becomes an insurrectionary act.

The power of the poetic body lies in the strength of her will to detach violent attachments both in time and space. While speaking up about the past is one of the keys to break its hold in the present, we cannot forget how agonizing it can be to bring back these memories. Some of the violence mentioned in the poem was intended to force indigenous bodies to never speak again, or worse, indigenous subjects were killed so that their history and bodies would never share a part in the social world. The poetic voice hints at how violence can restrict one from ever speaking about pain, “Sobreviví a la ausencia de las letras” (verse 5). The hurt is so much to bear that silence becomes another form of violence that impedes one from ever overcoming the past. Nevertheless, Chávez’s poetic subject gains power as she emits speech acts that change this common reality. Let us not forget how it was not expected for Maya bodies to ever speak up about their experiences at the Genocide Trials or for the women of Sepur Zarco to testify how they were sexually abused, breaking the taboo around that topic. The silencing aspect of violence is what the poetic body overcomes in this poem. Thus, the iterative “sobreviví” thirty times is her poetic and political sociolinguistic response.

To move forward without the baggage of a history of violence over her body, the poetic subject peels off those layers that no longer serve her in her process of becoming a new Maya woman. In “Dejo tirada esta piel que ya no me pertenece”/ “I leave stranded this skin that no longer belongs to me” from her poetry book *El corazón de la piedra*, we witness a body that releases the historical senses which appropriated her body. While in the previous poem she

named the violence, in order to give birth to a new woman she has to release the pain and suffering as she does in this poem. The woman who once felt these emotions is being born again and this time, she is not bringing these external affects with her.

Dejo tirada esta piel que ya no me pertenece
esta piel abandonada testiga de otra muerte
alguien encontrará mis escamas tías en el corazón de las
sombras
alguien me quitará tres colmillos para su medicina. (5)
Volveré entonces a parirme con los ojos abiertos
volveré a cicatrizar como gusano de fuego
volveré a estirar mi lengua para hacerle cosquillas al pasado
ya no soy esta piel abandonada
contraigo los músculos con dolor (10)
estoy naciendo.

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The poetic subject is shedding those layers carried in “Me escupiste,” “Me siento triste,” and “Sobreviví.” For she is no longer the material body that carries all those emotions and violent senses; she is releasing herself from their weight.¹¹⁸ While those emotions and senses imposed by a racist and classist society affected the woman we read earlier on, here they are healed anew, “volveré a cicatrizar” (verse 7) as she speaks back to the past that aimed to destroy her sense of self, “volveré a estirar mi lengua” (verse 8). We have a woman with a new consciousness who is creating a new “common sense” that is removed from violence. For violence is in the past tense, “dejo tirada esta piel” and her rebirth is in the future with the use of “volveré.” The use of the present “contraigo” and a continuous present “estoy naciendo” at the end of the poem, confirms a body in process of transformation and healing.

¹¹⁸ If we consider the politics at play in Chávez’s poetic, we can find the poet transforming anger or negative emotions into politics, when “those subjects to ‘read’ and ‘move’ from anger into a different bodily world [...] might just shudder us into new ways of being” (Ahmed 175). Such shuddering or shedding of the old is Chávez’s feminist response to the world that made her feel anger, sadness, or loss in the first place.

As she recognizes that her body has the capacity to heal itself, this becomes her superpower. While women's dead bodies continue to appear in the public and private space of Guatemala, this poetic body resuscitates herself. There is no need to tell us what caused her death, for the focus is on her afterlife, her new beginning. Although there were attempts to injure her and destroy her sense of self in her past life, the woman we are currently observing and unfolding in front of us, rises with "los ojos abiertos" so that she too does not fall into the current "common sense" of fear that pervades society. Her resuscitation is not a simple self-defense tactic in response to the rising feminicides in Guatemala City. Her rebirth demonstrates the power in bodily transformations. Her rebirth offers us new possibilities to *performing* Maya. To perform differently opens the doors to new subjectivities, to new ways of existing. This is important when we recognize that if one body can transform itself, it can eventually transform the body politic of society. Just as a machista culture has made women to believe themselves inferior, if one woman feels free, more women can aim to taste that freedom. Ultimately, the poetic body is meddling with the norms set by a Machista State and society. To reawaken then, is a political act.

Her self-healing ritual, her act of speaking up with open eyes, are political acts that challenge a society and State that rejects her existence in the social imaginary of the nation. However, her politics are collective, not individualistic. In the verse "alguien me quitará tres colmillos para su medicina" (verse 5), the poetic subject becomes a shaman that has the power to heal *others*. Her sharp canines are someone else's medicine, someone else's defensive tool to survive in this world. While her deceased material body no longer belongs to her, it becomes a sort of offering to heal the pain of others, as her new body is coming into the world. Despite the fact that she is reborn in a society that rejects her, to exist in such world is her birthright. More

importantly, she makes it her mission to defy anyone's concept of what it is to be a woman, a Maya woman in the twenty-first century. For we have a new woman who is free from the hold of the past, who is creating a new future in the present tense.

This new woman's first task is to challenge the machismo that penetrates women's bodies, both in the Ladino and Maya culture. In "Me desato el corte"/ "I untie my skirt" the poetic body transgresses her culture's norms by choosing freedom and her own way of expressing her femininity, regardless of the consequences. She is reinventing the Maya identity today. As Sylvia Marcos, Mesoamerican, gender and religion studies scholar informs us about Indigenous women today,

"The[se] [women] want to create their own identity; they refuse to be museum objects. It is not a question of reviving the past. Indigenous cultures are alive, and the only way for them to survive is to reinvent themselves, re-creating their identity while maintaining their differences" (Marcos "Mesoamerican Women's Indigenous Spirituality" 29).

As the title suggests, the Maya woman we see in this poem recreates a Maya identity that can choose *not* to wear the *corte* and still be Maya.

Me desato el corte
y el llanto antiguo que me acompaña
me desato de quien aprieta mis nudos
me desata la madre mundo
me desata el padre mundo
desatada ando por la vida
de un lado para el otro
pastoreando chivos
entre el monte citadino,
el monte rudo,
el monte cóncavo,
el monte de Venus,
el monte tapiscado,
el monte pisado,
ando desatada,
cuidado.

The act of an indigenous woman to untie her *corte*, the traditional skirt worn by Maya women, can be read in multiple ways. For example, it can be interpreted as if she were exposing her feminine sexuality or her sexual desires in its undoing, or it can even indicate rejection of the Maya attire and consequently a rejecting of her culture. However, this latter interpretation is not applicable, given the fact that the poem is from her poetry book, *Piedra*, which in words of del Valle Escalante, is a “precioso canto a los ancestros y a través de la metáfora de la ‘piedra’, Chávez entreteje su historia personal con su presente, pasado y futuro” (“Xibalba como alegoría” 198 n9).¹²⁰ In fact, the entire poetry book shows us how the poetic subject finds herself precisely in her culture, ancestors, father and mother. Thus, we propose that she is undoing her traditional Maya skirt, her *corte*, as a symbolic act of undoing patriarchy, for machismo is also very present in Maya communities. In *Mayanización y vida cotidiana* by Aura Cumes and Santiago Bastos, they assert that:

Para algunas mujeres feministas los trajes indígenas en las mujeres pueden ser vistos [...] como una imposición patriarcal, una vestimenta que ata, algo que hace a las mujeres más femeninas a gusto de los hombres. Con ello se invisibiliza la capacidad de creación y recreación [...] [pero para otras mujeres indígenas feministas] no resulta siendo necesariamente así, porque ello forma parte de su vida, de sus costumbres, y de su resistencia, no solamente frente al patriarcado sino también [...] a las formas de racismo,

¹¹⁹ In *Piedra/Ab'aj* each poem is listed in the index using its first line as the title.

¹²⁰ “it is a precious song to her ancestors and through the ‘stone’ metaphor, Chávez interweaves her personal history with her present, past and future.”

en que marcar la diferencia con los mismos rasgos que se inferiorizan resulta siendo una opción política de peso. (180)¹²¹

In short, the *corte* can either be a way for the patriarchy to constrain women, figuratively and quite literally, or a form of resistance against patriarchy and racism. Both interpretations are valid in their own right; however, we will focus on the former, given the fact that *Piedra* is a poetry book that focuses on the poetic Maya voice and not on her experience in the City of Guatemala, as in her other book *Casa solitaria*.¹²²

Not wearing the traditional attire is probably the most visible manner in which a Maya woman can challenge the machismo that exists in her family and community. The gender limitations that exist in Maya communities are presented when we carefully consider the difference between how indigenous men perform their indigeneity versus women. For example, Manuela Camus' study, *Ser indígena en Ciudad de Guatemala*, brings to light how men have the liberty to not use their Maya attire while women do not have that freedom, "El hombre puede vestir como indígena en su comunidad y si sale a espacios no 'adecuados' se cambia de ropa sin mayor conflicto -lo que no ocurre con la mujer" (Camus 314 n8).¹²³ Thus, the poem highlights the invisible sexism that lies behind men and women's use of the Maya attire. When a Maya

¹²¹ "For some feminist women the indigenous attire in women can be seen [...] as a patriarchal imposition, an outfit that ties, something that makes women more feminine to men's taste. With that the capacity of creation and recreation is invisibilized [...] [but for other feminist indigenous women] it is not necessarily interpreted that way, because it forms art of their life, their customs, and their resistance, not only in the face of patriarchy but also [...] to the forms of racism, in that marking their difference with the same traits that are used to make them inferior turns out to be a powerful political option."

¹²² As opposed to her poetry book *Casa solitaria*, where we see the Maya woman encountering the City of Guatemala and all its discriminatory obstacles, *Piedra* is not about the city; it is about Maya traditions and histories. Therefore, we do not consider the idea of removing her traditional attire as a way to ease her way into the Ladino society of the City, or as a way to erase the social and cultural difference.

¹²³ "Men can dress indigenous in their community and if they go out into spaces not 'adequate' they change their clothes without major conflict—which does not occur with women."

woman chooses not to wear her *traje*, she is often criticized for not being Maya *enough* by other Maya people, or if she is in the City of Guatemala, she may be *too* Maya for Ladinos and thus rejected. The former reality is in fact one that Rosa Chávez herself is very familiar with, as she shares that in the past she experienced,

Rechazos y cuestionamientos de parte de mi pueblo que yo escuchaba en el idioma burlándose de que yo no traía traje o porque yo no podía hablar bien el idioma; o de gente cercana del mundo del arte, amigos míos, mestizos, diciendo que yo estaba escribiendo ciertas cosas porque estaba de moda, y que mi trabajo iba a ser más reconocido si yo escribía desde mi parte indígena. (Márquez, Toledo, Chávez *La escritura* 168)¹²⁴

Chávez is not only criticized for not wearing her *traje* but also because of her language difficulties and, later, for writing about Maya topics.¹²⁵ These speech acts that question her identity are partly resolved in this poem.

The poetic voice and the poet herself are set free from the “real-life” judgements that inflict violence on their psyche with the last verses that warn us “Estoy desatada / Cuidado.” She

¹²⁴ “Rejections and questioning from my community that I would listen to in the Maya language, making fun of the fact that I wasn’t wearing the indigenous attire or because I could not speak the language well; or people close to me in the art world, friends of mine, mestizos, saying that I was writing certain things because it was in fashion, and that my work was going to be recognized more if I wrote from my indigenous part.”

¹²⁵ Del Valle Escalante advises us about the danger in seeking or expecting “authenticity” from Maya writers due to their inability to speak a native language, “críticos y literatos suponen que la producción textual indígena necesariamente debe provenir de hablantes de idiomas indígenas, o que deber ser escrita en estos idiomas. Estas posturas, sin embargo, no consideran las experiencias de castellanización, asimilación, desplazamiento y disgregación que han obligado a muchos de nosotros a no aprender nuestros idiomas nativos. En muchos casos, con el objetivo de evitar la discriminación y marginalización” (*Teorizando las literaturas indígenas contemporáneas* 7). “Critics and literary people assume that the textual indigenous production necessarily has to come from speakers of indigenous languages, or that it should be written in those languages. These stances, however, do not consider the experiences of Hispanicization, assimilation, displacement and disintegration that have forced many of us to not learn our native languages. In many cases, with the objective to avoid discrimination and marginalization.”

is freed from the machista impositions of the *corte*, but also of the expectations of how to perform her indigeneity and femininity. This Maya woman challenges the traditional representations. To undo her *corte* opens a new world of possibilities for women to express themselves in the larger imaginary of the Maya. However, there is another component that makes the speech act “estoy desatada” truly revolutionary: the fact that she undoes the *corte* and not the *huipil*. Rather than disclosing the top part of her body, she chooses to undo the bottom half. This is a carefully developed feminist speech act, for to become “undone” is to become “emancipated.” For women, not to mention indigenous women, to speak of their sexual organs and sexuality is still a taboo in Guatemala.¹²⁶ To even suggest that to become “undone” can point to her de-virginization, or unvirginal state, is transgressive. Nonetheless, the poetic subject removes precisely this item of clothing to politically state that she will live in a machista world *as a sexually emancipated woman*. She accentuates the speech act by interpellating the patriarchy and her readers with a warning, “cuidado.” In such interpellation, *we* become the recipient of her words and she, the empowered speaker.

In this reversal of who interpellates and who is made to believe and sense the interpellation, the poetic body resituates her position in the social world. In other words, she is prepared to challenge the norms that do not fit in *her* understanding of the world. In Ahmed’s words, “placing hope in feminism is not simply about the future; it is also about recognizing the persistence of the past in the present” (Ahmed 187). By recognizing how the traditional attire of Maya women can be restrictive for women today, the poetic subject who felt violence and pain at the beginning of this chapter is now a free and liberated woman. This newly “desatada” woman

¹²⁶ Camus explains how, “El corte cubre la parte privada, íntima -estigmatizada - del cuerpo y se conserva con más fuerza: ‘un cambio en las prendas que cubren los bajos es considerada más extrema que un cambio en la parte superior del cuerpo’” (Hendrickson, 1995: 172).

creates her femininity outside of patriarchy and inside “el monte de Venus.” The poetic voice has (re)constructed and constituted herself with the guidance of the *madre mundo* and *padre mundo*. Furthermore, as Márquez & Toledo put it, this poem “señala ese estar ‘suelta’ sin lugar de pertenencia, pero dueña, advierte, de sí misma y de su cuerpo. En ese sentido, el poema es desafiante, implica la elección de la autonomía y la voluntad de asumir las consecuencias del desafío” (Márquez & Toledo *La escritura de poetisas mayas* 70). The Maya woman of the twenty-first century in Guatemala is no longer the interpellated subject but this time is the one who interpellates the *other*, because her identity no longer depends on the other.

What the poetic voice emits in “Me desato el corte” is a sociolinguistic reversal of power. She affirms her gender and sexuality by undoing the *corte* at the same time that she shows how those parts that others abuse to violate women—sexual organs—are in fact reservoirs of power. This time she won’t be violated because in uncovering her femininity she is making a statement that her sexuality is precisely the weapon to combat machista social constructions that control women. With a clear and affirmative tone that revises who has the right to warn and advise women, “cuidado” is no longer aimed at women but is in fact uttered *by* women. It reverses the exhausting responsibility women have in living life with caution; this responsibility will now belong to those who oppress and violate women’s bodies. Moreover, the interpellation ruptures *Machistañol’s* axes of communication, for “cuidado” makes visible an indigenous woman’s speech act within the machista discourse. Now the tables have turned, and the poetic subject has gained linguistic agency. In fact, she has introduced a woman who is no longer afraid to express herself as what she once feared to be—a woman in a machista society.

If in the previous poem we have examined a woman affirming herself in her femininity and sexuality, her autonomy and power, in the poem, “Soy una mujer morena,” the journey of

self-acceptance continues when the speech acts of a fearless Maya woman reveal that she is ready to live out her freedom. By bringing up other parts of herself that are often criticized and make her feel inferior and unaccepted in society, she performs insurrectionary speech acts that force change. The poetic subject takes the disdainful speech acts and resignifies them to reclaim *woman* in language and in society.

Soy una mujer morena
no le tengo miedo a la palabra que me arrebató la guerra
camino confiando en que tantas muertes me regresarán a la vida
mis trece sentidos se han ofrecido jugosos a las manos del tiempo
por mirar de frente me han dicho india creída
por buscarme en las verdades enterradas
por nombrar lo que me apretaba la garganta
me han dicho india resentida
no olvido que un compañero de juegos en mi primera infancia me dijo:
las indias no pueden saltar
y yo pego brincos que truenan
que revientan, que le sacan chispas a la rudeza
de aquel desprecio
porque mi piel morena ha decidido sentir el tacto de la libertad
me han dicho sangre rancia, mal ejemplo,
no quiero ser ejemplo,
soy sangre caliente que atiende el llamado de mi voluntad
soy espíritu al que le nacen deseos, espinas,
raíces, troncos, llamados de este y otros tiempos
morena, sudorosa, sinvergüenza, apalabrada carne morena
carne que baila, que baila con los ojos abiertos y cerrados
que recupera su movimiento
carne y huesos que danzan por toda la alegría y el baile
que le fueron negados a mis ancestras¹²⁷
boca que mastica hongos en el invierno del futuro
boca infantil que fue saqueada por la brutalidad
boca que recupera su canto, su grito, su saliva.
boca que recupera su canto, su grito, su saliva.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ *Ancestras* is how it appears in the original. The use of the feminine to name her ancestors carries a spelling error which we take as intentional on the poet's behalf, for she finds in the women who came before her the knowledge and strength to stride forward.

¹²⁸ Published in *Pikara Magazine*, an online magazine that focuses on social and political topics from a feminist perspective, Rosa Chávez shared this poem with interviewer Florencia Goldsman in 2018. The interview took place after the First International Political, Artistic, Sports and

From the first verse the poetic subject takes a feminist intersectional stance to make clear that her gender, race and class are tools that will help her to get her point across. In other words, the exact social markers that taint her worthiness in a society that does not accept her become the necessary tools to respond to such society. That is how insurrectionary speech functions, “Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163). She will no longer be put at risk by the elements that make her who she is; she will discard the force of this language by appropriating it to give it a new context.

The assertive tone with which she tells us that she is a dark-skinned woman does not leave room for sexist and racist speakers to injure her in those terms. As the second verse expresses, while the war aimed to eliminate subjects just like her, she will no longer allow for that previous reality to silence her in the present. The poem continues listing the violent speech acts uttered by others—conceited, bitter, incompetent, rancid blood, bad example—all of which she dismantles one by one. To repeat the injurious speech does not cause her pain anymore, for this time she names the violence so that she can defeat its linguistic power, similar to in “Sobreviví.” Put differently, the poetic subject is usurping the historicity of force of these words. She does not appropriate the words to redefine them; she appropriates their force and introduces her process and how she primarily undoes the violence. For example, if they called her conceited for looking forward, or bitter for remembering the past and for naming her violent experiences, now she turns that bitterness into freedom, “mi piel morena ha decidido sentir el tacto de la libertad.” If they once called her rancid blood, she is now filled with boiling blood; she is alive,

Cultural Encounter of Women who Fight (I Encuentro Internacional Político, Artístico, Deportivo y Cultural de Mujeres que luchan in Spanish).

not dead. This woman refuses to be an example for anyone, for she listens to her yearnings and desires alone, not those of others.

This poetic subject is made possible because she has found in herself the freedom, will and joy that was once taken away from her. The reality of a machista world which once suffocated and silenced her and did not allow her to live as a “mujer morena” is replaced through taking a healing journey. In order to get to this place, she had to inquire about her experiences of pain that took place corporally, linguistically and socially. Taking a look back at the history of her ancestors, finding in her Maya culture an insight on how to carry out the healing process, Chávez’s poetic subject succeeds in reconstructing a new subjectivity. The subject we had at the beginning of the chapter is a completely new subject by the end. Our focus on the subject-formation process has been intentional because the politics that it involves has rippling effects in literature as much as in society. In accordance with Emma Chirix, “La subjetividad no trata solo lo personal sino lo social, es saber y sentir quién soy y lo que existe a mi alrededor; es conocer el proceso histórico, identificar las políticas de segregación, asimilación y etnocidio” (Chirix *Tejiendo de otro modo* 211).¹²⁹ Subjectivity is about the politics of a society that identifies certain bodies as active or passive participants of the construction of the world. To change a Maya woman’s subjectivity from its established understanding then, is to contest the systems, the machista institutions, that govern the State of Guatemala. In sum, Rosa Chávez has given us a Maya subject that transgresses established norms in order to gain her autonomy in language and in politics.

¹²⁹ “Subjectivity is not only personal but social, it is to know and feel who you are and what exists around you; it is to understand the historical process, identify the politics of segregation, assimilation and ethnocide.”

5.0 TEXTUAL BODIES, ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS IN REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO

*una hace arte político no porque lo desee
sino porque es un sujeto político.*¹³⁰

Regina José Galindo



Figure 1. Regina José Galindo, *Testimonios/ Testimonies*.¹³¹

I am alive. An affirmation that validates a woman's existence.¹³² The juxtaposition of a petite woman's body against capital letters made out of iron begs the question, "Is this a body subject to the power of language?" As capital letters scream out "I am alive!" we see a woman who confirms this statement as she stands with her eyes wide open and even smiles for the camera. Although this image is not an "official" image of the performance *Testimonios*,¹³³ it allows us to

¹³⁰ As quoted by Sergio C. Fanju from the newspaper *El país Madrid*.

¹³¹ The image is from: <https://airenuestro.com/2014/04/07/regina-jose-galindo-estoy-viva/>

¹³² Following gender grammatical rules in Spanish, the verb ending in -a here, refers to its feminine use, hence, "I am alive as woman."

¹³³ In the actual performance, Galindo walks down the streets of Antigua, Guatemala declaring phrases she has collected from the many testimonies Maya Ixil women presented at Efraín Ríos Montt's trial for genocide. Ríos Montt was sentenced to prison for 80 years for committing

explore the power dynamics behind an image, specifically when thinking about corporality and language. Power, vulnerability and agency are concepts that resonate in Regina José Galindo's works for they are too familiar to her. Galindo is a silently loud Guatemalan woman, performance artist and poet. At face value, the phrase "silently loud" might suggest a contradictory character trait embodying both muteness and sound, but this description is less a matter of personality than an inherent aspect of her work. In her poetry, her voice screams with the use of capital letters. In her performances, her voice becomes silent as her body does the speaking. Full of wonder and complexity, such qualities have made her one of Guatemala's most fascinating and thought-provoking contemporary artists.

Born and raised in Guatemala City in 1974, she continues to live in one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman.¹³⁴ During her first twenty-two years of life she survived Guatemala's Civil War. At the turn of the twenty-first century, she became a target in the war against women, a war where women are murdered for the simple fact of being a woman. Violence has been the backdrop of her life, and "survivor" and "target" are social identities that have been imposed upon her. As a survivor she learned when to be quiet; as a possible target she learned when to scream. The real-life experience of being a woman in Guatemala has taught her how to be strategic not only with her life but also with her art. Her poetry and performances candidly show us the ways in which she struggles with this violent past and present.

Regina began her career as a performance artist in 1999, with the inaugural performance of *Lo voy a gritar al viento*. During this performance, she hanged herself from the Post Office

genocide. A few months later, his conviction was overturned. Rios Montt died April 1, 2018 from a heart attack.

¹³⁴ Guatemala holds third place for countries with the highest number of femicide cases per a 2015 FLACSO report by Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz.

Building's arch in Guatemala City, and she read, ripped and threw the pages of her own poetry book to a crowd that, as she continued to perform, began to grow.¹³⁵ The poems were from her first poetry book *Personal e intransmisible*. At one point during the performance, the crowd asked her to use a microphone, so they could hear her better. Thus, she read her poems using a microphone. The spectators could then hear her better, but Galindo did not intend for people to necessarily hear *her voice*; rather, she wanted them to “listen” to the body that was hanging from above, the body that suggested either a possible suicide or the idea of her body as a microphone in and of itself—the *female body speaking*.¹³⁶ This bold debut set the tone for the performances that followed. As a sort of introductory manifesto, she conveyed a clear message to a machista society¹³⁷ founded on violence: “I will scream so loud so that you cannot ignore another woman ever again! We are alive, and I embody the many women whose deaths and stories go unnoticed, untold.” This performance is the first and last where we hear Galindo’s actual voice. From here on out, her body becomes her only language. That is performance art.¹³⁸

In this chapter, we will analyze a selection of Galindo’s performances ranging from 1999 to 2018 alongside poems from her two poetry books, *Personal e intransmisible* (2000) and *Telarañas* (2015). Combining the verbal with the nonverbal text, poetry and performance, allows

¹³⁵ <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/1800/1/regina-jose-galindo-the-body-of-others> In an article published the day after the performance by *Prensa Libre*, Ingrid Roldán tells us that the crowd asked for a microphone so they could hear better what she was saying.

¹³⁶ Galindo shares her reflection after this performance in an interview with David Schmidt: “Lo Voy a Gritar al Viento” fue un performance bastante tradicional —a pesar de haber contado con la presencia de muchos espectadores, su participación fue pasiva. Se paran en la calle y me observan mientras leo mis poemas en voz alta” (“Entre la violencia y la ceguera”).

¹³⁷ A machista society is one that follows specific social patterns, such as the domination of the other, especially women; rivalry between men; a constant need to demonstrate supposedly virile traits, hence despising anything that resembles feminine values and traits (Castañeda *Intro*).

¹³⁸ “Performance is not always about art. It’s a wide-ranging and difficult practice to define and holds many, at times conflicting, meanings and possibilities,” says Diana Taylor in her book *Performance*.

a more thorough analysis of Galindo's *oeuvre*. The performances and poems I have included are those that have to do with the many ways women experience violence. Galindo's performances are not always pleasant; in fact, more frequently than not, they are quite unsettling. That is because she reveals experiences people prefer not to see, analyze or reflect upon. Violent truths are oppressive, and because they make people uncomfortable, they often opt to ignore their existence. Ignoring their importance in Guatemala has created a society that has become desensitized to violence. Because people prefer not to learn from a horrifying past, they continue to be unprepared to handle a violent present. As many have said before, "*Those who do not know, understand or choose to forget their history are doomed to repeat it.*" In Galindo's journey as a poet and performer, we can trace Guatemala's violent historiography. In a way, through her performance, Galindo's body acts as a living history book. Her work does not allow Guatemalans to forget so easily.

Galindo's first performances in Guatemala engaged (social, political, gender) issues at play in her native country. Due to the relevance of the issues her work touches upon, she affirms that most of her performances relate to universal truths, or histories. From her point of view, what happens in Guatemala can and does happen elsewhere around the world. Her conception frames Guatemala in a global configuration, and thus her work relates to other realities; particularly when the case is violence against women. As her artistry has developed, she has begun to consider each country's history, the pressing and current sociopolitical issues they are facing, planning her performances around these topics. For example, some performances touch upon problems that are relevant in Latin America, the U.S. and Europe: Her 2005 performance *Recorte por la línea/ Cutting around the lines* references Venezuela, *America's Family Prison* is situated in the United States (2008), *Saqueo/Looting* references issues in Germany (2010), and

Combustible depicts issues in the Dominican Republic (2014).¹³⁹ When she performs in another country, she attempts to “encontrar un punto en común y hacer un puente con el otro contexto” (Galindo “No soy paz, soy guerra”).¹⁴⁰ Galindo recognizes that “Del otro lado del charco también abundan las injusticias, también la muerte se vive de maneras violentas; en otros países las sociedades están igualmente construidas sobre la guerra o la negación y, sea donde sea, los problemas humanos son similares” (Galindo “No soy paz, soy guerra”).¹⁴¹

Her performances present vividly how Guatemala is not the only country where injustice, death and corruption take place. The first performance I mentioned was *Recorte por la línea*. This performance speaks to the corporal invasiveness of plastic surgery imposed on Venezuelan women (and women in general) so they can match society’s beauty standards. The second, *America’s Family Prison*, has to do with the private prison industry in the US as a new form of slavery in “modernity.” The third, *Looting*, speaks about the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and exploitation of people, goods, land and cultures. The last one, *Combustible*, is about the complexities of Haitian immigration in the Dominican Republic and discrimination against “the other.” For the most part, neither Galindo or the people involved in the performances speak, nor do they need to, as meaning is deduced from the movement of their bodies, the materials used, and ultimately, the time and space of each performance.

By using her body as the sole instrument of communication, Galindo has been able to reach audiences in other parts of the world. Her performance work transcends alphabetic and phonetic language and occurs on a visual plane, where all one needs is sight and the will to

¹³⁹ All of these performances took place in the country which they reference.

¹⁴⁰ “Find common ground and make a connection with another context.” My translation. All translations into English are mine from here onward.

¹⁴¹ “On the other side of the road, there is also an abundance of injustices, death is lived in many violent ways as well; in other countries societies are also built upon wars or in denial of them and, wherever it is, human problems are similar.”

“see.”¹⁴² From the beginning, the topics she chose and the dynamic images she produced with her body quickly attracted attention from international art circles. By 2005, she was participating in festivals, *biennales*, and artist residencies worldwide.¹⁴³ At the 51 Venice Biennale in 2005, she won the Golden Lion for Best Young Artist for her performances *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (Guatemala 2003) and *Himenoplastia* (Guatemala 2005). This award confirmed her as a *performance artist*. Galindo continues to be recognized for her vulnerability and concern for matters that affect humanity. In 2007, she won first prize in the 5th edition of *Inquieta Imagen*, published by the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design in Costa Rica.¹⁴⁴ In 2010 she won First Prize for her video performance *Alarma* (2011)¹⁴⁵ at the Juannio event, the most important art event in Central America due to its philanthropic and artistic influence.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Galindo is aware that not everyone has the capacity to see. She also speaks to this in her performance *Punto ciego* (Guatemala 2010) where only blind spectators were allowed to enter the performance. Rather than sight, the other four senses were activated (touch, smell, taste, hearing).

¹⁴³ For example, she has attended multiple Biennale festivals, including in Venice (49, 51, 53, 54 Italy), XI Cuenca (Ecuador), Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), Pontevedra (Spain), 17th Sydney (Australia), II Moscow (Russia), Istanbul (Turkey), IV Valencia (Spain), III Albania, II Prague (Czech Republic), III Lima (Peru), the 1st Auckland Triennial (New Zealand), 29th Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana (Slovenia), and the 1st Art and Architecture Biennale in Tenerife (Canary Islands). She has been invited to countries like Spain, France and the US as part of artist residencies where she is funded and supported to create her own work. Through all of these experiences, she has been able to connect spaces and people otherwise disconnected and distant. When she performs outside of Guatemala, she presents audiences with the idea that what is happening in “far-away-Guatemala” is also happening in their own country.

¹⁴⁴ This was part of a Central American and Caribbean competition for the best video creation and digital art; she won it for her works *Ablución* (video-performance 2007) and *XX* (Guatemala 2007). These performances expose the gravity of violence committed by the *maras* (gangs) and the pain of burying an unidentifiable body. Galindo’s human capacity to create a sense of empathy, her boldness in bringing to the forefront unhealed wounds and the humble and powerful way in which she achieves empathy and reflection, is why her work deserves the accolades it has received and continues to receive.

¹⁴⁵ This is a performance in which inside an ambulance she roams the seemingly calm streets of Guatemala City. What appears to be a “peaceful” afternoon is interrupted by the sound of a siren. The audible silence of streets where women are murdered by day is juxtaposed with the audible alarm of the ambulance. The invisible truth about feminicides becomes visible when she

One of the most intriguing and probably most relevant prizes Galindo has earned is the Prince Claus Award.¹⁴⁷ Galindo receives this prize in 2011 precisely because she was able to transform her personal anger and sense of injustice into powerful public acts that, as her website states, demand an answer, acts that interrupt the daily ignorance and complacency of society, thus creating empathy. This same year Galindo, along with Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera, Mexican conceptual and performance artist Teresa Margolles, Cuban visual artist Félix González-Torres, and Argentine artist Graciela Carnevale, participated in the 29 Biennale of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia, an event which aims to present art in “global” terms. Competing with these renowned artists, whose work is also crucial to the dissemination of untold realities, Galindo received the Grand Prize for three of her performances: *Confesión* (Spain 2007), *Caparazón* (Italy 2010) and *Móvil* (Mexico 2010).¹⁴⁸ These awards and recognitions have solidified Galindo as an internationally celebrated artist whose works engage with pressing social issues, unveiling not so hidden realities, disrupting a conformist society, and simply talking about issues that are affecting humanity.

“alarms” the passersby, who appear calm to a local emergency—someone’s mother, daughter, or sister is in danger.

