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Summer 2020, Volume 9

Ámbitos Feministas

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While we accept submissions at any time, in order to be considered for the **Summer 2020 Issue**, originals should arrive to our editorial office by **October 15th, 2019.**

Submit original and cover letter as Word attachments to:

Carmen de Urioste

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A current membership to the coalition Feministas Unidas Inc. (http://feministas-unidas.org) is required of all authors at the time of submission and must be kept until the end of the process. Membership information

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For review purposes, originals should contain no reference to the author. Include a one page cover letter with author's information: name, rank, academic affiliation, email, postal address, essay's little, and a brief bio (8-10 lines) with latest publications.

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The editors of *Ámbitos Feministas* have the right to reject manuscripts for the Fall volume that do not address the criteria of the journal and of the coalition *Feministas Unidas* Inc. <feministas-unidas.org>

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Feminism and Nationalism in Aixa de la Cruz's *La línea del frente*

Olga Bezhanova
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Aixa de la Cruz belongs to the younger generation of Spanish writers who entered into adulthood at the time when Spain was descending into the economic crisis that novelist Antonio Muñoz Molina described as "la emergencia más grave que hemos tenido desde la Guerra Civil" (244-5). Ten years after the Spanish economy was devastated by the "most important and complex crisis that capitalism has known since World War II" (Guillén 42), it has become clear that precarious working conditions and the anxieties that these conditions produce have not dissipated once Spain's GDP began to grow.[1] Aixa de la Cruz's 2017 novel *La línea del frente* explores the construction of female identity in the post-crisis era. The global recession of 2008-9 undermined the celebratory feminism of the preceding two decades "that hailed young women in particular as free and confident agents with supposedly infinite choice" (Genz and Brabon 8). Cruz's novel is written, instead, from the perspective of a "postfeminist stance that engages with a disillusioned and indeterminate recessionary environment characterized by deepening inequalities, dashed hopes and constantly lurking fears" (Genz and Brabon 2). Sofía, the novel's first-person narrator, grows disillusioned with the globalizing capitalism that has robbed her of

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financial security and decides to ally herself with the nationalist ideology of the Basque terrorist organization ETA. Nationalism is one of several narratives that Sofía uses throughout her life to construct a sense of selfhood, and it seems to her that nationalism is the last line of defense against globalization.[2] Sofía discovers, however, that nationalist ideology is incapable of providing her with a stable identity that would shore her up against the insecurity and isolation created by flows of global capital. *La línea del frente* contributes to our understanding of the challenges faced by women who rebel against patriarchal limitations on female agency yet find no place for their aspirations within the nationalist alternative to globalization.

The novel's publication coincided with a growing popularity within Spain of works of literature that address the legacy of ETA's violence. The most notable among them are Gabriela Ybarra's novel *El comensal* (2015), awarded El Premio de la Literatura de Euskadi and nominated for the Man Booker International Prize, Edurne Portela's book-length essay *El eco de los disparos* (2016) that has undergone 8 editions, becoming a crucial point of reference for those who are interested in the conflict between ETA and the Spanish state, Portela's autobiographical novel *Mejor la ausencia* (2017), and Fernando Aramburu's mega-bestseller *Patria* (2016) that has gone through 25 editions, sold 700,000 copies within a year of its publication (Seoane) and brought its author a host of prestigious literary prizes.[3] The almost simultaneous publication of these books and their popularity among critics and readers make it clear that reflections on ETA's legacy in Spain constitute a thriving literary subgenre. As Aixa de la Cruz pointed out in an interview: "se trata de una especie de sinergia histórica, más que de un asunto causa-efecto. Lo más probable es que mi libro y el de Edurne Portela e incluso el de Fernando Aramburu se escribiesen de forma simultánea" (Sainz Borgo). Works of literature that discuss the legacy of ETA have been published in a steady stream both in castellano and euskera throughout the past thirty years. None of them, however, have enjoyed the popularity of the recent publications by Ybarra, Portela, and especially Aramburu. Even Aramburu's preceding work on the same subject (such as, for instance, his critically acclaimed collection of short stories *Los peces de la amargura* that came out in 2006) did not become a publishing phenomenon like his 2016 novel.

La línea del frente stands out among the novels that are part of this wave of highly successful works of literature about ETA because it combines a discussion of ETA's legacy with a poignant depiction of the consequences of the global economic crisis of 2008-9. Spain's literature

of crisis represented a highly significant artistic trend in the years between the collapse of the global financial industry in 2008 and the fading of its most obvious effects by 2015. Among the most significant novels of the crisis are Pablo Gutiérrez's *Democracia* (2012), Luis García Montero's *No me cuentes tu vida* (2012), Rafael Chirbes's *En la orilla* (2013), Benjamín Prado's *Ajuste de cuentas* (2013), Elvira Navarro's *La trabajadora* (2014), Belén Gopegui's *El comité de la noche* (2014), and others. Since 2015, the interest in the devastating effects of the crisis among writers and readers seems to have waned.[4] Cruz's novel, however, demonstrates that the subject has not been exhausted as she deftly connects the disillusionment of the younger generation of Spaniards with neoliberalism and their incapacity to embrace a totalizing narrative of nationalism that could serve as a way of resisting the atomizing push of neoliberal mentality. What makes *La línea del frente* particularly valuable is the way in which it integrates the feminist perspective on the crisis, which is something that has often been absent in some of the most popular crisis novels.

The global economic crisis of 2008-9 made it clear that there is an urgent need to re-evaluate the ways in which the transformations of the world economy are impacting the feminist achievements of the preceding decades. As Tisha Dejmanee points out, in the world where no limits are placed on the movement of liquid capital, "women become flotsam in a cultural ebb and flow, guided by the ephemeral hope of empowerment. Thus, the triple destabilization of the nation, the economy and the female subject ultimately belie the power of postfeminism in its cultural malleability and longevity" (120). The opening scene of Cruz's novel echoes this vision of womanhood as suffering from the impact of the instability created by the global capital. As Sofía arrives in the Cantabrian town of Laredo where she is planning to write her doctoral dissertation in a secluded vacation house owned by her formerly well-to-do family, she finds the beach covered with hundreds of dead newly hatched fish: "He contado quinientos. Los hay por toda la orilla, no más grandes que un meñique. Son del color de la arena porque han muerto sobre la arena. Alevines recién desovados. Lubinas, probablemente… Me pregunto si habrán muerto por un vertido tóxico o por capricho de las mareas" (11). The dead fish, whose growth was stunted by the inhospitable conditions of their environment, mirror the situation in which Sofía finds herself as she attempts to construct a stable narrative of the self in the world where constant change undermines any sense of stability.

As Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon point out in the introduction to their study of postfeminist theory, the female identity-

building process in the twenty-first century cannot be analyzed outside of the context of the wider socio-political developments characterized by a profound instability of any form of identification:

> Risk and uncertainty now seem to be our continual watchwords, defining and delimiting our everyday moves and our understanding of who we are and our position in the world. We seem to be living in a perpetual state of crisis and anxiety, and those points of reference and identification that provided a sense of security and directed our ways of being and seeing… continue to be evaporated and replaced by a sense of menace and foreboding. (1-2)

In the risk society of late modernity, "handling fear and insecurity becomes an essential cultural qualification" (Beck 96). As Sofía reaches adulthood, she discovers that she can no longer count on her family's fortune that, when she was growing up, provided her with an upper-middle-class lifestyle "con las vacaciones en hoteles de lujo, con los cumpleaños con cáterin, con las clases de equitación" (42). She has to learn to fend for herself precisely at the time when Spain's economy collapses and the precarity of working conditions grows.[5] In 2017, the year when the novel was published, the president of Consejo de la Juventud de España pointed out that the economic recovery that the country was supposedly undergoing did not improve the labor prospects of Spaniards under the age of thirty: "A pesar de la anunciada recuperación económica, Chica Linares señala que hay datos alarmantes: la tasa de paro juvenil se sitúa en el 41 %, el 92 % de los nuevos contratos son temporales y el 38,2 % está en situación de pobreza o exclusión social" ("El Consejo"). This is the economic reality that Sofía has to consider as she tries to fashion her adult identity in the midst of unrelenting instability.

Throughout her life, Sofía adopts different scripts that are meant to help her elaborate a sense of self which will allow her to find a place in the world. With the arrival of puberty, she learns to perform the traditional gender role that her social milieu expects of a young woman: "Desde entonces se me ha dado muy bien mi rol de género; lo perfeccioné como jamás se perfecciona lo inconsciente. Soy experta en sonrisas, en compasión, en zapatos estilizados, en falta de asertividad, en cháchara intimista" (92). Sofía is convinced that she can preserve her sense of agency if she positions the gendered behavior that she adopts as stemming from her individual choice. The language of the neoliberal economic success—"lo perfeccioné," "soy experta"—allows Sofía to maintain the illusion that she is a freely choosing agent of the kind that

neoliberalism values. The possibility of achieving success in the globalized economy is predicated on "individuals' abilities to make market principles the guiding values of their lives, to see themselves as products to create, sell, and optimize" (Ventura 2), and Sofía adopts this approach uncritically in her early youth. Behind the myth that neoliberalism allows one to become whatever one wants hides the reality of alienated individuals who are carrying the burden of being inescapably to blame for everything that happens to them.

For Sofía, her way of being in the world is akin to a product that needs to be constantly updated with a view to releasing a new and improved version whenever the market demands it. She is acutely aware of the high emotional and psychological costs exacted upon the representatives of her generation by this worldview: "Mi rabia no tiene remedio. Intuyo que es generacional, que la nostalgia prematura es nuestro emblema… Parecemos supervivientes de un cataclismo que borra y reescribe el mundo a cada minuto y que, por tanto, idealiza cuanto recuerda. Estamos ávidos de pruebas de vida" (29). The nostalgia that Sofía experiences harkens back to the times when the possibility of experiencing solidarity was not yet fully eroded by the belief that individuals must shoulder responsibility for events that lie largely outside of their control. The title of the novel evokes, for its readers, one of the most famous songs by the Basque punk rock band *Kortatu* which enjoyed immense popularity in the 1980s.Tthe famous title verse of the song is followed by a call to solidarity among its listeners: "Es el rock de la línea del frente, / Que se note que estás presente." *Kortatu* coincided with other bands of euskalpunk (or Basque punk) in its efforts to "instigar una salida transformadora de la injusticia sociopolítica y cultural, o bien una simple resistencia ante el ímpetu de la cultura oficial y sus instituciones" (Porrah Blanko 312). Sofía's state of isolation is underscored by her memories of the time when she attended performances of Basque rock bands and experienced being "un rostro más entre el público adolescente de un concierto al aire libre donde una llovizna de sudor anubarrado nos volvía consanguíneos. Jamás he vuelto a sentir aquello, tan parecido a meditar a gritos, coreando un mantra con una voz que suena a mil voces" (65).

