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Narratives of Violence

edited by
Teresa Iribarren, Roger Canadell
and Josep-Anton Fernàndez



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Serie diretta da
Enric Bou

21



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Narratives of Violence

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Abstract

Narratives of Violence is a contribution to the ethical turn in literary studies. In the current context of systemic political violence unleashed in the wake of 9/11 and the global advance of capitalism and neoliberalism, literature constitutes a particularly timely device to raise awareness about injustice, the abuse of power, and the violation of human rights. Literature may also be helpful in order to face social challenges such as peaceful coexistence with immigrants and displaced people, and the settling of refugees. This book is an invitation to read a selection of narratives of violence anchored in different geopolitical realities, and located in historical contexts ranging from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. By adopting ethical criticism in order to tackle the dilemmas posed by these stories, we aim to contribute to the configuration of global imaginaries based on respect, recognition, and empathy, especially towards those who are most vulnerable. This collection offers critical readings of works of various genres, originally written in different languages. Authors discussed comprise Mřırıda n'ait 'Atiq (Morocco), Janina Heschel (Poland), Eva Koch (Denmark), Marřa Galindo and Sonia S'anchez (Argentina), Najat El Hachmi (Morocco-Catalonia), Arundhati Roy (India), Leila Abdelrazaq (Palestine), and Yř Miri, Murata Sayaka, and Kawakami Mieko (Japan). The corpus includes biographical, autobiographical, testimonial, and fictional narratives, sometimes very close to documentary or life history. The works analysed in this collection portray experiences of violence and oppression caused by social, political, and military conflicts. The novelty of this book lies in the challenge it poses to the Western-centric and patriarchal bias often found in similar collections of scholarly essays. Thus, the book focuses on female authors, seeking to give visibility and voice to women victims, generally forgotten in hegemonic cultural discourses.

Keywords Literature. Violence. Ethical turn. Human rights. Subalternity. Representation. Memory. Postmemory. Body. Violence against women.

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Narratives of Violence

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Introduction

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Narratives of Violence is a contribution to the ethical turn in literary studies. In the current context of systemic political violence unleashed in the wake of 9/11 and in the midst of the global advance of capitalism and neoliberalism, literature has become a particularly fitting device for raising awareness about injustice, abuse of power and human rights violations. We believe that literary work can be useful in addressing social challenges such as the abolition of patriarchal and colonial imaginaries, the prevention of gender-based violence, and the construction of a peaceful coexistence with immigrants and displaced persons.

We believe that a good way to achieve this goal is by paying academic attention to the voices of people and groups traditionally excluded from knowledge and cultural representations - voices that crystallize into literary or artistic creations, sometimes thanks to the help of a mediator. Ethical commitment forces us to listen to the denunciation of the oppressions they have suffered or continue to suffer; also to consider their resistance or rebellion, especially when it takes the form of an alternative political proposal, be it personal or collective. Thus, subverting the hierarchies and dynamics of the canon, we invite readers to discover a selection of narratives of violence

of female authorship that have been published in non-hegemonic literary or cultural spaces and that, because of the political potential they include – beyond their literary qualities –, it is worth fostering. The mediating function of the academic works we have gathered, therefore, seeks to amplify the subversive potential and the circulation of texts that tell stories of oppression.

The attention we have paid to a very small, yet diverse, set of creations that testify to experiences deeply marked by violence has been reflected in eight critical essays.¹ These essays provide contextual elements and theoretical tools for a better understanding of the positions of subjects who want to subvert the unjust power relations that grip them. The main goal, it should be emphasized, is to encourage readers to develop their own ethical response to the various dilemmas posed by these creations.

The works we analyze have been said, sung or written originally in different languages. They also belong in a wide range of genres: oral poetry, song, biographical or autobiographical narration, *testimonio*, novel, essay, comic and visual art. Anchored in different geopolitical realities, the works are set in historical contexts ranging from the 1920s to the present day. In order to reinforce the diachronic dimension of the selection, we present the essays according to the chronological order of creation of the works – which does not always coincide with their publication.

The stories we invite you to read display precarious experiences lived on the margins, sometimes in situations of confinement, caused by conflicts of all kinds: military, social, political, economic or religious, of a patriarchal nature, often intimately intertwined with *machismo* – which has its worst expression in femicide. The stories we have selected are generally controversial: their sharp edges, we must warn, will possibly bother readers. These works are situated at the opposite end of creations of wide global circulation, conceived as a commercial commodity, that often reinsert victims at their bowed down condition and prevent the articulation of alternative imaginaries.

By tackling works rooted in local experiences as the essays we proceed to present do, *Narratives of Violence* does not want to be limited to a gesture of listening to voices that are generally ignored because they are outside the hegemonic and mainstream patterns and channels of circulation. It also wants to strengthen the political agency of the literary text by contributing to the configuration of global imaginaries based on respect, recognition and empathy, especially towards the most vulnerable people.

¹ In order to guarantee the academic quality of the chapters, the texts have gone through a double-blind peer review process.

Lhousain Simour opens the volume with a proposal that connects with postcolonial and subaltern studies: “Colonial Encounters in Gendered Settings: Reflections on Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq, a Moroccan Amazigh Courtesan and Singing Poet”. Simour deals with the legendary oral poet Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq, from Morocco, an illiterate Amazigh absent in the hegemonic historiographical accounts, eminently urban and elitist, and in the narratives that glorify the nation. As he warns at the outset, her songs, which have come down to us through René Euloge’s French version, *Les Chants de la Tassaout* (1986), do not escape the problem of the construction of images of the Eastern woman by Western male subjects. Simour’s analysis of the embodiment of the female body and subjectivity, themes, and rhetorical strategies of Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq songs helps to vindicate her as an emblem of women’s resistance to patriarchal and colonial oppression.

Alfons Gregori’s essay, “Janina Hescheles, o la resistència del subjecte trasbalsat. Identitat, heroisme i dignitat” (Janina Hescheles, or the Resistance of the Upset Subject: Identity, Heroism and Dignity), is located at the crossroads between studies on concentration and autobiographical literature. Gregori addresses the testimonial text *Oczyma dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (1946) (*My Lvov. Holocaust Memoir of a Twelve-Year-Old Girl*), in which the Polish Janina Hescheles reflects on her experience as a persecuted and confined Jewish girl in a concentration camp during World War II. In his essay, Gregori relates Hescheles’ text to Anne Frank’s canonical *Diary*, briefly recalling the anti-Semitic barbarism deployed in Poland in the 1940s in order to contextualize the work for today’s readers, and studies the concepts of identity and dignity. Gregori describes Hescheles, a still little-known author, as an activist and social heroine.

Montserrat Lunati Maruny studies a testimonial work in “Personal Remembrance as Historical Memory: Eva Koch’s Interactive Visual Work on Her Mother’s Experience of the Spanish Civil War”. Lunati analyzes the video installation *Villar* (2001), by Eva Koch, in which the Danish artist reconstructs the experience of her mother, Cristobalina Martínez López, when she was adopted by a leftist, committed to pacifism Norwegian couple at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Koch articulates a visual interactive body of work shaped by the memories of several family members who narrate how they lived through the war and what the absence of Cristobalina meant to them: therefore, Lunati considers Koch a “postmemory subject”. She addresses Koch’s work by mobilizing theoretical concepts of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), collective memory (Maurice Halbwachs), history (Walter Benjamin), and performance of memory (Jay Winter). She highlights the connections between personal experiences and collective history, and points out the need to recover them, as Koch does, in a choral and interrelated way to build the memory of the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of the defeated Republican side.

Federico Pous sets out to reflect on a space of tensions that is especially controversial: the position of feminism vis-à-vis prostitution in “Memoria Transversal. Aportes a las genealogías del movimiento feminista en Argentina en *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*” (Transversal Memory: Contributions to the Genealogies of the Feminist Movement in Argentina in *No Woman is Born to Be a Whore*). Pous discusses the work of the Argentine María Galindo and the Bolivian Sonia Sánchez, *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*, a collection of voices by various self-organized prostitutes and ex-prostitutes who explain the multiple violence they suffer. He argues that Galindo and Sánchez’s text has radicalized Argentine feminism by defending the abolitionist stance amid the intense debate over prostitution in Argentina. Pous highlights that, for the current feminist wave in the South American country, the points of reference are the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), who flagged the motto *Ni una menos* (*Not one less*) as a response to the social scourge of femicides. In his opinion, the main virtue of this work, which aspires to undermine the patriarchal domination that legitimizes and gives continuity to the prostitution industry, is its weaving of a transversal memory of the narratives created by prostitutes while articulating a complex and disruptive political proposal that draws attention to the most vulnerable, precarious and marginalized women, those who have always had their bodies exploited but never have had access to the word.

Josep-Anton Fernàndez analyzes the work of Najat El Hachmi, a Catalan novelist who has denounced the various kinds of systemic violence inflicted on women, particularly migrant women, both in her country of origin, Morocco, and in Catalonia. In the chapter “Dislocated Temporalities: Immigration, Sexuality, and Violence in Najat El Hachmi’s *L’últim patriarca*”, Fernàndez focuses on the novel that was awarded the prestigious Premi Ramon Llull in 2008. Fernàndez explores, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, how El Hachmi’s novel portrays the effects of the clash of temporalities brought about by immigration. These effects are present in the psychic conflicts experienced by the unnamed protagonist, but also in her brutal disruption of gender subordination. El Hachmi, argues this scholar, locates in the reproduction of patriarchal domination a kind of sexual violence that is both foundational and structural, and that is dealt with by the protagonist by means of a sexual transgression – carried out in the realm of anal sexuality – whose effects are no less violent and shattering. This transgression, Fernàndez claims, “manifests as a symptom, expresses, and brings into play the conditions of possibility of the construction of contemporary Catalan identity, as well as its risks and dangers”.

Teresa Iribarren, for her part, proposes incorporating Arundhati Roy’s controversial work *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) into ac-

ademic curricula in Western universities. In this hybrid text, which combines journalistic chronicle, essay and *testimonio*, the respected novelist explains her long journey through the forests of India with the young Naxalite guerrillas. Roy defends the militia's armed struggle to protect their natural environment from the extractive projects of the government and various corporations, while showing the richness of their tribal culture at risk of being annihilated. Although this work has been widely criticized in India, and even banned in some universities, in "L'escriptora i els guerrillers: *Caminant amb els camarades*, d'Arundhati Roy" (The Writer and the Guerrillas: *Walking with the Comrades*, by Arundhati Roy) Iribarren would like to see it promoted among young people, especially in the global North. She believes that reading it can contribute to the formation of a critical, more conscious citizenry to build new political imaginaries and more equitable and respectful forms of life and habitats.

María Porrás studies a memorial comic in the chapter "Representations of Violence and Exile in Leila Abdelrazaq' *Baddawi*". Porrás inscribes *Baddawi* (2015), a work in which Palestinian author Leila Abdelrazaq recreates her father's childhood and adolescence in a refugee camp in Lebanon, in the paradigm of those comics that deal with postmemory and testimonial writing, which began in 1986 with the publication of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Through the analysis of the text and graphics, Porrás argues that Abdelrazaq manages to translate a personal experience of violence and exile representative of the Palestinian diaspora into a graphic novel capable of connecting with a wide and very diverse audience.

Finally, Jordi Serrano-Muñoz discusses three current Japanese novels in "Bodies and Economic Violence in Contemporary Japanese Fiction: Absence, Change, and Empowerment in Yū Miri, Murata Sayaka, and Kawakami Mieko". This study compares *JR Ueno-eki kōen-guchi* (*Tokyo Ueno Station*) (2014), by Yū Miri, *Konbini ningen* (*Convenience Store Woman*) (2016), by Murata Sayaka, and *Natsu monogatari* (*Breasts and Eggs*) (2019), by Kawakami Mieko. His interpretation revolves around a highly original core idea: the global decline of Japanese wristwatches. Serrano-Muñoz explores the different ways in which the authors denounce the violence of an unjust economic system from multiple points of view. The works studied, which incorporate the intersectional view, show the extent to which economic violence and social oppression have a profound impact on the precariousness of people's lives, a problem that is often hidden behind macroeconomic figures. Through the mobilization of the concepts of invisibility, imitation and metamorphosis, and empowerment as a form of resistance, Serrano-Muñoz focuses on the treatment of the bodies of the protagonists. Thus, he argues that the body is a space of tension where Japan's neoliberal policies are questioned and proposes, through markedly feminized dissent and subversion, the changing of hegemonic norms.

Narratives of Violence has been published in open access to facilitate its use, both for teaching and research purposes, by those seeking literary works politically committed to the prevention and deactivation of violence. We hope that the essays that make up the volume will inspire students and teachers to read, analyze, and discuss the works in question.

Colonial Encounters in Gendered Settings

Reflections on Mrīrīda n'ait 'Atiq, a Moroccan Amazīgh Courtesan and Singing Poet

Lhoussain Simour

Hassan II University of Casablanca, Morocco

Abstract Mrīrīda n'ait 'Atiq, or Mrīrīda ūt-'Atiq as she is locally known, is an Amazīgh popular troubadour who has been brought to oblivion by historiography writings. She was a courtesan and a traveling poet whose physical wanderings in the mountainous villages and valleys of Tasāout and Azilal are retold in her oral and aural poetry. Curiously, the often-scornful audiences in the public markets (*souks*) where she performed never got interested in Mrīrīda's poems until she met with a French instructor who spoke the local dialect, taped the poems, translated them in French and documented them in *Les Chants de la Tassaout*.

Keywords Mrīrīda n'ait 'Atiq. Gender. Amazīgh culture. Morocco. Epistemic violence. Colonialism. Postcolonialism.

What could you offer me, tell me, young naïve man?
Days without meat... sugar and songs,
The sweat and the filth of painful labors,
The manure of stables, stinky clothes
And the frightful smoke of the dark kitchen,
While you are out to dance the “adersi”.¹
And you would ask me, the thing is quite certain,
To give birth to boys, boys, boys!
Cannot you see that I am not made for it?

(Euloge 1986, 35)

In dealing with Mrīrīda, a controversial woman of remarkable beauty, a Moroccan *Amazīgh* illiterate poetess, and one of the “victims of historical assassination”, I deem it relevant to start with a personal experience that has inspiringly been very influential in the writing of this piece. A couple of years ago, on a Sunday evening of February 5th, during its *Des histoires et des homes* TV programme, the Moroccan 2M showed Kamal Hackkar’s road-movie musical documentary *Tasanū, Tayrinū* (2017).² The title literally means ‘my liver, my love’, and it metaphorically refers to the confession of ardent emotions in the *Amazīgh* context of the Moroccan Middle Atlas Mountains. In dealing with the concept of love in the *Amazīgh* background, Hachkar has based his documentary on the narrative of the legendary poet Mrīrīda ūt-‘Atiq. This mid-twentieth century local figure symbolized *la joie de vivre*, freedom of movement and thought; and was an emblem of female resistance to the patriarchal order who blurred the boundaries between shame and honor through her poems and through her nomadic experience.

Mrīrīda has her own story, which in varying degrees represents an early colonial and precolonial feminist awareness in Morocco, and wherein the oral tradition with its elusive memories, is overshadowed

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Itzea Goikolea Amiano from SOAS University of London for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper, and for her interview with me on Mrīrīda. Many thanks are also due to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful remarks.

1 This is one Mrīrīda’s poems. The translations are mine unless stated elsewhere. *Adersi* is a famous dance in the Ait Bouguemaz valley, Azilal, where men and women are grouped together in a semicircular like-manner. In discussing the *adersi* dance with my mother, she told me that men get mixed with women in lines wherein each man’s elbow is adjacent to the woman’s and that the lineup of women should more or less be equal to the men’s. *Adersi*, played with *tālūnt*, also called *taguenzāt* (*bendīr* in Moroccan *dārija*), assigned to male counterparts, often opens with sung verses that venerate God and his Prophet, then moves to various social issues about rural life and lasts overnight to reach the form of singing duels between men and women late in the evening.

2 The transliterations used in this article follow the Index Translationum provided by UNESCO Arabic transliteration wherein long vowels are represented as [ā, ū, ī]. Consonants are represented as follows: [ض as ḍ], [ظ as ḏ], [ص as ṣ], [ط as ṭ], [ق as q], [ح as ḥ], [خ as kh], [غ as gh], [ع as ‘].

by the powers of history and by the orthodoxy of the mainstream urban male-based elitist historiography. Her life experiences have been obscured by those who wrote the glorious narratives of the country, without paying much tribute to the epics that unfolded around them. Mrīrīda, who speaks of and for the other Moroccan Mrīrīdas, remains a valuable case of study. Her poetry and sung poems provide “a contested site where gender, morality, and the state intersect” (Ciucci 2012, 788; see also Ciucci 2008). Her life narrative and poetic experience are worth retrieving in the light of the intricate cultural, historical and identity discourses her individual and collective subjectivities purport to represent. What we all know about her is that she was born in Megdāz, a small ramshackle village that stretches the Tasāout valley deep in the Atlas Mountains of Azilal, earlier in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, her real name is still unknown to us; yet, the nickname given to her and by which she was famous in her tribe was Mrīrīda, as she herself states in one of her poems: “People called me Mrīrīda / Mrīrīda, the agile rennet of meadows” (Sadiqi 2003, 234).

Literature about Mrīrīda’s little story is scarce, if not almost inexistent. Few webpages have mentioned her but with no insightful critical reflections on her sung poetry. Nearly all the discussions raised in internet public domains either reproduce the French translated versions of her poems or hint to the overwhelming obscurities in which she has been drawn for long. Very significant, though, is that the mysteries surrounding the narrative of this emblematic figure have been contested by few bloggers who discussed her case.³ They state that she never existed as she seems to have been one of those mythic characters of the life dramas created for reasons that are still uncovered; and that if she ever existed at all, she only occurred in the French instructor’s orientalist fantasies. In here, Mrīrīda is meant to fade away from collective imagination, vanish naturally and disperse into total amnesia. In the midst of the shifting discourses of intentional fallacy and forced amnesia – visible enough in relegating this figure to second-hand position – and the recuperative endeavors of memory in restoring the other’s forgotten history, crops up a wonderful story of a fabulous female wandering poet. Her songs and poetry are now available to us thanks to the French instructor René Euloge. In 1927-28, while on a visit to Azilal to experience the exotic Otherness and live up to his Orientalist expectations, he discovered quite by chance Mrīrīda and her two other roommates. Bacha from Zāwit Echeikh and

3 See Lhoussain Azergui’s article “Mririda N’Ait Attik, un Destin Amazigh!”, published on December 14, 2013 (<http://neocultureamazighe.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/12/14/mririda-nait-attik-un-destin-amazigh/>). See also, abdelkarim Ochacha’s article on “Colonial Literature in the Mirror”, *al-ḥiwār al-mutamadin: al-adāb wa al-fan*, 2930, 28 February 2010 (<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=2056920>).

Bibia from Msemghir were also courtesans and performers who used to wander across the region's *souks* and perform their musical poetry for the *Amazigh Souk* goers. A French soldier first urged Euloge to visit Mririda and the two girls. Euloge states that

C'est pendant une halte à Azilal que je fis connaissance de la jeune poétesse. Mon regretté ami, Jo G... venu de Demnat me dit: "vous tombez bien. J'ai fait pour vous une découverte. Ce soir nous irons boire le thé chez Mririda. Ne m'en demandez pas davantage, car la rencontre vous réserve certainement une inoubliable surprise!" (Euloge 1986, 12)

It was during an errand to Azilal that I became acquainted with the young poetess. My friend, o G... came from Demnat and said, "It's good that you are here. I made a discovery for you. Tonight we will go to have tea at Mririda's. Do not ask me further, because the meeting is certainly hiding an unforgettable surprise for you!"

Nobody cared about what these artists were singing and rehearsing. Whatever their artistic compositions meant, the French officers and the regular visitors of the *quartier réservé* would not pay the slightest consideration to the vague poems they could not understand. Such was definitely the case with the native *taqāt* goers, the merciless *Gūm* soldiers,⁴ the merchants, the traders and the farmers, who were only taken by lustful moments of pleasure and missed the chance to look at these Mriridas' poetry with approval and respect.

The first Moroccan academic source to have mentioned Mririda and paid attention to her life story, albeit in passing, is Fatima Sadiqi's *Women, Gender and Language in Morocco*. She has analyzed the different expressive genres that women make use of in *tamazight* and in Moroccan *dārīja*, including some verses by Mririda. She has found, and she is right, "creativity, boldness and moral strength" in the poems of the "poor illiterate Berber woman living in a remote mountainous village at a period in the history of Morocco where women were denied the least of rights" (Sadiqi 2003, 235). For her, Mririda's art "is a prototype of the authentic oral female literature of Moroccan women" (235). She excelled in the art of improvising and singing *Amazigh* poems in a context wherein artistic production was singularly dominated by men. Sadiqi's mention of Mririda is an interesting historical and cultural act geared toward both voicing out the

⁴ The Moroccan *Gūm* soldiers, *les Goumiers Marocains* in French, were indigenous soldiers in the service of the Moroccan Sultan who also served in the French army between 1908 and 1956. The *Gūms* were used during the French colonial occupation of Morocco up to the early 1930s. They then served in Italy and France during the Second World War and in Indochina from 1946 to 1954.

Amazīgh women's contribution to the reshaping of literary and musical landscapes in the country, and exploring the agency of women within Morocco's cultural and linguistic "structures of power" (235) from both theoretical and ethnographic positions. Her project is a valid critical study at least in the overall argument it supports as to the starting of a recuperative terrain that touches on women as marginal voices and their contribution in the reshaping of postcolonial linguistic and cultural identities in Morocco.

Within the same vein, and in an article published in a conference proceedings edited by Sadiqi, Osire Glacier mentions in passing one of Mrīrida's poems. Glacier's article focuses on the intersection of power and on the production of narratives about feminism in Morocco, including feminist narratives themselves. Adopting an empirical-based approach, the study sketches the history of women in Morocco in general and Moroccan feminism in particular with the attempt of retrieving forgotten figures and narratives that articulate early precolonial, colonial and postcolonial feminist consciousness in Morocco. She argues that Mrīrida's voice contests the social conditions of the women of her times, and that the discourse on modern Moroccan feminism is the continuity of an indigenous feminist consciousness perpetuated through national and cultural traditions but overlooked by mainstream literature (Glacier 2012, 47-63).

Also, in dealing with Moroccan *Amazīgh* women, Cynthia Becker who has worked extensively on the *Amazīgh* women states that "women are the artists in Amazigh societies: they create and wear the public visual symbols of Amazigh ethnic identity such as woven textiles, tattoos, and particular styles of jewelry and dress" (Becker 2006, 4). Becker's work, devoted to the *Ait Khabbāsh* from Southeastern Morocco, remains a valuable theoretical source on the study of *Amazīgh* women's arts and culture regardless of its methodological shortcomings. It is not a book on *Amazīgh* arts in Morocco *per se*. It is intrinsically descriptive of ceremonial and communal rites of passage performed during women's gatherings. By being so, it overlooks various historical and cultural factors that have been fundamental in shaping the Moroccan *Amazīgh* identities. In addition, the analysis "ignores the role and influence of Islam and religious ideology in the shaping of the mores and traditions the author attempts to present" (Hagan 2008, 341-2). Becker's work's merit lies in offering interesting anthropological data on the construction of ethnic identity in visual arts in the Moroccan *Amazīgh* context, and in investigating the role of women in the maintenance and preservation of the *Ait Khabbāsh*'s artistic tradition. The merit of the book, concomitantly in line with the argument of this article, also lies in contextualizing and theorizing a feminist discourse that allows the previously unheard voices and stories to emerge against the constricting grid of national historiographical writings and elitist cultural documentation.

In delineating counter-hegemonic and transgressive voices of the margins in Moroccan musical landscape, Deborah Kapchan has published her book *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (1996). Kapchan relies on ethnographic research through an in-depth fieldwork she started in mid-1980s in Beni Mellal to read the 'body' of the *shīkhā*, the Moroccan dancing woman. Kapchan untangles the artistic and bodily prowess of the *shīkhāt* (plural of *shīkhā*) in articulating some of the more powerful metaphors of Moroccan Arabo-Amazigh identity. For her, this female performer whose singing and dancing are central to all festivities, including marriage ceremonies and birth and circumcision celebrations, represents a model of the transgressive female dancer in Moroccan society. Her study, which comes in the form of encounter with and analysis of conversations with the dancers, illustrates various discourses on women's performances in an Islamic society. It highlights the ways in which the performers' identities are negotiated within complex discourses of sexual freedom, social marginalization and moral ideals. Focusing on the *shīkhā's* body as a palimpsest of erotic inscriptions, Kapchan declares that the animated site of these dancers' physical activity and their sexually loaded spectacles make them "embodiments of the *matluq*" (Kapchan 1994, 87) with unlimited freedom that violates the borders of social restraint. The free and unrestricted *shīkhā* is accepted as "garrulous and outgoing", incarnating a sexual texture of "exhilaration and flowing movement" (94). These dancers' openness in performing sexual prowess through the manipulative forces of the body, their bodily and linguistically "loose language" on and off stage, defy religious and cultural taboos. They bear witness of the dishonorable character of the dancer/singer in the "dominant value system that degrades their material and spiritual worth" (96). One of the limitations of Kapchan's work is that it foregrounds the manipulation of the discourse on women within the Orientalist mode of representation that focuses on the definition of female voices as forms of patriarchal domination and oppression. It does not provide a genuine understanding of Moroccan/Oriental women beyond the confinements of tradition, and beyond the discursive constructions of Orientalist legacy complicated by the ethnographer's position. Still, *Gender on the Market* offers an interesting study of the Moroccan marketplace as a contradictory site of linguistic and bodily interactions where various discourses about gender, tradition and values are constructed and experienced through women's daily practices. The evocative forces of the marketplace in Mrīrīda's case are very telling. It stands as an oratorical space wherein the expressive forms and beliefs of the traditional realm are revealed and wherein this poet is in constant contestation of social categories and continuous challenge of gender boundaries.

This is also true for some Moroccan *Amazīgh* women who are seen as agents of oral tradition wherein various discourses about gendered spaces and traditional formulations of social authority are negotiated and reconstructed. Within this vein, the case of Mrīrīda ūt-‘Atiq is significant. She managed to impose the authority of her physical presence and enforce her voice in both the public and private spheres through a type of oral texts she created and sung during her nomadic journeys across the various spaces she had physically and imaginatively visited. Curiously, the presence and contributions of Moroccan *Amazīgh* women in oral tradition have largely been unrecognized in historical writings, and their physical and epistemological experiences have also been scarcely tracked in the academic groves. This is a lacuna that this piece hopes to fill through the interrogation of “history from below” as Rosalind O’Hanlon has put it. The endeavor to rescue the voices and stories of these women from oblivion and restore the left-out fragments of history is of critical importance; a process that “turns an absence into a presence and peoples vacant spaces with figures” (O’Hanlon 2000, 79).

1 Gendering Colonialism and Colonizing Gender: Reflections on Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq’s Encounter with René Euloge

Despite ūt-‘Atiq’s contribution in the remapping the Moroccan *Amazīgh* cultural landscape through her poetry, she has, nonetheless, gone unnoticed, and her influences have been put into oblivion by the annals of national historiographical writings. Her achievements have been weakened and neglected because of her illiteracy and lack of intellectual pedigree, and because of her ethnic and gender affiliations as an *Amazīgh* woman. As stated earlier, Euloge had the chance to know and meet ūt-‘Atiq on various occasions and for several months. The encounter reminds us of Flaubert and his Egyptian courtesan, kuchuck Hanem. Stimulated by a set of romantic images which had fueled up his imagination about oriental fantasies and the Other’s unexplored geographies, like Flaubert himself, Euloge moved to one of the most marginalized zones of the country to experience his European “collective day-dream of the Orient” (Said 1979, 52). During the encounter with his courtesan, he states that

en l’écouter chanter monts et vallées, avec la vie quotidienne au village, ses drames familiaux, ses joies et ses peines, je me persuadais qu’elle atteignait à ces moments-là la plus haute élévation de pensées et de sentiments et, qu’on paroxysme de ses envolées lyriques, une sorte d’ivresse la transfigurait en l’allégeant des mières terrestres. (Euloge 1986, 14)

In listening to her singing about the mountains and valleys, about the village's everyday life, her family's dramas, her joys and sorrows, I was almost convinced that at that unmatched moment she had reached the highest rise in thoughts and feelings and, in the outburst of her lyrics, a kind of intoxication transfigures her by alleviating her from worldly miseries.

In here, Euloge is keen in grasping the stock motifs and concerns of Mrīrīda's poetic experience at large. He admits that the creative potential of his poetess inscribes her within a highly refined poetic art and hints, albeit implicitly, to her linguistic ability in crafting and translating everyday tribal issues into sophisticated poetic diction. The powerful meanings that her poems/songs resonate with elevate her from earthly physical spaces up to a subliminal universe wherein she becomes possessed by the atemporal spell of the words she uses. Euloge's perceptive impressions attest to the artistic flair his courtesan is endowed with and refers to how she polishes up her words to give a more captivating veneer to the overall thematic concerns she explores. Mrīrīda handles the trepidations and tribulations of the village life to give way to a poetic sagacity about her own physical and epistemological nomadic experiences. Her poems, accordingly, are astute revelations about individual and collective experiences wherein the roughness of the mountains and valleys is tamed by the graceful sensitiveness of the poetess's feelings. These poetic motifs construct the textual fabric of her individual narrative as the case with the translated poem that I discovered while writing this piece, titled "The Brooch" and which talks aborted desires due to expatriation in a foreign land:

Grandmother, grandmother,
Since he left I think only of him
And I see him everywhere.
He gave me a fine silver brooch
And when I adjust my haik on my shoulders,
When I hook its flap over my breasts,
When I take it off at night to sleep,
It's not the brooch I see, but him!
My granddaughter, throw away the brooch.
You will forget him and your suffering will be over.
Grandmother, it's over a month since I threw it away,
But it cut deeply into my hand.
I can't take my eyes off the red scar:
When I wash, when I spin, when I drink -
And my thoughts are still of him!
My granddaughter, may Allah heal your pain!
The scar is not on your hand, but in your heart.
(Joris, Tenghour 2012, 514-15)

Coming back to Mrīrīda-Euloge unremitting connection, Mrīrīda's interest in Euloge, if there might be any, given her ways of understanding life in a bohemian-like manner, complicates the discourse of encounter of the French male visitor with his Oriental subject. It is true that the encounter occurred under conditions of asymmetrical power relations; the French visitor is white, knowledgeable, civilized and rich enough with a civilizing mission in mind, whereas his courtesan is a supposedly submissive Oriental object available for the Western male's fantasies and sexual promiscuity. Yet what we discover is that Mrīrīda's powerful presence through her pristine poetic imagination in manipulating human experiences and turning them into refined aesthetic constructions and symbolic poetic imageries fluidly dissolves and disbands Euloge's position as an Orientalist ethnographer.

Euloge has not felt at any moment the need to describe how far she was oriental; and this is quite apparent all the way through his preface to ūt-'Atiq's collection of poems. Furthermore, he seems to have overlooked, and this is one of the constraints of translation, the real meanings behind Mrīrīda's poems and songs. He might not have paid attention to one of her poems where she vehemently condemns his presence, and by extension the colonizer's, and implores him to take a quick leave back home (see the extract below). In here, it is clear that Euloge's courtesan was aware of the dangers of colonial encroachment and her involvement in resisting its premises is quite evident. To my own understanding, the founding figure of this feminist anti-colonial awareness in Morocco is accredited to Malika al-Fassi's writings (1919-2007), one of the urban elites that has found its way through the annals of Moroccan official history on national struggle against colonial presence. Moroccan history is yet replete with absences of figures from the unfathomable Morocco that are condemned to remain silenced including ūt-'Atiq herself, whose poetry that has violently been neglected on aesthetic, ethnic and elitist grounds, articulated an early feminist consciousness about national integrity and liberation. Despite the significance of these figures' contributions to the making of Moroccan history, contemporary scholarship on this critical topic is still lagging behind, producing more absences where there should be a serious engagement with little narratives about the ironies of history. This is an issue that begs for future research investigation.

In a satirical tone where images speak about themselves in clearer terms, and with depth of meanings through impressive and allegorical overtones that are both liberating and insightful, Mrīrīda says:

For you, you, it will be better for you
If you go back to your country
I know that you frequently have to swap your girlfriends
You accept any key
Because you are like an old wooden lock. (Euloge 1986, 75)

Euloge is relegated to a passive, if not frail, position by the poetess's authority and her sense of freedom to reveal her rebellious voice and vibrant passion. We feel that Euloge's voice is totally confiscated and repossessed by the spontaneous fascinating poetic skills of his courtesan, and by her instinctive drive in translating her individual and communal anxieties into poetic expression through the creative linguistic structures of her native language. The importance of looking at gender when exploring issues about coloniality and colonial difference is significant as it provides the possibility of delineating alternative forms of Orientalism (Porter 1994, 150-4). The orientalist template of encounter upon which colonial difference is constructed in the case of Euloge and his Moroccan courtesan becomes vulnerable to reversal.

The encounter of Euloge with Mrīrida entails a discussion on colonial contacts through the manipulative forces of Orientalist discourse. In his *Orientalism*, and with the Foucauldian notion of discourse in mind, Edward Said defines orientalism as a "western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient" (1979, 3). He also tells us that "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies" (118). The colonial encounter in the Maghreb was incontestably a sexual encounter as well. Colonies, viewed as contradictory terrains where "cultures, sexualities, bodies, fantasies, and politics meet and emerge more complex for having encountered one another" (Mullins 2002, x), often were seen as sanctuary sites providing sexual prospects and bodily pleasures away from the authoritarian sexual codes that regulated individual relations in the metropolitan centers.

Following Edward Said's critique of *Orientalism*, scholars from a wide range of disciplines explored the ways in which other people and places have been constructed in colonial imagination (Aijaz 1992; Alloula 1986; Kabbani 1986). The traditional image of the Middle Eastern and North African woman that has dominated Western imagination for long is that of an oppressed, sexualized, eroticized and exoticized object. She is controlled by patriarchal and religious institutions, and often made limitlessly available for the Western male's sexual gaze. Such model of the Oriental woman as a 'non-isolated instance', which discursively hammers on Mrīrida's case and disturbs and disorients the template of Orientalist discourse, is clearly delineated in Gustave Flaubert's encounter with Kuchuk Hanem, the late nineteenth-century famous Egyptian courtesan and dancer.

The discursive prowess of both cases lies in the fact that they express the gendered shifts in Orientalist constructs. They reveal ideas about images of European stereotypical discourse about Oriental sexuality and the preconceptions associated with cultural, sexual and textual encounters between the male visitor and the oriental



Mririda út-Atiq

Figure 1 Mririda út-Atiq in the 1940s, the only picture available in the public domain, retrieved from Lhoussein Azergui's article "Mririda N'Ait Attik, un Destin Amazigh" (<http://neocultureamazighe.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/12/14/mririda-nait-attik-un-destin-amazigh/>), published on December 14, 2013

woman. Yet, above all, the discursive power of such representation is in the systematic association between the Oriental woman and the concept of colony, as a vulnerable land awaiting the Westerner's conquest. René Euloge and Gustave Flaubert, who were both French males speaking from a position of authority, received the Orient as a haven of exoticism wherein their heterosexual desires could be inscribed. They aimed to possess their subjects physically, control and dominate them in a situation that "stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (Said 1979, 6).

According to Edward Said, Flaubert's Hanem underscored a view of the Orient as a site of feminine decadence and a "seemingly unbounded sexuality" (178). She is totally possessed and controlled by the undissipated French male visitor. She "never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her" (6). In interrogating the grand narratives of colonialism, Said's *Orientalism* fails to produce an alternative formation of the Other. His theorization of the "operations of power in colonial relations leads him, in the first instance, to take insufficient account of resistance or contradiction within imperial culture itself" (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 50), and he is caught in an endless process of reinscribing the "very forms of cultural essentialism for which [he] condemns Orientalist discourse" (50). Other critics note that he places too much emphasis on the passivity of the native while not discussing, or even allowing for, the diverse ways in which indigenous people of the East have used, manipulated and constructed their own positive responses to colonialism using Orientalist conceptions (Beinorius 2003, 149-65). Said, accordingly, focuses on the epistemic transgressions of Empire rather than on the resistance of the oppressed. His model has not only been criticized for theoretical and methodological shortcomings, but also for an incisive obliteration of "the voice of the very agents he is so keen on liberating" (Bekkaoui 1998, 32).

However, this intricate case in Mrīrīda-Euloge encounters reveals various discursive manifestations that foreground the Oriental woman as a defiant subject with unbounded freedom of movement and speech. Her poems which swing back and forth in emotions of sadness and joy, indifference and compassion, incarnate an individual self in quest for self-expression, identity assertiveness, and broader horizons of nomadic creativity and physical wandering. Thus, in so doing, Mrīrīda seems to be contesting "the mainstream historical theories that regard women as passive absorbers of orders" (Sadiqi 2003, 239).⁵ Her life experience provides a genuine case about the understanding of Oriental women beyond the confinements of tradition, and beyond the discursive constructions of Orientalist legacy whereby Moroccan women's experiences seem to be narrated within a homogeneous discourse of various social and sexual constructs that are endorsed and complicated by the mainstream narratives of colonial history.

⁵ Sadiqi refers to a seventeenth-century poem titled *rebbi Tlebt lik!* (I ask you God) by an unknown female poet in her discussion of the dynamics of gender and language in Moroccan oral poetry. According to her, the poem explores the desire that women would not dare to express publicly: "ruling over men and being free to entertain lovers. The imploration of God, as the supreme power, expresses the poet's despair in getting power and freedom from men" (Sadiqi 2003, 239).

If Flaubert's Hanem was "no more than a [sex] machine", and to a certain extent "less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity" (Said 1979, 187) – a fact that denies her action and voice –, Euloge's Mrīrīda articulates a counter-discourse of subversion that challenges the cultural and ideological hegemony of the Western male's gaze and its discourse on identity and difference. She resists the constricting grid of representation by being the 'master' of her own narrative as an Oriental woman endowed with substantial feminine potential wherein her agency is affirmed and her pristine poetry remains an intrigue to the French visitor. She is made visible through her poems and not through Euloge's representational categorizations of how she was oriental. She has managed to speak about herself and express her identity and belongingness through her intuitive power of creativity and expressive forces of poetic reflection. If in Orientalist writings Oriental women are more often than not "the creatures of a male power-fantasy" as they are "more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (207), Mrīrīda's encounter with Euloge reverses this template and inscribes her within a much more dynamic discourse of resistance wherein the French instructor has been primarily concerned with her unimaginable ability in weaving her poems without being fully interested in describing her as an oriental type to Western readers.

In other words, Mrīrīda's power detectable enough through the choice of words and poignant thematic concerns for her poems disengages the instructor's male's gaze and underscores the reversal of the Orientalist stereotypes about Oriental women. The deeply-rooted stereotype of Muslim women confined by the patriarchal orders of oppression, wherein their voice is ultimately denied while waiting for the Western male to bring salvation, is totally undermined. Sexual liaison through physical pleasure and the unlimited sensuality in Kuchuk Hanem's case with Flaubert contrasts in meaningful terms the intrigues of poetry crafting and poetic crudeness of Mrīrīda in Euloge's case of encounter with the Atlas courtesan. This situation turns back the old specter of Orientalist ideology on itself and offers an interesting perspective as to how gendered encounters in the historical context of French colonialism on Morocco have been considered and rethought.

Just like Kuchuk Hanem in the case of Flaubert, Mrīrīda, who was unable to adjust herself to the *taqāt*'s mysteries wherein she coupled physical satisfaction with dignity and poetic sensibility, had to disappear in order to be resurrected more completely. After the Second World War, re-driven by an immortal Orientalist desire in the revival of his exotic experience after a momentary break, Euloge came back to look for the courtesan he would never be able to see again. As he himself tells us,

En 1954, le hasard, dernier et premier des dieux, me permet de rencontrer près d'Ait Ouariat chez les Ait Bou Ou Guemmêz, une montagnarde que les années avaient sévèrement marquée, mais robuste et souriante... Une quinzaine d'année auparavant, au marché d'Azilal, elle avait été l'une des collègues de Mririda, la "tanedamt", la poétesse "qui choisissait ses amants"... la courtisane retirée des affaires m'apprit que Mririda avait quitté le souk hospitalier pour vivre dans une intimité sans partage avec G., adjudant des Goumiers. Plus tard elle aurait eu maille à partir avec un Caid de la région et le sergent S. l'emmena alors au poste de *Taguelft* et en fit sa compagne pour quelque temps (Euloge 1986, 15)

In 1954, the first and last chance from the Gods allowed me to meet closer to the Ait Ouariat at the Ait Bou Ou Guemmêz, a healthy and smiling mountainous woman, although she had severely aged. About fifteen years before, in the Azilal market, she had been one of Mririda's colleagues, the "tanedamt", the poetess "who chose her lovers"... this courtesan who backed out of the business told me that Mririda had left the generous souk to live in unshared intimacy with G., an assistant of the Goumiers. Later she refused to yield to a Caid from the region, and Sergeant S. took her to the *Taguelft* post and dated her for some time.

As this extract delineates, in his relentless quest for his lost courtesan, and upon an unforeseen encounter he struck with an old woman from the *Ait Ouariât* in the *Ait Bouguemâz* tribes in 1954, Euloge tells us that this "retired courtesan" knew Mririda as they both shared the mysteries of *taqât* and those of its goers. She was a colleague to *tandâmt*, the poetess, "who was keen in choosing her lovers". She told him that she left Azilal to live in "unshared intimacy" with a local chief army officer. Later, as she refused to yield to the lustful desires of an authority officer, a sergeant major had to take her to an army garrison in *Taguelft*, a village in the upper parts of the nearby mountains, and dated her for some time before she completely vanished.

Mririda's poems that are available to us are René Euloge's French translated versions. Many of her verses and sung poetry in their original *Amazigh* language are now lost to us. If there remains any, they are only fragmented pieces from various poems, or at worst full poems with incomplete structure. This is due to the forces of age over the people who lived with this distinguished artist and learnt her songs/poems, and to the workings of time over the nature of the transmission of an oral genre that is vulnerable to the dangers of extinction.

The translations offered by Euloge's *Les Chants de la Tassaout* to more than a hundred poems cannot capture by any means the intricate images and metaphors the poems purport to convey in their orig-

inal language. Euloge himself tells us in the preface to his book that “the most faithful translation fails to fully restore the flavor of such poetry”. He is definitely right. Furthermore, it is certain that the re-translation of Mrīrīda into English would distort, disorient and deform her work further, and do harm to the poetess’s intended meanings; another injustice that runs through the discursive implications of cultural transfer and the relocation of languages transmitted through orality in the case of Moroccan women’s little known narratives.

In spite of all the constraining complications that generally surround literary translations, and particularly the translation of vernacular language, *Amazīgh* poetry as a case in point, Euloge’s translated collection of poems has at least saved Mrīrīda from oblivion and has perceptibly, albeit to some extent, succeeded in bringing out the concealed meanings in the aesthetic fabric of her texts. Mrīrīda has addressed various themes in her songs, mainly the body and its shifting discourses as a woman’s concern in a tribal context, the representation of the woman and the images such (mis)representation perpetuates in a male-oriented society, and the human relations that emanate from gendered spaces in the *Amazīgh* context. Through various poems, we witness the poetic interplay of the body with the colonial experience and the counteracting resistance that emerges in the precincts of Mrīrīda’s text. Through one of the translations of her poems titled “The Bad Lover” she states,

Leave me, soldier without sense or manner!
I can see that you are full of contempt,
Your hand raised, insults on your lips,
Now that you have had what you want from me.
And you leave, calling me a dog!
Sated with my pleasures,
You’d have me blush for my trade,
But you, were you ashamed
When you pushed gently at my door,
Up like a bull? [...]
Guest of mine for the moment, my slave,
Don’t you feel my disgust and hate?
One of these days
The memory of tonight will bring you back to me
Conquered and submissive again.
You’ll leave your pride at the door
And I’ll laugh at your glances and your wishes.
(Joris, Tengono 2012, 513)

Mrīrīda composes as she sings and sings as she composes; stringing her words and tying up her poetry pieces together with powerful expressions and images borrowed from everyday experiences, as if she

were stringing the *Amazīgh lūbān* laces⁶ (amber stones) to put around her neck and ornate her body. Her nimbleness and skillful imagination in assembling words and composing/singing through metaphors, simile and satire have conspicuously singularized this poet's artistic creativity; thus, acquiring the seal of a *tanẓāmt* (professional poetess). In her poems, she deals with the exasperating pains of love, unhappiness and departures that yield melancholic poetic aura; real and imagined situations contemplative of issues about her individual and collective experiences such as separation and loneliness, unreciprocated love, gossiping, betrayal, death, etc. Part of her poetry, related to or induced by ardent sexual desires, involves well-knitted motifs and images that are stringed in a romantic fashion as is the case her "What do you want?":

What do you want, girl of the village below?
To marry me, is that what you are thinking?
It is said that you are hardly unfriendly,
and I too dream of holding you.
Here is my only piece of silver.
The peddler will sell you perfumed soap,
a comb, a mirror - what do I know?
But by my neck, I'll bring you a red scarf
from Demnat if you want.
What do I need, son of the high pasture,
with a piece of silver or silk scarf?
Then tell me what you want -
to marry me? What do you think,
pretty girl of the village below?
You make me laugh, son of the high pasture.
I don't care about money or a scarf,
and even less about marriage.
I expect from you
what you expect from me.
And satisfied, we will leave each other.
What I want, strong son of the high pasture,
what I want is the shelter of this bush,
where you will lie on my breasts - which I hold
out to you - and in a moment
happiness sweeter than milk,
while my eyes lose themselves in the sky. (514)

6 See Mrīrīda's picture; she is wearing one around her neck.

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Janina Heschels, o la resistència del subjecte trasbalsat

Identitat, heroisme i dignitat

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Abstract This chapter analyzes the role of identity, heroism and dignity in the resistance of the disrupted subject in the Holocaust survivor's memoir written by Janina Heschels Altman, which was published as a book in 1946 under the title *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (1946) (English transl., *My Lvov. Holocaust Memoir of a Twelve-Year-Old Girl*). The analysis takes an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on the concentrationary universe and the politics of representation, using as corpus the Catalan edition of Heschels' memoir, which is one of the few versions that takes comprehensively into account her original manuscript.