¹⁴⁶ This event aims to support artists and art in general, encourages appreciation for the arts and critical thought, as well as aids the non-profit Neurologic Institute of Guatemala, which primarily serves children and adolescents.

¹⁴⁷ This Award is given by the Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlands to “individuals and organizations based mainly in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean for their outstanding achievements in the field of culture and development and the positive effect of their work on their direct environment and the wider cultural or social field” (*Prince Claus Fund Org*).

¹⁴⁸ In *Confesión*, a volunteer performs the waterboarding torture technique on Galindo; in *Caparazón*, Galindo’s nude body lies inside a transparent carapace as a group of people frantically beat the dome with sticks, producing violence in sonic form; and in *Móvil*, Galindo lies inside a wheeled metal coffin and people can move her wherever they like—it speaks to the idea that live bodies go north (USA) and return lifeless to the south (Mexico and Latin America).

In sum, many of her works that have received awards are about violence against women and other forms of violence against human bodies: gang violence, death, murder, drug war, and corruption. Violence is without a doubt a theme that comes up year after year in her *oeuvre*. The fact that she chooses to live in a country that has the world's third highest rate of femicide inherently inspires her work. One of the biggest issues for her as an artist in Guatemala is that her work is not promulgated enough or thought relevant or noteworthy by other Guatemalans. This may or may not be entirely about her work, rather, the circumstance of silence and fear in which Guatemalans are living in today. For a few, it is a privilege to ponder on the violence that surrounds them; for many Guatemalans, they are forced to live this violence thus, to stop and watch a performance becomes redundant.¹⁴⁹

The lack of attention that Galindo's work has received in her native country, suggests a form of silencing that is similar to a time when artists were persecuted for speaking against the State and its way of governing the country during the civil war. This was a time when censorship was a brutal and violent form of aggression exacted on human bodies. Today, censorship seems to occur a little differently. On this topic, Galindo shares: "Para el Estado de Guatemala los artistas no existimos, no aportamos y por lo tanto no tenemos ningún derecho. Si durante un tiempo se desaparecieron poetas de manera violenta, ahora se intenta silenciarlos con el abandono y la indiferencia" (Galindo, *Plaza Pública*).¹⁵⁰ One asks, how is it possible to ignore or

¹⁴⁹ In no way am I saying that most Guatemalans do not ponder or reflect on violence; on the contrary, they are constantly thinking about it since it permeates so many spaces of their lives. My point is that sometimes in Galindo's performances it is too difficult to distinguish between life and art. Consequently, her getting too close to reality is overwhelming for many.

¹⁵⁰ "According to the State of Guatemala, artists do not exist, we do not contribute to society, therefore, we do not have any rights. If for some time poets were disappeared in violent ways, today they intend to silence them through abandonment and indifference." *Plaza Pública* is an online platform managed primarily by the Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala that aims to

be indifferent to a naked woman's body on a bed, tied up by the hands and ankles and blindfolded like in *El dolor en un pañuelo* (Guatemala 1999)? Or more violently, her performance *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* (Guatemala 2007) where this time, she is tied up with real umbilical cords? The former work speaks to the increase of feminicides in post-war times, the latter to the violence women experienced during the civil war. The answer may be simple and bleak: the national amnesia that characterizes most Guatemalans is a result of having to endure so much injustice and impunity that no one wants to "dig up" the lives that have been lost under State hands. While most attempt to forget, Galindo insists to remember. Others' hopelessness does not stop Galindo from producing, creating and expressing these violent histories in her performances. Along with other artists, she attempts to "wake up" a desensitized people with images from a harrowing history that continues repeating itself daily.

Until recently with artists like Galindo, the discussion on the surge of violence against women in 21st century post-war Guatemala has been dominated by those who are directly or indirectly involved: the Machista State and its brothering institutions. Machista-driven avenues such as the State, journalism and forensic sciences present us with nameless bodies and involve sterile investigation, both of which do nothing to create a sense of empathy or create a sense that something is wrong. They are the mediums that can *publicly* talk about what is going on, and their answer is that femicide is an unintelligible phenomenon. It is unintelligible because we never find out who killed *her*, why did (t)he(y) kill her or what we are going to do to solve the femicide epidemic. Let us remember Musalo and Bookey's report, "[in] 2011 more than 20,000 cases were filed with the courts [...] Less than three percent of the cases that reached the courts, resulted in a judgement" (106). A more recent example of lack of sufficient information

provide information and ideas in pursuit of a solid and vigorous democracy invested with ethics and social justice.

to solve a feminicide case is Cristina Siekavizza whose husband was found guilty by a judge in 2014.¹⁵¹ Yet, the Constitutional Court postponed the trial and her husband Barreda remains free today. This type of epidemic has made violence against women socially acceptable.

Regina José Galindo stands far outside this *machista* discourse. Her performances take the form of a wake-up call—a direct contrast to the unfeeling, lackluster machista discourse. She intentionally returns the audience to the crime scene to think from there, to name the body, name the violence, and find evidence. This reenacting of the violence is aimed at finding answers rather than converting another feminicide case into a statistic. Moreover, her body becomes the canvas to talk about violence *differently*. The conversation transforms from one that is “incomprehensible” to one that pleads to be comprehended in its enactment. By embodying violence, Galindo is able to question its function, language and power. She is not merely *representing* violence in her performances, as a type of mimicry, she is in fact *embodying* the pain. To put herself in the shoes of thousands of women who have been unjustly murdered permits her to question violence from a different perspective. Rather than viewing violence from the machista gaze, here we have it from a woman’s gaze. Such change of perspective allows us to focus on ways Galindo does in fact demystify patriarchal notions of violence, and therein, endorses women’s experiences of violence.

To change our own gaze as spectators is how we can participate in this global conversation, should we choose to do so. In other words, if we comprehend Galindo’s performances as reproductions of machista actions as they are already occurring in real life, we

¹⁵¹ “En noviembre del 2017, la defensa de Barreda, César Calderón —también abogado de Otto Pérez M. [ex presidente de Guatemala] —, apeló el convenio de colaboración eficaz suscrito por Petrona Say con el MP alegando que esa modalidad se utiliza nada más en la Ley contra la Delincuencia y el Crimen Organizado y que su cliente no está acusado por ese delito. Desde entonces el proceso quedó estancado” (Roesch “7 años #JusticiaParaCristina” *Prensa Libre*).

are thinking and seeing through a sexist and violent male gaze. Instead, I aim to shift the perspective to one that validates the female experience as a female gaze endorses. Achieving this shift presents a challenge as we are not accustomed to seeing the world through female eyes. A male gaze typically recognizes the naked female body (in the performance) as victim. We feel pity for her; she is an object of desire, powerless. Such an interpretation would argue that Galindo is just replicating the existing discourse on violence where the male has power over the female.

On the other hand, if we interpret that same body/performance through a female gaze, we come up with different subjectivities. For example, that fragile looking woman is in fact strong because she outlives violence on a daily basis. She is not a sexual object, but rather the subject and object of *her* story. In some ways, the female body becomes a case study that invites us to understand *her* experience with fresh eyes. She is a woman with agency. Galindo's performances rewrite the stories of those women whose stories have been divulged through a male gaze. In short, a male gaze says she is representing violence, while a female gaze says she is embodying violence. The former is passive, and the latter is active. While the former simply describes the acts of violence committed against a body, the latter proposes to move us away from descriptions and towards clarifications.

We will focus our attention on highlighting these clarifications by analyzing the body as text, as a body that speaks effectively as an open investigation waiting to be solved. When appropriate, we will introduce the artist's poetry alongside a performance. At times the body cannot tell us the whole story; thus, her words will aid to expose the missing pieces. The poems are the written "documents" which carry substantial information about what "this woman" (acted out by Galindo) experienced before her body was found at a dump site or placed on a mortuary

table. As if we were performing a criminal investigation, her poetry will act as the “paper trail” we need in order to support our inquiry. We started with an image of *Testimonios* that raised more questions than answers about the power of language and corporality. As we expand on this idea, let us not forget that ultimately, both written and corporal language can be used to hide, yet also elucidate, the violence women experience in its own unique ways.

5.1 CORPORAL AND TEXTUAL ACTS

In performance, context is all.
Diana Taylor

*As hearers and readers,
we are free to lend our aesthetic attention
to any text at all.*
Mary Louise Pratt

If one can read a body in a written text, then one can read a body in a corporal act. As performance is a means to articulate embodied knowledges, it places the body as the site of transmission, fluidity, and interpretation. Moreover, performance involves a performer and an audience. It involves action. The common understanding is that in performance art, the body becomes the canvas; it is the site where action takes place. Consequently, the performer becomes the subject and object of the actual performance. To fully understand performance art, we must focus on the nuances and complexities of a specific performance piece. To achieve this understanding, we frame the following performances within a specific time and space.

A renowned specialist in theater and performance studies, Diana Taylor offers us what is probably the most complete understanding of performance in the context of Latin America. As

Taylor points out, defining performance is just as complex as coming up with one sole definition of body. A performance, like a body, produces knowledges and makes visible or invisible that which the artist-person chooses to display. In her latest book on Performance Studies, Taylor explains performance to be the following:

Performance, [...] means and does many— at times paradoxical— things. It's a doing, a done, and a redoing. It makes visible, and invisible; it clarifies and obscures; it's ephemeral and lasting; put-on, yet truer than life itself. Performances can normalize behaviors, or shock and challenge the role of the spectator very frontally and directly. Neither true nor false, neither good nor bad, liberating or repressive, performance is radically unstable, dependent totally on its framing, on the *by whom* and *for whom*, on the why where when it comes into being. (Taylor *Performance* Ch 1)

We would like to highlight the framing of the performance, because, as Taylor states, “In performance, context is all” (*Performance* Intro). The time and space of the performance gives meaning to the performance. The performer can transform an ordinary room into a mortuary, for example. Or a heavily trafficked street can all of a sudden become still as spectators stop to see, hear or witness the performance. Another distinct quality of performance is that it is ephemeral. Either you were present or not, because to watch a video of the performance or see images taken by either the artist's photographer or a spectator, are archival forms of the performance. It is paradoxical to think that a performance *does* and *did*, when we say that it is ephemeral; thus, can it really *redo*? Our analysis of performance will pay close attention to the corporal acts of the artist and our interpretation of the given space and time in which the acts take place, and when appropriate highlight how a performance can in fact *redo* itself.

In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor explains that “A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire)” (Taylor, *A & R* ch 1). However, years later Taylor later expands on her first opinion when she considers Ana Mendieta’s work: “A performance implies an audience or participants, even if that audience is a camera. Ana Mendieta’s (Cuba/ U.S.) work, for example, was not always staged directly for spectators. People can experience it only through film or photographs” (Taylor *Performance*). Something similar happens with Galindo’s performances. For the most part, they all have a live audience as seen in the video and photography archives, yet in some cases the camera is her only audience. This post-performance period or performance through the archive is important because “The holdings in the archive— the videos that we see displayed, the photos, artifacts, and so on— can spring back to life. They convey a sense of what the performances meant in their specific context and moment, and what they might mean now” (Taylor *Performance*). For our purposes, we bring back to life the archives of Galindo’s performances to analyze them in the current context of feminicides, to include them in the conversation around violence against women.

If, as Taylor claims, “Performance is a doing *to*, a thing done *to* and *with* the spectator,” then the spectator is always part of a performance (*Performance*, emphasis added). Performance cannot exist without a spectator. In some of Galindo’s archives we can see spectators as they surround her, as they intervene, as they sit motionlessly during the piece. We can ask why the spectators did or didn’t intervene, but then we wouldn’t understand that “Performances ask that spectators do something, even if that something is doing nothing” (Taylor *Performance*). It is impossible to go back in time to find out what the spectators in her performances were thinking

(or not), for sometimes *we* don't know how to feel or what to think in that moment. What is most important, I believe, is that the performance took place. Similar to how there is no concrete singular definition for performance, the spectator can also be a fluid subject, one that shows up during the actual performance or one that comes to the piece days or years later (as in our case).

Our goal is to expand upon Taylor's work by adding to performance theory what Guatemala's contemporary artist Regina José Galindo has to offer. Galindo's performances present us with a body which is in confrontation with the world that surrounds her at the same time that she is embodying the untold stories. Due to her female subjectivity and location, her body most often confronts Machista institutions of power and embodies the violent injustices that affect women. Embodying the realities that surround her allows her to understand the violence more actively and feel it more acutely; it also enables her to formulate gender specific questions in relation to violence in Guatemala. In feminist thought, this personal embodiment is called "situated knowledge"—a knowledge that one can only access because of one's gender, sexuality, race, and class. To this we credit Donna Haraway's 1988's concept of situated knowledge as it still applies today:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden. [...] Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision. Feminism is about a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space. (Donna Haraway "Situated Knowledges" 589).

To avoid thinking about violence as an abstract issue and to move away from the idea that all women face the same violence or that violence affects all women, the concept of *situated knowledge* allows us to focus on multiple women's experience as they think critically about those matters that affect them personally.¹⁵² In her performances, Galindo recognizes that her point of view and experience is hers alone, not that of every Guatemalan woman. Aware of the importance of thinking critically from a feminist perspective, she offers us new information on the "case" of violence. Stepping away from that "god trick" lens that reasons in abstract, allows the artist to position herself within the situated knowledge space, a space that searches to diversify and materialize experiences and knowledges about the world. As we analyze Galindo's works, we too will take on the task of seeing and understanding through a feminist lens. The perspective from which one approaches violence against women is especially relevant when discussing a woman performer who commits acts of violence upon her own body. In short, the concept of situated knowledge goes hand in hand with Galindo's performances because if the former insists on "a view from the body," performance complements it by being a "an episteme, a way of knowing" through the body (Taylor *Archive & the Repertoire* Intro). Both rely on the body as a lens to produce new knowledges about the world.

5.1.1 POETRY IN ACTION

Before Galindo produced corporal knowledges through the performative realm, she began creating and interpreting on matters of the female body through her poetry. Galindo's first poetry book, *Personal e intransmisible* (1999) was written while the Civil War was still in effect. In it, we are confronted with a woman who endures, struggles, survives and fearlessly rejects the

¹⁵² Hence, to avoid these generalizations about violence and women, we have included three women's experiences and perspectives on violence in this study.

patriarchal-machista order. Poems like “De la vagina de una reina” which positions a mother as a strong queen and rejects the father figure as the holder of power and verses like “mas no por eso / tengo que soportar / a un hombre perfecto” (10) shows how a woman does not have to put up with a “perfect” man. Poems that speak about death and the forgotten such as “Allá abajo” and “Pedro Tun” depict images of bodies that endured the layers of violence during the war. Her most recent literary text, *Telarañas/Spiderwebs* (2016), contains poems that speak of the aftermath of the war and the new war against women. Two poems in particular, “¿Qué dirán de mí si un día aparezco muerta?” and “Vamos a defendernos” clearly depict the feminicide epidemic. While in *Personal e intransmisible* we witness a body *in the making*, by *Telarañas* we have a body in dissent to the previous making. In other words, the poetic voice is empowered. She refuses to be defined by the external world and composes new possibilities for being and living in the twenty-first century. At times, the textual corporality first presented in her poetry later comes to take on a “real-life” effect in her performances. What we read in her poems later becomes a *living* body, a body in action—words manifest in corporal acts. Poetry in action then, ruptures the limitations of literal, official or corporal discourse, while providing a new context for speech acts that did not exist before to widen the conversation of violence.

Referring to her first poetry book, Galindo shares with Francisco Goldman that “writing is for me a land filled with great fear. For a time, poetry was of supreme importance to me, and I valued it quite a bit, in the same way that I now do my work using the body” (Galindo 5). However, in *Personal e intransmisible* we see a poetic voice that is not afraid to speak up. We infer this from the fact that the entire poetry book is written in capital letters. The poetic voice reveals a woman unafraid of expressing, quite vividly, topics and images that have to do with family, love, prostitution, menstruation, abortion, racism, body image and poetry. With every

poem her confidence grows; she gains a sense of self and authority. The social world in which she was living in is reflected in each poem. Textual images show us how a woman endures pain both in the private and public space, or how a man suffers from poverty due to his race, or how a prostitute tries to make a living, and what the future looks like for a child who is about to be born into such chaotic society.

While *Personal e intransmisible* refers to the complexity of human experiences, in *Telarañas/Spiderwebs* we have a rewriting of the past in present tense. The problems of the past continue in the present poetry book, yet this time the poetic voice intends to process them differently. She refuses to be limited by the fear imposed upon women when we read her happy in the poem “He abierto los ojos y soy feliz.” In other poems, there is a stronger intention to incite action upon the readers geared towards positive action. A poem like “La guerra ha terminado,” for example, speaks about celebrating life when we read verses that encourage us to “despertar y ver la vida con otros ojos” (100) or “salgan a las calles a respirar / a bailar / a tomar / que la vida es muy corta” (101). Other poems are inclusive of those who can create change alongside her, such as “Vamos a defendernos” which incites women to take a stand, “Vamos a defendernos entre todas” (83).

However, there are also many poems in this *Telarañas/Spiderwebs* which speak to someone in particular (society), as a sort of response or dialogue with those who have committed acts of violence. For example, “Celebremos” (88) questions a society that allows the raping of girls (“Salgamos a las calles a violar niñas”), the killing of indigenous people (“Salgamos a los pueblos a matar indios”) or celebrates “nuestra mala mala mala Guatemala” (89). While in *Personal e intransmisible* the poetic voice wanted to fight fire with fire, in *Telarañas* she wants to transform fire into life. In short, *Telarañas* is a book of hope, resistance, and transformation

when read against *Personal e intransmisible*. Put differently, while the first poetry book was evidently personal with the use of the first person, Galindo's second book is promisingly collective as the poems we find in it use the plural "nosotros" or "us."

About a decade after publishing her first poetry book and taking up performance more vigorously, Galindo shares how she moves from the word to the body:

Fernández: ¿Por qué pasaste de la poesía a la performance, a usar directamente tu cuerpo como herramienta expresiva? ¿No bastaban las palabras?

Galindo: No, no es que sintiera que las palabras no eran suficientes... Claro que la palabra tiene la capacidad de generar todo tipo de cosas. Pero yo tenía una sensación en el plexo solar que me decía que para mí no eran suficiente. Se me removía todo por dentro. En mi caso personal, había una sensación real, que la sentía en mi cuerpo, de que yo necesitaba hacer algo más. (Galindo 2017)¹⁵³

To transition from poetry to performance in no way implies that writing is a passive activity. On the contrary, it is what prompted Galindo to take her poetry live. Moreover, performance is an opportunity to transform a reader into a spectator and for the artist to witness her spectator's reactions quite vividly and instantly. Although both reader and spectator can take on passive roles, in performance, even stillness is a noteworthy response or reaction. Galindo can feel and observe the spectator's reactions and emotions through their faces and bodies, as they sit or stand, stare or look away, and enter or leave the space. A performer can access almost immediately when and how the spectator intervenes in the performance by watching or feeling

¹⁵³ Fernández: Why did you go from poetry to performance, to directly use your body as an expressive tool? Were words not enough? Galindo: No, it is not that words were not enough... Certainly the word has the capacity to generate all sorts of things. But I had a sensation in my solar plexus that told me that for me, words were not enough. Everything stirred up in me. In my personal case, there was a real sensation, which I felt it in my body, that I needed to something more."

what he/she does with what he/she is witnessing. In short, turning her poetry into a performance gives her access to a knowledge that is seldom accessible to writers—a response, a reaction.

When studied together—poetry with performance—we have language in writing, language on the body and powerful images, all of which communicate with *Machistañol*'s¹⁵⁴ own multifaceted sociolinguistic styles of expressing violence. Galindo's *oeuvre* contests the power dynamics of *Machistañol* because both body and text become crucial interlocutors in our analysis of femicide and violence against women. To perform violence or to write about it begs the question: which of the two is more powerful—literary or corporal knowledges? Diana Taylor also asks herself this question when she explains, “The concept of performance, as an embodied praxis and episteme, for example, would prove vital in redefining Latin American studies because it decenters the historic role of writing introduced by the Conquest” (Taylor, *Archive & Repertoire* ch 1). I argue that Galindo is able to decenter and expose the relations of power of those who act out violence and speak about violence precisely because she inserts herself both in writing *and* performance. The two mediums, although effective in different manners, allow *woman* to become the center of the discourse on violence.

5.1.2 PERFORMING FEMINISM

To publicly and privately contest the social norms imposed by the patriarchy, or in our case a Machista State, is to perform feminism. A norm that is proliferated by *Machistañol* —the

¹⁵⁴ *Machistañol* as corporal, linguistic and social language is spoken and acted out by machistas who commit acts of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them, primarily women. This language is expressed through the mutilation, dismemberment and disposal of women's bodies in public spaces, one that uses women's bodies as canvases to write, think about, represent, create and oppress women in the twenty-first century.

language of the male order—is that violence against women is socially acceptable. Galindo's performances present us with what is *not* said in or by the machista discourse. What is not said cannot be said except only by a woman.¹⁵⁵ By analyzing her works through a feminist lens, we are empowering the female gaze. Moreover, when we validate a woman's version of the story and listen to how a woman feels about violence committed against her, we can support *her* experience. That is how Galindo performs feminism in her works, by listening to women's stories of violence and critically thinking through them in performance art. In her essay, "Is there a Feminist Aesthetic?" Marilyn French tells us two things to highlight the female gaze in art and literature:

In a work with a feminist perspective, the narrational point of view, the point of view lying behind the characters and events, penetrates, demystifies, or challenges patriarchal ideologies; [and] Feminist art focuses on people as wholes; the human is made up of body and emotion as well as mind and spirit; she is also part of a community, connected to others. (French *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* 69, 70)

This last point about the female gaze being community-oriented, greatly distinguishes it from the male gaze, which tends to be self-centered. By displacing the phallogocentric view of the world, feminist art, along with feminist interpretations, give us the opportunity to demystify and rebuild the social world as well as their subjects.

¹⁵⁵ In "Writing the Body Toward an Understanding of l'Écriture feminine," Ann Rosalind Jones explains Kristeva's point of view on how women should challenge current phallogocentric discourses instead of coming up with new ones because "woman" to Kristeva represents not so much a sex as an attitude, any resistance to conventional culture and language" (249). Although I do not completely agree in not coming up with new discourses, it explains one form of female resistance.

Galindo tries to understand the violent world that surrounds her more collectively than individualistically by embodying the diverse realities experienced by Guatemalan women, not just her own. Galindo explains in an interview:

I cannot separate myself from what happens. It scares me, it enrages me, it hurts me, it depresses me. When I do what I do, I don't try to approach my own pain as a means of seeing myself and curing myself from that vantage; in every action I try to channel my own pain, my own energy, to transform it into something more collective. (Goldman 9)

In short, Galindo's work is fundamentally feminist due to the fact that she sees the human body as a whole, as a collection of emotions and experiences, and tries to demystify the machista view that aims to oversimplify the body politic. One may ask, why the need to embody the collective pain suffered by other bodies? To embody it, to experience the pain allows Galindo to move away from representing it, because to represent pain is not enough for Galindo; it is too passive for her; therefore, she needs to activate the experience in order to better understand it. In Rancière's words,

Representation is not the act of producing a visible form, but the act of offering an equivalent - something that speech does just as much as photography. The image is not the duplicate of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid. [...] It is always an alteration that occurs in a chain of images which alter it in turn. And the voice is not the manifestation of the invisible opposed to the visible form of the image. It is itself caught up in a process of image construction. It is the voice of a body that transforms one sensible event into another, by striving to make us 'see' what it has seen, to make us see what it tells us. (Rancière *The Emancipated Spectator* 93-4)

In short, Galindo's performances are not mere representations of violence because they transform violence so we can see the aspects of violence that are made invisible by official discourse and actors. This is one way in which Galindo's approach to truly understand the violence differs from the Machista State's—she doesn't just "describe" what is happening to these women, she feels and evokes those feelings upon us. The monotone discourse we have repeatedly been exposed to by machista perspectives about violence is unproductive; disrespect and impunity continue to suffocate Guatemalans.¹⁵⁶ What we don't know is how *women* feel or think about the violence committed against them. For the discourse on violence to be a constructive and thorough account of what women experience, we must listen to *female voices*.

The artists in this dissertation are just a sample of a number of very powerful voices that aim to question and decipher the violence committed against those bodies who can no longer speak, who are lost in the statistics, who are, ultimately, dehumanized in every way possible. For Galindo, her own body stands for the collective body of Guatemalans and those who have experienced similar situations. Her body is not necessarily that of the nation; rather, her body is the body of someone who is empathic, of someone who feels an ethical responsibility to *do something*. Galindo substantiates this argument when she says: "Mis trabajos son pequeños actos de resistencia en donde un cuerpo individual es metáfora de un cuerpo social siempre en

¹⁵⁶ According to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), "impunity levels for solving cases of crimes against life have fallen from 95% in 2009 to 72% in 2012, demonstrating—to a certain degree—the influence of the ongoing support provided by CICIG to the MP, through the Special Anti-Impunity Prosecutor's Bureau (FECI) and other bureaus, to tackle criminal structures" (*Sixth Report of Activities of the CICIG* 6).

confrontación” (*El País* “Las imágenes pueden hacer tambalear el silencio” 2012).¹⁵⁷ She resists reality; she resists the “official story,” and she resists the silence that follows these acts of violence. The performances that have to do with *lived* experiences endured by women fuel her creativity in confronting *Machistañol*. She is not speaking for them; on the contrary, her own experience as a Guatemalan woman forces her to reflect on these unjust and perturbing realities: “No es que conscientemente me siento y pienso ‘voy a hacer una obra que exprese la realidad de las mujeres guatemaltecas’, sino que me nace reflejar mi propia condición como mujer guatemalteca. Es inevitable que mi nacionalidad y mi género estarán siempre presentes en mi trabajo” (Galindo “Entre la violencia y la ceguera”).¹⁵⁸

The artist’s empathy to the matters that affect the social life of women in Guatemala derives from her position as a Guatemalan woman. When her interviewer, David Schmidt, asks her if there was anything in particular that inspired her to analyze topics such as violence, torture, and murder in her work, or a specific event she experienced during the war, she explains:

Nada que vaya más allá del hecho de haber nacido en Guatemala. Acá las cosas que pasan, pasan en la banqueta ahí en frente de vos. Tendrías que tener el cuero muy duro para decir que no te interesa, que no sentís empatía. El hecho de que no te pase a vos personalmente no significa que no te afecta. Esa es una característica del movimiento de arte en Guatemala —siempre conlleva una postura muy crítica sobre estas cuestiones sociales. Por supuesto hacemos arte como hacen en cualquier otro lado— pero siempre nos mueven y nos motivan las ganas de reflexionar sobre esas cosas. En mi caso

¹⁵⁷ “My works are small acts of resistance where an individual body is a metaphor for a social body always in confrontation.”

¹⁵⁸ “It is not that I consciously sit and think ‘I am going to perform a piece that expresses the reality of Guatemalan women,’ rather, it originates in me to reflect upon my own condition as a Guatemalan woman. It is inevitable that my nationality and gender will always be present in my work.”

particular, en muchas obras hago con mi cuerpo lo que les sucede a muchas y a muchos.

(Galindo “Entre la Violencia y la Ceguera Entrevista a Regina José Galindo”)¹⁵⁹

For Galindo then, to situate herself as a woman in Guatemala, allows her to take on the task to reflect and then embody another woman’s experience through performance art. Her empathetic performances, which tend to blur the line between life and art, have the capacity to create a sense of community amongst women not only in Guatemala but all over the world. What happens in Guatemala also happens in other countries. Thus, by performing feminism, she is able to appeal to a more global conversation about violence against women. As Lois McNay advises us,

In order to enlarge its understanding of freedom, feminist politics must break out of the masochistic logic of suffering and resituate itself within a broader, political conversation oriented towards ‘diversity and the common, toward world rather than self, and involving conversion of one’s knowledge of the world from a situated (subject) position into a public idiom.’ (McNay 513)¹⁶⁰

This is precisely what we see in the following works, how she presents a local problem—femicide and violence against women— as a world matter, not a woman’s issue.

¹⁵⁹ “Nothing more than the fact of having been born in Guatemala. The things that happen here, they occur on the sidewalk, right there, in front of you. You would have to have very thick skin to say that it does not interest you, that you do not feel empathy. The fact that it does not happen to you personally does not mean that it does not affect you. This is a characteristic of the art movement in Guatemala—it always entails a very critical stance about social matters. Of course, we create art as they do in other places—but we are always moved and motivated by the urge to reflect upon these things. In my case in particular, in many of my works I do with my body what happens to many.”

¹⁶⁰ In the section with quotations she is citing Wendy Brown in her book *States of Injury* (51).

5.2 BODILY UTTERANCES

Silence is performative.
Judith Butler

The body in performance speaks in nonverbal terms, and we understand what it says and does due to local and universally known gestures. While our day-to-day conversations are verbally expressed, the performative power of our body emits a language of its own. Without too much thought, we instantly begin reading each other's body language as soon as we come in contact with one another. For example, even before a friend shares a story and we see her smile, we interpret her to be happy or excited. In a classroom setting, when a student raises a hand, the professor assumes they want to ask a question, so the professor gives the student a nod, meaning that the student can speak. Though this last communicative exchange is silent, we comprehend it due to gestures occurring within a given context. Both spoken and corporally expressed languages are methods by which we communicate with the world. Our capacity to understand them depends on an established historicity within a given time and place, or within a culture.

The history and established communicative method of a society determines whether a speech act and its corporal force will be understood. Some histories are shared amongst many spaces, like the history of violence. There is a universal language that makes violence recognizable across nations, languages, cultures and people, especially today in the time of social media and daily news alerts. When violence is spoken or acted out, most recognize it almost instantly. There are cases of violence that are unspeakable or invisible due to either State terror, social pressure, or because they have been normalized to the point of oblivion. It is these cases of violence that will take up more space in the following pages of our analysis. The performances I selected include matters that are known by most but yet are often forgotten or have become unquestionably accepted as part of the social world of Guatemalan women.

We have already established that a speech act can be enacted as a bodily act. Since “to make an utterance is to perform an act” (Pratt *Toward a Speech Act* 80), “the body [becomes] the rhetorical instrument of expression” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 152). However, Pratt reminds us that for the phrase “You must have another piece of cake” to be understood as an invitation and not a command as the “must” would imply, the speaker must set the appropriate conditions. In other words, capturing the *difference* between a command and an invitation or a threat and a suggestion relies heavily on understanding the context. Hence, this is where speech acts and performance begin to “speak the same language”—context is of the essence for both to have successful conveying. Yet, we must go a step further. It is important to clarify how a performance can become a speech act because such a conversion will allow us to place Galindo’s corporal language on the same playing field as *Machistañol*. The body that speaks in Galindo’s performances asks us to codify it, thus, transforming the bodily act into a speech act, advancing the linguistic process.

If a speech act can take full effect only if the listener comprehends what is said by the speaker, then in performance, achieving meaning requires the spectator to understand what the corporal language expresses in a given piece. Similar to how Pratt brought literature into the realm of speech act theory, I bring performance into the realm of speech acts. The change here is that of the addressed, in other words, we give attention to the spectator rather than the reader. Moreover, just as we never truly know if readers understand or take away what the author intended, in performance, we too face such uncertainty with the spectator. However, due to the fact that we are addressing Galindo’s performances after they have taken place, we have the advantage of being “post-spectators.” A post-spectator is someone who witnesses the performance after it has taken place, yet, more importantly, has access to the archives of the

performance: photos, videos, museum exhibits, conferences, and interviews. These materials provide contextual background to the piece. Additionally, the archives of a work provide us with crucial information that allow us to reach the *felicitous condition* of performance as a speech act.

We so give priority to the aftermath of the performance, thereby signaling a move towards re-activating the performance. Put differently, *the archive can perform* and allow us to formulate new interpretations for not only what a performance meant then, but also what it means today (Taylor *Performance* Ch 8).¹⁶¹ When we encounter Galindo's performances on YouTube or see photographs online and at museum exhibits, our post-spectatorship is impacted. Maybe the impact will never be the same as the ephemeral moment of when the original performance took place; nevertheless, we are affected. In addition to the impact of her performances upon spectators in years to come, "What's interesting about performance studies, [...] is not so much what it "is" but what it enables us to do" (Taylor *Performance* Ch 9). In the case of this dissertation, Galindo's performances allow me to create a Body Language Catalogue to understand her performances as speech acts. Her body speaks; every move or gesture says something. Thus, codifying her gestures at specific moments in her performances will allow me to create a common language, although corporal, that can be interpreted as verbal.