Sofía's early adoption of the scripts of traditional womanhood does not stem from her affinity for strictly gendered behavior but, rather, from a belief that this is the easiest way for her to ensure a degree of economic stability for herself. As Eva Illouz points out, during its consolidation, capitalism enforced precisely the kind of gender divisions that inform Sofía's behavior in her early youth: "To be a man

of character requires one to display courage, cool-headed rationality, and disciplined aggressiveness. Femininity on the other hand demands kindness, compassion, and cheerfulness. The social hierarchy produced by gender divisions contains implicit emotional divisions, without which men and women would not reproduce their roles and identities" (3). Sofía is prepared to perform the spectacle of a cheerful, compassionate femininity because, in the booming Spanish economy of the 1990s and early 2000s, she sees it as an opportunity to ensure her economic well-being by marrying a wealthy man (41-2). In the wake of the crisis, however, she discovers that a strict adherence to the gender stereotypes that she learned from her mother stands in the way of "an obligatory, never-ending and open-ended pursuit of self-actualization where [individuals] can experience their 'authentic' self and become 'who they are' or 'who they are meant to be'" that has become the norm in late-capitalist societies (Genz and Brabon 17).

Following the scripts of traditional femininity no longer secures economic success for women of Sofía's social class. As she observes her mother's descent into economic insecurity (42), Sofía arrives at a realization that practices of traditional femininity are incapable of shoring her against the demands of fluid capitalism. Zygmunt Bauman refers to the late-capitalist era as the "fluid stage of modernity" (13) and notes that it is characterized by the emergence of "light, free-floating capitalism, marked by the disengagement and loosening of ties linking capital and labor" (149). This form of capitalism requires individuals to attempt to mimic the constant movement of capital in the ways in which they fashion their identities as endlessly malleable and fluid. Sofía eagerly switches between identity discourses, which is a necessary, albeit an insufficient, condition for arriving at any degree of economic security in the globalized economy. She becomes drawn to the story of an escaped ETA militant Mikel Areilza because she finds it easy to identify with his plan to "reinventarse… reescribir su historia, como quien se somete a una cirugía estética con la identidad" (50). Areilza is forced to amputate parts of his identity because of his membership in a terrorist organization and his condition as a political exile. Sofía's willingness to mold her identity, on the other hand, is a response not to the political but to the economic reality of today's Spain.

Once Sofía makes a break with the gendered practices that she associates with her mother, she begins to find the older woman's physical proximity intolerable: "Imaginarla irrumpiendo en mi territorio con su taconeo arrogante y su mueca de escándalo—qué pocilga es esta cocina,

cuántos días llevas sin lavarte el pelo—me ha provocado una reacción alérgica" (93). Like many women of her generation, Sofía sees embodied in her mother the painful destiny of women who dedicated their lives to following the patriarchal rules of conduct only to find themselves disempowered and helpless at an age when it is much harder to start everything anew. Sofía intuits that following in her mother's footprints will lead her into the same trap of patriarchal conformity that confined the women of preceding generations. At the same time, she has absorbed the neoliberal way of thinking that "impels us to extend the market, its technologies, approaches and mindsets into all spheres of human life [and] to move the ideology of consumer choice to the center of individual existence" (Ventura 2). As a result, she can only couch the critique of her mother in the neoliberal terms of blaming her as an individual who made suboptimal choices instead of concentrating on the power structures that made such choices all but inevitable.

Sofía's rejection of her mother's conventionally gendered behavior is mirrored by her hostility towards women in general. Throughout the novel, Sofía's interlocutors are always men, and she does not engage, socially, physically, emotionally, or intellectually, with any other women. With the exception of a fleeting mention of her mother discussed above, Sofía's thinking is colonized by men with whom she maintains an unceasing internal dialogue. This is true not only for Sofía's private life but also for her scholarship, given that her research concentrates on studying a creative collaboration between two men.[6] In spite of arriving at a realization that scripts of traditional femininity have been nothing but oppressive to her, Sofía does not seek to establish connections with a community of women who could guide her in a search for greater agency. Sofía's rejection of any meaningful contact with other women stems from the neoliberal worldview that positions everybody as a competitor for scant resources: "Neo-liberalism, far from being an ideology or economic policy is firstly and fundamentally a *rationality*, and as such tends to structure and organize not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled. The principal characteristic of neo-liberal rationality is the generalization of competition as a behavioral norm and of the enterprise as a model of subjectivation" (Dardot and Laval 4). Sofía has interiorized this vision of the world and is incapable of gaining a critical distance from it even after she grows disillusioned with the economic system that she inhabits.

As a budding scholar of literature, Sofía does not want to follow the scripts created for her by others and, instead, strives to become the

author of the narrative of her life. Fluid capitalism offers her an opportunity to cast off the patriarchal narratives of femininity and experiment with alternative ways of narrating the self. Yet this kind of freedom comes with its own set of constraints and penalties. As the theorist of neoliberal cultural practices Jim McGuigan points out,

> now that the old collective supports and scripts no longer apply, everyone is abandoned to their fate… Individualization is a contradictory phenomenon, however, both exhilarating and terrifying. It really does feel like freedom, especially for women liberated from patriarchal control. But, when things go wrong there is no excuse for anyone… The individual is penalized harshly not only for personal failure but also for sheer bad luck in a highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment. (234)

Sofía embraces the freedom to choose her life narrative, yet in order to do that, she isolates herself as completely as she can from any meaningful contact with others. This sense of alienation is an inescapable part of the neoliberal mentality that positions individuals as entrepreneurs whose product is their own self: "While neoliberalism operates at the level of the population it aims to make the members of the population feel divorced from the larger group. This sense of separation is part of the larger death-of-society rhetoric, and it is an inescapable aspect of any analysis of neoliberalism or neoliberal culture" (Ventura 29). The kind of freedom that Sofía seeks comes at the expense of any form of solidarity with those who face similar struggles within an economy that has been ravaged by the crisis. Sofía's feminist consciousness is limited to the realization that her chances at economic success might be compromised if she does not liberate herself from strict gender norms and does not translate into an interest in joint political action with similarly situated women.

Sofía's decision to pursue graduate studies and become a scholar of literature places her among the swelling ranks of the *precariat*, a social class that has no certainty of stable and continued employment in a country where the governmental investment in education has collapsed as a result of the crisis.[7] The uncertain conditions of labor experienced by the members of this growing social class prompt precariously situated workers to adopt the persona of a self-reliant individual who feels no allegiance to other members of the *precariat*:

> Precarious forms of labour are increasingly the norm across the professional-managerial occupations… People subjected to such

> uncertainty and unpredictability especially in so-called 'creative' and allied careers, though not only there, must fashion… a neoliberal self, figuring a competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others—and, therefore, incapable of organizing as a group to do anything about it. Such a person must be 'cool' in the circumstances, selfishly resourceful and fit in order to survive under social-Darwinian conditions. (McGuigan 236)

Sofía's reaction to finding herself among the precariously situated workers who have no access to an economic cushion to protect them from the constantly shifting needs of the market consists of looking for a narrative that offers a refuge from the scripts which celebrate globalization. Together with many of her contemporaries, she strives to find refuge from the chaos created by the global flows of capital in the ideology of nationalism.

Sofía is not alone in her desire to turn to nationalism in times of growing fluidity. In the words of Manuel Castells, "identity-based movements are the main entities that confront globalization by denying the superior value of the market and production per se. They do so by positing networks rooted in cultural and historical identity" (28). Within the repertoire of identity-based responses to globalization, nationalism stands out as the source of an identity that is rooted in the form of governmentality which, by its nature, is doomed to an uncomfortable coexistence with the globalizing impulses of the liquid economy. The foundations of the nation-state are being eroded by the global capital because capital recognizes no limitations on its power to transcend distances and borders in search of increasing profits: "El nuevo orden mundial basado en la globalización de la economía y la interconexión de los mercados ha dejado prácticamente obsoletas muchas de las nociones asociadas al estado-nación independiente y soberano, a la vez que presenta nuevas demandas sobre los mecanismos de auto-presentación y representación nacional en el mercado global" (Martínez Expósito 24). The severity of the economic crisis in Spain has made it clear that national governments are either incapable or unwilling to resist the push of global capital to dismantle the protections offered by the welfare apparatuses that exist within the framework of nation-states. As Zygmunt Bauman and Carlo Bordoni have pointed out, "much of the power previously contained inside the borders of the nation-state evaporated and flew into the no-man's land of the 'space of flows'" (20). The disempowerment

of the nation-state in the face of liquid capital has made various forms of violent nationalism more attractive to those who feel dispossessed in the global economy because they come to perceive nationalism as the natural enemy of the homogenizing impulses of globalization.

When Sofía realizes that her erstwhile boyfriend Jokin was jailed during a manifestation organized by the Basque terrorist organization ETA, she uses her connection to Jokin as a basis of her newfound identity as a Basque nationalist. Sofía relies on her sudden pro-ETA sympathies to help her establish "el sentimiento de pertenencia a aquel grupo de gente de guerra" (155), yet she remains oblivious to the paradoxical nature of her efforts to find a sense of belonging by way of isolating herself in her summer house in Cantabria. A sense of being part of ETA, even in the capacity of a sympathizer who engages in no action on behalf of Basque nationalism and remains at a physical and emotional remove from the organization, offers Sofía a possibility of feeling empowered in the midst of an economic environment that robs people like her of control over their lives: "Identificarse con ETA tenía una gratificación especial: le permitía a uno gozar del poder presuntamente ilimitado del grupo armado. Daba ocasión de vivir vicariamente el 'estado de excepción' de ETA" (Zulaika 100). The state of emergency associated with ETA is more attractive to Sofía than the one arising from the country's dire economic situation.