Keywords Memoir. Testimony. Holocaust. Dignity. Identity. Heroism. Polish Jewishness.

Sumari 1 Presentació: un testimoni excepcional. – 2 Antisemitisme i identitat: el subjecte trasbalsat per l'impensable. – 3 Les víctimes: entre el testimoni i l'heroisme. – 4 A la recerca de la dignitat. – 5 A tall de conclusió.

1 Presentació: un testimoni excepcional

Per a moltes persones el nom d'Anne Frank (1929-1945) no sols és reconeixible, sinó que evoca ràpidament la figura emblemàtica dels innocents que durant la Segona Guerra Mundial van patir la persecució i l'extermini a mans de les forces alemanyes i els seus còmplices per la seva condició de jueus o per tenir orígens familiars jueus. Poquíssimes persones, en canvi, coneixen Janina Heschels (1931), una nena de la

ciutat aleshores polonesa de Lviv que, a diferència de Frank, no va morir en un camp de concentració nazi,¹ sinó que en va ser rescatada l'any 1943 just abans que fos desmantellat,² gràcies a una operació empresa per activistes de l'esquerra clandestina de Cracòvia (cf. Calaforra 2013). En plena postguerra va establir-se a Israel, on va poder cursar els estudis de química i va canviar-se el cognom pel d'Altman arran del seu matrimoni. Una similitud que cal destacar entre Frank i Heschels és el fet que ambdues van deixar testimoni escrit de les respectives experiències com a víctimes de l'antisemitisme nazi i d'una part de la societat que practicava el col·laboracionisme interessat. La versió del *Diari* d'Anne Frank que durant dècades es va difondre estava destinada a ser llegida com a literatura del jo, perquè, como va demostrar Lefevre ([1992] 2017, 54) en un estudi publicat originalment el 1992, el fet que la nena volgués ser escriptora la va dur a un procés de reescriptura dels seus esborranys inicials per consideracions ideològiques, poètiques i de possible mecenatge,³ procés culminat per les persones que van participar en l'edició pòstuma. En efecte, aquest estudiós de la traducció assenyalava que la persona Anne Frank es va escindir entre persona i autora, i aquesta darrera va començar a reescriure d'una forma més literària allò que la persona havia escrit, a la qual cosa cal afegir les intrusions durant el procés editorial:

That is why part of her experience, very definitely a formative part, is missing from the 1947 Dutch text, and why she has been made to conform, in German, to a cultural stereotype and made to water down the description of the very atrocities which destroyed her as a person. (Lefevre [1992] 2017, 54)

En canvi, malgrat el talent precoç que se li ha atribuït (Calaforra 2015, 39), la intenció principal del text de Heschels era específicament testimonial, tasca reeixida gràcies a un altre dels seus dots: la seva excel·lent capacitat d'observació (Kozmińska-Frejlik 2015, 11). Així, la jove autora va emprendre'n la redacció l'any 1943 a Cracòvia a instànci-

Voldria dedicar el següent treball a Mercè Picornell, amb qui comparteixo la fal·lera de furgar pels traus i les esclatxes dels palimpsests.

1 Com és sabut, Frank va morir del tifus al camp de Bergen-Belsen poc abans que aquest fos alliberat per les tropes aliades.

2 Cal tenir en compte que el fet de desmantellar un camp en aquelles dates no implicava l'alliberament dels presos, sinó més aviat el seu trasllat a altres camps -sovint d'extermini- o que fossin executats. Sembla que al camp on havia estat internada Heschels va passar això darrer.

3 Lefevre ([1992] 2017, 9-19) no empra aquest terme per referir-se al sistema de suport financer d'una obra artística, sinó als factors de control extern de la recepció, escriptura i reescriptura de la literatura, que, per bé que sovint interactuen entre ells, podem desglossar-los en ideològics, econòmics i d'estatus.

es de membres de l'organització clandestina Żegota, també coneguda com a Consell d'Ajuda als Jueus, en el marc d'una acció planificada de recollida de diaris i notes autobiogràfiques escrites per jueus que plasassin les experiències del seu passat més recent (Kozmińska-Frejłak 2015, 9). El text de Heschels va ser publicat l'any 1946 amb el títol *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (*Amb els ulls d'una nena de dotze anys*). Prenent com a punt de partida aquest testimoni autobiogràfic, l'objectiu del present treball és analitzar les qüestions de la identitat, l'heroisme i la dignitat en relació amb la resistència de Heschels i altres supervivents dels camps nazis en la seva condició de subjectes.

En un reconegut estudi publicat l'any 1998, *L'ère du témoin*, Wieviorka (2013, 12) constata, d'una banda, la ingent necessitat de testimoniatge derivada de la barbàrie antisemita que es va patir durant la Segona Guerra Mundial –incomparable en magnitud a altres casos similars–, i, de l'altra, la important tasca de recopilació posterior d'aquests materials per a qui volgués emprendre'n una investigació a fons. L'autora hi posava en relleu el gran nombre de supervivents de la Shoah que van mirar de relatar-ho durant la seva captivitat o en les dècades que seguiren a l'extermini de jueus a Europa, aportant l'exemple dels 7.300 testimonis depositats a l'Institut Històric Jueu de Varsòvia (Wieviorka 2013, 9-10).⁴

D'aquesta manera, textos com el de Heschels formen part de les històries del *Hurbn*, és a dir, els fets de l'Holocaust escrits des del punt de vista de les víctimes (Wieviorka 2013, 119), i en conseqüència pertany a la categoria genèrica que anomenem 'literatura concentracionària'.⁵ Les dues característiques que fan especialment interessant aquest text són les següents: va ser escrit per ella mateixa quan solament tenia dotze anys, com el títol indica, i la traducció directa del manuscrit original es troba disponible en llengua catalana gràcies a l'encomiable tasca de Guillem Calaforra,⁶ que va fer una transcripció completa dels fitxers fotogràfics que el contenien.⁷ El mateix traduc-

⁴ A més a més, trobem una 'democratització' de la paraula testimonial en el sentit que els testimonis van ser escrits per tot tipus de persones, fins i tot adolescents com la mateixa Heschels. Així, Wieviorka (2013, 45) assenyala que qui els relata no eren pas cronistes professionals, com havia passat fins aleshores en el cas dels historiadors, els etnòlegs, els rabins o els talmudistes erudits, sinó que es dona la paraula a tothom.

⁵ Curiosament, la Janina Heschels (2015a, 9) contemporània defineix la seva obra com un «llibre de records», sense el posicionament militant que se li suposaria.

⁶ De 2000 a 2005 Calaforra va treballar com a professor de llengua i cultura catalanes a la Universitat Jagellònica de Cracòvia i s'hi va doctorar, endinsant-se al mateix temps en la rica cultura expressada en polonès. També ha traduït d'aquest idioma, entre d'altres, l'assaig *La ment captiva* (2005) de Czesław Miłosz i, en col·laboració amb Marta Cedro, les novel·les *El llenyataire* (2013) de M. Witkowski i *El defecte* (2015) de M. Tullii.

⁷ Si bé existeixen traduccions de l'obra a altres llengües (alemany, francès, anglès, ucraïnès, finès i espanyol, aquesta darrera a càrrec del mateix Calaforra), en general no prenen en consideració el manuscrit original. En són excepcions parcials la reedició

tor posa sobre la taula el valor d'aquest text primigeni, que tanmateix els editors de postguerra van voler corregir i embellir a causa d'allò que ell anomena «una mena de perfeccionisme típic dels polonesos»:

aquestes imperfeccions tenen per a nosaltres el valor dels indicis amagats en el manuscrit; formen part del document històric i filològic, de l'escriptura del nen [...]. (Calaforra 2015, 37-8)

2 Antisemitisme i identitat: el subjecte trasbalsat per l'impensable

Per entendre el seguit de fets històrics que van portar a la reclusió i extermini de milions de jueus cal tenir present que l'antisemitisme era una concreció d'odi ideològic estesa per tot el món occidental en diversos graus, és a dir, que no era privatiu dels ucraïnesos, els russos, els polonesos o els alemanys, sinó que estava present secularment a Europa. Al llibre de Heschels, la violència s'exerceix, principalment, contra un sector –el dels jueus de parla polonesa– que constituïa una de les comunitats més progressistes i modernes de la zona (Hrytsak 2015, 22), caracteritzat pel poliglòtisme, l'elevada formació educativa i la dedicació a tasques de caire cultural. Heschels, doncs, pertanyia al col·lectiu de víctimes que feia nosa als partidaris de la instauració d'un règim totalitari per un doble motiu: la seva adscripció forçosa i arbitrària a una suposada 'raça jueva' i la seva condició de potencial enemic ideològic. Així, hem de recordar que en la propaganda elaborada per les autoritats del Tercer Reich es difonia una imatge dels jueus recolzada pel mateix Hitler, segons la qual aquests personificaven simultàniament el marxisme, el bolxevisme, la plutocràcia britànica i el capitalisme nord-americà (Borejsza 2002, 297). Es tracta d'un conglomerat ideològic contradictori i irracional que s'unificava sota una sola figura, esborrant apories i aplicant, alhora, el recurs transhistòric del cristianisme consistent a definir el Mal com una entitat amb moltes cares, una multiplicitat que calia eradicar en nom de l'ordre i la supervivència dels propis descendents.

Polònia era, fins a l'esclat de la Segona Mundial i la consegüent ocupació nazi, un estat autoritari en què dominava encara un bloc

polonesa de 2015, que, a banda d'un extens aparell de notes, presenta un annex elaborat per Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak que compara els fragments divergents de la versió editada l'any 1946 amb els de la primigènia de Heschels (cf. 2015b, 87-131), així com la francesa, *À travers les yeux d'une fille de douze ans* (2016), que inclou la traducció de fragments del manuscrit d'acord amb els mateixos paràmetres filològics que van guiar la tasca de Calaforra (2015, 39). Finalment, val a dir que la versió anglesa és la més recent i, a part de ser una traducció indirecta a través del francès i l'hebreu, porta un títol més comercial i esbiaixat: *My Lvov. Holocaust Memoir of a Twelve-Year-Old-Girl* (2020).

polític hereu del mariscal Józef Piłsudski, que era anomenat popularment *Sanacja* per la seva meta regeneracionista, però que en realitat partia d'una visió elitista i jerarquitzada de la societat, així com d'una tendència a identificar l'essència polonesa amb el catolicisme. A això cal afegir que un altre dels corrents sociopolítics importants d'aquells anys convulsos era el moviment ultranacionalista liderat per Roman Dmowski, col·loquialment conegut com a *Endecja*, el qual encara se situava més a la dreta dels plantejaments dels partidaris de la *Sanacja*, és a dir, presentava una orientació política i una actuació cada cop més propera als feixismes de l'Europa coetània, alhora que comptava amb el suport de l'Església:⁸ distingia els polonesos catòlics, a qui considerava «els veritables polonesos», dels polonesos judeocomunistes, ucraïnesos i alemanys (Borejsza 2002, 163). D'aquesta manera, si un dels eixos vertebradors dels plantejaments d'aquest sector radical era l'antisemitisme, com a resultat de la seva voluntat d'excloure qualsevol mena d'alteritat del mapa polonès, en el cas de la *Sanacja*, un cop desapareguda la figura de Piłsudski, va adoptar sense complexos –fins i tot en declaracions oficials– demandes de caràcter antisemita en l'ideari polític, per exemple l'emigració forçosa dels jueus a territoris fora de Polònia. Per tant, alhora que el nacionalcatolicisme constituïa una marca identificadora clara del paradigma polític en què es movien les majories a la Polònia de la segona meitat dels anys trenta, l'antisemitisme va resultar un ingredient que, compartit socialment en diferents graus, va penetrar en el discurs i l'acció política de forma obertament amenaçadora, especialment per part de la joventut polonesa (cf. Borejsza 2002, 164-7).

A Alemanya l'odi antisemita ja feia anys que s'havia institucionalitzat i s'anava definint en un projecte genocida a gran escala. De fet, la versió tècnica definitiva de la 'solució final' va madurar en el pensament de Hitler després de confrontar les condicions reals de l'Europa oriental, quan durant la campanya de Polònia de setembre de 1939 va poder convèncer-se del gran nombre de població jueva al país veí, impressió que segurament va influir en les decisions posteriors sobre la construcció de camps d'extermini en aquelles terres (Borejsza 2002, 297). Aquest terrible plantejament va comportar una massacre ingent, no solament de jueus, és clar, malgrat que proporcionalment aquest col·lectiu va patir un major nombre de víctimes que els polonesos catòlics, una part dels quals a més va col·laborar en les tasques de persecució i extermini de la població jueva. Polònia va ser el país que va patir una major pèrdua de vides humanes: van morir uns sis milions de ciutadans del país (3,2 milions dels quals eren jueus), en bona part civils, per bé que no tots van morir

⁸ Una part dels religiosos va difondre també propaganda nacionalista, antibolxevic, antisemita i, de vegades, obertament feixista (Borejsza 2002, 166).

a mans dels alemanys, perquè els invasors soviètics van ser responsables d'una part dels crims i de nombroses deportacions a Sibèria (Borejsza 2002, 295).

A la tardor de 1941 es van iniciar les deportacions en massa de jueus polonesos cap als camps de concentració i d'extermini. Dels darrers els construïts a Polònia eren Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek i Chelmo nad Nerem.⁹ El primer i més tristament famós era l'únic situat a la Província d'Alta Silèsia, és a dir, la unitat administrativa recuperada pels nazis de l'antic Estat Lliure de Prússia que s'ubicava a unes desenes de quilòmetres a l'oest de Cracòvia.

Ara bé, malgrat tant les lleis antisemites aprovades i aplicades meticulosament a Alemanya i altres països afins, com l'antisemitisme transversal abans esmentat, el nazisme va voler ocultar l'Holocaust des de l'inici mateix de la seva implementació, fins i tot entre les masses que els recolzaven. En dona fe una de les múltiples proves de la planificació de l'anihilament del poble jueu per part de la cúpula del nazisme. Es tracta de l'esfereïdor discurs que va pronunciar Heinrich Himmler, cap de la SS i mà dreta de Hitler, a la ciutat polonesa de Poznań el 6 d'octubre de 1943 davant de dirigents d'alt rang del partit, en què reconeixia que s'havia pres la decisió de fer desaparèixer el poble jueu de la capa de la terra i s'estava actuant en aquest sentit, alhora que demanava que mantinguessin aquesta informació en secret (Lawson 2010, 1).

Qui era, però, Heschels? Per un costat, de forma simple (i també elusiva) es pot afirmar que és l'autora del text que aquí serà emprat com a base de les reflexions i anàlisis sobre els temes definits al títol del capítol. Per l'altre, aquesta pregunta aparentment tan simple desvetlla immediatament esquerdes identitàries que el nacionalisme polonès i els totalitarismes nazi i soviètic van voler ocultar o suprimir físicament. Lviv, la ciutat on ella havia nascut i passat la infantesa, acollia bàsicament tres comunitats distintes, que eren, per ordre d'importància, la polonesa, la jueva i la ucraïnesa, tot i que una part de les segones absorbia elements culturals de la comunitat hegemònica. Així, la família de Heschels estava integrada per:

jueus de parla polonesa que passaven per estrangers a ulls de tothom: els ucraïnesos els prenién per polonesos, els quals, a llur torn, tal com feien els alemanys, els consideraven només jueus. (Hrytsak 2015, 21)

⁹ En aquest darrer camp en concret, el desembre de 1941 els ocupants alemanys van començar les proves d'execució massiva assassinant grups de jueus que hi eren reclous amb el gas que sortia dels tubs d'escapament de camions.

El subjecte infant cerca punts de referència que permetin entendre el seu entorn i adaptar-s'hi. Malda per un encaix mitjançant patrons de reconeixement identitari que no trenquin aquells llaços de convivència que li atorguen seguretat i una certa estabilitat emocional, ja sigui en el si de la família o en els escassos cercles concèntrics de sociabilitat en què sol situar-se una persona de la seva edat. Tot això deixa de ser vàlid quan la nostra protagonista, la jove Heschels, descobreix que la seva ciutat, Lviv, ha estat ocupada per l'exèrcit soviètic el setembre de 1939, poc després de l'esclat de la Segona Guerra Mundial. Ells van ser els primers a tancar les sinagogues i liquidar els comerços de propietat jueva, mentre que l'entrada de les tropes nazis el juny de 1941 va significar un xoc encara més terrible, amb l'inici de l'extermini massiu, les dades del qual són esfereïdores:

Durant l'ocupació alemanya, 150.000 jueus de Lviv van perdre la vida; el 1945 només n'hi quedaven 260. (Hrytsak 2015, 19)

Una identitat escindida i difusa per la dinàmica d'autoimatges i heteroimatges en conflicte topa de sobte amb l'emergència d'una caracterització monolítica no sols preexistent, sinó també coexistent en la societat polonesa en general, tot i que segurament poc visible a ulls de molts infants gràcies a la protecció oferta pels pares i per una distribució espacial de la població que condicionava els cercles de relació del nucli familiar. Es tracta, òbviament, de la caracterització monolítica del jueu com a cap de turc, que ara esdevé font de desenfrenada violència antisemita: els jueus com a infrahumans, enemics, dimonis que cal destruir en nom de formulacions tan etèries i inabastables com la raça ària, l'assassinat de Jesucrist o l'avidesa d'enriquiment personal. La primera coerció lligada a una heteroimatge es deriva del desplaçament forçós a un espai marcat identitàriament:

Des que els russos ens havien fet fora del nostre pis, vivíem a cal iaio i la iaia, al barri jueu. (Heschels 2015a, 91)

La violència exercida sota justificacions irracionals a l'entorn d'identitats distorsionades sorgia en l'àmbit d'allò pretesament conegut –els sectors de la comunitat ucraïnesa més obertament antisemites–, que aleshores es presentava com una amenaça del tot real. L'impensable esdevenia ominosament real:

Pels carrers hi havia tot d'ucraïnesos amb pals a les mans, amb ferros, i de lluny se sentien crits. [...] Davant de Correus hi havia gent amb pales, i els ucraïnesos els pegaven i cridaven: “*Jude!*” (Heschels 2015a, 93)

Les penes arbitràries eren decretades de forma tan indiscriminada com humiliant: es va imposar una contribució de 20 milions de rubles que calia pagar en dues setmanes, l'obligació de dur braçals als jueus de més de 14 anys, l'apropiació de l'habitatge sense poder recollir pertinences, l'afusellament al carrer de 200 persones i també del president del consell municipal de jueus (*kahal*), etc. (Hescheles 2015a, 96-7, 102-3). El text autobiogràfic relata, entre desenes d'altres dades, que els barracons que s'estaven construint al carrer Janowska van esdevenir inesperadament un camp de concentració:

Un dia van penjar al portal d'entrada als barracons la inscripció *Zwangsarbeitslager*. Llavors van començar a enxampar homes per al camp de concentració. Al camp s'estava molt malament, apallissaven sense pietat la gent. Els del camp pareixien cadàvers vius, esquelets errants. (Hescheles 2015a, 102)

L'espai que s'havia identificat amb unes pautes de comportament i socialització assumides com a 'normals' es desintegren i presenten una nova funció que denigra el subjecte i fins i tot l'elimina. Cal assenyalar que aquella 'normalitat' també incloïa la denigració i la marginalitat de determinats individus, però en aquell passat previ a les ocupacions constituïen excepcions que no se solien tenir en compte, no resultaven rellevants per als observadors infantils. Els cossos del camp improvisat prenen una aparença tan allunyada dels paràmetres coneguts i reconeixibles que el macabre envaeix tot l'espai i la capacitat de racionalització: s'esvaeixen les esclotxes per copsar una possibilitat altra, una dimensió mental (més enllà de l'espai-presó) que ofereixi formes de resistència o de fugida.

En contrast amb tot plegat, enmig de les ordres vexatòries de les autoritats alemanyes, apareixien mostres espontànies de solidaritat al si de la comunitat jueva:

ajuntàvem el pa que els nostres pares ens havien deixat per al desdejuni i el portàvem als presoners del camp, que treballaven des-trossant monuments, al cementiri jueu. (Hescheles 2015a, 106)

A la presentació de l'edició en català del llibre l'autora fa esment explícit de la seva arribada al camp de «Janowski» i aprofita per posar en relleu la tasca de salvament duta a terme per persones realment coratjoses:

El dia que vaig arribar al camp, en passar per l'oficina de registre, em van preguntar la data de naixement. Vaig respondre: 1931. Akser va anotar en el registre: 1929. Als més joves els afegia anys, als més vells els en restava, tot per evitar que els matessin de seguida. Akser i Jakubowicz van salvar la vida a molts condemnats gràcies a les funcions que duïen a terme. (Hescheles 2015a, 11)

L'experiència viscuda de reclusió als camps va ser de tal intensitat que molts supervivents la van assumir com un final de cicle, concebut l'etapa anterior com un tot complet i clausurat (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 148): en el cas de Janina aquesta sensació es corresponia, a més, amb el pas de la infantesa a l'adolescència, és a dir, el pas d'una etapa més o menys despreocupada i de caràcter fortament dependent envers una altra de més conscient i de recerca d'autonomia. A més, els successos van tenir lloc de forma accelerada en el temps i amb molta d'intensitat, per la qual cosa aquest pas psicobiològic va objectivar-se en una experiència duríssima per a Heschels: la pèrdua de la innocència infantil i l'assumpció de rols de responsabilitat. En força casos, l'experiència concentracionària va suposar una situació límit tal, amb sensacions de patiment fins aleshores ignorades, que el pres qüestionava la seva pròpia consciència de subjecte (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 138).

3 Les víctimes: entre el testimoni i l'heroisme

Van ser uns herois Akser i Jakubowicz, esmentats en la citació anterior? Si prenem en consideració la definició que des del camp de la psicologia aporten Franco, Blau i Zimbardo (2011), sí, en efecte, ja que compleixen amb els requisits que plantegen en el seu estudi referenciat a la bibliografia final. D'acord amb aquests investigadors, l'heroisme és una activitat social que inclou un servei a d'altres en estat de necessitat (una persona, un grup o una comunitat) o en defensa d'ideals sancionats socialment, tot i que també pot tractar-se de la introducció de nous estàndards socials; el compromís voluntari, el reconeixement de possibles riscos i costos personals, la predisposició a acceptar un sacrifici anticipat i la manca de guanys externs previs en el moment de l'acte heroic (Franco, Blau, Zimbardo 2011, 101). Akser i Jakubowicz ajudaven a un col·lectiu de presoners que es trobaven en perill de mort, ho feien de forma del tot voluntària, reconeixien en la seva tasca el risc de ser descoberts i executats pels nazis, i estaven disposats a sacrificar-se sense guanyar res a canvi abans de dur a terme l'acte heroic, perquè no demanaven diners ni pagaments en espècies.

Abans d'entrar en la relació entre la condició de víctima i heroicitat, cal fer una breu parada en les reflexions d'un dels més aguts pensadors de l'Escola de Frankfurt. En efecte, en el seu estudi *Negativer Dialektik* (Dialèctica negativa) Theodor Adorno (2003, 438) afirmava que per culpa del mecanisme d'extermini aplicat en l'Holocaust, és a dir, la mort administrada a milions d'éssers humans -quelcom que mai no havia hagut de ser temut en aquest format-, la mort mateixa ja no es podia integrar harmònicament en l'experiència dels transcurso vital dels individus: la persona era expropiada d'allò darrer i més miserable que encara li restava i, de fet, als camps no hi morien in-

dividus, sinó exemplars, mers espècimens. Tanmateix, val a dir que la posició última d'Adorno (2006, 102) mantenia una certa esperança en l'educació i la il·lustració com a mètodes antibarbàrics, no per impedir que sorgeixin «assassins d'escriptori», els ideòlegs de la barbàrie, cosa difícil, sinó perquè les persones en posicions inferiors –els subalterns que diríem en termes més spivakians– deixin de perpetuar el seu esclavatge, és a dir, que deixin d'actuar seguint unes ordres que fan minvar la seva pròpia dignitat com a éssers humans –i aquí emfasitzem el terme 'dignitat'-. Mostres de literatura concentracionària europea com el text de Heschels contribueixen en certa mesura a la tasca d'educació i il·lustració necessaris en aquest sentit, és a dir, formen part d'aquell model d'escriptura en el qual –com assenyala Sánchez Zapatero (2010, 28)– s'han emprat les vivències dels autors per tractar d'inculcar a les societats la consigna del 'no oblit'.

Així, enfront d'aquesta condició de víctimes absolutes, desproveïdes del component racional identificador del subjecte i situades a una distància abismal de l'heroïcitat entesa en un sentit estricte, però inscrites en el mateix marc de l'Holocaust (cosa que les apropa a les persones que van deixar-hi la vida), sorgeix la figura del testimoni, que recupera la veu i en fa un ús racional per a la denúncia, assumint en tot plegat un determinat grau d'heroïcitat per raó de la seva pròpia *supervivència*. Aquest estatus s'agermana amb el dolor sofert com a víctima per la desídia generalitzada sobre els fets viscuts, com reflecteix la mateixa Heschels quan, amb la perspectiva dels anys, posa l'èmfasi en el punyent oblit en què van caure els sacrificats i el lloc de memòria:

Del camp Janowski no va quedar ni rastre. El 1993, per iniciativa d'Alexander Schwarz [...], allà on antany s'obria l'entrada al 'cangost de la mort' es va col·locar una peça de granit en record de les víctimes dels crims del nacionalsocialisme. Molts altres llocs que evocaven la rica cultura jueva de la ciutat de Lviv han desaparegut de la faç de la terra. (2015a, 11-12)

I és que parlem d'uns crims insòlits en la història de la humanitat. Per bé que coneixem dramàtiques mostres del fenomen concentracionari a tots els continents, la majoria d'investigadors subratllen el caràcter excepcional i qualitativament diferenciat dels camps nazis, en especial els camps d'extermini:

El Holocausto es hoy un símbolo desbordante del mal, de la barbarie gestada en el corazón de la civilizada Europa, y se vuelve un motivo de enorme fuerza política ente conflictos contemporáneos, donde se reproducen situaciones de negación de valores y principios democráticos o, directamente, de genocidios o limpiezas étnicas. Aunque constituya su tema central, el Holocausto, co-

mo omnipresente discurso memorístico que se proyecta como advertencia sobre escenarios presentes, abarca más que el propio exterminio de los judíos en Europa. (Baer 2006, 42)

La publicació durant dècades de centenars de textos testimonials a l'entorn de la Shoah va acabar fent front a l'estratègia d'ocultació perpetrada pels genocides nazis:

Es ésta una literatura que nace de una experiencia concreta, pero que se une con un marco intercultural determinado por la universalidad del fenómeno concentracionario y que, más allá de mostrar y denunciar la inhumanidad y el horror, intenta convertirse en memoria activa a través de la interacción con el lector en busca de reacciones condenatorias. (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 31)

En el seu estudi sobre la topologia de la violència, Han (2016, 18) suggereix la dificultat d'aquesta denúncia i d'aquesta memòria activa assenyalant que als camps nazis la brutal acció violenta s'amagava pudorosa, s'intentava que no cridés l'atenció i fins i tot mancava de llenguatge i simbologia, diferenciant-se de la tipologia pròpia de la violència premoderna: el *Lager* és, doncs, al seu parer, un no-lloc.

En aquest context de dissimulació a gran escala, la víctima dels camps ha de dur a terme una tasca encara més àrdua que en els períodes en què l'exercici de la violència per part dels poders fàctics era públic i notori. Esdevé, doncs, testimoni essencial a causa de les insòlites condicions mantingudes als camps, una reclusió volgudament amagada a la major part de la població, cosa que repercuteix en els seus textos autobiogràfics:

La característica esencial que relaciona todos los textos concentracionarios es la condición de testigo de sus autores. [...] El hecho de haber presenciado y haberse visto afectado por un fenómeno traumático como el paso por un campo de concentración otorga un carácter diferenciador a la escritura que tal vivencia genera. (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 93)

Una qüestió que ha estat tractada amb atenció en els estudis sobre aquest tipus d'obres és la inefabilitat de l'experiència concentracionària, experiència que es caracteritzaria per no poder ser compresa ni transmesa per qui la pateix, que alhora és l'únic/a en condicions de comunicar-la en la seva condició de testimoni (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 122). Malgrat aquesta dificultat, i tal vegada paradoxalment, el text testimonial pot arribar a commoure els lectors, conscienciar-los i mobilitzar-los contra el retorn de la barbàrie gràcies al dispositiu d'escriptura, el qual ha de presentar una dimensió que condueixi els receptors a la indignació, una dimensió articulada amb el cos mateix

del testimoni (Dulong 2004, 99). Com explica Dulong (2004, 109-10), patim la temptació d'abandonar la lectura dels detalls i retenir solament el missatge global, és a dir, una crida a la mobilització per la pau, la democràcia i el respecte de la dignitat humana (terme que fa servir literalment), però gràcies als testimonis podem viure una 'experiència carnal' quan ens confrontem amb els desastres succeïts, si bé es tracta d'una experiència mediatitzada pel relat d'allò que va ser la realitat viscuda pel testimoni.

Tres haurien estat les alternatives adoptades pels autors a l'hora d'intentar resoldre el problema de la inefabilitat: l'elaboració de textos descriptius, sobris i mancats de retòrica i inventiva, abundants en verbs de percepció o lligats a la capacitat de recordar; l'ús dels silencis com a recurs carregat de significat al·legòric; i, finalment, l'aplicació de la inventiva i la creativitat per mirar de concentrar l'experiència humana i respectar així allò que va succeir als camps (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 126-31). La sobrietat combinada amb la ingenuïtat adolescent es percep en el següent comentari al text autobiogràfic de Heschel:

Algunes persones es preocupaven d'haver de donar diners, i d'altres s'alegraven perquè pagant els deixarien en pau. (2015a, 108)

El text molt sovint és estrictament descriptiu, sense circumloquis, impactant per la immediatesa dels fets relatats; no cal ni esmentar l'autor o culpable dels crims comesos perquè contínuament són els mateixos:

[Jo] Era encara a casa quan enfront, al carrer Hermana núm. 15, al *kahál*, van penjar Ladesberg i 11 policies. (2015a, 115)

La jove autora també volia demostrar en ocasions inventiva narrativa, en especial a l'hora de comparar allò viscut amb elements del seu repertori cultural, la significació dels qual es veia limitada per la moral imperant en els infants de família burgesa. Per exemple, afirma que casa seva comença a semblar Sodoma i Gomorra perquè hi van a viure els avis i uns oncles (2015a, 104). Ara bé, per la naturalesa de l'obra -un text 'd'encàrrec' en què havia d'aportar el màxim d'informació possible sobre els fets viscuts-, no trobem silencis clamorosos més enllà del pudor sobre la higiene íntima i les necessitats fisiològiques. Aquests silencis, en tot cas, prenen cos en els eufemismes creats pels mateixos nazis a fi de dissimular les seves malvestats, i que són assumits per l'autora i la resta de víctimes, com ara *Aktion*, que en nota a peu de pàgina es descriu de la següent manera: «concentració forçada de jueus en un mateix lloc abans de la 'deportació' cap a la mort a les cambres de gas» (2015a, 102); o els 'Piaski', que eren el «lloc d'execucions massives al camp 'Janowski', de Lviv» (57).

Un cop present en el sistema editorial, el text concentracionari s'oposava tant a l'espiral de silenci que van acceptar els supervivents dels camps, horroritzats per haver d'enfrontar-se al record, com a la tendència a la incredulitat en les societats occidentals, que consideraven exageracions o un invent l'existència dels camps d'extermini (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 32). De fet, en els anys immediatament posteriors a la Segona Guerra Mundial regnava un manifest desinterès per la gran majoria de textos sobre els camps de concentració publicats (Sánchez Zapatero 2010, 74). En aquest sentit, el fet d'alçar-se contra les veus negacionistes (ja fossin causades per la ignorància, la mala fe o la mala consciència) suposava un acte d'heroïtat que anava més enllà de la funció necessària del testimoni-supervivent i s'inscrivía en un procés de reconstrucció de la subjectivitat en un moment de màxima fragilitat i, alhora, de màxima necessitat de dignificació per part de les víctimes. En aquest sentit, la reconstrucció de la subjectivitat s'imbrica completament amb el servei a altri, amb el fet de donar-se a l'altre, que constitueix un valor en els actes coratjosos i heroics. Es tracta del tipus d'heroisme que Franco, Blau i Zimbardi (2011, 100-1) cataloguen com a «social», però en una variant que de fet al·leguen haver introduït ells en la definició mateixa d'heroisme: en ocasions l'heroi ho és quan intenta establir unes idees, uns valors, que no són compartits en aquell moment per la comunitat, cosa que l'enfronta de tal manera amb el seu context social que, a llarg termini, pot comportar fins i tot un risc físic per a l'individu (tot i que el perill físic no és el tret més preminent de l'heroisme social).¹⁰ Com assegura aquest equip d'investigadors en psicologia social, el veritable poder d'aquest tipus d'heroi és que les seves accions poden guiar a través de la dissonància que produeixen aquestes mateixes accions en el context existencial d'aquest heroi, a fi d'acollir un conjunt de valors nous que potencialment poden dur endavant accions constructives (Franco, Blau, Zimbardi 2011, 111).

Paral·lelament, en el camp de l'escriptura del jo testimonial, l'heroisme pot derivar de fer de testimoni seguint unes pautes de pragmàtica literària que corresponien a unes convencions epistemològiques d'èpoques passades, anteriors a la Segona Guerra Mundial. Així, si bé des de l'Antiguitat prevalia una referencialitat en les obres considerades avui fictionals basada en el seu estatus politicocultural (la

10 En conseqüència, l'heroisme en aquest cas no consistiria tant a escriure un text testimonial en una edat adolescent encoratjada per una organització dedicada al salvament dels jueus i la pervivència de la memòria de les atrocitats antisemites, sinó en una tasca vital, a llarg termini, duta a terme en contextos privats més que públics, en què es defensen uns posicionaments assolits amb la maduresa que porta el desenvolupament personal i la conscienciació sobre la gravetat dels fets viscuts, quan uns sectors majoritaris de la societat no comparteixen aquests posicionaments, se'n desenten o els banalitzen.

‘veritat’ de la creació divina i de la condició humana es trobava en el cànon de textos dels autors il·lustres), el Romanticisme va transformar aquesta vàlua referencial i la va conduir a la sinceritat aclaparadora del jo singular. Aquesta visió ja havia arrelat força en uns inicis del segle XX en què l’edifici conceptual que havia permès tant la referencialitat clàssica com la romàntica s’esquerdava des de diversos angles: els postulats de Marx pel que fa al pensament socioeconòmic, les tesis de Nietzsche en l’àmbit de la filosofia, les teories de Freud quant a la psicologia, el gir lingüístic propiciat per l’hermenèutica, el relativisme antropològic i la filosofia del llenguatge contemporània. Malgrat que aquests plantejaments havien sorgit principalment en àmbits acadèmics, els seus efectes disruptius ja s’havien filtrat en una societat que, a més, començava a conèixer les barbaritats que s’ocultaven sota la propaganda soviètica.¹¹ Alhora, i paradoxalment, la sospita sobre el valor testimonial d’un text s’incrementava per la magnitud inaudita dels crims nazis. Tot plegat convertia les veus que maldaven per ser escoltades en veus heroïques, ja que el seu testimoniatge suposava el risc d’una gran frustració personal (en alguns casos, el suïcidi) a causa del més que possible rebuig per part de la major part de la població, que els hauria encasellat com a mentiders, estafadors o bojós. En aquest sentit, no podem oblidar que l’antisemitisme no s’havia esfumat de les societats occidentals, i que continuava sustentant-se en contranarracions, ja fos en la tradicional forma de conxorxes internacionals (el ‘contuberni judeomacònic’ com a discurs imperant en el règim de Franco, per exemple), ja fos per mitjà de testimoniats des de ‘l’altre costat’ de l’Holocaust (declaracions exculpatòries dels botxins). L’heroïcitats consistia, doncs, a dur a terme activitats testimonials a fi d’enfrontar-se a tot plegat superant la condició de víctima. Es consolida, doncs, un heroïsmes no derivat del fet de ser víctima,¹² sinó de l’actuació posterior de la víctima per defensar-se coratjosament, o més que coratjosament, cosa que demostra «fortitud en el sofriment», com explicita la definició del DIEC (2007) a l’entrada «heroi heroïna».

11 Todorov (2018, 10) resum magníficament les actuacions totalitàries d’aquest i altres règims, per a qui tots els mitjans són bons per assolir l’objectiu: l’esborrament, maquillatge o transformació d’allò que ha existit, la substitució de la veritat per mentides i invencions, així com la prohibició de buscar i difondre la veritat.

12 La identificació entre els conceptes de víctima i heroi que s’ha vist en les darreres dècades, per exemple en el cas dels atemptats a les Torres Bessones de Nova York l’any 2001, comporta una pèrdua de singularitat semàntica del segon terme i la seva consegüent banalització etnocèntrica. Es tracta, però, d’una qüestió prou complexa que no convé analitzar en poques línies.

4 A la recerca de la dignitat

Un aspecte que queda pendent dels punts desgranats en l'apartat anterior és la prevenció davant del testimoniatge pel seu caràcter subjectiu, per la impossibilitat de reproduir verbalment els fets tal com van succeir. Seguint la coneguda formulació de Lejeune (1996), el pacte que atorga carta de naturalesa a un text autobiogràfic és l'assumpció d'identitat entre autor, narrador i protagonista del relat, però no pas la identificació entre veritat i narració.¹³ La topada es produeix, doncs, amb la necessitat d'una aportació autèntica, epistemològica i èticament fiable. Una solució a aquest cul-de-sac podria ser l'aplicació del concepte de dignitat:¹⁴ posar sobre la taula el patiment i l'oblit de les víctimes, reconduir la seva mera quantificació, contrarestar la deshumanització soferta tot retornant-los la biografia, en definitiva, mirar d'atorgar la dignitat que tot ésser humà mereix. De fet, no és pas una coincidència que la dignitat humana sigui un concepte important als sistemes legals d'Alemanya i Israel, mentre que en molts d'altres no ho és pas (Niederberger 2014, 89).

Gomá Lanzón (2019), en un assaig força recent, sintetitza el recorregut filosòfic del concepte de dignitat.¹⁵ D'aquesta manera, Kant el va integrar en la seva filosofia moral tot just a les beceroles de la Modernitat, encara que el va emprar més aviat com a sinònim de certs elements cabdals del seu pensament filosòfic: autonomia del subjecte, autolegislació, fi en si mateix o compendi de la humanitat d'allò humà (Gomá Lanzón 2019, 26). Un sentit ja plenament modern seria considerar *sempre* la cosificació com l'acte immoral per excel·lència, que deshumanitza en la mesura que posa preu –una quantificació– a éssers amb dignitat (Gomá Lanzón 2019, 28). Aquest plantejament més contemporani es distingeix de visions anteriors segons les quals la persona havia de corroborar la dignitat que potencialment se li atribuïa mitjançant l'elevació proporcionada pel cultiu d'una virtut: la raó en Ciceró, la llibertat en Pico della Mirandola i la moralitat en Kant (Gomá Lanzón 2019, 28-9).

13 Sánchez Zapatero ho presenta sota una noció similar però amb efectes distints: «el pacto de veracidad que ha de cumplimentar el receptor [del testimonio concentracionario] para tomar lo leído como cierto no ha de cifrarse en parámetros de referencialidad, sino de sinceridad» (2010, 116).

14 Sánchez Zapatero relaciona les limitacions del llenguatge amb la manca de dignitat que van sofrir els testimonis-supervivents de l'Holocaust: «Los presos de los campos de concentración fueron tratados con tal falta de dignidad que muchos de los supervivientes se plantearon al intentar relatar lo vivido si el lenguaje convencional podía llegar a servir como medio para narrar sus experiencias» (2010, 115).

15 Per a un recorregut històric, etimològic i intel·lectual més complet del terme 'dignitat', cf. Rosen 2012.

Si anem al text de Hescheles, en el terreny de la dignitat expressada amb fets, trobem un episodi en què la cosificació de l'ésser humà es dona en l'intent d'usar com a moneda de canvi un grup de jueus de Lviv en què es trobava la mare de l'autora: dos jueus al servei de la Gestapo havien delatat el grup en qüestió, perseguit pels nazis i acorralat per la població antisemita local, i en resposta el grup va optar pel suïcidi col·lectiu¹⁶ mitjançant enverinament, dut a terme un cop ja eren al camp de concentració, accions que ens explica amb una naturalitat corprenedora la mateixa Hescheles (2015a, 10) en la introducció a l'edició catalana de la seva obra. La no rendició s'ha interpretat habitualment com una mostra de dignitat quan serveix per defugir una acció criminal o una mort deshonrosa. La mateixa autora ja ho tenia en compte quan era una nena sota el jou nazi i s'havia de separar de la seva mare, que volia que se salvés per aconseguir venjança; ella, però, va refusar actuar per revenja, en un acte de maduresa que demostra la voluntat de conservar la vida únicament en/amb dignitat, mostrant-se alhora disposada a morir amb el cianur de potassi de què disposaven:

- ¿Però per a què he de viure, jo? Sigui com sigui no aguantaré sense documents. Mama, ¿[...] vols allargar-me aquest suplicí? ¿Que no serà millor acabar ja d'una vegada, abraçada a tu? ¿Què pot ser la vida per a mi tota sola?
La mama començà a suplicar-me:
- Has d'anar-te'n! Has de venjar-nos al papa i a mi!
Li vaig respondre:
- ¿Que la venjança em restituirà ma mare? ¿Val la pena turmentar-se per això? ¿Què en traurem, d'això? ¿Que no és millor acabar ara, així, estirada a la teva vora? Mama, m'estalviaries tants sofriments que m'esperen, tants turments!!! (Hescheles 2015a, 132)

No obstant això, el concepte de dignitat i (de forma similar) el d'ideologia¹⁷ han patit un fort rebuig suscitat per determinats autors de la Modernitat, per bé que en l'època més contemporània hagin estat recuperats en l'esfera intel·lectual partint de reformulacions i comprensions més productives: dignitat i ideologia com a

16 Aquesta acció evoca el tipus de resistència -considerada heroica pel sionisme- que va tenir lloc a la fortificació de Massada durant l'ocupació romana de Judea al segle I de la n.e.: el suïcidi massiu de gairebé un miler de persones per evitar caure en mans dels invasors.

17 Així, en el seu estudi *Über die Grundlage der Moral* (Sobre el fonament de la moral), Schopenhauer va criticar durament l'ús filosòfic del concepte de 'dignitat humana' (difós en bona mesura gràcies a l'obra kantiana), titllant-lo de 'Schiboleth', un lema buit propi dels moralistes irreflexius, mancats d'arguments per a la concreció significativa del mot (cf. Rosen 2012, 1). Quant a la problemàtica del terme 'ideologia', cf. Gregori 2015, 130-6.

termes que fan de punta de llança d'una renovació de tesis caduques. Gomá Lanzón (2019, 9) defineix la dignitat com un 'concepte vacant' en la història del pensament antic, modern i actual, i la planteja com una nosa, quelcom que ho resisteix tot, inclòs l'interès general i el bé comú:

Quando por diversos caminos tropieza uno con ese estorbo tan resistente, la sensación que despierta el choque es la de encontrarse ante un poder antiguo, ancestral, que hunde sus raíces en los estratos más profundos de la historia y de la naturaleza humana, y al mismo tiempo poder novísimo, como acabado de nacer [...]. (Gomá Lanzón 2019, 13)

El secretisme dels nazis respecte de l'Holocaust, esmentat més amunt arran d'una citació de Himmler, trasllueix alhora la convicció per part d'aquells genocides que una bona part de la població no podia acceptar de cap manera aquest pla sanguinari d'extermini: la dignitat, doncs, apareix com aquell destorb que s'ha de superar, en aquest cas mitjançant l'ocultació dels actes barbàrics i més endavant mitjançant la negació de l'evidència.