A Body Language Catalogue which codifies the corporal language in the artist's performances will function as our common language or alphabet. This Catalogue establishes a method to interpret non-verbal communication vis-à-vis verbal language, to then convert a performance into a speech act. Such method will help us demonstrate how Galindo's corporal acts contest *Machistañol*, both linguistically and corporally. We had previously asserted that

¹⁶¹ Taylor goes further by proposing that, "Performance studies, I believe, is postdisciplinary in the sense that it resists becoming a discipline with definable limits; it is (forever) an 'emergent' field. If the norm of performance is breaking norms, the norm of performance studies is to break disciplinary boundaries" (*Performance* Ch 9).

there is a language of violence only accessible to the machista mafia order; here then, we are deciphering that language from the bodies that made *Machistañol* possible to begin with. Similar to Rita Segato's book title, *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez*, in Galindo's performances, we have a rewriting of that violence directly on *her* body. A Body Language Catalogue specific to Galindo's performances gives us a way to access the "secret" language of violence against women.

The creation of a Body Language Catalogue is a complex task if we are to incorporate all the possibilities of what a body can say. Just as there is a fluidity to the way our body moves, the catalogue has to be flexible. Without the possibility for new interpretations of corporal doings, we fall into the old conventions and ways of understanding the world. As we know, the body carries corporal knowledges and histories; thus, we have to study the body in particular moments of the performance to highlight those histories.¹⁶² By understanding what the body carries, we can process it, understand it, and create new ways of being. Furthermore, as a political subject and object of her own work, an entire social world is played out directly *on, in and through* her body. By carefully examining the artist's corporal language, we can underscore how and why "Performance is world-making" (Taylor *Performance*).

If performance champions the idea that the body can create a *different* world, then we must disarticulate it. That is, our analysis of a performance must go further than saying that when the artist's eyes are open, she is alert and asking us to open our eyes to the truth, because it could also mean she is referring to the violent numbing or paralysis of a society. Or when Galindo performs nude, we can't assume she is always referring to or contesting the objectification of

¹⁶² Diana Taylor will later challenge us to think about the power dynamics between cultures whose language is non-verbal versus those who communicate (and create) through writing or verbal language.

women. We have to consider whether she is standing or resting on a platform, how her limbs are positioned, whether her eyes are closed or open, and most importantly, what space her body is inhabiting. If we want to reach an (almost) exact understanding of what her non-verbal body is telling us, we must consider not only her body but *all* that comes to play with it to produce an image, a message, a speech act. Due to the fluidity of corporal language, a posture can have an infinite amount of interpretations.

Every performance produces a speech act or multiple speech acts. To extract the verbal from the non-verbal or corporal language of the artist, we take into account the title of the performance, its time and location, the artist's commentary on her own work, and my own interpretation of the piece, as a Guatemalan-American woman. In the Body Catalogue, each bodily act says something in the first person. For example, in the performance *Perra*, the artist uses one hand to carve the word "bitch" on her leg while she uses the other to hold her skin taught. The hand that holds the knife (right hand) speaks "I have the power to resignify this word," while the hand that holds her skin taught speaks, "I decide how much pain this term causes upon my body." By writing out the acts performed by the artist into speech acts, we are able to create *another* language that is written upon the body. However, in contrast to *Machistañol* that writes violence on women's bodies, Galindo's corporal language rewrites the violence to help us decipher *Machistañol* and the enigma of feminicide.

6.0 AN INVITATION TO SENSE THE WORLD WITH FEMALE EYES

As we read Regina José Galindo's performances and poems, we do so by performing an intersectional feminist interpretation, analyzing each piece through the female gaze. Such an analysis allows us to think critically about the intersections of race, gender and class in specific cases of violence against women. If during the Civil War of Guatemala race was the driving force behind the elimination of Indigenous people, in the war against women gender comes to take its place. Class has not remained quiet in the background of these wars; nevertheless, it is an important factor to consider when producing a thorough analysis that can lead us to understand *Machistañol* today.

Our method of analysis is one way to access our goal: find in the artists' works ways in which they demystify and make intelligible the enigma of feminicide and violence against women. On the other hand, the artist's goal is different. For Galindo, it may be sufficient "for the performance to impel the spectators to reflect on the issue. For her, this modest goal is sufficient" (Taylor *Performance* Ch. 7). For some of us, her work impels us to do more than just reflect; perhaps it can propel us to *act*. As we carry out our examination of her performances and poetry, it may be easy to forget Galindo's simple intention: to reflect and resist desensitization, resist the normalization of violence. Guatemalans know violence; they see it and sense it every day. A reflection on violence may be too difficult for them. Hence, what may be too simple a goal for us may be too heavy for those who are currently living in terror, wondering if their mothers, daughters, sisters and wives will make it home.

6.1 HOW MAYA WOMEN DEFEATED AN ARMY TRAINED TO KILL THEM

She is a woman, an Indigenous woman, a poor Indigenous woman. During the thirty-six year long civil war in Guatemala, thousands of people suffered under the hands of the military who were trained to kill. But one particular group endured more than just gunshots, dismemberment and public shame. Specifically, when it came to dealing with women victims, killing was never sufficient, for a woman had to be raped once, twice, or fifteen times, mutilated, and tortured before receiving the final gunshot if the previous number of attempts were unsuccessful. This was the reality of Maya women in the Ixil community, Q'eqchi' women of Sepur Zarco and many others who died in or survived the war. Unsatisfied with the path that came after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the survivors have worked for more than three decades to pave a new road towards justice, recognition and healing. The courage and determination of many women in Guatemala and those who support them has inspired a community of people who want to discuss and move forward from the harrowing and unjust past.

In 2016, eleven surviving women of Sepur Zarco give their testimony in front of the High-Risk Court in Guatemala. They won the “first case of conflict-related sexual violence challenged under Guatemala’s penal code” (“Sepur Zarco: In pursuit of truth, justice, and now reparations” *UN Women*). As the *UN Women* article elaborates: “the bucolic village of Sepur Zarco was the scene of systematic rape and exploitation of indigenous Q'eqchi' women, from 1982 until 1988. The women of Sepur Zarco were used as domestic servants, raped and made to live in slave-like conditions by the Guatemalan military.” For triply marginalized women

(gender, race and class) to have attained such a level of success in a space of power like the legal system is a revolutionary success for all women across the globe.¹⁶³

Before the success of these “Sepur Zarco Grandmothers,” the testimony of Ixil men and women made possible the genocide conviction of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt. The Maya Ixil Genocide Trial began in January 2013. The resilience and community support of the Ixil women in particular, was seen on television worldwide. When each gave their testimony as they wore their traditional *perraje*, or shawl, to cover their faces, one could see other Ixil women in the audience showing their solidarity.¹⁶⁴ A few months later, on May 10th of the same year,¹⁶⁵ “Ríos Montt was found guilty of overseeing the genocide against the Ixil Mayan people that claimed nearly 2000 lives between March 1982 and August 1983. The former dictator was sentenced to 80 years in prison. The watershed case was the first time in the world that a former head of State was found guilty of genocide in its own national courts” (Abbot “Fighting Impunity, Seeking Justice in Guatemala”). Since then, Ríos Montt has died, and the case was overturned and moved to the courts in the municipality of Nebaj in the department of El Quiché. Certainly, these events have not been but hiccups in the trajectory of a relentless Ixil community who “won’t get tired of demanding justice” (*AJR Genocide Trial*).

While cases such as these have forced the Courts and the State to finally acknowledge that genocide took place, an important historical achievement, it is just an example of the changes taking place in Guatemala. For an Indigenous woman to speak up in a country that discriminates her due to not only her gender, but also her race, class, and language, the biggest

¹⁶³ Not only were they made to retell their stories in public court, the defense made sure to continue the violence against them by accusing them of prostitution. In other words, the defense rejected their testimony to publicly shame them once more (Monzón “Vivas, libres, sin miedo” *Prensa Libre*).

¹⁶⁴ Galindo created *Ascención*, a performance to tribute to their struggle and courage.

¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that his conviction was read on Mother’s Day in Guatemala, May 10th.

win has come from the exposure of old wounds engendered by the testimony during the genocide and Sepur Zarco trials. Anthropologist Diane M. Nelson reminds us that to talk about race, class and gender for “both nonindigenous Guatemalans (ladinos) and Maya [...] is a “finger in the wound” (un dedo en la llaga)” (Nelson *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* Ch.1). Thus, the trials against those in power brought about by Indigenous communities has allowed Guatemalans to dig deep into that old wound in order to heal it, both politically and discursively.

As we step into the topic of race in this first section, we engage with performances that speak to a historicity of racism and sexism. Although their history extends far before the Civil War, new forms of sexism and racism have appeared that exceed verbal language. The United States may have trained the Guatemalan military to kill communists during the Cold War, but what the Guatemalan army and State officials did afterwards was unforeseeable. It was “the cultivation of sadism and the deliberate defiance of all taboos” that came to challenge “any notion of the state as the guardian of the human rights of its population” (Franco *Cruel Modernity* 55). Hence, I suggest we consider the possibility of Galindo’s poetry and performances as *performing justice* outside of official parameters. By justice we do not mean by legal means, since that would give too much credit to the Machista State. Rather, the following analyses create alternate interpretations for justice which are founded on healing methods. If the state continues to repeat the same patterns of violence, eliminating the hope to repair the nation from its violent past, these performances interrupt violence precisely to repair a society from so much suffering.

In the words of Maya Kaqchiquel sociologist Emma Chirix, “El racismo representa la condición bajo la cual se puede ejercer el derecho a matar. El papel que juega el Estado es de servidor que se ve obligado a someterse para servir a una raza superior y excluir o matar a una raza inferior” (Chirix “Subjetividad y racismo” 220).¹⁶⁶ Chirix is not merely speaking in theoretical terms. Her words are a reflection of the present situation in most underdeveloped nations with a high concentration of indigenous people. In many cases, and particularly during periods of war, thousands of indigenous bodies have been the means to a brutal and racist end. In fact, during Guatemala’s civil war, 83 percent of victims were Maya and 17 percent were Ladino (CEH 1999). Today, for Maya groups a violent history weighs heavily on their body, mind and spirit.¹⁶⁷ The atrocities they witnessed left a mark, an unhealed wound that an entire country has decided to ignore for more than three decades. This historical condition found its way into Regina Jose Galindo’s performance *Hermana/Sister* (2010), which points to not only the physical damage of racism but the psychological pain that the Indigenous subject continues to experience until today.

Reflecting on *Hermana/Sister*, one finds confirmation of the suggestion that when bodies *suffer* because of injustices, it “ha[s] *something to do* with what is ‘wrong’ about systematic forms of violence” (Ahmed 193, emphasis in original). One of the greatest sociopolitical struggles in Guatemala has been played out on the question of race, particularly between Ladinos and indigenous people. In Guatemala, there are twenty-three Maya groups and over twenty

¹⁶⁶ “Racism represents the condition by which one can exercise the right to kill. The role that the State plays is that of a servant who finds itself obliged to subdue itself for a superior race and exclude or kill an inferior one.”

¹⁶⁷ In McAllister and Nelson’s words, “The military regimes ruling Guatemala almost continuously since 1954 responded to grassroots challenges by directing counterinsurgent violence not only against the bodies of those they perceived as enemies but at the integrity of subaltern forms of life and at the hearts and minds of the population as a whole” (*War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* Intro).

spoken languages.¹⁶⁸ While half of the population is Indigenous, Ladinos, those of mixed race between Indigenous and European descent, make up the other half, and their primary language is Spanish. It is interesting to note that “Ladino” also functions as a pejorative term when used against an indigenous person, because it implies that they have assimilated, in other words, they are *ladinizados*. To utter one has *ladinizado* is one of many examples of how Guatemalan society—including indigenous people—inflicts pain in the psyche of a people through speech acts. Certainly, language has somatic power over a being, and that is what this performance addresses more poignantly.



Figure 2. Regina José Galindo, *Hermana / Sister*.¹⁶⁹

In *Hermana/Sister*, we see how systematic forms of psychological violence have divided a country whose majority is Indigenous, with the other half of the population being either Ladino, Garífuna or Xinca.¹⁷⁰ In Figures 2, an Indigenous woman is inflicting bodily harm upon a Ladina woman. The woman who is clothed is poet Rosa Chávez,¹⁷¹ an indigenous woman whose father is of K'iché descent and whose mother is of Kaqchikel descent. She is wearing

¹⁶⁸ The diversity in language alone presents a separate issue about discursive domination. “Of the approximately six million Mayas, at least four speak one of those dominant languages [k'iche', kaqchikel, mam, y q'echi']” (Arias, “The Maya Movement, Postcolonialism and Cultural Agency” 252).

¹⁶⁹ Except when otherwise indicated, the descriptions of the performances are taken from the artist's own website. Translations to English are all mine. *Mi cuerpo ladino es abofeteado, escupido y castigado por una mujer indígena guatemalteca. My ladino body is slapped, spat on and punished by a Guatemalan indigenous woman* (Guatemala 2010).

¹⁷⁰ The Garífuna are descendants of Africa and the Caribbeans that live on the Atlantic coast of Central America; the Xincas are a non-Maya indigenous group.

¹⁷¹ Chávez is the artist included in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

traditional Maya attire called a *corte* and *huipil*, and as we can see, the roles of speaker and addressed or victim and aggressor have switched. Rather than a Ladino being the protagonist or instigator of violence upon a Maya body, it is Chávez who takes the lead of the narrative in this piece. At first glance, it appears that this is a scene of vengeance where the slave performs upon the master the violence once inflicted upon him, to recall the master-slave analysis by Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth*. According to Fanon, the only way for a slave to assert his existence is through the same method the colonizer/master used against him—violence. Our own analysis does not support this claim, for the use of violence here is meant to invite us to reflect upon the nuances of violence. Violence is not used to make the colonizer/master feel less than or to effectuate a sort of well-deserved punishment, despite Galindo alluding to punishment in her description of this piece. We argue that since the title suggests sisterhood and not enmity, we are asked to read between the lines. The sisterhood is not presented as a homogenous and harmonious union; it instead, points to the how violence can fracture even gender affiliations.

This opening performance speaks to a discourse we aim to make visible that goes beyond violence. Amidst the injustices, violations of bodies, and differences between these two women, there are opportunities for justice and healing through art. This type of analysis allows for what Butler calls insurrectionary speech.¹⁷² In our analysis we appropriate the norm of violence and oppose the historically sedimented effects of the acts of spitting, slapping and whipping. Thus, by seeing these acts in a new light, we can offer a new way to see the future that moves away from force to therapeutic. More significantly, the artist herself is inducing us to see a new future within art by inserting an Indigenous woman in her piece *Hermana/Sister*. The video-

¹⁷² Butler defines insurrectionary speech as, “The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with the past” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 158-9).

performance begins with a conversation on the complex relationship between Indigenous and Ladina women today. Moreover, the piece takes on an intersectional approach to feminism that considers the cultural, racial, class and language differences that can be used either to move forward or remain unchanged in the fight against violence.

A hasty interpretation would tell us that the message in this performance is that violence is the only avenue to find justice and heal the wounds of the past. Moreover, some may argue that Galindo positions herself deliberately as the sacrificial object, the Ladina who will take responsibility for all the damage her race has caused upon the Indigenous subject.¹⁷³ While this reading is appropriate, we suggest de-centering the Ladina and centering the Maya woman in the performance. Specifically, we suggest a reading that centers around the idea of empathizing with the pain of the Indigenous woman. For instance, the gaze of the audience quickly fixates on the body that is being harmed, but the Ladino body is not at the center of this narrative. Quite the reverse; the actor here is a Maya woman who has endured the spitting, slapping and back whipping (literally and figuratively) for the centuries before this one.¹⁷⁴ The carefully selected bodily acts indicate that a previous speech act had to take place before the bodily reaction. Here, the previous speech acts of violence have to do with the offensive language acted out upon Maya bodies, reminding them of “knowing your place,” or the various demonstrations of hatred towards the *other* in social and linguistic life.

¹⁷³ “Con ese gesto de autohumillación y de autopurificación, de reconstitución del vínculo social por medio de la violencia redentora, en la cual ella se ofrece como víctima sacrificial propiciatoria, Galindo busca interpelar a las mujeres ladinas, y en general a la población ladina, para que asuma humildemente su responsabilidad histórica con la violencia, realizando un acto de contrición que permita ajustar cuentas con la historia de la dominación y el colonialismo interno” (Villena Fiengo “El Anti-ceremonial público en la obra de Regina José Galindo” 187).

¹⁷⁴ There also exists the possibility that a Ladino spectator may be insulted by this video-performance if (s)he observes from a stance of superiority.

The speech and corporal acts of violence in this piece speak to a double violence—physical and mental; that is, both body and mind are implicated in these acts. For the purposes of understanding the racial relevance in this piece, we will refer to Chávez as representing indigenous bodies and Galindo the ladino bodies. The slapping, spitting and whipping are acts we easily recognize because they carry a historicity of violence. For instance, spitting on another's face usually occurs as a response to a prior comment that was offensive or disrespectful. The spitting is a way to express disgust or anger at such speech act. A slap, on the other hand, is a reaction to a previous statement that has incurred humiliation or injury. Finally, the whipping on the back not only denotes slavery but speaks to the power and abuse of one body over the other, as in the dynamics of the ladino race over the Maya. While all these corporal acts are non-verbal, there is a readability to them. These are corporal and linguistic confrontations between two races, two belief systems, two cultures. We examine these confrontations from a perspective that moves away from machista constructions of the social world.

When we see a Maya woman spit on the face of a Ladina we think it is an expression of anger or disgust. While the dominant social discourse in Guatemala has taught us that the indigenous body is abject in comparison to the ladino body, here, the discourse is a different one.¹⁷⁵ Rosa Chávez redefines spit to give it a curative value. The saliva in this piece represents the medicine with which Chávez is going to heal the accumulated anger or disdain that Galindo's

¹⁷⁵ I am referring to Kristeva's idea of abjection where "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (*Powers of Horror* 4). Furthermore, Caroline Rodrigues talks about the abjection of Galindo's pregnant body in her article "Performing domination and resistance between body and space: The transversal activism of Regina José Galindo" which is pertinent to the performance, *Mientras, ellos siguen libres*.

ladino body holds against the Indigenous individual. In a poem from her poetry book *Quitapenas*, Chávez takes the negative connotation of spitting on someone's face and transforms it into a positive speech act.

Me escupiste
por placer y por desprecio
vos ignorás que la saliva
es una gran medicina.

Chávez *Quitapenas* 26

While spitting on someone's face most commonly intended to injure or demean the self of the other, in the poem, spit functions precisely to cure the other. Therefore, in this performance, as in the poem, a violent act turns into a moment of healing. By resignifying language and a corporal act and Chávez immersing her Maya epistemology, allows for a rupture with the violent historicity of the spit act.

The resignification of acts that are meant to injure continues in the second image. Here, Chávez, an indigenous body is whipping a ladino body on the back—the spine which holds our body together as human beings. Indisputably, the back is the site where slave masters would express their fury upon slaves, which speaks to a history of domination and prejudice.¹⁷⁶ However, if we consider the back through yogic philosophy, we appreciate that the spine is where we hold onto tension and unresolved emotions.¹⁷⁷ The upper back, especially, is where we hold the emotion of anger.¹⁷⁸ If in the first image the Maya body is finally able to express her

¹⁷⁶ It is worth noting that the back is a body part that tends to be hidden from public view. At the same time that the violence doesn't damage the slave's aesthetic value, it hides the crime and makes such crime a kept secret between master and slave—inflicting further trauma upon the slave.

¹⁷⁷ In yoga, the spine is representative of our health and wellbeing. As the common phrase goes, "You're only as healthy as your spine."

¹⁷⁸ In his enlightening book *BodyMind*, Ken Dychtwald explains how "the spine becomes the 'garbage pile' for these unwanted feelings and unresolved conflict [...] as they continue to

anger upon a race that made her feel inferior, here, the whipping with a stick speaks to a shared release. On the one hand, the Indigenous woman is able to release her fury with the whipping, while simultaneously unleashing the troubles the Ladina carries on her back.¹⁷⁹ Put differently, this is a moment of double healing, where one woman lets go of her anger and the other releases the knots of negative energy she's been carrying against her *sister*.

In indigenous communities across Guatemala, and different parts of the world, there are numerous ways to cleanse stagnant energy, a spell, or the aura and chakras in the body. In many Latino cultures, to perform a spiritual cleanse, or *barrido*, a shaman uses plants to purify the energy in the body, as we see Chávez holding one.¹⁸⁰ In this performance, Chávez takes on the role of a Maya healer or *curandera*, to cleanse the energy that is stagnant in Galindo's upper body when we see her whip Galindo's back. The cleanse is meant to release unproductive emotions and energy to allow her ladino body to sense life differently from the racist and machista ideologies that have been carried over for centuries. In addition, the *barrido* brings to light the idea that ladinos and Indigenous individuals can work together if there is mutual respect of each other's cultural practices. A reading of this image that moves away from its violent historicity allows for an interpretation that shows a fostering of healing instead of resentment. While "the spine is in a very real sense the 'backbone' of the bodymind," the focus on the back is really an attempt to release those limiting structures that hold up an entire society: discrimination, racism and sexism (Dychtwald *Bodymind* 181). These two acts of release and

accumulate, congestion in these muscles increases and the feelings begin to grow into anger and then rage. If unexpressed, this rage will translate itself into spite and bitterness" (181).

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted that the black circle on Galindo's back is a tattoo, not a wound that came about due to the whipping.

¹⁸⁰ In Guatemala, *limpias*, or cleanses of all kinds are commonly used by indigenous people and less frequently by ladinos. Despite the negative connotation of witchcraft or *brujería*, today we are seeing a surge in these spiritual cleanses as they are discussed more openly.

healing—spitting and whipping— rather than providing an illustration of violence, provide the indigenous individual a sense of agency and help the ladino body release pressure from an unhealthy “backbone,” symbolic of ladino society.

In the last image, the slap on the face is a final wake-up call. A slap on the face is most commonly interpreted as a reaction to humiliation or injury, when someone has said something offensive to another. Though this is a common interpretation, here, we interpret the Indigenous body as prompting the ladino body to react, to wake up to the violence that affects them *both*. As we know, after the civil war a new type of war emerged in Guatemala, a war against women with an accompanying rise in feminicides. Violence against women is not just an indigenous woman’s issue, it is an epidemic that affects all women. Hence, the Maya woman aims to open up the other woman’s eyes to the reality that *all women* live in a society where they are at the hands of a society trained to kill women. In other words, the face slap is in fact saying, “Wake up sister! We have to fight together, not against each other.”

In the beginning of our analysis we are presented with a confrontation between women of two different races, a ladino and an indigenous woman. After approaching the performance from a new perspective, not from that of historicity but that of feminism, we see how the race difference becomes slightly obscured, how the Maya woman comes to take the main stage and how performing violence in fact becomes a curative act. Moreover, through the re-opening of the wound of race, we are able to see glimpses of sisterhood, where a Maya woman and a Ladina are able to coexist amidst the violence and move away from the racist notions that place these two women always in confrontation. By decentering the narrator of a history of violence from a machista perspective to that of a feminist interpretation, race here no longer separates. On the contrary, in letting go of the hatred and anger held within their bodies through their violent

actions, they are able to create new bodies free of subjugating histories. In the performance *Mientras, ellos permanecen libres/ Meanwhile, they remain free*, the healing process is more arduous due to the fact that a woman has to face her pain privately.

The multi-layered violence indigenous women endure in postwar times is precisely what Galindo presents to us in *Mientras, ellos permanecen libres/ Meanwhile, they remain free*.¹⁸¹ The title speaks to the fact that while women continue to seek justice and attempt to heal from a violent past, the soldiers, state officials and all those who were complicit during the war are roaming the streets of Guatemala, free.



Figure 3. Regina José Galindo, *Mientras, ellos siguen libres / Meanwhile they remain free*.¹⁸²

As Galindo lays eight months pregnant, bare naked on a bed, bound at the ankles and wrists with real umbilical cords, we are presented with a rape scene pleading to be resolved. Within closed walls, the rape scene speaks to the silence that exists both literally and figuratively around the experiences of thousands of women who were subjected to sexual violence during the war. Prior

¹⁸¹ On her website, Galindo includes the following testimonies as part of the piece: “*Me ataron y me vendaron los ojos, tenía tres meses de embarazo, pusieron sus pies sobre mi cuerpo para inmovilizarme. Me encerraron en un pequeño cuarto sin ventanas. Les escuchaba decir malas palabras de mí. De repente vinieron al cuarto, me golpearon y me violaron. Empecé a sangrar mucho, en ese momento perdí a mi bebé.*”– C 18311. Abril, 1992. Mazatenango, Suchitepequez. Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio. “*Fui violada consecutivamente, aproximadamente unas 15 veces, tanto por los soldados como por los hombres que vestían de civil. Tenía siete meses de embarazo, a los pocos días aborté.*”– C 16246. Marzo, 1982. Chinique, Quiché. Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio. This performance took place in 2007 in Guatemala City.

¹⁸² Con ocho meses de embarazo, permanezco atada a una cama-catre, con cordones umbilicales reales, de la misma forma que las mujeres indígenas, embarazadas, eran amarradas para ser posteriormente violadas durante el conflicto armado en Guatemala. / Eight months pregnant, I remain tied up on a bed-cot, with real umbilical cords, the same way that pregnant indigenous women were tied up to be later raped during the armed conflict in Guatemala. (Edificio de Correos. Guatemala. 2007).

to the genocide trial and Sepur Zarco trials, no one believed that there was an intentional war against the reproduction of indigenous bodies.¹⁸³ Hence, this performance impresses upon the spectator what is easy to ignore in a statistical report—*sí hubo genocidio*.

In the report *Guatemala, Memoria del Silencio*, published by the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) in 1999, we find out that pregnant indigenous women were raped, tortured and forced to abort during the most atrocious years of the civil war.¹⁸⁴ The silence during the war and after the publication of this report successfully enacted speech acts that effectuated shame, discomfort and pain upon the victims. After giving testimony to the many attempts at eliminating the indigenous body from the nation, no one believed Maya communities or cared to acknowledge their experiences.¹⁸⁵ Certainly some “measures” were taken to prove that things would be different after the signing of the Peace Accords, such as “El reconocimiento de la identidad y derechos de los pueblos indígenas,” and more importantly, acknowledging that Guatemala is “una nación de unidad nacional multiétnica, pluricultural y multilingüe” (*Peace Accords*).¹⁸⁶ Although part of the Peace Accords claimed to “conocer plenamente la verdad sobre las violaciones de los derechos humanos y los hechos de violencia ocurridos en el marco

¹⁸³ As I stated in the introduction, the anti-communist discourse justified the killing of Indigenous people in the popular discourse. In addition, not many Guatemalans took the time to read the report by the Historical Clarification Commission in 1999.

¹⁸⁴ “The Truth Commissions acknowledged that the majority of raped women were indigenous, an estimated 88.7 percent in Guatemala” (Franco 79).

¹⁸⁵ I should mention that Rigoberta Menchu’s testimonio, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, published in 1983, initiated international awareness of the atrocities committed against the Maya in Guatemala.

¹⁸⁶ The acknowledgement of the identity and rights of the indigenous” and “a nation that is united by its multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual make up.”

del enfrentamiento armado interno,”¹⁸⁷ it did not mention specific actions the State would take once having this information.

The findings of the Truth Commissions tell us that preventing the reproduction of Indigenous individuals was premeditated, and in fact, genocidal if we consider that is only women who can reproduce a people, a nation, and in the case of the Maya woman, she is in charge of passing on the cultural knowledge from generation to generation. Given the hatred against the Indigenous subject, the army—and by implication the State— took on the role of Mother during the war by determining who is worthy of life. In other words, “wartime rape can be understood as a mark of sovereignty acted out on the body of women” where woman’s freedom to do as she pleases with *her* body, is supplanted by a machista discourse of domination where the Father is the Creator (Franco 80).¹⁸⁸ The difference between a Father in the position of Creator instead of the Mother is that the former uses violence. In other words, Father destroys to create; the State and machista institutions destroyed indigenous communities with the intention to create a white-Ladino Guatemala. We can see an example of the intentional annihilation of indigenous bodies from a testimony where men “Abrieron la panza de una mujer embarazada y sacaron el nene y al nene le pusieron un palo por atrás hasta que salió de su boca” (CEH; C 11162. Ixcán, Quiche).¹⁸⁹ To create for *him* is to dehumanize, torture and kill not only the biological creator but also her fruit, “Estaba embarazada, la violan, luego la cortan con cuchillo degollándola y finalmente le abren el vientre, ya tiene ocho meses de embarazo, y le arrancan el

¹⁸⁷ “to clarify the real truth about violations against human rights and learn the facts about the violence produced within the armed conflict confrontation.”

¹⁸⁸ Franco adds, “As a result of military service, men become machista and disrespectful, with the result that they violate all the cultural norms of family and community” (*Cruel Modernity* 80).

¹⁸⁹ “They opened a pregnant woman’s belly and ripped out the baby from her, and then they stuck a stick into the baby’s back until it came out through its mouth.”

niño” (CEH; C 2309. Octubre, 1981. Uspantán, Quiché).¹⁹⁰ These lived experiences surface in the performance *Mientras, ellos siguen libres*. It points to the extreme dehumanization of women’s bodies during the armed conflict.

Ripping away these women’s subjectivity not only physically but more significantly, socially, left the witnesses *to* and survivors *of* these atrocities with psychological trauma regarding life, hatred and death. Unquestionably, “the army and civil patrol commanders used rape to denigrate women, they sought to destroy them physically and mentally” (González Izás *War by Other Means* 405). What these acts express upon a people is that some bodies are not worthy of life. Put differently, “the rejection of genocide is not only a refusal of any official responsibility, but also a denial of deep trauma and of the ethnic personhood of an entire people” (Palacios “Scars that Run Deep” 146). Thus, the killing of indigenous bodies, especially pregnant women, emitted what Pratt calls “felicitous” speech acts to Indigenous individuals—their bodies are not welcomed in society and their pain is for them to endure on their own.

Moreover, there is another side to this violence—the trauma of being a rape survivor. Talking about rape brings pain, suffering and shame to many families. Such shame is especially impactful for an indigenous woman who lives within her community, as opposed to one who lives in the city, because the former survivor risks being ousted from her community. Thus, talking about what happened is a double-edge sword. First, these women are considered damaged goods and second, they are to be “condemned by a patriarchal community” where the

¹⁹⁰ “She was pregnant, they rape her, later they slit her throat with a knife and finally they open her womb, she was eight months pregnant, and they rip out the baby from her womb.”

husband blames the woman for putting herself at risk (Franco 78).¹⁹¹ The trauma and imposed identity of “victim” are matters of the past that demand healing in this piece.

In her chapter, “Scars That Run Deep: Performing Violence and Memory in the Work of Regina José Galindo and Rosa Chávez” published in *Human and Environmental Justice in Guatemala*, Rita M. Palacios argues that the works by these two artists makes “explicit what the state attempts to conceal: a violated body that ails and that demands healing, a body that is political, female, Ladino, and Indigenous” (164). In regards to Galindo’s performances, Palacios highlights the fact that Galindo presents violence *in media res*, thus requiring the viewer to *do something* to complete the performance (“Scars That Run Deep” 150). In this performance in particular, that *doing* can take many forms: “The viewer can turn away, but at that moment her decision to do so has acquired the significance of a moral choice: to witness or not to witness; to empathize or not to empathize; to remember or to forget” (Palacios “Scars That Run Deep” 150). What are we as post-spectators going to do with these images? More importantly, I think Galindo

¹⁹¹ The Truth Commission in Guatemala made a separate volume for violence against women which explained that in addition to the 1,465 cases documented, there was an estimated 9,411 that could not be documented because many women died as a result of rape and torture and because the surviving victims often felt guilt and shame and so found it difficult to narrate the experience (Franco 79; CEH). In 2013 when the Genocide Trial began in Guatemala against former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, María C.G. explained how her husband was incapable of sympathizing with her experience when she told him of being raped by soldiers: “They pushed me down and a soldier held my arms while another two raped me. The third didn’t do anything to me because he saw I was practically dead, so they left. I grabbed my child and ran, leaving all the food behind. I went home and told my husband what had happened, and he said I was to blame for having left the house instead of staying with the children. I said, how can I stay here when my children are dying from hunger? He said that it was only because we were living in such a difficult situation that he pardoned me” (*National Security Archive*). <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/guatemala/genocide/round2/may27.pdf>

is asking us how *we* are going to redress the sexual violations that still remain unaddressed in 2007, the year when this performance took place.¹⁹²

One way spectators may respond to this piece is by distinguishing whether they are going to react with guilt or responsibility. Given that the performance took place in Guatemala City, she is in fact interpellating Guatemalans. It is clear that we are talking about a rape scene that directly refers to the sexual crimes committed against indigenous bodies, even more macabrely to women who were pregnant. To feel guilty implies that we have forgotten what happened, that we see ourselves detached from the other's experience or worse, that we have done nothing about that guilt that lies dormant within us. Certainly, one can analyze this performance from the perspective of culpability, but that would entail passivity in the viewer. This performance is calling forth activity; it is an invitation to join the discourse on violence against women given how today we continue to see cases of feminicide. The performance's relevance transcends time. The feeling of responsibility on the other hand, has the potential to motivate Guatemalans to join the collective struggle that is empowered by the truth of thousands of women's stories. Furthermore, widening the scope of violence encourages people to begin to speak up about the matter so that it is not only one woman's issue, but a global issue that affects us all.