Sofía believes that the loneliness of her new abode in Laredo will allow her to construct an identity for herself that nobody but she will be able to control or dictate. In order to integrate herself into the new identity script of a powerful fighter for a nationalist cause, she has to cast off the limitations imposed by her former identity as a docile, traditional woman. One of the very first actions that Sofía undertakes as she learns to inhabit her new identity aims at liberating her from the constraints that the male gaze places on women. The interiorization of the male gaze underpins the alienation of women from their own selves: "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves… Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger 47). After spending her youth trying to turn herself into an object that would appeal to the male gaze, Sofía decides to take possession of her own body by undressing in front of a window that faces the sea. She hopes to experience nakedness in a way that does not aim to arouse male desire and does not contribute to "la codificación visual de la mujer [que] acaba encerrada en el binarismo patriarcal erótica/pudorosa" which places the

female body under male control (Keefe Ugalde 49-50). Sofía discovers, however, that it is not that easy to escape from the male gaze when she learns that a neighbor is watching her from the shadows. She recoils in terror from the realization that her attempt to reclaim authority over her own body might have put her in danger of attracting the attention of a stalker (21-2).

Throughout her stay in Laredo, Sofía avoids engaging in forms of self-care that aim to turn the human body into an attractive commodity: "The body as object is not merely passively, externally constructed, but also enables us to distance ourselves from ourselves and to critically evaluate our experiences. This inner distance… makes neoliberal forms of (self)-normalization and optimization possible and masks them as natural, voluntary forms of self-care and mastery" (Jansen and Wehrle 39). Sofía realizes that her gender makes this vision of human corporality particularly limiting. She avoids washing herself, combing her hair, and changing her clothes before venturing outside in an attempt to subvert the expectation that women should market themselves as physically desirable objects when they appear in public spaces. Casting aside gendered norms of behavior, however, is a complex endeavor that requires a great amount of conscious effort: "Even if women purposefully resist gendered expectations and conventional modes of embodiment, even if they attempt to move in a more optimal (rather than 'normal' way), this can be a cumbersome process that has to be attentively learned and thus does not feel 'natural or 'normal' at all—not until it becomes part of an altered, rehabitualized body schema" (Jansen and Wehrle 43). As she ventures into a local bar, Sofía realizes that she still cannot avoid seeing herself with male eyes and interiorizing the belief that a woman should signal her belonging to a male when she finds herself in a public space: "Me siento incómoda. Un grupo de hombres con chalecos reflectantes me mira de reojo, haciendo que sea consciente de mi pelo sucio y de mi ropa de dormir, recordándome que no está bien visto que una mujer beba sola. Los imagino preguntándose a quién espero, quién me dejado plantada" (160). Instead of offering her a feeling of liberation, her lonely stay in Laredo makes Sofía feel constantly exposed to the danger implicit in being a young and attractive woman with no male protection in an unfamiliar environment.

It is only when she finds herself alone that Sofía can experience any sense of freedom from patriarchal constraints and concentrate on authoring the script of her life. Her interest in the idea of a script leads her to study theater theory in spite of her initial aversion to the genre (16).

Sofía integrates into her narrative diary entries written by the Argentinean playwright Arturo Cozarowski and adopts Cozarowski's suggestions on how to create a work of theater as guidelines for her emotional life (24-25). When she visits Jokin in jail, Sofía records her encounters with him in the form of theatrical dialogues, preceded by stage directions in the cursive script, where she appears as one of the characters:

> *La habitación recuerda a la de un hostal. Una cama, una mesilla, una butaca. Baño sin ducha: lavabo y retrete. Hay una ventana que da al patio y las cortinas, de un tejido acartonado y verde, hacen juego con la funda del edredón. Jokin y Sofía lo han arrojado al suelo y yacen desnudos sobre las sábanas, boca arriba.*
> JOKIN: Dios mío, me siento como si…
> SOFÍA: ¿Cómo qué? (83)

Sofía's slippage into the third-person narrative style that follows the conventions of the dramatic genre underscores the artificial nature of her newfound identity as an ETA sympathizer. She is simultaneously the author of the script, the director, and the actress who performs the leading role. The dialogues between Sofía and Jokin invariably center around Sofía's desire to mold her boyfriend's experience in a way that would suit the goals of the narrative that she is trying to create. She believes that nationalism can offer her both an escape from the hopelessness of her situation and a degree of control over her romantic partner whom she sees as weaker and more malleable because of his working-class origins.[8]

As she was growing up, Sofía's wealthy family imbued her with a feeling of class-based contempt for Basque nationalism. Sofía associates nationalist sentiments with third-world conflicts that she sees as unworthy of the attention of the cosmopolitan elite to which her family used to belong: "No era exactamente amnesia ni mucho menos represión traumática, sino esa especie de apatía que sentimos por las guerras de las pobres, por los crímenes bizarros que se cometen a machetazos en repúblicas africanas cuya sola fonética nos distancia" (65). Sofía's parents confiscate a map of Euskal Herria that her classmates give her because the nationalist sentiments that inspired the creation of a map of a unified Basque Country "simbolizaba una lucha que no era nuestra. Porque ninguna lo era" (63). This is not entirely true, given that one of Sofía's uncles is an ETA militant, and the little girl's parents go to great lengths to conceal from her the nationalist sentiments of one of the family members. When the uncle begins to serve a jail sentence for his terrorist

activities, the parents tell Sofía that he is taking a journey around the world to explain his absence (63-4). An elaborate fiction of a jet-setting uncle who sends her postcards from Moscow, Bagdad, and China allows Sofía's parents to position themselves as members of "the nomadic and exterritorial elite" that reaps all the benefits of the globalized economy and feels no emotional attachment to a particular nation (Bauman 13). For as long as she can see herself as belonging to this elite, Sofía has no use for the nationalism of her Basque classmates and friends. When the flows of global capital sweep away her family's fortune, however, she develops an interest in nationalist ideology which constitutes one of the few spaces of resistance to the globalization: "In the new global system that is emerging, in which strong identity is the fundamental antidote against disappearing into the uncontrolled global flows, there is a strong Basque identity" (Castells 31).

In spite of her hopes that becoming an ETA sympathizer will prove liberating, Sofía soon discovers that the vision of nationalism that she embraces leads her to the same fantasy of being a beautiful object whose only value arises from serving a male companion which defined her youthful attempts to comply to gendered expectations. The nationalism of ETA is not particularly friendly to female aspirations of empowerment, and as Carrie Hamilton observes, "ETA itself was constructed as a place of male domination" (4). As she prepares to visit Jokin in jail, Sofía abandons her goal of becoming self-sufficient and prepares to dissolve her individuality in the relationship with her boyfriend: "El frío estiliza mis facciones. Estoy perfecta. Lista para ver a Jokin… Soy el único apoyo que tiene y ser su apoyo es lo único útil que he hecho, así que nuestro vínculo es tan sólido como el que une a la luz con el agua y las algas en un ecosistema autosuficiente" (139). Paradoxically, Sofía uses the power she has over her male partner to create a fiction of her subservience to him. Her approach is fully in keeping with Hamilton's observations as to women's contribution to narratives of female subservience within the Basque nationalist movement: "To position women as the victims of an all-powerful male nationalist discourse would be to ignore the ways in which women themselves, through their actions and narratives, have helped to construct the myth of male nationalist heroism and martyrdom" (Hamilton 6).

Sofía's vision of herself as a self-sacrificing partner to a heroic male nationalist, however, is a product of her imagination and has no basis in reality. The script of belonging to a nationalist organization that Sofía constructs around her relationship with the presumed ETA militant Jokin

falls apart when she is confronted with an alternative narrative authored by Jokin himself. Jokin is aware that Sofía's class status and educational background make it easy for her to drown out his voice and refuse to accept him for what he really is. As she integrates Jokin's narrative into the script she is creating, Sofía accompanies his words with sarcastic stage directions that infantilize Jokin and diminish the import of what he is trying to communicate to her:

> JOKIN: Bueno, pues ahí va. (*Toma aire y comienza a leer muy rápido. Omitirá a menudo las pauses entre oraciones. Su prosodia es poco natural, como la de un niño que recita un poema que no entiende*)… Me dejaste porque no estaba a la altura, no entendía tus libros, ni tu cine de autor, y te avergonzaba ante tus colegas, que me trataban como si fuera un chucho que habías rescatado de la protectora. (146)

Jokin finally reveals to Sofía that he was never a member of ETA, and that his imprisonment was a result of an attempt to buy cocaine in the area where a political manifestation was occurring (149-51). Once Sofía realizes that she will not be able to integrate Jokin into the narrative she is creating, she cuts off his monologue and dismisses him as "un pobre tipo de los que protagonizan documentales callejeros, la escoria de la que me apartaba en las avenidas" (160). Sofía's class biases remain unchanged and provide the only constant throughout her experiments with articulating different identities for herself.

After the failure of her project to assume the persona of an ETA supporter, Sofía looks for a new identity to adopt. The last dialogue she records in the form of a theatrical script is the one she maintains with her drug-addicted neighbor. In her search for a cause that would give her a sense of belonging and serve as an alternative to the alienating script of neoliberal competitiveness, Sofía finds refuge in a drug-induced stupor that simultaneously allows her to reach a degree of understanding of Jokin's struggles with addiction and maintain, with somebody who is a long-time addict, the only sincere dialogue she has throughout the novel. The closing lines of the novel reveal Sofía's decision to throw away the keys from the Laredo apartment and stay locked in it until the summer brings a fresh sense of hope for her struggles: "No eché el candado al salir pero lo echaré al entrar y arrojaré el manojo por la ventana, para encerrarme hasta que llegue el verano, para no cambiar de idea, porque hoy he visto muchas luces, todas intensas, todas punzantes, pero mañana veré la luz del día, y el dibujo será otro, la explicación será otra, y entonces quién sabe" (175). Sofía's symbolic discarding of the keys brings to mind Tisha

Dejmanee's discussion of a turn to interiority that characterizes female narratives in the early decades of the twenty-first century: "Interiority is both the romanticisation of mythic, conservative cultural tropes and the individualist, neoliberal demand for self-reliance as the only form of security" (120). As the novel ends, Sofía has found no alternative to the alienating narratives of neoliberalism and has not been able to learn to connect with others without the assistance of narcotic substances.

Sofía's experimentation with various identity scripts in the wake of the crisis brings to mind the words of Antonio Gramsci who defined a transformational crisis as a time when "the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (32-33). The protagonist of *La línea del frente* struggles to counteract the effects that the global economic collapse has on her life, yet she fails to liberate herself from the mentality that produces the very kind of economic practices that caused the crisis. Isolated as she might be, Sofía is not alone in experiencing this kind of difficulties:

> In general, we can say that modernity produces a chronic deficiency of meaning for the individual because of the systemization of the world and the privatization of the processes of production of life's meaning. Postmodernity, with its distancing through globalization and systemization and through deterritorialization and anomie, further exacerbates the individual's sense of deprivation. But this panorama of progressive abstraction, of loss of meaning, enhances the importance of those social institutions and elements that can assist the individual in acquiring a meaningful existence. (Pérez-Agote 56)

At the end of the novel, Sofía still has not been able to arrive at a realization that her feelings of alienation and hopelessness can be counteracted by joining a meaningful struggle alongside other women who share her predicament. Aixa de la Cruz's novel points to the hopelessness of attempts at a feminist vindication that are conducted in isolation from larger feminist movements. The destabilization of advanced capitalist societies makes establishing meaningful connections between individuals exceedingly hard. As sociologist César Rendueles points out, "we no longer see ourselves as a coherent continuum that is connected to a more or less permanent physical and social context but rather as an incoherent chain of heterogeneous experiences, fleeting emotional connections, unrelated jobs, impermanent homes, and conflicting values" (70). It is only by overcoming this kind of alienation that we can hope to create a truly powerful feminist response to the crisis.