Foucault va analitzar la qüestió des d'un altra perspectiva i va arribar a la conclusió que l'Holocaust s'havia produït com a paroxisme d'allò que va anomenar «la societat de normalització», conformada al segle XIX com a confluència de mesures per disciplinar els cossos individuals mitjançant la vigilància i l'ensinistrament, iniciades ja abans del segle XIX, i unes altres mesures d'aplicació a tota la massa humana, que requerien òrgans complexos de coordinació i de centralització (1997, 222-3). En el marc del paradigma biopolític foucaultia de la Modernitat, el racisme -l'antisemitisme en aquest cas- permet establir una relació entre la pròpia vida i la mort de l'altre que no és militar ni guerrera, sinó de tipus biològic. Així, el pensador francès assenyalava que allò que va tornar la vida en general més sana -més sana i més pura- va ser la mort de l'altre, l'eliminació de la raça inferior, degenerada o anormal (Foucault 1997, 228).

En aquest sentit, es conforma una dialèctica política i moral entre el valor de la (pretesa) majoria democràtica d'una societat, d'un Estat, i el dret d'existència i el respecte de les minories que conté, els quals esdevenen eliminables en règims que fan prevaldre la biopolítica de la normalització sobre qualsevol altre principi. Gomá Lanzón exposa la resistència contra els principis d'una majoria intolerant (el racisme, per exemple) com el triomf d'una veritat moral que se sintetza en la dignitat de les persones:

Se trataría de una verdad moral que se ha impuesto últimamente a la mayoría por la propia evidencia de lo excelente, demostrada a través de experiencias históricas recientes de indecible inhu-

manidad y extremada miseria que han logrado crear el consenso universal, por vía negativa, de que nunca, en ningún caso, deben volver a repetirse. (2019, 35)

D'aquesta manera, el mateix autor deixa clars els propòsits que la justifiquen:

La dignidad se erige sólo como principio humanista de orientación anti-utilitaria que se opone a la frecuente pretensión de legitimar las acciones morales por sus consecuencias ventajosas para la mayoría o para muchos (ética consecuencialista). (2019, 31)

En aquest sentit, és necessari un sistema polític que, mitjançant un marc jurídic estable, impedeixi o penalitzi l'aplicació d'aquesta mena d'accions morals que van en detriment de la dignitat d'una minoria. De fet, una important pensadora com és Nussbaum apunta la relació profunda entre dignitat i sistema polític, el qual sorgeix de la nostra incompletesa, de la nostra natura d'éssers continuament necessitats i en perill de patir-ne les conseqüències:

As political beings, we are also dignified beings. Animals lack the sense of justice, and a fundamental task of the political realm is the protection of human dignity from abasement. (1998, 274)¹⁸

La dignitat no és un estat, sinó un procés dinàmic que requereix un esforç –la resistència propiciada per 'la nosa', en termes de Gomá-Lanzón- i uns plantejaments clars sobre l'estadi al qual es vol arribar, que és el de la igualtat d'estatus i no tant, com s'ha cregut sovint, en la fixació d'unes condicions mínimes existencials.¹⁹ Caldria parar atenció, doncs, a l'aspecte pragmàtic i finalista de la literatura concentracionària que el text de Hescheles exemplifica perfectament. Aquest és l'aspecte que cal subratllar a l'hora de concebre aquestes obres com un conjunt de caràcter ètic. Ho recull Sánchez Zapatero en la seva definició final de la literatura concentracionària escrita per supervivents:

¹⁸ Nussbaum s'inscriu en el corrent intel·lectual del liberalisme, com podem observar en la seva fórmula per respectar la dignitat de les persones com a animals polítics i alhora afrontar la seva vulnerabilitat en un marc de convivència entre els membres de les diferents religions: «The hope is [...] that they can all agree on a liberal political conception that protects opportunities, liberties, and material quality life for all citizens» (1998, 285).

¹⁹ Niederberger (2014, 62) considera que la noció de 'dignitat humana' conté un element d'igualtat d'estatus i, en conseqüència, per satisfer-la cal establir termes comparatius i no pas trobar un llindar fix de condicions 'decents' mínimes.

De esta intención de ser portador de un discurso de valores universales nacen sus textos, que conjugan su experiencia personal y la realidad histórica con el desarrollo de toda una gama de estrategias expresivas destinadas a hacer de su testimonio una forma literaria impactante a través de la que concienciar a los lectores del horror del fenómeno concentracionario. (2010, 193)

D'igual manera que va alertar sobre l'horror nazi, Janina Altman ha mantingut en la seva etapa a Israel el discurs ètic que atorga dignitat a tots els éssers humans i, en conseqüència, s'ha alçat contra les actuacions de l'Estat israelià envers els palestins. Milita al moviment pacifista de les Dones de Negre contra la permanència als territoris ocupats. En aquest sentit, no s'està de reconèixer les greus mancances en què viu la democràcia israeliana ni d'equiparar els seus conciutadans arabòfobs amb els antisemites del seu final d'infantesa a Lviv (Hescheles 2015a, 168-9), continuant la pauta del seu heroisme social, un heroisme sorgit i consolidat de manera progressiva:

La societat israeliana empitjora i va de mal borràs. L'excel·lència científica i tecnològica d'aquesta societat no pot amagar un absolut fracàs humà i moral. (Hescheles 2015a, 168)

5 A tall de conclusió

Una possible explicació complementària a la biopolítica desenvolupada per Foucault en relació als camps nazis seria que, mentre que abans del segle XX a Occident l'enemic sota atac solia ser assassinat immediatament, practicant-se les matances de *l'hic et nunc*, o bé esdevenia esclau propietat d'altri si era fet presoner, en els camps nazis aquests dos destins es fusionen: els presoners es converteixen en esclaus alhora que morts vivents, aprofitats fins a l'extrem per a treballs forçats o experiments científics, però destinats a una mort prompta i sobtada a causa d'inusitats actes de violència, les condicions de reclusió o el treball extenuant. Això va poder produir-se per la capacitat tecnològica i burocràtica moderna, fonament del monstre concentracionari, i s'explica en part per la perversió cínica d'una visió contemporània de la dignitat humana, perversió que cristal·litza en el secretisme sobre la Solució Final per part dels líders nazis: després d'animalitzar la figura dels jueus mitjançant la propaganda, se n'oculta la sàdica derivació genocida que té lloc als camps. Per tant, fins i tot en una situació tan terrible romanen els pòsits d'una certa dignitat, d'aquella nosa ancestral.

Janina Heschels Altman, com a testimoni i víctima, autora, mare i científica, jueva i no sionista, s'allunya dels tòpics que es poden haver creat a l'entorn del col·lectiu dels supervivents que, finalitza-

da la Segona Guerra Mundial i alliberats els camps, van acabar després de mil peripècies en territori de l'actual Israel i van contribuir a bastir l'Estat que encara ocupa territoris palestins i hi aplica polítiques barbàriques. Si, com afirma Baer, «el judío sería un arquetipo de desterritorialización, diáspora, otredad» (2006, 41), Heschels n'és un exemple extrem i, fet i fet, la sòlida imatge del manteniment de la dignitat i de l'heroisme social en l'era del capitalisme avançat.

Els dos cognoms de l'autora, l'heretat del pare (Heschels), lligat indefectiblement al seu text autobiogràfic, i l'assumit com a esposa (Altman), sucumbeixen davant la continuïtat com a subjecte de la dona digna que és Janina, més enllà dels accidents nominal dictats pel patriarcat, del país de residència, de l'època històrica i de la ideologia hegemònica. Roman, doncs, en la seva figura d'autora-activista, d'heroïna social, una resistència impermeable als elements disruptius en la condició de subjecte.

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Personal Remembrance as Historical Memory Eva Koch's Interactive Visual Work on Her Mother's Experience of the Spanish Civil War

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Abstract This essay explores the Danish sculptor and video-installation artist Eva Koch's interactive visual works from 2001 based on her mother's, and her mother's family's, experiences during the Spanish Civil War: *Villar* and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela*. These works are a textualization of the past through remembrance in which no attempt is made to offer a linear account of events or play down uncomfortable sub-narratives. The analysis, which exposes the precarious boundaries between the personal and the collective, draws from theoretical approaches to memory and history by Marianne Hirsch, Walter Benjamin, Jay Winter and Maurice Halbwachs.

Keywords Eva Koch. Villar. Villar - Los hijos de Manuela. Interactive visual art. Spanish Civil War. Nini Haslund Gleditsch. Oliva and Norwegian humanitarian aid. Marianne Hirsch. Maurice Halbwachs. Jay Winter. Walter Benjamin.

Summary 1 The Photographed Body and Its Context. – 2 *Villar* (2001), and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* (2001). – 3 The *Villar* Project: A Tapestry of Individual Textualizations of the Past as a Social and Political Construction. – 3.1 Isabelica. – 3.2 Ángel. – 3.3 Ernesto. – 3.4 Chris. – 3.5 Clemencia. – 3.6 Extra. – 4 Conclusion.

1 The Photographed Body and Its Context

The landscape of Postmemory is peopled by faces from the past, by images in and out of the family album, by photos of victims and of survivors. (Hirsch 2012, 25)

An eight-year-old girl looks over her shoulder at the camera which is recording her having lunch with two other children of a similar age. The latter are concentrating on the meal while she, spoon in hand, has stopped eating and gently and confidently exposes her face and her beautifully shaped head to whoever is taking an interest in them, acknowledging the attention with a sweet smile. The girl is Cristobalina Martínez López and the photograph is a still taken from the film *Hjelp Spania!* (Help Spain!) attributed to the German photographer Walter Reuter¹ and recorded, most likely, towards the end of January 1938 (Morell 2011, 111). The documentary was sponsored by the Scandinavian, especially Norwegian, humanitarian relief agencies mobilising help for the children in the Republican region of Valencia during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). It was made at a Children's Hospital named after the Norwegian explorer and 1922 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Fridtjof Nansen. The Hospital was in Oliva (Valencia), a town which made an extraordinary effort to welcome evacuees and refugees from areas where the fighting affected the civilian population, as documented by historian Joan Ramon Morell Gregori in his book *Solidaritat a Oliva, 1936-1939* (2011).² Morell has comprehensively researched all the children's colonies established in Oliva thanks to the Republican Government Ministry of Public Instruction and Health, the Oliva City Council, local unions and other social and political organizations, as well as many Oliva

1 I am following Joan Ramon Morell Gregori (2011, 111) in saying that the film is "attributed" to Walter Reuter since there are no credits on the film itself. Witnesses at the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital corroborated that he made the film, which would be shown in Scandinavian cinemas before the evening commercial film to collect money towards the Spanish children aid programme during the Civil War. Its main objective, made explicit at the end through messages on the screen encouraging donations for the Spanish children, may explain why the authorship credits were not included.

2 Joan Ramon Morell Gregori (2011) has published the only book that deals with the effort that the town of Oliva made during the Civil War years. He was also the curator of the 2011 exhibition *Solidaritat a Oliva, 1936-1939* (Morell 2012; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28Yv9-DMvtQ>). Gabriel Pretus (2013), in one of the few books dealing with foreign humanitarian help during the Civil War, does not mention Oliva, nor does he mention, in any accurate way, the Maternity of Elna, located in Southern France near the concentration camps for refugees after the Republican 'Retirada', a place for mothers and babies which was set up by Swiss aid under the direction of Elisabeth Eidenbenz (Montellà 2016). Throughout his book, Pretus seems primarily interested in proving that Franco never rejected foreign aid. Farah Mendlesohn (2002) does not mention Oliva either, but her focus is on the aid provided by British and American Quakers.

individuals who supported the democratically elected Republican Government.³ However, the most effective and generous contribution to Oliva's determination to help child refugees at the time came from the humanitarian aid provided by Norwegian left-wing and socially-minded intellectuals and politicians, who were unhappy with their Government's neutrality vis-à-vis the Spanish Civil War.

Rescued by members of the International Brigades (Morell 2011, 86), Cristobalina probably arrived as an evacuee at the Fridtjof Nansen Children's Hospital in January of 1938, when it had just been opened. Her arrival coincided with the fighting between the troops loyal to the Second Republic and the Fascist rebels in and around the city of Teruel, where a sector of the frontline was located between 15 December 1937 and 20 February 1938 (Thomas 1990, 788-93). She remembers staying for several days in the humid cellar of a convent in Teruel, where children would die every night, while the nuns occupied more salubrious parts of the building, and the horrific journey to Oliva trying to dodge the bombs. Cristobalina had been born into a peasant family from the Aragonese village of Villar del Cobo, in Teruel province. When their father died of pneumonia in 1934, and her mother, Manuela, became ill and could not take care of her children, Cristobalina and her brother Ernesto were sent to an orphanage in the town of Teruel. Cristobalina and Ernesto were the two middle children. They remained together until the evacuation in January 1938, when she was sent to Oliva, and he stayed in Teruel. Later on, he was sent to a hospice in Manises (Valencia). The eldest, Ángel, who was nine at the time, was placed with some relatives and eventually would go back home, helping his mother to take care of the land they owned. Two baby twin sisters, Fe and Clemencia, were placed in the care of a local wet nurse. Sadly, Fe died. After the war, Manuela "made it her life project to bring her children together once more" (Movin 2010, 102). It would not to be an easy task: the outcome of the Civil War and the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) were to complicate matters in unexpected ways.

3 Morell (2011, 35-82) gives a wealth of information on the five children's colonies which were established in Oliva during the Civil War, the activities of the children hosted in them, the difficulties in making them financially viable, and the progressive thinking which inspired teachers and workers responsible for the colonies. He devotes especial attention to the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital, the doctor who run it, Pedro de Alcántara Martínez, later persecuted and blacklisted by Franco, and the person who set it up in the first place, the Norwegian pacifist Nini Haslund, representative of the Norwegian Aid Committee and the Office International pour l'Enfant (Morell 2011, 83-112). For the history of Oliva during the Second Republic, the Civil War and the subsequent Francoist repression, see the excellent <http://www.eLscaminsdeLamemoria.com/camins-memoria/>.



INVITATION

Det ville glæde os meget at se dig til

**Nytårskur og åbning af
Eva Kochs videoinstallation VILLAR**

Lørdag den 11. januar kl. 16

Der vil være taler ved museumsdirektør Andrea Rygg Karberg og kunstneren Eva Koch.

Vi byder på et glas bobler til alle og ser frem til sammen at markere et nyt års begyndelse.

Tak til Beckett-Fonden.

Med venlig hilsen
Nivaagaards Malerisamling
Gammel Strandvej 2, 2990 Nivå
49 14 10 17
www.nivaagaard.dk

Figure 1
Invitation to Eva Koch's *Villar*
video-installation in the Nivaagaards
Malerisamling (Copenhagen)
in January-April 2016.
The photograph of Cristobalina
is a still from *Hjælp Spania!*,
a film made by Walter Reuter
in Oliva during the Spanish Civil War

In the photograph, a still from *Hjælp Spania!*, that proves the medium's "abilities to *frame, freeze, and fix* its objects" (Lury 1998, 3; italics in the original), Cristobalina's face is captivating. It does not betray the hardship she had endured up until that moment, escaping bombardments, hunger and fear in her native Aragon before arriving at the Oliva safe haven in the middle of the war. It appears in flyers and catalogues for the exhibitions⁴ of the Danish artist and sculptor

⁴ The following are the exhibitions of *Villar* and *Villar - Los hijos de Manuela* so far: 2001: Tensta Konstall, Stockholm, Sweden; 2001: Project Room, Galleria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, Portugal; 2002: X-rummet, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark; 2003: Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway; 2003: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 11 April-20 June, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; 2003: Museo de Teruel, 25 July-14 September, Teruel, Spain;

Eva Koch's visual works⁵ based on the war and post-war experiences of her mother, the Cristobalina of the photograph, and her family: *Villar*, an interactive video installation for six projectors (2001), and *Villar - Los hijos de Manuela* (Manuela's Children), an interactive visual art documentary for single users (initially on DVD form, now to be watched on a media player) (2001). In their oral and visual textualization of the past, historical discourses and personal stories are interwoven in both representational formats. They present the family members reminiscing about what they went through during the Civil War and afterwards, as well as old and current images of Villar del Cobo, photographs of family members at different points in time, contemporary and historical material, including images of the children hosted in the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital, like Cristobalina herself, from *Hjelp Spania!*, and short clips from old reels of the Civil War fighting. The main dissimilarities between these two works are to be found in their interaction with the viewers: the video-installation images are activated by sensors on the ceiling, marked on the floor in front of each screen, which viewers trigger when approaching the images. They watch and listen to the accounts being performed on the screens, and they move around from one screen to another as each focuses on the story and the memories of one member of Cristobalina's family, herself included, now as Chris. When the sensors are triggered by more than two viewers, all six projections become synchronized and scenes from the family life can be seen simultaneously, as if viewers were 'there'. A sensor installed in the middle of the room, when activated, offers a synchronized vision of the village from 'outside', as it were, from the perspective a tourist might have. The single-user version of *Villar - Los hijos de Manuela* has a menu that enables viewers to listen to every performance in succession, or to go from one to another as they please at specific points of contact, so that the recollections can be compared and contrasted.

2003: Venice Biennale, Arsenale, Venice, Italy; 2004: Museo Pablo Serrano, Zaragoza, Spain; 2018: CAB, Centro de Arte Burgos, Spain; 2020: Nivaagaards Malerisamling, 12 January-19 April, Copenhagen, Denmark; 2021: Statens Museum for Kunst, The National Gallery of Denmark at Jutland, Doverodde, Thy (25 March-24 October, and on permanent exhibition afterwards; <https://www.smk.dk/en/>).

5 Visit Eva Koch's website (<https://evakoch.net>) to see the length and the breadth of her outstanding artistic production as a visual artist and sculptor. Mai Misfeldt (1998, 6) writes: "Eva Koch's works are distributed almost equally between exhibitions and works in public spaces in an uninterrupted sequence that integrates the experiences gained from project to project. [...] No matter whether she chooses sculptures, sound or video as her medium, Eva Koch's practice is characterised by a concentration on a small number of elements, achieving a balance that unites simplicity and economy of form with a complex and universal content. The works are site-specific, installed so that they relate actively with the space around them, often with an interactive dimension". Amongst other works, she has designed sculptures for children to play in the centre of Copenhagen. I will come back to some of her works which can be linked to her *Villar* project.

Eva Koch describes the installation itself as the ‘horizontal’, while the [single user] is the ‘vertical’ version. By this she means that where the meeting with the six simultaneous projections of the installation will typically give the viewer a physical sense of being present in Villar del Cobo and being surrounded by the drama’s primary actors, the [single user] affords the possibility of looking into each individual narrative in depth. (Movin 2010, 104)

If the video-installation format provides a more public experience, on the single-user version it is the privacy of the viewing what prevails, while both supplement the personal narratives with old photographs illustrating what is being referred to, so that viewers can link events and private memories meaningfully. The interactive documentary material of both formats acquaints viewers with the many layers of Cristobalina’s experiences, and those of her family, including testimonies, sub-narratives, and present-day reflections, always shown with an awareness that experiences are as genuine as the stories constructed about them may be conflicting.

The photograph of Cristobalina, with the powerful immediacy of her image, lays bare the interdependent relationship between subject and context, and suggests the blurring of boundaries between the private and the social as it goes from personal experience to collective history. It also conveys the strength of the body as a signifier for resilience in a challenging social and historical circumstance. The image does not belong to the tradition of family portrait photography: the children wear some sort of uniform, an indication of the non-silent background, or, as Marianne Hirsh would put it, an example of how “history [...] refuses to remain in the background or outside the text” (1997, 12). The photograph instantiates the bodies of the three children, with their short, well-cared for hair (a must, given the risk of getting lice at the time), and their contented faces, as it captures a moment of safety in the middle of the war, with food on the table. We, the current viewers, know it is a lull, a technologically preserved precious moment, and indeed a precarious one, taking place in the middle of extreme brutality, as illustrated by the images of the fighting interspersed in *Villar*. Cristobalina and her friends also remind viewers of the plight of children displaced by war, and the vital importance during the Spanish Civil War (as in the armed conflicts of today)⁶ of the help delivered by the associations of foreign relief workers who looked after displaced and orphaned children, a humanitarian intervention that in the case of Cristobalina proved to be life changing. It was in the Oliva Children’s

⁶ Morell (2011, 116) suggests that this type of internationalist relief work to help the civil population began during the Spanish Civil War. This is also Pretus’s contention, as Helen Graham (2013, xiv) highlights in her “Preface” to his book.

Hospital where she met Nini Haslund Gleditsch, a pacifist and a member of the Norwegian intellectual left-wing party Mot Dag (Towards Day), who had gone to Republican Spain as an aid worker, and who played an essential role in setting up the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital. Towards the end of the war, Nini managed to adopt Cristobalina and take her to Norway. The adoption process was problematic: Nini tried but was unable to contact Cristobalina's close relatives, such as her mother, as she was on the other side of the divide, and, at the time, nobody else from the family had claimed to be the girl's relative. Finally, in Sagunto, near Valencia, Nini located Cristobalina's grandmother on her father's side. Given the chaos in Spain at the end of the war, the old lady signed the adoption papers probably thinking that it would be the best possible outcome for the child. That decision, however, was to create a rift between the two sides of the family that would never heal. Manuela did not forgive the Sagunto relatives, and she always lived under the impression that, notwithstanding their claims to the contrary, they had sold Cristobalina to "the Norwegian lady" (Movin 2010, 104). Cristobalina was happy to go with Nini, but she insisted that she had a brother, hence Nini looked for Ernesto. Nini found the boy and helped him with clothing and food as she was appalled to see how neglected he had been. She tried to adopt him as well, but she was unsuccessful as Ernesto was deemed too weak to travel. When Nini, her husband, and Cristobalina departed from Oliva, Nini left their details in Norway with the Sagunto relatives in case Cristobalina's close family wanted to get in touch.

In the photograph, Cristobalina's expression, which I would describe as one of curiosity and cautious happiness, easily evokes her subsequent attitude to life, positive and courageous. As she told her daughter Eva only recently,⁷ although she was undoubtedly affected by the war, she never felt traumatised by being taken away. Her refusal to regard herself as a trauma survivor is revealing of her personality, and indicates that the trauma trope can universalize experience and obliterate an individual's circumstance.⁸ As a child, she could hardly miss what she had barely had, having been separated from her family well before the outbreak of the war. Her life, however, was to be shaped by the events that originated before and around the time of her stay at the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital. Having returned to Norway, when the Second World War started, Nini Haslund and her husband Kristian Gleditsch (who had been the Secretary of the Norwegian Aid Committee during the Spanish Civil War), followed the

⁷ Eva Koch has kindly filled in many gaps in her personal information (emails dated 06-10-2020, 02-11-2020, 09-12-2020, and 11-02-2021).

⁸ As suggested by Joanna Burke in a research seminar entitled "Why War: Reflections on the Twentieth Century", presented at Cardiff University on 26 April 2007.

Norwegian Government into exile. They held key posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were tasked with transporting the Norwegian gold to Great Britain. Consequently, Cristobalina/Chris went to live with Kristian's siblings: Ellen, Adler and Liv Gleditsch. They took care of the girl and gave her the stability and affection she needed during the years of the Second World War. She remembers her loving aunts and uncle. At this juncture, Cristobalina/Chris was facing huge changes in her life, acquiring a new language and a hybrid identity⁹ which arguably made her belong to two countries and, at least at the beginning, to none: a true nomad,¹⁰ a child of troubled times, tossed around in the middle of the violent and devastating institution of war.

Here, it would be appropriate to bring into the conversation Rosi Braidotti's figuration of "nomadism" as the "critical consciousness that resists into settling socially coded modes of thought and behaviour" (Braidotti 1994, 5). Braidotti blends the physical movement of the nomad with a philosophical stance that favours a fluid conceptualization of identity and the embodiment of subjectivity. In *Villar*, Braidotti's "nomadism" applies to a degree. It is not a choice that as an eight-year old child Cristobalina could have made: she was thrown into it, even though she embraced her hybrid identity with an open mind and instinctive courage. The same could be said about 'Los niños de Rusia', or similar groups of children who were sent abroad by their parents to protect them from the ravages of the Civil War, like the so-called 'Los niños de Morelia'. The name comes from the Mexican city that welcomed 468 Spanish children who arrived in Mexico on 7 June 1937. As Mexico was blacklisted by Franco as a country that helped the Republican side during and after the war, many of these children never had the chance to go back to Spain. There is a plethora of YouTube videos on their experience. Some images are from films made in Mexico at the time, some from films that were made much

9 Julian Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011, 140) refers to Derrida's "undecidables" when discussing Jaime Camino's *Los niños de Rusia*, a documentary on the children evacuated to Russia during the Spanish Civil War. These children were neither Russian nor Spanish, but to some extent they were both. Derrida's "undecidability" questions dualisms as they do not conform neatly to the opposing elements of a dichotomy. The same can be said of Cristobalina/Chris's hybrid identity when trying to adapt herself to the new circumstances, something she always did with great sensitivity.

10 Eva Koch has a work entitled precisely *NoMadLand* (1998), a sound installation where the whispering of human voices interacts with the viewers. In the summer of 1998, it was installed in a Copenhagen supermarket and its title plays with words in a meaningful way, ultimately referring to Denmark as a land of immigrants. As Mai Misfeldt (1998, 30) points out: "No mad land or nomad land? [...] why this conjuration? And when one has squeezed one's way out of the absorbent mass of jostling bodies inside, the fragile human voice insisting on civilization as opposed to the oblivious inferno from which one had just emerged seemed sinister, almost prophetic. A nomad land? Well, even though Denmark is situated where it has always been, its inhabitants arrived here in great migratory streams, primarily from the south".

later, as a small number of these children went back to their places of origin decades later and were interviewed by different TV channels. They were grateful to President Lázaro Cárdenas for making Manuel Azaña, the Spanish Prime Minister, the offer to host them. The Morelia children also embraced a hybrid identity. As adults, they felt genuine indebtedness to Mexico, but, in some cases, it was apparent that the strangeness of being displaced had lasted a long time: they missed their families and resented having been sent abroad by parents who wanted to keep them out of harm's way. They considered themselves "un capítulo olvidado de la historia oscura de España" (a forgotten chapter of Spain's dark history), as one of them put it in a 2005 documentary made by the Master of Periodismo, BCNY.¹¹ Interviewed for the TV3 programme *La nit al dia* on 30 April 2008, in a statement that seems like an attempt to face up to the complexities of their identity, two of them, Jordi Llop and Josep Gallur, claimed to feel, above all, "morelianos", and their best memories to be those of mutual companionship.¹² At the end of the Civil War, Mexico continued to welcome Republican refugees. As for many other Republican refugees in France and elsewhere in Europe and America, their "nomadism" was not entirely the happy place that Braidotti conceptualizes, but it was a way of learning that their identity, however melancholic - in a Freudian sense - had to be flexible enough for them to adapt to another culture even though they were mourning (Freud 1991) the place they had left behind, in many cases for ever.

After the Second World War, Nini Haslund and Kristian Gleditsch went back to Norway with their son, Nils Petter, who had been born in Great Britain. Chris's relationship with her adoptive mother became rather tense as Nini was frustrated that only men were offered jobs, even though she had been as active as any of them during the Second World War. Chris went on to study interior architecture in Copenhagen and became an independent young girl. Later, she married Jens Koch, and they had three children - Eva is the eldest - and in 1958 moved to the Faroe Islands, where Jens took office as a judge. As we shall see, it was there she met someone who was to be instrumental in her reunion with the Villar del Cobo family in 1962.

In 1996, Eva Koch created one of her more innovative works, ultimately related to the *Villar* project: a visual biography of Nini Haslund Gleditsch, *Nini - Glimpses of a Woman's Life*.¹³ It consisted of nine

11 "Los niños de Morelia: el regreso olvidado" (The Morelia Children: The Forgotten Return). See it on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eckJbIMjFHs>.

12 A theatrical production on the Morelia children was being shown at the time at the Sala Muntaner in Barcelona. See the interview on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Psh47g_Doo.

13 See a description on <https://evakoch.net/works/nini-2/>.

billboards exhibited in subway stations, first in Copenhagen's Ishøj Station, and later, in 1997, in Oslo's Stortingets and Grønlandsdortorget Stations. The billboards had been donated by the railways DSB for artistic use coinciding with Copenhagen's stint as the World's Cultural City, and were shown in rotation, changing every two weeks during a period of six months. Nini, who died in July 1996, was still alive and very cooperative as the billboards were being put together. They were collages displaying photographs of Nini at different times of her life as well as documents of her public persona with excerpts from her memoir added to them. Eva had spoken to her about the project and Nini suggested the inclusion of these excerpts, beginning with the title of her memoir itself. It was taken from her favourite poem by Norwegian poet Inger Hagerup, *Vær utålmodig Menneske!* (Human, Be Impatient!). The title chimes with Nini's lifelong commitment to peace activism. Nini also wrote words specifically for the billboards which were evocative of her personality. As regards to her time in Spain, she wrote: "Life becomes much easier when you have something to fight for..." Nini's own handwriting was reproduced on other billboards: "Contact with people, also over generations, means a lot to me".¹⁴ The billboards were an outdoors exhibition which, ironically, appropriated public space by using advertising locations for purposes other than consumerism. In Eva Koch's visual biography of Nini, Henri Lefebvre's "social space" (2000, 68-168), which is not atemporal or metaphysical, but "produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (and with the relations of production)" (2000, 77), acquires a further level of complexity as it is the location to celebrate the life of a pacifist committed to progressive leftist politics, and not just any pacifist, but a woman pacifist, making this appropriation of social space much more significant because gender comes into the equation. Eventually Nini found a job at the Norwegian Statistisk Centralbyrå (Central Statistics Office) in Oslo and worked there for the rest of her life. She always remained politically active: she was, among other things, an inspirational member of the movement Grandmothers for Peace who met every Friday in front of the Norwegian Parliament.

"Memory dislikes motion, preferring to hold things still", writes John Banville in *The Sea* (2005, 221). Indeed, Cristobalina's *instantània* is an excellent point of entry into the dynamics of memory that Eva Koch elicits in her visual works in order to deal with the complexities of her mother's memories, and those of her family. In his exploration into the way photographic practices inter-relate knowledge, power, and the body, from mostly a Foucauldian perspective, Suren Lalvani argues that the task of Foucault's genealogy is "to ex-

¹⁴ I am grateful to Eva Koch for an email dated 03-11-2020, in which she kindly provided information about her *Nini* project and translated Nini's words from Norwegian into English.

pose a body totally imprinted in history” (1996, 32). Cristobalina’s photograph constitutes a prime example of this. Lalvani also quotes Judith Butler to the effect that

what is required [...] is “a genealogical account of the demarcation of the body as such as a signifying practice,” without resorting to the language of a prediscursive body and its disruptions, [an account that] requires seeing the body not as a “being” but as a culturally constructed variable of different permeability. (1996, 33)

Cristobalina and her friends are therefore to be regarded as porous bodies, since

[p]hotography operates in disciplinary discourses to arrest, isolate and instantiate the body in relation to the axes of time and space; it enables the decipherment, delineation, and analysis of the body’s surface. (1996, 34)

Divisions between inside and outside, public and private, are permeable and regulated by historical and political discourses. In the photograph, Cristobalina’s gaze, directed to whoever is looking at her, ourselves included, engages the viewers with a gripping story which is part of the Republican history of the Spanish Civil War.

Cristobalina’s photograph can also be read from the perspective of Marianne Hirsch’s “postmemory”, the memory of those who live their lives under the shadow of challenging or traumatic circumstances experienced by a previous generation; the memory of those who were the recipients of painful family memories. Hirsch coined the term “postmemory” to distinguish it “from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection”. She writes:

Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (Hirsch 1997, 22)

As an artist who grew up listening to haunting “narratives that preceded [her] birth” (Hirsch 1997, 22) and were to shape her artistic output when reconstructing the history and the stories of her family during and after the Civil War through the *Villar* project, Eva Koch is a fitting example of a postmemory subject.¹⁵ Her “postmemorial work”, in Hirsch’s words,

15 Hirsch develops the notion of “postmemory” in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but she intimates that the concept can be applied to other people who have inherited family memories of collective traumatic events and experiences (1997, 22; 2012, 18-19).

strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. (2012, 33)

The photograph from *Hjelp Spania!* of Cristobalina (not yet Chris, that is, not yet Eva Koch's mother, just a younger version of her) that Eva chooses to be the cover image for the *Villar* world she has constructed, is highly significant and, like the other photographs of the family and the village that will be part of this world,

[t]hey affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridged distance. (Hirsch 1997, 23)

In effect, they are "fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory" (Hirsch 2012, 37-8).

2 *Villar* (2001), and *Villar – Los hijos de Manuela* (2001)

Memory is history seen through affect.
(Winter 2012, 12)

In 2000, after years of talking with Chris about her war experiences and having overcome her mother's reluctance to expose her family to public scrutiny, Eva Koch started filming in Villar del Cobo what were to become two highly related, interactive visual art works, among the most important of her career. Previously, Chris had not wanted to inflict upon her newly rediscovered relatives any publicity about her story or her 1962 reunion with them, which, in any case, had found its way into the Spanish newspapers and attracted the interest of the populist ('yellow') press. Chris's siblings encouraged Eva to carry out her project, and finally her mother was happy for her to do it. In the two *Villar* representational formats, Eva Koch succeeds in communicating an "affiliative relation" to her mother, and to her family, which is "nonappropriative" (Hirsch 2012, 99) in that she does not call attention to herself as the author of the work, and daughter of its main subject, but lets the members of her family speak freely in front of her camera and be the protagonists.

The video-installation *Villar* is made up of six big screens, hence it requires a big room to be exhibited. Each screen focuses on the account of one member of Cristobalina's family: herself, as Chris; her brother Ángel; her brother Ernesto; her sister Clemencia; her niece Isabelica (Ángel's daughter); and Teresa, an old aunt, their fa-

ther's sister, who had been present at the signature of Cristobalina's adoption papers, and whom Eva met near Sagunto when she was 103 years old and ill with skin cancer on her face. Each of them tells their own personal memories of the Civil War period and its aftermath, how they survived the hard times, and how the disappearance of Cristobalina impacted their lives, that is, how Cristobalina's presence *in absentia* cast a long shadow over their existences, in particular that of Manuela, who never stopped trying to find her daughter, and of Clemencia, who was a baby when Cristobalina left Villar del Cobo, but whose prospects of a life outside the village were thwarted by being the only female daughter remaining in Villar: she was expected to stay and take care of her mother, as Clemencia herself suggests in her performance, not without some resentment.

Each narrative is nuanced by the others, but there is never any attempt to cancel any of the accounts, or to hide uncomfortable sub-narratives. In both *Villar* formats, through a process of individual remembrance and perception, the history of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath becomes personal, while at the same time acquiring a symbolic collective meaning: the history / stories of the members of an ordinary family from one of the areas ravaged by the conflict echo the plight of many families and many individuals, as the reunion of Chris and her Spanish family in 1962 will prove in documented, visual fashion through the photographs taken by Chris's husband, interspersed with the personal accounts among other visual material. The six individual voices narrating events that affected each of them as well as, inevitably, the family as a whole during a unique period of time, approach history by avoiding the pitfalls of an exclusive, one-sided discourse, or those of a winner's discourse. On the contrary, crucial events in each person's formation as an individual subject are highlighted by putting all their accounts together and letting viewers decide how to read and contrast them. This is a social tapestry of mnemonic voices from a family group that refuses to offer a non-contradictory continuity, or a set of apparently coherent narratives. The individual recollections reinforce each other as part of a group: the power of memory comes from the collective, but every member produces a unique discourse. As Lewis A. Coser says:

It is, of course, individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past. (1992, 22)

In *Villar*, they constantly refer to one another, so that the collective portrait is foregrounded: "autobiographical memory is always rooted in other people" (Coser 1992, 24). Moreover, their narratives are structurally connected to each other (explicitly so on the single-user

version), hence, what prevails is the family's choral memory: by continuously demanding the agency of the viewer, the technical and spatial mechanisms of both versions, their visual interactive formats are central to this successful pluri-dimensional rendering of the past and its non-linear narrative(s). By not offering a single version of events to the viewers, *Villar* expands the social impact of its politics of memory.

At the same time, we cannot forget that the representation of the past, verbally or otherwise, is merely a representation that cannot be taken to be the past itself, that it is influenced by the present to which the memories are brought back. Maurice Halbwachs states that:

the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society. Is it not strange that society causes the mind to transfigure the past to the point of yearning for it? [...] people know that the past no longer exists, so that they are obliged to adjust to the only real world - the one in which they now live. (1992, 51)

However, the fact that the past is not preserved, but rather reconstructed on the basis of the present (Halbwachs 1992, 40), does not mean that the characters in *Villar* misremember, however unintentionally. What Halbwachs means is that by evoking the past from the present one can never replicate it, that the past is always conditioned by the present. In his introduction to Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser writes that Halbwachs

was without doubt the first sociologist who stressed that our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present. (Coser 1992, 34)

That is why, for Halbwachs, "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present" (Coser 1992, 25). Halbwachs's work helps us to read *Villar* as an example of collective memory originating from, but not limited to, individual memories:

collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (Halbwachs 1992, 40)

If, according to Halbwachs (1992, 40), "individuals always use social frameworks when they remember", it also makes sense to see *Villar* as part of the so-called memory boom that became so important at

the turn of the twenty-first century in humanities disciplines. Within the cultural studies paradigm, they showed an exceptional interest in the complexities of historical memory.¹⁶ It was a consequence of a wider social and political awareness which prompted the rescuing from oblivion of many experiences and tragedies that had been silenced for years. Spain was a case in point due to the lasting effect of Franco's politics of retribution (Graham 2004), both during and after the Civil War. In Spain, the reluctance to confront the country's bloody past under the dictatorship persisted, to a large extent, during the so-called Transition to democracy years, and well into the twenty-first century. Bodies of executed political enemies buried in forests, by roadsides, and in other locations specifically chosen to humiliate them, such as the entry to cemeteries so that people would tread on the mass graves of murdered Republicans, are still being unearthed.¹⁷

In *Villar*, the family's recollections are obviously traumatic. All of its members are willing to talk, but they recollect in ways that are not always pain-free - the most composed of all performances is Chris's. For slightly different reasons and with varying intensity, their accounts are like pieces of an occasionally disjointed jigsaw that complement each other, but do not always fit in neatly. However, Chris's refusal to define herself as a trauma survivor, and their readiness to share their memories, bring to mind Ruth Leys's critique of the conceptualization of trauma developed by scholars associated with the Yale School, Cathy Caruth (1995; 1996) being the best known. From a neurobiological perspective, Caruth and others claim that in PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) trauma is unrepresentable on the grounds that after the traumatogenic event(s) the conscience and memory mechanisms are temporally destroyed. Leys does not accept their view that the images, body sensations and emotions remembered cannot be verbalized and finds their examples unconvincing because these scholars see "pictures and visual images as if they were inherently non-symbolic, which is of course absurd" (Leys 2000, 249), and because they oppose images to verbal representation. Leys considers trauma's socio-historic

16 In 2000, Kerwin L. Klein wrote about "the memory industry [which] ranges from the museum trade to the legal battles over repressed memory and on to the market for academic books and articles that invoke *memory* as a key word", and related it to the 1970s interest in "autobiographical literature, family genealogy, and museums". He argued that in the 1980s "two literary events: Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora's 'Between Memory and History', the introduction to an anthology, *Lieux de mémoire* (1982)" (Klein 2000, 127) were central to its expansion.

17 There are numerous publications about this subject. See, among others, Ferrándiz 2006 and 2016; Torres 2007; "La Generalitat exhumarà les fosses 21 i 126 del cementeri de Paterna per a recuperar les restes de 316 persones. Serà l'exhumació més nombrosa de víctimes del franquisme que s'ha fet fins ara", *Vilaweb*, 14 December 2020 (<https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/la-generalitat-exhumara--les-fosses-21-i-126-del-cementeri-de-paterna-per-a-recuperar-les-restes-de-316-persones/>).

background a key factor, and questions the notion of PTSD as “a timeless diagnosis” (2000, 3). Moreover, even if trauma may initially be resistant to narrative, in due course, linguistic articulation is possible. Leys’s approach is useful to analyse *Villar*’s verbalization of the family’s memories. After more than sixty years, they are eager to remember and talk. By virtue of their performances, they textualize their memories and perceptions. Despite the collective background, they do it individually, as the very structure of Eva Koch’s work underlines by presenting their individual performances on individual screens.

Jay Winter indicates that the “performative nature of remembrance” is “particularly marked by the act of listening, of attending to the voices of victims and survivors” (2012, 20), which is the feature that defines the whole *Villar* project being as it is so geared towards the interaction with its viewers.

Winter, acknowledging Halbwachs’s insight into the social framework of remembrance, discusses the performative condition of collective memory:

Memory performed is at the heart of collective memory. When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. [...] the performance of memory is both a mnemonic device and a way in which individual memories are relived, revived, and refashioned. Through performance, we move from the individual to the group to the individual. (Winter 2012, 11)

The mnemonic voices performing their past in Eva Koch’s works are pieces of a collage.¹⁸ As Jo Labanyi summarizes, mostly in relation to *One-Way Street* (Benjamin 2009, 46-115),

Benjamin’s historian is a collector or bricoleur [...] in the sense that he or she [...] looks for the significance in fragments and details normally overlooked, [and] reassembles the fragments in a new “constellation” that permits the articulation of that which has been left unvoiced. (Labanyi 2000, 69)

18 In this context, collage is a word that evokes Benjamin’s concept of the historian as bricoleur, but here I also borrow it from Jay Winter: “Stories about the past that we remember are collages, complex and shifting mixtures of narratives, some of which arise from historical writing and history as visualized in a dizzying variety of films, plays, museums and websites. Approaching the intersection of history and memory through the performative turn highlights what they have in common and how important it is to avoid rigid bifurcation between the two” (2012, 12). In *Villar*, this multidirectional approach is less wide-ranging, as it is limited to memories of the family members, but not less complex or multifaceted, and there is no question that it can be described as a collage of stories.

Indeed, even if the *Villar* voices are not the usual examples of popular culture associated with Benjamin's "debris left by the past", they had certainly been silent before they became protagonists of the "montage" that Eva Koch makes possible through her work.

The *Villar* project's approach to history can also be related to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1992, 245-55). In this essay, Benjamin distinguishes between "historicism", conservative and reactionary, and "historical materialism", progressive and left-wing inspired, but not following Marxism to the letter in envisaging a revolutionary future. Benjamin identifies "historicism" with an approach to history which grasps and holds the past so that a fix and totalitarian interpretation of it prevails, an interpretation that "gives the 'eternal' image of the past" (Benjamin 1992, 254), a view that favours history's winners. Instead, Benjamin favours "historical materialism", which makes it feasible "to bring the past to memory", in David Eng's and David Kazanjian's expression in their book on mourning (2003, 1-2). It implies an open and active relationship with the past which continuously engages with loss and its remnants, as

a historical materialist views [...] with cautious detachment [...] the cultural treasures [whose] origin he cannot contemplate without horror. [...] There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Benjamin 1992, 248)

Eva Koch's work responds to Benjamin's sober approach to history. *Villar* does not answer the viewers' queries by offering tales of the good and the bad, or by proposing joyous closures that simplistically resolve the conflicts uncovered by the individual performances of remembrance. *Villar* does not construct Cristobalina/Chris's story as one of success, even though it could have been fashioned as such if the focus had been on Nini, Kristian, and his siblings' efforts to rescue a child from the grim prospect of ending up in a Francoist institution for orphaned children. Nor does it celebrate Chris's reunion with her family in her birth town as a happy ending to a separation caused by the Civil War.¹⁹ Quite the opposite: while never los-

19 When some of the children from Republican Spain who had been evacuated to Russia during the Civil War returned to Spain, Franco presented the evacuation to save these children from the ravages of war as a "robbery", and used it as propaganda: "La España rota y roja te arrebató a ese hijo. La España de Franco te lo devuelve. Ellos y nosotros cumplimos nuestros designios diversos. Ellos destruyen la familia. Nosotros edificamos la sociedad sobre ella" (Red and broken Spain stole your son. Franco's Spain returns him to you. We have different purposes to them. They destroy the family. We build society upon it) (T. Constenla, "Historias bélicas de niños viejos", *El País*, 27 March 2009, http://elpais.com/diario/2009/03/27/cultura/1238108401_850215.html). However, those who went back to Spain were seen with suspicion and spied on, and the tone of this political message was not reflected in the way they were treated.

ing sight of the extraordinary good fortune of the family who finally found each other, *Villar* focuses on the conflicts, the pain, the endurance, the absences, the long-lasting effects of the events that affected them all so profoundly during the war and afterwards. Eva Koch does not romanticize her family's history and stories of the Civil War and their consequences. She respects their emotional excavation into their past, expressed in various ways, but, even as she privatizes history's impact on their lives, she does not depoliticize it, or beautify it at all. *Villar* is fundamentally an exercise in historical memory: by letting the members of her family relate their experiences, Eva Koch brings the past into the present and, by putting these memories in the public domain, she rescues them from oblivion. Her work encourages social responsibility beyond hegemonic conceptualizations of history and the self.