For example, let us consider the #metoo movement in the United States. Leading with the idea of "empowerment through empathy," African-American civil rights activist Tarana Burke started the metoo movement in 2006 to find pathways of healing so that women do not feel alone as victims of sexual violence. It took over a decade for the hashtag #metoo to take the

¹⁹² Galindo proposes this idea of resurfacing the past to move past it in her performance *Suelo común* (2013), which took place in Slovenia. The artist states that "En Eslovenia, como en Guatemala estamos parados sobre un pasado escondido, del que poco se habla, que nos negamos a desenterrar." What performances like *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* and *Suelo común* have in common is their attempt to stop us from creating a society based on forgotten histories and its most vulnerable victims.

conversation on sexual violence to a national, and soon after global, discourse. In 2017 women all over the world were using the hashtag to destigmatize the act of surviving and to support women across the world to speak up against the structures of power that allow the proliferation of sexual violence against women.¹⁹³ Now, I am not necessarily suggesting that Galindo's performances are equivalent to a movement, but her work certainly opens up a space to have such conversations within Guatemala and internationally. The relevance of sexual violence today reminds us that the patriarchy and machismo are a transnational network.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, women too are fighting on a globally conscious level.

Let us return to the way in which Galindo's body is calling for empathy or responsibility through corporal acts. If we break down the position of her body into speech acts, we come up with an invitation, or, an ethical demand. The way in which her legs are forced wide open reveal the theme of the invitation—women and violence. Moreover, the old saying of “my hands are tied” takes on a literal meaning when we see the umbilical cords wrapped around her hands and ankles. This piece is not a mere replica of the force used against indigenous women during the armed conflict. While the piece may be uncomfortable to witness, she is literally giving the spectator the opportunity to disentangle the truth. However, she cannot find justice alone because she is constricted. With her eyes wide open, she tells us that she knows who is roaming free while she remains within closed doors. Furthermore, the fact that she is eight months pregnant

¹⁹³ All of this information can be found on the organization's webpage online: metoomvmt.org.

¹⁹⁴ During the editing of this section, Justice Brett Kavanaugh was sworn into the Supreme Court despite Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's compelling testimony which detailed how he sexually assaulted her in high school. It is stories like hers that remind us that we have a lot of work to do because the Patriarchy continues to silence women's lived experiences of violence. The manner in which women discuss these injustices is diverse, the goal is to not stop talking about it.

points to the urgency of the matter so that the new generation along with her unborn child can come into a different world.¹⁹⁵

This raw performance breaks with the disturbing silence that oppresses the voice of many women from telling their story. A voice says: “While they remain free, I feel imprisoned by a harrowing experience. Help me to speak up. Join me in disclosing the perpetrators who committed sexual violence against me.” This is not a mere representation of a rape scene. The piece changes the paradigm of the Truth Commissions by speaking up in the present, by bringing to the foreground the fact that this injustice and pain has not healed. It is a political demand, a protest, a call to all women so that together they can break with the past attempts to forget. This body does not permit us to forget, because forgetting is what allows the cycle to repeat itself. By unveiling the different layers of sexual violence—silence, intimidation, repressed memory, pain, shame, defeat—this performance makes it possible to tackle each layer one at a time. More importantly, this piece empowers the voice and experience of the victim, consequently turning Galindo’s body into a platform where resiliency and strength can become the new descriptors for women who endured violence during the armed conflict. In other words, there is a rupture with the passivity that shame and guilt bring upon a survivor that pushes us to think about the resiliency of those women who are still alive today.

While the narrative around the testimonies of thousands of civil war survivors primarily focused on telling the truth about what happened in the past, this performance allows us to think about those events in the present because there has not been closure. Something similar happens

¹⁹⁵ Ramírez Blanco offers us another reading of the image of a pregnant woman, *Ya no se trata de desmontar la mística de la maternidad utilizando las herramientas del psicoanálisis y un tono reflexivo y científico. Hay tan sólo una cruda exhibición de unas condiciones que pretenden ignorarse, la enorme violencia asociada al proceso de gestación para numerosísimas mujeres del mundo*” (Julia Ramírez Blanco 437).

with the poem “Aunque el cuchillo metieron hasta dentro”/ “Although they stuck a knife inside” from Galindo’s poetry book *Telarañas* (2015) where we see women sending us messages of resistance from their deathbeds:

Aunque el cuchillo metieron hasta dentro
Rodaron nuestras cabezas
Quemaron nuestras lenguas

Aunque forzaron nuestras vaginas
y sacaron de dentro los fetos

no estamos muertas.

Sin pellejo en los huesos
bajo veintiséis años de tierra

seguimos aquí.¹⁹⁶

Telarañas 75

This is a testimonial poem where we hear the voices of women who have formed an underground collective to resist being forgotten. In other words, they are fighting from their tombs. The candid and uncouth use of language in this poem is as disturbing as the images of the previous performance. There is no elegant or civil way to discuss the atrocities committed against indigenous women during the war. The author will not embellish facts to please the reader. Instead, the poetic voice warns us that although these women may be buried in the massive graveyards, as she performs in *Tierra / Earth*,¹⁹⁷ their souls are still present. The violation carries

¹⁹⁶ English translations of poems can be found in Appendix. All are my translations unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁹⁷ From the artist’s website about this performance: – *¿Cómo mataban gente? –preguntó el fiscal.*

– *Primero ordenaban al operador de la máquina, al oficial García, que cavara un hoyo. Luego los camiones llenos de gente los parqueaban frente al Pino, y uno por uno, iban pasando. No les disparaban. Muchas veces los puyaban con bayoneta. Les arrancaban el pecho con las bayonetas, y los llevaban a la fosa. Cuando se llenaba la fosa dejaban caer la pala mecánica sobre los cuerpos.* El anterior testimonio narra una de las formas en que el Ejército construía las

on despite time, “bajo veintiséis años de tierra/ seguimos aquí.” The mourning is incomplete. The use of “aunque” in the past tense and the last verses expressed in present tense: “no estamos muertas/ [...] / seguimos aquí” confirm its incompleteness. Thus, we have to bring these women to light to finalize their mourning.

The poem redirects the conversation from death to life, from the past to the present henceforth effectuating that the reader see and feel violence differently. The conjunction “aunque,” or “although,” which begins the poem, connects two different discourses on violence. The first discourse, which we see in the first two stanzas, focuses on what acts the military committed against female bodies. The second discourse is that of women who are now skin and bones—they are speaking from their graves. They are still waiting to be unearthed. The military cut off their tongues, so they fight back with their bodies, the “evidence” that needs to come to the surface. The act of cutting off the tongue alone highlights the fact that there was a double intention on the part of the military to not only mute their speech while they were alive, but also postmortem. Women were prevented from ever speaking again in this lifetime or the next. However, declaring that they are alive, “no estamos muertas,” astutely demystifies the machista expressions of violence. This exemplifies how a feminist discourse on violence counters the machista discourse.

Certainly, it is their cadavers that remain, not a breathing body, but the central point here is that the body speaks louder than words. We can definitely see that in *Mientras, ellos siguen libres*, where the artist remains silent and yet we have multiple readings and understandings of what her body is speaking to us. Likewise, in the poem it is a body which rematerializes to negate any power the State and its officials attempted to previously effectuate upon her. Both

fosas previo a asesinar y tirar los cuerpos dentro y fue escuchado durante el juicio por genocidio contra Ríos Montt y Sánchez Rodríguez. Guatemala 2013.

performance and poem speak to the power of corporal and written language when it comes to disclosing a tumultuous violent past. They give us a visual and a verbal understanding of what women endured during the war. More importantly, these pieces blur the line between life and art by inserting themselves in the work by historians, archivists, archeologists and truth commissions. For instance, the poem highlights that a cadaver can speak. In addition, the performance emphasizes that there is no need for verbal speech when corporal positions emit a language of their own. Both the living body in *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* and the corpse in “Aunque” are mediums that have the potential to contest the discourse on violence.

While Galindo’s pieces prevent us from forgetting the women who were victims and survivors of sexual violence, the quite literal “unearthing” of old National Police files and exhumation of bodies from mass grave sites brought these bodies to life. In 2005 a miracle occurred in Guatemala. In an old abandoned building delegates from the Procurator for Human Rights (*Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos*, PDH) office discovered “stacks of police files dating to the first decade of the nation’s police force, in 1882” (AHPN).¹⁹⁸ These papers were especially important because they held information about what happened during the civil war, 1960-1996. What these “paper cadavers” revealed were names of state officials and police officers, and the names of thousands of people they tortured, killed and made disappear. Many officials were sentenced to prison after their names came to light.¹⁹⁹ Families finally had a ray of

¹⁹⁸ The *Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional*, or AHPN, ’s staff has digitized and catalogued the Archive’s contents, which can be found online at https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/about_ahpn The finding of old police files inspires Rodrigo Rey Rosa’s novel *El material humano* (2009)/ Human Matter. This work is a blend of fiction, history, journalism and biography as it tells us the story of a man’s experience in his country’s most sanguineous years.

¹⁹⁹ “In January 2016, investigations led to the arrests of 18 former military officers implicated in two prominent cases” (Malkin *New York Times* A8).

hope in finding out whether their relatives had been made to disappear or murdered.²⁰⁰ In addition, the arduous work of the Director and one of the founding members of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (F.A.F.G.), Fredy Peccerelli, has uncovered bodily remains in mass graves sites throughout Guatemala, primarily in many indigenous communities.²⁰¹ After sending these cases for DNA testing, Peccerelli returns the bone fragments to their respective families so they can give their loved ones an appropriate burial and gain some peace in having the answers to the questions they've been asking themselves for decades.²⁰² For Pecereelli, to discover these bodies is to “give voice to the dead in a way no one else could” (Jones “The Secrets in Guatemala’s Bones”).

While in forensic anthropology a corpse speaks to the anthropologist about what it endured prior to its death, in *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* Galindo’s body becomes a piece of evidence that narrates the experiences women endured during the war. At the beginning of our analysis of this performance we mentioned that the artist’s body was a rape case pleading to be solved. Her mute, alert and immobile body speaks about feeling imprisoned in the past while at the same time asks us to help her seek justice. This body invites us to find answers directly on her body as she lays there pregnant, carrying the new generation in her womb. In the poem “Aunque” we saw the poetic voice giving us even more clues to disentangle the many cases of sexual violence by pointing to the evidence that lies right underneath us—bones. These two

²⁰⁰ In the documentary, *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (2012) by filmmakers Pamela Yates, Paco de Onís, Peter Kinoy, a live film is presented of when Yates interviewed Rios Montt about the period from the armed conflict up until the discovery of these National Police Files.

²⁰¹ I recommend his TED talk titled, “A forensic anthropologist who brings closure for the ‘disappeared’” which explains more about his work and the accomplishment of identifying thousands of bodies so that especially Maya families have a “body” to bury and mourn.

²⁰² In 2016, the New York Times Magazine published an article, “The Secrets in Guatemala’s Bones” explaining Peccerelli’s work. In this article we see Peccerelli with the family and friends of Roberto Xol at his funeral. Xol is one of hundreds of bodies that Peccerelli’s team has identified and returned to their families.

pieces set the stage for the performance *La verdad*, where the artist reads actual testimonies presented in court.



Figure 4. Regina José Galindo, *La verdad / The Truth*.²⁰³

Performed only months after the Genocide Trial in Guatemala, *La verdad* shows us an anesthetized Galindo struggling to speak the words Ixil women presented as testimony in front of the Court, the dictator that ordered these violations, and the world watching the trial progress. The testimonies the artist chose to read for this performance focus on the inhumane acts which women's bodies were subjected to during the war. The testimonies tell us about a woman who carried and gave birth to the child of her rapist: *Hay quienes me dijeron que lo regale, o que lo mate, y yo digo, cómo lo voy a regalar, cómo lo voy a matar, si es mi hijo*.²⁰⁴ Other testimonies tell about the time that a daughter was raped in front of her mother as she screamed for her mother to help her (minute 52); or how a school director was forced to group all the young middle school girls so that the army could rape them, one by one, as the school administrator watched, incapable of intervening (minute 31); finally, she presents testimony of how babies were snatched from their mothers to be later smashed against the wall (minute 22). Each brutal

²⁰³ Durante una hora leo testimonios de sobrevivientes del conflicto armado en Guatemala, mientras un dentista intenta silenciarme, anestesiándome la boca, una y otra vez. *For an hour I read testimonies from survivors of the armed conflict in Guatemala, while a dentist attempted to silence me, anesthetizing my mouth, over and over again.* (Centro de Cultura de España. Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala. 2013).

²⁰⁴ "There are those who told me to give it away, or to kill it, and I say, how am I going to give it away, how am I going to kill it, if it is my son."

experience exceeds the previous one in the hour-long performance. Each story reveals facts the Machista State attempted to keep hidden for decades.

Playing with the idea of a desensitized society and the brutal experiences that can leave a woman numb and speechless, Galindo hires an anesthesiologist to inject her with small doses of anesthesia to purposefully impede her from speaking the truth, *la verdad*.²⁰⁵ Towards the last twenty minutes of the hour-long piece, she becomes physically incapable of speaking clearly; her speech begins to slur. The interpretations that can be elicited from this performance are endless. One interpretation champions the women who testified, focusing on the way in which Indigenous women gained political agency by telling their side of the story. In other words, their truth became validated when the Court convicted José Efraín Ríos Montt of committing genocide.

The conviction of a former dictator in his native country was a historical moment for Guatemala and for humanity at large. There was hope in the justice system even if just for a few days. The conviction decision was overturned shortly thereafter on procedural grounds, not evidentiary, thus, the testimonies by hundreds of Ixil survivors were still very much valid. Despite this technicality, this performance underscores that the testimonies and the women who gave them had achieved a break with the “official truth” that the State had been feeding its citizens for more than three decades— that there had been no genocide. Thus, what they tell us is a *different* truth, one that had been told before in reports like *Guatemala: Nunca más* and Truth Commission files, but that now the whole world is aware of due to the global broadcasting of the Genocide trial case. Therefore, *La verdad* is not a performance that merely replicates the witness

²⁰⁵ It is important to note that this is one of few performances in which Galindo speaks. The first one, *Lo voy a gritar al viento* (1999), she reads her poems aloud as she hangs from an arch as we previously discussed. When Galindo uses verbal speech in her performances it is to contest the State’s silencing of women and their experiences. Here, in *La verdad* and later in *Nada nos calla* (2018) to speak up, to scream is a way to pierce through the silencing veil of *Machistañol*.

stand and places a Ladina woman to read the testimonies by indigenous women—it is a ritual that cleanses and breaks with the past. It is a piece that shines light on the fact that these women’s stories forged a rupture with who can tell the truth and how one can interrupt the systems of power that aim to prevent one from entering them.

La verdad is about gaining agency in the reactivation of a memory that empowers the women who gave their testimony in front of the world. Following Rancière’s line of thinking, in a regime of visibility regarding the arts, art “renders [itself] autonomous and [...] this autonomy [is linked] to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making” (Rancière *Politics of Aesthetics* 22). The violent memories Galindo expresses and makes visible in the form of speech acts, reactivates their force and consequently, allows these speech acts to gain autonomous power in the present. We can see her performing agency when there is a continuous effort by the anesthesiologist to silence her speech.²⁰⁶ In the performance, the male anesthesiologist takes the role of the silencer, more specifically, the machista State who holds not only physical power over a woman but also linguistic influence over what she says. The syringe becomes the weapon of choice to achieve both, to silence and manipulate her speech. Yet this woman who keeps her gaze down and holds her composure to not show any sign of weakness is not alone. The woman

²⁰⁶ We can also say that it plays with the idea of silencing artists in the country such as Galindo. For example, when this video was uploaded to YouTube, a viewer commented on how she had never heard of Galindo. This was just a few years ago in 2015, meanwhile Galindo has been performing since 1999 in Guatemala. The viewer expresses: “No entiendo porque ella en Guatemala nunca se ha escuchado. Es la primera vez que oigo de ella y por un canal alemán en una entrevista... Soy Quetzalteca, estudio Ciencia Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales y puedo decir que es una mujer con una capacidad mental increíble. Su forma de expresarse es admirable. Me gustaría conocerla o hacer un pacto con la universidad Rafael Landívar para que le hagan alguna conferencia, foro, cualquier cosa con los estudiantes de políticas para que conozcan esta brillante mente. Saludos” (Stephanie Rosal *YouTube*).

on the witness stand whom he attempts to control is multiplied when we begin to listen to the story of not one but many Ixil survivors.

What stops the artist from speaking is not necessarily the anesthesia, rather, the act of reading each survivor's experience; and water becomes her self-defense tool. The feelings and sensations these words and images produce cause a deep vibration within us. The accounts can become unbearable to hold. Yet, the artist finds strength in the community of women who decided to speak up against a tyrant in open court. To put it differently, what fuels her to hold her composure is the idea that to show any sign of weakness would negate the resiliency of the survivors. Whenever the artist feels like she is about to break down, she pauses and takes a sip of water. Water becomes a defense mechanism to fight against the silencing anesthetic tactics used against her. To use water as a healing weapon rather than a violent one empowers Galindo to break with the historicity of force. She will not give in to the same *modus operandi* that has permitted violence to continue in Guatemala.²⁰⁷ Instead, Galindo breaks the cycle of violence by creating an antidote that ruptures with the idea of “an eye for an eye”—a cup of water. Rather than relying on violence or speaking their language—*Machistañol*—the woman on the stand speaks a language that prioritizes life over death.

In the context of Maya epistemology, water is life, thus, this cup of water represents *Machistañol's* counter-discourse—non-violence. Since we are talking about testimonies presented by Ixil women survivors, it is appropriate to dive deeper into these seemingly miniscule elements. In the *Popol Wuj*, the book of the K'iche people, we read about two main elements that make up human beings: corn and water. According to the Maya Creation story,

²⁰⁷ In an earlier work, *Limpieza social* (2006), water becomes a violent weapon when we see the artist's body being hosed down by a pressure washer which references the merciless tactics used to silence people during a protest.

men *and* women are created from white corn, yellow corn and water (*Popol Vuh* Ch 1).²⁰⁸ In addition to body composition, we have to consider the large bodies of water in Guatemala. Geographically speaking, there are two important lakes which besides being tourist attractions, are crucial to the wellbeing of the indigenous communities that surround them. These bodies of water are Lake Atitlan and Lake Amatitlan. According to their etymology, *Atit* means grandmother and *Amat* means grandfather, while *Tlan* means water. Respectively, they are the Grandmother and Grandfather of Water.²⁰⁹ For this reason, water becomes the “giver” of life, the essence of human existence. The cup of water, then, cleanses the violence committed against women, both physically and linguistically.

In *La verdad* we have a ritual in which water acts as a powerful element that cleanses the pain she evokes with the survivors’ details of violence.²¹⁰ In this light, we can see certain components in the performance form part of a ritual practice: the artist is seated and keeps her gaze down as if praying, the book she reads from turns into a sacred text of testimonies, her hands rest face-down on her legs in a meditative state, the cup of water is the offering, and the table is the altar space. In short, what appeared to be a witness-stand transforms into an altar where the light sipping of water heals the stories she reads from the “sacred” text. According to the *aj q’ijab’*, or Maya shaman-priests, “The activity of a sacred place as a site of transmission

²⁰⁸ I highlight the genders in the Maya Creation story because while the Christian creation story uses a man’s rib to create a woman, in the Maya version both men and women are created “equal” in the sense that there is no “lack of” or dependency on Man. In other words, the Maya version of the creation of humanity is pre-feminist to the degree that both genders start out equally from their conception.

²⁰⁹ In Miguel Angel Asturias’ *Cuentos y leyendas*, he notes the etymology in Spanish of “atit” = abuela and Lan = agua, thus, Abuela del Agua (46). Meanwhile, Patricia Macías elaborates on the significance of these lakes for the Maya in her piece titled, “Water in Maya Consciousness.”

²¹⁰ By “ritual” we understand a practice that can create closure with the past, invoke healing energy for transformation in our lives, and perform a more pragmatic function like that of remaining goal-oriented and focused through meditation.

has also been translated to more domestic settings, such as a home altar, a glass of water, a crystal, or to the image of Mam, the Earth Lord” (Molesky-Poz *Contemporary Maya Spirituality* 113).²¹¹ Here, the anesthetic injection as representative of the Machista State comes to intrusively interrupt the transmission of the *truth*. However, Galindo finishes reading the entire text as she turns the last page; thus, she is capable of defeating the State as she completes the ritual.

Now, every ritual needs an intention that will guide the practice. The ultimate intention of the ritual performed in *La verdad* is to let go of the past in order to obtain freedom in the present by telling the truth.²¹² Earlier we said that Galindo holds back her tears to show the resiliency of the Ixil women. To preserve the strength with which the survivors presented their testimonies in court is another intention the artist respects devotionally, because at the end of the day, these women survived and are *alive*. In an interview at the Spanish Headquarters of the Women’s Association of Guatemala, Galindo shares an anecdote about an interaction she had while sitting in the audience during the Genocide Trial. After listening to the Ixil women testify, she began to cry. Beside her sat a Maya woman who, upon seeing her crying, kindly asked Galindo to stop, that there was no need to cry because they were alive.²¹³ As in any ritual where one honors a

²¹¹ This book is a great source for those interested in Maya spiritual practices and the ideology of Maya spiritual leaders themselves. For example, in chapter 3 we can find an interview of Kaqchikel-Maya poet and activist, Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, who gave the author a rare insight into Maya philosophy and spirituality.

²¹² There is a complexity to the word “truth” since it is primarily based on a collection of vivid memories. Doesn’t one always swear under oath to “tell the truth to the best of your ability”? There are limitations to how one tells the truth, but this doesn’t negate the fact that something deeply wrong happened to these survivors of war and violence.

²¹³ She shares this experience in an interview with an Italian news network, Televisionet. At the trial a Maya woman tells Galindo: “No llore, estamos vivas, estamos aquí y tuvimos la oportunidad de contar nuestra historia y mientras estamos vivas, hay esperanza.” Galindo shares that this was an impactful life lesson for her, which we argue influenced many of her works after

divine source, this performance honors the survivors by presenting us an artist who withholds her tears to emit the survivor's strength.

By participating in the collective pain of the Ixil women, Galindo is able to highlight to the spectators that their cup is *half full*. The few sips of water she took throughout the performance were carefully thought out to leave a glass of water that was full of life. To continue with this idea of life over death, the artist donates an iron sculpture to the Ixil community to commemorate the two-year mark of the guilty verdict against Ríos Montt—*Isle'l in* (2015). In the Ixil language, *Isle'l in* means “I am alive,” a phrase that should not be taken lightly.



Figure 5. Regina José Galindo, *Isle'l In / I Am Alive*.²¹⁴

As these women dress in their traditional Maya attire, they affirm two facts: they are alive, and they are alive as Maya women.²¹⁵ Put differently, their *corte* or *huipil*—long skirt— confirms that their ethnic community was not fully destroyed; this demonstrates that they have triumphed

the fact: *Estoy Viva, Isle'l in, Testimonios, I am alive* and others. The interview can be seen on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/UXUmcOVsHFk>.

²¹⁴ Estoy Viva en idioma Ixil; I am alive in the Ixil language. Con el objetivo de conmemorar dos años de la condena por genocidio contra Ríos Montt doné una escultura a la comunidad Ixil, la cual tenía una frase que conmemora la lucha por la justicia. *With the objective to commemorate two years of sentencing Ríos Montt for committing genocide, I donated a sculpture to the Ixil community, which is a phrase that commemorates their fight for justice.* (Guatemala. 2015).

From the artist's website: La fuerza y valentía con la que las mujeres Ixiles se han enfrentado a una Guatemala que niega su historia y que niega el genocidio, es admirable. Ellas, con su verdad, nos han mostrado un camino de luz. Nos han dado una verdadera lección de vida.

²¹⁵ The fact that women are at the forefront of the photographs and the men in the background on the artist's website, in addition to placing the phrase in its feminine form in Spanish, with the use of -a in “estoy viva,” places an emphasis on women.

over the State's intentions. What stands out in these images is the phrase which is made out of iron, *I am alive*. This phrase points to the unyielding struggle of these women and their communities, who, despite the many forces that attempted to eliminate them during the cold war and make them invisible after the war, persevered.

Furthermore, the use of the present "I am" in the iron sculpture is a political statement. During the genocide trial, we heard testimony from an Ixil woman who expressed how she survived rape, hunger, and torture. The army men would tell her, "Quien la manda a quedarse viva," as if fighting for her life was her fault, as if to endure the pain and shame was her choice. Moreover, throughout the trial Rios Montt continuously denied these women's (and other's) testimonies by repeating, "No es verdad, eso no pasó." Thus, to exclaim "I am alive" is to contradict the psychological violence former tormentors acted upon them as well as discredit what former state officials declare to be true. In *La verdad* and *Isle'l* in the tables turn, for it is no longer those in command who have a voice in speaking about the war. There is a rupture with the political and linguistic dominance Machista institutions once held. By rising to the occasion and pronouncing *different* truths about the events, these performances champion the women who contested *Machistañol*.

The following poem expresses the belief that language that is sexist, racist and intrusive no longer has the power it once did.

Por cada milpa que tú quemes
nosotros sembraremos cien semillas

Por cada feto que tú mates
nosotros criaremos cien hijos

Por cada mujer que tú violes
nosotros tendremos cien orgasmos

Por cada hombre que tú tortures
nosotros abrazaremos cien alegrías

Por cada muerto que tú niegues
nosotros tejaremos cien verdades

Por cada arma que tú empuñes
nosotros haremos cien dibujos

Por cada bala perdida
cien poemas

por cada bala encontrada
mil canciones.

Telarañas 102

The damage that *Machistañol* effectuated upon nature, men, women, children during the war, is counterbalanced in this poem. Each stanza describes the various acts of violence performed, along with what can mend them. As if making a list of the atrocities that took place, we notice that the acts that cure the violence, its antidote—life, reproduction, hope—are also in this list. For example, what they burn, will be replanted; what they kill, they will give birth to; when they rape, women will orgasm; for every man they torture, they will sing out in joy; for each death they deny, they will weave truths; for every weapon that is fired, they will make drawings; and for every bullet that is lost or found, they will create poems and songs. The most compelling part of this poem is that for one act of violence, they will produce *one hundred* acts of anti-violence, and what is more, *one thousand* songs. The poem harmoniously creates a crescendo of actions, responses and a growing community of “nosotros.”

In terms of the language used in the poem, specifically, Spanish in Guatemala, there is a blatant difference between the use of the personal pronouns *tú*, *usted* and *vos* which deserves closer attention. While there is one “tú” there are thousands of “nosotros.” For instance, the use of “tú” as the informal or familiar use of the personal pronoun “you,” is a deliberate choice by

the poetic voice because it sets the linguistic power dynamics. First, by using *tú* instead of *usted*, which would entail recognition of authority or esteem towards a person, the poetic voice is referring to someone for whom she has no respect. Second, by using *tú* the poetic voice changes the tone of the poem to one of familiarity; however, this casualness is not friendly, rather it is accusatory. Put differently, the poetic voice *knows* who performed these violent actions with the mention of burning of cornfields, killing of unborn children, women and men, and denying responsibility. She is pointing a finger at the Machista State and its minions.

Lastly, the deliberate rejection of using “vos” as is commonly used in Guatemala amongst those we trust or as a term that demonstrates solidarity removes any possibility that *nosotros* will ever see *tú* as someone worthy of trust. The idea of nation²¹⁶ clearly did not include Indigenous people during the civil war. Therefore, in the aftermath, survivors had to create a different sense of community than that of the (nation) State. Moreover, the *nosotros* in each stanza represents a coalition of Guatemalans who are ready to counter the violence with hope and life. This poem emphasizes the fact that to defeat the cycle of violence, one needs not succumb to using the same tactics used by a Machista State that functions by destruction and elimination. On the contrary, the piece highlights the power of linguistic activities, which impact the social construct of a people such as creating music, writing poems and weaving truths. For it is in alternative histories, literature, and cultural activities where the Indigenous individual began to have a more pressing role after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. Despite the State’s attempts to diminish the colorful array of indigenous communities, this poem reflects their fight for the life that has been denied.

²¹⁶ By nation I understand Benedict Anderson’s concept of an “imagined community” that is limited and sovereign. It is imagined because its members cannot all know each other, and it is a community because a nation is conceived of as a horizontal comradeship of equals (*Imagined Communities* ch 1).

In this section, we have seen how each performance and poem responds to a violence that suffocates a people. The response is not through violent means, although in some cases, that may be our first impression. Each piece speaks about the years of the Civil War in Guatemala, the racism that provided a rationale for performing atrocities upon indigenous bodies, and the sexual violence that women had to endure. For many, the idea of surviving or of ever being recognized as subjects was unimaginable when the State and its men were literally and socially taking the humanity out of women's bodies and sense of self. Rather than running the risk of becoming "invested in the wound, such that the wound comes to stand for identity itself" these women's experiences come to life in Galindo's works precisely to move away from an imposed identity (Ahmed *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 32). They realize that "In order to move away from attachments that are hurtful, we must act on them" (Ahmed 173). Therefore, to speak out these experiences is their way "to attack the 'truths' that make this world and give it 'value'" (Ahmed 169). As survivor, Feliciano Herrera Ceto declares, "Las heridas siguen abiertas" ("El genocidio se comprobó" 2018). However, for the wounds to be "open" is different than to say that they *are* the wound. To recognize that the wounds are open sets in motion the need to heal them with awareness, not unresponsiveness.

Moreover, the women we see in these pieces are no longer invested in the wound. They are not passive but active participants in the healing process of their bodies, socially and linguistically. Galindo presents us with female voices that speak up against the injustices committed against them. While the performance *Isle'l in* commemorated a delayed victory, that of Rios Montt's conviction for committing genocide which started in 2013, by the end of writing

this chapter, the case was reopened. According to an independent newspaper in Guatemala, *Nómada*, on September 27th, 2018: “El genocidio se comprobó ante un tribunal (de nuevo).” In the details we find that “La justicia determinó por segunda ocasión que sí hubo genocidio en Guatemala” and that “Este no será el último juicio por genocidio en Guatemala” (“El genocidio se comprobó”).²¹⁷ It took nearly forty decades to legally recognize what occurred to the Maya Ixil communities. While they were not the only indigenous group to be affected by the war, it is definitely a win, a move in the right direction.

However, in the twenty-first century, the fight turns from genocide to feminicide. At the turn of the century, women have become the new preferred target of violence. While in this section we discussed the racist intentions of *machismo*, in the next section, we dive into a machismo that is sexist, classist and mystifying due to the lack of answers that can explain a rise of feminicide. Our intention, then, is to demystify these acts of gender violence, because one of the crucial problems “with making the crimes unspeakable is that they become mystical, outside the bounds of political action” (Franco *Cruel Modernity* 248).

6.2 DEMYSTIFYING FEMINICIDE IN 21ST CENTURY GUATEMALA

*No saldré a la calle vestida de hombre
para sortear el peligro
y no dejaré de salir.
Galindo Telarañas*

²¹⁷ “Justice determined for a second time that there was in fact genocide in Guatemala” and “This will not be the last trial for genocide in Guatemala.”