Notes

[1] The concluding statement of the IMF's annual assessment for 2016 offered glowing praise for Spain's economic progress in dealing with the effects of the crisis: "The Spanish economy has continued its impressive recovery and strong job creation. Earlier reforms and confidence-enhancing measures have paid off, and combined with external tailwinds and fiscal loosening fueled the strong economic rebound of the past two years" ("Spain: Staff Concluding"). IMF's optimism about the state of the Spanish economy, however, is not shared by the many Spaniards who are still suffering from the aftereffects of the economic collapse.

[2] The title of the novel is taken from a popular song by the Basque punk rock band *Kortatu*. The impact of *Kortatu*'s artistic production on the mobilization of the younger generations of Basques for a nationalist struggle has been studied in depth by Roberto Herreros and Isidro López in *El estado de las cosas de Kortatu: lucha, fiesta y guerra sucia* (2013).

[3] The list of awards received by *Patria* includes Premio Euskadi de Literatura en castellano, Premio de la Crítica de Narrativa Castellana, Premio Ramón Rubial, Premio Francisco Umbral al Libro del Año, and Premio del Club Internacional de la Prensa.

[4] As Pablo Valdivia points out, this might be due to the attempts by some of the country's most well-established writers to appropriate the suffering created by the crisis: "Banalization of the crisis and its tragic repercussions are well personified in two opportunistic and strategic novels, *Los besos en el pan* (2015) by Almudena Grandes and *Hombres desnudos* (2015) by Alicia Giménez Barlett, that explicitly were announced by their correspondent publishing houses as the 'Novel of the Crisis.' The latter was awarded the Planeta prize of literature" (Valdivia 170, n. 7).

[5] In response to the 2014 assertions of Spain's Minister of Employment and Social Security that the country's employment statistics showed marked improvement, Inmaculada Cebrián, Economics professor of Alcalá de Henares University, pointed out that precarious employment actually grew after the crisis passed its peak years: "Pese a la gravedad de la crisis y el sufrimiento que conlleva, no estamos arreglando ninguno de los problemas estructurales del mercado de trabajo. De hecho, la temporalidad no solo se ha mantenido, sino que ahora empieza a aumentar (roza el 24% de los contratos); se ha introducido con fuerza el tiempo parcial no querido por los trabajadores (crece a ritmos del 9% interanual) y el empleo autónomo, que se promociona desde el Gobierno" (Gómez and Sánchez-Silva).

[6] Sofía's research centers on a working relationship between an Argentinean theater director named Arturo Cozarowski and an escaped ETA militant Mikel Areilza.

[7] As the daily periodical *El Mundo* reported in 2017, cuts in education funding have been a regular feature of the government's response to the effects of

the crisis in Spain: "El Gobierno reducirá en 2018, por tercer año consecutivo, la proporción de Producto Interior Bruto (PIB) que destina a Sanidad, Educación y Protección Social… Lo que resulta indudable es que el Ministerio de Hacienda destinará una menor proporción de los recursos económicos del país a estas tres partidas tan sensibles, tal y como viene haciendo desde 2015. En ese ejercicio, el gasto destinado a Educación estaba en el 4,1% del PIB y durante los años sucesivos la cifra ha ido disminuyendo hasta el citado 3,8%. Además, la previsión del departamento dirigido por Cristóbal Montoro es que la tendencia continúe durante los próximos años" (Viaña).

[8] Sofía attributes her initial encounter with Jokin, "el hijo de un electricista" who is clearly inferior to her in terms of social class (19), to the linguistic policies of the Basque government that, as she was growing up, had a short-lived effect of somewhat bridging the class divides in Euskadi: "A finales de los ochenta, cuando se implantó el modelo de inmersión lingüística en vasco, los colegios públicos se llenaron de clase media-alta, de la prole de abogados y políticos nacionalistas que querían predicar con el ejemplo. Mis padres, a quienes era indiferente aquella lengua que jamás aprendieron, se dejaron llevar por la moda" (19).

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Silence and Violence in Dulce Chacón's *Cielos de barro*

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> *It [Violence] is material and symbolic; structural and aberrant; collective and individual; visible and invisible; legal, extralegal, and illegal; brutal and subtle; sporadic and everyday; and spectacular and banal.*
> (Kilby 263)

The world has paid keen attention in recent years to Spain's galvanizing crime story of "La Manada," or "The Wolfpack," a group of five men convicted of "sexual abuse," rather than of a brutal gang rape partially recorded on a cell phone during the San Fermín Festival in Pamplona in 2016 (see Works Cited for *The New York Times*' coverage of the case). The major, country-wide protests that followed the lenient ruling in April, 2018, point to many shortcomings in the Spanish justice system (akin to those we see in other nations' systems), and especially to a struggle to define terms surrounding violence and to hear traditionally silenced voices who have something to say about surviving violence and living to talk about it.[1] This particular case in Spain takes place just a decade beyond the wave of activist movements, legislation, and cultural production that sought to bring visibility and justice to the

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visibility and justice to the victims of the Franco dictatorship. "La Manada" reminds us that rape is a form of gender-based control, violence is often publicly perpetrated and publicly indulged, and silence surrounding violence carries the weight of the violent event and the resultant trauma.

Spanish author Dulce Chacón is perhaps best known for her blockbuster 2002 novel, *La voz dormida*, which featured fictionalized testimonies of many Republican activists who had lived to tell of their political work and the ferocious repression of the Franco regime. Chacón's 2000 novel *Cielos de barro* won the Azorín Prize for the Novel and has been hailed as a structural tour de force that alternates between the monologue-testimony of a rural potter and the third-person narration that unveils the history and violence of an Extremaduran family and its servants, thus creating an interesting hybrid narrative mode. The tensions between the alternating chapters construct the mystery surrounding a violent crime and evoke the often unspoken, unrecognized acts of violence of the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War.

A combination of detective novel, Spanish Civil War historical memory, and general intrigue, Chacón's novel defies clear genre classification (see Shelley Godsland's "History and Memory, Detection and Nostalgia: The Case of Dulce Chacón's *Cielos de barro*," 254) and thus speaks to the importance of hybrid narratives in the understanding of violence. Even the back cover of the Planeta 2001 pocket edition reads, "*Cielos de barro* arranca como una novela de intriga—un crimen múltiple y la búsqueda de su autor—pero es mucho más que eso" ("*Cielos de barro* starts out as a novel of intrigue—a complicated crime and the search for the criminal—but it is much more than that"). The multiple silences in the novel serve as elements or analogs of violence, and thus allow the reader to take into serious consideration Nancy Scheper-Hughes' and Philippe Bourgois' notion that, "Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of silence are what give violence its power and meaning" (cited in Kilby 266). I am interested in violence as inflicted on the whole body—causing very real pain, emotional trauma, and potential change in intellectual function or priorities—and in silence as its own repeated violent intertext in Spanish narrative treating the Spanish Civil War.

In this essay, I examine *Cielos de barro* through the lens of silence and violence, attempting to address Jane Kilby's exhortation (in her "Introduction to Special Issue: Theorizing Violence"; via Zygmunt Bauman and John Law [264]) that theories of violence be developed more slowly,

with more care, more nuance, and a greater variety of disciplines in order to study the heretofore unknowable elements of violence. This article synthesizes theories of silence and violence, explores the concept of violence done to the whole body, with implications for present harm and future trauma, and signals plot points and stylistic techniques employed by Chacón, thus revealing a profound concern regarding the long-term effects of silence and violence. Chacón's novel offers an intrinsically intersectional examination of gender-based violence, in that characters' socioeconomic status, clearly divided in the manor household and mapped at Antonio the potter's house, plays as important a role as their gender, and these two categories reveal a narrative of suffering for both the oppressor and the oppressed.

The novel's two-pronged narration creates information gaps regarding the multiple homicides and the machinations of the upper-crust family members of the manor house, thus sowing confusion about exactly what happened, to whom, and by whom. As Wesley Weaver says, "The plot is at times quite confusing, no matter who is narrating" (35). The length of Edurne Portela's footnote recounting the plot also confirms the plot's complexity (204-05). In addition, the byzantine genealogies of the Albuera y Paredes Solar family and of Antonio the potter's family add to the confusion and displacement inherent in these intertwined stories. The servant class crisscrosses the aristocratic class in violent incidents which, although allusively recounted, serve to advance the plot. These incidents include: the rape of Isidora, a servant in the manor home; the rape of Isidora's best friend Quica; Isidora's vengeful killing of Quica's attacker; the knowledge of Isidora's act by powerful landowner daughter, Victoria, and her lengthy emotional blackmail of Isidora in light of this knowledge; Victoria and Leandro's theft of Isidora's son and subsequent lies about his parents' supposed abandonment of him; the lack of treatment for Aurora's faithful servant Felisa when she contracts tuberculosis; the final multiple homicide carried out by Leandro (296) when he believes that the family is cheating him; Leandro's insistence that his daughter Aurora kill him following the multiple homicide. In addition, the plot reaches back to episodes from the Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War, thus meshing past violence with the crimes of the diegetic present (during the Francoist period).[2] The characters oppressed by gender and/or socioeconomic status are the victims of rape, child abduction, blackmail, harmful lies, and neglect, while Leandro of the master class ends up as the major assassin of the plot, a victim of his own greed and lack of trust in others.

Hannah Arendt states in *On Violence* (1969): "No one engaged in thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs, and it is at first glance rather surprising that violence has been signaled out so seldom for special consideration" (8). Kilby calls for a broader sociology of violence, emphasizing the use of violence as social process, the presence of violence in social institutions and systems of oppression, and the conceptualization of silence with violence through the notion of presence and absence (261-61). As Cheryl Glenn has said, "Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that" (4). She goes on to say that "speech and silence depend upon each other: behind all speech is silence, and silence surrounds all speech" (7), thus adding weight or gravity to the unseen and unheard phenomenon of silence.