3 The *Villar* Project: A Tapestry of Individual Textualizations of the Past as a Social and Political Construction

Justice is not simply a feeling. And feelings are not always just. But justice involves feelings, which move us across the surfaces of the world, creating ripples in the intimate contours of our lives.
(Ahmed 2014, 202)

Even though *Villar* prioritizes the links between each family member's constructions of the past, and the technical possibilities of the single-user version allow spectators to go from one performance to another at specific points of contact, for the purposes of the analysis I shall consider each performance individually, following the sequence in which they are presented on the single user version. I will also explore some of the points of contact, particularly those related to the 1962 reunion in Villar del Cobo. "Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history", writes Kerwin Klein (2000, 129) in relation to the memory v. history debate, as

memory's notorious vagaries become its strengths, and the acknowledgement of what some historians have taken as evidence of memory's inferiority to 'real' history emerges as therapeutic if not revolutionary potential. (2000, 138)

Villar constitutes a fine example of the power of memory as an invaluable partner to 'real' history.

3.1 Isabelica

The first to appear is Isabelica Martínez Simón, Ángel's daughter, who talks about her grandmother in a brief introduction which is as respectful to Manuela as her father's and her aunt Clemencia's performances. She insists that Manuela's goal in life was to re-group all her children and she did not stop trying until she saw them all together in Villar del Cobo. Her narrative is a reminder of how, according to Halbwachs, family feelings function:

no matter how spontaneous they are, [feelings of affection towards those around us] follow paths laid out in advance and completely independent of us, which society has been careful to point in the right direction. (Halbwachs 1992, 56)

Isabelica then succinctly explains that conditions of life in the village have improved over the years, but laments that the lack of industry and an economy based solely on rural activities is driving young people away.

3.2 Ángel

Ángel's account begins by evoking his mother Manuela and the problems they faced after his father's death in 1934, when they had no money, were evicted from the house they had been renting, and had to go and live with relatives in one of village's poorest houses. He talks about the time of the Civil War and beyond, being forced to grow up quickly and, as a young teenager, helping his mother to survive. One of the most poignant moments of his recollection has to do with an episode that badly affected him: as a teenager, he had to claim back a piece of land that was rightly theirs but had been appropriated by an uncle who took advantage of their precarious situation. The long overdue resolution of the feud came about thanks to the intervention of his grandmother on his mother's side, but not without consequences, as his uncle was never happy to have given up the land and did not hide it. He is still overwhelmed by this episode from the past: the fact that an uncle of his acted so selfishly in the circumstances they found themselves in is too unpleasant a memory to put into words, and yet he talks about it, even though his feelings of sadness and disgust run deep. In moments like this, the blending of past and present – the present being conditioned by the past – which takes place throughout the *Villar* project and is achieved in a variety of ways, is made devastatingly clear to the viewer. Emotion is not dismissed as simple sentimentality, but valued, in keeping with current theoretical thinking, as a “category of historical analysis” (Delgado, Fernández, Labanyi 2016, 2). Catherine Lutz

(2007, 19-29) argues that emotions and affections (not always easy to separate) are culturally constructed categories, but Sarah Ahmed is even more precise in her exploration of the politics of emotion: for her, as for many others, emotions are not the reflection of interior psychological states, nor are they just socio-cultural constructions:

My argument about the cultural politics of emotions is developed not only as a critique of the psychologising and privatisation of emotions, but also as a critique of a model of social structure that neglects the emotional intensities, which allow such structures to be reified as forms of being. (Ahmed 2014, 12).

In Ángel's performance, as well as in all the others, we see that "emotions are inextricably entwined with bodies" (Ahmed 2014, 10), as emotions undermine neat dichotomies such as mind and body, or reason and feeling.

The episode mentioned above, which links the survival of the peasant family to the land they own, and to the role of the eldest son in demanding what he and his mother believed to be Manuela's inheritance from her husband, takes us back to Halbwachs and his deliberations on the family, in particular the peasant family, as a location for collective memory:

It is [...] quite natural that the family and the soil remain closely linked to each other in common thought. Moreover, since the peasantry is fixed in the soil, the representation of a limited piece of land and of the village is etched very early in the mind of its members, with all its particularities, divisions, and the relative position of its houses and the interpretation of its pieces of land. (Halbwachs 1992, 65)

Ángel refers to his mother Manuela very affectionately. He explains that she worked hard, helping him to yoke up the mules and turn the plough in the fields as he was too young to do it by himself; how she worked as the village baker, and he would help her to light the oven fire very early in the morning and call out the village women to bring their bread to be baked. In his words, "one was at the service of the entire village".

Ángel follows a loose chronology and talks about the end of the Civil War and Cristobalina's disappearance, as well as the return of Ernesto who, as a child refugee in Valencia, abandoned to his own devices, had become a wild boy. Ángel tells about Manuela's pain in being unable to be reunited with her daughter Cristobalina, and her attempts to get help from the Norwegian Consulate, and the Red Cross, to no avail. He becomes emotional again when telling a story which epitomizes the misery felt by many in post-Civil War Spain. Shortly after Ernesto

returned, they learnt that in the Valencian village of Dos Aguas there was a girl who might be Cristobalina, so Manuela and Ángel went there hoping for the best. Upon meeting the girl, Manuela realized that she was not her daughter, she did not look like her. Cristobalina had a birth mark on her back and the girl did not. However, the girl insisted that she was her daughter, and pleaded with them not to leave her there. “My mother was going mad”, Ángel remarks.

When reflecting on the present time and how well they all have done despite the hardship during the post-war, Ángel mentions her sister by her Spanish name: Cristobalina, although she has been known as Chris for decades. Apropos of the family collective, Halbwachs states that

first names, even though they have been chosen without taking the subject to which they are applied into consideration, seem to be part of their subject’s nature. (1992, 72)

Bearing in mind their relational value within the family structure, not the material sign in itself, he claims that

[i]f first names help to differentiate the members of the family, it is because they correspond to the group’s need to distinguish them for itself and also agree to the principle and means of that distinction. The principle in question is the kinship structure, according to which each member of the family occupies a fixed and irreducible position. (Halbwachs 1992, 72)

Just by uttering a first name, each family member may evoke images and experiences:

this very possibility is the result of the existence of [the] group, of its persistence and integrity. (Halbwachs 1992, 73)

Cristobalina is not the same person who left the village decades ago, and her life has changed dramatically but, in Ángel’s mind, she is still that girl their mother pined for, and calling her Cristobalina does not hint at a refusal to accept the changes in her sister’s life, but at an unconscious acknowledgment of the position she had occupied in the family structure for many years. Ernesto and Clemencia also call her sister Cristobalina, and in their accounts it is clear that she has remained the Cristobalina that belonged to the family group during the twenty-four years they had been longing to see her again, a mental landscape that time has not altered, no matter how big the changes in her life have been.

Ángel is again overwhelmed by his emotions when he speaks about Chris’s reunion with her family. He recalls the fortuitous encounter be-

tween her, a notary from Teruel and Jens. The notary and his wife were spending their honeymoon on the Faroe Islands and were introduced to Eva's parents by a common acquaintance. By coincidence, that very same week Chris had received a letter from the Red Cross (through Nini) - there may have been many that never reached their destination. Chris told the notary about her Teruel origins and he promised to look into it, which he did upon returning to Spain. This is how the reunion was made possible in 1962. In *Villar*, it is illustrated by a number of photographs taken by Jens Koch. Everybody is in the village square: Chris and her husband, Manuela, as well as all the family, the local authorities, the village priest included, and, most significantly, neighbours from Villar del Cobo, and people from other villages in the area: quite a crowd. These images are extraordinary. Probably, everyone attending the reunion had a Civil War story to tell, personal losses to mourn. The neighbours who wished to participate in the gathering were likely to have their own dead and disappeared, to carry their own ghosts, to engage with their own mourning of Derridean proportions, as they may have been trapped in a "deuil possible qui intériorise en nous l'image, l'idole ou l'idéal de l'autre mort et vivant qu'en nous" (possible mourning which interiorizes in us the image, the idol or the ideal of the dead other alive only inside us) or, alternatively, in a "deuil impossible qui, laissant à l'autre son altérité, en respecte l'éloignement infini" (impossible mourning which, leaving the alterity of the other untouched, respects their infinite estrangement) (Derrida 1988, 29).

And yet, they may have found in the reunion, in the happiness of others, a measure of solace among the devastation caused by the war. Cristobalina and Manuela, presiding over the crowd, may have offered a proxy closure to many who were unrelated to the family, but had experienced the pain brought about by the conflict. This beautiful, collective act of togetherness evokes again Halbwachs's view of memory as a group exercise, and the photographs, so socially relevant, speak for themselves and are steeped in the history of post-Civil War Spain. Nobody cried that first day, says Ángel, but on the following one, when they were celebrating as if attending a wedding, "it looked like a funeral", as everybody gave in to feelings which had been held back for so long. An odd presence at the first reunion is that of an interpreter, as neither Chris nor Jens spoke Spanish, and the rest of the family's only language was Spanish. This mediator, who translated from English into Spanish and vice versa for Chris and Manuela, was arguably one of the factors preventing the encounter from becoming emotional on that very first day, and he added to the strangeness surrounding the communication between the intensely desired daughter, and the recently rediscovered mother.

3.3 Ernesto

Ernesto's performance is that of a man who, as a child, was abandoned by the authorities whose duty it was to look after displaced children like him. His features contrast sharply with the softness of Ángel's face and body. He recalls the women in the Teruel hospice as his surrogate mothers: he missed his mother so much that "each of them was a mother to me, I felt they were all mothers of mine", he says. He recalls that he was separated from Cristobalina during the Battle of Teruel and was sent to the city's seminary, then occupied by Republican soldiers,²⁰ and he fondly remembers a sergeant who would share with him the little food available: toasted chickpeas, not always well cooked, sugar, and hard-to-eat nougat. When Republican soldiers were forced to withdraw from Teruel, they and children like Ernesto walked towards Rubielos (Teruel), which was still in Republican hands. He talks about children who fell by the roadside and were unable to get up. Eventually, two vans took them to Rubielos. On their arrival they were offered a big paella. They were so hungry that they ate it with their bare hands. From Rubielos, he was transferred to Manises. According to Ernesto, "many children left Teruel, just a few of us arrived in Valencia". He became wilder as the war went on. He and other children would steal oranges from the orchards, even when they were not ripe enough to eat, or they would go to the market, to find food to assuage their hunger, until they were caught by the police and returned to the hospice. His health had never been great, but now he was weaker than ever before. Cristobalina's insistence that she had a brother prompted Nini Haslund Gleditsch to find Ernesto. She helped him with food and clothing, and for a short while they visited him. However, her attempts to take him to Norway with his sister were in vain as he was not deemed fit to travel. Whoever decided to keep Ernesto in Spain was to be responsible for the separation of the two siblings, which lasted until 1962. At the end of the Civil War, he was a rebellious child, and by the time he was found by Manuela's relatives and went back to Teruel, where he was collected by Manuela, he was almost a beggar. Despite everything he had experienced, he always remained loyal to the family. During his stay at the Manises hospice, several couples tried to adopt him, but he always made it clear that he had a family and did not want to be adopted. He would hide when visitors to the hospice were looking for children to adopt. Once he hid in the doghouse where a ferocious dog protected him from being discovered. Halbwachs writes about how "extraordinary" it is

20 Hugh Thomas (1990, 791) mentions the seminary as one of the Teruel buildings occupied by Republican troops since Christmas 1937.

that families generally succeed in motivating their members to love each other all the time despite separations and distances, that its members spend the major part of their emotional resources within its bosom. (Halbwachs 1992, 57)

And he emphasizes that

[the] family is capable of finding within itself sufficient strength to overcome the obstacles opposing it. What is more, it can happen that the family transforms obstacles into advantages, that it is fortified by the very resistances encountered externally. (1992, 68)

Like Ángel's, Ernesto's performance is dense with moments of strong emotion, especially when remembering Cristobalina, and when telling about the family reunion in November 1962. He believes that "in life, everything is bleak", and makes no bones about how much he missed his mother through all the years of separation. He has strong words about the Sagunto relatives, who would visit him until Cristobalina went to Norway with Nini, but whose visits stopped when he was left behind. And yet, Ernesto was the one joking and laughing in 2000 as Eva Koch was recording the images she would use for her *Villar* project.

3.4 Chris

Against the background of an old wall ravaged by time, calling to mind her experiences and, to some extent, her own face, Chris reminisces about the time of the Spanish Civil War, when she was Cristobalina, an eight-year-old girl estranged from her family and living in Oliva with other children who had been evacuated from the frontline, or were orphans of war. Her effort to remember what her life was like at the time is visible in the way she talks, her eyes looking into the distance. The 1962 reunion with her family makes her smile. As Eva has explained to me, she speaks in Danish with a melodic Norwegian accent, a blending of languages and accents that reflects the turns taken by her life since she left Spain at the end of 1938. Her memories of the Civil War are sparse, but she has retained some images of the evacuation to Valencia: the nuns not wearing their habits, a destroyed house with everyday objects scattered everywhere, airplanes flying over them, children dying, a boy holding a piece of bread, an image which gave her joy and she has not forgotten. From Villar del Cobo, she vaguely recalls the smell of her father eating fried liver. She talks fondly about the Fridtjof Nansen Hospital in Oliva, where everything was designed with the children and their welfare in mind. When they had convalesced, they were sent to one of the children's colonies in the region, and she tells the story of a boy who walked a considera-

ble distance to go back to the Hospital: "It was a wonderful place", she says. Clips from *Hjelp Spania!*, showing a smiling, well-looking after Cristobalina, illustrate her memories of the children's Hospital.

Chris understands that her mother could not be contacted by Nini at the end of 1938, as they were separated by the war: Manuela was in the so-called 'National' zone, and Nini and herself, in Republican territory; and why her grandmother signed the adoption papers.

Her recollection of the 1962 reunion begins with the letter that Cristobalina had received from the Spanish Red Cross (through Nini) the very same week that she and Jens met the notary from Teruel and his wife when they were honeymooning on the Faroe Islands. Chris also recalls a previous letter from the Red Cross enquiring about Cristobalina when she was living with Kristian's siblings. On that occasion, Ellen Gleditsch, aware of the situation in Spain, put the letter in a tin and buried the tin in the garden. When it was dug up after the Second World War, the tin had disintegrated, and it was impossible to retrieve any information about Chris's family in Spain. Obviously, Ellen Gleditsch was protective of Chris, and did not want her to go back to fascist Spain where she might have ended up in a Francoist institution. Doubtless, Ellen's decision allowed Chris to enjoy the good life she was to have first in Norway, and subsequently in Denmark. However, it is difficult to ignore Manuela's plight, and that of the whole family, as a consequence of this decision, and all those other decisions that helped to provide Cristobalina/Chris with another identity, another life away from them. Once everything is taken into consideration, are we entitled to conclude whether human rights can be violated in order to protect human rights? This is indeed a challenging question.²¹

Chris recalls her and Jens's first trip to Villar del Cobo in November 1962: the interpreter who travelled with them from Teruel; the church they saw as they were approaching the village; her mother and her siblings; the crowd who welcomed them... everything was moving. The following summer Chris returned with her own children, as they would do on many other occasions. Photographs from her and her husband's first visit to Villar del Cobo illustrate her account. She also recalls the journey away from Spain at the end of 1938, when they stayed in Sweden for a few months before finally arriving in Norway, where she was left in the care of Kristian's siblings for the duration of the Second World War, until Nini and Kristian returned from their official assignment with Nils Petter. Photographs of Chris as a modern young woman accompany her recollections.

Eva Koch's memories of her first visits to Villar del Cobo with her family have been the subject of another of her visual works entitled

21 Anne Orford (2003; 2011) discusses the problematics of humanitarian interventions within the context of international law.

en face,²² an installation for three projectors with slides taken by her father Jens Koch. The three sections are: “Between the sea and the sky”; “To Spain”; and “portrait”. First, Eva showed *en face* using three Kodak carrousels. Since its exhibition at the Statens Museum for Kunst, she has converted it into video to be shown on three walls in an intimate space of the Museum. It is a collection of her memories of a land that she first encountered as a ten-year old child. The photographs from the 1960s of her and of her family divert the attention away from the historical memories of Villar and towards the discovery of a different world, with its own images and textures: the flowers – poppies she collects with great care –, the ball she holds tight, her mingling and that of her siblings with the village people, her own parents and the Villar del Cobo family: they are all part of this voyage of discovery she puts together in a delicate and evocative work which, once again, highlights the significance of remembering the past from the present, of reconstructing the past in a way that is private and yet may establish a fruitful dialogue with the viewers’ own memories.

3.5 Clemencia

The younger sister Clemencia’s account adds to the angles and nuances of her siblings’ performances. When Clemencia was a little girl and Manuela and Ángel went to work in the fields, Manuela left her with a village woman who was paid not in money, as they had none, but with eggs, bread, and other things they were able to produce. Clemencia feels for her mother the same admiration conveyed in Ángel’s account. Manuela would wash the clothes of Republican soldiers during the war: “from the captain to the last soldier, even to those who had no money to pay her”. She recounts the story of a soldier who, having been sent to the front, gave Manuela all his books. He said that, were he not to return, she could keep the books as a gesture of gratitude towards her. The soldier never came back.

Clemencia speaks of Manuela’s distress upon discovering that Cristobalina and Ernesto had been moved to Valencia, and Ernesto’s return at the end of the war: he looked dishevelled and it was difficult for him to become part of the family life again. She gives her version of Cristobalina’s adoption and she categorically states that the Sagunto family did not want to keep Cristobalina, even though Nini had offered them that possibility. She insists that Nini helped them with food and goods as they had nothing at the time. When Manuela invited her husband’s family to Villar del Cobo, she cooked a good

²² See a description on https://evakoch.net/wp-content/uploads/enface_uk.pdf.

meal for them and asked for the details Nini had left. Once she had them, she threw her relatives out of the house, telling them never to come back as they had sold Cristobalina: “This is what happened”, Clemencia says, defending Manuela, “they sold her daughter, even if it was a sale through paperwork”. Clemencia expresses her emotion with a severity that contrasts sharply with the gentleness of her brothers and sister. Emotions can be expressed in different ways, but what we see in all of these performances is that “[e]motions show us how histories stay alive”, and how “[t]hrough emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies” (Ahmed 2014, 202), irrespective of how bodies conduct themselves.

Manuela was inconsolable and Clemencia was always reassuring her that one day Cristobalina would come back “in a big car”, just to keep Manuela’s hopes alive. Manuela, Clemencia reminisces, was very good with the village kids, she would invent ways to make “chocolate” with flour, sugar and cinnamon, when there was no chocolate available, or she would extract syrup from beets, to give the children as a treat at Christmas and New Year.

Clemencia’s tone turns sombre when she relates that a Francoist authority from Teruel came to the village, heard her sing in the church choir, and offered her the chance to get musical training in the city, all expenses paid. She felt she could not accept as her mother would not have coped with yet another daughter gone: perhaps if Cristobalina had been there, she says, but that was not the case...

When the notary who had met Chris and Jens on the Faroe Islands contacted them through the local authorities, Manuela and Clemencia went to Teruel to meet him. The notary struck them as being aloof, says Clemencia. He seemed to suspect that Manuela wanted to take advantage of her missing daughter. Manuela said that all she wanted was to help her, to welcome her back – Manuela had in mind the state Ernesto was in when he was found, and she thought that Cristobalina might be alone and neglected. As they were leaving the house, in a compassionate gesture, the notary’s wife told them not to worry, that soon they would have her daughter and sister back.

3.6 Extra

The single-user version includes an “Extra” series of clips that are also part of the video-installation: in the first, Isabelica talks about the village as she had done before. In the second, old aunt Teresa from Sagunto pledges that they never sold Cristobalina, that “that lady” was very generous to them at a very difficult time, that it was Cristobalina herself who wanted to go with her, that Manuela was wrong, that they could not visit Ernesto at the end of the Civil War because of the ongoing fighting in the area – something which is at

odds with Ernesto's view of these relatives, as he is adamant that they had abandoned him after Nini's and Cristobalina's departure.

Other clips include images of Villar del Cobo, what Pierre Nora (1989) calls a *lieu de mémoire* if ever there was one, a place that is unavoidably attached to the family's experiences and memories. We see photographs from the 1930s, and then we see images of the village even as filming was taking place, a visual palimpsest²³ which implies the passing of time, while the rural setting suggests that modernisation may have passed Villar del Cobo by – signs of contemporary life are signified through a few commodities such as television (with bullfighting being broadcast), or the big bottles of butane gas brought to the village by a lorry and collected in the square by the women. Other scenes indicate how little everyday life seems to have changed in the village: from Ángel killing his rabbits, to shepherds herding their goats, or people attending church services. Another clip shows the family reunited over a meal, a shared paella, as they no longer lived together in Villar del Cobo: Clemencia is now in Valencia, and Ernesto, in Teruel. Later that day, we see the brothers watching television while Chris placidly makes crochet in their company, as if she had never left Villar del Cobo, although she definitely had.

4 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to go back to the title of this chapter as I hope to have shown how with *Villar*, Eva Koch's "postmemorial" interactive visual art work, successfully embarks upon a journey from personal remembrance to historical memory.

Aleida Assmann (2012, 35-50) accepts Halbwachs's contention that memory depends on social frames to turn into collective memory, but she proposes to go further as the concept

needs to be theoretically differentiated and elaborated as social, political, and cultural memory. (Assmann 2012, 50)

Her categories are enlightening. However, in *Villar*, the categories do not exclude but blend into each other: *Villar* is individual remembrance transformed into the collective memory of a family group

23 In this context, I borrow the term 'palimpsest' from Andreas Huyssen: "an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is. The strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses and heterotopias" (Huyssen 2003, 7). In *Villar*, the "palimpsestic nature" of literature Huyssen refers to is made possible by putting together images which relate the past to the present but also differentiate them.

that reaches a wider community, as seen, for instance, in the visual document of the 1962 reunion, and in the agency it demands from its viewers. The context of the experiences remembered, as well as the contemporary setting of the recordings, turn *Villar* into a valuable record of social memory, and it is through its social relevance that can be regarded as a significant cultural exercise. Finally, due to its focus on a turbulent period of Spanish history experienced by a group of ordinary people who never had access to power but suffered its terrible effects, it becomes an invaluable historical and political memory document.

Eva Koch's *Villar* project reminds me of the work of the Belarusian writer, journalist, essayist and oral historian Svetlana Alexievich, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize for Literature, and the testimonies she has collected from women who participated in various war conflicts in the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Union countries, and whose role had been systematically ignored. In 2015, Alexievich declared:

I've been searching for a literary method that would allow the closest possible approximation to real life. Reality has always attracted me like a magnet, it tortured and hypnotised me, I wanted to capture it on paper. So I immediately appropriated this genre of actual human voices and confessions, witness evidences and documents. This is how I hear and see the world - as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details. This is how my eye and ear function. In this way all my mental and emotional potential is realised to the full.²⁴

In January 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, in the unlikely space of Barcelona's Biblioteca de Catalunya (Catalonia's National Library), a play was performed by the theatre group Perla 29. The play was a Catalan adaptation of Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (2018), which had been translated into Catalan as *La guerra no té cara de dona* (2018). In her review of the performance, Bel Zaballa quoted Alexievich's acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature: "Flaubert s'anomenava a si mateix home-ploma, jo diria que sóc una dona-orella" (Flaubert called himself a man-pen, I would say that I am a woman-ear).²⁵ In this work, she listens to forgotten women who

²⁴ M. Bausells, "Everything You Need to Know about Svetlana Alexievich, Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature", *The Guardian*, 8 October 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/oct.08/everything-you-need-to-know-about-svetlana-alexievich-winner-of-the-nobe-prize-in-literature>.

²⁵ B. Zaballa, "Les dones de Svetlana Aleksíevitx i Clara Segura", *Vilaweb*, 18 January 2021. <https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/les-dones-de-svetlana-aleksievitx-i-clara-segura/>.

were active during the Second World War tell the small stories that make up the big history. In *Villar*, Eva Koch is a postmemory subject who inherits the memories of not just one but two previous generations, and constructs an interactive visual art work made up of the performances of her mother and her relatives telling their personal memories from a difficult period of Spain's twentieth-century history. In this respect, she is like Svetlana Alexievich's "woman-ear", the artist-woman-ear who pieces together a Benjaminian and Halbwachsian collage of neglected voices, thereby creating an historical, cultural and political document of epic proportions.

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Memoria Transversal

Aportes a la genealogía del movimiento feminista en Argentina en *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*

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Abstract This article reads the book *Ninguna mujer nace para puta* (by Sonia Sánchez and María Galindo, 2007) to question the patriarchal hypocrisy that justifies the abuse of men against women around the industry of prostitution. *Ninguna mujer* has been considered an abolitionist text that clashes with the struggles for the unionization of prostitutes. From my perspective, the book constructs a transversal memory of women struggles that has significantly influenced the radical emergence of feminist movements in Argentina (2015). I focus on the use of the word *puta*, the empowerment of women, and the rupture with 'make up' narratives about prostitution to engage in the long-term struggle against patriarchal society.

Keywords Feminism. Historical memory. Argentinean feminist movement. Genealogies. Prostitution.

Sumario 1 Introducción. – PARTE I. – 2 Genealogías feministas: *Ni una menos* y la cultura de la memoria. – PARTE II. – 3 *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*: el dislocamiento subjetivo. – 4 Método dialógico: la palabra directa y la máquina de preguntar preguntándose. – 5 Una memoria transversal más allá del testimonio. – Parte III. – 6 El uso de la palabra 'puta' como interpelación política. – 7 Dilemas organizativos: la transversalidad de las rupturas. – 8 Corolario.

1 Introducción

Los debates sobre la industria de la prostitución y la subjetividad de las mujeres en torno a la figura de la puta han tomado un nuevo cariz público a partir del resurgimiento del feminismo de masas en América Latina y algunos países de Europa en los últimos años (Moraes et al. 2016; Sánchez 2017; Galindo 2020; Sosa 2020). Esquemáticamente, la disputa se discierne entre quienes aspiran a la eliminación total de la prostitución (abolicionistas) y quienes procuran obtener el reconocimiento de las trabajadoras sexuales como base de las demandas de derechos y servicios al Estado (regulacionistas) (Morcillo, Varela 2017; Behrens 2017; Sosa 2020).

En Argentina, uno de los libros que más ha impactado esta polémica ha sido *Ninguna mujer nace para puta* (Galindo, Sánchez 2007, de aquí en más, NMNP). Publicado por el Colectivo La Vaca, una pequeña editorial autónoma, el libro es la transcripción de un diálogo entre dos mujeres: Sonia Sánchez, argentina, ex prostituta y activista de trayectoria sindical; y María Galindo, boliviana, lesbiana y militante política, fundadora del grupo autónomo Mujeres Creando.¹ En NMNP, las autoras llevan a cabo una reflexión sobre la muestra artística homónima, *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*, presentada primero en Bolivia y luego en Argentina en 2006. La misma combinaba grafitis, fotografías, e instalaciones sobre el mundo de la prostitución. El evento, organizado autónomamente por las putas mismas con el apoyo de organizaciones afines y lideresas feministas (entre ellas María y Sonia), invitaba al público a escuchar la palabra directa de las mujeres ‘putas’ para interpelar y desplazar la mirada de la audiencia sobre el tema.²

En el contexto del debate mencionado, NMNP es considerado un texto que ha fomentado el abolicionismo de la prostitución, y de hecho Sonia se ha reconocido públicamente como abolicionista (Sánchez 2015; Morcillo, Varela 2017; Sosa 2020). Sin embargo, dado su contenido y su formato, sostengo que la potencialidad del libro va más allá de esa controversia binaria que reduce su capacidad de transformación política. Precisamente, el objetivo de este capítulo consiste en indagar las contribuciones específicas de NMNP a la lucha por terminar con el patriarcado, más allá de la polémica entre abolicionistas y regulacionistas.

Desde mi lectura, el valor primordial del libro de María y Sonia consiste en interpelar la hipocresía patriarcal que sostiene y justifi-

1 Para las citas de *Ninguna mujer nace para puta* usaremos la sigla NMNP identificando el nombre de cada autora, ‘María’ o ‘Sonia’, cuando sea pertinente.

2 En Bolivia, la muestra fue organizada por Mujeres Creando, una organización autónoma liderada por María Galindo; y en Argentina, fue apoyada por el sindicato Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina (AMMAR).

ca la industria de la prostitución. Las autoras proponen enfrentar esa hipocresía como un problema social al cual *todes*, mujeres, hombres y otros colectivos como LGTBQI+ y travestis, tienen que responder desde su propia responsabilidad política.³ De ese modo, NMNP genera un desplazamiento de la subjetividad que invita a *les* lectores a revisitar las presunciones internalizadas sobre las percepciones de género que organizan la sociedad. Y en vez de pensar cómo el feminismo puede incluir a las putas en su lucha, las autoras plantean reformular las bases del movimiento feminista desde el punto de vista de la experiencia de las putas.⁴

Desde mi perspectiva, NMNP funciona como una memoria transversal a partir de este desplazamiento político. Es decir, se trata de una memoria en el sentido que procesa una serie de narrativas y experiencias de luchas personales y colectivas de las putas para dejar un registro de su pensamiento de y sobre ellas. Y al mismo tiempo, la manera transversal en la que se teje el diálogo en el libro repercute en la experiencia de otras mujeres 'no putas' reforzando el empoderamiento político de todas. De ese modo, NMNP no despliega un testimonio tradicional donde una persona cuenta su vida, sino que lleva a cabo una elaboración conceptual de una experiencia política en el formato de una memoria transversal, capaz de ser retomada en el futuro en su ímpetu de ruptura y desplazamiento político.

Con todo ello, sostengo que *Ninguna mujer nace para puta* constituye una memoria transversal que alimenta la radicalidad del movimiento feminista actual en Argentina. Para elaborar esta tesis, mi argumento se despliega en tres secciones. En la parte 1, presento las características del movimiento feminista *Ni una menos* y su conexión con la cultura de la memoria en el país. Esta conexión me permite distinguir la potencia transversal de la lucha por la memoria histórica, y al mismo tiempo, plantear su fuerza de ruptura como fuente primordial de la genealogía política del feminismo en el país. En la parte 2, indago el modo en que el método dialógico del

3 El uso de 'todes' en vez de 'todos' surge para resaltar la desigualdad de género que carga estructuralmente la lengua castellana. El así denominado 'lenguaje inclusivo' transforma el género de las palabras utilizando las terminaciones 'x', '@' y 'e' (Castillo Sánchez, Mayo 2019, s.p.). El uso de la letra 'e' ha sido quizás el más controvertido dada la facilidad de su expresión oral. Aunque también ha habido disquisiciones en torno a la expresión escrita de documentos, como en organismos públicos o en el circuito académico. Cabe destacar que este lenguaje inclusivo ha sido implementado en los grupos feministas y personas afines en Argentina, Uruguay y Chile, al menos a partir de 2018. En este capítulo, voy a utilizar itálicas para destacar su uso en los momentos en que resultan conceptualmente relevantes para indicar el desplazamiento de la subjetividad que invocan.

4 A lo largo del texto, utilizaré la palabra 'puta' o 'putas' entre comillas cuando me refiera a la palabra o para distinguir entre mujeres 'putas' y 'no putas'. En los otros casos, cuando refiere a la figura de la puta, no usaré comillas. Me refiero a las disquisiciones sobre el uso de esta terminología en la parte 2 de este capítulo.

libro disloca la subjetividad y el formato testimonial para reformular el locus de enunciación de la puta (y de las mujeres) con relación al feminismo.

Por último, en la parte 3, me pregunto de qué modo el cuestionamiento del lenguaje y de las estrategias organizativas llevado a cabo por las autoras impactó la radicalización y masificación del movimiento feminista. Para ello, comparo el uso de la palabra 'puta' en NMNP con la performance *El violador en tu camino*, la cual se ha vuelto un himno del feminismo a nivel internacional (Las Tesis 2018, s.p.). Y para concluir, reflexiono sobre la transversalidad de las rupturas organizativas planteada en NMNP en relación con la polémica antes mencionada entre abolicionistas y regulacionistas. Cabe aclarar que no es mi intención explayarme sobre las distintas facetas de esta controversia, sino que me refiero a ella como uno de los desafíos actuales donde el movimiento feminista enfrenta el fantasma de la ruptura o la pérdida de su potencia radical.

Parte I

2 Genealogías feministas: *Ni una menos* y la cultura de la memoria

El movimiento feminista en Argentina estalló masivamente el 3 de junio de 2015 a partir de una convocatoria del colectivo *Ni una menos* para protestar frente al femicidio de Chiara Páez, una chica de 14 años asesinada por su novio.⁵ Ese día, la movilización callejera desbordó ampliamente la proyección de las organizadoras de *Ni una menos* alcanzando a distintas ciudades del país. Desde entonces, ese evento político funcionó como hito fundacional para la expansión de la lucha contra el patriarcado a nivel masivo y popular (Bidaseca 2016). En los años siguientes, se multiplicaron las huelgas feministas y se consolidaron demandas concretas, tales como los pedidos de protección de las mujeres contra la violencia doméstica (que es política) o los proyectos de ley por la legalización del aborto (obtenido en 2020).⁶ Estas consignas, entre otras, fortalecieron un proceso de lucha que interpeló a la sociedad entera de manera irreversible, instalando un horizonte de radicalidad que se proponía (y se propone aún) acabar con el patriarcado (Gago 2019, 235)

⁵ Para una interpretación del movimiento feminista, ver *#NiUnaMenos. Vivxs Nos Queremos* (Bidaseca 2016) y el artículo «Los legados de Antígona» (Pous 2019).

⁶ Ver la noticia completa en <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/314405-el-senado-sancciono-la-legalizacion-del-aborto>.

Al mismo tiempo, cabe destacar que la así denominada ‘cuarta ola feminista’ es un fenómeno de nivel internacional (Vallejo 2019, s.p.).⁷ Fuertemente sostenida por las mujeres jóvenes de una generación emergente, esta ola se ha expandido ampliamente, sobre todo en el continente americano y en Europa occidental. Sus características más visibles la componen las instancias de movilización colectiva (como la huelga internacional feminista llevada a cabo cada 8 de marzo), su expansión en las redes sociales (como el caso del movimiento *Me Too*) y su impacto en las políticas públicas (como el caso de la legalización del aborto citado más arriba). En términos genealógicos e interseccionales, sin embargo, el encuadre predominante de esta historización de las ‘olas feministas’ destaca luchas propias de países europeos y de Estados Unidos, enfocándose en las revueltas por los derechos civiles y políticos. Sin desmerecer esas luchas fundacionales, resulta crucial reconocer otras genealogías anti-coloniales, anti-racistas y anti-clasistas que se intersectan con éstas, a veces coincidiendo y a veces generando conflictos y rupturas.⁸ Y si bien excede ampliamente este trabajo, resulta fundamental considerar esta perspectiva en la realización de este mapa genealógico.

En este contexto, la singularidad de este fenómeno social en Argentina se destacó por la coincidencia entre la expansión masiva del movimiento feminista y la radicalidad de sus consignas y prácticas políticas (Gago 2019, 234).⁹ En su libro *La potencia feminista* (2019), Verónica Gago sostiene que esta confluencia histórica se debe a que la transversalidad de las luchas que el feminismo ha aglutinado con el correr de los años «prioriza una política de construcción de proximidad y alianzas sin desconocer las diferencias de intensidad en los conflictos» (236).

Mi objetivo en este capítulo consiste en avanzar sobre esta hipótesis de Gago que identifica la transversalidad política como el conector fundamental entre radicalidad y masividad propio del feminismo

7 Muy brevemente, la primera ola del feminismo engloba la lucha por «los derechos de la mujer y la educación» desde la Revolución Francesa de 1789 hasta mediados del siglo XIX. La segunda ola refiere a las luchas por «los derechos civiles y políticos de las mujeres», especialmente los movimientos de *suffragette* de Estados Unidos e Inglaterra por alcanzar el voto femenino (de mediados del siglo XIX hasta mediados del XX). Y la tercera ola, ocurrida a partir de la década del setenta, se enfoca en «las políticas públicas que reivindican a la mujer y el fin del patriarcado» incluyendo los dilemas de «la violencia de género y la sexualidad en la mujer» tales como el control del cuerpo mediante el uso de anticonceptivos. En esta genealogía, la característica de la cuarta ola es su «activismo a gran escala dada la masificación de los medios de comunicación virtuales» (Vallejos 2019, s.p.).

8 Para explorar este tipo de genealogía anticolonial, ver el libro *A despatriarcar!* (Galindo 2013).

9 La tercera de las ocho tesis de Gago dice: «El movimiento feminista actual se caracteriza por dos dinámicas singulares: la conjunción de masividad y radicalidad. Esto lo logra porque construye proximidad entre luchas muy diferentes. De esta manera inventa y cultiva un modo de transversalidad política» (Gago 2019, 234).

contemporáneo en Argentina. Para ello considero fundamental vincular la transversalidad política con la cultura de la memoria histórica generada en el país en torno a la última dictadura militar (1976-1983).¹⁰ Me refiero a la búsqueda de verdad, justicia y reparación en torno a los desaparecidos y sus familiares llevada a cabo por distintos organismos de derechos humanos desde hace casi cincuenta años. El impacto de este activismo ha funcionado como caldo de cultivo para la formación de nuevos movimientos sociales, mientras ha interpelado a cada *une* a tomar una posición política con respecto a la memoria histórica de aquellos años.

De manera específica, las figuras de Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo han sido referentes fundamentales para el movimiento feminista trazando una genealogía directa entre ambas luchas.¹¹ Esto se expresa en el paralelo entre la búsqueda de justicia por los desaparecidos llevada a cabo por estos organismos de derechos humanos, y la lucha contra los femicidios propia del feminismo contemporáneo. Además, a nivel simbólico, el uso de los pañuelos blancos en la cabeza, que ha caracterizado a Madres y Abuelas, ha sido adoptado por los pañuelos verdes en la lucha por el derecho al aborto (Felitti, Ramírez Morales 2020). De hecho, Nora Cortiñas, de Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Línea fundadora), dijo que «no era feminista hasta que se llevaron a mi hijo».¹² De ese modo, Cortiñas reformula la lucha por los desaparecidos con los nuevos lentes feministas habilitando la transversalidad de memorias entre ambos movimientos.

En el contexto de esta cultura política, considero que NMNP se erige como una memoria transversal cuya genealogía funciona a contrapelo de esa misma cultura. Esto se debe a que la especificidad de la transversalidad del libro de María y Sonia, aquello que la distingue, se circunscribe al tema de la ruptura. En términos genealógicos, el problema no es identificar la coincidencia del feminismo con la lucha por los derechos humanos, sino más bien en analizar en «la entrada de sus fuerzas [y] su erupción» como movimiento político, los orígenes dispersos de donde proviene (Foucault 1977, 149). Porque

10 Además del vínculo con la lucha por los derechos humanos, Gago señala otras tres genealogías específicas que confluyen en la emergencia del feminismo actual: «las más de tres décadas del Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres [...] la irrupción del movimiento piquetero [...] y la larga historia del movimiento de disidencias sexuales» que proviene también desde los años setenta (Gago 2019, 235).

11 Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo son un grupo de mujeres que se organizaron para pedirle al Estado por sus hijos e hijas que habían desaparecido durante la dictadura militar. Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, por su parte, formaron un grupo para exigirle al Estado la búsqueda de sus nietos (hijos de las personas desaparecidas) que en su mayoría fueron dados ilegalmente en adopción a hogares afines al régimen militar de entonces.

12 N. Cortiñas, «No era feminista hasta que se llevaron a mi hijo», *La tinta*, 7 de junio de 2017. <https://latinta.com.ar/2017/06/nora-cortinas-no-era-feminista-hasta-que-se-llevaron-a-mi-hijo/>.

justamente, si algo impulsa al feminismo es su potencia de ruptura con el patriarcado.

En términos del mapa genealógico, NMNP lleva a cabo tres rupturas radicales que sirven de precedente al modus operandi del feminismo actual. Me refiero, primero, al uso del diálogo entre las dos activistas. En vez del registro de un testimonio por parte de una mujer 'no puta' hacia una mujer 'puta', María y Sonia ejercen un método dialógico donde hablan de 'igual a igual' como mujeres militantes con trayectorias disímiles. Esta alianza heterogénea entre sujetos de enunciación distintos ha contribuido a la masificación del movimiento feminista que hoy incluye a sectores populares y sus *lideresas* como actores que participan en los procesos de decisión política en las asambleas (Gago 2019, 158).

En segundo lugar, Sonia y María proponen usar la palabra 'puta' en contraposición con el lenguaje de 'trabajadoras sexuales' impuesto por el circuito de oenegés y sindicatos. Desde su perspectiva, la utilización de la palabra 'puta' genera un impacto disruptivo dado su uso peyorativo generalizado en la sociedad que exige enfrentar los presupuestos que asumen sus distintos significados. De modo similar, la transformación del 'lenguaje inclusivo' propia del feminismo, por ejemplo, con el uso de la letra 'e' en *todes*, genera discusiones sobre el trasfondo patriarcal del idioma castellano.

Por último, las autoras proponen un modelo organizativo basado en alianzas heterogéneas entre grupos o individuos. La característica de estas alianzas es que procesan las rupturas, potenciales y reales, como parte constitutivas de las decisiones y acciones políticas. Uno de los objetivos de esta estrategia es evitar la cooptación de las luchas por organizaciones 'parásitas' o por el Estado mismo. De igual manera, *Ni una menos* privilegia las asambleas como órganos de decisión política donde *todes* confluyen en una acción consensuada (Gago 2019, 236). Según Judith Butler, las asambleas transforman la «precariedad» de la situación y la «vulnerabilidad de los cuerpos» (su capacidad afectiva de sentir y ser afectada) en una «performance política» donde la «interdependencia» de *les* participantes confluye en una fuerza común organizada que sostiene el corazón de la democracia (Butler 2015, 22).

En síntesis, la memoria transversal de NMNP funciona con esta potencia de ruptura tanto en el formato como en el lenguaje y los modos de organización política. Es una memoria de rupturas que emerge en una cultura de la memoria histórica, la cual le permite canalizar su transversalidad. La paradoja final de esta genealogía es que carga la potencia de transformación radical anti-patriarcal mientras se enfrenta, con la precariedad de los cuerpos en la asamblea, a la posibilidad real de la ruptura misma del movimiento.

Parte II

3 *Ninguna mujer nace para puta: el desplazamiento subjetivo*

Cuando Sonia y María proponen pensar la experiencia de la puta como un problema que implica a todas las mujeres y a toda la sociedad están derribando el estereotipo que enfrenta la ‘mujer buena, no-puta’ contra la ‘mujer mala, la puta’. De ese modo, no «presuponen una idea universal de mujer», como sostienen Morcillo y Varela, sino por el contrario, buscan despejar las capas del patriarcado que la acicalan para ponerla a discutir entre mujeres (Morcillo, Varela 2017, 230). Es decir, al invertir la dicotomía de los roles femeninos y desplazar el esquema que los contiene, el libro (y la muestra) plantean desde el título un punto de partida ineludible: nacemos mujeres antes de ser putas, y por lo tanto, como putas, tenemos la posibilidad de interpelar e interpelarnos como mujeres.

El uso del plural en primera persona procura distinguir la apelación al conjunto de mujeres como parte de esta sociedad. Siendo el que escribe este texto un hombre, la distancia subjetiva y política con ese *nosotras*, plantea una grieta en el despliegue del argumento. Es desde esa grieta, íntima y social a la vez, abierta en parte por la lectura de este libro, desde donde esta intervención me interpela. No solo en el reconocimiento de mi trayectoria privilegiada dentro de la estructura patriarcal, racial y clasista en la que vivimos, sino en el impulso personal y colectivo a través del cual buscamos arrancar de raíz esa misma imposición que nos corroe por dentro. Por lo tanto, es la pregunta por el lugar desplazado de la masculinidad frente al colectivo de mujeres, la dislocación que habilita esta reflexión. Y es por eso que el locus de enunciación en la redacción de este artículo alterna entre el uso del plural como lector y ciudadano (interpelado por el contenido del libro) y mi propia intervención crítica como escritor en primera persona.