On November 25th, 2013, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, it was reported that 690 women had lost their lives due to feminicide in Guatemala that year.²¹⁸ By 2017 that number had increased to 877.²¹⁹ The reason behind so much violence against women seems to be a working patriarchal order. As bell hooks reminds us, “patriarchy has no gender;” thus, violence against women entails not just male actions of domination but also the ways in which organizations (State, the Law, the Church) and cultural narratives function within a specific space. In other words, feminicide is more than the act of murdering a woman. The systematic way in which hundreds and thousands of women’s bodies are found dead in Guatemala, the lack of urgency given to investigating their cases, the peculiar and careless application of the law in cases of violence against women, and the way a society normalizes or becomes part of such violence, are all part of the enigma of what we call *feminicide*. All of these organizations and cultural narratives have created what I earlier call, *Machistañol*—a language founded upon the violation²²⁰ of the (female) human body.

²¹⁸ I gathered this information from a blog by Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (Village Communities in Resistance) which participates in the walk every year in Guatemala. It is important to mention that November 25th has a history that places the Dominican Republic on the map for championing women’s rights ever since the Mirabal sisters were brutally murdered under Rafael Trujillo’s regime in 1960 for opposing and denouncing his dictatorship. Also, 2013 marks the year when I begin to research feminicides more seriously as I began my career as a Ph.D. student.

²¹⁹ According to the United Nations office in Guatemala, “el Ministerio Público ha reportado que el delito más denunciado es el de violencia contra la mujer, registrándose en lo que va del año 2017 (de enero a octubre) un total de 51,742 denuncias. Adicionalmente, se registraron 877 delitos de muertes violentas de mujeres y femicidios y 10,963 delitos sexuales en el mismo periodo. El Registro Nacional de las Personas (RENAP) reportó 54,114 nacimientos en niñas-madres de 10 a 19 años.”

²²⁰ By “violation” I understand the harm and the rape of a body, per its Spanish twofold connotation. According to the *Real Academia Española* “violar” is defined as: 1) Infringir o quebrantar una ley, un tratado, un precepto, una promesa, etc.; 2) Tener acceso carnal con alguien en contra de su voluntad o cuando se halla privado de sentido o discernimiento.

Machistañol speakers use a strategy that employs cultural norms to go unnoticed in the conversations that surround gender violence. For instance, if women commit adultery, they are the ones to blame and not their husbands or partners because for men, the murdering of an unfaithful wife is a “crime of passion” (Suárez & Jordan 6). More recently, if women are found dead and wearing a belly button ring, they are branded as belonging to a gang or of being prostitutes, in other words, unworthy of further investigation (Sanford “From Genocide to Femicide” 111). Parenti & Muñoz point out that “some officials blame the victims for their own deaths, implying that the women bring it on themselves... [because] they refuse to lead *properly conforming lives* within the safe confines of a traditional family and community” (2, emphasis added). Women who do not follow the scripts set out for them by a patriarchal and machista foundation are censored from performing their gender as they please by death. Moreover, the machinations of the killers are supported by the legal system as “statistics reveal that hardly one percent of the perpetrators are ever tried and convicted, and the sentences are outrageously light” (Parenti & Muñoz 3). With all of these findings, how can we discard the idea that not only is Guatemala a Machista State, but also one that has an ineffective *Law Against Femicide*?²²¹ It is no surprise then, that for Galindo, “injustice, oppression and gender inequality are literally violence” (Ramírez Blanco 437).

In the twenty-first century, violence has been normalized by machismo and *de facto* impunity has been its best ally. It is within this culture that normalizes and accepts violence against women that performance artist Regina José Galindo challenges her readers and

²²¹ The *Law against femicide and other forms of violence against women* was passed in 2008. As clearly as the law states that physical violence is not the only form of violence, it also includes intersectional based (gender, sex, class, race) power roles in society that prevent women from receiving the same opportunities as men; it has proven to a machista society that passing a law is quite different from applying such law (*Decreto Ley N° 22, 2008*). The Judicial branch does not enforce the law and criminals have taken advantage of this negligence.

spectators. She is a *woman* who chooses to live in Guatemala, the third most dangerous country in the world, for women.²²² The fact that she is alive, despite openly contesting the way in which a State and its organizations fail to combat violence against women, fuels her artistry. The following pieces give us an opportunity to find in her rebellious acts the means to decipher *their* language—*Machistañol*. For language—in the form of her body and her words—is her armor.

At the turn of the century, Galindo pointed out the new wave of violence against women with her very first performance, *Dolor en un pañuelo/Pain on a Handkerchief* (Guatemala, 1999). With this performance, Galindo breaks with the patriarchally scripted role of being a woman when she transitions from the private to the public space with her nude body. Her nudity, “como una acción pública, se revela contra la pasividad que le ha sido impuesta. Sociabiliza el dolor y lo convierte en testimonio, por lo que de inmediato adquiere matices políticos” (Veliz Flores “Cuerpo femenino” 57). By inserting a woman’s nude body in front of a community of observers, or spectators, she frees woman from her imposed *locus*—domesticity (Veliz Flores 57). Performing nude enables a change in the script of *Machistañol* today, where the only naked female bodies that can exist in a public space are prostitutes or victims of femicide.

There is an unsettling feeling that arises when we are presented with two different time periods, yet very similar tactics of violence as seen in *Dolor en un pañuelo* and *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* from the previous section. The way many women were tied down to a cot during the Civil War, right before military men committed their acts of violence upon them, is no

²²² A New York Daily News article from January 2014 published a story on Femicides in Central America, which ranks the most dangerous countries for women globally: El Salvador is #1, Guatemala #3 and Honduras #7. Link to article <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/femicide-rise-central-america-article-1.1552233>

different from the way women are found today. As we can see in the images below, the artist's body lies bare naked over a bed. Both of her hands are tied down, this time by a cloth and not umbilical cords, and this time her eyes are blindfolded. While in *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* we found a call for women to rise together and speak up about the acts of violence committed against them during the war, here Galindo alludes to the invisible nature of *Machistañol*. Her body speaks louder than what the statistics in the newspaper tell us for these newspapers only announced the violation of women and not the fact that they later became victims of feminicide.



Figure 6. Regina José Galindo, *El dolor en un pañuelo / Pain on a handkerchief*.²²³

The artist lies motionless as news articles are projected over her naked body. These newspaper clippings present statistical information on the number of feminicides that were occurring at the time, “Thirty in just two months.” Moreover, they give us the site of where women’s bodies are found— “Planes de Minerva,” one of the most dangerous zones in

²²³ Amarrada a una cama vertical, se proyectan sobre mi cuerpo noticias de violaciones y abusos cometidos en contra de la mujer en Guatemala. *Tied to a vertical bed, news of violations and abuse committed against women in Guatemala are projected onto my body.* (Colectiva Sin Pelos en la Lengua, (PAI). Plaza G&T. Guatemala. 1999). The three images in the bottom are commissioned by Fortunata Calabrò from Twin Gallery in Madrid, Spain.

Guatemala City, Zone 11. The clippings also tell us what is causing their deaths — “maltrato de mujer”/ “mistreatment of women” and “machismo”—, and even suggest that they should start categorizing these murders due to their rapid escalation. However, there is a juxtaposition that inverts the facts here. While the words on the newspaper clippings speak of answers by stating statistics, her body points to concealment. *Machistañol* is injuring a restrained female body with the intention to silence her as it distorts the facts. Put differently, these words that state facts are slashing over the body of a woman. Language here acts as violence, injuring her on a physical, linguistical and psychological plane.

The actions the newspaper describes take place on her body. But the actions are described in the past tense, conveying a present that resists being left unresolved or as an archive. This piece is not only an attempt to provide a more visual confirmation of those rapes and murders, but also speaks to the way women were forced to assume a position of subordination. These were violations that took place under duress, making women immobile, inaudible and scared for their lives. Galindo presents the reality of Guatemalan women via a more corporal method to make these bodies tangible. If women, who the Machista State attempts to maintain invisible, could practice power, the percentage of unsolved femicide cases would not be as low as it is. The language that machista institutions use to talk about, refer to and carry out these acts of violence deserves its own line of investigation. It calls for a sociolinguistic inquiry on the information that is not spoken or shared with the public. What we read in headlines is what some call “yellow press” which informs the public only to scandalize or sell its discourse. What this type of reporting hides are the facts, the way in which a Machista State fails to investigate and find justice for the women who are double-victimized in journalism.

Thus, Galindo is interpellating the State by making her body an instrument of discourse, linguistically and politically, to examine and redefine that language. A living woman's body is contesting the machista language that imposes on and victimizes women in society. Her body speaks a different language and it tells a different story. The verbal language of the clippings vis-à-vis the corporal language of the artist are at a state of *dissensus*. For Rancière, there is a possibility for political and artistic activities to reorder relations of power between existing groups, however, *dissensus* is not an institutional overturning (*Dissensus On Politics and Aesthetics* 2). Artistic activities like Galindo's performances are able to cut across "forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception" (*Dissensus* 2). In the case of *Dolor en un pañuelo*, her body language disrupts the power of those mediums that have controlled the discussion on violence against women and feminicides.

By inserting her body in the discussion on feminicide, she is presenting us a new subject who understands the language of violence—woman. Her interpretation contests, questions and investigates feminicides and violence by thinking and speaking *through* the body, and such epistemology is indispensable.²²⁴ Women respond to violence with their body. Furthermore, giving priority to a feminist corporal language allows us to confront the speakers of *Machistañol*—a language imposed on female bodies— and how they speak about gender violence in spaces such as, journalism, forensic sciences, the State, the Law and society. These phallogentric institutions characterize women as nameless subjects. These women though, have a social identity and Galindo's body becomes the tangible identity, making the nameless female body

²²⁴ I bring back Diana Taylor's idea to think of performance as a corporal epistemology, "embodied expression has participated and will probably continue to participate in the *transmission* of social knowledge, memory, and identity pre- and postwriting" (*Archive & the Repertoire* Ch.1, emphasis added).

that is being victimized in writing a visible and readable individual. The body that speaks in *Dolor en un pañuelo* denounces what the Machista State is trying to reduce to a statistic. Consequently, her body exposes details that *Machistañol* keeps invisible.

First, her arms are forced wide open and similar to *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* where both wrists were tied together, the body is pleading for help. However, there is a slight difference in the opening of the chest area since here each wrist is tied down separately. To open the arms to the side is to release anything we are holding onto in the heart area. Like any heart-opening pose, it takes courage to enter a space of vulnerability and exposure. Therefore, this vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, on the contrary, to speak up from a space that has been tagged as feminine, thus fragile, flips the conversation. In other words, to be a vulnerable body and yet speak up about this body's suffering is to perform courage.

Moving onto the legs, we find that here too there is a slight difference with the pose as well as the speech act. In *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* the artist's legs were forced wide open to signify an invitation to the conversation centered around rape and violence during the war, in other words, asking the viewers to reflect on the past so violence does not linger into the future. In this piece though, her legs are slightly closed to represent that the discourse on violence is not so easily accessible. Keeping her legs closed is another way to tell us that cases of violence are not only performed "behind closed doors" but are also closed to the public, who want to find answers. If we are to dive into the enigma that these cases are, we must be ready to explore what is happening behind the scenes. However, with this query for answers come threats, as we learned from Rita Segato's personal experience.²²⁵ Inquiring about a case presents a risk to the

²²⁵ Let us not forget Rita Segato's personal experience in México we mentioned in the Introduction, where the television network signal failed at the exact moment she was going to answer the "why" of the rise of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. (*La escritura en el cuerpo* 12).

person looking for more answers; however, doing nothing is more dangerous because it allows *Machistañol* and machista institutions to augment their power and to disseminate inaccurate information to the public.

As we have seen over the years, the number of convictions for acts of violence against women have proven weak in comparison to the rising number of cases that are reported every month and every year.²²⁶ One main reason that allows these cases to go unresolved is displayed on the artist's body—the blindfold. Galindo wears a blindfold to point to the idea that people see only what they want to see—the newspaper headlines or her body. In effect, the Machista State has fostered a culture that doesn't seek answers *outside of* those given by holders of power, like the government, news outlets and state-sponsored investigations. In *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* her eyes were wide open to indicate that the victim knew her attacker, yet here, the blindfold asks us to take action and unveil the *truths* that are not as visible or attainable. For the truth is not one-sided, it has many facets which need to be examined.

This performance suggests another significant point by the fact that it takes place indoors and on a bed: the home is no longer a safe space for women even if the Machista discourse states otherwise. We cannot forget that in 2005, former president Oscar Berger's solution to violence against women was to ask women to stay at home (Parenti & Muñoz 4). His recommendation ignores the fact that the private space is in fact where many women are found as victims of acts of violence and femicide. One can even suggest that the Machista State is willingly putting women's lives at risk by giving such irresponsible recommendations to them. In addition, to think of the home as a "safe space" for women allows these cases to remain "behind closed

²²⁶ See Parenti and Muñoz's article "Gender Savagery in Guatemala" and most recently, an article by Shannon Walsh and Cecilia Menjivar "'What Guarantees Do We Have?' Legal Tolls and Persistent Impunity for Femicide in Guatemala."

doors.” We return to the old notion that what happens between a husband and wife is a private matter that the State is not willing to intervene in. That is why our attention is drawn to the bed in this piece. It represents the home or private space. The bed, which is commonly considered a piece of furniture to rest on or take pleasure in, is no longer so when it turns out to be the platform of choice to violate women’s bodies and their rights.

On New Year’s Day in 2015, Guatemala’s widely circulated newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, published an article that set the tone for that year. The piece explains how the local firefighters in the city of Quetzaltenango, or Xelajú by its Maya name, found a victim of femicide, “la víctima se encontraba sin ropa sobre una cama, con golpes en las piernas y señales de asfixia” (“Muerte de mujeres genera preocupación en Xelajú”).²²⁷ In 2016, “María José Segura Rojas, de 24 años, fue localizada sobre su cama, con una herida de arma blanca en el cuello y otra en el pecho, del lado izquierdo, según informó la Policía Nacional Civil (PNC)” (“Localizan cadáver de mujer en residencia de la zona 13”).²²⁸ Meanwhile, in 2017 “El cuerpo de Irma Juana Pú Barrera, de 18 años, quedó sobre una cama en una tortillería ubicada en zona 10. Los motivos aún se desconocen” (“Localizan muerta a joven que trabajaba en una tortillería de la zona 10”).²²⁹ For a change, María Thelma García, just 29 years old, was found outside of her home in Zone 7 of Quetzaltenango, “según reportes oficiales, salió de su casa para practicar deporte [y] fue estrangulada y su cuerpo abandonado en ese lugar” (“Muerte de mujeres genera

²²⁷ “The victim was found without clothes on a bed, with blows on her legs and signs of asphyxiation.”

²²⁸ “María José Segura Rojas, of 24 years, was found on her bed, stabbed in the neck and chest, on the left side, according to the National Civilian Police.”

²²⁹ “The body of Irma Juana Pú Barrera, of 18 years old, was left on a bed in a tortilla shop located in Zone 10. The motives are still unknown.”

preocupación en Xelajú”).²³⁰ What these stories inform us is that *Machistañol* has intruded into women’s safe space—the home—as well as the public realm.

Machistañol has taken over the public *and* private space for women to exist and participate in society. Galindo emphasizes this intrusion in a poem that carries the same name as her performance, “Dolor en un pañuelo,” from her poetry book *Personal e intransmisible*.

EL DOLOR EN UN PAÑUELO

PIEL MAGULLADA, MIRADA ACUOSA, MAR.
CÍRCULOS AZULES, TORNASOL. LABIO REVEN-
TADO, LAS BABAS SE CHORREAN, SE MEZCLAN
CON LAS GOTAS DE PLASMA. NINGÚN PAÑUE-
LO LAS LIMPIA. CAEN SOBRE LAS TETAS IN-
FLAMADAS, VAPOR. VAGINA SECA, EXPUESTA.
PUTA, HIJA DE PUTA, MADRE DE PUTA. HE-
RENCIA. “ACEPTO”. LA BOCA CERRADA. “SI
LA ABRES TE BOTO LOS DIENTES”. LÁGRIMAS,
CEBOLLA, GRASA EN EL PELO. HUEVOS, DE-
MASIADO CALIENTES, UNA CUALQUIERA, DE-
MASIADO FRÍOS, ABANDONO. CEREBRO DOR-
MIDO, PUÑO AMENAZADOR, RUEGOS, PORTA-
ZO. SILENCIO. EL SONIDO DE TRIPAS LO
ROMPE. MONEDERO SIN PESO, UN BILLETE,
CANJE, UN PERIÓDICO. SECCIÓN DE EMPLEOS
“SE NECESITAN SEÑORITAS”. MALA PAGA,
DESVELO. SIGUE LA BÚSQUEDA, APLANANDO
CALLES, CALLOS. LLEGA LA NOCHE, SE ESCU-
CHAN PASOS. LA PUERTA SE ABRE, RECONCI-
LIACIÓN. EL VIENTRE VACÍO SE LLENA.
NUEVE MESES. SE ROMPE LA FUENTE, GRITOS
SILENCIOSOS... NACE UN OBSERVADOR MÁS.²³¹

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²³⁰ “According to official reports, she left her home to practice sports and was strangled and her body abandoned in that place.”

²³¹ The poem is presented exactly as it appears in her poetry book, with hyphens and capital letters.

The violence that we encounter in this poem is one that transcends spaces. It goes from the private sphere to the public and finally returns to the private, which we interpret as a representation of the cycle of violence. This form of machista violence, which can be hidden and visible at the same time, is embedded in social norms and has been mistaken as “normal.” One of the first things we notice when we encounter this poem is that it is written in capital letters, giving the poetic voice a sense of authority. The fact that every letter is capitalized also indicates that every word is as important as the others. These experiences are not hiding behind the letter or the medium of writing. As Acevedo and Toledo point out in regards to the poetry book, these “texts discard any literary artifice [...] She dispossesses the verse from any rhetoric intention, leaving it bare” (Avila 279).²³² Each experience that is shared with us, as bare and raw as language permits, is Galindo’s way of constituting women in language. These experiences cannot be aestheticized; they refuse to be anything but what they are—violent.

What we have in this poem is a female poetic voice that sheds its layers, both physically and literally. The act of shedding violent memories, experiences, realities, one at a time like the peeling of an onion, makes visible experiences that are so heavy as to become unspeakable. However, each word emits a sensation which attempts to (de)construct the body, including the tears, bruises, punches, hunger, long distances on foot, financial insecurity, rape, and contractions. Put differently, the corporality of the text, though far from pleasant to read, is as real as it gets. This violence is part of a cycle that has no end, because it was inherited from her grandmother’s *pañuelo*. In another poem in this collection the poetic voice explains:

MI ABUELA NO ME DEJÓ
UNA MUÑECA
UNA JOYA

²³² In Avila’s book *Mujer, Cuerpo y Palabra* he cites Acevedo and Toledo’s analysis of Galindo’s poetry book *Personal e intransmisible*.

UN TE QUIERO

ME DEJÓ

-EN CAMBIO-

MUCHOS RENCORES

ENVUELTOS EN UN PAÑUELO ROJO

QUE DECÍA:

PERSONAL E INTRANSMISIBLE.

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If the poetic voice chooses to end this cycle, she will have to end her grandmother's legacy of enduring pain because that is the type of life she lived.

Earlier we stated that patriarchy has no gender, and this short poem validates such a statement. For a patriarchal family is one where men are in charge and use force when they see fit. It is not uncommon to hear that the grandmothers and mothers are also machista, for "muchas lo son. Pero es por sobrevivencia" as Martín Pellecer tells us ("Por qué no es comparable la violencia contra las mujeres y los hombres" *Nómada*). He adds that "generación tras generación aprendieron que para salvar sus vidas y su integridad física tenía que mandar el hombre. Porque debe ser un infierno recibir una paliza cada noche y una violación sexual en el matrimonio cada vez que el macho quiere sexo y la mujer no quiere."²³³ While our grandmothers and mothers were trained to perform under a patriarchal family structure and simply endure the violence Galindo expresses in this poem, the poetic voice breaks with the silence that machismo imposed and continues to impose on women.

While the violence that her grandmother endured was shed on a bloody red handkerchief which she was to keep secret, personal and not "transmissible," the poem breaks with this

²³³ "Generation after generation they learned that to save their lives and physical integrity the man had to have control. Because it must be hell to receive a blow every night and be raped in marriage every time the macho wants to have sex and the woman does not want to."

machista “legacy”. For machista violence is repeated because it is accepted generation after generation. This idea is most directly expressed in the last verse, when the poetic voice exasperatedly speaks of “another observer is born.” The gender of the word “observador” is masculine, which in Spanish can mean two things: either she is talking about Men or male-dominated institutions as observers or about Society in general, where both men and women have become observers of machismo. What’s important though is that whoever the poetic voice may be interpellating, the fact is that to observe is to take on a passive role, contrary to the active role taken on by the poetic voice, which speaks up. However, we imagine that both the Machista State and society are interpellated. Such interpellation authorizes Galindo to take action and expose the traumatic experiences women have embodied or witnessed as a way to break with the machista saga.

The narrative that is presented to us in “Dolor en un pañuelo” is one of subjection and abuse in the private and the public sphere. The two main places in which the female body experiences violence in this poem are the kitchen and the bedroom. In the kitchen, she is beaten to the point that the marks left on her body distort her own sense of self. This embodied disfigurement initiates a sort of shame upon her, as we see in the verse “LAGRIMAS, / CEBOLLA, GRASA EN EL PELO” (9-10). We are left wondering if the reason for her tears is the beating or the slicing of an onion as a woman “should,” or both. Feeling useless because of her inability to cook eggs the “right” way causes her husband to abandon her. The abandonment by her husband makes her feel financially insecure which speaks to other injustices. First, women have to subject themselves to unfair work conditions to make ends meet. Second, the job market they are entering is sexist and ageist, as verse sixteen demonstrates: the sign that reads “SE NECESITAN SEÑORITAS” (16) makes reference to the socioeconomic inequality of

Guatemalan women. Not only do they receive unfair pay for working long hours, but it is their bodies that become the commodity for labor; it is their appearance, their beauty, and not their intellect that defines them. In other words, the sexism and ageism that lie behind such a job search posting is also a form of violence. The woman who doesn't "fit" the prototype loses the opportunity to gain some sort of income to attain basic human welfare. This woman is caught in a systematic cycle of violence; she is forced to return home where she will experience other forms of violence.

The tone of those last verses, "LA PUERTA SE ABRE, RECONCI- / LIACIÓN. EL VIENTRE VACÍO SE LLENA" (20-21), is one of automatization or passivity. The passive use of "se" in "SE ABRE," "SE LLENA," and "SE ROMPE," confirms that this woman is forced into reconciliation, and more disturbingly, forced to have sex and birth a child. In blatant terms, she is raped by her husband. The linguistic simplicity in which this violent experience is expressed produces a sense of frustration in the reader. It is as if to be raped by a husband is normal for both partners. Not embellishing the rape scene allows Galindo to perform a successful perlocutionary speech act because that clearly evokes a host of feelings to the reader: anger, frustration, disgust, and even pity. Depending on what feelings this poem provokes in us, the poetic voice takes it a step further by asking us to make a decision. Unlike the woman in the poem, we have a choice to either consider this narrative as unacceptable or we comply with the norms of a machista society in which, "UN OBSERVADOR MÁS" (22) is born.

While in this poem the woman is confronted with limited options, in the poems that fill the second half of *Personal e intransmisible*, specifically section IV, we have a woman who takes on a more active role. In poems like "No importa" (57) she speaks about her hunger for sex and in "Al diablo la serenidad" (62) she refuses perfection, she refuses the life of a perfect

woman and marriage. Therefore, *Personal e intransmisible* is a poetry book where Galindo initiates a rupture with the matrilineal legacy of suffering and resentments her grandmother left her. We see how the poetic voice starts as a woman who obeys with verses like “GUARDO SILENCIO / Y LO INTENTO” (13) and becomes a woman who refuses the life that she is meant to follow because of her gender. More pertinent to our study, the poetic voice slowly becomes an agent in (Her)story. At the same time that she disobeys her grandmother’s antiquated orders to keep these matters private and incommunicable, she forthrightly cuts the chord of machismo in her family. Once the poetic voice puts an end to the violent patterns ingrained generation after generation, she releases a new sense of self.

What we have in *Personal e intransmisible* are instances of what Butler calls “insurrectionary speech”. Insurrectionary speech allows empowerment because it can function as a way of rewriting a disempowering stereotype (Butler 147). For example, in speaking about physical and psychological injuries that have been committed upon a woman’s body and mind, which are typically perceived as weakness, the poet is addressing them straight on to show an empowered self. In other words, the poetic subject is *telling* us everything society has told her to keep quiet, as they are considered private matters. In speaking these acts of violence *out loud* with the use of capital letters, she breaks the boundaries within which women’s experiences are kept. By the end of the poetry book, the poetic voice transforms into a woman who denounces and renounces her womanhood with verses that explicitly state her decision “ESTOY RENUNCIANDO” (62) and “CON TODA LA VAGINA” (76). The rawness of the language overthrows both the patriarchal and moral codes of conduct imposed on women.

As we have seen, language is a device that can change the narrative of how women are perceived; it is indispensable in making new ways of being and belonging in a violent machista

society. Moreover, paying “close attention to the words of women, to their stories, and to how they talk about their lives can lead to a rethinking of how we theorize and study violence” (Menjívar *Enduring violence* 238). Our intention in this study is precisely to think about violence through a feminist lens, for women artists like Galindo articulate violence differently. For example, the following performance asks us to redefine the language used on bodies of feminicide, quite literally. In *Perra* (2005) the artist asks the viewers to think about the words and experiences that injure women on a physical, psychological and sociolinguistic plane by appropriating a term that is carved on women postmortem—*perra*.



Figure 7. Regina José Galindo, *Perra / Bitch*.²³⁴

As we see in the images and video of the performance, Galindo is wearing a black dress and is in a seated position with a knife in her hand. With every breath she takes, she carves the lines of the word *perra* into her thigh. Her leg begins to shake, her face begins to express the pain of the blade, and blood begins to fill the word drop by drop, letter by letter. After she is done, she allows the blood to well into her wound; she allows herself to breathe for a few seconds. She sets the knife down on the floor and gets up, her dress slides back down below her

²³⁴ Escribo la palabra PERRA con un cuchillo sobre mi pierna derecha. Una denuncia de los sucesos cometidos contra mujeres en Guatemala, donde han aparecido cuerpos torturados y con inscripciones hechas con cuchillo o navaja. *I write the word BITCH with a knife on my right leg. Condemnation of the acts committed against women in Guatemala, where tortured bodies have appeared with inscriptions carved on them with knife blades.* (Prometeo Gallery di Ida Pisani. Milano, Italia. 2005). You can find the video of the performance on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/n7XjLkpwnqk>

knees, covering the word, the blood, the act. This performance speaks about a woman who is in control of her narrative and appropriates the power of language. It is her right hand which writes the context of the derogatory term, while her left hand manages the feeling such word produces, when she holds her skin taught. Her eyes are focused on the canvas that is her body. When we finally see her stand up and walk out the room, we understand the speech act: I refuse the word *perra* to injure me or other women. One can argue that the corporal pain that we witness, and which is later “covered-up” by her dress, communicates the physical and linguistic injury of language. Though there is truth to this interpretation, it is more about a woman assuming authority over the language that is used to define her socio-linguistically in order to counter the effects of the original machista intentions.

In Spanish, the term “perra” carries a few connotations that in English would be equivalent to a female dog, a bitch, a prostitute or slut. Inscriptions like these appear on the bodies of women who are found on the street or spaces for the public to see. For example, in an interview with Francisco Goldman, Galindo tells him that she saw the “hacked up legs of a woman near [her] home one day” (Goldman 9). As if killing them wasn’t enough, the murderers inflict more violence on women’s bodies with terms like “perra.” It is not only offensive but demeaning because it implies that as a woman, you are a nobody or unworthy of respect. Furthermore, such a term carries a social identifier of class, which marks these women as poor, or worse, if they were prostitutes, they are blamed for their death despite the fact that the system is built for them to find in prostitution a way out of their unjust socioeconomic situation.

This piece exposes the verbal and non-verbal speech acts of *Machistañol* which cause violence against women to escalate to feminicide cases. The abusers use written language as a terrorizing tactic and to assign women *another* identity that initiates a trickling effect of

injustices. The investigations go unnoticed; they are easily discarded, and these markers transmit to society that the use of such language justifies the killing of women. Thus, in the process of self-torture, Galindo is making “visible the humiliations against women [...] marked by concrete historical processes” (Ramírez Blanco 442). When women are murdered in Guatemala, they don’t simply receive a *coup de grâce*, they are first raped, humiliated, then mutilated and sometimes dismembered. Unlike male bodies that are found with a single shot to their bodies, women’s bodies endure a significant amount of injury and pain before they die. This is how the killing of a man is different than a woman’s—the injury reaches different extremes. If “the structural causes of violence against women function within a patriarchal system in which values, social norms and practices assigned to women are viewed as inferior and subordinate,” in this piece, Galindo rejects “one of its main characteristics, being its social legitimation” (Méndez Gutierrez *La erradicación de la violencia contra las mujeres* 19).²³⁵

Galindo refuses to accept the derogatory language with which women are often cat-called, marked by or defined by in a machista society. She refuses to accept that if a woman’s body is found with a belly button piercing, she is a *cualquiera* or if she had tattoos that she is a *marera*. In this performance it is her speech and corporal act, the verbal and nonverbal use of language, which makes it possible for the word *perra* to mean something different. The way in which one can appropriate, reverse and recontextualize such utterance is by citing the term to produce a different effect than that of injury (Butler *Excitable Speech* 39). The reason for which *Machistañol* uses the term *perra* is to humiliate a woman especially after her death when she cannot fight back. While *Machistañol* uses the term to cause an injurious effect upon the addressed, Galindo uses the term to reverse that effect. She achieves this by performing and

²³⁵ My translation.

appropriating the injurious speech act “perra” and interpellating the “original” speakers of *Machistañol*. They are no longer interpellating *her*. Reversing the injurious interpellation grants Galindo authorization over the term so she can alter its effect and give it a new future reception. Butler explains, “If the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act. This raises the possibility of resignification as an alternative reading of performativity and of politics” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 69). The term “perra” is no longer ordinarily offensive when the artist changes the politics around its performative power. What was once injurious speech is now a speech act that calls for action, protest and empowerment. Consequently, Galindo “de-officializes” *Machistañol*.

The effect the artist brings about in this performance is that of objection, not violation or subordination. We have a female and political body in dissent. The artist affirms this stance in her description of the piece, “Una denuncia de los sucesos cometidos contra mujeres en Guatemala”/ “A denunciation of the incidents committed against women in Guatemala.” One of the most important elements in a speech act, as well as in performance, is context. While *Machistañol* and *Perra* share the same context—femicide—the bodies on which the language is acted out are different. In *Machistañol* the woman has no agency or power to contest the language used against her. However, in *Perra*, she is in control of her own pain, of her own body. By the artist taking hold of the weapon, she takes on an active role in the discourse of violence to oppose its injurious effects. Unlike other performances where Galindo hires a volunteer such as in *La verdad*, which we saw previously, or *Piedra* (2013), where men and women urinate over her charcoal covered body, in *Perra* she emits the nonverbal and verbal speech act.

In as little as five minutes the artist converts a five-letter word that wounds into “an instrument of resistance” by redistributing the pain that it carries and successfully destroying the context in which it once operated (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163). As Butler reminds us, the word that wounds “destroys the prior territory of its operation” in its redeployment (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163). Destroying its prior territory, or prior context, is the moment the speech act can perform in a different context than its original or habitual one—such as using the word as a political stance against violence against women in this performance—and the word can take on new meaning. To offer a new context for the injurious word is how Galindo intercedes in what Rita Segato explained as the secret jargon used by the mafia order. In Segato’s two axes of interlocution, the attacker speaks down to the female victim in the vertical axis and he speaks with his fellowmen on the horizontal axis. The dialogue between the attacker and his victim can only occur if he holds power over her, because he speaks *to* her and not *with* her as he does amongst his fellowmen. However, by speaking in *their* language and using terms *they* use to degrade women, the artist interferes in their dialogue, in their “operations” of violent language. She changes from object to subject in the axes of machista discourse. This interference is what allows her to appropriate the word and change the context in which *perra* can function in the future.