Glenn insists that she figures "silence as a rhetoric" (155), precisely as happens in *Cielos de barro*, in which, again, the potter's one-sided narration to the police commissioner already takes on a rhetoric of silence, and the third-person narration simply layers on silence after silence in the wake of each violent act of the plot. In "El espectro y la memoria en *Cielos de barro* de Dulce Chacón," Edurne Portela relates the mourning process to memory and, by extension, to suffering: "El trabajo de Antonio, cuya narrativa habla de, por, y a los muertos, hace presentes a los ausentes y les abre la puerta para que se puedan conocer sus historias y, en consecuencia, su sufrimiento" ("The work of Antonio, whose narrative speaks of, for, and to the dead, makes the absent present and opens the door to them so that their stories and, as a result, their suffering can be known") (194). Antonio speaks of the many ways in which death signals constant loss and trauma: "A mí, mi santa se me muere cada vez que me acuerdo de que se ha muerto. Y en el cementerio me acuerdo todo el rato, así que todo el rato se me está muriendo" (For me, my dear wife dies again every time that I remember that she has died. And in the cemetery I remember all the time, and so all the time she is dying on me again") (51). In this sense, *Cielos de barrio* reckons with the violent oppression and loss of Spanish citizens of the past and present, by repeatedly evoking, or calling into existence, the silences of those vanquished in the Spanish Civil War and unable to enunciate the horrors of the regime that followed.

Both Arendt and Kilby understand violence not only as an inherent part of wartime, but also as a constant in times of uneasy, or unestablished, peace. As such, in *Cielos de barro*, subtle references back to the violent altercations of the Spanish Civil War underpin the reality

of continued violence during the Franco period, which used to be called "the post-War period," thus belying the completely fractious character of the relationship between victors and vanquished and the continued violence of exile, incarceration, and judicial and extrajudicial killings. A key example appears in the third-person narration of *Cielos de barro*: "Nadie podría detenerla. Quica no paró de correr hasta que no llegó a la tapia exterior del cementerio. Y pudo ver cómo unos soldados con turbantes manipulaban sus palas. Y pudo ver cómo arrojaban cadáveres a una fosa. Restos de cuerpos calcinados. Todos los restos juntos, de todos los muertos" ("Nobody could have stopped her. Quica didn't stop running until she got to the outside wall of the cemetery. And she could see soldiers with turbans gripping their shovels. All of the remains, of all the dead people, gathered together") (127-28). An example of Chacón's characteristically anaphoric narration, this quote raises the specter that has so moved the Historical Memory Movement in Spain—that of the mass grave, the unwillingness to uncover the dead, and the multiple silences imposed both by Francisco Franco and by the "pact of silence" or "pact of forgetting" of the Transition period.[3] In fact, *Cielos de* barro contrasts sharply with *La voz dormida* in that the unspoken trauma of historical memory largely remains unspoken in the earlier novel. Another example of this weighty silence of *Cielos de barro* appears in the third-person narration of the departure to exile in France of the aptly named Doña Ida, who "acompañó la marcha de los hombres y mujeres que caminaban junto a ella en un silencio tristísimo" ("accompanied the exit of men and women who walked next to her in the saddest of silences") (217). Through this brief allusion to Doña Ida's forced departure, Chacón links the tacit—the felt but not spoken—to the violence of exile.

If we take into account two theoretical points—Glenn's that silence is a form of rhetoric and Elizabeth Stanko's that violence is not hidden (546-49)—, then we can successfully pull both silence and violence out of the shadows. Heavy silences mean something; they tell us something, just as much as speech does. To interpret these silences is to attempt to hear others and to understand their tacit stories and histories.[4] Silence often communicates that a form of violence has taken hold of the would-be speaker. Elizabeth Stanko states, "I question whether it is useful to insist on thinking about violence as if it is largely hidden. In doing so, we render invisible what we do see and know about" (546). Stanko goes on to link violence to gender and to "ordinary women" who talk about "ordinary violence" (546).[5] In other words, the more we ignore silence, the more we obfuscate and multiply actual acts of violence. This

goes to Arendt's point that, in general, violence begets violence: "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (80). In the case of *Cielos de barro*, all of the violence is class- and gender-based, but it is up to the astute reader to put the pieces of the plot together and to give name to the violence that moves it. In this sense, with this novel, Chacón has gone beyond questions of historical memory and towards "successful advocacy for large-scale cultural investment in human rights. [...] This new phase has come to be defined by intolerance of violence in all its forms" (Babovic and Vollendorf, 79).[6] Rather than exploit violence for potentially increased sales, as we see in, for example, the film version of "Las trece rosas," Chacón subtly signals violence and the trauma it causes.

The compelling combination of historical memory, silence, and violence of *Cielos de barro* is reinforced in both of the novel's narrative threads. As he recalls the many events leading up to the murders at the manor house, Los Negrales, Antonio the potter interweaves his memories of the Spanish Civil War. For example, he examines at length the Nationalists' use of the word "rojo" ("red"): "Rojo, comunista, maricón, ahora vas a ver por dónde te vamos a dar. No se me despintan esas palabras, señor comisario, lanzadas como piedras con honda, para herir" ("Red, Communist, faggot, now you're going to find out where we're giving it to you. Those words don't leave me, Commissioner, slung like stones, in order to wound" (56). "In order to wound"—the deliberate use of language for harm, is described here as an almost physical harm, just as Antonio then describes the fear that permeated these reprisals: "El miedo es muy hijo de madre, el muy canalla, un hijo de la releche, y usted me perdonará las maneras, señor comisario, pero es que hay veces que a uno se le cuece la sangre y las palabras han de salir calientes, por fuerza" ("Fear is a bitch, a scoundrel, a bastard, and you will have to excuse my manners, Commissioner, but it's just that sometimes your blood boils and words have to come out hot, by force") (57). Blood boils, and words come out hot. In a subsequent conversation with the police officer, Antonio recounts the past killing of five wealthy people from the small town. The unspoken but assumed question, tacitly posed, we suppose by the police commissioner, is who killed these five people. We know the question was posed because Antonio says, "Algunos nuestros" ("Some of our own people") (69). Again, the rhetoric of silence provides an answer without the reader seeing or hearing the question in a direct way. Lorraine Ryan astutely marks this moment of Republican strength

as a destabilization of the power of the manor family at Los Negrales (the Albueras) in that "these same memories are no longer private but rather tainted with the memories of their disempowerment during the Civil War" (102). The memory of violence, then, is also the memory of loss of power. In this sense, Chacón brilliantly underscores the importance of interpreting silence and exposing violence in the examination of power dynamics and structural oppression.

In *Cielos de barro*, Antonio narrates in startlingly simple ways class differences and basic inequalities. For example, early in the narration he declares to the police commissioner, "¿Sabe usted? En mi vida he hablado yo de esta manera con nadie de su condición" ("Do you know what? I have never before in my life spoken with anyone of such high standing") (18). Of course, not only do the words themselves state that Antonio has always had to display deference to those of a higher station, but so does the use of "usted" throughout Antonio's one-sided testimony to the police commissioner.

On the manor side, an exchange between the aristocratic daughter Aurora and her servant Felisa directly underscores these class differences: "—Si supieras leer… —Pero no sé leer. —Deberías haber aprendido. —Cucha con el empeño que le ha dado ahora. —¿Quieres aprender? —¿Para qué había de servirme? —Para leerme algo. —Mira, confórmate con lo que tienes, niña, que hay mucha gente que está mala, y más mala que tú, y no tienen tu misma suerte" ("—If you only knew how to read… —But I don't know how to read. —You should have learned. —Such insistence at this point. —Do you want to learn? —For what? —To read to me. —Look, be happy with what you have, girl, because there are many people who are not doing so well, worse than you, and they don't have your same luck") (48). Chacón's great irony manifests itself here in two ways: (1) the implied criticism that Felisa should somehow have figured out how to supply her own education; and (2) the potential purpose of Felisa's learning to read—simply to be able to give pleasure to a member of the wealthy class. The question of illiteracy arises repeatedly in the sections in which Antonio speaks, especially because he cannot read the letters that have become a part of the police commissioner's collected testimony. Instead, Antonio has most of them memorized from when his wife used to read them aloud. In the third-person narration of Los Negrales, Carmen and her family exploit Isidora's and Modesto's illiteracy by having them sign documents they cannot read (186), documents that are supposed to protect them from reprisals against known Republicans. In a sense, in this novel, illiteracy becomes an agent of silence and a perpetrator of violence

in the form of blackmail and secret testimonies, which affect the sanctity of the physical body.

Antonio also alludes to the silence with which his parents had to do hard labor in the fields, the blood they left on those fields, and the irony of their death from malnutrition, despite having produced harvest bounty for others their entire lives (208). Antonio tells the police commissioner, "El pan de hoy es para hoy. Y para el hambre de mañana, hay que agenciarse otro pan" ("Today's bread is for today. And for tomorrow's hunger, you have to produce more bread") (209), thus alluding to the precarity of daily existence and fortifying the examination of socioeconomic gaps in Chacón's work. In "El gusto de lo precario," José Luis Venegas echoes this idea: "Es difícil gozar de la comida cuando hay arroz hoy y mañana también. Ya no se puede oír el rumor de la muchedumbre, saborear una cerveza u hojear un libro sin pensar en la brecha abierta por la miseria y el abandono" ("It is difficult to enjoy food when there is rice today and rice again tomorrow. One can no longer hear the noise of the crowd, savor a beer or leaf through a book without thinking about the gap opened by misery and abandonment") (223).

Antonio continues the lesson of living in precarity with this oft-cited quote, "Y yo le digo que no hay ley que se pueda comer, ni de antes, ni de ahora" ("And I tell you, sir, that there is no law that one can eat, not back then, not now") (209). When a family is occupied with simply putting enough food in everyone's stomachs, the family might have trouble imagining a life and a sense of justice beyond this daily existence. Even when this bare existence is further threatened or acted upon with real violence, the tendency is to ignore those of the laboring class.[7] For example, when Isidora recounts to Doña Carmen and Doña Victoria that Leandro witnessed her being raped, they immediately want to protect the family from stains on their honor and therefore warn Isidora to silence the violent, traumatic event. In so doing, they repeat the negative words "nadie," "no," "ni," and "ninguna" ("nobody", "no," "neither/nor," and "not one"). The retraumatization of Isidora after her violent experience of rape is sealed when Doña Carmen repeats, "—Tú no has perdido tu honra, Isidora, porque nadie te ha visto perderla. Y no se te ocurra decirle nada a Modesto, a un hombre no le gusta llevarse a una mujer que ha servido ya de primer plato para otro" ("You have not lost your honor, Isidora, because no one saw you lose it. And don't even think of saying anything to Modesto; men don't like to be with a woman who has been someone else's main dish") (152). Foucault sees punishment as "the most hidden part of the penal process" (9), and, in Isidora's case, she has been

informally tried and resoundingly but silently punished. This negation of all that has happened becomes both a rhetorical and a real threat when Doña Carmen blames Isidora for the rape and implies that her husband Modesto will leave her if he finds out about her supposed impurity. In addition, the insistent use of "tú" places Isidora in the social hierarchy way below the aristocratic manor residents.