Desde esa perspectiva, la propuesta de Sonia y María cambia los términos del diálogo: nos obliga a escuchar a la puta sin mediaciones ni «maquillajes», como dice Sonia, para referirse a la narrativa que cubre, justifica y hace presentable a la puta en la sociedad. En consecuencia, al ponernos en el lugar de la otra, nos impulsa a cuestionar los prejuicios propios, al mismo tiempo que nos exige reconocer el saber de la puta sobre el deseo y los cuerpos, sobre la trama relacional del poder que opera dentro y fuera de la sexualidad. En el cruce de ambos desplazamientos, el libro plantea la posibilidad de generar «alianzas placenteras, enriquecedoras, horizontales, cargadas de pasión y de sentido de encuentro entre diferentes» (NMNP, María, 12).

Específicamente, NMNP convoca a un encuentro entre mujeres ‘putas’ y mujeres ‘no putas’ en un registro común. Sonia y María proponen un desplazamiento de lugar (físico, conceptual, y subjetivo) con el obje-

tivo de que las mujeres puedan enfrentarse a sí mismas frente a la experiencia de las otras. Desde mi perspectiva, este dislocamiento es un resultado de la transversalidad que genera memoria, pues al moverse del lugar asignado, emerge la potencialidad de visibilizar y escuchar a la otra. Y de ese modo, la experiencia del encuentro entre mujeres registrada en el libro imprime una marca que las atraviesa para insertarse en su cuerpo y en la historia. Y en consecuencia, partiendo de esta dislocación, María y Sonia construyen lo que denomino ‘un método dialógico’, el cual procura incorporar y sostener este desplazamiento subjetivo como parte del socavamiento constante del patriarcado.

4 Método dialógico: la palabra directa y la máquina de preguntar preguntándose

El método dialógico llevado a cabo por las autoras coloca a las putas en el centro de la indagación del universo femenino, con el objetivo de dismantelar la trama de opresión y explotación sistemática en la que se encuentran las mujeres. Para ello, María pone en funcionamiento una «máquina» de preguntar «que también obliga [a] hablar, pensar y descartar las palabras fáciles» donde el sujeto es hablado por un discurso que lo determina (NMNP, María, 200). Esta máquina de preguntar preguntándose exige indagarse a sí misma para interpelar a la otra; y al hacerlo, cuestiona el lenguaje, el pensamiento y la estructura del diálogo que lo habilita.

Por su parte Sonia utiliza la *palabra directa*, en referencia a la voz propia de la puta que logra desprenderse de los roles que está invitada a jugar. Cabe aclarar que no se trata de la veracidad de una voz que representa a todas, sino de una voz que, al reconocerse como resultado del procesamiento de su experiencia singular, interpela la base de los significados que contienen la figura de la puta. De ese modo, la máquina de preguntar preguntándose de María se combina con el uso de la palabra directa de Sonia, para discernir conceptualmente las distintas capas de análisis y crear una memoria del encuentro en formato de libro.

Mediante este método dialógico, la propuesta de NMNP consiste en identificar la interdependencia política entre tres constelaciones sociales que usualmente operan por separado para pensar la opresión que se ejerce sobre las putas y las mujeres en general. Me refiero, en primer lugar, a las mujeres en situación de prostitución que están directamente sometidas frente al ‘fiolo’, y viven en función del ‘prostituyente’.¹³ El grado de explotación económica y precarización

13 El ‘fiolo’ o proxeneta refieren a la persona, en general un hombre, que explota económica y personalmente a la prostituta.

social en esta relación de dominación directa implica una vulnerabilidad elemental de las putas frente al proxeneta quienes están obligadas a responder a las necesidades del prostituyente sin un amparo externo que la contenga.¹⁴

En segundo lugar, esta relación de dominación funciona como la contraparte del mundo patriarcal de la familia. Allí, los 'hombres de familia', o se aprovechan de este sistema como prostituyentes, o pasan desapercibidos sin intervenir en él. Mientras que las mujeres 'no putas' pueden descansar a pesar de su propia sumisión: tal el caso prototípico de la «ama de casa» cuya soledad se encuentra cobijada por una unidad económica que la sostiene y un discurso social que la valora (NMNP, 23). Todo ello lleva a denigrar el trabajo de las putas para resaltar modelos de mujeres que se comportan de acuerdo con las reglas sociales de la familia. Y de ese modo, el desprecio de una mujer 'puta' funciona para valorizar, en contraposición, a una mujer 'no puta'.

Por último, en tercer lugar, la explotación de las trabajadoras sexuales se ancla en el intercambio económico de sexo por dinero, del cual el cuerpo de la mujer que es explotado no percibe los «beneficios correspondientes» (NMNP, 16). Al mismo tiempo, el dispositivo político que sostiene la industria de la prostitución se extiende en una trama que implica al Estado y a «los parásitos» (sindicatos, iglesias, oenegés, etc.) (16). Estos cómplices, sostienen las autoras, procuran ofrecer una ayuda, pero terminan en su mayoría por reforzar el lugar de la puta en ese mismo sistema opresor. Las explotan de otro modo, aunque no dejan de reflejar las estrategias dobles del fiolo, que cuida y humilla a la prostituta para mantenerla sometida. «Los parásitos hablan por vos», dice Sonia, «te tutelan, te representan, te intermedian, te quitan la voz y te imponen su pensamiento de una manera suavizada, sutil a veces, y siempre disfrazada de ayuda» (NMNP, Sonia, 103 y 104). La paradoja de los parásitos es que «generan dependencia en nosotras», continúa Sonia, y «al mismo tiempo dependen de nosotras» (104).

En todo caso, este triple esquema de opresión y explotación que implica la dominación directa fiolo-prostituyente-prostituta, la complicidad social generalizada (por participación u omisión) y la sustracción parasitaria de organismos gubernamentales y no gubernamentales, predetermina el locus de enunciación de las putas. De hecho, la descripción de este cuadro de situación refuerza la victimización de las mujeres en situación de prostitución y frena su potencial empoderamiento.

14 Hay que destacar que el ejercicio de la prostitución es legal en Argentina. Y aun así, la trama clandestina de la trata y los locales no habilitados funcionan como elementos predominantes para sostener el funcionamiento clandestino de la industria en el país.

Para contrarrestar esta paradoja, Sonia pone en práctica el uso de la palabra directa para correr a la puta del lugar de la víctima y del supuesto orgullo de su trabajo. En ese sentido, NMNP no es un testimonio clásico de denuncia (aunque sí opera una denuncia al patriarcado). Y tampoco es la reivindicación de un trabajo, desde donde poder pedir un aumento de salario o mejores condiciones laborales (aunque eso también es necesario). Para María, el punto de partida para llevar a cabo esta inversión de roles consiste en preguntarse primero por el dolor de la puta para habilitar luego la expresión del dolor compartido por las mujeres. Y en última instancia, esta metodología «revisa la intimidad subjetiva de una complicidad» con el sistema, la cual es necesario quebrar para avanzar en la lucha contra el patriarcado (NMNP, María, 112).

Desde mi punto de vista, la máquina de preguntar preguntándose y la palabra directa se potencian para transformar el develamiento de esa intimidad en una memoria transversal. Al compartir la experiencia propia entre mujeres en un espacio autónomo (como en la muestra o en el libro), esa intimidad deja una huella que se vuelve fuente de complicidad en la lucha contra el patriarcado. Aunque para ello resulta fundamental desprenderse de los formatos testimoniales donde una sola persona comparte su historia, y por lo tanto se construye una narrativa en torno al dolor ajeno donde *les* testimoniante quedan expuestos de tal modo que puede terminar «causándole más daño a la víctima sobre la que se cuenta la historia» (Dawes 2012, 394).

5 Una memoria transversal más allá del testimonio

A primera vista, NMNP pareciera seguir el esquema propio del testimonio político latinoamericano: María, una mujer ‘no-puta’, intelectual y activista interroga a una mujer ex prostituta, sindicalizada, sobre el mundo de la prostitución para darle voz a ese ‘sujeto subalterno’ que nos da su versión de primera mano del sufrimiento y la injusticia vividas en las calles y los prostíbulos por el colectivo de trabajadoras sexuales.¹⁵ Por el contrario, como vimos con el método dialógico, el dislocamiento subjetivo exige deconstruir este esquema testimonial:

¡Es que ofrecemos tanta información! [dice Sonia] que escriben libros sobre nosotras, y nosotras no somos las escritoras de esos libros. Y nuestro testimonio no va como pensamiento, va como una historia que se construye sobre una relación de poder. (NMNP, Sonia, 122)

¹⁵ Para un análisis del testimonio y la subalternidad, ver, entre otros, *On Testimony: The Politics of Truth* (Beverley 2004), y el ya clásico texto «Can the Subaltern Speak?» (Spivak 2010).

Este desmantelamiento puede vislumbrarse ya desde el comienzo del texto cuando las autoras se presentan como mujeres militantes. Para Sonia, «este libro es una manera de tener voz propia y que nunca más me la arrebaten bajo ningún pretexto. Las putas hemos puesto el cuerpo siempre para sobrevivir y para luchar, pero nunca la palabra» (NMNP, Sonia, 14 y 15). Por su parte María dice: «Lo hago como grafitera, como feminista, como agitadora callejera, como lesbiana y como una terca convencida de que las alianzas prohibidas e insólitas son las únicas que nos enriquecen» (NMNP, María, 12). De ese modo, ambas mujeres ya tienen su voz, su pensamiento y su trayectoria política desde donde establecen el diálogo en el libro, el cual a su vez potencia la radicalidad de sus luchas. En ese sentido, concluye María, «[n]o es un libro testimonial, sino conceptual» (NMNP, María, 189).

No obstante, este desplazamiento del formato no quita que Sonia comparta su experiencia como trabajadora sexual y como activista con distintos colectivos organizados de putas a las que solo ellas pueden referirse porque lo conocen desde adentro. Me refiero a las dinámicas propias del grupo de mujeres en situación de prostitución, pero también a la profunda reflexión sobre la soledad y la omisión de la puta que Sonia lleva a cabo en los primeros capítulos.

En efecto, la soledad de la puta es única porque está sujeta al mecanismo político donde «todos quieren expulsarla, al mismo tiempo que la utilizan» (NMNP, María, 23). En ese sentido, la soledad de la puta es 'total': se la menciona para omitirla como ser (23). Se borra su existencia en el propio uso de la palabra en una suerte de inclusión anuladora. Más aún: este mecanismo perverso de la omisión de la puta es también un reflejo de la omisión de las mujeres en la sociedad que, en algunos casos, buscan «la inclusión, [...] desde una anulación» de sí mismas en función de los valores del mundo patriarcal (NMNP, Sonia, 30 y 31).

En definitiva, si bien hay un elemento testimonial que destaca la soledad y la omisión de la puta, el objetivo de éste es reconocer la singularidad de su experiencia para elaborar conceptualmente las alianzas transversales entre las mujeres. Acaso se podría decir que el libro es un testimonio de lucha sin formato testimonial. O más precisamente, se trata de un texto que interpela el fundamento político del patriarcado desde la experiencia militante de dos mujeres pensadoras frente al mundo de la prostitución. La intensidad de esta experiencia es lo que cuenta (y se cuenta) en el libro porque en esa soledad de «la esquina» donde se paran miles de mujeres para ejercer la prostitución, hostigadas por proxenetas, policías y prostituyentes, nace la rebeldía de la puta que «no tiene más nada que perder, [pues] ya lo ha perdido todo» (NMNP, Sonia, 100).

Desde mi perspectiva, la potencia de NMNP reside en su impulso por expandir esa rebeldía a otras situaciones de opresión de las mu-

jeros, acaso distintas en intensidad, pero sujetas a un mecanismo similar: la humillación para reforzar la sumisión. Para María, «dar el testimonio como india, puta, lesbiana campesina migrante o mujer pobre sólo repite y reitera tu lugar de subordinación» (NMNP, María, 180). En cambio, la palabra directa interpela a hombres y a mujeres a reconocer su responsabilidad en esa soledad singular de la puta. De ese modo, en vez de indagar a las putas para poder dar cuenta de su sufrimiento y su capacidad de cambio, propone reconocerlas como interlocutoras de un diálogo de transformación colectiva. Y en última instancia, María arguye que «el lugar de la puta es el de la anfitriona del cambio social» (NMNP, María, 193).

Esta propuesta tiene un impacto directo en el movimiento feminista actual: no solo le exige a éste incorporar a la puta como interlocutora del colectivo de mujeres, sino que distingue en su experiencia y su pensamiento la capacidad de la puta de *recibir el testimonio de otras mujeres* (para ponerlo con el lenguaje que nos ocupa en este apartado). Con ello, las autoras invierten los roles y los desplazan hasta cuestionar el fundamento político de lo colectivo que sostiene el feminismo: ¿En qué modelo de mujer se sustenta la búsqueda común de derribar el patriarcado? ¿Se ha asumido, de modo consciente o inconsciente, un modelo o referente que organiza el colectivo feminista? ¿Cuál es el rol de la anfitriona del cambio social? ¿Desean las putas mismas asumirlo? ¿No debería rotar con el tiempo para no consolidar poder en una persona o una figura política? ¿Dónde queda el valor del testimonio (sin la estructura testimonial) si las que escuchan el relato son aquellas que más han sufrido?

En todo caso, estas preguntas corroboran la actualidad del método dialógico para indagar el sustrato radical del movimiento feminista. Para mí, NMNP es una memoria transversal que habilita y, a la vez, interpela al feminismo actual porque refleja un cambio colectivo en la intimidad subjetiva. Y esto lo logra en al menos tres registros. Primero, el libro es, en sí mismo, un ejercicio de memoria porque deja una huella sobre una expresión artística (la muestra) que refleja una experiencia (la de las putas en la vida cotidiana), la cual puede ser retomada y renovada en el futuro (en este caso, por el movimiento feminista). En segundo lugar, es transversal en su *modus operandi* (el preguntar preguntándose y la palabra directa) porque requiere reconocer la palabra de la otra (su dolor, su pensamiento, y el desacuerdo entre ambas) desde la experiencia propia, desmantelando el formato testimonial. Y por último, el efecto de inversión de roles y la proposición de considerar a la puta como anfitriona del cambio social habilita al feminismo a ir más allá de sí mismo. No porque haya que aceptar o rechazar esta propuesta, sino porque la misma abre un horizonte radical de preguntas que, en el enfrentamiento con sus propios presupuestos, se juega la vitalidad del movimiento feminista y el alcance histórico de sus triunfos concretos.

Para abordar la trama de este dilema, que no es otro que el delicado balance entre demandas concretas e impulsos radicales, voy a analizar dos instancias de memoria transversal en el libro de María y Sonia. Me refiero al uso de la palabra 'puta' como interpelación política, y a los dilemas organizativos del colectivo de mujeres entendidos como alianzas heterogéneas que operan con un horizonte de ruptura con el patriarcado.

Parte III

6 El uso de la palabra 'puta' como interpelación política

Según Sonia, hay que «empezar a mirarnos a nosotras [las putas], a interpelarnos a nosotras para interpelar a los demás» (NMNP, Sonia, 177). Si bien es cierto que habría que interpelar al prostituyente como el primer eslabón del uso de la palabra 'puta' como acceso al sistema de explotación y perversión que lo rodea, las autoras sostienen la importancia fundamental de trabajar las subjetividades de las putas a partir de esa nominación. «Cuando yo me dije puta [dice Sonia] a mí me dolió. [Pero] para que haya un cambio hay que empezar a decírtelo» (177). En efecto, dada la especificidad de la vida de las mujeres en situación de prostitución, Sonia sostiene que no es posible una relación de «pares» entre putas basada en las experiencias de ellas porque así planteado, solo refuerza el lugar de pertenencia que cada una tiene (NMNP, Sonia, 171). De ese modo, la palabra 'puta' genera mucho dolor porque «una puta para otra puta es una puta. [Por eso hay que empezar por] decírtelo para que resuene y abra una grieta que te permita cuestionarte y cuestionar las condiciones de reproducción junto a tus compañeras» (171).

En su estudio sobre las «mujeres que ejercen prostitución» en Río Gallegos, Argentina, Romina Behrens sostiene que hay que considerar cómo ellas mismas se perciben y prefieren ser denominadas dada la situación de clandestinidad o semi-clandestinidad en la que viven (Behrens 2017, 10). La autora destaca que estas mujeres entienden «su relación con la prostitución desde la acción y no desde la identidad, porque esta identidad no aparece como problema en sus relatos» (10). De ese modo, la trama identitaria se reduce y se desprende de su impronta esencialista para dar lugar a la circulación de palabras como 'puta' o 'trola' donde prevalece la acción como base de la narrativa.

Ante esta tensión entre la interpelación directa y la elección personal de cada una, Sonia se pregunta: «¿Por qué esa palabra nos paraliza?» (NMNP, Sonia, 178). El problema es que en cada interacción, cada una de ellas le recuerda a la otra su sufrimiento y su lugar anu-

lado en la sociedad. Este reforzamiento basado en la igualdad de las experiencias, sin pensar las trayectorias personales y sus significados, se expresa en el uso de palabras sustitutas tales como «trabajadoras sexuales» o «sexo-servidoras» (NMNP, María, 14). El resultado del uso de este lenguaje suaviza el dolor y, en consecuencia, genera una paralización. Frente a ello, Sonia se pregunta: «¿Quién controla el sentido de esa palabra? ¿Cómo devolverla a la sociedad?» (NMNP, Sonia, 178). En ese punto, María propone que «lo que todas las mujeres necesitamos es usar esa palabra [puta] para procesarla y que no nos paralice más» (NMNP, María, 106).

Esta propuesta va mano en mano con el uso de la palabra directa y la máquina de preguntar preguntándose, dado que «la prostitución es un espejo fundamental para todas las mujeres del mundo [y] la palabra puta está instalada al mismo tiempo que la palabra mamá» (NMNP, Sonia, 14). En su reverso, para los hombres que no forman parte del sistema de explotación de la prostitución (fiolo, prostituyente, policía) ni del parasitismo (sindicato, oenegés, iglesias, etc.), este espejo refleja su grado de complicidad con el patriarcado: la complicidad de sentirse ‘observador’ frente a las capas de desigualdad de género cuya violencia impúdica recae en el cuerpo de las mujeres. En ese sentido, la palabra ‘puta’ dicha por un hombre no tiene el mismo efecto, y en general refuerza el poder opresor que la promueve. De hecho, solo funciona cuando logra avanzar como palabra directa en el desmantelamiento de las complicidades no asumidas, y nos enfrenta al espejo que refleja esa escisión íntima detrás de las palabras complacientes.

Sonia sostiene que procesar cada experiencia es un «largo camino de regreso a casa» para apropiarse de «tu cuerpo, tu palabra y tu decidir» (NMNP, Sonia, 59). Pero no es un retorno a la casa de la infancia o a un sitio idílico. Para Sonia, «la casa eres tú» (59). Y para llegar a ello, hay que moverse de lugar: «parar y mirarse al espejo», salir del circuito cotidiano, porque «no es desde el lugar de la víctima o de la enferma que haces este proceso, [sino] desde el lugar de la mujer rebelde» (NMNP, Sonia, 65). De esa manera, la casa-cuerpo, el espejo y la rebeldía confluyen para «reinventarte a ti misma» y legitimar el uso de la palabra ‘puta’ como palabra directa que interpela las subjetividades, y a la sociedad patriarcal.

Desde mi punto de vista, este mecanismo doble de interpelación que opera para socavar la internalización del patriarcado en las subjetividades políticas que lo sostienen es uno de los pilares del feminismo actual. Sobre todo, cuando pensamos cómo las mujeres, al procesar colectivamente las experiencias traumáticas de vida, propias y ajenas, pueden empoderarse para denunciar y exigir al Estado una política pública pertinente. En ese sentido, Sonia considera que el Estado no solo es patriarcal, sino que también es ‘proxeneta’, sobre todo cuando ofrece cajas de alimentos y condones a las putas, pero no ataca al

sistema de la prostitución (NMNP, Sonia, 72). De ese modo, hace más «llevadera» la vida cotidiana de las putas, aprovechándose de su explotación mientras «adormece» su capacidad de empoderamiento (72).

En el feminismo contemporáneo, el caso más emblemático que despliega el uso de la palabra directa como mecanismo de denuncia, es la canción/performance *El violador en tu camino* (Las Tesis 2019, s.p.).¹⁶ Creada por el grupo Las Tesis, la performance se representó por primera vez el 25 de noviembre de 2019 en Valparaíso, Chile, en medio de un estallido social a nivel nacional.¹⁷ La misma dispone a un grupo de mujeres (usualmente con una venda en los ojos) que llevan a cabo una danza simple y enérgica en la vía pública. Las palabras de la canción denuncian a los hombres y al Estado por las violaciones y abusos cometidos contra las mujeres. La interpelación de la poesía invierte los roles estereotípicos en torno a la violencia contra la mujer cuando dice: «y la culpa no era mía, ni como vestía» (Las Tesis 2019, s.p.). Al mismo tiempo, en la performance, acusa y señala con el dedo índice a los hombres y al Estado, mientras les canta frases como: «el violador eres tú» o «es el Estado violador, el juez, el presidente». De ese modo, la canción/performance desplaza la mirada de culpabilización sobre las mujeres e identifica el origen del problema en el patriarcado y la estructura política que lo sostiene.

Cabe destacar que, en la combinación de sus presentaciones en protestas feministas alrededor del mundo y su reproducción masiva en las redes sociales, *El violador en tu camino* se ha convertido en uno de los himnos más representativos de esta cuarta ola feminista.¹⁸ La radicalidad de la canción/performance reside en el empoderamiento de las mujeres que, con su cuerpo y su voz, acusan pública

16 Compuesto por cuatro chicas jóvenes, Las Tesis es un colectivo que utiliza el saber de las teóricas feministas para crear material artístico que sea ‘entendible’ masivamente. El ejemplo de esta canción/performance, si bien sobrepasó sus objetivos, al mismo tiempo, hizo efectivo el espíritu de su intervención. Por otro lado, el estallido social de octubre de 2019 en Chile comenzó con una protesta contra el aumento del boleto del metro llevada a cabo, en su mayoría, por jóvenes que dijeron «basta» a las políticas neoliberales. La protesta se expandió a nivel nacional, y tuvo su punto más álgido en una convocatoria multitudinaria conocida como la ‘Marcha más grande’ el 25 de octubre de 2019, donde se calcula que 3 millones de personas protestaron pacíficamente en todo el país. En los siguientes días, se convocó a un plebiscito para llevar a cabo una reforma constitucional que recién en 2020 aprobó la realización de una asamblea constituyente popular (https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_marcha_m%C3%A1s_grande_de_Chile).

17 El 25 de noviembre es el Día Internacional de la Eliminación de la Violencia contra la Mujer.

18 Resulta interesante ver el mapa interactivo que señala los sitios donde esta performance ha tenido lugar desde su creación para medir el impacto de esta ola feminista en el mundo occidental: https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/es/map/un-violador-en-tu-camino-20192021-actualizado-al-0_394247?fbclid=IwAR1engk0-FaIsZ4xSzI7Gn82dIPbBtUvw0V70mYldr_Yr0Brow_bNj7p0B9M#2/-14.4/32.3.

y colectivamente al hombre violador y al estado que lo cobija. Por un lado, la canción pone en funcionamiento la palabra directa en el sintagma «el violador eres tú». Y por el otro, las mujeres congregadas generan una nueva danza/protesta cada vez que la presentan valorizando la actitud de enfrentar al patriarcado. En ese sentido, la puesta en escena de la performance es, como decía Sonia sobre las putas, *su nueva casa*: las mujeres ponen su cuerpo y su palabra en un espacio público y politizado, desplazado de sus roles tradicionales, mientras le devuelven el espejo a la sociedad en el uso impactante de la palabra ‘violador’.

Ambas palabras, ‘puta’ y ‘violador’, contienen una violencia que resuena e interpela a cada *une* que la menciona y a cada *une* que la escucha, produciendo un impacto que incomoda y hasta duele. Al no poder pasar desapercibidas, esas palabras requieren una reacción personal. Esto, que a primera vista puede resultar problemático y acaso poco efectivo, busca que la audiencia pueda reflexionar a partir de su propia incomodidad. De lo contrario, las palabras que refieren a lo mismo, pero no son tan impactantes, como trabajadoras sexuales o abusador, pueden bajar la tensión de lo que implican. Y no es que haya una obligación a usar siempre las palabra impactantes, sino que es importante hacerlas circular en el momento preciso para generar una ruptura política con esa violencia que contienen.

En última instancia, para transformar la profundidad en la que el patriarcado y el capitalismo funcionan bajo el maquillaje de la democracia formal, con el violador, el fiolo y el estado proxeneta, «la ruptura sólo puede ser radical» (NMNP, Sonia, 99). El dilema del feminismo ha sido cómo llevar a cabo esta ruptura en las condiciones actuales, donde la radicalidad ha alcanzado un grado tal de masividad con las huelgas feministas inigualable en las olas precedentes. Por eso vale la pena indagar los dilemas organizativos que esta expansión conlleva.

7 Dilemas organizativos: la transversalidad de las rupturas

En el último capítulo de *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*, titulado «¿Cómo construir una organización entre nosotras?», María propone «dejar detalladas las rupturas que tú propusiste [en referencia a Sonia]: rupturas de lenguaje, rupturas temáticas, rupturas del lugar, rupturas de estrategia... y por último, rupturas de horizontes» (NMNP, María, 176). Desde mi perspectiva, estas rupturas están organizadas por una transversalidad que procura incentivar y sostener el movimiento político activo. De allí que la fuerza del feminismo actual resida en la puesta en ejercicio de esta transversalidad como principio político para mantener el equilibrio entre radicalidad y masividad. Y en ese sentido, la elaboración conceptual de las rupturas

en NMNP es un precedente fundamental (una memoria transversal) para plantear los dilemas organizativos del movimiento feminista.

En el libro, el punto de partida de este análisis consiste en considerar las rupturas temáticas como impulsoras de un cambio a nivel subjetivo en relación con un horizonte radical de transformación social. Por un lado, María sostiene que no es posible «[n]inguna discusión sin los sujetos protagonistas»; y por el otro, previene sobre la posibilidad de «encerrarnos en guetos identitarios que terminan homogeneizando y repitiendo una y otra vez el mismo contenido auto-enunciativo por carencia de diálogo con otros universos de sentido» (Galindo 2020, s.p.). Compartir las experiencias de las putas entre putas, otorga una reafirmación identitaria «que tiene un impacto afectivo, porque es catárquico» (NMNP, María, 175). Sin embargo, con el tiempo, esta homogeneidad se vuelve limitante. Sonia misma destaca que luego de «once años organizadas [entre putas] no avanzaba[n], no tocába[n] otros temas» que no implicaban directamente la urgencia de sus necesidades cotidianas (NMNP, Sonia, 180).

María sostiene que, además de enfrentar la tendencia identitaria, hay que «asumir el conflicto como parte de la estructura organizativa» (NMNP, María, 199). Para ello, la autora propone formar alianzas heterogéneas para trabajar «en torno a acuerdos éticos y no de pensamientos», dado que «la capacidad de hacer política nace de la capacidad de generar ideas propias y de tomar la iniciativa asumiendo el riesgo» (199). De esa manera, la potencialidad de la ruptura estratégica funciona como la transversalidad política porque privilegia la diferencia de intereses entre grupos e individuos. Y así, marca el ritmo de la construcción colectiva que va de ruptura en ruptura, o de interpelación en interpelación, trazando el recorrido de la memoria transversal.

Desde mi lectura, la memoria fundamental que deja el libro sobre la transversalidad de las rupturas contribuye a fortalecer el feminismo contemporáneo. A modo de síntesis, NMNP despliega, primero, la saga del dislocamiento subjetivo de las putas mediante las rupturas temáticas (formato testimonial), de lugar (organización de la muestra NMNP en un local autónomo) y de lenguaje (el uso de la palabra 'puta'). Con ello, el colectivo de putas se abre a recibir a otras mujeres 'no putas' para poder avanzar estratégicamente, mediante alianzas heterogéneas, en el horizonte radical que se plantea el fin del patriarcado.

En ese sentido, el impacto de esta memoria transversal en la masificación del movimiento feminista en Argentina desde 2015 resulta significativo. A grandes rasgos, el *modus operandi* de *Ni una menos* basado en la asamblea como órgano de decisión colectivo le permite tomar iniciativas arriesgadas a partir de ideas propias (convocatorias de paros y huelgas generales), y exigir intervenciones al Estado (tales como la legalización del aborto) mientras mantiene la red activista entre los grupos homogéneos y heterogéneos que lo forman.

Todo ello nos lleva a pensar que, parafraseando a Gago, la potencia feminista de la ruptura reside en su habilidad para mantener la fluidez del triángulo entre masividad, radicalidad y transversalidad.

Sin embargo, el impulso de la ruptura con el horizonte del fin del patriarcado choca con esa misma transversalidad tensando los hilos de este equilibrio delicado. Esta tensión puede verse en la disputa entre abolicionistas y regulacionistas con relación al mundo de la prostitución, tanto en Argentina como a nivel internacional. Y si bien estas discusiones son de larga data, el carácter público y polarizante que han asumido recientemente se debe tal vez a la fusión del abolicionismo con las luchas anti-trata de los años 2000 (Morcillo, Varela 2017, 239). Y esto repercute más aún en el contexto actual, donde la convocatoria de las huelgas feministas se ve mermada por las precauciones sanitarias impuestas por el Estado en torno a la pandemia.

Retomando el comienzo del capítulo, recordemos que las abolicionistas apelan a la eliminación de la prostitución, y las regulacionistas procuran lograr conquistas demandando derechos al estado para ser reconocidas como «trabajadoras sexuales» (Morcillo, Varela 2017; Behrens 2017).¹⁹ En esta discusión, las trabajadoras sexuales organizadas en el sindicato AMMAR (con el cual Sonia rompió relaciones luego de la muestra NMNP) sostienen la importancia de conquistar derechos y ser reconocidas por el Estado y la sociedad para diferenciarse del negocio de la trata. Por su parte, Sonia escribe que «el feminismo regulacionista no existe» porque el corazón del movimiento feminista es «luchar contra tanta desigualdad, y tantas violaciones y violencias que sufrimos las mujeres», y al reconocer la prostitución, se acepta la perpetuación de esa violencia (en Sosa 2020, s.p.). En todo caso, el feminismo se encuentra frente a un dilema: no puede anular ninguno de los razonamientos ni tampoco imponer una decisión sobre uno de ellos. Como dice Sonia, «no hay un movimiento abolicionista regulacionista, ese es el patriarcado y el capitalismo introducidos en el movimiento feminista para dividir» (en Sosa 2020, s.p.).

Por su parte, Galindo sostiene que «ambas posturas configuran un cuadro binario y dicotómico que se sataniza mutuamente y dentro del cual he decidido no colocarme» (2020, s.p.). Su respuesta concreta ha sido la creación de «espacios autogestionarios de prostitutas» en Bolivia que les permiten a ellas trabajar sin la intervención constante de la policía, que en nombre de la «clandestinidad» y la presunción de «trata de personas» beneficia a los proxenetas (Galindo 2020, s.p.). De ese modo, su postura no es regulacionista porque no busca la inclusión en el Estado, sino la legislación que le permita ser autónoma. Su intervención es muy lúcida en este sentido porque es-

19 De hecho, a principio de 2020, se incorporó en Argentina «el término 'trabajadora sexual' en el registro único de trabajadores informales» (Sosa 2020, s.p.).

tos esquemas opuestos anquilosados de los movimientos políticos de izquierda son los que más daño le han causado, olvidándose de las personas concretas que enfrentan la violencia a diario.

En todo caso, hago referencia a esta polémica porque expresa el desafío de convivir con la potencia latente de la ruptura. Mi intención no es tomar una postura ni evaluarla, sino señalar el modo en que esta tensión opera dentro del movimiento feminista. De ese modo, el impacto de NMNP es doble: no solo las autoras del libro participan de esta discusión específica, sino que su reflexión sobre las rupturas se actualiza y contribuye a la misma. Por lo tanto, sería un error ver NMNP solamente como una expresión del abolicionismo. Desde mi perspectiva, resulta más productivo considerar al libro como un intento de organizar la transversalidad de las rupturas. O al menos eso es lo que he intentado demostrar aquí.

8 Corolario

A modo de síntesis, en mi propuesta de leer *Ninguna mujer nace puta* como una memoria transversal que traza la genealogía radical del feminismo contemporáneo en Argentina presenté tres análisis concretos. En primer lugar, identifiqué las rupturas que lleva a cabo el libro como su especificidad genealógica en el contexto cultural de la lucha por la memoria histórica en el país. En segundo lugar, me referí al dislocamiento subjetivo de las putas y la necesidad de invertir los roles entre las mujeres mediante el método dialógico para despertar la potencialidad del cambio social feminista. Mi énfasis en el desmantelamiento del formato testimonial buscaba iluminar la influencia de la palabra directa y el preguntar preguntándose (utilizadas por Sonia y María) en el *modus operandi* del movimiento feminista actual. Por eso analicé, en tercer lugar, el modo en que la transformación del uso de la palabra 'puta' en el libro funcionaba de modo similar al uso de la palabra 'violador' en la canción/performance *El violador eres tú* del colectivo Las Tesis. Por último, sostengo que la contribución fundamental de NMNP al feminismo es su reflexión sobre las rupturas, porque ofrece un marco de pensamiento para enfrentar los desafíos actuales, tales como la polémica entre abolicionistas y regulacionistas.

En todo caso, el dislocamiento subjetivo, el uso del método dialógico y la contemplación del doble filo de las rupturas constituyen una de las bases de la radicalización del movimiento feminista contemporáneo. Por eso creo que desplazar NMNP de la disputa entre abolicionistas y regulacionistas me ha permitido iluminar la potencia feminista que el libro contiene. Y al elaborarlo como una memoria transversal, pude establecer las conexiones entre el libro analizado y el feminismo actual con el objetivo de expandir el mapa genealógico que dio lugar a su surgimiento masivo en los años recientes.

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Dislocated Temporalities Immigration, Sexuality, and Violence in Najat El Hachmi's *L'últim patriarca*

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Abstract Recent Catalan criticism has focused on place and space, but has overlooked temporality. Yet migrations are not only a matter of space, but also of time: immigration questions the idea of origins and the possibility of a shared future. Temporality, in fact, is a key axis in the formation of identities and in cultural conflicts, also in relation to the normative uses of the body. The coexistence of asynchronous temporalities provoked by immigration is a factor in both cultural and psychic conflict. Najat El Hachmi's novel *L'últim patriarca* (2008) is an excellent example of these phenomena. Through a dialogue with the Catalan literary tradition and a focus on the shattering effects of anal sexuality, the novel problematizes biological reproduction and gender subordination, and challenges patriarchal temporality, understood as a succession of generations. This essay offers an integrated analysis of these issues by reference to psychoanalysis.

Keywords Najat El Hachmi. Catalan literature. Immigration. Temporality. Anal sex. Psychoanalysis. Jean Laplanche.

Recent Catalan scholarship has tended to focus on issues of place and space (particularly the city), and has paid a great deal of attention to immigration. In both cases the vector of temporality seems to have been largely overlooked. Yet migratory processes are not only a matter

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of space (of demographic movements and geographical relocations), but also of time: immigration engages and questions the idea of origins and the possibility of a shared future, and renders the rhythms of everyday life visible and therefore problematic. Temporality, in fact, is a key axis in the formation of identities and a site of struggles in cultural conflicts, not just regarding the uses of the past and the projection of societies towards the future, but also in relation to the definition of normative uses of the body. The coexistence of asynchronous temporalities given rise to by immigration has a double effect, as a factor in social and cultural conflicts and as a source of psychic conflict.

Najat El Hachmi's first novel, *L'últim patriarca* (2008), is an excellent example of these phenomena. In this novel, the circular temporality, based on the repetition of cycles, of a traditional society (that of rural Morocco) comes to an abrupt halt in the failure of the protagonist's father to reproduce patriarchal domination in the family's new context of Catalonia. At the same time, the novel roots this experience in modern referents through an intertextual dialogue with the Catalan literary tradition, most notably Víctor Català's *Solitud* and Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant*. On the other hand, the novel questions the idea of temporality understood as succession of generations, by means of its critique of gender subordination, and most particularly through the shattering effects of anal sexuality, which is seen here as both the cause and the strategic means of a radical break with the past.

El Hachmi's entrance into the Catalan literary field with her autobiographical essay *Jo també sóc catalana* (2004) was a remarkable event: it was saluted by the critics as the emergence of a new literary voice of recent migrants from Northern Africa who, like El Hachmi herself or Laila Karrouch, represented the experience of immigration in Catalonia; the success among the readers of this book contributed to give this experience a great deal of visibility. In 2008 El Hachmi won the Premi Ramon Llull (one of the best endowed Catalan literary awards for non-published works) with her novel *L'últim patriarca*, which was published by Planeta and later translated into several languages, including French and English. Later on, in an attempt to distance herself from the 'immigrant writer' persona into which critics and audiences had typecast her, El Hachmi published *La caçadora de cossos* (2011), a harrowing exploration of the limits of female sexuality. In 2015, she returned to the depiction of Northern African immigration in *La filla estrangera*, with which she won another major literary award, the Premi BBVA Sant Joan. More recently, El Hachmi has published the novel *Mare de llet i mel* (2018), again centered around immigrant experiences, but this time focalized from the maternal point of view; and the polemical essay *Sempre han parlat per nosaltres* (2019), in which the author puts forward a secular feminist argument against the use of the veil or the so-called 'Islamic

feminism'. In 2021 she won the prestigious Premio Nadal with *El lunes nos querrán*, which has been simultaneously published in Catalan as *Dilluns ens estimaran* (2021).

El Hachmi's work has received considerable critical attention outside Catalonia, particularly in English-speaking academia. Many of the readings produced by North-American critics tend to focus on the 'multicultural' dimension of the author and her work, against the background of an analysis of the responses to contemporary Moroccan immigration in Spain that authors such as Daniela Flesler (2008) have carried out. Thus critics like Martín-Márquez (2008) and Sanjuán-Pastor (2015) engage with the 'border identity' that El Hachmi constructs in *Jo també sóc catalana* and the inner, subjective tensions that this identity brings about; others, such as Celaya-Carrillo (2011), relate this essay to the controversies over language and Spanish nationalism in Catalonia, while Ricci (2007; 2010; 2011) takes El Hachmi's work as an example of the construction of a mixed Amazigh-Catalan identity. On the other hand, a significant group of critics perform feminist readings of *L'últim patriarca*, analyzing several aspects related to gender and immigration (Climent Raga 2010; Everly 2011; 2014), presenting the novel as a possible example of Islamic feminism (Elboubekri 2015) or engaging with the sexual politics of the novel (Folkart 2013).

The reading I present in this essay differs from the point of view of these other critics. Although I focus on the effects and the representation of immigration, I treat this novel as an integral part of the Catalan literary series, and its author as fully incorporated into the Catalan literary and cultural fields, both symbolically and in terms of position. This is not to say that the symbolic value of both author and novel is straightforward, or that their position in the cultural field is free from conflict: quite the opposite, and in consistence with my own line of thinking that immigration is the crucial factor in the constitution of a differentiated Catalan national identity (Fernàndez 2008, 255-6), my reading assumes that *L'últim patriarca* manifests as a symptom, expresses, and brings into play the conditions of possibility of the construction of contemporary Catalan identity, as well as its risks and dangers.

Although my analysis will primarily draw on psychoanalytic theory, I would like to start by referring to Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who in *Heritage of Our Times* proposes the concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* or non-contemporaneity in order to account for the disjointedness of time, its non-coincidence with itself, the persistence of an apparently superseded past which comes to disrupt the present. Bloch wrote in 1932:

Not all people exist in the same Now. Older times than the modern ones continue to have an effect in older strata [...]. Various years in

general beat in the one which is just being counted and prevails. Nor do they flourish in obscurity as in the past, but contradict the Now; very strangely, crookedly, from behind. (Bloch 1991, 97)

Historian Enzo Traverso has invoked Bloch's concept to explain the cultural conflicts experienced by second-generation immigrants in Europe (Traverso 2006, 59-60). Yet the effects of the dislocation of time, as Bloch suggests (1991, 108), are not just cultural or social, but also subjective or psychic, and manifest themselves in the form of anxiety, rage, and alienation. And as I will try to show, in *L'últim patriarca* these effects are related to the temporal organization of subjectivity, to complex cultural negotiations with tradition that the novel performs, and to language and sexuality.

The complexity of the temporal conflict depicted in the novel is already apparent in its first chapter, significantly entitled "chapter 0", as though it were the beginning of a new epoch:

Aquesta és la història de Mimoun, fill de Driouch, fill d'Allal, fill de Mohamed, fill de Mohand, fill de Bouziane, i que nosaltres anomenarem, simplement, Mimoun. És la seva història i la història de l'últim dels grans patriarques que formen la llarga cadena dels avantpassats de Driouch. (El Hachmi 2008, 7)

Thus the nameless narrator –later revealed as Mimoun's daughter, who will focalize the narrative in the entire second part of the book– both posits a view of history and time as a coherent chronological line, as the succession of generations, and anticipates its abrupt ending in a radical break with the past. Interestingly, however, this anticipation goes hand in hand with a disavowal of the very idea of origins:

De com es forma un gran patriarca o un patriarca mediocre en sabem ben poques coses, el seu origen es perd en els principis dels temps i aquí no ens interessen els orígens. [...] El fet és que Mimoun marca la finalització abrupta d'aquesta línia successòria. (2008, 7)

The author had expressed a similar ambivalence regarding the notion of origins in *Jo també sóc catalana*, where she speaks of her desire to "neutralitzar l'origen" so that it no longer stigmatizes the immigrant subject (El Hachmi 2004, 12). Yet in fact the nameless narrator of *L'últim patriarca* clearly is interested in origins, to the extent that she constructs a myth of her own origins and development as an autonomous subject, spanning from Mimoun's birth to his migration to Catalonia, his marriage, his abusive relationships with women, all the way to the narrator's birth, her education in Catalonia and adoption of the Catalan language, her trouble understanding her father's

erratic behavior and her mother's depression, her sexual awakening, and ultimately her emancipation from Mimoun's authoritarian grip by means of sexual transgression.

The impulse that mobilizes the construction of this myth, however, perhaps is not so much its neutralization but a desire to reinterpret it or, to use the term of French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche (1999, 265), to "retranslate" it. Yet there is a contradiction inherent in the narrator's statement and the teleology it both resists and reproduces: her break with the family line is an attempt to write her own destiny, but its anticipation here is itself a form of teleology. This contradiction, I would argue, is the sign of a conflict of temporalities manifested in a set of related tensions: a tension in the narrative between anticipation and uncertainty, and a tension between the oral tradition of Amazigh culture and the Catalan literary tradition through which El Hachmi mediates the narration of certain events.

The first tension is clearly apparent in the constant movement backwards and forwards in the novel, not just back to the family origin and forward towards the *dénouement*, but also in the frequent appearance of prolepses and marks of narrative unreliability. I have already mentioned how we are told from the outset that Mimoun will fail to reproduce patriarchal domination in his family; but we are also given throughout the text signals of what is to come. For example, Mimoun's grandmother sees his painless birth as a bad omen:

Un mal auguri, filla, els nens que neixen sense dolor. Si no et fan mal en néixer, te n'han de fer la resta de la vida. I així va ser. Aquell dia va néixer Mimoun, l'afortunat, el que tindria l'honor de cloure les generacions i generacions de patriarques destinats a fer del món un lloc ordenat i decent. [...] Però ell tot això encara no ho sabia. (El Hachmi 2008, 14)

Also, the loss of virginity of Mimoun's wife at her wedding night is the anticipation of great misfortune:

aquell dolor a dins de la vagina només era el començament del calvari que l'esperava. (107)

At the same time, the narration is peppered with marks of uncertainty and doubt: we are told, "Potser va anar així" (2008, 16) or, "No sabem com va anar del cert" (17), and on occasions we are given competing versions of crucial events (as is the case with the so-called 'goat's incident', in which it is strongly suggested that an adolescent Mimoun is anally penetrated by his uncle). Importantly, narrative uncertainty has a clear subjective dimension; early in the second part of the novel, when the family has reunited in Catalonia, the narrator says:

Passa, de vegades passa que no saps fins a quin punt el que va passar va passar o no. Si ho vas somiar o ho vas viure, si el record és teu o és de qui t'ho explica una vegada i una altra. Per això mai no he acabat de saber si realment vaig ser testimoni o no de l'es-trany incident. Si en vaig ser, va anar així. Si no, els records de la mare ja deuen ser també els meus i no sabré mai on vaig interve-nir-hi jo. (El Hachmi 2008, 173)

The above quotation refers to the uncertain status of traumatic events as they are reported. I will later show the relevance of this. For the moment, let me simply note that the narrator's observation denotes a certain degree of tension and anxiety regarding her own tale and her role in it.