However, there is more to this language power battle. To gain access to their axes of communication is not sufficient, for the goal is to take down the language that is utilized to injure women physically, socially and linguistically. The artist dismantles the linguistic system of *Machistañol* by taking, or appropriating as Butler argues, the sociolinguistic power of *Machistañol* with their own words. We have a “cambio de armas” where the victimizer’s weapon is used against him. Speaking and acting out the same utterances meant to injure women is not an

act of repetition; but an act of insurrectionary speech, for when an individual who is not bestowed with authority claims herself to be sovereign when she speaks in the machista axes of communication, she breaks with the spiral cycle of who has the right to power, to use language, to speak, and to act. In short, this linguistic schism yields her the opportunity to *perform agency*.

The power of the performative succeeds when the speaker or actor upholds authority when she is denied any ration of power. Thus, to perform agency is to claim that which is not already given. Butler asks what is the

performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused in order to deplete the term of its degradation or to derive an affirmation from that degradation, rallying under the sign of “queer” or revaluing affirmatively the category of “black” or of “women”? (*Excitable Speech* 158)

Her response is that it is precisely in such appropriation which relies on performative (bodily) productions, that we can recompose and disorient the cultural and sedimented usage of the terms used to degrade and injure us (Butler *Excitable Speech* 159). Put differently, it is in our intention to perform “queer,” “black,” and “woman” differently than its historical norm, where we perform a break with the past that injures. Therefore, in *Perra* the artist gives the term a new value when she acts it out in the context of a woman in resistance; she is no longer a victim. We begin to see more of these acts of resistance in the next few works. In her poem “¿Qué dirán de mí si un día aparezco muerta?” / “What will they say about me if one day I appear dead” Galindo rewrites the story of every woman who is violated by *Machistañol* speakers and actors. That includes the State as much as society. This poem is from her second poetry collection *Telarañas*, where we see how women no longer tolerate the inherited patriarchal violence we once saw in *Personal e intransmisible*.

¿Qué dirán de mí si un día aparezco muerta?

Abrirán mis gavetas
sacarán mis calzones al sol
revisarán minuciosamente mi pasado
y dirán
quizás
que lo merezco. (7)

Cada periódico hará un despliegue de mis defectos
mis vicios
mis fallas
y dirán
quizás
que lo merezco. (14)

Se desnudaba con demasiada facilidad
Dirán algunos
fumaba mariguana
dirán los otros.

Saber en que estaba metida
dirá fulanito
saber que debía
dirá menganito. (22)

Se acostó con el que ahora es mi esposo
dirá la zutana
era una puta
dirá la fulana
una loca
pensará merengana. (28)

Una comunista que afirmaba el genocidio
escribirá perengano
una vergüenza para el país
apuntará perencejo. (32)

Una cualquiera
denunciará el policía
tenía las uñas mal pintadas de rojo
y la marca de un arete en el ombligo. (36)

Una marera
concluirá el fiscal
tenía la pierna tatuada con zopilotes

y una horrible telaraña en la parte de atrás. (40)

Alguien localizará mis antecedentes penales
en la comisaría de Santa Catarina Pinula
y esa será mi perdición. (43)

Dirán entonces que era una paria
una delincuente
una mala semilla
una drogadicta. (47)

Las señoras en sus casas dirán que fue lo mejor para
Guatemala
el envidioso se alegrará en secreto con la noticia
y unos cuantos que me quisieron no dirán nada.

En mi entierro
mis cuatro hermanas
limpiarán sus lágrimas
y limpiarán mi nombre. (55)

Dirán que es mentira
que Regina nunca estuvo vinculada al PRI
que no fue una puta
ni una loca
ni una vaga (60)
ni una maleante
ni una bandida
ni una terrorista
ni una delincuente
ni una paria (65)
ni una asesina
ni una ladrona
ni una extorsionista
ni una drogadicta
ni una vendida (70)
ni una comunista
ni una criminal
ni una marera.

Dirán que Regina fue su hermana
y que era buena. (75)

Y de ti.
¿Qué dirán de ti si un día apareces muerto?

Starting with the title of the poem, the poetic voice seriously plays with the phrase “el qué dirán” or “what will they say.” In Spanish, this short phrase refers to the debilitating effect of gossip within a community, a family, and society at large. This question is dangerous because it restricts the way people live out their lives, the choices they make and the patterns they can break. Furthermore, “el qué dirán” is important when we consider how it affects the psyche of women who experience domestic violence. To leave an abusive husband would taint her image, yet to stay is to live with a future murderer. It is restricting when young girls tell their own friends they shouldn’t wear a mini-skirt because of what “they” will say or what message the girls are giving boys.²³⁶ These are actual examples of what Marina Castañeda calls *machismo invisible*, “lo que he llamado el machismo invisible domina la vida cotidiana, la comunicación, la salud y la sexualidad de todos y cada uno de nosotros” (*El machismo invisible regresa* Preface).²³⁷ In short, to begin the poem with the question: “¿Qué dirán de mí si un día aparezco muerta?” actually asks: What will a machista society say about my body before and after my death?

²³⁶ BBC News published a study that addresses how young women in Latin America participate and perpetuate machismo by thinking that “no” is really “yes” or that to dress a certain way justifies men sexually harassing one in the streets or worse, raping them. The study is disturbing without a doubt, but also very necessary, “Una mujer decente no debe vestirse provocativamente”: el estudio que revela cómo muchas adolescentes de América Latina justifican la violencia de género.”

²³⁷ “What I have called invisible machismo dominate daily life, communication, health and the sexuality of every one of us.” A clear example of *machismo invisible* is when a woman thinks that a man who is jealous or acts jealous is in fact expressing love to her. Or when women are blamed for the violence if they don’t follow the script of a “good woman”, i.e., one that dresses conservatively, doesn’t walk alone or drink. This type of discourse is still very much present today.

Galindo creates a dictionary of the terms and phrases used against women's bodies or the reasons for why they receive the blame for their own fatal destiny, one by one she lists them: she was a slut (verses 15 and 25), she smoked pot (17), she wore a belly button ring (36), she had tattoos (29). It is important to note that although she is describing her own body, given the obvious marker of black vultures tattooed on her leg and her own name which appears at the end, she is calling forth what is said about victims of femicide in the newspapers and by family and society. This is a testimonial poem that speaks to the reasons why "real" women were blamed for their fatal end. For example, when she says "Una cualquiera / denunciará el policía / tenía las uñas mal pintadas de rojo / y la marca de un arete en el ombligo," (33-36) she is evoking the case of Claudina Isabel Velasquez Paiz. According to the police officers, her murder was not worth investigating because she had a belly button ring and "in the parlance of the Guatemalan police, this meant she was a gang member or prostitute" (Sanford "From genocide to femicide" 114). Claudina Isabel Velasquez Paiz was only nineteen years old and in fact a law student.

Another important piece of the poem is the list of machista institutions. In the first stanza she refers to the investigators, in the second the newspapers, machista rumors in the third through sixth, the police in the seventh, the Law in the eighth, and society in the tenth and eleventh stanzas. If we think about this poem in mathematical terms, we can say that *Machistañol* and its speakers/actors make up seventy-five percent of the poem. *Machistañol* suffocates the reader; it is inescapable. However, all it takes to set her free is twenty-five percent of the poem. Along with her sisters' help, the poetic voice counters the damage and effects of *Machistañol* with a repetitive "ni" which takes up the thirteenth stanza. Everything that was said by the machista discourse of violence is negated by the feminist discourse on violence. Through

repetition, the poetic voice protests what was previously said. In disempowering *Machistañol* with her incessant “ni,” she empowers Regina.

The way to debunk a system that attacks women sociolinguistically is to use the same tools but for different purposes. In other words, *Machistañol* is best defeated *in language*. In the words of Butler, “Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, *a repetition in language that forces change*” (Butler *Excitable Speech* 163, emphasis added). While most of the poem aims to injure Regina through sexist insults and language, she is able to oppose the historically sedimented effects with “no fue” and “ni.” Yet, the big insurrectionary moment occurs in the verse “era buena” (75). This last verse breaks with the past of what *Machistañol* painted her to be. If *Machistañol* has only interpellated women as subordinates and undeserving of life, there is room for what women have *not* been called. In other words, we can find new possibilities for linguistic life precisely in what *she*, the poetic object and subject, is never called (Butler *Excitable Speech* 41). To say “She was good” ruptures the historicity of the sexist language of *Machistañol*.

In the following performance, Galindo offer us a new sight of life, despite the fact that she portrays the body of a victim of feminicide. Through the simple act of breathing, *Exhalación* (*Estoy viva*), contests the space which violence has forced women to inhabit—death. Fully anesthetized, her body lies on what appears to be a tombstone. The temperature is uncannily cold when we see her prickly skin and nipples, alluding to the space of a morgue. This piece was part of the Contemporary Art Pavilion’s (Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea, PAC) opening exhibit in Milan, titled *Estoy Viva*, the first and most complete exhibition of the artist’s *oeuvre* per the pavilion’s information.

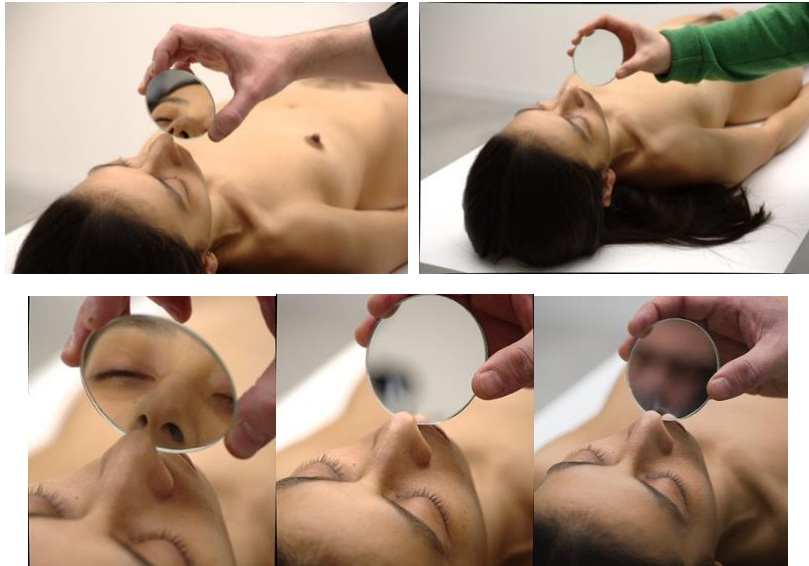


Figure 8. Regina José Galindo, *Exhalación (Estoy viva) / Exhalation (I am alive)*.²³⁸

In this piece, Galindo is performing a corpse pose quite literally. Her hands by her side, shoulders tucked underneath her, eyes closed, and chin slightly tucked, she is meditatively immobile. Without really having to act or move her body, she loudly speaks “No, violence will not take my breath away from me!” To breathe then, denies death as a possibility. Contrary to hunger strikes where people refuse to eat to express resistance, here to exclaim for life by continuing to breathe becomes this woman’s political motto. For the hunger strikers, the type of life or system in which they are working or living in is no different than death, so to go on a hunger strike exposes the inhumanity of the situation at the same time the body is in resistance, finally “formulating a ‘no’ through bodily actions that may or may not take the form of speech” (Butler *Dispossession* Ch 13). Although it can be argued that to stay alive is to become involved

²³⁸ Permanezco completamente anestesiada sobre una base blanca. El público es libre de tomar mi exhalación con un pequeño espejo para comprobar que estoy viva. *I am completely anesthetized over a white base. The public is free to take my exhalation with a small mirror to prove that I am alive.* (Milán, Italia. 2014). The Italian PAC Museum made a video-performance of this piece where we hear poems written by Galindo in the background. In one of the videos we can hear the poem “La guerra ha terminado” as the camera focuses on the artist’s body as it lies on an autopsy table. We did not include this video in our analysis because it was not part of the artist’s website, and it may have been done for promotional purposes of the exhibit.

in the relentless violence that pervades life, for women in Guatemala, this line of thinking is insufficient. For a woman to survive in Guatemala City, she must not only claim life but assert her position as a woman that *is* alive. Rather than speaking about the death of hundreds of women every year, this performance forces us to think differently—to think about the possibilities where life still exists. The simple act of breathing challenges the Machista State, *Machistañol*, and the systems that stop women from living. Her resistance to the effects of violence speaks volumes as she continues to breathe despite the violence this woman must have endured before showing up on a dissection table. Furthermore, the anesthesia challenges the idea of a desensitized society who can look at death and violence without turning away because it has become normalized. Here, we must pay closer attention to her corpse. Her breathing, as seen through her stomach inflating and deflating as well as the mirrors in which the spectators collect her visible breath, offers a new perspective.

There is certainly a juxtaposition of life and death at play, a sort of battle between the two. This juxtaposition appears in many other performances. For example, *Alud* (2011), where she is covered in dirt or *Piel de gallina* (2012), where her body lies inside a mortuary freezer, or even *Hilo de tiempo* (2012) and *Caminos* (2013), where she is covered by black and white cloth sacks, respectively; all these bodies take the position of a corpse too. Unlike these performances, in *Exhalación (Estoy Viva)* her body is in a state of calm, where the anesthesia comes not to offset the senses but to release them. Corpse pose, or savasana in the yogic tradition, allows one to reap the benefits of yoga asanas or movements; here it becomes an outlet to let go of the difficulties of being a woman *in movement*. She can exhale because she is alive, after all.

If in her first performance, *Dolor en un pañuelo*, Galindo pointed to the sudden increase of violence against women in Guatemala, in this last performance she highlights the fact that

Machistañol has not succeeded without a fight. Moreover, it is a piece that calls forth responsibility and assertiveness, for through the act of living we can diminish the power of a violence that has been systematically ingrained in Guatemalans. To attest *I am alive* becomes a conscious political act, and to be alive is its utmost rebellious expression. Thus, to participate in life is to participate in politics because when women not only exclaim for life, but act within the terms of a life they deserve, they create a new subjectivity (Butler “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics” vii). Asking for permission to exist is not the same as taking. To acquire that which is denied to a person, one must act as if it is already theirs, Butler argues.²³⁹ One must then, position oneself in a place of power. When one woman stands up for life, it encourages other women to do the same.

The Machista State’s war against women has had a trickle-down effect in the physical, psychological and sociopolitical way women carry out their lives. Women are filled with a fear of being too feminine, afraid to roam the streets at any hour of the day; they endure the daily trauma of returning home to an abusive partner – all because to be born female automatically creates an uncertain future.²⁴⁰ A machista world forces women to live these and other violent experiences on a daily basis. A call to end that scripted lifestyle can be found in the following poem. While violence against women occurs precisely because of their gender, what they wear or how they perform their sexuality, in the poem “Vamos a defendernos”/ “Let’s defend ourselves” the collective feminine use what has been used against them—every single part of

²³⁹ “Asserting a right they did not have in order to make the case, publicly, that they should have that very right” is how precarity and performance can best assert a different reality in the social sphere (Butler “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics” iv).

²⁴⁰ Stories like Evelyn Price’s “Doce horas siendo mujer” or Edna Sandoval’s “Miedo a ser mujer en Guatemala” published in *Plaza Pública* speak to the realities expressed above.

their body –to perform agency. Such tactic ruptures with the historicity of sexism, which views women's bodies as free property, weak in every sense of the word, and unfit for society.

Vamos a defendernos
con los puños
las uñas
los dientes
las cuerdas vocales (5)
la vagina
el útero
los ovarios.

Vamos a defendernos con verdades
fuerzas ancestrales (10)
cambios de luna.

Vamos a defendernos con poemas
tejidos
dibujos
la voz. (15)

Vamos a defendernos entre todas
y cada una
porque todas somos una
y sin una
no somos todas. (20)

Vamos a defendernos entre todas
antes de que todas caigan
y de nosotras
no quede ninguna. (24)

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The poetic voice calls women to participate in the breaking with social perceptions of being Woman precisely by using their corporality. By intentionally naming everything that has been tagged feminine, indigenous, and thus inherently inferior by *Machistañol*, the poet transforms these parts into empowering characteristics with which they can defend themselves.

²⁴¹ This poem was dedicated to Monica Casco, a woman who was sentenced to prison for killing her abusive husband. <https://lahora.gt/hemeroteca-lh/acusada-por-muerte-de-su-esposo-deja-la-carcel/> Nov 15 2013.

Moreover, Galindo initiates a rewriting of “los estereotipos de las mujeres de Guatemala” as she deconstructs these stereotypes from an empowering perspective that rejects “las connotaciones paternalistas que globalmente han dirigido las miradas hacia las mujeres de color y del tercer mundo” (Sandoval “Regina José Galindo y su libro *Telarañas*”).²⁴² In short, the poet does not attempt to unite women by focusing on only what they share; rather she is calling to unite them based on their differences. In the case of Guatemala, the poem opens the door to a comparative feminism that does not impose but rather listens to find points of intersection between the different narratives of an array of women.²⁴³

In the poem, the poetic voice begins by naming the corporal attributes of a woman to make it clear that the current war against women affects *all* women; thus, no woman is alone in this. She is naming the body parts that are violated in “real life” to redefine them. If in an antiquated patriarchal and paternalistic perspective women’s bodies are considered weak or in need of protection, the feminist poetic voice turns women’s bodies into armor. Women fight back with precisely the body parts that are most often abused, mutilated, and tortured by machista violence—the vagina, uterus and ovaries. These reproductive organs then, will bring to life what a Machista State intends to eliminate—women, indigenous bodies, a new generation. However, more than reproductive abilities, it is important to highlight this area of the body because it is where women can hone a sense of security, safety and power. Taking into account the chakra system in Vedic philosophy, the root, sacral and solar plexus chakras are the most

²⁴² “The stereotypes of Guatemalan women” and “the paternalistic connotations which globally have directed their gaze towards women of color and third world countries.”

²⁴³ I am referring to Mohanty’s idea of comparative feminism in her essay, “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” where she proposes a course in Women’s Studies departments that “shows the interconnectedness of the histories, experiences, and struggles of U.S. women of color, white women, and women from the Third World/South” (522).

important for women to achieve balance and ignite their full potential. The artist herself told us how her solar plexus was calling her to do more with her artistic expressions.²⁴⁴ Thus, through the act of naming women's sexual organs, the poetic voice calls forth the energy in these wheels of Life so that with them, women can act from a place of confidence and empowerment.

Another chakra that comes to play in the second and third stanza is the throat chakra. The act of speaking up is at its fiercest after the first three chakras have been ignited, for self-confidence and security allow us to speak our truth. In the verses “Vamos a defendernos con verdades” (9) and “la voz” (15) the poetic voice makes reference to the women who spoke their truths against the State in open court—the women of Ixil and Sepur Zarco. These emblematic women have become the inspiration for women across the world that it is possible to fight violence with speech, with the truth and not fall into the trap of using the same means of *Machistañol*. For example, the second stanza invokes ancestral knowledges as their “handbook” and relies on the moon—the goddess of fertility in Maya philosophy—to decide when to reap and sow. While these knowledges were erased by the colonizer, the poetic voice brings them back to light as tools of wisdom to defeat the violence that has saturated the cycle of life.

In addition to invoking Maya ancestral knowledges, the poetic voice advocates for a writing of history through art—poetry, textiles, drawings, and oral *herstories*. To participate in the worldmaking of an alternate world, one can use language in its multiple manifestations, for the goal is to include an array of voices and expressions. While poetry is one avenue to express knowledge, Maya women express their narratives in their textiles. For example, the *huipiles* and *cortes* that they wear convey the story of their communities through elaborate colors and

²⁴⁴ “Claro que la palabra tiene la capacidad de generar todo tipo de cosas. Pero yo tenía una sensación en el plexo solar que me decía que para mí no eran suficiente. Se me removía todo por dentro. En mi caso personal, había una sensación real, que la sentía en mi cuerpo, de que yo necesitaba hacer algo más” (Galindo 2017).

images.²⁴⁵ While at the beginning the poetic voice turns women's bodies into armor, here she turns indigenous women's attire and narratives into political expressions of belonging, for "porque todas somos una / y sin una / no somos todas" (18-20).

As we have seen, this poem highlights a key difference between *Machistañol* and the language used by women—while the former is destructive, the latter is creative. Rather than succumbing to the same tactics of violence used by a Machista State, these women collaborate in juxtaposition of each other's differences to defeat a common enemy—*Machistañol*. This piece champions women from all spaces who suffer from machista violence to come together to speak up, to tell their narratives, share their knowledges and embody their gender without fear because "Vamos a defendernos entre todas" (21). While in this piece the poetic voice calls for all women to unite and use their bodies as armor, Galindo's most recent performance, *Nada nos calla*, is probably the closest representation of this poem *in action*.



Figure 9. Regina José Galindo, *Nada nos calla* / *Nothing can silence us*.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ "En Guatemala la vestimenta étnica es uno de los marcadores más visibles para identificar a mayas/indígenas de ladinas/mestizas, esta vestimenta se compone del hüipil (sinónimo de blusa) y corte (sinónimo de falda, pollera, etc.) pero por factores económicos, políticos y de racismo, ya sea por escasez de recursos, por protección ante el racismo o por opción política, no todas las mayas/indígenas visten cotidianamente esta vestimenta" (Gómez Grijalva *Tejiendo de otro modo* 272)

²⁴⁶ This performance took place October of 2018 during the International Book Fair in El Zócalo, Mexico. Before the performance, the artist and the event organizers published a call which

Days before the International Book Fair in El Zócalo, México, Galindo summoned women to participate in a nine-minute-long collective scream. The length of time commemorated the young girls at the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción who were crying out for help for nine minutes from the locked building, which was on fire in March of 2017 and which officers refused to open until it was too late. Forty of these young women died in the fire because nobody opened the door to free them.²⁴⁷ In the aftermath we find out that days before the fire, they were protesting the physical and sexual abuse acted out on them by the same men who were set to “protect” them in this “safe house”—hogar seguro. This has been the most evident and public machista attack upon young women as of yet. Every piece of evidence pointed to the State, the President of Guatemala, and the machista guards as responsible for their deaths.

The harsh and violent realities women endure in Guatemala and around the world can render them incapable of speaking or acting. However, for Galindo, asserting that there is hope even in the environment full of feminicides and violence in post-war 21st century Guatemala encourages us to think about what the future could look like if women, and men, come together to fight the war against women through different means. Despite the dark topics the artist focuses on in her work, there is always a glimpse of hope as we hope to have demonstrated. Moreover, she believes that it is necessary to negate the language that has been written on women’s bodies

explained that women were welcome to come scream and manifest their opposition to violence against women. The 1st image is from the book fair that announces details on the performance (date, place and time). The second image is from Secretaria de Cultura Mexico, <https://cultura.cdmx.gob.mx/comunicacion/nota/la-artista-visual-regina-jose-galindo-presento-su-performance-poetico-nada-nos-calla-en-la-fil-zocalo-2018> There is also a YouTube video where the artist explains the context of the performance and invites women and men to participate in a 9-minute-long scream, <https://youtu.be/ML3qRWuhknU>

²⁴⁷ According to the newspaper *El País*, “en la madrugada del 8 de marzo, Día Internacional de la Mujer, encerraron bajo llave a más de 50 niñas en un aula, quienes provocaron un incendio para que las dejaran salir” (Bonilla).

up until today so that the future generations can learn a *new* language that is not based on violence and destruction but on life and creation. I end with the poem “Vamos a defendernos” and the performance “Nada nos calla” because women are in fact writing a new language today that will eventually defeat *Machistañol*.

6.3 BODY LANGUAGE CATALOGUE²⁴⁸

Hermana

- Spitting on face: I have the power to cleanse you; You must let go of the past.
- Slapping of face: Wake up!; I can express anger.
- Whipping: I release tension and old stories from your body; You are renewed.
- Disclosed back: Your back is the site to be cleansed.
- Closed eyes: I am ready to receive.
- Face to face: We need a confrontation in order to heal old wounds.

Mientras, ellos siguen libres

- Legs open: I invite you to a conversation about rape.
- Arms open: Help me find justice.
- Bound by wrists and ankles: I cannot do this alone, let's disentangle the truth together.
- Eyes open: I know who did it.
- Pregnant body: I hold the future generation within me.
- Naked: My naked body speaks the bare truth.

La Verdad

- Seated: I take a seat before you to tell versions of many women's experiences of violence.
- Gaze down: I pray for the strength of the women whose stories I am telling.
- Gaze up: You may want to silence me but I will continue.
- Anesthesiologist: He represents the machista State.
- Microphone: You will hear me.
- Desk: Witness stand.
- Cup of water: the cleansing medicine to heal the wounds I read.
- Drinks water: Water is life; it restores my strength.

²⁴⁸ I would like to remind the reader that these speech acts are my own interpretation of Galindo's bodily acts in her performances. My reading of her corporal acts into verbal acts denote my positionality as a Guatemalan-American woman.

El dolor en un pañuelo

- Legs Closed: These cold cases are closed.
- Arms open: I have the courage to interfere the discourse on feminicides.
- Legs closed: The conversation about femicide is off limits, but I contest it with my bare body.
- Wrists bounded: I ask that you release me to disclose the stories of violence against women that hides between my legs.
- Blindfolded: Do not be fooled by the news, we must read between the lines with *new* eyes.
- Naked: I am the body of the women you read about in the newspapers.

Perra

- Seated: I take a seat to show you what violence can do.
- Holding knife on one hand: I have the power to resignify this word.
- Holding skin taught with other hand: I am in control. I decide how much pain this term causes upon my body.
- Stands up and the dress covers her inscription: I have ownership of the word *perra* now.

Exhalación / Estoy viva

- Corpse pose: I release the pain and negative experiences that came before my current state.
- Belly inflating and deflating: I am alive. The Life Force is still within me.

7.0 EXAMINING A MACHISTA'S PARADISE IN DENISE PHÉ-FUNCHAL

*the importance of feminism remembering the past
– its own violent as well as violated history –
and in some ways affirming the phallogentric legacy,
[...] is the only way in which feminism can be truly responsible to the other,
and, indeed, benefit from the other's capacity to alter things through its reiteration.*
Lydia Rainford

A paradise for whom? Denise Phé-Funchal's poetry book, *Manual del mundo paraíso/ Manual of a World in Paradise* (2010) is a repertoire of money-hungry men who are the head of their households, who act like god, who believe themselves to be god almighty. The poems in this book suggest a community where the sensory fabric is built on "fitting in" and that to do so, one must subscribe to monthly payments ("pagar paraíso," a verse that is often repeated) in order to access godlike features and perks. One need only pay their due to be part of the "representatives," the exclusive group in this godly world. However, there is one condition that must be met before making payments —one must be a man; women can never access divine power. Excluded from entering or attaining divine power in this purely male order, in her short story collection *Buenas costumbres/ Good Traditions* (2011) woman is also incapable of escaping man's paradise, much less creating a paradise of her own; or that is what we believe at first reading. These two works present us with a machista male-order context that functions at the expense of woman. She is not welcomed as an active participant in this machista paradise.

The narratives we read in her poetry and short-stories are “commonly” machista as we quickly recognize its framework and language of domination—*Machistañol*—a language spoken and acted out by machistas in their exercise of violence against those perceived to be inferior to them. The candid manner in which Phé-Funchal exposes machismo and *Machistañol* in her writings, gives her interpretative power *a la* Jean Franco.²⁴⁹ The author presents the reality of many women who find themselves in spaces that indeed invisibilize women and their violent experiences. These stories pose the question, “Is there a way out of the patriarchy?” and “Can the women in Phe-Funchal’s works thwart *Machistañol*?” These questions arise in the poems “madre” and “entrega un hijo al mundo” from *Manual del mundo paraíso*.²⁵⁰ They are answered in the short stories “Zapatos”/ “Shoes” and “Partiré mañana”/ “I leave tomorrow.” In these stories we read about real-life cases of domestic abuse and oppression of women in a patriarchal home. In fact, the violence we read about in the short stories where husbands control and abuse their wives physically, emotionally and psychologically highlight the verisimilitude between literature and life. This is not a coincidence. In an interview with Fernando Chaves Espinach from *La Nación - Costa Rica*, Phé-Funchal shares how when she directed a clinic for attention to victims of violence, “La mayoría de personas que buscaban los servicios eran mujeres, y más de la mitad de casos atendidos eran de violencia intrafamiliar [...] de ahí, un par de historias que están publicadas en *Buenas costumbres*.”²⁵¹ Blurring the lines between literary fiction and life

²⁴⁹ Jean Franco’s interpretative power concept explains that by women interpreting the social world that surrounds them in their writings, as Phé-Funchal accomplishes in her works, women can attain discursive power over what has been said primarily by men, patriarchy and machismo in our case.

²⁵⁰ The poems in the poetry book *Manual del mundo paraíso* are numbered and I use the first verse as the title of each poem.

²⁵¹ All translations of primary texts into English are mine: “The majority of people who looked for services were women, and more than half of the cases were about domestic violence [...] from there, a few of the stories that are published in *Buenas costumbres*.”

alters the reader's senses; we are left asking "did this really happen?" or worse, "does this continue to happen today?"

In our analysis we pay close attention to the intricate relationship between the content of *Manual del mundo paraíso*, a how-to manual based on religious commandments, and the stories in *Buenas costumbres*, where the instructions are acted out. Reading these two texts hand in hand gives us an opportunity to trace a historiography of the strict machista belief system that is established in the former and to see how it is debunked in the latter, where we see instances of rebellious speech acts. For women who are trapped in patriarchal structures, to speak up or act out of the norm is a deadly risk. Therefore, the female characters in the stories play along in the machista's paradise, while at the same time challenge the nuanced forms of *Machistañol* as they make them readable. If this male-dominated language was meant to be understood and spoken only amongst men, we observe an interference in *their* language. More importantly though, the women in the short stories resist *Machistañol* in obscure ways, thus transforming the sensory fabric of what is "common" to men to one that is "common" to women. Reading these stories through a feminist perspective, we argue that the women in the short-stories rebel against the image of woman instituted in the poems.

To better understand the anti-patriarchal connotations in her work, we must take into account the author's background. A writer, sociologist and professor, it is inevitable that Phé-Funchal should combine literature and sociology when creating stories that carefully blend the real with the imaginary. Her works introduce us to a world that leaves the reader wondering if in fact there is some truth behind the lines. Her *leitmotiv* is violence in complex nuclear family dynamics and female dramas, or "mujeres en crisis," as the newspaper *La Estrella de Panamá*

referred to them.²⁵² At the root of this violence, there is a larger concept that penetrates the families and women's lives—religion, more specifically, Christianity. At times omnipresent in her works, and other times scrupulously violent towards marginal beings in *Manual del mundo paraíso*, the religious institution assigns each member of the patriarchal family a specific role and mission to carry out in their lifetime—this is their fee to enter paradise, or His Kingdom.

The religious references present in her work come as no surprise, given that the author's dissertation "El recuerdo del discurso o los recursos gracias al discurso: análisis de contenido del discurso de la iglesia Neopentecostal guatemalteca 'Casa de Dios'" is a meticulous analysis of the discourse enacted by the famous Cash Luna—the megachurch pastor in Guatemala—and the social coercion of donating to the *Kingdom* in order to receive divine blessings on earth. Her dissertation's main focus is the economic implications of the Neo-Pentecostal ideology. Although, Phé-Funchal also examines how Cash and Sonia Luna's discourse are speech acts that ripple into the minds and homes of their followers. When we read a poem like "Madre," it becomes palpable that the poems are a critique of Luna's interpretations of the Bible, especially in how sexist they are towards women.

A multi-genre artist, Phé-Funchal also writes film scripts and literature for children.²⁵³

²⁵² At the XI International Book Fair in Panama, Phe-Funchal gives us her perspective: that, in regards to writing about women, one should "avoid sanctifying them or placing them as victims that deserve compassion. At the end of the day, us women are humans (even if you don't believe it); and able to be bitches and to free ourselves from what weighs us; a bitch in two senses, to be bad when necessary-or for pleasure- or to be strong and brave." Original: "evitar santificarlas o ponerlas como víctimas que merecen compasión. Al final de cuentas, las mujeres somos humanas (aunque no lo crean); y capaces de ser unas grandes cabronas y de liberarnos de lo que nos pesa; cabronas en dos sentidos, ser malas cuando es necesario -o por placer- o fuertes y valientes." Note how the author resignifies the word "bitch" by removing its negative connotation and transforming it into a term of power.