Elizabeth Stanko says that, "Understanding violence requires one to develop a cognitive map for contextualizing 'what happened.' The landscape is tightly woven around social identities, social meanings, and social context" (545). In this sense, when the novel's characters insist on silencing 'what happened,' they are attempting to repress these social identities, meanings, and contexts. Stanko also makes clear that "the mechanisms of silence are so embedded in the texture of social and economic privileges" (551), which is clearly framed through class and gender in Chacón's novel. In fact, Antonio comments on domestic abuse (179) and then sums up the cultural context by saying, "Las han enseñado a ir detrás" ("They [referred to in the feminine] have been taught to follow behind") (180). Antonio thus demonstrates a subtle understanding of how a society can both punish and silence women, further entrenching them in centuries-old traditions of gender-based violence, cover-up, and victim-blaming.

Finally, Stanko speaks of the "unspoken and unwritten rules of engagement" (552) practiced by people affected by violence. In other words, we learn that violence is natural, and that we—perpetrators, victims, and witnesses—are supposed to quietly move on from it. Babovic and Vollendorf credit Chacón with a "heart wrenching portrayal of the isolation, fear, and psychiatric breakdown caused by gender violence" (81) in *Algún amor que no mate*, and the same can certainly be said for *Cielos de barro*. When Antonio tells of the day he became Catalina's "novio" ("boyfriend"), he says, "La conocí en el camino del cementerio, el día que nos mataron a todos un poco" ("I met her on the path to the cementery, the day that they killed us all a little") (130). This Cela-style juxtaposition of romance (the "noviazgo") with the cemetery reinforces the texture of imposed silences of the Franco period and the slow-moving violence of "being killed a little." Antonio's extended narration and reclamation of his and his family's dignity serve as a poignant thread in Chacón's novel. The dignity of Antonio's family can be extrapolated to a vindication of the dignity of the Republican cause, a common denominator that Lorraine Ryan has astutely noticed in many Spanish novels and films of the past two decades (97). Don Leandro's triple assassination and subsequent

command that he himself be killed reveals the greed, vengeance, and ultimate self-destruction of the novel's aristocratic family and, at the same time, introduces the concept of self-inflicted violence enacted out of deep pain and suffering.[8]

The previous sections have addressed Chacón's artful technique of structuring a two-pronged narration with chapters alternating between the voices of Antonio the potter and the third-person narrator, who recounts the events that transpire at Los Negrales.[9] Weaver mentions the "incompatibility of the two accounts" (35), thus underscoring the gaps, or silences, between and among the alternating chapters. Godsland highlights that "the old man [Antonio]'s illiteracy also contrived to ensure the silencing of the losers to which Aguilar Fernández refers" (257). Nevertheless, Portela interprets Antonio's narration as endowing the impoverished and the silenced with authority (192). She sees Antonio as "médium, es decir, mensajero e intérprete del personaje sin nombre [el hijo de Isidora y Modesto que nunca se nombra en la narración]" ("medium, that is, messenger or interpreter of the nameless character [Isidora and Modesto's son, who is never named in the narration]") (193). This hybrid structure fashioned by Chacón speaks to the textured, nuanced approaches to the subject of violence advocated by Kilby. Jo Labanyi has suggested that in the television series *Amar en tiempos revueltos* "trauma is an alibi for the failure to work through shame" (232). In *Cielos de barro*, Chacón allows narrators and characters to evoke the physical and emotional trauma of violence and, by extrapolation, in working through shame, to signal the social and political injustices inflicted as part and parcel of silence and violence.

The use of gossip and the concomitant phrase "dicen que" ("it is said that"; "they say that") (e.g., p. 112) in both narrative strands intensifies the notion of gaps and silences and underscores not only violence itself, but also the movement or occurrence of violence in cycles. This lengthy quote reveals the inventory of violent acts against the serving class and the new cycle of violence in the use of blackmail and vengeance surrounding those very same events. The reader grasps that gossip can be a vehicle to knowledge and, by extension, knowledge ("sabía que") is power:

> [Felipe] Sabía que Catalina ignoraba que habían violado a su madre, y él había aceptado como un hecho que no debía saberlo jamás. Revelarle aquella violación no se le había ocurrido nunca, hasta ahora. La sangre y el nombre de Quica sobre la medalla dispararon su imaginación. Podría mostrársela en

> primer lugar a Isidora. Sí. O reunirlas a las dos. Ver sus caras, mirándose la una a la otra mientras les ponía delante la prueba de que Isidora mató al soldado que violó a Quica, revelando a un tiempo que Quica había sido violada y que Isidora había asesinado a un hombre. Las sirvientas no tenían por qué saber que él no faltaría a la lealtad hacia Leandro. No podía denunciar a Isidora pero la amenaza del garrote vil las haría temblar. (281)

> [Felipe] knew that Catalina did not know that they had raped her mother, and he had accepted that she should never find out. It had never occurred to him to tell her about the rape, until now. The blood and Quica's name on the medal fired his imagination. Maybe he could show it first to Isidora. Yes. Or get the two of them together. See their faces, the two of them looking at each other while he put before them the proof that Isidora had killed the soldier who had raped Quica, revealing all at once that Quica had been raped and that Isidora had killed a man. The maids had no reason to know that he would not be loyal to Leandro. He couldn't denounce Isidora, but the threat of the garotte would make them tremble.

Felipe's possession of the medal gives him the power to reopen old wounds and to place real lives in real danger. The line that follows this quote demonstrates that he has, in a sense, licked his chops ("saborear" [283]) at the prospect of causing others physical and emotional pain.

Chacón's use of onomastics also foregrounds shifts in information, which of course relates to the multiple silences in the novel. Isidora and Modesto's son remains nameless throughout the narration, despite his being a significant link between the impoverished characters and the wealthy ones. He is not named, in part, because he seems to belong to everyone and to no one, and thus cannot claim his familial legacy. Portela poignantly describes the use of this technique: "La ausencia de nombre nos alerta del peligro de morir doblemente: en cuerpo y en memoria" ("The absence of a name alerts us to the danger of dying doubly: in body and in memory") (199). She also relates the nameless character's return to the town 40 years after his departure to Francoism and the "desmemoria oficial" ("official un-memory") (200) of this period and its aftermath in the Transition. Aurora, daughter of the Paredes Solar family, is called Aurora at home, but Eulalia as her religious name (e.g. 39, 61), thus creating further onomastic shifts and puzzles, contrasting the innocence of the name "Dawn" (Aurora) with the maturity of "She Knows" (Eulalia). One additional example is Antonio's narration of political killings in which he uses no names but associates the people about whom he is speaking through their kin relationships (68-69).

The named, the unnamed, and the doubly named create a sense of absence in the narration that Portela (195) and Weaver (39-40) connect to the ghostliness of the novel. Portela speaks of the 40-year absence of the unnamed character as "síntoma o remanente de un pasado traumático enraizado en la violencia de la guerra y el poder absoluto de los vencedores (Victoria y su familia), un remanente que retorna para recordar la injusticia" ("a symptom or remainder of a traumatic past rooted in the violence of war and the absolute power of the victors [Victoria and her family], a ghost that returns to remind of injustice") (195). Of course, Victoria is aptly named, given her family's participation in the Nationalist victory. The name, however, is ironic in that Victoria's family's decades-long corruption causes the family's self-destruction.[10] In her theorization of violence, Kilby emphasizes the use of the word "ghost" as a verb to allude to this presence of absence in silence and violence: "If we are to take seriously the view that violence 'goes by many names, ghosts manifold discourses, and is manifest in numerous phenomena' (Eckstrand and Yates, 2011), then we need to widen our field of research and develop our skills accordingly" (263).

Silence, whether imposed or self-imposed, marks the body and mind. It ties the tongue, suffocates emotion, suppresses the truth. Silence exists on a continuum with violence in that it inflicts harm and diverts humans from a path of justice. If we accept Elizabeth Stanko's powerful declaration that violence is not hidden, then we must understand that silence surrounding violence gives violence even more strength and pushes it into an all too familiar repetitive cycle. Dulce Chacón's *Cielos de barro* effectively incorporates themes and techniques of silence to connect it to violence and to write against the impossibility of memory and justice.

Notes

[1] See Works Cited for the Instituto Nacional de Estadística's 2017 statistics on domestic violence and gender-based violence in Spain. The 14-page introductory document goes to significant effort to define complicated terms surrounding gender violence and intimate partner violence.

[2] Major research on Chacón's *Cielos de barro* includes Shelley Godsland's study on detection and nostalgia, Edurne Portela's examination of specters and historical memory, Lorraine Ryan's work on space and agency, and Wesley Weaver's analysis of gender and genre.

[3] After winning the Azorín Prize for the Novel (2000), Dulce Chacón stated that, "No es necesario el olvido ni el perdón, sino el conocimiento, y reconocer que en la vida no todo es blanco y negro, y esto sirve para enfrentar el presente" ("Neither forgetting nor forgiveness is necessary, but rather knowledge, and the recognition that not everything is black or white, which allows us to come to terms with the present") (Sabogal).

[4] The Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (ARMH) in Spain serves to hear silenced voices and uncover bodies struck by violence.

[5] Hannah Arendt writes: "It is against the background of these experiences that I propose to raise the question of violence in the political realm. This is not easy; what Sorel remarked sixty years ago, 'The problems of violence still remain very obscure,' is as true today as it was then. I mentioned the general reluctance to deal with violence as a phenomenon in its own right, and I must now qualify this statement. If we turn to discussion of the phenomenon of power, we soon find that there exists a consensus among political theorists from Left to Right to the effect that violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power" (35). Arendt goes on to link power to rule, and "'the power of man over man'" (citing Strausz-Hupé, 36-37). This theorization of violence goes again to a gendered core.

[6] Of course, we can also include Chacón's *Algún amor que no mate* (1996) and *La voz dormida* (2002) on the list of novels that examine gender-based violence and look broadly at questions of human rights.