The temporal oscillation in the novel is akin to the double move-ment of anticipation and retrospection that, according to psychoanal-ysis, organizes psychic time. Jacques Lacan accounts for this phenom-enon in two different ways. In his early essay, "Le Temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée", he argues that the subject's inte-raction with the other and the uncertainty regarding its own iden-tifications results in a temporal tension that is resolved through an anticipation of certitude which also prompts a move to action (Lacan 1999a). On the other hand, in "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage", Lacan posits the grammatical tense of the future anterior to describe the imaginary temporality of the ego:

Je m'identifie dans le langage, mais seulement à m'y perdre comme un objet. Ce qui se réalise dans mon histoire, n'est pas le passé dé-fini de ce qui fut puisqu'il n'est plus, ni même le parfait de ce qui a été dans ce que je suis, mais le futur antérieur de ce qui j'aurai été pour ce que je suis en train de devenir. (1999b, 298)

The future anterior, as Tim Dean puts it:

eclipses the uncertainties of the present by anticipating a future self with the capacity to retrospectively view its former state from a safe distance. (2011, 84)

Lacan's account of subjective time may help us make more sense of the quotation from the novel I gave a little earlier. For the tension expressed by the narrator isn't simply related to the epistemological status of the events she reports. Her anxiety has to do primarily with her origins, as the uncertainties in her own account question the co-herence of the speaking subject who narrates her story from the van-tage point of her future anterior. Yet this anxiety also affects her fu-ture: indeed, do the events narrated provide sufficient justification for her final decision, her act of betrayal that will finish the job of doing

away with patriarchy in her family? Will her sacrifice at the end of the novel actually mean that she will be able to write her own destiny?

But let's not anticipate things. For now, I will deal with the second of the tensions I outlined earlier, related to orality. When the novel was published, Catalan critics remarked the oral, conversational style of El Hachmi's novel (Cortadellas 2008; Pla i Arxé 2008), and stressed the importance of Amazigh oral tradition in this text (Isarch 2008, 131), a tradition mostly transmitted by women. But it has also been observed that El Hachmi establishes a dialogue with the Catalan literary tradition, in particular that of women authors (Víctor Català and Mercè Rodoreda) (Guillamon 2008; Julià 2012, 259). In her review of *L'últim patriarca*, Simona Škrabec (2008) stated that El Hachmi carries out "una lectura molt pobra" of *Solitud* and *La plaça del Diamant*, but I beg to disagree. It is not just that El Hachmi is anchoring the conflicts of immigration in the Catalan tradition, which is interesting in itself; the narrator is also retrospectively interpreting the events she reports through the lens of the Catalan texts, and operating an inversion of them. Thus for example, just as Natàlia is renamed Colometa, Mimoun is renamed Manel (El Hachmi 2008, 83); the episode in which Mimoun meets his future wife is highly reminiscent of the beginning of *La plaça*, but it is focalized from Mimoun's point of view (El Hachmi 2008, 152). References to *Solitud* are also significant: the narrator's mother -who is nameless too- cleans her husband's apartment upon her arrival in Catalonia, in a scene that evokes the famous chapter "Neteja". However, while the narrator speaks of the mother's "capacitat transformadora de la realitat", unlike Mila the narrator's mother simply cleans the flat, in the sense that, far from metaphorically representing the autonomous subject of the Modernist artist like Mila, she reconfirms and perpetuates the patriarchal laws that her daughter will set out to destroy. The main confrontation between the mother and Mimoun is also presented by reference to the heroines of the two Catalan classics, but here the wife fights to keep an abusive and unfaithful husband.

El Hachmi's use of the Catalan written tradition, however, does not delineate a narrative of progress, nor a straight chronological line, but rather a movement of retrospection and inversion which, as we will see below, links language, culture, and sexuality. At this point I would like to introduce Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, variously translated as 'belatedness' or 'afterwardsness'. This term designates the temporality of trauma: typically, a sexual incident occurring in adolescence triggers the unconscious memory of another event from childhood, which is now retroactively understood as sexual and as traumatic. *Nachträglichkeit* or afterwardsness thus refers to the impact of the present on the past, the retroactive interpretation of events that the child was not able to metabolize and therefore has repressed. For French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche this con-

cept describes psychic temporality in general; sexuality, he argues, is by definition traumatic because it always arrives too early, when the child's psychic apparatus is unable to process all sorts of actions and images, coming from the adult world, of an unconscious sexual nature. These actions or images are "enigmatic signifiers" (Laplanche 1999, 78) traumatically implanted in the child, and become an "internal foreign body" (Laplanche 1999, 65) inside it, an otherness that is constitutive of human subjectivity. The enigmatic signifiers that the subject will have to detranslate and retranslate also include what the child hears: what is heard is:

l'histoire, ou la légende, des parents, ce discours parlé ou secret, préalable au sujet, où il doit advenir et se repérer. (Laplanche, Pontalis 1985, 67)

This last point returns us to oral tradition and emphasizes the importance of language in relation to sexuality and the body in *L'últim patriarca*. Indeed, bodily acts may be read as signifiers in Laplanche's sense, as suggested by the traumatic event that marks Mimoun's entrance into subjectivity: the slap his father gives him when he's six months old "havia sonat així, plaf, sorda" (El Hachmi 2008, 15), whereas the "bufetada" Mimoun gives his wife shortly before the narrator's conception is "plaaf [...] sonora" (2008, 137). Voiced vs. unvoiced: linguistic difference is thus traumatically inscribed on the body through foundational violence. The construction of the subject is in this text explicitly linked to language. In the second part of the novel, a teenage narrator starts reading the *Diccionari de la llengua catalana* and in each chapter she relates the action to her reading of the entries for a letter in the alphabet. It is therefore unsurprising that the narrator's mastery of the Catalan language through her reading of the dictionary gives her a measure of imaginary control over her sense of self. Yet at the same time, the dictionary provides her with a substitute for the orgasms that she, as a child, cannot have, a *jouissance* that would help her fulfil her desire to empty herself:

Per escapar del *poltergeist*, [...] has de riure molt, fins a sentir que tens les costelles a punt de petar, o has de plorar molt, fins a sentir que t'has buidat, o has de tenir un orgasme, que, fet i fet, també és buidar-se. Jo encara no en sabia, de tenir orgasmes, al pare no li agradava que ningú plorés i a la mare no li agradava que ningú rigués. De manera que vaig començar a llegir, paraula per paraula, aquell diccionari de la llengua catalana. Tothom deia quina nena més intel·ligent, quina nena més estudiosa, però només era per buscar una de les tres coses. (El Hachmi 2008, 181)

As Climent Raga puts it:

[g]ràcies al diccionari, la narradora fa un parèntesi a la distòpia per tal d'aconseguir tornar a suspendre el temps narratiu en el *no res*, allà on la relaxació i el repòs psicològic són possibles. (2010, 32)

The nothingness Climent Raga refers to is tantamount to a linguistic *jouissance* that the narrator uses as a means of escaping, at the cost of her own subjective boundaries, from what she calls her “poltergeist”, a sexual nightmare she cannot understand: an out-of-control Mimoun boasts in front of his preadolescent daughter his sexual exploits with his Catholic lovers, and in a highly sexualized household presided over by physical and linguistic violence, the father:

em parlava de coses que jo no entenia però que ara les rebobino i tenen sentit. Deia sempre allò que la Rosa només li demanava de fer-ho pel darrere i jo no sabia ni què era fer-ho ni el darrere de què. (El Hachmi 2008, 210)

The sexual is for the narrator an enigmatic signifier violently implanted by her father which only makes sense retrospectively, as she tries to detranslate it and retranslate it.

The mention of “el darrere” brings us logically to the end. The metaphor of “rebobinar” suggests once again Laplanche’s use of the term *Nachträglichkeit* or afterwardsness. This concept, describing the impact of the present on the past, is highly relevant because in El Hachmi’s novel the end of the patriarchy, the break with the past, is located in the past itself, and is prior to the gender conflict between father and daughter. Whereas the women in the family are presented as the main actors in the legitimation and maintenance of masculine domination (“L’àvia i les germanes havien educat [Mimoun] per fer de senyor i la mare havia continuat la tasca”, El Hachmi 2008, 30), it is adolescent Mimoun who commits the violent act that will later result in his own demise as patriarch:

Era la primera vegada que un fill pegava al seu pare, era un capgirar l'ordre natural de les coses, era allò que ningú s'havia imaginat mai. (El Hachmi 2008, 47)

Furthermore, Mimoun’s desire to have a daughter corresponds to his desire to avoid phallic competition with his offspring:

Mimoun era tan feliç d’haver procreat [...] perquè veia acomplert el seu somni de tenir una filla. Les nenes són més lleials als pares, et fan més cas i t’estimen de tot cor, no pas per l’obligació de ser

els teus fills. I t'ho demostren, les nenes et demostren que t'estimen facis el que facis i el seu amor és sempre incondicional. (147)

Thus the end of the patriarchy in the Driouch family comes from behind, “pel darrere”, from an unfinished past that, like Bloch's *Ungleichzeitigkeit* or non-contemporaneity, comes to disrupt present times. Literally from behind, too. The event that constitutes the final nail belongs to something excluded from discourse yet perfectly integrated in culture as a practice. For in *L'últim patriarca* we find a literary, written tradition, and an oral tradition, but also an *anal* tradition where “[a]nal sex embodies a ‘backwards’ act” (Folkart 2013, 371). Integrated in culture: girls back in the Moroccan village freely discuss anal sex as an alternative to vaginal penetration (El Hachmi 2008, 277) that Mimoun demands of his Catalan lovers presenting it as “un precepte religiós” (2008, 90). Excluded from discourse: if anal sex is a religious sacrifice, it is an act for which there is no word in the liturgy, it remains non-symbolized, an *allò* that amounts to an unspeakable vice. Non-symbolized, too, because anal penetration at the hands of his uncle marks the traumatic entrance of pubescent Mimoun into the world of adult sexuality:

[E]l primogènit dels Driouch devia entrar de ple en el món dels adults acomplint el paper que els solia tocar als membres de la família d'aquestes edats per aquelles contrades. Tenint en compte que el germà de l'àvia havia pujat del riu poc després que Mimoun, no és estranya la possibilitat que, cansat d'investir ases i gallines, aprofités l'eufòria del moment per buscar una cavitat més humana on introduir el seu membre erecte. No hauria estat cap fet usual que li hagués dit baixa una mica Mimoun, no et faré mal, no, no et faré mal, Mimoun, para quiet, deixa't anar, deixa't anar, així, sí, així no et farà tant mal. (El Hachmi 2008, 34)

This shattering event is never discussed, and is instead referred to as the mysterious and terrifying apparition of a goat.

And so we come to the end of the novel. The narrator, having finally managed to emancipate herself from the domination of the last patriarch of her family, orchestrates her final act of revenge against Mimoun, who keeps stalking her. She has received the visit of her uncle, her father's rival, and makes sure that Mimoun can see how she is fucked in the ass. “Ho has fet mai pel darrere?”, asks her uncle.

Qui millor que el teu oncle per ensenyar-te aquesta mena de coses, eh? Són la mena de coses que han de quedar en família. (2008, 331)

Penetration is both traumatic and leading to *jouissance*:

Va dir deixa't anar, així, i jo només de tenir-lo a sobre ja havia tingut un orgasme. Vaig tornar-hi quan em va fer mal i el dolor no se sabia on s'acabava o on era que continuava amb el plaer. M'hauria volgut morir, del mal, i encara em vaig tornar a escórrer. (331-2)

Anal sex thus provides the ecstatic emptiness that reading the dictionary did not offer. And although the Catalan literary tradition is once again invoked, the narrator's betrayal amounts to a failure of language, the anus's simultaneous entrance in and exclusion from discourse:

Jo no era Mercè Rodoreda, però havia d'acabar amb l'ordre que ja feia temps que em perseguia. Que millor que un secret tan gran que ja no pogués tornar-ne a parlar mai més ningú. Que millor que un fet tan repugnant que al pare ja no li quedés altre remei que callar. (331)

The conflicts, both cultural and psychic, arising from dislocated temporalities are thus resolved not by means of a talking cure, but through a form of the return of the repressed.

Or to put it in other words: through the narrator's sacrifice, the death of an oral tradition is traumatically brought about by anal sex and its inscription into a literary, written tradition that is at once foreign and *pròpia*, familiar and uncanny. The narrator's sexual transgression appears as the necessary operation to cut herself away from an inherited narrative of origins and write her own narrative within the codes of the culture in which she has grown up; but the traumatic effects of her transgression lead to the repression of the inherited codes, that may not be metabolized through discourse. In presenting this state of affairs, Najat El Hachmi is redescribing both the conditions of possibility and the dangers of the construction of contemporary Catalan identity.

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L'escriptora i els guerrillers

Caminant amb els camarades,

d'Arundhati Roy

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Abstract Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) is a controversial oeuvre. It is the story of the writer's long march with young Naxalite guerrillas through the forests of India. Roy narrates the struggle of the militias to defend their natural habitat from the plunder of government and corporations, and shows the richness of their tribal culture, which is in danger of being annihilated. Despite the fact that in India the work has been censored, this chapter will present four arguments to promote it among youth, especially in the global North. This chapter aims to prove that reading *Walking with the Comrades* can contribute to the formation of a critical citizenship, better equipped to build new political imaginaries, more egalitarian and respectful of all forms of life and habitats.

Keywords Political violence. Guerrillas. India. Precariousness. Human rights. Respect. Sustainability. Youth. Reading.

Sumari 1 La dimensió política de dues escriptors del Sud global i la prescripció lectora. – 2 Quatre raons per prescriure *Caminant amb els camarades* al jovent del Nord global. – 3 Cloenda.

1 La dimensió política de dues escriptors del Sud global i la prescripció lectora

El 2 d'octubre de 2017 l'autora índia Arundhati Roy feia el primer acte a l'Estat espanyol de promoció de la seva segona novel·la, *El ministeri de la felicitat suprema*, publicada en traducció catalana i castellana per la prestigiosa editorial barcelonina Anagrama. L'esdeveniment,

celebrat al Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), una institució de pensament hegemònica de Catalunya i agent clau quant a prescripció lectora, va tenir un gran èxit de públic –tant presencial com en línia.¹ Duia el títol «Idea, paraula i acció» i obria el cicle *Revolució o resistència*, organitzat per commemorar el centenari de la Revolució russa.²

Durant l'acte va projectar-se el vídeo de Penguin per promoure la novel·la,³ protagonitzat per ciutadans indis que apareixen en uns entorns majoritàriament precaris, o molt precaris. En una de les seqüències apareixen joves guerrillers corrent per un paratge emboscats, empunyant fusells. La seqüència següent mostra joves guerrilleres amb els fusells penjats a l'espatlla, vestides amb roba militar o tradicional, ballant enllaçades en línia. El ralenti de la projecció en destaca una de molt riallera, bella, amb el cabell molt curt i les dents molt blanques. És l'encarnació de la felicitat –i, hi afegiria, del riure de la Medusa d'Hélène Cixous.⁴

Un parell de dies després, l'autora nigeriana Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie omplia el mateix auditori del CCCB per parlar-hi sobre diàspora africana, raça i, sobretot, feminisme, a propòsit de dos llibrets

1 Recuperable en línia al portal del CCCB: <https://www.cccb.org/ca/multimedia/videos/arundhati-roy/227623>. A Madrid la presentació de la novel·la es va fer el 4 d'octubre al Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (recuperable en podcast a: <https://www.mu-seoreinasofia.es/multimedia/arundhati-roy-conversacion-chantal-maillard>).

2 El cicle, que va tenir lloc entre el 2 i el 23 d'octubre del 2017, va comptar amb la participació d'Angela Davies, David Fernández, Xavier Antich i Ivan Krastev. A diferència de diàlegs que altres personalitats índies amb gran projecció internacional han protagonitzat al CCCB posteriorment, com «L'educació del futur», de la crítica literària Gayatri Spivak i la filòsofa catalana Marina Garcés (16 d'octubre de 2018, recuperable a: <https://www.cccb.org/ca/multimedia/videos/arundhati-roy/227623>), i «Elogi de l'ombra», de l'artista Nalini Malani, guanyadora del Premi Joan Miró 2019, i de l'artista sud-africà William Kentridge (10 d'octubre de 2020, recuperable a: <https://www.cccb.org/ca/multimedia/videos/william-kentridge-i-nalini-malani/234532>), el de Roy es va dur a terme en unes circumstàncies excepcionals que, lògicament, el van condicionar: era l'endemà de l'1 d'octubre. Tal com va subratllar en la breu presentació de l'acte Vicenç Villatoro, aleshores director del CCCB, Arundhati Roy estava al cas que el dia anterior havia tingut lloc el referèndum sobre la independència de Catalunya (ella va fer-hi referència en algun moment) i que, com van recollir sobretot els mitjans de comunicació catalans i internacionals, l'acte de no-violència i d'exercici del dret de llibertat d'expressió que va dur a terme la ciutadania catalana va ser reprimida amb una violència desproporcionada per part dels cossos de seguretat de l'Estat espanyol. Poc després, els dos principals activistes i els polítics més destacats del Procés van ser empresonats (el President i alguns consellers van fugir a l'exili, on encara romanen a hores d'ara). L'octubre de 2019 van ser condemnats per sedició a penes de presó d'entre 13 i 9 anys.

3 Recuperable a: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JA0mFLmMc.

4 A *Le Rire de la Méduse*, un assaig fonamental de la segona onada feminista, publicat originalment el 1975, la filòsofa algeriana sosté: «Per veure la medusa de cara n'hi ha prou amb mirar-la: i no és mortal. És bonica i riu» (Cixous 1995, 21). La traducció al català de totes les citacions textuals en traducció castellana és meua.

seus publicats en català i castellà: *Tothom hauria de ser feminista i Estimada Ijeawe! Manifest feminista en quinze consells*.⁵

«Dues veus potents contra la injustícia» era el títol de la crònica d'ambdós actes que Jordi Nopca va publicar al diari *Ara*. El periodista destacava que les autores es distingien per haver «alçat la veu contra les desigualtats tant en les seves novel·les com en assajos i també en actes públics» (Nopca 2017). Roy i Adichie, ben mirat, respondrien a l'ideal humanista que propugna Edward W. Said quan defineix la responsabilitat d'escriptors i intel·lectuals: mobilitzen tot el poder del llenguatge per «qüestionar, impugnar i reformular gran part del que se'ns presenten com a certes ja mercantilitzades, envasades, incontrovertibles i acriticament codificades» (2006, 49).

L'èxit global de Roy i Adichie indica que s'ha començat a revertir la doble exclusió que pateixen les dones que escriuen en cultures minoritzades o marginals (Reizbaum 1992). És més, sembla abonar la tesi de David Damrosch (2006) sobre l'emergència i consagració en l'espai literari d'aquelles figures subalternes que les institucions canonitzadores sempre havien invisibilitzat –una pràctica cultural paradigmàtica de la violència simbòlica. No és estrany, doncs, que l'agència literària londinense de David Godwin gestioni els drets de Roy; la novel·la *El déu de les coses petites*, Premi Booker 1997, d'àmplia circulació internacional gràcies a traduccions a múltiples llengües, és considerada un clàssic modern de la literatura índia. El drets d'Adichie, per la seva banda, estan en mans de l'agent literari més important del món, Andrew Willie, conegut amb el sobrenom d'El Xacal. Tant Roy com Adichie, doncs, empen instruments de l'hegemonia cultural i política com són la llengua colonial i el poder d'institucions del llibre de la metròpoli –«eines del senyor», per dir-ho en l'expressió de l'activista feminista afroamericana Audre Lorde, autora de l'assaig «The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House» (1984).

Per «desmantellar la casa del senyor» –seguint l'efectiva metàfora de Lorde–, que en el cas d'Adichie venen a ser els relats únics del poder neocolonial i la violència de les estructures patriarcales, l'autora ha mobilitzat múltiples *eines del senyor*. Ha dictat i viralitzat amb enorme èxit les TED Talk «The Danger of a Single Story» –el llibret que la recull ha estat traduït al català amb el títol *Sobre el perill dels tòpics* (Adichie 2018)– i «We Should All Be Feminists»;⁶ ha col·laborat en la cançó *Flawless* de Beyoncé per fer pedagogia entre el jovent sobre com identificar i prevenir actituds masclistes, i ha protagonitzat campanyes de maquillatge d'una prestigiosa marca fran-

⁵ Recuperable a: <https://www.cccb.org/ca/activitats/fitxa/conversa-amb-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/227335>.

⁶ En el moment d'escriure aquestes línies, la primera lliçó sobrepassa de llarg els set milions i mig de visualitzacions a YouTube, mentre que la segona s'acosta a sis milions i mig.

cesa (Safronova 2016) que han contribuït a reforçar-la com a icona global de l'empoderament i l'èxit de la dona africana consagrada a la causa feminista. La celebritat assolida per l'autora, l'estil planer i directe, molt proper a l'oralitat, la brevetat, i l'eficàcia pedagògica del missatge feminista dels llibrets han animat diverses institucions d'arreu del món a incloure'ls en repertoris prescriptius per la seva exemplaritat. El govern suec ha promogut Adichie entre els adolescents del país per combatre la violència masclista -i, de retruc, els prejudicis racistes, en amplificar la seva veu- fent-los arribar a tots un exemplar de *Tothom hauria de ser feminista* (Flood 2015). A Catalunya, l'hegemònica Edicions 62 ha publicat els llibrets amb el suport del Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat.

A diferència d'Adichie, Roy no ha dictat cap TED Talk, tampoc no ha participat en activitats vinculades al glamur mediàtic, ni els seus llibrets han rebut suport institucional per arribar a l'alumnat escolar. Tanmateix, pel compromís amb la justícia en el tractament de les veus subalternes i els imaginaris de precarietat, protagonistes de les seves novel·les i assaigs, també ha estat consagrada per mitjans de comunicació i institucions canonitzadores occidentals -universitats, editorials, museus, etc.-, sobretot en contextos d'una sòlida tradició d'estudis postcolonials, en bona mesura marcats per l'influent assaig de l'acadèmica índia Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak «Can the Subaltern Speak?» (1988).

La recepció de l'obra assagística de Roy, però, ha estat de signe contrari per part de l'*establishment* indi: institucions governamentals, mitjans de comunicació, universitats i intel·lectuals l'han vituperada. El govern de l'Índia, *la major democràcia del món*, l'ha perseguida per la publicació d'obres com ara *Caminant amb els camarades* (2019), un text en què Roy exposa la història de la insurgència naxalita originada el 1967, on defensa les raons dels rebels maoistes a partir del testimoni, sobretot, de la joventut guerrillera.⁷ El mateix any en què el text va veure la llum, el 2010, la policia de Delhi va incriminar-la per sedició. També ha estat blasmada per l'escriptor i reconegut activista dels drets humans Harsh Mander: tot convocant la memòria de Gandhi, la va acusar de legitimar la violència pel retrat dels joves guerrillers, que titllava d'idealista (2010). Més tard, Mukherjee (2014), del Ministeri de Defensa indi, condemnava que fes romanticisme del reclutament dels joves naxalites, una pràctica que equiparava a la de la màfia siciliana.

⁷ L'article sobre Arundhati Roy a la Wikipedia en castellà diu: «En 2010, hizo un reportaje llamado *Caminando con los camaradas* sobre la guerrilla maoísta conocida como naxalita, el mayor problema de seguridad interna que sufre la India según el ex primer ministro Manmohan Singh con la intención de esclarecer las razones de la violencia y por ello es perseguida hoy en día por el estado indio» (https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arundhati_Roy).

A l'assaig «My seditious heart» Roy explica que, a propòsit d'un episodi de violència entre estudiants i forces de l'ordre indis del febrer del 2016, el presentador del canal de televisió *Times Now* l'acusava d'antipatriòtica per ser-ne, en part, la inspiradora. El seus *delictes* eren haver escrit

sobre la lluita per la llibertat al Caixmir, haver qüestionat l'execució de Mohamed Afzal Guru, haver caminat amb els guerrillers maoistes (els 'terroristes' en llenguatge televisiu) pels boscos de Bastar, haver associat la seva rebel·lió armada amb els meus recels sobre el model de 'desenvolupament' escollit per l'Índia i [...] haver qüestionat fins i tot les proves nuclears del país. (Roy 2020, 541)

Tot seguit, Roy afegeix:

Bé, és cert que els meus punts de vista sobre aquells assumptes estan en desacord amb els de la classe dirigent. En temps millors una cosa així se solia considerar una perspectiva crítica o una visió alternativa del món. A l'Índia d'avui se'n diu sedició. (2020, 542)

Això explica que *Caminant amb els camarades*, per bé que hagi estat reconegut com un «instant classic» (Mani Jha 2020) per la seva qualitat literària, estigui prohibit en currículums acadèmics de l'Índia. Els guerrillers, que segons l'escriptora són «canalla curiosa i bella amb el seu arsenal peculiar» (2019, 24), segons les autoritats i els mitjans de comunicació indis són, ras i curt, «terroristes». Per aquesta raó són objecte d'«una guerra de la qual el govern de l'Índia s'enorgulleix i s'avergonyeix»: la «Cacera Verda» (2019, 6). L'escriptora és molt vehement quan denuncia la institucionalització de la injustícia per part de l'estat indi i la seva tàctica d'«'assassinats selectius' per 'decapitar' el Partit Comunista Indi (maoista)» amb l'objectiu de posar «fi a la violència». Assegura que estan equivocats: «la violència s'estendrà i s'infensificarà, i el govern no tindrà ningú amb qui parlar» (2019, 101).

Walking with the Comrades va veure la llum a *Outlook* el 29 de març de 2010 en format digital i en paper, il·lustrat amb impactants fotografies en color realitzades per ella mateixa i per Sanjay Kakva (Roy 2010a). Molt pocs dies després en va aparèixer la versió catalana en dos lliuraments del 9 i del 24 d'abril, al portal digital de La Fàbrica (Roy 2010b; 2010c).⁸ El 2011 l'hegemònica Penguin va treure'n la versió en llibre. La mateixa casa va posar-lo de nou en circulació el 2019:

⁸ La Fàbrica ja havia publicat l'article «L'esquerra a l'Índia: La revolució naxalita», d'Alberto Cruz (2008). El 2016 va publicar un altre text de Roy, «Com el poder de les corporacions ha convertit la riquesa en filantropia per al control social».

és un dels assaigs compilats al volum que pren el provocatiu títol del text del 2016, *My Seditious Heart* -traduït en castellà com *Mi corazón sedicioso*, publicat per Anagrama el 2020 sense cap fotografia. En català, el llibret *Caminant amb els camarades* no va editar-se fins a nou anys més tard, en el catàleg d'un petit segell independent de Manresa, Tigre de paper. L'edició -que reproduceix les fotografies en blanc i negre del reportatge- no ha rebut cap suport institucional.

A manera de reclam publicitari, a la coberta de l'edició anglesa hi ha el següent extracte del relat de Roy:

We are moving in single file now. Myself, and the one hundred 'senselessly violent', bloodthirsty insurgents. I looked around at the camp before we left. There are no signs that almost a hundred people had camped here, except for some ash where the fires had been. I cannot believe this army.

Amb una ironia que cerca *desmantellar* el llenguatge articulat des de les instàncies del poder governamental i mediàtic indis -emmirallant-se en com ho fa Noam Chomsky, a qui tant admira, quant al llenguatge dels poders estatunidencs-, Roy indica que les persones que han estat qualificades de violentes i sanguinàries, paradoxalment, no deixen darrere seu cap petja que sigui irrespectuosa amb la natura. Només llegint la coberta de l'edició anglesa, doncs, advertim que Roy està assumint la funció de l'intel·lectual que prescriu Said, atès que presenta «narracions alternatives de la història i altres perspectives sobre aquesta diferents de les ofertes pels litigants que defensen la memòria oficial i la identitat i la missió nacionals» (Said 2006, 168). Com veurem, Roy també *desmantella* el llenguatge dels ideòlegs fundadors del moviment naxalita i, fins i tot, del mateix Gandhi, l'aura del qual ella qüestiona sovint des de fa anys, especialment davant d'auditoris occidentals. El paratext de la contracoberta de l'edició catalana fa bandera de manera molt explícita d'aquesta missió:

De la premiada autora d'*El déu de les coses petites* (1997) i *El misteri de la felicitat suprema* (2017), arriba un relat apassionat des de la primera línia de la resistència a l'Índia.

Arundhati Roy narra en aquest llibre els mesos que va conviure amb els naxalites, les guerrilles que s'enfronten als abusos del govern i de les multinacionals des dels boscos de l'Índia.

En aquest treball extremadament documentat, Roy ens apropa a un moviment rebel poc conegut de l'Índia i en resulta una obra plena de revelacions transcendents. Al llarg de les pàgines descobrim com el govern hindú lliura una guerra atroç contra la seva pròpia ciutadania per defensar els interessos de les companyies mineres que volen extreure els minerals rars que hi ha enterrats a les terres tribals.

L'autora transporta, boscos endins, els lectors fins a les línies d'un front invisible d'aquesta batalla en curs. I a partir de la crònica de les lluites locals, reflexiona sobre una qüestió molt més àmplia: el capitalisme global tolerarà que cap societat existeixi fora del seu control total?

Roy, per bé que denuncia la violència de la guerrilla maoista, i que desemmascara la retòrica quasi genocida dels ideòlegs fundadors d'aquest moviment revolucionari, mostra una clara adhesió a la causa d'aquests pobles tribals. La naturalesa bel·licista del mateix títol i d'alguns passatges del relat, reblada amb les fotografies de joves amb roba militar i armats que l'il·lustren, allunyen l'obra de l'exemplaritat. Com la majoria dels editors occidentals d'aquest *testimonio*, que per rebaixar-ne la càrrega bel·licista han optat per eliminar de la coberta del llibre la fotografia de l'escriptora i els guerrillers que ocupava tota la coberta de la revista *Outlook*, soc molt conscient que la recepció de l'obra pot ser problemàtica. I més encara si tenim en compte que a Occident, després del 11-S i dels atemptats perpetrats a Europa per part de terroristes engegats per una ideologia –com els cosos pels joves de Ripoll a la Rambla de Barcelona i a Cambrils l'agost de 2017–, es persegueixen policialment i judicialment els discursos susceptibles de legitimar-ne cap i que puguin vincular-se amb el terrorisme –un terme que s'empra de vegades amb massa laxitud.

Tanmateix, en aquest capítol argumentaré que, si bé *Caminant amb els camarades* està prohibit en algunes universitats índies perquè, segons la perspectiva del poder, legitima la violència dels joves «terroristes», existeixen diverses raons per animar el nostre alumnat universitari a llegir aquest *testimonio*.⁹ La seva condició d'obra problemàtica, amb tantes arestes –la disposició esteticitzant de posicionaments ideològics respecte de la violència armada, l'exhibició fotogràfica de joves amb fusells– que ens incomoden profundament, és el que la fa especialment oportuna. Discutir-la a l'aula propicia l'entrenament en la construcció de dissensions davant de discursos impugnable, en l'escolta radical –això és, la comprensió dels textos de l'*altre* tenint en compte els seus punts de vista i compromisos axiolò-

⁹ Proposar la prescripció de *testimonios* en els currículums acadèmics no és pas cap novetat: als Estats Units és una pràctica més o menys institucionalitzada des de fa més de tres dècennis. La lectura d'un gènere que planteja problemes a l'entorn de l'autoritat, l'autenticitat i la representació ha estat molt controvertida, sobretot arran de la polèmica generada a l'entorn de *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), d'Elizabeth Burgos. La introducció als plans docents d'aquesta tipologia de textos, que persegueix desplaçar els criteris hegemònics de configuració del cànon occidental, ha tingut defensors com ara Steven Benz, autor de *Teaching and Testimony. Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom* (1996) i bel·ligerants detractors, com explica Mercè Picornell (2015).

gics a fi d'aprendre de les diferències (Tobin 2009)- i en la revisió de les pròpies conviccions. A més, cal subratllar-ho, encaixa amb l'actual promoció dels estudis subalterns en els currículums (Picornell, Martínez Fernández 2019).

D'entrada, sembla oportú preguntar-se: si els joves occidentals han estat educats tradicionalment a partir de l'èpica homèrica, un relat bèl·lic que encimbella els poderosos, exalta els valors de la comunitat pròpia i celebra la conquesta de l'espai de l'altre, no paga la pena llegir-ne un de signe radicalment contrari? Això és, un relat que impugna els valors patriòtics i que exalta els qui, des d'una condició de vulnerabilitat, han d'arriscar la vida per mor de l'autopreservació (Dorlin 2017) i en defensa del dret a l'arrelament (Weil 2016) enfront de poders polítics i econòmics alienants. Aquesta narració de ressonància bèl·lica, que subverteix el gènere sexual (és d'autoria femenina i presenta dones i homes lluitant plegats, en lloc de ser d'autoria masculina i mostrar en exclusiva l'heroïtat agonal masculina) i el gènere textual (és una crònica periodística en clau de *testimonio* i empeltada d'assaig, en lloc d'un relat èpic), contribueix a qüestionar la jerarquització de valors i gèneres de l'*statu quo* literari.

Plantejar la conveniència de llegir el llibret, d'una banda, pot ser un pretext per fer prendre consciència que la literatura, al llarg dels segles, ha reforçat violències simbòliques i sistemiques de les societats i cultures patriarcalcs, i que aquestes violències, mitjançant la prescripció lectora, han estat traslladades a l'àmbit educatiu revestides de prestigi, en nom de la tradició i dels valors nacionals. D'altra banda, el text de Roy convida a establir relacions amb els relats bèl·lics clàssics i interrogar la manera com en el decurs de la història s'han lliurat i s'han narrat les guerres. Pel fet d'estar ancorat en el present, propicia a pensar en fórmules de mediació capaces d'apauvagar conflictes armats d'avui, i en noves maneres d'explicar-los per tal de comprendre'ls en tota la seva complexitat i, així, evitar que es repeteixin o es perpetuïn (Todorov 2014, 141). Una manera de dur-ho a terme és, justament, com fa Roy, animant a substituir les armes pel diàleg tot posant les bases per a nous escenaris de no-violència.

Si considero adequat introduir als currículums universitaris *Caminant amb els camarades* és perquè, malgrat que s'aparti dels llocs comuns dels relats pacifistes i de l'ortodòxia literària, entronca amb el corrent que vincula la literatura i els drets humans, impulsat amb tanta força des del 11-S ençà (Slaughter 2007; Dawes 2009; Swanson, Schultheis 2012; Iribarren 2021a). A fi de brindar uns horitzons de futur més humanitaris, el text revela el sofriment que causa «la força letal d'un capitalisme mundialitzat completament insostenible» (Guardiola, Segarra 2020, 149), sense perseguir una resposta de compassió estèril per part del públic lector; per això evita articular un discurs victimista que reinscriu els naxalites en un imaginari de vulnerabilitat insalvable. El que busca, sobretot, és trans-

metre la felicitat d'aquells que malden per dur a terme alternatives de vida en comunitat més dignes. Gràcies a la potència poètica que travessa l'obra (d'aquí que se l'acusi d'estetitzar la violència), a més, evoca la bellesa de l'entorn natural que aquests pobles tribals volen preservar, tot promovent la presa de consciència ecologista –tan necessària avui per afrontar el repte de la sostenibilitat del planeta. L'imaginari esperançador que proposa Roy, doncs, em resulta oportú per al temps profundament marcat per la pandèmia durant el qual he escrit aquest capítol, i encara més per a l'era post-COVID-19 que vindrà. És un imaginari per a qui vulgui fer camí sense submissions.

2 Quatre raons per prescriure *Caminant amb els camarades* al jovent del Nord global

La primera raó per prescriure *Caminant amb els camarades* als estudiants universitaris és perquè Roy no només practica l'escolta empàtica i compromesa amb els joves: fa camí amb ells. I el fa, passant tota mena de penúries i posant-se ella mateixa en una situació de risc vital, durant setmanes, quasi com una *camarada* més. Es tracta, doncs, d'un trajecte llarg. Un viatge consagrat a la comprensió d'un conflicte armat multicausal i molt complex que obliga, per a Roy, a concedir una atenció sostinguda i temps al jovent emboscats, nòmada per pura supervivència. Ella sap que només la convivència perllongada propiciarà que li confiïn les conviccions i els afectes que els mouen a *fer camí* amb la mirada posada en un futur menys precari i més feliç. Per això també, malgrat les penúries, l'esgotament físic i l'amenaça constant de ser atacats per les forces de seguretat, arriba a tenir prou complicitat per riure amb ells –«Ens vam petar de riure» (Roy 2019, 55).

En un moment del viatge veu que un guerriller, en Sukhdev, somriu. Quan ella li pregunta què li fa gràcia, ell respon:

- Pensava en els periodistes que van venir l'any passat per les celebracions del Bhumkal. Van venir un parell de dies. Un d'ells es va fer una foto amb la meua AK i després se'n va tornar i ens va definir com unes «màquines d'assassinar» o una cosa semblant. (Roy 2019, 84)

Sens dubte, aquests periodistes buscaven reforçar el relat del poder sobre la condició de terroristes dels guerrillers i atiar el sentiment d'odi envers tot el que representen, de confirmar-ne l'abjecció. Autores com Susan Sontag (2003) i Judith Butler (2019) ja ens han advertit dels perills que comporta posar en circulació fotografies que mostren dolor, violència o atrocitats, perquè poden causar molts equívocs: fan aflorar la indignació entre el públic, i difícilment fan jus-

tícia a les experiències que retraten. Per això Roy, que es guanya la confiança dels naxalites per retratar-los al llarg del viatge, publica les fotografies en el marc interpretatiu del relat a fi d'anorrear les llegendes i imatges que els presenten com a «terroristes violents».

La portada impresa d'*Outlook* mostra una fotografia de grup, horitzontal i en colors, en què apareix ella i cinc joves guerrillers: tres noies i dos nois –la mateixa que presideix la publicació digital.¹⁰ Són en una clariana enmig del bosc. L'autora, consagrada mundialment per la novel·la *El déu de les petites coses*, apareix vestida amb roba i sandàlies de muntanyisme, i amb el cabell cobert amb un mocador palestí (*kufiyya*), prenent notes en una llibreta: la tecnologia de l'escriptura està activada. La posició corporal de Roy és molt significativa: asseguda damunt d'un tronc, més aviat encongida, està en una actitud de recolliment i d'escolta amb extrema atenció, amb el cap recolzat a les mans i el colze recolzat a la cuixa. Aquesta inclinació corporal connota un sentiment d'estima –«l'amor és una inclinació cap a l'altre» (Guardiola, Segarra 2020, 81), oposada a la verticalitat heroica, i als antípodes, val a dir-ho, de les escenificacions dels TED Talk, «de les típiques presentacions a l'americana, amb aquell estil masculí i pompós de bellugar-se amunt i avall per l'escenari» (Salami 2020, 46). La inclinació de Roy té un significat polític, identificable amb l'actitud altruista que postula Adriana Cavarero (2016) a fi de subvertir les actituds i els valors vinculats a l'*homo erectus* clàssic. A tocar seu, cara a cara, els joves vestits amb roba militar o esportiva, asseguts a la mateixa alçada, s'expliquen. La guerrillera de primer terme té el fusell a l'espatlla, en posició de repòs: la tecnologia militar està desactivada. Els cossos dels combatents, també inclinats, més enllà d'explicitar l'estima envers la *camarada* visitant, vehiculen, al seu torn, un clar missatge polític: estan en disposició de dialogar amb voluntat d'entesa. L'espai natural propicia una interacció corporal i dialògica més propera, franca i simètrica, lliure de les convencions, els símbols i les servituds dels fòrums de poder.

Crec que paga la pena subratllar que l'escenificació no té res a veure amb la de diversos actes d'escolta institucional als joves, com els protagonitzats per Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, de les Illes Marshall (assolades recurrentment per la violència dels tifons i en perill de ser engolides pel mar de resultes del canvi climàtic), quan va recitar el poema «Dear Matafele Peinem» en la cerimònia d'obertura de la Cimera del Clima del 2014;¹¹ la iraquiana Nadia Murad, quan va fer el discurs d'acceptació del Premi Nobel de la Pau el 2018 davant l'au-

¹⁰ Per a l'anàlisi de la fotografia vegeu la comunicació «Arundhati Roy y los guerrilleros: capital simbólico y politización del cuerpo» (Iribarren 2021b).

¹¹ Recuperable a: <https://www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/united-nations-climate-summit-opening-ceremony-my-poem-to-my-daughter/>.

ditori suec;¹² o la sueca Greta Thunberg, del 2018 ençà, quan ha pres la paraula en fòrums com la Cimera del Clima de Nacions Unides, el Fòrum Econòmic Mundial, el Comitè Econòmic i Social Europeu, i el Parlament Europeu. Aquesta escolta institucional a tres dones joves, en solitari, que s'han desplaçat per situar-se davant d'una audiència imponent que, al seu torn, compta amb la difusió dels grans mitjans de comunicació internacionals i nacionals, és un acte simbòlic de legitimació de les mateixes institucions –convindria analitzar, a més, fins a quin punt són fórmules de *greenwashing* o *purplewashing*.

El que escenifica la fotografia de l'escriptora i els guerrillers és de tota una altra factura. La intel·lectual consagrada per institucions literàries i culturals hegemòniques –sobretot del Nord global– és qui es desplaça, en solitari i en un entorn natural allunyat de les instàncies de poder i dels mitjans de comunicació, per atendre la causa del col·lectiu dels naxalites rebels i desvelar quin imaginari de futur albiren. La imatge plasma l'acompliment del requisit, segons Todorov (1982), per a la descoberta de l'altre: l'acostament per establir un diàleg en termes d'igualtat. Roy vol descobrir qui són els joves naxalites, uns «dels refugiats del progrés de l'Índia» (Roy 2019, 9), que en la seva gran majoria són pobles tribals, i per quins motius lluiten. I ho fa sense voluntat d'imposar cap discurs ni dir-hi l'última paraula, com també postula Todorov. El text que acompanya la mateixa fotografia en l'edició catalana diu:

Tinc la sensació que hauria de dir alguna cosa en aquest moment. Sobre la futilitat de la violència, sobre la inacceptibilitat de les execucions sumàries. Però què els hauria de suggerir que fessin? Anar a judici? [...] Quin partit haurien de votar? A quina institució democràtica d'aquest país s'haurien d'adreçar? (Roy 2019, 49)

Al llarg de l'obra Roy no apareix mai sermonejant els guerrillers ni fent proselitisme de cap mena. Tampoc no es presenta com a emissària de les grans causes Occidentals. Sap perfectament fins a quin punt l'exportació de determinats discursos dels drets humans i dels feminismes «occidentals poden servir d'instrument al neocolonialisme ideològic i econòmic», com adverteix Slavoj Žižek (2016, 13). És més: Roy desmitifica la icona global del pacifisme indi per excel·lència quan denuncia «la mentida piadosa de Gandhi sobre la superioritat de la 'via no-violenta' i el seu concepte d'administració fiduciària» (2019, 81).

El tracte entre els guerrillers i l'escriptora és transparent i equitatiu. Ells li confien la seva història¹³ i li proporcionen una experi-

¹² Recuperable a: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqB0cMvGnIk>.

¹³ A l'assaig *El màxim bé comú*, de 1999, Roy confessava que l'atracció per trobar una bona història i poder-la narrar –i no pas la compassió– li va fer abandonar la lectu-

ència de vida comunitària enmig del bosc, un jaç, te i aliments frugals –«Kamla em porta una guaiaba boscana que ha collit pel camí i ha guardat per a mi» (Roy 2019, 55). Ella, al seu torn, posa l'ofici d'escriptora i tot el poder simbòlic i la projecció pública que té a Occident –el 2014 la revista *Time* va incloure-la a la llista de les cent persones més influents del món– al servei dels drets dels naxalites. D'aquesta simbiosi n'emergeix un relat vibrant i trasbalsador, d'indiscutible volada literària. L'adulta sàvia i els joves s'han *bescanviat* els papers: ella mostra gratitud perquè els guerrillers l'han instruïda –«Estic agraïda de la lliçó d'història» (Roy 2019, 53). El bosc, malgrat la precarietat, i el fet que algunes escoles han esdevingut casernes de policia, esdevé un espai informal d'aprenentatge –que arriba al lector en forma de *testimonio* empeltat d'assaig.