²⁵³ An avid participant in literary and creative spaces, Phé-Funchal has participated in literature symposia and book fairs alike over the years. In 2007 she took part in the Congress of Central American Literature, and in 2014 she participated in the New York conference *Journeys Toward*

Her most recent book, *La habitación de la memoria* (2015), is a collection of short stories for children. In 2009 she wrote a script for the documentary *Reinas de la Noche*, and in 2010 the script for *Chapstick* –a screen adaptation of the short story we find in *Buenas costumbres*. This last was selected for the Short Film Corner at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. Phé-Funchal's creative works go beyond mere representations of daily life. As our analysis will show, there is a constant dialogue or response that takes place between the world that surrounds her and her own literary expressions. Moreover, her stories, about family dynamics, poverty, sexism, classism, racism, and consumerism, are not necessarily local; nor are they about Guatemala alone. On the contrary, many of her works do not name a spatial context, allowing these social topics to interconnect or inter-dissect on global terms. The idea that classism, racism or violence against women only occurs in Guatemala is displaced in Phé-Funchal's works as these issues can take place *anywhere*. We will take a close look at the texts that address women issues, violence against them and how *Machistañol* is disarticulated in these pieces to offer another woman's effort to decipher feminicide and violence today.

Daylight / Guatemalan Writers: Travel to the Sunrise. She has also contributed in panel discussions and book presentations at Guatemala's annual book fair, FILGUA (Feria Internacional del Libro en Guatemala) since 2007, as well as the International Poetry Festival of San Salvador in 2010 and the International Book Fair in Guadalajara in 2011, where she presented her book *Buenas costumbres*. Her poetry and short stories have been published in various anthologies throughout Latin America, for example, *Sin Casaca* (Centro de Cultura Española, Guatemala, 2008), *Región* (Interzona Eds., Argentina, 2011), *Memorias de la Casa* (Índole Eds., El Salvador, 2012), *Ni Hermosa ni Maldita* (Alfaguara, Guatemala 2012), *El Futuro Empezó Ayer* (Catafixia Eds. and UNESCO, 2012) and *Un Espejo Roto* (GEICA and Goethe Institut, 2014).

7.1 A PARADISE OF HER OWN

*Lo que crucifican es a la cotidianidad y la cultura,
no directamente a los hombres.*

Denise Phé-Funchal

A candidly hyperbolic interpretation of the roles that men and women must follow to access a modern version of paradise, the poetry book *Manual del mundo paraíso* negates woman direct access to divinity. The book is an instruction handbook to guide one to achieve paradise on earth, to experience joy and bliss. The instructions included in the book must be strictly followed. While men must pay their godly dues, women's roles and duties are intentionally unworthy of entering His Kingdom. Women are to remain silent and obedient, procreate, sacrifice herself (for she brought hell to paradise), and follow orders from the man of the house, or else. The Neo-Pentecostal ideology²⁵⁴ which Phé-Funchal critiques throughout the poems has defined class and gender roles meticulously. Women are never to be at the head of the table due to their impossibility of paying off the monthly fee that grants them access to "el paraíso." The divine script for women prohibits them from seeking financial gain, much less independence. In short, divine paradise is only made accessible to wealthy men. The manual leaves no room for women to access or exist as her own person. In fact, it brazenly categorizes her as an object whose only role is to birth children, and not even raise them as she sees fit, which is a man's job: "recuerda que sólo eres la vasija que/ garantiza el reino de dios en la tierra [...] que a la cabeza va el hombre, / el que decide [...] como criar" ("Madre").

The notion of paradise transmitted in *Manual del mundo paraíso* is deceptively told from a feminist perspective. A sarcastic tone fills its pages; it is a mockery of the patriarchy and

²⁵⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, we find clear similarities between the author's dissertation—a study of Cash Luna's neo-Pentecostal ideology — and the speech acts in each of the verses in the poetry book.

Machistañol. At first, it appears as a direct imitation of the story of how the Father is the leader of the family and everyone obeys his orders. It is the typical patriarchal story where males “have individual destinies; they are promised domination, a surrogate godhead, transcendence over the natural world through power in heroism, sainthood, or some form of transcendent paternity—founding a dynasty, an institution, a religion, or a state” (French *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* 69). In such patriarchal discourse, males transmit power “from spiritual father to spiritual son,” to the direct exclusion of females (French *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* 69). Although a conventional narrative in many societies, here we have it told once more, but this time by a poetic voice who utilizes sarcasm and hyperbole to demystify this godly machista discourse.

Using an ironic tone in poems “madre” and “entrega un hijo al mundo,” the author appropriates the patriarchal discourse to question its expressively violent and sexist doctrine. From her dissertation, Phé-Funchal explains that “las categorías mujer-esposa-madre, conforman la identidad ideal de las Neopentecostales” (*El recurso del discurso* 136).²⁵⁵ An ideal woman, then, is one that is sociopolitically dependent on a man because she is *his* woman, *his* wife and mother to *his* children. In this work, a woman’s three set roles—the female trinity of woman-wife-mother—to perform in life are outlined in such a way as to expose that what appear as “good morals” instead are ways to objectify and violate women in every sense of the word. The poem “madre,” a creed that is followed by religious devotees, challenges the female trinity in its reiteration.

Poema 13

madre,

²⁵⁵ “the categories woman-wife-mother make up the ideal identity of the Neo-Pentecostal women.”

eterna madre,
madre que enseña,
madre que protege,
madre que da gozo (5)
madre ausente, imaginaria, siempre virgen,
madre tuya bajo todas sus formas,
madre de enaguas grandes, de cuerpo
hermoso,
madre que castiga y perdona, (10)
que perdona,
madre poseída, comprada
mujer, mujer que comprende,
mujer que se convierte en madre,
madre con título de propiedad privada, (15)
mujer de alguien,
aunque ella no sepa,
aunque ella no quiera
sigue el documento tú que eres cómplice
del diablo, (20)
que trajiste el dolor a la tierra,
tú que mezclaste el mundo, el infierno y el
paraíso,
debes compensar
hacer sacrificios (25)
dios te pondrá mayores pruebas ya que el
diablo vive en ti,
en tu debilidad y en tu cuerpo,
ya que eres quien tienta al hombre, quien
lo aleja del camino sagrado (30)
recuerda que sólo eres la vasija que
garantiza el reino de dios en la tierra
el triunfo de dios sobre el diablo,
del hombre sobre lo humano
sigue a tu hombre, mujer, (35)
no caigas en las caricias del demonio,
calla que en tu voz radica el infierno, no
intentas pensar,
que a la cabeza va el hombre,
el que decide quién eres, cómo debes verte, (40)
cómo actuar,
cómo hablar, como criar,
sigue al hombre imagen de dios,
escucha su voz y encontrarás la tuya.

The trinity of woman-wife-mother are intertwined in such a way as to obfuscate any other way of performing her womanhood. To perform her role differently would warrant punishment against her because she would be violating the commandments set forth by this creed. More problematic is the fact that she is to believe these roles are her divine function. As Phé-Funchal notes, “Se exalta el papel del ama de casa y de la esposa abnegada, y se recalca que ésta es la función divina” (*El recurso del discurso* 134).²⁵⁷ To act any other way would bring hell unto paradise. She would be blamed for not following her divine responsibilities.

Offering us different degrees and nuanced forms of discursive and corporal violence, “madre” is a foundational poem as it makes visible the misogynous undertones in the religious discourse(s) of Christianity that influence the lives of women at different stages of life. The poem implies that to be a good Christian woman she must act, speak, and perform her womanhood according to his/His vision. To be a good wife and mother, she must follow his/His lead for he is the only one who knows how to build a good patriarchal home.²⁵⁸ Phé-Funchal tells us in her dissertation,

La pastora Sonia Luna, durante la charla especial para mujeres dentro del Congreso para Jóvenes Hechos 20:05, mencionó que ella había crecido en una familia en la que no se respetaba la jerarquía divina del hombre sobre la mujer, y que no había sido, si no hasta su encuentro con su esposo Carlos –Cash- que ella había conocido del verdadero orden

²⁵⁶ English translation of poems can be found in the Appendix. All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

²⁵⁷ “The roles of housewife and self-sacrificing wife are exalted, and it is emphasized that this is her divine function.”

²⁵⁸ Although surprising and frustrating to hear for a feminist in the twenty-first century, the truth is that this discourse that places man as the all-knowing continues to spread.

dentro de la familia, de la cual él es la cabeza y ella las extensiones para procurar el equilibrio en el hogar. (*El recurso del discurso* 129)²⁵⁹

The poem is critiquing discourses like Sonia Luna's that are condescending towards women by naming them as mere "extensions" to a man's world.

Moreover, the poem elucidates the fact that religious discourse is inherently patriarchal. If Butler argues that, "The racial slur is always cited from elsewhere, and in the speaking of it, one chimes in with a chorus of racists, producing at that moment the linguistic occasion for an imagined relation to an historically transmitted community of racists" (*Excitable Speech* 80), this poem exposes the Neo-Pentecostal discourse as a patriarchal community whose speech acts intend to denigrate women as second class citizens. By re-citing their discourse, the poetic voice is demystifying Luna's pious-appearing discourse to show what it really is—*Machistañol*. In its reiteration, the poem is acting against its prior act to offer us an alternative reading.²⁶⁰ The poetic voice's alternate interpretation makes visible the violence against women deeply embedded in the institution of Christianity.

This poem emphasizes the unquestionable acceptance and reproduction of a discourse that is based on the legitimization of violence against women. The first few verses present a caring and beautiful mother who brings joy and protects us all. By verse 15 she turns into "madre con título de propiedad privada." The abrupt shift from a caring and fertile goddess into private property quickly denotes that she is caught within a modern machista framework. Within such

²⁵⁹ "Pastor Sonia Luna, during a special talk for women at the Jóvenes Hechos 20:05 Congress, mentioned that she grew up in a family where the divine hierarchy where man is above woman was not followed, and it was not until she met her husband Carlos -Cash- that she found the real family order, where man is at the head of the household and woman an extension to create equilibrium in the home."

²⁶⁰ I am referring to Butler's idea: "If the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act [...] as an alternative reading" (Butler *Excitable Speech* 69).

discourse, her physical and sociolinguistic exploitation are justified. Physically, her body is controlled by her husband and forced to reproduce children. This is her divine duty. Sociolinguistically, she can only perform three roles: *mujer-madre-esposa*. This Holy Trinity, as opposed to man's "Father, Son and Holy Spirit," operates as a subjugating discourse when it assigns woman subordinate functions within the patriarchal world. Woman is prohibited from creating her own subjectivity. She cannot speak for herself, since her speech originates from hell, which consequently deprives her of a chance to think for herself. Her entire exterior and interior are controlled by him (father-husband-son). She is to follow his commands— "recuerda, calla, sigue, escucha." Neither in private nor public life does woman have the opportunity to perform her womanhood. She is literally and socially made up of man's own way of thinking, leaving no room for coexistence or negotiation. The structure of the poem, ultimately, is outlining *Machistañol's* axes of communication.

More than outlining the machista discourse, the poetic voice is playing with the axes of communication explained by Laura Segato in *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez*.²⁶¹ For Segato,²⁶² the vertical and horizontal axes of communication in the context of a rape scene places woman as a victim or sacrificial object, respectively. Here, the religious context implies a similar submissive role for women. Woman becomes a victim when she is silenced and oppressed by the fact that she cannot perform her womanhood outside of the commandments established in the poem "madre." Furthermore, she is

²⁶¹ In the introduction, I explained how by incorporating these artists' expressions of violence within Segato's axes of communication, I can show how a woman *can* speak from those sites of violence. Although in the poems in *Manual del mundo paraíso* we don't have women speakers per se, we find *her voice* in the short-stories of *Buenas costumbres*. Hence, we read these two texts side-by-side to show that when we carefully listen/read to what woman is saying in the texts, we can usurp the power *Machistañol* intends to keep over women.

²⁶² Refer to the previous chapter which explains Segato's concept.

also an object to be sacrificed as the duties of wife and mother entail in the poem—hers is a life full of sacrifices and control and being controlled. There is no possibility for her to find her own voice or agency within this religious-social construct.

It is crucial to trace the connection between the discursive and corporal silencing of women by Christianity and the violence that is taking place in Guatemala today. Those women who are not deemed “good women” in society, either because of what they are wearing or because they are out in public without a man by their side, often become the feminicide cases which are forgotten about or deemed unworthy of investigation.²⁶³ However antiquated the role of “madre” may appear to the reader of today, if we think about the inequality of power that exists between men and women, we realize that this role of “madre” remains gravely relevant. Certainly the *Law Against Femicide* is intended to recognize gender inequality, but there is no doubt that women are still seen as private property and gender violence is still misunderstood.²⁶⁴ There have been cases where women have to display physical abuse bruises that last more than ten days before they can initiate a legal case against their abuser, who is more often than not their partner or a male family relative.²⁶⁵

Although it may seem like an exaggeration, this poem speaks to a phenomenon that tends to go unnoticed — invisible almost: machismo. In her book, *El machismo invisible regresa*, Marina Castañeda offers a meticulous study of the machista speech acts that can go unnoticed, as

²⁶³ See Victoria Sanford’s “From Genocide to Feminicide.”

²⁶⁴ For example, the idea of rape between spouses is still not recognized in many countries, specifically because women are considered property. See Pellecer’s article “Por qué no es comparable la violencia en contra las mujeres y los hombres.” Another example is the case of gang violence where women are viewed and used as property to seek revenge against rival gang members, where to “kill his enemy’s girlfriend” is “to destroy his lost prized possession” (Suárez and Jordan “Three Thousand and Counting” 3).

²⁶⁵ “[P]erpetrators can be charged with assault only if signs of physical injury from the abuse persist for ten days” (Chazaro, Casey, Ruhl *Terrorizing Women* 102).

they fall under the category of “traditional” behavior and speech. Invisible machismo ranges from the most frequent phrases uttered by men and women to the machista behaviors that are passed on from generation to generation. For example, the phrase “My husband is considerate of my needs, he *lets me* go out with my friends” is deceptively a machista speech act since it insinuates she needs his permission. Another common example is when the male partner appears to be protective of his partner by constantly checking-in on her. Rather, he is in fact controlling her because his protection is obligatory, not optional (Castañeda “Proteger a las mujeres”). Another example is the speech act “no empieces” or “not this again.” It acts as a way for a man to disqualify *her* speech before she can even utter a word (Castañeda “La descalificación”). In sexual relations, men are empowered for being promiscuous, it makes him a “macho” while for women, sexual relations disempower her as her promiscuity elicits derogatory speech acts: puta/whore.

The rippling effects of these patriarchal speech acts of authority, control, disqualification and disempowerment become dangerously visible when we see nuanced forms of violence take place upon women’s bodies today. What are framed as “divine morals” for men are in fact modes of violence against women. Put differently, “madre” not only reiterates the subordination of women within a machista discourse, it highlights the fact that it is acceptable to treat women as bodies where men carry out a phallogocentric divine program. Both, the poem and machista discourse, justifies man’s doings, his speech acts. As objects, women are denied access to freedom of speech, thought or action. In the vertical axis of violent communication (Segato) woman has no speech; thus, what the religious discourse in this poem is suggesting is that violence against its female followers is divinely justified. What the poem makes clearly visible is the fact that an entire institution prevents and violates woman’s access to divinity *on purpose*.

Whether it is due to fear or mere machismo, it is the father-husband-son trinity's mission to deny women the possibility of attaining agency by disempowering them in speech and in social life. In short, while disguised as a list of "divine responsibilities" for men and women, the poem unveils the multi-layered violence of the religious discourse.

While the poem "madre" identifies mothers, daughters and wives as the only roles women can fulfill in a machista paradise, the poem "entrega un hijo al mundo" moves on to further emphasize the objectification of women with the appellation "cuerpo" (body). As if the previous poem were not patronizing enough towards women, here young men and women are given roles to follow within the family dynamic.

Poema 14

entrega un hijo al mundo para que en él
 recaigan los pecados,
dile que su objetivo es ser como tú
como él
poderoso (5)
enséñale a callar, a no responder
dile que el paraíso es cumplir el ciclo,
ser príncipe y encontrar un cuerpo
y a tu hija dile que no espere ser cabeza,
que como madre de futuros príncipes y (10)
 cuerpos, guarde silencio,
espere el esperma divino
cuéntales la historia del hijo del hombre,
del hijo de dios
y diles que él ha cargado con sus pecados, (15)
 con los de todos,
secula seculorum,
que no hay necesidad de hablar, de
 reclamar,
que el paraíso se encuentra en el mundo, (20)
en medio del pecado,
de los demonios,
cuéntales que el paraíso no se gana con palabras,
no se gana con acciones,
las monedas lo cubren todo, (25)
sus pecados son cargados por el más grande,

por el que todo perdona a cambio de
piezas para que logre su sueño eterno,
el reino de dios en la tierra,
la muerte de los malos a manos de los (30)
ejércitos
de nada vale, diles, hablar de justicia,
querer paz, vivir en paz,
todo será dado después de la muerte, si has
entregado monedas suficientes, (35)
si has pasado las pruebas del mundo,
las tentaciones y los desiertos,
si has evitado la cruz.

Manual del mundo paraíso 21

Young men are given numerous actions they must carry out as the patriarchs of the family. In addition, young boys are born princes for they “have individual destinies; they are promised domination [and] sainthood” according to the gender hierarchy established in the story of the Father, where the male figure is at the head of the household (*French Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* 69). Meanwhile, young ladies are not granted the title of “princess” for they cannot participate in this divine program. They, instead, must wait for things to happen *to* them. If for a young man his primary task is to give his divine sperm, for a young woman it is to receive, for she is just a *cuerpo*. This mission is simply stated, in “ser príncipe y encontrar un cuerpo” (verse 8). The idea that women are bodies whose only role is to reproduce more bodies while men are to be powerful princes illustrates the normalization of the concept of women as objects who should be prevented from performing outside the trinity woman-mother-wife.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ These inherently machista values and beliefs are reproduced and transplanted from the private space to the social world. Referring to the distribution of machista roles, Castañeda tells us that “La familia no sólo reproduce a las personas; también sirve para transmitir de generación en generación los valores y las creencias que, a su vez, servirán para que sigan reproduciéndose los roles correspondientes” / “The family does not only reproduce people; the family also functions to transmit from generation to generation the values and beliefs that, in turn, will function in such

The reiteration of the patriarchal structure within the Christian discourse and with keen attention to women, like in these two poems, allows the poetic voice to question the morals and divine reasoning behind such discourse. Positioning herself within the divine norm that aims to exclude her, grants the poetic voice sociolinguistic sovereign power. Butler explains how,

[O]ne who is excluded from the universal, and yet belongs to it nevertheless, speaks from a split situation of being at once authorized and deauthorized. That speaking is not a simple assimilation to an existing norm, for that norm is predicated on the exclusion of the one who speaks, and whose speech calls into question the foundation of the universal itself. (*Excitable Speech* 91)

Briefly put, precisely because of their split situation, authorized as a *cuerpo* at the same time that woman is deauthorized as a princess, women can perform agency under her authorized status to challenge man's divine power. Her discursive agency, albeit as a *cuerpo* in the poem, can call into question the foundation of her social existence from such position. Furthermore, if she were to speak from her deauthorized position, she would be performing the ultimate insurrectionary speech act *à la* Butler.

Ultimately, the poem unveils the layers of violence behind a religious discourse which intentionally excludes women from political and economic spaces so that she can never enter the machista "paraíso" on her own, if at all.²⁶⁷ If the only way one can enter god's kingdom on earth is by contributing enough capital, women are destined to live in a violent world that is not

a way that the roles too will continue reproducing themselves correspondingly" (Castañeda *El machismo invisible regresa*).

²⁶⁷ More than just a sexist paradise, it is also inherently classist and racist as the poem "si construyes el paraíso en tierra" denotes and verses throughout the poetry book that remind us that "dios nos mide por la riqueza"/ "god measures us by our riches" (12).

paradise, because her capacity to gain an income is truncated from the beginning. For women to partake in the journey to paradise, she must transgress the rules and in doing so risk her own existence. To speak as a deauthorized subject would imply that risk. In the two short stories that follow, “Zapatos” and “Partiré mañana,” two women speak up against *Machistañol* as (de)authorized subjects in a man’s world.

In the short story, “Zapatos”/ “Shoes,” we witness the life of a woman-wife-mother who carries out her trinity role as was established in *Manual del mundo paraíso*. However, she does not fully abide by the machista discourse; rather, she interferes in both of *Machistañol*’s axes of communication. Placing *Machistañol* in the context of the home, the vertical axis in the story appears when her husband disciplines her through violent speech acts and domestic abuse. On the horizontal axis, the husband communicates with his son and teaches him what it takes to carry forth the role of the “man of the house.” The woman-wife-mother discreetly rebels the only way she sees fit—she proves to be “incapable” of memorizing and following the rules as ascribed by a machista man. From the short story collection *Buenas costumbres*, “Zapatos” can be read as poems “madre” and “entrega un hijo al mundo” *acted out* in “real life.” Similar to the husband in “madre,” who is the head of the household and decides everything for his wife, the husband in “Zapatos” takes on an authoritative role. Moreover, the son’s mission, as laid out in “entrega un hijo al mundo,” is to find a *cuerpo* and become a *príncipe*. Here, the father teaches him how to fulfill his mission by example, by violence.

The story is told from the son’s perspective and it carefully details what a man must do to keep his household under control. For example, the son informs us, “Los zapatos de un hombre deben estar siempre limpios y brillantes ya que son el reflejo de su inteligencia y de sus

aspiraciones” (*Buenas costumbres* 41).²⁶⁸ He then moves from a man’s wardrobe to a man’s clean and immaculate space—the home, “Dedo sobre la mesa. Inspección cercana del pliegue de las sábanas [...] La señora del hogar limpiaba desde la mañana al ritmo de los ronquidos de mi padre” (42).²⁶⁹ Lastly, the son informs us that a man’s sexual desires must be met, “Un hombre respeta sus impulsos y exige satisfacerlos” (42). Everything that happens inside the private space reflects upon a man’s power in the public eye. Thus, private and public life are controlled by man because his reputation and authority over the family are at risk otherwise.

To maintain his power and for others to meet his expectations, he must constantly educate. Except, in a machista household, the act of educating is equivalent to causing violence along with the lesson he teaches, “Todo el que perturbe el ambiente de un hombre merece castigo” (42).²⁷⁰ Both the wife and son are taught lessons with violence, “Él educaba y las heridas y la piel morada se apoderaban del cuerpo de mama” (42)²⁷¹ whenever the wife does not maintain the house dust-free or allows wrinkles on the bed sheets, she is beaten. Similarly, whenever the son does not produce good handwriting, the father reminds him of its importance by hitting him, “La letra de un hombre repetía mientras cubría de rojos y morados mi trasero” (42).²⁷² What the father does not realize is that his educational methods jeopardize his role as “protector” of the family, “Seguridad. Él le daba seguridad a mama” (42). In causing harm upon his wife and son, he is breaking with the myth of the father figure as the primary protector of his family. In Castañeda’s words, “El mito de la protección masculina también ha sido desmentido

²⁶⁸ “A man’s shoes should always be clean and shiny, since they are a reflection of his intelligence and his aspirations.”

²⁶⁹ “Finger over the table. Close inspection of the crease on the bed sheets [...] The woman of the house cleaned since early morning to the rhythm of my father’s snoring.”

²⁷⁰ “All those who disturb a man’s environment deserves punishment.”

²⁷¹ “He educated and the wounds and the purple skin took hold of mom’s body.”

²⁷² “A man’s writing, he repeated while he covered my rear with red and purple.”

por la investigación reciente en el campo de la violencia intrafamiliar” (*El machismo invisible*). The power the “man of the house” believes to have is first debunked by this father’s own doing.

Moreover, the *Machistañol* embedded in the lessons is also undeniably sadistic when the son tells us how his father enjoys bruising his mother. He informs the reader, “Un hombre escoge el color de piel de su mujer. Mi padre disfrutaba del color verdoso de la piel de mamá y sonreía mientras tocaba las costras que le adornaban mejillas y piernas” (43).²⁷³ The fact that he does not question his dad’s actions at any moment in the story, despite seeing his mother’s body be continuously bruised and abused, serves as a warning that he will repeat this discourse. He will follow his father’s teachings and implement them in the future. He will carry forth the machista discourse. In such discourse there is no room for empathy, and we see that when the son organizes a list of the many ways his father punishes his mother and sees the punishment as part of educating a woman. This is the norm that is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Soon the son realizes that to be the head of the house he must exercise violence too. After the father teaches his son that “Un hombre necesita una mujer que no moleste y que no hable. Una que mantenga limpio el espacio del hombre. El hogar” (42),²⁷⁴ the son partakes in the violation of his own mother by keeping her prison to *el hogar*. Except, under the machista discourse, he is in fact keeping her “safe.” The son tells us how his father “le daba seguridad a mamá. Sólo yo tenía la llave para regresar de la escuela e ir a la tienda” (42).²⁷⁵ This idea of

²⁷³ Not to mention that the story ends with, “Un hombre *disfruta* educar. No se te olvide. No quiero al volver tener que educarte” (43, emphasis added).

²⁷⁴ “A man needs a woman who does not bother and does not speak. One who will maintain man’s space clean. The home.” When he is referring to a woman who behaves and remains quiet, he is talking about how she should behave while they are having sex. In other words, she cannot contest or oppose his sexual desires. This woman is both raped by her husband and silenced—absolute violence against her body and speech.

²⁷⁵ “gave mom security. Only I had the key to return home from school and go to the store.” The mother is not allowed to leave the house or to buy the groceries.

safety or that women need protection is a nuanced form of machismo. Castañeda refers to it as the infantilization and disqualification of women, “hay una infantilización de su mujer, como si fuera incapaz de cuidarse sin él. Y bien podríamos preguntarnos si todas las formas de protección que los hombres imponen a sus mujeres no incluyen, implícitamente, esta forma sutil de descalificación” (“Proteger a las mujeres”).²⁷⁶ Moreover, to say that a woman is safe only if protected by a man is to ignore the fact that the increase of femicide cases is due precisely to the fact that men are abusing and killing women. And they are carrying out these crimes primarily within the space of the home, where man is supposed to give her “seguridad.”

The woman is a prisoner in her own home, where the husband physically and sexually abuses her without concern of being convicted. Her son tells us, “A mamá no le gustaban las tonterías y lloraba de agradecida cada vez que él se satisfacía al llegar. Decía que mamá era una buena mujer que se quedaba quieta” (42).²⁷⁷ To be a good woman according to the patriarch, is to receive the abuse without objection, to endure the humiliation and pain. These qualifiers of what makes one good or bad have been instilled in the mindset of women. These norms have been established by a man’s perspective without question, but viewing women as territory to be exploited, gives men a sense of justification, as if it is acceptable to act this way. On the other hand, women who live under these circumstances have been “trained” to please the man because that is her duty. In its reiteration, this discourse is being put into question here. It asks us, if we are in fact still passing this mentality from one generation to the next. The story appears to confirm that the cycle does repeat itself when at the end we find out, “Pero ella no aprendía.

²⁷⁶ “there is an infantilization of his wife, as if she were incapable to protect herself without him. And we could ask ourselves if all forms of protection that men impose on women does not include, implicitly, this subtle form of disqualification.”

²⁷⁷ “Mom did not like messing around and would cry out of gratitude every time she met his sexual needs. He would say that mom was a good woman who remained still [during sex].”

Nunca pudo y no volvió a ocurrir. Mi padre limpió y limpió durante un tiempo y otra mamá llegó, pero se equivocó pronto. Su piel tomó el tono verde luego de unos días de parches morados (43).²⁷⁸ Another woman enters the patriarch home, she too fails to abide by the father's orders and is soon replaced. It is precisely in this inability to comply with the machista discourse that we find the insurrectionary moment for woman—in her inability to memorize and learn the rules set forth by the head of the household.

To not complete the tasks with utmost perfection is to challenge a man's power within the space of the home. To challenge his power, then, is to challenge violence. The first mother-wife does not endure the violence without resisting it first. Despite her sudden death at the end of the story, she displays moments of resistance, even if miniscule, whenever she appeared to not learn his ways.

Severidad para educar. Él educaba a mamá. Le decía del polvo y de las sábanas. Le advertía sobre la línea del pantalón en este lugar y del cuello de camisa doblado exactamente a esta altura. Pero *mamá no entendía* y él educaba [...] La castigaba. Le quitaba el color de la piel y mamá se olvidaba de todo. *Olvidaba las palabras*, pero él se las recordaba. (43, emphasis added)²⁷⁹

As we saw at the beginning, for a man to appear powerful, his shoes, clothes and home need to be in perfect condition. The designated person who maintains his image, and thus his power, is the woman-wife-mother trinity. Therefore, her not learning or doing a good job is how she

²⁷⁸ “But she wouldn't learn. She never could and it never happened again. My father cleaned and cleaned during some time and another mother arrived, but she made mistakes early on. Her skin turned a shade of green after a few days of purple patches.”

²⁷⁹ “Educate with severity. He educated mom. He would tell her about the dust and bed sheets. He warned her about where the pant line should go and the height of the fold on the shirt's collar. But mom did not understand, and he educated [...] He punished her. He took away her skin color and mom would forget everything. She forgot the words, but he would remind her of them.”

intentionally jeopardizes his power. Put differently, her insurrectionary moments occur whenever she forgets or appears to not understand what he has taught her. These moments occur three times in the text when the son repeats “ella no aprendía.”²⁸⁰ The first time is when she does not iron correctly, “la línea del pantalón” (43).²⁸¹ The second after the husband “volvía a decirle cómo deben ser las cosas.”²⁸² Finally, after he screams at her because “el centro de la mesa no estaba justo bajo el foco de cincuenta watts” (43).²⁸³ Her inability to learn is not a display of her incapacity but rather her agency. She finds in resisting the patriarchal lessons a way out, a different way of performing her womanhood. To not learn the lessons well, then, is to say she disagrees with them. To forget them is to deny their existence, “Olvidaba las palabras” (43). Ultimately, not partaking in the vertical axis where her husband and son control her being, victimizing her, infantilizing her, is how she comes to speak up in a discourse that attempts to silence her. She gets out of the sadistic discourse by repeatedly not obeying its lessons.

Risking her own life in order to challenge *Machistañol*, the woman in “Zapatos” does not become another victim; she is a fighter. To position her as yet another victim of femicide would deny her ever having the strength to live in the toxic environment that is a patriarchal home. She utilized whatever means were accessible to her—forgetfulness—to show how much she opposed the system that oppressed her. Changing the narrative from victim to survivor is important as it highlights the difference between seeing her as controllable by man (victim) versus a woman who is actively fighting such control (survivor). Analyzing through a feminist perspective allows us to focus on how Woman becomes an active subject under the patriarchal regime that thinks of her as passive and malleable. Furthermore, to explain how some women

²⁸⁰ “she wouldn’t learn.”

²⁸¹ “the pant line.”

²⁸² “would repeat to tell her how things are.”

²⁸³ “the center of the table was not directly under the fifty-watt bulb.”

survive such environments in ways that may appear passive to a modern woman today, in his article, “Why we cannot compare violence against women and men,” director and CEO of the journal *Nómada*, Martín Pellecer states,

Es una construcción política que se llama patriarcado. Un sistema en el que los hombres son los que mandan. A fuerza de violencia. Porque hemos escuchado que las abuelas o las mamás también son machistas. Y muchas lo son. Pero es por sobrevivencia. Porque generación tras generación aprendieron que para salvar sus vidas y su integridad física tenía que mandar el hombre. Porque debe ser un infierno recibir una paliza cada noche y una violación sexual en el matrimonio cada vez que el macho quiere sexo y la mujer no quiere. (Pellecer “Por qué no es comparable la violencia contra las mujeres y los hombres”)²⁸⁴

Pellecer’s understanding of a patriarchal home clearly depicts the narrative of “Zapatos.” The repetitive violence performed by the husband, his raping of his wife, her attempting to abide to his rules, and the way the son appears to repeat the violence, show the typical structure of a patriarchal home. Pellecer changes our perception of women as passive actors to active subjects who find their own way to survive and live in such a patriarchy. Therefore, although it may appear that the female trinity in the story did not try hard enough to alter the patriarchal system, interpreting the situation through this lens, she did so in her own way. She found a way to resist, and although she did not win the battle, her death was not in vain.

²⁸⁴ “It is a political construction called patriarchy. A system where men are in charge. By the force of violence. Because we have heard that the grandmothers or moms are also machista. And many in fact are. But for their own survival. Because generation after generation they learned that to save their loves and physical integrity the man had to be in charge. Because it must be a living hell to be beaten every night and be sexually violated in their marriage every time the macho wants sex and the woman doesn’t want it.”