[7] See Kilby, p. 269, for mention of forms of neoliberal violence.

[8] See Banu Bargu's "Theorizing Self-Destructive Violence" for a fuller understanding of the political effects and implications of self-destructive violence.

[9] I note here that Wesley Weaver for some reason labels the omniscient third-person narrator a "male narrator": "On a thematic level, *Cielos de barro* is a strong testimonial to the condition of women in rural twentieth-century Spain, yet at the same time subverts any attempt to present a clear, historical portrayal of events to any meaningful extent, as history is inevitably linked to the male hegemony. This is evident in the presence of two male narrators, each of whom will fail in their respective attempts to provide a satisfactory account of the events leading up to the murders" (34-35). I have not found textual evidence that the third-person narrator's sex or gender is marked, and therefore this gendered reading may be somewhat flawed, influenced itself by gendered assumptions.

[10] Lorraine Ryan astutely analyzes Chacón's use of space to invert the power structures of the aristocratic family: "Doña Victoria's decision to sell the house, which has been in her family for generations, can be considered as a surrender to these circumstances and an excision of a key part of her identity, that of the lady of the manor (275). Even when Doña Victoria decides to sell the manor, it still seems to exert a malign influence on its inhabitants, as the family's quarrels over the sale lead to the murder of three Albuera family members. The scene of

so much criminal activity becomes the scene of the killing of this amoral family by one of their own, a radical inversion of Francoist space" (103).

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"Reina de la Sabiduría": La teología mariana feminista de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y su sermón escondido en los *Ejercicios devotos*

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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, una de las escritoras hispanoamericanas más celebradas de la historia literaria, se ha convertido en metonimia del feminismo mexicano, especialmente por su carta famosa *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (1700). En esta carta, defiende la intelectualidad femenina después de recibir criticismo del padre Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz y Sahagún sobre sus actividades de escritura y estudio. La fama de la *Respuesta* consiste mayormente en que Sor Juana indirectamente critica a la Iglesia por no permitir que las mujeres estudien y escriban. No obstante, existe una obra sorjuanina menos conocida que también critica la misma problemática implícitamente. Esta es *Ejercicios devotos para los nueve días antes del de la purísima Encarnación del Hijo de Dios, Jesucristo, Señor nuestro*, escrita en 1685 o 1686, varios años antes de la Respuesta. Electa Arenal explica que "…she used Catholicism to structure a feminist ideology…" (*Untold* 337). Por ejemplo, mediante la figura venerada de la Virgen María, Sor Juana implícitamente defiende los derechos de las mujeres de no sólo escribir, sino de producir ideas intelectuales y tener autoridad para proclamarlas. Hace esto por medio de lo que Grady C. Wray llama el "sermón escondido" de Sor Juana en

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los *Ejercicios devotos* porque Sor Juana subversivamente escribe un sermón, y le llama esta escritura devoción. Esto es significante porque el sermón es un género literario determinado masculino por la Iglesia Católica, mas la devoción es un género literario que la Iglesia aprueba que la mujer lea y escriba. En este ensayo, tomo como base el concepto del "sermón escondido" de Wray y desarrollo la praxis feminista de Sor Juana al escribir estos sermones. También exploraré cómo Sor Juana, a través los *Ejercicios devotos*, desarrolla una teología mariana feminista.[1]

El género literario de las devociones

Josefina Muriel explica que la literatura devota en la Nueva España fue impresa desde el siglo dieciseis, y lo que fue publicado fue escrito por hombres. Sin embargo, las mujeres también escribían literatura devota, aunque muchas veces eran escrituras anónimas y no se difundían a un público mayor (Muriel 474). Monjas como Gerónima de la Asunción, María de la Antigua, y Sor Juana son unas de las pocas mujeres cuyas escrituras se han publicado.[2] La razón por esto es que no son consideradas escrituras que discuten cuestiones teológicas, empero tratan temas religiosos. Además, se esperaba de las mujeres letradas que utilizaran sus destrezas literarias en escribir sobre su religiosidad. La literatura devota, la cual también es llamada "devociones," consistía de oraciones y ejercicios para fortalecer la fe de la lectora, ya que eran mayormente eran mujeres las que leían devociones. Grady C. Wray explica que estos ejercicios tienen temas de la humildad, la ignorancia y la obediencia (10). Según el monje Guigo II, las devociones son dividas en cuatro categorías: "reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation" (11). En general, las devociones escritas por Sor Juana siguen este formato. Sor Juana tendía escribir y divulgar sus trabajos, por lo tanto no hay un consenso sobre la fecha exacta de producción y publicación de los *Ejercicios devotos*. La tarea de coleccionar estos trabajos muchas veces resultó complicada, pero se sabe que esta obra fue escrita durante la década de 1680, la cual fue la década de mayor actividad intelectual de Sor Juana (Wray 5). Estudiosos de la obra sorjuanina como Georgina Sabat de Rivers datan los *Ejericicios devotos* antes de 1685; Sabat de Rivers indica que Sor Juana menciona los *Ejercicios devotos* en la *Respuesta*, la cual fue publicada en marzo del 1691 (261). Esto es porque Sor Juana señala en la *Respuesta*: "Hícelos sólo por la devoción de mis hermanas, años ha, y después se divulgaron [los *Ejercicios devotos* y los *Ofrecimientos de Dolores*]" (847). Alberto G. Salceda, unos de los editores de las *Obras completas* de Sor Juana, y Josefina Muriel, reconocida académica especializada en la Nueva

España, están de acuerdo en fechar los *Ejercicios devotos* entre 1684 y 1688 (Sabat de Rivers 260).

Sor Juana misma explica qué son los *Ejercicios devotos*, y por qué escribió tal obra:

> Yo, pues, viendo esto, considerando que nosotros (en cuyo provecho resultó este tan incomparable beneficio) es razón que nos prevengamos a él con algunos devotos Ejercicios, para sanear en algo el torpe olvido con que tratamos tan sagrados misterios y tan inestimables finezas, dispuse las siguientes, por dar alguna norma de que se una la oración de muchos… (848-49)

Oficialmente, y ante los ojos de la Iglesia Católica, los *Ejercicios devotos* son ejercicios espirituales para los que desean alcanzar un estado espiritual más profundo y más cercano a Dios. Sor Juana divide sus *Ejercicios devotos* en tres categorías: la meditación, "el ofrecimiento" (que es una oración), y el ejercicio. Los *Ejercicios devotos* comprenden nueve días, y cada día está dividido en tres actividades: la meditación, el ofrecimiento y el ejercicio. Sor Juana aplicó lo que tradicionalmente se consideraba ejercicios devotos, pero modifica la estructura un poco para entrelazar su argumento en defensa de la intelectualidad femeninia y su derecho de escribir. La meditación funciona para establecer una fundación teológica basada en tanto las escrituras bíblicas como en enseñanzas tradicionales católicas. Sor Juana incluye bases bíblicas de los libros de Génesis, Jueces, Reyes, Ester, Lucas, y Apocalipsis, y enseñanzas de San Agustín y San Buenaventura. Los ofrecimientos son oraciones a la Virgen María para que les dé, tanto a Sor Juana como a los ejercitantes, las virtudes que se discutieron en la meditación. Finalmente, el ejercicio es la categoría práctica: "interior and intelectual exercises (meditation, contemplation, praise of God, etc.)… and mixed exercises that combined an exterior activity with interior action or thought (hair shirts, discipline, fasting, abstinence) (Wray 11). Los ejercicios son instrucciones de cómo poner en práctica, o ejercer, los conceptos teológicos que acaba de repasar la autora—desde los lectores que no saben el latín hasta los mismos sacerdotes.

Además de "sanear en algo el torpe olvido," Sor Juana también indica claramente quién es su audiencia: "Y continuando mi propósito, digo que los he dispuesto con la suavidad posible, porque todo género de personas (aunque sean de poca salud y ocupadas) los puedan hacer" (849). Existe un debate sobre a quién dirige Sor Juana sus escritos

devocionales, ya que algunos estudiosos indican que sólo escribió para sus hermanas monjas: Sor Juana misma declara en la *Respuesta* que escribió los *Ejercicios devotos* "sólo por la devoción de mis hermanas" (Juana 847). Otros dicen que Sor Juana escribió para lectores masculinos y femeninos. Aunque Sor Juana sí explica en la *Respuesta* que la escribió para sus hermanas, Wray señala que ella utiliza las formas masculinas y femeninas de los sustantivos para referirse directamente a sus lectores (26-27). Un ejemplo de la aserción de Wray se encuentra en el día tres de los *Ejercicios devotos*, en el cual Sor Juana habla con su audiencia con las referencias: "Señores y Señoras mías…", "Mirad, Señores y Señoras…", y "No, hermanos y hermanas" (852). Además, Sor Juana da instrucción a los sacerdotes en la sección del ejercicio del último día, el Día de Encarnación: "Los sacerdotes que rezan en sus casas, podrán rezar de rodillas el Oficio Divino, al menos Vísperas, en reverencia de tanto misterio" (866). Ciertamente, la escritura de Sor Juana demuestra una subversión del rol prescrito como mujer al dar dirección espiritual sutilmente a sacerdotes. Los roles de género dentro de la tradición católica son rígidos, tanto que líderes católicos históricamente han institucionalizado sus justificaciones de la sumisión de la mujer y el liderazgo masculino.

La complementariedad

En sociedades influenciadas por nociones patriarcales occidentales las enseñanzas religiosas moldean expectativas tanto para la mujer como el hombre. Es preciso entonces explorar la doctrina de la complementariedad dentro de la Iglesia Católica, ya que prescribe roles de la mujer y el hombre de acuerdo a tradiciones y enseñanzas cristianas. Las escrituras de Tomás de Aquino son particularmente importantes en considerar, ya que "Thomistic thought [was] one of the principal theological systems of Colonial America" (Montross 17). Además de la influencia teológica, el estilo de predicación y retórica de Aquino fue empleado en el siglo diecisiete.[3] Entonces la teología tomista influye el concepto de complementariedad, es decir, que personas del sexo masculino y personas del sexo femenino se complementan, pero no son son iguales. El concepto de "complementarse" es en referencia a la anatomia de los órganos sexuales, por consiguiente también socialmente en roles determinados de acuerdo al género. Es decir, la mujer y el hombre tienen un rol distinto dado por Dios. En *When Women become Priests: The Catholic Women's Ordination Debate* (2000), Kelley A. Raab explica lo siguiente sobre la complementariedad:

> Complementarity refers to the idea that men and women have different roles to perform within church and society, originating from innate, predetermined functions. In this "two nature" vision of humanity, men and women are ordained to complement one another, leading to a division of male and female roles, which are not interchangeable. (39)

Se utiliza enseñanzas de complementariedad para perpetuar la sumisión de la mujer ante el hombre, ya que su supuesto rol es de sumisión y procreación. Aquino escribe en *Summa Theologica* (1485) que: "… since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order."[4] El institucionalizar la sumisión de la mujer, y por consiguiente asegurar que el orden de sacerdocio sólo le pertenezca al hombre, Aquino ha sido de gran influencia al mundo novohispano que habita Sor Juana.