Per mor del rigor en la seva funció de mediadora entre guerrillers i lectors, i per captar tots els matisos de les explicacions, tan importants per aprehendre la complexitat de la lluita, Roy enregistra les converses –«tinc hores de gravacions per escoltar» (2019, 50). Equipada amb suport tecnològic, pot tornar a escoltar, seleccionar i transcriure diàlegs amb fidelitat. Els més rellevants els incorpora oportunament en un discurs que combina retrospecció històrica, històries de vida, crònica de viatge i reflexions de tessitura assagística. La transcripció de la veu dels guerrillers, més enllà de conferir vivacitat i versemblança al relat, li permet bastir l'espai d'enunciació de la subjectivitat dels qui són considerats, sense matisos, *terroristes*. Aquesta tècnica narrativa persegueix un objectiu que no és menor: la *humanització de l'altre*. Conseqüentment, els lectors podem *escoltar* els guerrillers reconeixent la futilitat de la violència que han exercit, mostrant penediment, però alhora acusant la tergiversació dels relats de la premsa i fins i tot d'activistes dels drets humans sobre les seves activitats armades:

No es tracta de cap revenja, es tracta de sobreviure i salvar vides futures... Evidentment, hi ha problemes, hem comès errors horrosos, fins i tot hem matat gent innocent en les emboscades, pensant que eren policies, però les coses no són com s'han publicat a la premsa. (Roy 2019, 71)

Intel·ligentment, Roy subratlla la diferència entre els discursos dels guerrillers i els dels ideòlegs fundadors del moviment naxalita, com Charu Mazumdar:

La seva retòrica abrasiva fetitxitzava la violència, la sang i el martiri, i sovint fa servir un llenguatge tan groller que gairebé arriba a

ra de Joyce, Nabokov i Don DeLillo, i anar a conèixer de primera mà una zona de conflicte de l'Índia: la vall del riu Narmada (2020, 37-109).

ser genocida. En trobar-me aquí [...] no puc evitar pensar que la seva anàlisi, tan vital per a l'estructura d'aquesta revolució, està tan allunyada de la seva emoció i la seva singularitat. «Només a través de la lluita de la classe assalariada –la batalla de l'aniquilació– es crearà un home nou, un home nou que desafiarà la mort i serà lliure de tot pensament d'interès propi». S'hauria pogut imaginar que aquest poble antic, que balla fins a altes hores de la nit, pogués ser el mateix sobre les espatlles del qual descansarien els seus somnis?

És un gran perjudici a tot el que s'està fent aquí que l'únic que tingui ressò al món exterior sigui la retòrica rígida i inflexible dels ideòlegs d'un partit que ha evolucionat d'un passat problemàtic. (Roy 2019, 75-80)

El compromís de l'escriptora amb els joves és diàfan: mobilitza *eines del senyor* –el poder de la llengua colonial i d'una editorial anglosaxona hegemònica, i el capital simbòlic que les institucions prescriptores occidentals li han atorgat– perquè el relat dels guerrillers circuli pels canals culturals i literaris hegemònics del Nord i del Sud globals. Creu que d'aquesta manera podrà sostreure els guerrillers de l'espai d'abjecció en què els relats oficials i mediàtics indis han situat. Pretén que les veus d'aquests pobles tribals que pateixen la violència del capitalisme nacional i global puguin ser escoltades (Spivak 1988) i que els seus cossos, els modes de vida i l'hàbitat per als qual lluiten puguin fer-se visibles. A més, atès que empra paraules com a instruments de comunicació a l'hora de construir un món comú (Ranciè 2011, 18), exemplifica la viabilitat i l'escaiença de l'activisme literari com a forma de lluita no-violenta (Butler 2021), encara que no empri la retòrica pacifista més ortodoxa.

La segona raó per prescriure *Caminant amb els camarades* és perquè els guerrillers, més enllà d'empunyar les armes, exemplifiquen de manera paradigmàtica com empren les *eines que no són del senyor* per oposar-se a uns poders amenaçants. Segons la feminista afrodescendent Minna Salami,

[e] que no són les eines del senyor, és la poesia, l'alegria, l'eros, l'abstència de fronteres, la consciència, el diàleg, la intuïció, l'emotivitat, la quietud, l'escalfor, la passió, la bellesa, la compassió, el misteri, la saviesa, l'honestedat, la feminitat, la interioritat [...]. (2020, 52)

Tots i cadascun dels elements apuntats per Salami són al llibret sobre els naxalites. De fet, Roy exposa com mobilitzen la pròpia cultura –llengua, literatura, teatre, danses– per combatre l'espoli de què són víctimes. A *Descolonitzar la ment*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o adverteix:

Els oprimits i abusats del món mantenen el seu desafiament: llibertat enfront de l'espoli. Però l'arma més gran que esgrimeix i que,

de fet, cada dia deixa anar l'imperialisme contra aquell desafiament col·lectiu és la bomba cultural. L'efecte d'una bomba cultural és anihilar la creença d'un poble en els seus noms, en les seves llengües, en el seu entorn, en la seva herència de lluita, en la seva unitat, en les seves capacitats i, a la llarga, en ell mateix. (2017, 40)

Al fil de l'advertiment de Thiong'o, és oportú consignar l'observació d'un superintendent de policia que, significativament, transcriu Roy:

-Miri, senyora, parlant amb franquesa, aquest problema no el podem resoldre ni la policia ni els militars. El problema amb els pobles tribals és que no entenen l'ambició. Si no es tornen ambiciosos, no tenim esperança. Ja he dit al meu cap que tregui les forces del carrer i que al seu lloc posi un televisor a cada casa. Llavors tot es resoldrà automàticament. (2019, 14)

Roy exposa fins a quin punt els guerrillers es resisteixen a les formes de dominació de la colonització cultural. Explica que part de l'*entrenament* consisteix a equipar-se per a la batalla pel relat en el domini de les *eines del senyor*: «Els joves comunistes s'enduen els retalls de diari per practicar la lectura. Volten pel campament llegint els articles antimaoistes en veu alta, imitant els locutors de ràdio» (Roy 2019, 87). No els presenta, en cap cas, en un idíl·lic estadi de civilització premodern ni tampoc evoca el mite del bon salvatge rousseauinià. També en consigna la creativitat: explica com es consagren a escriure cançons, llegendes, obres de teatre i poesies, algunes de les quals són transcrites al text -«Tenim cinc-cents cançons en hindi, gondi, chhattisgarhi i halbi. Hem publicat un llibre amb cent-quaranta de les nostres cançons. Tothom escriu cançons» (2019, 54). No només descriu amb detall la gran celebració de la festa del Bhumkal, amb timbals, danses i representacions teatrals de clar missatge polític; també la plasma en diverses fotografies.

Ballen en files de sis o set persones, homes i dones per separat, passant-se els braços per la cintura. Milers de persones. Han vingut per això. Es prenen la felicitat seriosament aquí, al bosc de Dandakaranya. La gent camina durant quilòmetres i quilòmetres, durant dies seguits, per celebrar i cantar, per posar-se plomes als turbants i flors als cabells, per passar-se els braços per la cintura i beure *mahua* i ballar tota la nit. Ningú canta ni balla sol. Això més que cap altra cosa, assenyalava el seu desafiament a una civilització que pretén aniquilar-los. (2019, 74-5)

Roy testimonia la funció resilient de l'art, de les creacions literàries i de les celebracions en comunitat. I ho fa fent èmfasi en el fet que per a ells no es tracten de meres formes d'entreteniment: són una

necessitat d'expressió identitària, de cohesió social i pertinença, de resistència enfront d'un enemic que mitjançant poderosos dispositius tecnològics i simbòlics d'aculturació posa en perill la seva etnicitat, la supervivència d'una ciutadania índia ancestral obstinada a seguir creient en ella mateixa.

La tercera raó per afavorir la lectura d'aquest text tan controvertit és perquè en la construcció d'un discurs que persegueix la *humanització de l'altre*, n'exposa la dimensió psicològica, emotiva i corporal. Un dels elements més xocants és la insistència a posar en primer terme el sentiment d'il·lusió i els somnis dels guerrillers: «penso molt sovint en la camarada Kamla. Té disset anys. Porta una pistola de fabricació casolana a l'anca. I, mare meva, quin somriure que té! Però si topa amb la policia, la mataran. Potser la violaran primer» (2019, 28). Tant al text com en bona part de les fotografies Roy retrata la felicitat i el vitalisme dels naxalites, i evita en tot moment donar-ne una visió victimista –quant al camarada Raju, explica: «diu amb un somriure alegre: -Tinc els genolls trinxats. Només puc caminar si abans m'he empassat un grapat de calmants» (2019, 51). Aquesta insistència en la joia la trobem fins i tot quan exposa el sofriment psicològic causat pel patiment d'experiències traumàtiques de violència extrema, el dol causat per successives pèrdues i el dolor físic; es tracta, doncs, d'una felicitat gens ingènua. Al capdavant, Roy vol testimoniar que la felicitat pot ser plena per a persones que viuen en un context de gran austeritat material, consagrades a un somni col·lectiu, al marge dels modes de producció i consum capitalistes.

Quan parla del dolor dels naxalites, ho fa apel·lant la universalitat del cos i la igualtat dels seus drets –com feia Shylock en el cèlebre monòleg d'*El mercader de Venècia* de Shakespeare (Sennett 2014, 49). Per plasmar la vulnerabilitat corporal dels indígenes, Roy reporta l'anàlisi del «camarada metge» quant a condicions sanitàries. A Dandakaranya compten amb «un petit centre mèdic de campanya», mentre que a Gadchilori hi ha només un parell d'hospitals. Malauradament, no disposen quasi de personal sanitari per atendre pacients amb tuberculosi, anèmia i malnutrició, a banda d'altres malalties: «malària, osteoporososi, tènica, infeccions dentals i otitis greus i amenorrea primària» (2019, 85). L'extrema precarietat sanitària fa del tot oportú recordar la consideració de Judith Butler: «la vida exigeix suport i unes condicions propícies per poder ser una vida digna de ser viscuda» (2019, 54).

La lluita per la dignitat i per la salvaguarda del propi cos adquireix un protagonisme especial en les dones. L'escriptora arriba a establir autèntics llaços de sororitat amb diverses joves: li confien que s'han convertit en milicianes en bona mesura per escapar de les violacions sistemàtiques com a pràctica bèl·lica, però també per sostreure's de les violències del patriarcat tradicional (2019, 62-5). Roy narra algunes de les atrocitats que han patit, però dedica força pàgines a explicar experiències de dones especialment resilients, molt actives, amb

inquietuds i rialleres –la felicitat de les quals és reblada en diverses fotografies. Rellegir el llibret de Roy en plena pandèmia, durant la qual s'«ha posat el cos [...] a primera línia de la política» (Guardiola, Segarra 2020, 169), m'ha fet veure fins a quin punt obliga els lectors a prendre un posicionament ètic davant d'aquelles polítiques i dinàmiques de poder que posen especialment en risc el benestar i la salut dels cossos més vulnerables, que sovint, arreu, són els de les dones.

La quarta raó per promoure *Caminant amb els camarades* als currículums acadèmics és per l'horitzó polític que vehicula: el manteniment de formes de vida en harmonia amb la natura dels guerrillers fàcilment connecta amb les inquietuds d'uns joves cada vegada més implicats en la lluita ecologista. Noies i nois d'arreu del món han seguit la mobilització per aturar el canvi climàtic sumant-se al moviment global dels Fridays for Future,¹⁴ liderat per Greta Thunberg, per exigir als estats que apliquin les mesures recollides en els Acords de París del 2015 a fi de reduir les emissions de gasos d'efecte hivernacle. No seria molt oportú, doncs, que el jovent conegués de la mà d'una gran narradora i activista com Roy la manera com els joves natalites estan lluitant contra la destrucció del seu hàbitat? I com ho fan amb coherència entre ideari i pràctica vital:

Em deixa admirada aquest exèrcit. Almenys pel que fa al consum, és més gandhià que qualsevol gandhià, i deixa menys petja de carbó que qualsevol adoctrinador contra el canvi climàtic. (2019, 52)

Semblantment a l'assaig *El màxim bé comú* (publicat el 1999),¹⁵ explica com la implantació de polítiques econòmiques extractives i la construcció de grans preses estan obligant els agricultors i habitants de les zones rurals a desplaçar-se:

La presa de Bodhaghat inundarà tota la zona per on hem caminat durant dies. Tot aquest bosc, tota aquesta història, totes aquestes rondalles. Més de cent poblats. És aquest el pla, doncs? Ofegar la gent com rates perquè el pla integrat de la planta d'acer de Lohandiguda i la mina de bauxita i la refinèria d'alumini als Keshkal Ghats puguin disposar del riu? (2019, 101)

¹⁴ Vegeu-ne la delegació catalana a: <http://www.fridaysforfuturebcn.cat/>.

¹⁵ L'escriptora hi denunciava de manera molt taxativa, fonamentant la seva acusació en informes tècnics, estudis d'impacte medioambiental, sentències judicials i entrevistes als agricultors afectats, el projecte i la nefasta execució material de 3.200 preses, de complexos i poc eficaços sistemes de canalització i distribució d'aigua, i de centrals hidroelèctriques que han estat devastadores per als milers de desplaçats de les zones rurals, especialment dels aborígens, així com per als rius, boscos i zones tradicionals de conreu. Roy en responsabilitzava el govern indi –i els descoordinats governs de tres estats– i el Banc Mundial.

La seva denúncia és directa i contundent: «els grans embassaments són un crim contra la humanitat» (2019, 102). La construcció d'aquestes infraestructures i la implantació d'indústries modernes emparades per la implementació de les polítiques neoliberals índies a partir de 1991 no semblen que hagin estat beneficioses per al conjunt de la ciutadania nacional: si bé l'Índia és una de les economies mundials que més creix, també és un dels països amb més desigualtats segons Oxfam.¹⁶ L'ambientòleg suec Andreas Malm, que subscriu la interrelació entre devastació ecològica i devastació social que demostren Aseem Shrivastava i Ashish Kothari (2014), adverteix: «Si perseguim la justícia entre humans, l'economia fòssil de l'Índia seria un dels pitjors llocs on buscar-la» (Malm 2020, 55). La injustícia i les desigualtats extremes expliquen que de l'Índia sigui el país del món del qual n'han marxat un major nombre d'immigrants: 17,5 milions, segons l'informe de Nacions Unides de 2019 (Pajares 2020, 107). En aquest sentit, en tot el llibret ve a ressonar la consideració de Simone Weil:

L'arrelament és, potser, la necessitat més important i la més ignorada de l'ànima humana. [...] Cada ésser humà necessita tenir múltiples arrels. Necessita rebre la quasi totalitat de la seva vida moral, intel·lectual, espiritual, a través dels mitjans dels quals naturalment forma part.

[...] el desarrelament és una malaltia gairebé mortal per als pobles sotmesos. (2016, 67-8)

Roy, doncs, executa una de les principals funcions que han de tenir les figures intel·lectuals avui, segons posicions que van des de les ecofeministes fins a Žižek (2016, 75): fer prendre consciència als ciutadans del Nord global de la nostra pròpia responsabilitat davant la perspectiva de la destrucció de les formes de vida d'aquelles persones que es veuen obligades a desplaçar-se, a emigrar. Roy ens invita a qüestionar les polítiques i les pràctiques de l'economia neoliberal governades per la màxima del Creixement Sostingut –que, no ho perdem de vista, recull l'Objectiu 8 de l'Agenda 2030 de Desenvolupament Sostenible– perquè estan contribuint a l'escalfament global, i perquè ja estant tenint unes conseqüències molt greus per a ciutadans d'arreu del món, especialment al Sud global –d'aquí que el gran repetit d'aquest segle sigui com la humanitat afrontarà migracions i desplaçaments massius (Pajares 2020). Curt: el llibret és tot un clam per reivindicar el dret a l'arrelament de les poblacions tribals i per al manteniment d'una natura que Roy ens presenta amb tota la força i la bellesa de la seva potència poètica.

¹⁶ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/india-extreme-inequality-numbers>.

3 Cloenda

Mentre reviso aquest capítol a l'ordinador, amb un parell de clics puc veure les primeres imatges d'ancianes i ancians europeus rebent la vacuna anti-COVID-19: la confiança en els avenços tecnològics i en els valors democràtics s'ha traduït en un consens per protegir els cossos i els drets de les vides més vulnerables. Però no són temps per a la ingenuïtat: sabem tot el que comporta que les patents de les vacunes protegeixin els beneficis econòmics d'empreses privades, a les mans de les quals rau la supervivència de milions de persones arreu del món. A més, la pandèmia no només «ha fet més evidents encara les classes socials» (Guardiola, Segarra 2020, 98); l'imperatiu de les cures ha agreujat les diferències de gènere: les dones en pateixen encara més les conseqüències.

Amb un parell de clics més vaig a la portada de la revista *Outlook* i lleigeixo les paraules de balanç del 2020 de Ruben Banerjee:

The significance of human rights has perhaps never stared at us this starkly ever. [...] With vaccines against the coronavirus now a reality, it is likely we will conquer the pandemic. But a worsening human rights situation has the potential to leave us emasculated and vulnerable forever. Humanity is faced with a future that would be 'inhumane'. (2021)

Rellegir *Caminant amb els camarades* enmig de la pandèmia m'ha confirmat la conveniència d'incloure-la en repertoris prescriptius de les universitats del Nord global. Amb aquesta obra que ens parla des dels marges, Roy ens interpel·la a tots, i de manera especial als que habitem entorns més segurs i vivim en condicions més dignes. Ens ve a preguntar, com Judith Butler, quines vides plorem. També ens fa prendre consciència, com aquesta pandèmia ens ha demostrat amb molt de dolor i sense conèixer fronteres, que «tots som vides precàries» (Butler 2019, 83), ésser «[i]nterdependents no solament entre els ésser humans, sinó també en relació amb les altres espècies» (Guardiola, Segarra 2020, 98).

Tal com he intentat argumentar, crec que cal promoure'n la lectura especialment entre els universitaris perquè els pot equipar per qüestionar críticament el llenguatge i tota mena d'imatges i relats de la violència que circulen àmpliament en els espais mediàtics i les xarxes socials, sempre parcials, sovint manipulats i, cada vegada més, falsos. Malgrat que no vehiculi una història didàctica, ni exemplar ni pacifista en el sentit escolar clàssic –al capdavant, tampoc no la vehicula la *Iliada*–, el fet que aquest *testimonio* posi el focus en els diferents usos i interpretacions de la retòrica bèl·lica, segons l'empri el poder o el subaltern, la fa especialment oportuna.

A partir de la comprensió d'un conflicte local –els motius pels quals els naxalites viuen emboscats empunyant les armes en la de-

mocràcia més gran del món-, Roy disloca la nostra percepció, i ens fa prendre consciència de la perillositat i la irresponsabilitat de tenir visions etnocèntriques perquè són, en essència, poc humanitàries. Així, d'una banda, ens invita a qüestionar críticament les polítiques i les pràctiques d'exclusió social que, emparades per la màxima de la democràcia, polaritzen les diferències entre les condicions de vida de la ciutadania del Nord global i la del Sud global. També dins de les fronteres dels mateixos països: si bé l'Índia n'és particularment paradigmàtica, el fenomen de la radical divisió de classes del capitalisme global (Sloterdijk 2013) es produeix, malauradament, arreu. De l'altra, indica la necessitat d'escoltar les veus subalternes, d'expressar reconeixement i respecte envers l'alteritat (Assmann 2013), i de posar en pràctica unes polítiques que permetin preservar unes formes de vida que no són les nostres, i que tenen tot el dret a mantenir-se al marge dels models de creixement capitalistes. Unes formes de vida com les dels pobles tribals indis que, des de temps immemorials, han habitat en harmonia en els boscos, i que es veuen amenaçades per la cobdícia de multinacionals i de governants que, no sempre benintencionadament, esgrimeixen les bondats del *progrés*.

Enmig dels discursos basats en evidències científiques que ens adverteixen sobre el dramàtic col·lapse del planeta de resultes de les polítiques extractives i de l'escalfament global, i d'un colonialisme cultural liderat per poderoses i ubiqües empreses tecnològiques transnacionals, una intel·lectual, Roy, posa la llum en descobrir-nos «el secret més ben guardat del món» (2019, 89). Mobilitzant un ampli repertori d'eines *-que són, o no són, del senyor-* l'activista impugna la legitimitat de polítiques que es fan en nom de la democràcia tot fent costat als qui, per perviure, s'hi rebel·len. Al capdavall, en donar a conèixer el «pla d'acció per a la seva supervivència», demostra la importància de lluitar per posar en pràctica alternatives, en «[c]ontra de les pitjors previsions» (2019, 89), per poder dur una existència digna, en uns entorns lliures de l'opressió i dels interessos del poder, lliures de violències. Es tracta de fer realitat el somni d'una vida menys precària i més feliç, amb imaginació i mitjans humans i materials. Paga la pena, doncs, que els lectors joves del Nord global, cada vegada més implicats en la lluita per la sostenibilitat del planeta, coneguin el somni i la lluita dels naxalites, que posen en qüestió una agenda mundial fonamentada en la lògica del progrés i de la innovació, i que promou la construcció de grans infraestructures i la industrialització.

No menystinguem el jovent lector. Encara que la retòrica i el contingut bel·licistes fan que aquesta obra sigui radicalment distinta als benpensants llibrets feministes d'Adichie, promoguts institucionalment en l'àmbit escolar, la joventut inquieta i amb ganes de canviar el món serà perfectament capaç de discernir què està dient aquesta *sediciosa* confessa. Una autora que, en contra del que sol ser habi-

tual, explicita el revestiment ideològic del seu discurs per tal d'oposar-se al del poder. La lectura de *Caminant amb els camarades*, en propiciar que els universitaris es posicionin èticament enfront de conflictes violents tant d'abast local com global, pot contribuir a la formació d'una ciutadania crítica, més ben equipada per construir uns nous imaginaris polítics, més igualitaris i respectuosos amb tota forma de vida i d'hàbitats.

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Representations of Violence and Exile in Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*

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Abstract Leila Abdelrazaq's graphic memoir *Baddawi* (2015), an example of postmemory and testimonial writing, reconstructs her father's childhood and teenage memories in the eponymous refugee camp in Lebanon. This chapter analyzes the graphic representations of violence and exile in Abdelrazaq's work and the possibilities of illustrating both through a non-naturalistic approach. Through visual and thematic analysis, this chapter attempts to answer whether Abdelrazaq is finally able to meet the ethical challenge of representing violence and Palestinian refugee identity in a comic suitable for all audiences.

Keywords Exile. Symbolic violence. Systemic violence. Graphic memoir. Testimonial narrative. Palestine. Ethics.

Summary 1 Introduction: The Palestinian Conflict and the Comics. – 2 Documenting Memory and Atrocity in Comics: Postmemory and Testimonial Writing. – 3 Ethical Implications of Representing Violence and Exile. – 4 Representing Objective, Systemic and Symbolic Violence. – 5 Representing Exile: Out-of-Placeness as Identity. – 6 Conclusions.

1 Introduction: The Palestinian Conflict and the Comics

Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* is a graphic memoir that tells the story of Ahmad, a Palestinian boy born in Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon after the Zionist paramilitary organization Irgun raids his family's village in 1948. Leila Abdelrazaq is a Palestinian author and activist who was born in Chicago in 1992. Her father happens to be Ahmad,

Baddawi's protagonist. Her graphic memoir fuses family stories and Palestinian history, becoming a repository of Palestinian memory.

Many graphic novels have turned their attention to Palestine as an "unholy land of conflict" (Fischer 2013, 201). It is the case of the acclaimed *Palestine* (2001) and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009) by Joe Sacco, *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman (2009), based in the eponymous film, the graphic travelogue *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* (2012) by Guy Delisle and Irene Nasser's *Budrus* (2013), portraying an unarmed protest movement through the eyes of a 15-year-old girl. Although all these graphic novels are non-fiction narratives and all of them address, albeit from different perspectives, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from a personal stance, Abdelrazaq's is the first graphic memoir in English in which the narrator and the protagonist are family related. It is also the first that focuses on the experience of exile.

Although comics have always been connected to social commentary, the number of autobiographic comics that bear visual witness to traumatic events and crisis has multiplied since the first edition of *Maus* (1986). The recent monographs and edited volumes analyzing comics as a form of memory, witnessing, autobiography and documentary (Chute 2016; Mickwitz 2016; Ahmed, Crucifix 2018; Mickwitz, Horton, Hague 2019; Nabizadeh 2019, among others) give proof of the increasing number of graphic narratives dealing with this content. As Chute argues, "the essential form of comics - its collection of frames - is relevant to its inclination to document" through the succession and accumulation of frames presented as evidences (2016, 2). It seems that Abdelrazaq shares this view of comics since she started using the medium "when I began looking for a creative outlet that would allow me to explore the types of political themes I was interested in" (Abdelrazaq qtd. in Ghanem 2018).

This chapter examines the graphic representations of violence and exile in Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* as the two poles of Palestinian history since 1948 and the possibilities of illustrating both through a non-naturalistic approach, promoting a stronger engagement with readers without reproducing or reenacting trauma. It follows Slavoj Žižek's categorization of violence (2008) and Edward Said's reflections on exile (1992; 2001; 2012), while drawing from comics studies to approach the specificities of the comic medium. As we will see, Abdelrazaq uses a two-fold strategy: the story she narrates is deeply personal - her father's and his family's -, but the graphic treatment and the narrative genre the author chooses to do so - the coming-of-age story - make the story universally appealing, prompting its readers to identify themselves with a simply-drawn boy and his yearn for a safe future.

2 Documenting Memory and Atrocity in Comics: Postmemory and Testimonial Writing

Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* shares with Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* an interest for bringing into focus historical episodes and personal stories that otherwise might have passed unnoticed. Or, as Edward Said argued in his introduction to Sacco's *Palestine*, a narrative concerned with the point of view of "history's losers" (Said 2001a, iv).

Abdelrazaq's graphic memoir – much like Sacco's documentary comics – bears witness, becoming a memory artifact. Unlike Sacco, she records family memories without documenting in detail the larger context. *Baddawi* narrates the story of Ahmad, Abdelrazaq's father, and his family: how they flee their ancestral home in Safsaf, Galilee, and become permanent refugees, first in the camp of Nahr al-Bared in Northern Lebanon and then in Baddawi, which opened in 1955, covering Ahmad's childhood and teenage years (1959-1980) until he abandons Beirut to pursue university studies in the US. As Cheurfa has pointed out, *Baddawi* is related to Sacco's and some of the most renowned comics authors in account of its focus on bearing witness as a "graphic life narrative which follows the testimonial tradition of postcolonial witness comics such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" (Cheurfa 2020, 364). Like these authors, Abdelrazaq uses black and white exclusively, similarly to the rest of her comics and artistic production. Her drawing style is austere, but her essentialism contrasts with the dynamism in the layout: each page shows a varied display of compositions and panel shapes, alternating black backgrounds and white backgrounds.

Since the author was not a direct participant of the action, but a listener of the stories shared by her family (Abdelrazaq 2015, 123), Abdelrazaq is a secondary witness (Jilovsky 2015), someone who was not present at the time in which the events took place but who was exposed to her father's memories of those events. For Jilovsky,

bearing witness for the secondary witness means adopting strategies to overcome the lack of physical presence as well as explicitly acknowledging this lack of presence in their testimony, whether through form or content. (2015, 34)

Those strategies include a preface situating her father's story within the historical context of the Palestinian exile and a glossary which highlights and expands information of socio-political agents involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – Irgun, PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), Intifada, Mossad, Political Factions in the Lebanese Civil War, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) – and cultural references about

food, geographic locations or festivities. There are also different paratexts, such as the use of family photographs included at the end of the graphic novel.

In addition, Abdelrazaq acknowledges the absence in her testimony in the dedication page of her graphic novel, while at the same time invoking other secondary witnesses to similar migration stories: "for all those children of immigrants who have not forgotten their parents' stories" (Abdelrazaq 2015, 7). The author expands this acknowledgment in the preface, clarifying that "the story you are about to read isn't about only my father" (2015, 11). By doing so, she draws a direct connection between the story of her father and his family and the context in which it happened; at the same time, she documents Palestinian history without attempting to summarize it, but through an individual story, her father's. This connection is symbolically evoked using geometric and floral patterns integrated in the illustrations. The author clarifies after the preface that they are *tatreez* designs from traditional Palestinian embroidery (2015, 13). This graphic motif acts as a visual thread embroidering the collective and the individual, family and history, memory and document, past and present.

Abdelrazaq's graphic memoir is an example of postmemory (Hirsch 1993; 2013). As Hirsch reflects, postmemory is the intersection of generational past and transferred trauma, between historical memory and family transferred memories: "At stake is precisely the guardianship of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a living connection and that past's passing into history" (2013, 202). Testimonial authority is then extended from ancestor to descendant, even if Abdelrazaq had no direct connection with the historical atrocities narrated in her memoir. Her graphic recreation of such a past functions as a homage to those who experienced such atrocity, as a recipient for her families' memories, and as the vindication of the visibility of the silenced and the repressed. Thus, the question of memory and bearing witness is a matter of political activism as a way of voicing silenced stories/histories for Abdelrazaq:

Memory is important to me as a Palestinian because of the way that oral histories and narratives of oppressed people are systematically erased. I'm also just interested in the way that memory is inconsistent, impacted by a person's feelings towards an event or their present political circumstances, changes as it turns into a story that is passed down between generations, and the way that memory, as it exists in the mind, toes the line between reality and imagination. From a creative standpoint, I think there are a lot of interesting things you can do when retelling memories because of all of these layers. (Abdelrazaq qtd. in Ghanem 2018)

Besides voicing “erased” oral “histories”, the author is aware of the inconsistencies of secondary witnessing as a reproduction of transferred memories, but she also emphasizes on the creative possibilities of such retelling. Reproducing family stories within a historical context furtherly explored in the graphic novel turns Abdelrazaq into a spokesperson of the Palestinian cause through the reception of the individual archive of her father’s and her family’s memories. This position illustrates the connection between individual and collective histories, since “individual archives also reveal emotional connections while functioning as nodes where individuals can engage with broader groups and communities” (Ahmed, Crucifix 2018, 282). The structure of the graphic memoir through short chapters organized chronologically, each one involving a specific memory, abounds on the notion of the individual archive and the inconsistencies and ellipsis of retelling.

In the case of *Baddawi*, the individual and the collective memory are intrinsically connected with violence and exile. Abdelrazaq reconstructs her father’s childhood and adolescence interspersing them with episodes of the Nakba and the events marked by it, such as the Six Day War and the Lebanon Civil War. The Nakba, ‘catastrophe’, was an extended operation of ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 which caused a massive exodus and the dismemberment of the historic Palestine. As Masalha states, the Nakba is fundamental for the Palestinian collective memory and “the most traumatic event in the history of the Palestinian people” (Masalha 2012, 1). Abdelrazaq chooses this event to open her graphic memoir as a turning point for her family and for all Palestinians, an episode in which history and subjective experience converge.

3 Ethical Implications of Representing Violence and Exile

The author is certain about the capacity of comics as a medium for shedding light on social and political themes like those she approaches in *Baddawi* by presenting them in a fragmentary, unpretentious way:

It’s also dealing with a lot of political and social themes that people might at first think are complicated [...] comics are really good because they’re more accessible and they break things down and they’re not pretentious. You can explain what you believe, and people will engage sometimes in what you believe as well. (Abdelrazaq qtd. in Sawyer 2018, 3)

Seeking for the reader’s engagement, Abdelrazaq deploys a didactic activism: comics are the accessible vehicle to teach readers alternative beliefs. As Alfarhan argues, graphic life narratives from the

Middle East are often framed within a universal human rights rhetoric which “facilitates empathy-fueled reading practices that do not force the reader to question or contend with their own role or subject position” (Alfarhan 2020, 155). However, Alfarhan also notes, *Baddawi* does not participate of such rhetoric by presenting a subjective experience – Ahmad’s individual story – within the larger context of Palestinian history (2020, 156-7). In this sense, it offers a subjective counter-narrative of history. As Said argued referring to comics read in his childhood, they “played havoc with the logic of a+b+c+d and they certainly encouraged one not to think in terms of what the teacher expected or what a subject like history demanded” (2001a, ii).

As Chute points out, documentary comics frequently involve “an ethical attempt to represent intimately those ignored in the world arena” (2016, 201). But it is an ethical attempt that calls for an ethical response. For Alfarhan, this is especially apt for confronting and provoking Western readers, “denying them the ability to empathize without feeling historically implicated in the violence to which [the protagonist] is subjected” (2020, 159). By engaging readers in such a counter-narrative, Abdelrazaq’s work becomes an ethical reading which connects with Palestinian history through her father’s individual experience, highlighting “the worldliness of Palestinian difference” (Feldman 2020, 1).

Baddawi is also an example of the ethical compromise in the politics of representation in many graphic life narratives. For Naghibi, Rifkind and Ty they show:

a shared affective and ethical drive toward balancing depictions of deplorable refugee, migrant, and immigrant conditions with representations of individual and collective agency, resilience, organizing, care, and resistance. (2020, 297)

Abdelrazaq uses two strategies for balancing ethically the refugee condition and violence with individual resilience in the story: the graphic treatment of atrocity and the coming-of-age theme.

Both strategies are present in one of its referential works, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (2000-03). Its global success turned it into a model for different coming-of-age autographics from and about the Middle East, opening a path to shed light on personal, sociopolitical and cultural issues in the Arab/Muslim world (Reyns-Chikuma, Ben Lazreg 2017, 758). Cheurfa considers that *Baddawi* “models itself in terms of style and subject” on *Persepolis* (2020, 364). It follows the same austere, monochrome aesthetic, defined by García (2015, 280) as the antithesis of detailed exuberance of mainstream comics.

Abdelrazaq’s graphic style is characterized by a low level of iconicity that keeps the quantity of details to the minimum: the backgrounds are simple – basic drafts of house interiors, street views,

landscapes -, the figures are flat and scarcely characterized, their features cartoonish. In the paratexts at the end of the volume the author includes a photograph of his father when he was a child, so it is easy to see that she makes no attempt to recreate his physiognomy nor to caricaturize any of his features. In this choice we see an authorial mark of style - no other character in the comic is drawn with naturalistic features, except for the leaders of the political factions in the Lebanese Civil War (2015, 44, 119) - but also an attempt to present Ahmad as an average boy. Thus, the iconic simplicity promotes an identification with the reader. As McCloud describes (1993, 36-7, 41), the cartoonish, simplified style of certain comics promotes an empathetic engagement. A cartoonish face with no personalized features, with no individuality, acts as an "empty shell" (1993, 36) in which readers project themselves. A cartoonish boy such as Ahmad, drawn with no attempt to portray realistically the author's father, calls for an identification reader-character. Revealingly, the *tatreez* designs which connect different chapters are reproduced in a more naturalistic way than figures and backgrounds: as we will see, they function as visual metaphors for the deep-rooted affiliation of exiles with Palestine.

Nevertheless, the graphic treatment of atrocity is also framed within Abdelrazaq's non-naturalistic, simple style. Violence is never explicit, although dead bodies and victims of violence are recurrent. Victims and perpetrators are represented with an even lower level of iconicity than the rest of characters. Corpses are represented as featureless blank silhouettes. Explicit violence is therefore simplified and codified through these blank silhouettes, so Abdelrazaq reproduces it without traumatizing the reader. In *Baddawi*, as in many other testimonial comics focusing on historical trauma, the question is not *whether* atrocity can be represented but *how* to represent it (Huysen 2003, 122). Through codification and fragmentary nature, comics like *Baddawi* ask for the direct participation of the reader, encouraging them to "fill in the blanks" which are suggested but not explicitly described. It is a form of asking the reader to invest creatively and productively in the story (Nabizadeh 2019, 4). Kidd argues that it is more effective to expose young readers to historical trauma rather than protecting them, disguising violent events under certain guise or presenting condescending stories (2011, 196). Abdelrazaq's style, in this sense, is the opposite to Joe Sacco's: Sacco saturates his narratives with details and give his characters a high level of iconicity, in an attempt to document facts in a journalistic, objectivist account. On the contrary, *Baddawi* does not attempt to document her story at a formal level. Even if she provides historical information within the text, her graphic treatment of that information is not documentary: violence is present but codified through low iconicity. In the absence of realistic details, drawings are less traumatic.

In order to know if *Baddawi* disturbs its potential readers, one should consider its ideal recipient. Upon its publication, some reviewers and librarians considered it a young adult graphic novel (Karp 2015; McLeod 2015).¹ A different reviewer considered it a crossover, “an ideal introduction to Palestine for people of all ages” (Davis 2015).² Taking into account Abdelrazaq’s considerations of comics as a medium for introducing complex political and social themes and presenting an alternative rhetoric to mainstream media regarding Palestine (Sawyer 2018), we can presume that the author did not address his graphic memoir to a young readership intentionally. However, this is a frequent feature in crossover narratives, since most of the times “there is no authorial intention when adult fiction crosses over to young readers” (Beckett 2009, 28). Whether it is addressed to young readers or not, violence and atrocity are presented subtly through a non-naturalistic and codified approach, as we will further explore in the next chapter. Therefore, the graphic memoir documents history in subjective way without traumatizing the reader. There is an ethical compromise with the story and the protagonist’s memories, but also with the potential reader, whose sensitivity is not thwarted by the recreation of explicit violence.

It is worth mentioning that *Baddawi* is marketed as a “coming-of-age story” in its back cover, a thematic framework that usually engages with young readers.³ Coming-of-age stories often make use of the motif of life as a journey, focusing on the growth of the main character from youth to adulthood. Ahmad’s story also involves such a journey of self-discovery in the midst of the larger context of Palestinian history and exile. When his (mis)adventures start in 1959 he is as a first-grade student, when *Baddawi* ends in 1980 he is a twenty-year-old adult. By adopting the conventions of this genre - depicting a young character who grows up, matures and faces different crises, confronting crucial choices that determine his future life - the author turns Ahmad’s individual plight into a recurrent model of the coming-of-age story, promoting identification, especially among younger readers.

1 See also Van Tech Library recommended readings at <http://www.vantechlibrary.org/summer-reads--for-students-in-grades-8-and-9.html>.

2 See also The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center recommended readings at <http://smithsonianapa.org/bookdragon/baddawi-leila-abdelrazaq/>.

3 Beckett mentions that the American Library Association created the Alex Awards for adult-to-child crossover fiction: “often the novels awarded have young protagonists and many are coming-of-age stories that appeal to teenage readers” (2009, 32).

4 Representing Objective, Systemic and Symbolic Violence

The pull of the Nakba's memory becomes evident in the graphic memoir. Even if the event took place before Ahmad was born, the introductory section is devoted to this event. Ahmad's parents were two of the 750,000 Palestinians who lost or fled their homes and became refugees. Their village, Safsaf, was raided on 29 October 1948 by Zionist soldiers who killed 50-70 people (Masalha 2012, 86).⁴ Abdelrazaq's paternal grandparents escaped a narrow death and then walked to a refugee camp in Northern Lebanon, transferring to Baddawi, the camp that gives the graphic memoir its title, where most of their sons and daughters were born and raised.

Therefore, *Baddawi* opens with a violent episode which also marks the beginning of the Palestinian diaspora. Violence and exile go hand in hand in the case of Ahmad and his family, in the case of the Palestinian people, and also in the graphic memoir.

In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek differentiates three types of violence (2008, 12): subjective (perpetrated by clearly identifiable individuals or groups, such as crimes or terrorist acts), objective (without a clear perpetrator, sometimes passing unnoticed behind the subjective type of violence, such as racism or discrimination), and systemic (the ominous result of political and economic systems). He adds a complementary category, symbolic violence, embodied in language and its forms (2008, 1). Žižek argues that the violent origins of the state of Israel linger through a state-sanctioned violence at present (2008, 120). In the Palestinian-Israeli context, systemic violence coalesces with objective violence (perpetrated by the army or the paramilitary groups, for instance) and subjective violence (violent attacks performed by individuals).

Baddawi offers plenty of examples of objective violence performed by soldiers of the Irgun, the Israeli and the Lebanese armies, in Safsaf (Palestine) before Ahmad was born, and then in Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon through raids and bombings.

In her introduction, Abdelrazaq presents her most salient graphic strategy when representing violence: Israeli soldiers are depicted as black silhouettes without features, they are only identified in account of their helmet, gun, and an exaggerate threatening grin full of teeth. Whether they are members of the Irgun, one of the Lebanese political factions or the Israeli Defence Force, soldiers are indistinctly represented as these black featureless silhouettes throughout the graphic

⁴ As Abdelrazaq mentions in the glossary (2015, 118), the paramilitary group Irgun was absorbed into the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), the Israeli army, normalizing the ethnic cleansing. Masalha (2012, 85-6) and other sources (Benvenisti, Gans, Hanafi 2007, 119; Khalili 2007, 167) also hold the IDF responsible for the Safsaf massacre.

memoir. They reappear in Ahmad's dreams with a slight difference: their contours become wavy. There is a clear identification between the real soldiers and the nightmarish soldiers, both are the monsters in Ahmad's story and the monsters in his dreams. Abdelrazaq is aware of the fact that she is demonizing the soldiers, but she does not feel responsible for giving them an "objective" representation:

So, I thought "Okay, if I'm going to this then there is no room for the other side. I'm responsible for my dad and my dad's story, I'm not responsible for keeping balance". I don't think there's any such thing as keeping balance, it's bullshit. Everybody has their bias and anyone who thinks they're not bias is usually white. Anyway, I just decided I don't care about faces and characters [for the army] because they can speak for themselves. (Abdelrazaq qtd. in Sawyer 2018, 5)

Abdelrazaq shows her commitment to memory and bearing witness by sticking to the facts of his father's story. At the same time, her activist choice is a way of (un)balancing the usual rhetoric in mainstream media when reporting violence in Palestine:

even right now when reporting on what's happening in Gaza, you see headlines of x number of members died. Did those people drop dead? No, they were killed! It's like taking the responsibility away from the Israeli soldier who's killing people. (Abdelrazaq qtd. in Sawyer 2018, 5)

If, according to Abdelrazaq, mainstream Western media hide the responsibility of the soldiers, she mimics and reverses such rhetoric by demonizing and depersonalizing them, depriving them of individuality. By doing so, the author also shows the clear connection between objective violence and systemic violence. Her depersonalization strategy is a tool for denouncing the individual responsibility behind the state-sanctioned, systemic violence.

The author also highlights the underlying systemic violence in the Palestinian-Israeli-Lebanese context by evoking the constant objective violence or reproducing symbolic violence in most of the chapters. As in the case of the Safsaf massacre, the author presents different episodes of objective violence. In the chapter "The Cluster Bombs", the wife of one of Ahmad's cousins is killed in her house in Baddawi while baking as a result of an Israeli bombing (Abdelrazaq 2015, 62-3). The kneading and the fighter planes appear side by side, creating an incongruous visual analogy: for precarious lives surrounded by conflict, violence and domesticity go hand in hand.

Ahmad's family moves to Beirut when the climate of violence becomes overwhelming in the refugee camp only to discover a city also

immersed in the preliminaries of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). In fact, violence is such a common occurrence that it is part of daily life, as we see in the chapter "The School Bus": Afif, one of Ahmad's younger brothers, is shot in his arm when he points a finger gun outside the window in the bus to school (Abdelrazaq 2015, 75). The reader cannot see who has shot him, but there are no textual references pointing at the shooter either. Ahmad takes his brother to their sister's apartment, and they go together to a nearby hospital. In the waiting room, Ahmad and his sister comment casually on Ahmad's progress in school (2015, 77). Characters show concern but no surprise, and there is not a single allusion to the responsible for the violent attack. This double ellipsis (graphic and textual) illustrates the recurrent presence of violence and its internalization by refugees, who endure and deal with it without any second thoughts. Objective violence becomes invisible but remains a permanent threat for Ahmad, who almost dies in a bombing in the streets of Beirut while buying groceries in another episode that goes uncommented (2015, 111).

Violence and impunity follow the protagonist wherever he goes, suggesting a never-ending cycle for the Palestinian refugee. When the situation in Beirut becomes unbearable with the Civil War, Ahmad asks his parents to return to Baddawi, where the UNRWA school is still open. One of his relatives, the butcher Abu Muhammad, dies during an Israeli bombing. The episode, as in the case of the previous ones, is evoked graphically but readers do not actually see the killing nor a graphic depiction of the body. They take place outside the page, in the gutters, "the rich empty spaces between the selected moments that direct our interpretation" (Chute 2009, 342). These gaps are productive, since they are the "basis of the discontinuous language of comics" (Groensteen 2007, 132). Far from obscuring meaning, these ellipses force the reader to use their imagination to recreate what is happening because, as Mikkonen states: "segmented sequences and fragmentation function as a provocation to meaning-making" (2017, 18).

Like their executioners, victims of violence are also featureless. Bodies are shown as blank silhouettes but, unlike the black and threatening executioners, they are represented in shading or even black, with bullet holes. These undifferentiation strategy recreates atrocity without reproducing it and causing further trauma, as we have argued in the previous section.

The everyday nature of violence is also present in chapters which might seem optimistic or cheerful at first time, like those in which Ahmad plays with his friends in Baddawi. Schoolground games frequently end throwing stones (Abdelrazaq 2015, 24) and one excursion to hunt birds ends with Ahmad being shot with lead bullets by an older boy (2015, 54). The occurrence of building a raft with balsa wood, which ends with hilarious consequences, hides the threat of death by water (2015, 59-61). All these chapters involve symbol-

ic violence in one way or another, even pointing at the psychological damage caused by systemic and objective violence. In yet another hunting excursion, Ahmad's rifle explodes hurting his hand. The last page in this chapter is a full-page panel in which Ahmad and his two friends are represented as black silhouettes with rifles and a *kufiyah* (2015, 89). The image powerfully reminds the reader of the black silhouettes of the army soldiers, insinuating that these boys might grow up to become Palestinian soldiers.