In the short story “Partiré mañana” we read about another woman who also finds a way to survive the patriarchal lifestyle by imagining herself outside of it. Told from the wife’s perspective, the story presents the life of a woman who is an unhappy wife and mother who finds solace in the afternoons she escapes home, only to have to return to be with her family. She acts the part assigned to her by machista society as accurately as possible. She is the mother we read about in “madre,” “los eternos sábados en los que me convierto en la compañera perfecta, en la madre ejemplar, en la que sonrío y habla del tiempo, de divorcios de estrellas, de niños, de todos menos de mí” (*Buenas costumbres* 45-6). However, her performance is a farce, a show she puts on to keep “him” happy. Moreover, this farce becomes a tool that helps her avoid the violence that commonly comes with transgressing the female trinity of woman-wife-mother. Day after day she gives an immaculate performance,

Te daré mi lengua y mis labios tibios, respiraré despacio mientras te beso, despacio para que no dudés de mi buena voluntad. Si no encontraras mi boca, si no respondiera de la misma manera, comenzarías a preguntar [...] no quiero arriesgarme a eso, prefiero partir sin explicaciones, mañana. (*Buenas costumbres* 47)

Although we do not see her leave the husband and children by the end of the story, her clear intention is the insurrectionary moment that keeps us in suspense. Playing a part until she finds the exact moment to escape what is an antiquated patriarchal prison for her is how the woman in this story interferes in the machista discourse.

Her power lies in her ability to fool the patriarchally-constructed home space, more importantly, the man of the house, into believing that she in fact agrees with it, that his house is in “order” and he has power. Such interference, which occurs on the same axes of communication that machista actors speak and act out on, makes her out to be an opponent

disguised as a mother-wife. Thinking about Francine Masiello's concept of "double-agency," a role that is "both antagonistic and useful, sustaining multiple identities that allow women to be at once complicit with the law and subversive of its principles and objectives" we can say that this woman in fact finds double agency within the machista framework that is meant to restrict and deauthorize her (Masiello "Women as Double Agents in History" 6). She knows how to play the female trinity of woman-wife-mother while also dream about being an independent woman, "soñar un momento con [...] viajes y amantes, con universidades lejanas" (47). While most of the story she plays the female trinity, the reader can perceive her wearing the "double-agent mask" in order to expand her range of identity and knowledge outside of *Machistañol* when she talks about herself and not the family.

We realize that she opposes the machista belief system when we read, "exploto la sonrisa de chiquilla de la que te enamoraste y con voz acorde—que cada vez se resiste más a salir" (46), and when she de-romanticizes maternity, "Tus hijos juegan a mi alrededor y me llaman madre. Pero yo no los he parido, ellos partieron mi cuerpo, dejaron sus sonrisas en él, se alimentaron de mí, robaron mis horas de sueño, secuestraron mis sueños" (47).²⁸⁵ She has reached her peak; she cannot put up with this life anymore, but no one must find out that she has had enough. Therefore, she plays along, "tu respiración me anuncia que si no los abro en ese momento te sentarás a mi lado y comenzarás a hacer preguntas [...] [ellos] me ven con tus ojos, exigen. Son tus hijos. Ellos también amenazan con preguntar" (47).²⁸⁶ She fools both husband and sons into

²⁸⁵ "I hate the little girl smile that you fell in love with and the complicit voice—which increasingly resists to come out" and "Your children play around me and call me mother. But I did not give birth to them, they departed from my body, they left their smiles in it, they fed off of me, they stole my hours of sleep, they kidnapped my dreams."

²⁸⁶ "your breathing announces that if I do not open my eyes in that moment you will sit by my side and begin to ask questions [...] [they] see me with your eyes, they demand. They are your children. They also threaten to ask questions."

believing that everything is under control with her double-agent capability. She knows exactly when her husband will call from work, “Van a ser las doce. No tarda en sonar el teléfono y en escucharse tu voz del otro lado” (48) so she puts on her “good wife” hat and says, “Hola amor—diré suavemente—cómo ha estado tu día” (48).²⁸⁷

Furthermore, she knows she is always under surveillance, so she manipulates what her husband sees, by giving him “Mi sonrisa de chiquilla está siempre para vos, para detener tus preguntas” (49).²⁸⁸ The woman in “Partiré mañana” performs Rancière’s notion of redistributing the sensible. According to Rancière, “What is common is ‘sensation.’ Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together” (*Emancipated Spectator* 56). While machismo is the sensory fabric that ties this family together, the female trinity is now in control of that “being together.” The paradigm has switched from a man controlling the family dynamic to a woman who is in control. This woman is exercising her political agency since, “politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’” (Rancière *Emancipated Spectator* 56).

However, before she can transform the “common” and create a discursive axis of her own, she must thoroughly understand *Machistañol’s* workings. She proves to understand the protocol well when she states, “Preguntarás con quién salgo y ojearé la agenda para ver o inventar con quién he quedado” (48).²⁸⁹ And later, as she carefully plans her escape, “En el camino repasaré los pasos para escapar sin huella. Cuando llegue al café [...] pensaré en los cambios al plan que debe estar listo para esta tarde. Quisiera tomar notas, pero las encontrarías

²⁸⁷ “It’s going to be noon. The phone is about to ring, and I will listen to your voice on the other end” and “Hello love—I will say softly—how has your day been.”

²⁸⁸ “My little girl smile is always there for you, to stop your questions.”

²⁸⁹ “You will ask who I am going out with and I will skim through my agenda to see or invent a name.”

en tus inspecciones nocturnas a mi bolso y mis bolsillos” (48).²⁹⁰ These nuanced forms of violence, where her husband interrogates and searches her belongings, common in a machista household, are discursively nullified by the wife. She knows what to expect by now, so her response is as cautious as possible. By intentionally lying and not leaving a trace of her knowledge of their system, she gains power. She is now in control of what they believe as true.

The female trinity in this story further exercises her political agency when she sets a limit to how much the men in her life—husband and sons—can have access to her. One way she manages their entrance into the machinations of her mind is by not giving them a chance to ask her questions, for the answers belong only to her. From the beginning she gives an immaculate performance that will avoid any suspicion from her husband about her desire to leave, “si no los abro en ese momento te sentarás a mi lado y comenzarás a hacer preguntas. Te digo buenos días, sonrío y finjo estirarme” (45).²⁹¹ She is aware that if she does not smile, the husband will question her, and consequently, if she does not tend to her children, they too will wonder if something is wrong, “el otro por desgracia ya habla, en cualquier momento puede preguntar qué pasa mami y no quiero escucharlo” (48).²⁹² This is how she is in control of what parts of her they have access to while making the husband believe he has power over her. She knows her husband well enough to wake up before he thinks something is wrong, to smile to assure him she is happy and to tell him about her day, giving him the version *she* wants. In short, no one can have

²⁹⁰ “On the way I will review the steps to escape without a trace. When I get to the café [...] I will think about the changes to the plan which should be ready by the afternoon. I would like to take notes, but you would find them in your evening inspections of my purse and pockets.”

²⁹¹ “If I do not open [my eyes] in that moment, you will sit beside me and start to ask questions. So I tell you good morning, I smile and fake to stretch.”

²⁹² “The other one unfortunately can speak, and in any moment, he can ask what is wrong mom and I do not want to listen to him.”

dominion over this woman's mind, her own concept of the world, and this is the first instance of how she de-authorizes the machista discourse.

For a woman to keep her thoughts, feelings, or outings to herself is almost impossible under a machista framework. Women feel the constant need to tell their husbands everything, whether because they were instructed to do so or as a way to avoid jeopardizing his notion of power. However, the woman in this story does not give in to this manipulation. She avoids it by responding according to the machista script, yet never disclosing what runs through her mind. Her agency remains intact by keeping that information to herself. This invasion of privacy is another type of machismo embedded in *Machistañol* which acts as a constant panopticon, Castañeda calls it “the right to secrets,”

El mundo interior de los hombres tiene, en este sentido, un rango privilegiado: lo que piensan, sienten y viven les pertenece sólo a ellos, en tanto que el mundo interior de las mujeres debe estar abierto al escrutinio de sus esposos, padres, hermanos [...] El derecho al secreto [...] otorga a los hombres una libertad de movimiento que no disfrutaban las mujeres, de hacer lo que quieran sin rendirle cuentas a nadie, mientras que el tiempo y las ocupaciones de las mujeres deben ser transparentes; los hombres de sus vidas tienen el derecho de saber lo que hicieron durante el día: adónde fueron, a quién vieron, de qué hablaron [...] muchas mujeres se sienten observadas permanentemente. (Castañeda “El derecho al secreto”)²⁹³

²⁹³ “A man's interior world, in this sense, has a privileged status: what they think, feel and live belongs to them only, whilst the interior world of women should be open to the scrutiny of their husbands, fathers, brothers [...] The right to secrets [...] grant men the liberty of movement that women do not enjoy, they do as they please without reporting back to anybody, meanwhile how a woman spends her time and her activities should be transparent; the men in their lives have the right to know what they did during the day: where they went, who they saw, what they talked about [...] many women feel permanently watched.”

Neither her husband nor sons get a chance to ask for an entry ticket into her mind. Her mind and imagination are her space of refuge, her safe zone. We find out what the world would look like from her perspective when her husband finally leaves the house, “puedo soñar un momento con las cosas que me gustaría hacer, con el tipo de mujer que quisiera ser, con viajes y amantes, con universidades lejanas y un cuerpo sin cesáreas” (47).²⁹⁴ In her world, she could live out her own life without the socially imposed rules that limit her potential. She tells us as she sits at a café, “yo me olvido de vos, de tus hijos, de la casa rodeada de árboles, de la sirvienta y la niñera, del colegio, de tu trabajo, de la habitación que compartimos. Mi sonrisa es verdadera, puedo ser un poco como quisiera” (48).²⁹⁵ She becomes *another* woman when she is not on *Machistañol*’s axes of communication. However, she must play the part so that her escape plan can remain intact.

Linguistically speaking, she speaks his language to remain on the same axes of communication so that she can gain her husband’s trust, who is constantly watching her, controlling her. She speaks and acts on his linguistic terms. That is precisely how she is able to decipher *Machistañol*; she knows how to communicate in *their* language. As he wants to know where, who and what she’s doing, she has an answer to please his query. When he has an inch of doubt and wants to confirm she is not lying to him, she gives him no reason to doubt her, emptying her purse and pockets. Moreover, she smiles in the way that he likes in order to remove any chance of further interrogation. This is how she makes him believe that everything is in order, that she is the perfect woman-wife-mother. Seen from this perspective, the one who has

²⁹⁴ “I can dream for a moment with the things I would like to do, with the type of woman I would like to be, with trips and lovers, with far away universities and a body without cesarean marks.”

²⁹⁵ “I forget about you, about your sons, about the house surrounded by trees, about the nanny and maid, the school, your work, the bedroom we share. My smile is real, I could be a little how I would like to be.”

real power is *her*. She has given him a false sense of power by allowing him to perform his machista role, while she plans her escape.

Her mockery, to pretend she agrees with the program, is her way of contesting the “rightness” of the system. Her double role-playing within the discourse is not to reproduce it or state that she is satisfied with it. She is in fact repeating it to show us *her own version* within it. To not end up like the woman in “Zapatos,” the woman in this short story is meticulous and aware of her risky endeavors. Creating a sense of self within *Machistañol*’s discourse, then, is her final insurrectionary moment. As she functions and survives in contexts where she does not belong and admits “alternative languages and expression” (Masiello 9) she positions herself at the center of a politics of hegemony (Butler *Excitable Speech* 161). If woman does not exist as a subject under *Machistañol*, here we have a woman who is a woman of her own. She has created a paradise of her own in her mind, to which no man has access to but herself. At the end of the story we are left in suspense, not knowing whether the next day she actually escapes *his* paradise and lives out her own as she had planned, “Sueño que mis maletas esperan escondidas en el armario junto a la puerta, sueño que he tenido tiempo de prepararlo todo, que esto no se repetirá mañana” (49).²⁹⁶ The end is left up to us to interpret. Does she escape or does she stay one more day? Does her dream come to life?

We believe there is an important point that is being posed by the author in the lack of happy endings in the stories found in *Buenas costumbres*—a happy ending is impossible within *Machistañol*. There is no space for happiness or freedom for women within a machista framework. These stories present us with realities that are not one-sided. They are multidimensional and complex, like the ongoing violence we see today. What the stories help us

²⁹⁶ “I dream that my luggage is waiting, hiding in the closet close to the door, I dream that I have had time to prepare everything, that this will not repeat itself tomorrow.”

accomplish is a reflection upon the ways in which women do in fact protest against the notion of the female trinity, woman-wife-mother. “La lucha de la mujer por el poder de interpretar” is still in effect (Franco *Las conspiradoras* 11). The insurrectionary speech acts of the woman in “Zapatos,” where she forgets and refuses to learn *Machistañol*, is one method out of the system. Playing along as a way to remain safe while planning her escape is the method the woman in “Partiré mañana,” uses. Although these are small gains in female agency, the fact is that they present us with a version of woman as an active subject. We can see in their acts of resistance hope for a break with the past. More importantly, we can see how there is room to expose and oppose the patriarchal system while inside it.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

*When you stand and share your story
in an empowering way,
your story will heal you
and your story will heal somebody else.*
Yyanla Vanzant

*Responsibility is thus linked with speech as repetition, not as origination.
If the performativity of injurious speech is considered perlocutionary
(speech leads to effects, but is not itself the effect),
then such speech works its injurious effect only to the extent
that it produces a set of non-necessary effects.
Only if other effects may follow from the utterance
does appropriating, reversing, and recontextualizing
such utterances become possible.*
Judith Butler

This dissertation examines the language of violence and its nuanced forms in the context of twenty-first century Guatemala, a period where women have become its primary victims. Femicide, the term used to explain the murdering of women, was the first step towards conceptualizing the surge of violence against women. The passing of the *Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women*, opened a legal avenue to discuss this epidemic. It is clear that violence has its own language. *Machistañol*, a term I coined to name a language of violence that uses women's bodies as canvases to write, think about, represent, create and oppress women in the twenty-first century, is both verbal and corporal. *Machistañol* is spoken and acted out in societies governed by machismo and patriarchal structures. Regina José

Galindo, Rosa Chávez and Denise Phé-Funchal understand *Machistañol* within the context of Guatemala. More importantly, they challenge its power and expose its speakers in every poem, performance and short story analyzed. Their works are interpretations of violence that disrupt and deauthorize a community of machistas—those who attempt to make feminicide and violence against women unintelligible realities. They present Woman as an agent and not a victim in the social world that attempts to eliminate her.

The study of Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal's works is an important contribution to the field of violence against women because they offer unique visions of what violence does and means to women. The activists make visible forms of violence that are embedded in patriarchal families and societies. The examples of insurrectionary speech acts we find in their literature and performances (Galindo) displace the male perspective to place Woman at the center of the discourse on violence. By questioning and theorizing about violence, the activists are able to empower women's voices and experiences. About this, Tijuana born activist and philosopher, Sayak Valencia, explains,

Puede resultar extraño hablar de empoderamiento femenino bajo las condiciones actuales de violencia recalcitrante. Sin embargo, el descentramiento del sistema capitalista/patriarcal y lo innegable de su fractura e insostenibilidad abren la puerta a los feminismos, a sus prácticas, para seguir planteando desde otros ángulos (no heteropatriarcales) las condiciones actuales en las que se rige el mundo. (Valencia *Capitalismo gore* 176)²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ "It can seem strange to speak about female empowerment under the current conditions of a recalcitrant violence. However, the decentering of the capitalist/patriarchal system and its undeniable fracture and unsustainability, opens the door to feminisms, their practices, to continue strategizing from other (non-heteropatriarchal) angles, about the current conditions by which the world is governed." My translation.

The displacement of the heteropatriarchal view and insertion of female interpretations of violence grants the activists discursive power. Their literary and corporal realization of a theory of violence represents a contemporary attempt to hold a public conversation about uncomfortable truths that tend to silence women.

The artists employed a series of insurrectionary speech acts to debunk the power that *Machistañol* continues to have over the discourse of violence. They gave us representations of women who are in control of their narrative. In Galindo's performance *La verdad*, the many women who gave testimony of their violent experiences during the armed conflict, transgressed the norm of who can tell the truth. Chávez's poem "Soy una mujer morena" is a political statement that affirms an Indigenous identity within a racist society that continues to discriminate her. Lastly, the woman in Phé-Funchal's short story, "Partiré mañana," gains political agency by transforming the sensory fabric of 'being together' within a traditionally patriarchal household. These are some of the texts which represent the numerous ways in which women have had to defy the norm in order to attain agency. By representing violent contexts and reiterating machista speech acts in their works, the artists have been able to transform the effects of such injurious speech acts. When women appropriate and recite these acts to produce a new effect and a new sense of being amidst the violence, injurious speech effects are cancelled.

Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal share a commitment to understand and decipher violence so that women are not defined by violence, rather, women can speak up about violence and move away from its censoring effects. They meticulously clarify the nuances of violence and the actors and systems that function by violence, to ultimately disarticulate *Machistañol*.

Following Segato's proposal²⁹⁸ which explained that to identify the speaker or author of these crimes, one must understand violent expressions as communicative acts, by interpreting the artists' works as speech acts has given us answers to who or what machista institution is committing violent acts against women. Galindo finds the State and machista culture as the primary culprits, while for Chávez it is a racist society and for Phé-Funchal, the institution of Christianity. What we have then, are theories of violence that assist us to understand feminicide and violence against women today from a linguistic and social perspective.

As the first systematic critical study that examines these three artists, Galindo, Chávez and Phé-Funchal's *oeuvre* is the theorization and experimentation of the idea that violence is decipherable in *language*. Examining the verbal and corporal effects of violence on women's lives linguistically and socio-politically offers new possibilities for understanding violence. The imaginary of woman is created and recreated in the way we speak about women, how we investigate cases of violence against them, and the actions we take to change the machista culture and discourse. Thus, juxtaposing the artists' works vis-à-vis *Machistañol* has allowed a conversation between different communicative fields that are often separated—official discourses (the State, Forensics, Church, Journalism, the Law, Society) and artistic practices. This dissertation initiated this conversation to offer a theory on violence where Woman, at the center of the discourse, can (re)create and reapportion the power that machista speakers and actors continue to hold.

I hope to have contributed with my investigation, even if minimally, to the discussion of violence against women with a type of lexicon—*Machistañol*—that allows us to understand how

²⁹⁸ “los feminicidios son mensajes emanados de un sujeto autor que sólo puede ser identificado, localizado, perfilado, mediante una “escucha” rigurosa de estos crímenes como actos comunicativos” (*La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres* 31).

misogynous violence continues to function. Particularly, a linguistic tool that helps us demystify the enigma of feminicides that this machista language attempts to keep secret. When we read “official” discourses that pretend to present facts about violence against women, may we more readily detect when these sources are speaking and acting out *Machistañol*. As I think about where I can deepen the conversation and how I can develop this project, I think that a book that includes diverse female voices from different spaces that are also governed by patriarchal practices is the next step to expanding a feminist theory of violence. Some women I will consider are Mexican-Salvadoran literary arts activist and performer Edyka Chilomé who makes visible the mestiza-mujer and queer indigenous mestizaje in the context of the United States, Afro-Brazilian writer and activist Jenyffer Nascimento who attempts to dismantle racism and machismo in her writings, and Oaxacan rapper Mare Advertencia Lirika who reflects upon women’s condition in society in her songs. These women contribute to the discourse on violence as they interpret what violence is within their respective contexts. In addition, I will also include more Guatemalan women’s voices in music like Rebeca Lane²⁹⁹ and poet Carolina Escobar Sarti who is also the director of Nacional de Asociación La Alianza Guatemala—an entity that works with victims of violence.

As a last comment, if this dissertation achieved one thing, I hope to have encouraged others to heal by recalling violent histories that we carry from generation to generation. As these real cases and artistic expressions have shown us, it is necessary to “recover the past in order to look to the future” (Weld *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*). Violence only has a hold on us if we keep holding onto it. When we disarticulate it, name the

²⁹⁹ Lane produced the song “Alma mestiza” with Rosa Chávez who scripted and directed her music video.

pain and release it either through writing, art, rituals, or simply living bravely in societies that aim to instill fear, we can diminish its power.

APPENDIX A

ARTIVISTS' POETRY TRANSLATIONS

A.1 ROSA CHÁVEZ

“Nos quitan la cabeza y el corazón sigue” / “They behead us and the heart keeps on”

They behead us and the heart keeps on
 beating
they skin us and the heart keeps on
 beating
they split us in half and the heart keeps on
 beating
they drink our blood and the heart keeps on
 beating
we have been raised to beat without pause.

“El hambre” / “Hunger”

Hunger
continues to drool
women appear
like mirrors in a wasteland
corruption continues
filling up their pockets/ the land-less
drowning in the mud
the trembling fear
settling in the avenues
depression oozing/ ink salt despair
children's cries
who inhale the steppe
rocks sweat
nobody cleans their forehead
it reeks of cadavers

we are the dead
the books without owners
the eyes without words
the murderer disguised as suicidal
robber politician pastor
artist marero philosopher
winter vomits
the lie overflows
it outbursts into dirty and foamy rivers
sex without love love,
without love and without sex
plastic ribbons
black and white
decorating doors and memories
it is true
I saw it all.

“Hace un mes” / “A Month ago”

A month ago
I came to the capital
my daddy abandoned us
and at home hunger hurt,
I work at a house
(the lady says as a maid)
although I don't really understand what that means,
they gave me a fabric costume,
that day I cried a lot, I cried a lot
I was embarrassed to wear it
and show my legs,
the lady says that in my town
we are all filthy
that's why I shower everyday
my long hair, they cut it
she says because of the lice,
I can't speak Castilian well
and people laugh at me
my heart
becomes sad,
yesterday I visited my cousin
I was happy because I wore my *corte*,
the bus driver didn't want to stop
and when I was going to step out, he quickly sped up,
—hurry you stupid Indian—he told me
I fell and scraped my knee

people were laughing and laughing
my heart became sad
my cousin says
that I will get used to it
that on Sunday we will go to central park
that there are lounges to dance
with the groups that come to the fair from over there,
from my town,
I am in my small room
counting the money they paid me
minus the soap and two cups I broke
the lady says I am really ignorant
I don't understand why they mistreat me
well, am I not a person?

“Me siento triste y culpable” / “I feel sad and guilty”

I feel sad and guilty
My problem comes from outside
I am not hungry
I get tired a lot
I get mad quickly
I feel like I am sick
of fright
I am evil-looking
I have the evil-eye spell
but not the kid's version
rather the one for grown-ups.

“El poema de las olvidadas” / “The poem of the forgotten”

The poem of the forgotten
is sharp
bad weed
and it still hurts.

“Me escupiste” / “You spat on me”

You spat on me
for pleasure and contempt
you ignore that saliva
is a great medicine.

“Sobreviví al incendio de mi cuerpo” / “I survived the fire in my body”

I survived the fire in my body

I survived the explosion of meat
I survived the chains around the ankles
I survived the iron in my veins
I survived the absences of words
I survived the punishment by the foreman
I survived the pyre where the sacred books were burned
I survived the redeeming exile
I survived the song of the mermaids and weeping women
I survived the national reality
I survived the persecution to the torture chamber
I survived the drought of desires
I survived extreme sweetness
I survived the piercing of words
I survived the night of poetry in my throat
I survived massacres
I survived the truth that overflowed from tongues
I survived the drama of meat and gunpowder
I survived the love that does not fit inside a person
I survived the torment of a destroyed bone
I survived the miserable abandoned tomb
I survived the loss of my flourished bones
I survived the savagery of civilization
I survived your nakedness anchored in my memory
I survived the savagery of a memento
I survived the extermination of the fire on
the mountain
I survived the perforation
I survived the acceptance of destiny
I survived the ancestral insecurity
I survived myself.

“Dejo tirada esta piel que ya no me pertenece” / “I leave stranded this skin that no longer belongs to me”

I leave stranded this skin that no longer belongs to me
this abandoned skin witness of another death
someone will find my stiff scales in the heart of
the shadows
someone will take my three canines for their medicine.
Then I will return to birth myself with eyes wide open
I will scar over like a fire worm
I will stretch my tongue to tickle the past
I am no longer this abandoned skin
I contract the muscles with pain
I am being born.

“Me desato el corte” / “I untie my skirt”

I untie my skirt
and the ancient cry that accompanies me
I untie myself from whomever squeezes my knots
the mother of the world unties me
the father of the world unties me
Undone I walk through life
from one place to another
herding goats
between the city hills,
the crude hills,
the concave hills,
the Mount of Venus,
the harvested hills,
the stepped on hills,
I walk untied,
be careful.

“Soy una mujer morena” / “I am a brown woman”

I am a brown woman
I am not afraid of the word that the war took away from me
I walk (confident that many deaths will return me to life
my thirteen senses have been colorfully offered to the hands of time
for looking forward they have called me conceited Indian
for finding myself in buried truths
for naming what tightened my throat/ they have called me resentful Indian
I cannot forget that a childhood schoolmate in my first infancy told me:
Indian women cannot jump
and I pound jumps of lightning
that burst, that strike sparks to the rudeness of that disrespect
because my brown skin has decided to feel the touch of freedom
they have called me rancid blood, bad example,
I do not want to be an example,
I am hot blood that tends to my will's calling
I am the spirit to which desires, thorns emerge
roots, trunks, callings from these and other times
brown, sweaty, without shame, brown meat full of words
meat that dances, that dances with eyes open and closed
that recuperates her movement
meat and bones that dance for all the joy and dances
that were denied to my female ancestors
mouth that chews mushrooms in the winter of the future
infant mouth that was ransacked by the brutality
mouth that recuperates her song, her scream, her saliva.
mouth that recuperates her song, her scream, her saliva.

A.2 REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO

“Aunque el cuchillo metieron hasta dentro” / “Although they stuck a knife inside”

Although they stuck a knife inside
our heads rolled down
they burned our tongues

Although they forced our vaginas
and took out fetuses from inside

we are not dead.

Without skin on our bones
underneath twenty-six years of dirt

we remain here.

“Por cada milpa que tú quemes” / “For every cornfield that you burn”

For every cornfield you burn
we will plant a hundred seeds

For every fetus you kill
we will raise a hundred children

For every woman you rape
we will have a hundred orgasms

For every man you torture
we will embrace a hundred joys

For every dead body that you deny
we will weave a hundred truths

For every weapon you grip
we will make a hundred drawings

For every lost bullet
a hundred poems

for every bullet found
a hundred songs.

“EL DOLOR EN UN PAÑUELO” / “THE PAIN ON A HANDKERCHIEF”

BRUISED SKIN, WATERY GAZE, SEA.
BLUE CIRCLES, SUNFLOWER. RUPTURED
LIP, THE SALIVA DRIPS, IT MIXES WITH
DROPS OF PLASMA, NO HANDKERCHIEF
CLEANS THEM. THEY FALL ON HER TITS
INFLAMED, VAPOR. DRY VAGINA, EXPOSED.
WHORE, SON OF A BITCH, MOTHER OF A BITCH.
INHERITANCE. “I ACCEPT.” CLOSED MOUTH
“IF YOU OPEN IT I WILL BREAK YOUR TEETH.” TEARS
ONION, GREASE IN THE HAIR. EGGS, TOO
HOT, A NOBODY TOO
COLD, ABANDONMENT. SLEEPY BRAIN
THREATENING FIST, PLEADS, BANG.
SILENCE. THE SOUND OF THE INTESTINE
INTERRUPTS IT. WEIGHTLESS COIN PURSE, A BILL,
EXCHANGE, A NEWSPAPER. EMPLOYMENT SECTION
“YOUNG LADIES ARE NEEDED.” BAD PAY,
SLEEPLESSNESS. THE SEARCH CONTINUES, FLATTENING
STREETS, CALLUSES. NIGHT ARRIVES, ONE
HEARS STEPS. THE DOOR OPENS,
RECONCILIATION. THE WOMB IS FILLED.
NINE MONTHS. THE WATER BREAKS, NOISELESS
SCREAMS... ANOTHER OBSERVER IS BORN.

“MI ABUELA NO ME DEJÓ” / “MY GRANDMOTHER DID NOT LEAVE ME”

MY GRANDMOTHER DID NOT LEAVE ME
A DOLL
A PIECE OF JEWELRY
AN I LOVE YOU
SHE LEFT ME
INSTEAD
MANY RESENTMENTS
WRAPPED IN A RED HANDKERCHIEF
THAT SAID:
PERSONAL AND INTRANSMISIBLE.

**¿Qué dirán de mí si un día aparezco muerta? / “What will they say about me if one day I
turn up dead?”**

What will they say about me if one day I turn up dead?
They will open my drawers
Take out my underwear for display
they will examine my past meticulously
and say
maybe
that I deserve it.

Every newspaper will display all my defects
my vices
my flaws
and say
maybe
that I deserve it.

She got naked with too much ease
some will say
she smoked weed
others will say.

Who knows what she was in
so and so will say
who knows what she owed
so and so will say.

She slept with who is now my husband
so and so will say
she was a whore
so and so will say
crazy
so and so will think.

A communist who affirmed genocide
so and so will write
a shame for the country
so and so will point out.

A nobody
the police will denounce
she had her nails painted red
and a belly button ring mark on her navel.

A marera
the district attorney will conclude
she had black vultures tattooed on her leg
and a horrible spiderweb on the back.

Someone will find my criminal records
in the Santa Catarina Pinula precinct
and that will be my ruin.

They will say then that I was a pariah
a delinquent
a bad seed
a drug addict.

The ladies in their houses will say that it was for the best
for Guatemala
the envious will get happy in secret with the news
and some who liked me will say nothing.

At my burial
my four sisters
will clean their tears
and clear my name.

They will say it's a lie
that Regina was never connected to the PRI
that she was not a whore
or crazy
or lazy
or a criminal
or an outlaw
or a terrorist
or a delinquent
or a pariah
or a murderer
or a thief
or an extortionist
or a drug addict
or a sell-out
or a communist
or a criminal
or a marera.

They will say that Regina was their sister
and that she was good.

And about you?
What will they say about you if one day you turn up dead?

“Vamos a defendernos” / “Let’s defend ourselves”

Let’s defend ourselves
with fists
nails
teeth
vocal chords
vagina
uterus
ovaries.

Let’s defend ourselves with truths
ancestral strengths
moon phases.

Let’s defend ourselves with poems
weaves
drawings
voice.

Let’s defend ourselves amongst each other
and each one of us
because we are all one
and without one
we are none.

Let’s defend ourselves amongst each other
before we all fall
and from us
none of us is left.

A.3 DENISE PHÉ-FUNCHAL

“Madre” / “Mother”

mother,
eternal mother,
mother who teaches,
mother who protects,
mother who gives joy,

absent mother, imaginary, always virgin,
your mother in all her forms,
mother with large underskirts, of
a gorgeous body
mother who punishes and forgives,
who forgives/ possessed mother, bought
woman, women who understands,
woman who turns into a mother,
mother with a private property title,
someone's woman,
although she does not know it,
although she does not want it,
follow the script you who are an accomplice
of the devil,
who brought pain unto earth,
you mixed the world, hell and
paradise,
you should compensate
make sacrifices
god will give you major tests since the
devil lives in you,
in your weakness and in your body,
since you are the one who tempts man, who
distances him from the sacred path
remember that you are just a vessel that
guarantees god's kingdom on earth
the triumph of god above the devil
of man above human,
follow your man, woman,
do not fall for the devil's caresses
keep quiet for hell resides in your voice, do not
attempt to think,
for man is at the head of the family,
he decides who you are, how you should look,
how you act,
how you speak, how you raise children,
follow man as he's god's image,
listen to his voice and you will find yours.

“Entrega un hijo al mundo para que en él” / “Offer a child into the world so that”

offer a child into the world so that sins
can fall upon him
tell him that his objective is to be just like you
like him
powerful

teach him to remain silent, to not respond
tell him that paradise consists of fulfilling the cycle,
to be a prince and find a body
and to your daughter tell her to not expect to be at the head,
as mother to future princes and
bodies, to remain silent,
to wait for the divine sperms
tell them the story about the son of man,
of the son of god
and tell them that he has carried their sins,
with everyone's,
secula seculorum,
there is no need to speak, to
complain,
that paradise can be found in the world,
in the middle of sin,
of the demons,
tell them that paradise is not won over with words,
it is not won with actions,
coins cover the costs,
their sins are carried by the most powerful one,
by the one who forgives everything in exchange for
pieces so that he can achieve his eternal dream,
god's kingdom on earth,
the death of the wicked are at the hands of the
armies
there is no point, tell them, to speak of justice,
to want peace, live in peace,
everything will be given after death, if you have
given enough coins,
if you have passed the world's tests,
the temptations and the deserts,
if you have avoided the cross.

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