Besides symbolic violence, the graphic memoir also exhibits poverty, discrimination, nepotism, problems for accessing education and lack of opportunities. All of them are constant presences in Ahmad's daily life in Baddawi and Beirut and can be also considered systematic forms of violence. This encroaching circumstance makes Ahmad realize that his life has come to a standstill, an illustration of Han's claim that "a society dominated by the hysteria for survival is a society of the undead, capable neither of living nor of dying" (Han 2018, 35). In order to move forward and escape violence, Ahmad chooses exile.

5 Representing Exile: Out-of-Placeness as Identity

For Palestinians, violence and exile go hand in hand. The Nakba, as we have seen, involved a massive ethnic cleansing and the establishment of a settler-colonialist state on the majority of Palestinian territory. But also about 90% of the population was driven out from their lands and homes "by psychological warfare and/or military pressure and a large number at gunpoint" (Masalha 2012, 2). The result was 750,000 refugees, who were barred from returning. For those in exile, Palestine became an "essentially lost world" (Said 2012, 14).

Said defines exile as an individual experience in connection with a collective, as an exterior experience that marks inner life: "exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation" (Said 2001b, 177). Many descendants of those who went into exile have never set foot in Palestine, many others do not longer have any relatives living there, as in Leila Abdelrazaq's case. However, she considers herself Palestinian and has become an activist for the Palestinian rights (Sawyer 2018, 4). She represents the "spirit of resilience" that Said assigns to Palestinian people (1992, 9) by bringing into focus the Palestinian diaspora in most of her works and also by promoting SWANA and Arab American comics creators through her independent publishing company, Maamoul Press.

As a second generation exiled Palestinian, her narrative proves that "Palestinian life remain dispossession, exile, dispersion, disenfranchisement and, by no means least, an extraordinarily widespread

and stubborn resistance" (Said 1992, 9). Even if Abdelrazaq's graphic memoir is an example of postmemory, exile continues to be an "essential sadness [which] can never be surmounted" (Said 2001b, 173).

The cover of the graphic memoir concentrates all the evocative and symbolic charge of exile. Besides alluding to the refugee camp in Lebanon, the title *Baddawi* "is derived from the word 'Bedouin': *no-mad*" (Abdelrazaq 2015, 18). Nomad identity is indirectly represented through the *tatreez* designs that frame the cover, the same graphic motif that serves as unifying thread through the different chapters. For Abdelrazaq, this motif is a representation of exiled Palestinians, as shown in her work *A Map of Palestine*, a hand-painted mural for her solo exhibition in the Arab American National Museum.⁵ The mural was a monochromatic world map where different areas around the world, those populated by the Palestinian diaspora, were marked with red *tatreez*. A thread stems from each of those areas, all of them converging in Palestine. The transnational presence of Palestinians and their connection with their home country highlights their reality, a diasporic existence that is "part of their lives, part of their very identity" (Žižek 2008, 128).

The "out of placeness" (Said 2012) suggested in the title is further emphasized by the presence of Ahmad with his back turned to the reader and his hands folded behind. It is a very evident reference to Handala, a character created by the Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali, perhaps the most popular artist in the Arab world (Chute 2016, 212). Al-Ali also abandoned Palestine as a refugee when he was ten. Handala was the protagonist of all of his comics strips, a bare-foot ten-year-old boy who never grows up nor turns his back to the spectator, a silent witness of the events in front of him, from the brutality of Israeli occupation to the corruption of Palestinian political parties. If in Abdelrazaq's work *A Map of Palestine* Handala is the one holding the threads that unite the diasporic existence, Ahmad impersonates Handala in *Baddawi's* cover. As the original Handala, both characters stand as symbols of Palestinian refugeehood, contributing to creating a site for the construction of Palestinian refugee and Arab identity (Najjar 2007, 258).

The tribute to Handala as a symbol of Palestinian exile is also a memento of the compromise between the collective and the individual in testimonial narratives. Although both characters bear witness implicating the readers in the events at hand, Ahmad's story relies in the individuality of his experience as an exile: Handala is a faceless,

⁵ *Drawing in the Diaspora: Comic Art & Graphic Novels by Leila Abdelrazaq*. Arab-American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan (November 12, 2016-April 19, 2017). <https://arabamericanmuseum.org/exhibition/drawing-in-the-diaspora-comic-art-graphic-novels-by-leila-abdelrazaq/>.

fictional boy who stands for Palestinian exile; Ahmad stands for a real boy with a real story, one of the countless examples for the same event. It is through his individual experience that he contributes to Palestinian memory (Naghbi, Rifkind, Ty 2020, 300). However, as we have seen, his individual experience is fictionalized through low iconicity and graphic essentialism, and through the use of the coming-of-age motif.

Beside its cover, *Baddawi* is replete with visual metaphors evoking exile. One of the first pages features a large panel framed by a *tatreez* design with a view of Safsaf at dawn, a tree, and Ahmad's parents up front (Abdelrazaq 2015, 16). This nostalgic vista abruptly changes with the above-mentioned attacks of the Irgun (2015, 17). However, when Ahmad tries to imagine what Palestine would be like, Abdelrazaq recovers the image of the dawn and the tree framed by *tatreez* while listening to her mother's stories (2015, 34). It is noticeable that Ahmad's happy memories with his friends are also set at dawn (2015, 56, 58). Also, the few chapters without any allusions to symbolic or objective violence involve a remembrance of Palestine. These frequently include memories related to food – as when Ahmad goes to pick up herbs for his mother for the preparation of the traditional Za'atar – or festivities – like the Eid in Ramadan, celebrated with card games, food and “stories of Palestine” (2015, 39). Stories about the lost homeland are the stronghold of Palestinian identity; memory is preserved in them in connection to food and traditions as a means of retaining cultural identity.

Nevertheless, identity is always fragmentary for exiles. The sense of homelessness pervades every aspect of Ahmad's life. He is always on the move to escape violence and travels between Beirut and Baddawi, “whichever seemed safer at the time [...] Ahmad was always trying to outrun the war” (Abdelrazaq 2015, 101). However, the war catches up with him even in his nightmares. Nostalgic reminders of Palestine are not enough for him to create a permanent haven. Said writes that “exiles feel [...] an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (2001, 177). Ahmad embodies this premise when the time comes to decide whether to stay in Beirut/Baddawi or go to the US to study and begin a new life. Such a choice is dramatically represented in a full page: above, the dawn, an adult Ahmad with a blonde wife and two kids, a house with a car and a fence dividing the scene; underneath, Ahmad and the silhouette of an Israeli soldier in the familiar, broken landscape of wartime Lebanon (Abdelrazaq 2015, 108). The choice is a mutually exclusive binary opposition: staying and facing a violent existence, even death, or leaving for good to survive and pursue the American dream. Ahmad opts for the second. The immediate threat of violence disappears, although the exiled condition remains.

Ahmad's comings and goings from Baddawi to Beirut, his precarious existence as a refugee exposed to daily violence, discrimination, nepotism or poverty, and the impossibility of returning "home" attest for the exile's "discontinuous state of being" (Said 2001b, 177). This interrupted existence is a constant reminder of what is left behind, Palestine, but Palestine's projection also hovers above Ahmad's future. Around the same time, he receives an acceptance letter from an US college, his parents recommend him to marry his friend Manal. In his imagination, the prospect of marrying Manal involves staying in Lebanon in the midst of violence (Abdelrazaq 2015, 112). Abdelrazaq recreates a literal crossroads to represent this turning point in Ahmad's life: Ahmad is presented in a full page with two roads: one traverses Lebanon, the other the US; in the distance, as the sun at dawn, a map of Palestine inscribed with *tatreez*. Both roads seem to lead to Palestine, although this could also be a golden mirage. Whichever road he takes, his choice for the future will be always tainted by what is left behind, Palestine. Going to the US is yet another detour to attain that end, a choice prompted by survival, not an end in itself. Again, Ahmad is represented as Handala but, unlike al-Ali's original and *Baddawi's* cover, he is no longer a child, but a soon-to-be adult facing adult life and adult choices. With these visual metaphors including crossroads and parted ways, Abdelrazaq introduces a common motif in coming-of-age narratives: a protagonist who matures when making vital choices which will be determining for their adult life.

6 Conclusions

In *Baddawi*, Abdelrazaq places her father's subjective experience at the center of Palestinian diaspora. Her family's individual archive sheds light on a wider context, Palestinian collective experience, offering a counter-narrative of history without documenting such context in detail. As a memory artifact and an example of postmemory, *Baddawi* evokes the dynamism of such a subjective experience in account of its rich layout and structure of short chapters: an array of independent memories that illustrate some of the most salient episodes of Ahmad's childhood and youth. As a secondary witness, Abdelrazaq acknowledges her position and the gaps in her testimony.

Abdelrazaq's originality strives in her use of family memories to create a personal story, but instead of documenting the larger context of the Palestinian conflict in detail or to present her characters realistically or even recognizably, she opts for two narrative strategies that depersonalize such story: on a graphic level, by using a low degree of iconicity which allows the identification reader-character, on genre level, by assimilating the coming-of-age motif. The author

treads her own path turning her subjective family memories not into a fictionalized documentary.

Furthermore, fragmentation can be effectively transformed into a creative device. Since readers can fill gaps and ellipsis productively, the fragmentary nature of comics in general and of *Baddawi* in particular echoes the fragmentary nature of memory. Such fragmentary nature also calls for the “nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” nature of exile (Said 2001b, 186). Homelessness provoked by violence and exile is kept at bay thanks to stories. In *Baddawi*, the only memories devoid of violence are related to stories of Palestine. Stories, passed from one generation to another, become a home for Ahmad and his family: “Ahmad wondered what Palestine would be like. He thought of his mother’s stories” (Abdelrazaq 2015, 34). These oral stories were told by Ahmad’s elders to Ahmad, and by Ahmad to Leila, who in turn tells them to us through her graphic memoir. Abdelrazaq’s text becomes yet another link in the chain of stories interconnecting subjective experiences within history, as *tatreez* connects exile experiences, memory and Palestine.

Systemic and symbolic violence permeates every aspect of Ahmad’s life, from his everyday activities to his dreams and his games with his peers. Ahmad’s choice of leaving Lebanon and his family to pursue university studies in the US is a way of avoiding systemic and objective violence, although it is a prolongation of his diasporic experience.

In terms of representation, the absence of explicit violence and its graphic codification involves a productive exchange between reader and author to engage with Palestinian memory. The threatening silhouettes of Israeli soldiers stand for the ruthless violence experienced by Ahmad and Palestinian people; the author depersonalizes and demonizes the soldiers depriving them of individual features in order to criticize the rhetoric in the representations of the Palestinian conflict in US mainstream media.

Like Naji al-Ali’s character Handala, Ahmad is endowed with a “moral entity” (Sacco 2009, ii) in his compromise with Palestinian memory, becoming a symbol of the Palestinian diaspora. But unlike Handala, his subjectivity makes his plight differential and unique. In addition, *Baddawi* also calls into the reader’s attention the ethical implications of transferring the “pain of others” (Sontag 2003) when documenting violent episodes of history. As a secondary witness, Abdelrazaq’s role in voicing silenced histories/stories without trivializing the exposed events and without causing further trauma is fundamental. The author uses a two-fold strategy to represent violence and exile for engaging the reader without traumatizing them. On the one hand, a non-naturalistic and simple graphic treatment of atrocity by which victims of violence become featureless, blank silhouettes. On the other, the use of the coming-of-age story, frequently seen in crossovers for illustrating narratives of

growth, resilience and resistance while promoting an identification with the reader.

Therefore, *Baddawi* manages to balance the individual and the collective experience of violence and exile, turning Ahmad's individual plight into a symbol of the Palestinian diaspora, but effectively presenting that experience as a universal motif, a coming-of-age story, suitable for engaging a wide range of young and adult readers.

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Bodies and Economic Violences in Contemporary Japanese Fiction

Absence, Change, and Empowerment in Yū Miri, Murata Sayaka, and Kawakami Mieko

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Abstract This paper explores how different ways of articulating the idea of the body in contemporary Japanese literature are inscribed within a paradigm of criticism against ongoing modes of economic violence. The goal is to explore three ways of articulating the body represented in these works: change and adaptation to neoliberal demands in the case of Murata Sayaka's *Konbini ningen* (*Convenience Store Woman*), a quest for empowerment in Kawakami Mieko's *Natsu monogatari* (*Breasts and Eggs*), and the invisibilization of poverty in Yū Miri's *JR Ueno eki kōen guchi* (*Tokyo Ueno Station*).

Keywords Japanese literature. Economic violence. Symbolic violence. Body literature. Murata Sayaka. Yū Miri. Kawakami Mieko.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Representing Economic Violence. – 3 Out of Sight, Out of Mind. – 4 The Uncanny Valley of Normality. – 5 Owning Your Body. – 6 Conclusions.

1 Introduction

I explore in this piece different ways in which the body has been treated as a vehicle for the articulation of economic violence in contemporary Japanese literature. My goal is to study how literary representations of alterations to the body fit with a decades-long critical trend of criticizing hegemonic heteronormativities in Japan. The discourse by

Japanese authorities to promote and sustain a healthy body as a way to uphold social and economic prosperity has a well-established history of cultural confrontations. The trope of the altered body mocks the impossibility of attaining these standards and offers a visual and figurative gateway to express dissent and propose alternatives to the imposed paradigm of social suitability. I work under the hypothesis that contemporary iterations of these denunciations can reflect a recent focus by artists, activists, and critical thinkers on intersectionality as the means to fully understand and tackle effectively the multiple ongoing modes of oppression. In this regard, representations of the altered body have evolved to signal not only an isolated complaint, but an entangled web of constraints that are dependent upon questions of gender, race, class, origin, and else. In this line, the individual expected for normalcy and whose body is put to the test of symbolic (and material) transformation must incorporate a wider range of potential subjects that incarnate diversity in repression and resistance.

To explore this particular promise of contemporary body representations, I narrow down the study to an analysis of the way they convey criticism against economic violence. For this work, I define economic violence as the implementation, reproduction, and enforcement of rules and circumstances that harm collectives in a way that normalises their unfair economic situation and perpetuates a system of unequal distribution and access to resources. In order to survey the points in common and the particularities of these inequalities, I look at the relationship between body representations and economic violence in three novels, exposing how each of them adopts a different strategy and targets of criticism. In *JR Ueno-eki kōen-guchi* (2014) (*Tokyo Ueno Station*, 2019), by Yū Miri, I study the theme of invisibility; in *Konbini ningen* (2016) (*Convenience Store Woman*, 2018), by Murata Sayaka, the focus is set on imitation and metamorphosis; and in *Natsu monogatari* (2019) (translated with the title of *Breasts and Eggs*, 2019), by Kawakami Mieko, I centre on the idea of empowerment through resistance. I vertebrate my analysis of these three works by looking at how the representation of the body as a space of conflict carries a broader objection to Japan's hegemonic neoliberal biopolitics. I ultimately link these representations with the concurrent changes in protest dynamics happening across the country.

2 Representing Economic Violence

Economic violence, along with physical and symbolic violence, establishes and naturalises the otherwise arbitrary power relations that define the positions of members within a certain social structure, or a field, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1991), with its own set of rules and practices ('habitus' [Bourdieu 1998]) that manage the means (the

‘capital’) with which players position and legitimise their preponderance in relation to the rest. The reproduction of modes of coveted and interiorised aggressions, like economic violence, subtle in their delineation even when their effects are clearly identifiable, can entail a challenge for the analyst to uncover. They tend to be compared with flashier and seemingly more polarising representations of physical violence, a question that is particularly prevailing in the quest for justice after natural or man-made disasters (Sharp 2014). In some instances, the fight against openly visible abuses of power through physical violence, like that of authoritarian regimes, can obscure or displace other pervasive structures that sustain unfair hierarchies. As Sharp points out (2014, 11), efforts to carry out projects of transitional justice, aimed at restoration, accounting for wrongdoings, and restitution of political power, can leave untouched or substantially unaffected economic structures that keep benefiting those groups previously in power and continue oppressing those formerly subjugated.

There are at least three reasons that can explain this phenomenon. First, physical violence inflicts a type of visible damage that demands direct attention. The nature of its consequences, albeit contingent to the degree of its application, is short-term survival. It tends to manifest in material displays, for instance, in corporeal wounds, a matter that is relevant for our current discussion. Although economic violence can also leave a visible mark on those suffering them (Allen 2001; Benzeval et al. 2000), they can be perceived as corresponding to a different typeset of predicaments, one that can only be tackled in the mid to long term. Second, there is the scale. Issues associated with economic violence tend to be assumed as belonging to deep-rooted, systemic, broad-encompassing dynamics within a community. This perception of economic violence as something that happens in a wide-ranging dimension is also supported by the World Health Organization, which circumscribes economic violence as a “collective violence”.¹ This connotation, while true in many accounts, also obfuscates the individual impact of economic violence. Its causes are systemic, but the consequences are also personal, a matter often overlooked and at the centre of contemporary strategies of confrontation to these structures. Third, intrinsic of this type of violence and sharing in this regard the same trait with symbolic violence in a Bourdieusian sense, economic violence require the acceptance and internalization of the groups inflicting and inflicted by them in order to work (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, Sanghera, 2016). For these power structures to operate, they demand the consent of the members affected by them, even if this consent goes against their individual and direct interests. This process is called ‘misrecognition’ by Bourdieu

¹ <https://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/>.

(Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, Sanghera 2016, 149) and while it doesn't hinder our capacity of identifying the source of our problems, it can account for part of the reason why it is difficult – although not impossible – to articulate operative alternatives, a challenge also reflected in the literary works explored in this piece.

The relationship between body tropes and the hegemonic biopolitical paradigm has a long history in Japan. During the Tokugawa era (1603-1868), the existence of a caste system that included a pariah group (the *eta*) was justified using distorted interpretations of Shintoist ideas regarding the corruption of the body. The stigma associated with members of these groups, usually conscripted to low-income and undesired jobs, persisted even decades after the abolition of this class system at the end of the nineteenth century. At that same moment, a political philosophy that among other things equated the state with a body (and the emperor as its head), called *kokutai*, came into place and stayed dominant until the end of World War II. The end of this conflict brought a new framework for conceiving the body that, in turn, perpetuated a dichotomy between pure and corrupted as the basis to arrange power relations. In his work *Bodies of Memory*, Yoshikuni Igarashi (2000) tracks down how Japan's treatment of postwar memories can be traced through its treatment of the body trope. Bodies are used to articulate Japan's understanding of the war, from suffering and decay of the direct aftermath, to then the will of promoting a healthy body that came during the 1960s and 1970s, and later to the returning of the rotting body when addressing repressed memories and traumatic reenactments of the conflict. The promotion of healthy bodies by state authorities had the purpose of replacing the image of Japan as 'unclean', both materially and morally, because of the war. It served the dominant conservative stance that predicated amnesia and acritical forgetfulness of the past, for a healthy body is free from past imperfections (Igarashi 2000, 199). It also had the function of fostering the alternative image, abroad and domestically, of Japan as an economically prosperous country, whose wealth was horizontally distributed among a seemingly homogeneous middle class. While Japan achieved to overcome the aftermath of the war and generally raise the average income of many of its citizens during the decades prior to the bursting of the bubble in the early 1990s, it did so by maintaining and reproducing unequal structures that would make it harder to recover once the market crashed. The most precarious groups (women, racial and ethnic minorities, and younger generations) suffer since the turn of the century from the combined weight of having been made an accomplice of a crisis they did not provoke or managed and co-responsible for the recovery of a system that had oppressed them and which kept them inherently subjugated. They inhabit bodies whose expectation of healthiness and normalcy is disproportionate or directly inaccessible.

The reaction to that pressure to comply has manifested precisely in the embracement of this rejection by caricature and excess. In the 1930s it was through the *ero guro nansensu* (erotic grotesque nonsense) movement that mocked consumerism indulgences in an increasingly militarised country (Silverberg 2006). During the immediate postwar, the literature of the flesh (*nikutai bungaku*) by the likes of Sakaguchi Ango basked in the supposed new freedoms while teasing the limits of the US Occupation. Cyberpunk and apocalyptic dystopias during the 1980s played with collective fears of social collapse via posthuman or bizarre corporeal alterations, as in *Ghost in the Shell* (1989) or *Akira* (1982-1990). During the 1990s, trash literature by Yamada Ami and Murakami Ryū kept pushing the boundaries of what acceptable bodies meant in Japan. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Amamiya Karin (Allison 2012, 349) coins the term *precariat* (an amalgam of 'precarious' and 'proletariat') to define the experience of her generation, echoing and updating a legacy of more class-based literature that gave unsuspected popularity to the works of Communist writer Takiji Kobayashi, killed by the police in 1933 (Field 2009). The triple disaster of March 11, 2011, became a turning point for Japan and exposed the interrelationship between physical, economic, and social violence in the handling of the aftermath, the management of the recovery, and the search for meaning. The three novels here analysed are written within this paradigm and react both to a need to articulate criticism to ongoing crises and an inheritance of critical corporeal representations.

3 Out of Sight, Out of Mind

It is possible to follow and understand many of the traits and paths of Japan's economic rise and decline by taking a look at Japanese wristwatches. During the 1980s, Japanese clocks were global leaders in terms of technological advancement and brand attractiveness. Heading the industry was Seiko, the pioneer of the quartz watch and the democratisation of acquired status. However, a series of misguided managerial decisions that had to do with an inability to adapt to global markets and an insistence on sticking with increasingly old-fashioned workflows brought the 'Seiko Empire' down in favour of Swiss and Chinese brands in the 1990s (Donzé 2015). Seiko and other Japanese watches have remained profitable and have kept quality standards high even when producing cheaper lines of product, but their time in the perch has gone. They struggle on the sidelines, their fame, glory, and status turned bittersweet.

Yū Miri's *Tokyo Ueno Station* explores the different ways in which a person can be rendered invisible. The reader follows the voice of a homeless person living in the camps right next to Ueno Park. The

protagonist came from Fukushima during the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the construction boom, to be employed as a temporary worker particularly in the projects associated with the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. He describes a life of coming back and forth between the capital and his birthplace in Tōhoku, unable to settle anywhere, a constant victim of systemic economic violence. He returns as an old man to his wife in Fukushima, but when widowed, the narrator decides to go back to Ueno and live as a homeless person. He ends up jumping in front of a moving train in that same station.

This novel plays with the lack of significant difference between the living and the dead when it comes to the economically oppressed. The narrator dies, but his spirit remains trapped in this world. As the plot unfolds using several time jumps, the reader can never be sure whether some of the actions described in the story happened to the protagonist while alive or in his ghost stage. The distinction is irrelevant, as he is unable to project his agency nonetheless. A witness of his several misfortunes, the narrator is a mere spectator, moved around to wherever he is considered useful as skilled labour, later discarded when old and unproductive, and finally a phantom that roams the scenarios of his previous life unable to change anything on them:

The clip-clop of their shoes rang out. When one of them stepped on a fallen leaf, there was a rustling sound, too. I can no longer hear sounds or voices with my ears. But I feel like I'm listening closely. I can't watch people anymore, either. But I feel like I'm watching intently. And I can't speak about what I hear or see anymore. But I can talk to people. The people in my memories, whether they're alive or dead. (Yū 2019, 39)

The ghost acts in this regard as an allegory of the homeless. The two are invisible to the eye, equating being an economically healthy member of society to being alive and becoming poor to passing away. They represent the fear of a potential future: the declassing of regular citizens into a life of poverty and the *memento mori* of ghosts. Ghosts are defined as abnormal creatures haunted by a curse of non-belonging; trapped between realms, they cannot be considered non-existent, but their fittingness in a positivist world is problematic. This connection is also material: while the homeless have a restricted association with material belongings, ghosts have no material substance, no proper body. By fleshing a story out of the voice of one of these ghosts, as Kristina Iwata-Weickgennant suggests (2019, 193), Yū is providing silenced and repressed subjects humanity and emphatic bonds.

In one of the final scenes, the narrator, now a spirit, travels to Fukushima on the day of the triple disaster and is forced to watch as his granddaughter dies drowned by a tsunami wave. The novel had

played up until that point a subtle but constant relationship with the region despite most of the action happening in Tokyo. The narrator's account of displacement and exploitation seems to stress the necessity of framing the 3.11 disasters as part of a historical situation of repression and away from lamenting it only as an isolated event. Yū became involved in the region after the episode, first by hosting a radio show that invited residents to tell how their lives had changed, and later by opening a bookstore-cafeteria in Minamisōma, one of the towns that were hit hardest by the catastrophe. Other authors like Furukawa Hideo (2016) also expressed in fiction the historical situation of oppression of Tōhoku, creating links that stretch in time beyond those particular disasters.

The novel explores inequality also by establishing a cruel and acknowledged parallelism between the lives of the narrator's family and that of Japan's imperial household. The protagonist is obsessed over this running trope: how he was born the same year as Emperor Akihito, and his son the same day as Emperor Naruhito. Their fates, however, couldn't be any more different: the narrator kills himself, poor and homeless, and his son dies young from a sudden and inexplicable death while a university student. The protagonist is forced to live most of his life apart from his family and to watch how his own clan disintegrates. He is deprived of a family as a site of memory, restoration, legacy, and affect. Towards the end of the novel, Yū places the narrator and the Emperor briefly in the same space. Akihito has to pass through Ueno Park to attend an event, a moment in which the police evicts the homeless and temporarily dismantles the camp to disguise reality. When given the chance to address the Emperor, even if at a distance and in the streets, the narrator is, however, incapable of speaking. He is invisible and voiceless; the Emperor is seen but doesn't witness. By putting next to each other representatives of the two farthest echelons of Japan's society, Yū exposes the materiality of its oppressions.

Tokyo Ueno Station is crossed by another main trope: trauma. Trauma signals the open, exposed wounds of individuals and communities. It indicates the existence of unsolved, unaccounted, unsettled damage, both physical and psychological. Ghosts are trapped in the material world because they have unresolved businesses. There is no closure or peace for them, as there is no closure for those suffering from trauma. The narrator carries the weight of his tragedies without openly processing them, as injuries that must be kept out of sight for they are socially unacknowledged and unknowledgeable. His suicide happens out of view, a matter that appears in contrast with the other two significant deaths: that of his son, Kōichi, and his granddaughter Mari. Kōichi's corpse is found in his student apartment and his father refuses to recognise the body at the morgue. He is from then on unable to find himself in the mirror, his identity shattered

by the loss of a son. Yū also describes in detail how the body of Mari is washed away by the tsunami tide:

When the breath of the tide calmed, the car was enveloped in the light of the sea. Through the windscreen I could see Mari's pink uniform from the animal hospital. Seawater in her mouth and nose, her hair flowing with the waves appeared brown in one light, black in another. Her wide-open eyes had lost their sight, but they shone like black slits. (Yū 2019, 159)

This effort of portrayal is significant once we frame it within the hegemonic discourse around the victims of the triple disaster. The imagery has been focused on pictures of material and structural destruction (torn asphalt, wrecked houses, ruined harbours), but devoid of human presence. The absence of injured bodies can be approached simultaneously as a way to show respect to the deceased and their families, but also as a means of hiding the abnormality of harmed, exceptional bodies that could alter hegemonic ideas of the healthy body as representative of the nation. It shares similarities to corporo-political strategies happening in other parts of the world, like Latin America (Audran 2017), in which the aberrant body's overexposure or utter disappearance sends the message that there are individuals that simply do not matter. The narrator received from his family upon retirement a Seiko watch. It was meant as a token of appreciation, a reward for his efforts, and as a material compensation for a life of deprivation. In the end, it was his only possession while homeless and he kept it in the hopes it could help the authorities identify his dead body, unaware that these watches were mass-produced and could hardly be associated with one anonymous individual. Ultimately, Yū denounces this idea of insignificance not by excessive display of the damaged body, but by playing with the willingly unseen, those made invisible.

4 The Uncanny Valley of Normality

The development of the mechanical clock and the idea that time could be properly divided, subdivided, standardised, and tracked in or near the workplace first, and at home later, was integral to the success of the Industrial Revolution. Authors like Richard Biernacki (1994) have studied how the apparition of means of monitoring time in a way that could be converted into profit and could be assigned a monetary value transformed the lives of workers both in their productive and reproductive dimensions. The clock shaped our habits, our rhythms, and the way we perceived and differentiated between time at work and time off, for both blue and white-collar workers. The protagonist

of *Tokyo Ueno Station*, for instance, asks his family for what reason would he need a wristwatch if he has already retired (Yū 2019, 134), disclosing the clock's primary function as a worktool. This meddling of economic instruments in the organisation of our daily lives led to a relative standardisation of our experiences as members of a shared community. The blurring of this division between productive and reproductive lives has been since the Industrial Revolution intensifying, and with it, the gender gap worsening, a matter that some suggest (Chung et al. 2021; Nahum 2020) might be aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rituals, habits, and expectations associated with our economic activity are integrated but largely remain a role to be played, not a consubstantial trait. Murata Sayaka explores in her novel *Convenience Store Woman* precisely how absurd and dehumanising it would be to assume uncritically the precepts dictated by economic principles. How abiding by the rules and expectations of a hyper-productive lifestyle that defines your identity, instead of bringing about success and acceptance, leads to alienation and rejection. Furukura Keiko is a woman in her mid-thirties that works in a *konbini*, a 24h small supermarket. In a profession almost defined by impermanence and precariousness, she has kept the same post for almost twenty years. Furukura has always felt disconnected from implicit social rules and inherent expectations based on gender, class, and age, so, by contrast, the multiple scripted rules and regulations of working in a convenience store bring her solace.

The novel's first conflict concerns her age. *Konbini* workers are usually students, foreigners, housewives, retirees, or other part-time employees that want to earn some additional income. These companies depend on the accepted exploitation of their employees and the assumption of precariousness. These are predatory postings with little career prospects that do not lead to individual prosperity and, because they hardly allow for individual sustenance, make it difficult or near impossible to support larger households, pushing workers that depend on them to postpone or forsake that decision. Convenience store positions are representative of what is known as *freeter* jobs: part-time, undervalued, temporary occupations that were hailed during Japan's economic boom as the neoliberal's evolutionary apex point. Starting from the 1990s, however, many workers were unable to secure fixed positions and so the number of *freeters* skyrocketed. Now associated with deprivation and transience, *freeters'* so-called flexibility was exposed as instability, and their position disfavoured, disgraced, and left even more vulnerable to economic violence (Kosugi 2006). Furukura, however, problematises even further the already uncomfortable position of *freeters* for Japan's normativity. She is perceived as too old to work in a convenience store, but she cannot get another job based on that experience alone or become

an attractive suitor because of that same stigma. She is a glitch in a system that produced the trap but never cared to design an escape.

Furukura doesn't seem burdened by the connotations associated with her job. As a matter of fact, she loves it. Throughout the novel, we see how she expresses a deep connection with her responsibilities at the *konbini*. Her display of passion is caustic precisely because it mocks the socially rewarded approval of one's economic commitment with the inherent precariousness and clout deficit of being a convenience store employee. Furukura's bond with her job is not rational, but corporeal. She describes sounds, smells, and texture of products as part of her biological experience, as if she and the shop were one and the same:

A cold drink is often the last item customers take before coming to the checkout till, and my body responds automatically to the sound. (Murata 2018, 3)

The sound of my chewing was extraordinarily loud. It was probably because I'd been surrounded by the sounds of the convenience store until shortly before. When I closed my eyes and pictured the store, in my mind its sounds came back to life. That sound flowed through me like music. Swaying to the sounds etched deep within me of the store performing, of the store operating, I stuffed the food before me into my body so that I would be fit to work again tomorrow. (Murata 2018, 77)

Even when she is not working, Furukura adapts her life to the needs of the store. When she leaves the store and becomes briefly unemployed, her body reacts as in withdrawal. She loses her sense of direction and her time management skills, unable to procure a stable timetable of meals and sleeping hours:

Normally I would be concerned about work the next day and would be sure to care for my physical needs with food and sleep. My body had belonged to the convenience store even when I wasn't at work. Having been liberated from this, I didn't know what to do with myself. (Murata, 2018, 90)

Nothing in her attitude is, in itself, extraordinary. It is precisely the excess of normativity, her abidance of the rules, that which makes it abnormal. Her body becomes estranged from the reader, as Furukura appears more closely related to the shop than to fellow human beings.

The choice of a *konbini* is suitable for the articulation of this message. It is a profoundly encoded environment, defined by rituals and repetition. The employees' physical appearance and attitude are homogenised, with a clear hierarchy based on position, gender,

and seniority. These rules are written down in company manuals, but the focus on repetition pushes the employee to mimic their colleagues. Furukura also likes this feature of her job. Throughout her life, she has been unable to get social clues. She requests the assistance of her sister to tell her what is acceptable or not. Furukura also imitates the way her coworkers talk, dress, and express emotions hoping to fit in.

The conflict of fitting in is the second theme that runs through the novel. Murata introduces another main character, Shiraha, as a counterpart to the protagonist. Like Furukura, he defies expectations of social acceptance, but does so by actively refusing to be productive. They meet during Shiraha's brief interlude as a worker in the same *konbini*, but he is fired for stalking customers. Shiraha is bitter, egotistic, arrogant, and a social outcast, but contrary to Furukura, he is aware of the codes, he just doesn't want to partake in them. He wants to live by his own rules, even if that means exploiting other people to do so. Furukura believes the reason why she doesn't fit in society is within her. Shiraha blames society for the way it is and is unable to assume any level of responsibility for his actions. They partner up because of their shared trait: a necessity to avoid being perceived as unfit and to be left alone. This desire of fitting in is in both of their cases a hoax: Furukura wants to keep living a scripted, automatised life, and Shiraha wants to escape from society. His physicality also expresses this wish: he is described as incredibly thin and progressively looks for narrower spaces to be confined in, ending up living in Furukura's toilet.

One of the novel's strengths is its capacity for remaining ambivalent in its criticism. It would be an unjust oversimplification to frame Furukura as a satirical hyperbole of the contemporary individual devoted to social and economic normativities. She is also not the conventional heroine struggling to expose the structures of oppression and overthrow them by breaking free from these configurations. While social assumptions mystify her, Furukura appears to be genuinely at peace with herself in the reproduction of *konbini* conventions. Throughout the novel, she feels the need transmitted by her parents and sister 'to be cured', that is, to be reintegrated as a functional member of society that understands and integrates what is expected in terms of age, gender, and class. She follows the guidance given to her by members of the community even if that goes against her direct interests. Furukura's eventual realisation that her place in the convenience store requires from her a renunciation of her humanity. If social expectations are what define a human being, she will stop being one and turn, instead, into a 'convenience store being'. In Japanese, Murata uses the word *ningen*, a term referring to humans that is free from gender associations. Her body became one with the *konbini* and we are left to judge whether that is subversive freedom

or claudication to economic life. The subject originally perceived to be receiving the burden of economic violence shifts from Furukura to the implied reader, questioning our role as passive or sometimes inadvertently active arbiters of economic rules.

5 Owning Your Body

The integration of clocks into our daily lives had an impact that went beyond the artificial delineation – but often not even separation anymore – between productive and leisure time. Other aspects started succumbing to the standardised clock even if that meant changing the scale way beyond its original twenty-four hours radius. The conversion of individual lifetimes into clocks, mirroring the phases of the day, has, on the one hand, a poetic effect that tries to organise and give meaning to the cycles and evolutionary processes experienced by each of us at different points in our life. But it can also have a more sinister effect as it transfers the productive pressures of achieving certain goals within a limited time span associated with the working day. The clock becomes through this association not only a physical but also a mental mechanism of control that fuses productive and reproductive lives. This effect is particularly significant in governing the lives of women, as Martina Yopo Díaz (2021) studies in her piece on how the narrative of the ‘biological clock’ impacts the perception of reproduction, childbearing, and conciliation.

The struggle for acceptance, resistance, or adaptation against gender conventions and expectations define Kawakami Mieko’s *Breasts and Eggs*. To clarify, the volume in English refers to Kawakami’s *Natsu monogatari*, published in 2019, which includes a rewriting of her previous novella *Chichi to ran (Breasts and Eggs)*, originally published in 2008, and a continuation of the same story and characters but ten years later. The first story presents three women from the same family, in the span of a weekend, and three conflicts associated with their bodies, gender expectations, age, and even economic dependencies. The second story is focused on the main character’s struggle with the idea of maternity. Kawakami locates the conflicts of these characters at the problematisation of to what extent women can change the narrative of what’s imposed in their bodies.

Natsuko has been living in Tokyo for a few years trying to make it as a novelist and is embracing her decision to become a single mother. She describes herself as coming from a poor, unstructured family, raised in Osaka by her mother and her grandmother after her abusive father ran away. Throughout the novel, we see her coming to terms with the institution of the family, disentangling the extent to which the pressure to find a couple and take up motherhood is socially imposed on her or whether it really can be considered an autonomous

desire. She wrestles with a relationship with her body that is considered non-normative and which goes against the prescriptive means of gender identification:

‘If you think about it,’ I said, ‘that’s what it was like when we were younger. Sex wasn’t a thing, it had no real role in our lives, you know? It didn’t matter if you were a woman or not. It’s just, for me, things stayed that way. It’s like that part of me never grew up. I don’t think there’s anything strange or unusual about it, though. That’s why sometimes I have to ask myself: Am I really a woman? Like I said, I have the body of a woman, I know that. But do I have the mind of a woman? Do I feel like a woman? I can’t say either way with any confidence. I mean, what does feeling like a woman actually entail? I’m not sure how that relates to how I feel about sex, but it must.’ (Kawakami 2019, 440)

She had never felt particularly attached to her sexual desires, and although capable of enjoying meaningful emotional connections, she preferred to embark on the journey to motherhood on her own. Kawakami offers through Natsuko’s case an exploration of the many hurdles and hardships for non-conventional family units: the exorbitant prices of fertility treatments, the privatisation of these services, the assumption of rules of exclusion, taboos surrounding sterility and adoption, or the existence of a potentially dangerous underground industry of sperm donation. Kawakami creates in Natsuko a character that can navigate with sincerity the doubts and contradictions of this process but which is, in the end, firm in her resolution of doing things on her own account.

While Natsuko’s conflicts occupy the whole of the second story, it is her older sister, Makiko, who is at the centre of the first one. Makiko is close to forty, works in a hostess club, and wants to get breasts implants. This decision occupies her mind and the conversations between their sisters for months. Makiko’s job is hard, badly paid, and undesired, but her precarious situation as an uneducated single mom left her without any other prospects. Her body is her means of sustenance, and as she was becoming older, she worried for the future. As put by Juliana Buriticá Alzate:

Makiko emphasizes the different places and research she did while making her decision, and it is precisely the wide variety of offers that reinforce the notion of an ideal, perfect type of body that should be, and can be pursued. Hence, cosmetic surgery can be viewed as a service - that “cuts,” hurts, and heals - offered by an industry that merges health and beauty discourses, a by-product of current consumer-driven, neoliberal societies. (2020, 536)

Kawakami pushes the argument even further, problematising the debate by opening up the possibility for Makiko to also honestly and independently wish to strive to specific beauty standards that would require modifications and interventions to her body. Makiko is hard-pressed to commodify her body to the economic violence of her precarious position in the sex industry, but as Natsuko suggests, it is simultaneously true that she can also be doing it for her own sake, out of enjoyment of aesthetic corporeal beauty. The two sisters' approaches to their bodies are complimentary, from detachment and apathy to change and alteration; Kawakami seems to suggest that there is no single normativity and that empowerment comes from accepting the limitations and opportunities of the two stances.

Midoriko is Makiko's daughter and Natsuko's nephew. We first learn from her diary that she is torn by the changes happening in her life. She is becoming fully aware of the precarious situation in her family, her mother's sacrifices, and the struggles to keep them two economically afloat. At the same time, she is puzzled and outraged by the physiological changes in her body, concerning menstruation, sex, and the idea of fertility as linked to femininity and motherhood:

It feels like I'm trapped inside my body. It decides when I get hungry, and when I'll get my period. From birth to death, you have to keep eating and making money just to stay alive. I see what working every night does to my mom. It takes it out of her. But what's it all for? Life is hard enough with just one body. Why would anyone ever want to make another one? (Kawakami 2019, 49)

These tensions eventually explode in a final confrontation with her mother in which she reclaims agency and respect. She wants better, more open emotional communication and an acknowledgment that facing challenges collectively is more effective in being more affectively responsible. Midoriko grows to become a strong young woman, level-headed and caring, more in touch with her thoughts and emotions than her mother and aunt. Kawakami seems to bring forward with her character the idea that choosing alternative pathways to life is not the only way to change and confront the norm. Midoriko is a university student in a seemingly happy heteronormative relationship. She is also aware of the conflicts and limitations of this model and has learned from the previous generation of women in her life to be skeptical even when hopeful.

There is another theme that runs through the novel, and that is an understanding of sorority as a basis for dealing with the conflicts presented in this work. Kawakami has self-identified as a feminist (McNeill 2020) and has called out, for instance, Murakami Haruki's treatment of women in his novels (Literary Hub 2020). Most of the characters in *Breasts and Eggs* are women, and their relationships

are based on mutual, regular, everyday expressions of aid instead of exceptional assistance at specific, isolated episodes. Natsuko's process of getting to terms with her desire for motherhood is inspired by feedback from people in her circles, like her friend Rika, who is also a single mother. These expressions of support and affection are not uncritical, and there is room for judgment (for instance, Natsuko's bewilderment at the idea of breasts implants or Makiko's admonition against single motherhood), but it is precisely a critical while supportive attitude that sends a message of adaptation, acceptance, and empowerment against the situations and structures of oppression suffered by the characters. Through the representation of these connections, Kawakami seems to suggest that while the suffering of violence might be perceived as an individual burden, it should be tackled as a collective struggle.

6 Conclusions

In this piece, I have explored how the representation of bodies in contemporary Japanese fiction can be inscribed within strategies of criticism and dissent to hegemonic biopolitical paradigms, particularly in its denunciation of neoliberal economic violence. Through the themes of invisibilisation, mimesis, and empowerment, Yū, Murata, and Kawakami question normativities by claiming the need of breaking free from the shaping gaze of the implicit and explicit Other. The alternatives considered in these novels are bodies that expose the unfairness of systemic structures of economic and social oppression, the diversity of their violence, but also the different ways in which solutions can be tackled and alternatives proposed. These works go beyond criticism and put forward modes of experiencing the body that, in their varying degree of subversiveness, can potentially dismantle the hegemonic norm. In that sense, they can be inscribed within a more contemporary paradigm of expressing dissent, a generation critical and distrustful of institutions of power, but also more put off by traditional left-leaning party strategies than in previous decades. Dissent has been channelled through the artistic, individual, and collective performance, indeed the *embodiment* of alternative choices, institutions, projects, and politics (Andrews 2016; Cassegård 2014).

Instead of expecting massive mobilisations and demonstrations as the only way to confront predispositions of power and lament when they cool down or die out, as it happened with post-Fukushima rallies, we must look at how a more diverse pool of agents is articulating criticism against hegemonic powers and their positions of legitimacy. Instead of focusing on the direct effects of unidirectional calls for action from specific parties as our only way to measure the temper-

ature of conformity of dissent in a community, I propose to take into account how these different streams of confrontation against discursive propositions that help agents stay in power speak to each other. I invite readers to take into account a larger net-system of solidarity in dissenting representations. The attention that I devote to highlight the characteristics of this framing should not obscure its limitations. First, these methods of protest have difficulties in achieving changes through institutional channels. Policy-making requires actors to play by a set of rules that do not easily fit with the ethos and medium of these alternatives. Second, for a network to accomplish structural feats, it has to act with an awareness of its interconnect-edness. Many of these dissident representations push for change but lack a common strategy. What they gain in autonomy and plurality is missing from having a centralised unit of command, as it is more common in traditional units of opposition like political parties or unions. Despite these shortcomings, it remains a valuable setting to explore the means through which dissent is articulated in contemporary Japan and to contest recurring discourses on passivity and social compliance, disputed but still predominant in public perceptions on the country. More research needs to be done on the relationship between these representations and the capacity of literature to articulate contemporary dissent through them against these biopolitical structures, but as I have attempted to show in this piece, the direction is promising.

These authors and their works have a more open predisposition towards articulating their criticism integrating an intersectional approach to understanding economic violence, in which class, gender, and origin are vectors that help us explain and counter its causes and effects. Moreover, they further push a tendency towards the feminisation of dissent in which the private is reclaimed as a space and a tool for denunciation and for the implementation of alternatives. Economic violence has long been studied at a level of larger systems and it needs to be refocused also in their individual impacts. Literary representations can help in validating this recent shift, but further research will help us keep track of the evolution of this movement.

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This book is an invitation to read a selection of narratives of violence with the purpose of fostering global imaginaries based on respect, recognition, and empathy, especially towards those who are most vulnerable. It offers critical readings of ten women's works, of various genres, originally written in different languages, by Mrīrīda n'ait 'Atiq (Morocco), Janina Heschel (Poland), Eva Koch (Denmark), María Galindo (Bolivia) and Sonia Sánchez (Argentina), Najat El Hachmi (Morocco-Catalonia), Arundhati Roy (India), Leila Abdelrazaq (Palestine), and Yū Miri, Murata Sayaka, and Kawakami Mieko (Japan).



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