Estas tradiciones y reglamentos patriarcales se han cementado en la Iglesia Católica contemporánea. La Congregación para la Doctrina de la Fe, una organización dentro de la Iglesia Católica Romana a cargo de cuestiones doctrinales, produjo el documento "Declaración sobre la cuestión de la admisión de las mujeres al sacerdocio ministerial" en 1976. Este documento declara que las mujeres, por la mayor parte, no puedan ser sacerdotisas, ni participar en el gobierno de esa institución.[5] El Papa Juan Pablo II escribió en *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (1997) sobre estas justificaciones de la complementariedad de los sexos al comentar sobre la creación del hombre y la mujer. Explica que en el libro de Génesis el hombre, Adán, estaba solo, por lo tanto este contenía ambos sexos ya que todavía no existía la mujer. Juan Pablo II le llama esta etapa de la creación humana la "solitud original." Mas cuando se crea la mujer de la costilla del hombre, Juan Pablo II explica que son dos encarnaciones: "that is, on two ways of 'being a body' of the same human being created 'in the image of God'" (John Paul II 43). Con esto establecido, utiliza terminología de "regalar" la mujer al hombre, tal como Dios lo hizo cuando creo a Eva:

> On his part, in receiving her as a gift in the full truth of her person and feminity, man therby enriches her. At the same, he too is enriched in this mutual relationship… throught he gift of himself… It manifests the specific essence of his masculinity which, through the reality of the body and of sex, reaches the deep recesses of the "possession of self." (71-72)

Entonces la complementariedad permite que el hombre llegue a su plenitud ya que en su solitud original contenía ambos sexos, y cuando Dios

creó a la mujer, la subsecuente unión que tiene el hombre con ella lo vuelve a su estado de inocencia y unión con Dios. La complementariedad utiliza la mujer como objeto y herramienta para asegurar la masculinidad del hombre.

Según el concepto de la complementariedad, los puestos de liderazgo en la iglesia, específicamente las ordenaciones sacerdotales, no son intercambiables entre el hombre y la mujer. A través de su investigación de varios documentos oficiales del Vaticano, Raab explica que la teología de la prescripción sacerdotal requiere que sea un hombre el que asuma este papel. Esclarece las explicaciones teológicas católicas y las resume en tres razones por las cuales sólo un hombre puede ser sacerdote: 1) la tradición, 2) sexo morfológico de Jesús a Jesús y 3) la alegoría bíblica que presenta a Jesús como el "novio" y la Iglesia como la "novia." La Declaración del Vaticano, dictada en 1976, indica que tradicionalmente jamás se ha nombrado a una mujer al sacerdocio.[6] Sin embargo, las explicaciones de la semejanza física a Jesús, y la imagen del novio y la novia, muestran una directa intención de subyugar a la mujer de acuerdo a la doctrina de complementariedad porque se excluyen de posicionalidades de liderazgo en cuanto a cuestiones teológicas. Raab añade lo siguiente sobre la Declaración del Vaticano:

> The document states that the incarnation took place in the form of the male sex and that this fact cannot be disassociated from the doctrine of salvation. Fundamentally, the argument runs, Christ cannot be symbolized as a woman because the historical Jesus was not a woman. (36)

El énfasis que pone la Iglesia Católica sobre las particularidades físicas del sexo de Jesús constituye la justificación de no permitir a la mujer entrar al sacerdocio. Aquí es donde se utiliza también el género en la imagen del novio y la novia: esta metáfora explica la relación entre Jesús, representado por el novio, y la Iglesia representada por la novia, en la cual hay sumisión por parte de la novia al novio. Raab define esta justificación como "determinismo biológico," un concepto ya establecido por Tomás de Aquino.[7] Esta creencia tomista ha tenido repercusiones en la participación de mujeres en la Iglesia Católica hasta hoy en día, y más en la etapa de Sor Juana. Es entonces significante que Sor Juana escribe sobre una figura femenina venerada y autoritativa: la Virgen María.

La Virgen María: la autoridad perfecta

La posición de la Iglesia de no permitir a la mujer entrar al oficio sacerdotal es particularmente interesante ya que la figura de la

Virgen María es exaltada como la Madre de Dios. La doctrina católica enseña que la Virgen María, la madre de Jesucristo, no tenía pecado, y esta enseñanza es considerada oficial e irrefutable. La doctrina de la Inmaculada Concepción enseña que María tuvo que haber sido un ser humano perfecto, sin pecado, para poder llevar en a Jesucristo su vientre. En el Concilio de Basilea en 1439 el Papa Felix V proclamó la Inmaculada Concepción una enseñanza oficial de la Iglesia, y en el Concilio de Trento en el siglo dieciséis declaró a la Virgen María sin pecado. El Papa Pablo V ordenó en el siglo dieciocho que ya no se debatiera en el púlpito el asunto de la Inmaculada Concepción, y el Papa Alejandro VII prohibió más debate sobre esta doctrina. Sor Juana misma argumenta fervientemente en los *Ejercicios devotos* a favor de la Inmaculada Concepción, de este modo desarrollando su teología mariana feminista.

Vemos a través de su devoción a la Virgen María que Sor Juana toma ventaja de la doctrina de la Inmaculada Concepción para crear un argumento agudo sobre los derechos de la mujer para el estudio y la intelectualidad. Además de estar libre de pecado, Sor Juana declara que la Virgen María es sabia al referirse a ella como "Reina de la Sabiduría, más docta y sabia que aquella reina Sabá!" (854) Aparte de hacer una referencia bíblica a una figura femenina poderosa, Sor Juana manifiesta en su ideología cómo, tanto la Virgen María como la "reina Sabá", tienen sabiduría, inclusive de conceptos científicos.[8] Esto lo presenta en la meditación del cuarto día, cuando explica que Dios creó el sol y la luna, dos cuerpos celestiales que han sido estudiado por científicos por años. Sor Juana toma oportunidad de señalar esto y de exhibir su propio conocimiento científico sobre este tema:

> [¿]Y la altísima sabiduría con que la gran Señora conoció todas las naturalezas y cualidades de todos aquellos luminares: sus influjos, giros, movimientos, retrogresiones, eclipses, conjunciones, menguantes, crecientes, y todos los efectos que pueden producir en los cuerpos sublunares, con perfectísima intuición?...Sabiendo con clarísimo conocimiento todas las causas de estos admirables efectos que por tantos siglos han tenidos suspensos y tan fatigados a los entendimientos de los hombres en escrúpulos, sin llegar a tener perfecta ciencia de ellas. (854)

Partiendo del precedente de la Inmaculada Concepción de la Virgen María, ahora Sor Juana construye una teología mariana feminista que es aceptada dentro de la Iglesia Católica novohispana, y apoya su mensaje

implícito de que la mujer es inteligente y debe permitírsele estudiar y escribir.

Sor Juana escribe que la Virgen María es perfecta y sabia, por lo tanto ella rige con autoridad sobre la creación de Dios por ser la Madre de Dios. Elena Deanda-Camacho escribe que Sor Juana ciertamente usaba la Virgen María para argumentar a favor de la intelectualidad femenina, pero que también menciona en sus escrituras la personificación de la Sabiduría que se encuentra en la Biblia. Al hacer esto, Sor Juana tiene el cuidado de no ser acusada de herejía. Establece que la Virgen María es divina y de ella proviene la sabiduría, pero Sor Juana es el vehículo por el cual se transmite esta sabiduria, lo cual requiere de la inteligencia: "sor Juana delimita las fronteras entre lo humano y lo divino al considerar la sabiduría cualidad divina y el conocimiento producto adquirido" (Deanda-Camacho 191).

Sabat de Rivers explica que "María no es solamente sabiduría, es dadora del poder y de la justicia que se opera en la tierra" (271). Esto se observa en la teología mariana feminista de Sor Juana, especialmente en el último día de los *Ejercicios devotos*, que es el celebrado Día de Encarnación. Sor Juana hace una declaración que sin duda exalta a la Virgen María: "…después de Dios, no hay grandeza, no hay potestad, no hay privilegio, no hay exaltación, no hay gracia, no hay gloria como la de María Santísima" (Juana 864). La Virgen María es poderosa y tiene autoridad: esta es la base de una teología mariana feminista en que Sor Juana les instruye a todos sus lectores que deben obedecer a la Madre de Dios. Atribuye a la Virgen María características de Dios, como la potestad, la exaltación, la gloria, y más importante, la gracia. Sor Juana empezó el primer día de los *Ejercicios devotos* tratando de probar la lógica de la Inmaculada Concepción, y esto permite que fluya su argumento de la perfección, sabiduría y autoridad de María Santísima. Sabat de Rivers encapsula esto muy bien en la siguiente cita:

> Mencionando los privilegios conocidos e 'infinitos que ignoramos', su sabiduría, su poder, su prístino origen divino y realzando la facultad reproductiva única del sexo al que pertenece, recrea la monja mexicana, en revancha, una figura femenina incontrovertible y reconocida por la Iglesia que, porque es superior, rige a los hombres que quieren dominar su mundo y que es modelo y bandera para sí misma y para toda mujer. (272)

La preexistencia de la veneración de la Virgen María como Madre de Dios permite que Sor Juana construya una teología mariana feminista a través

de los *Ejercicios devotos* para poder establecer la legitimidad de permitir la intelectualidad femenina.

La precedencia de la superioridad de la Virgen María

Es bien conocido y estudiado que Sor Juana aplica el uso de la formula de la humildad al referirse a sí misma como escritora para evadir repercusiones de personas como el padre Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz y Sahagún en la jerarquía eclesiástica de la Nueva España. Wray explica que es una "estrategia de retórica":

> the way an author uses set or original phrases to persuade readers to continue reading the text or to present her/himself in a proper light. Rhetorical strategies of humility generally involve an author's self-effacement, self-depreciation, self-references to worthlessness, uselessness, ignorance and incompetence… (21)

Esta estrategia funciona para protección contra posibles acusaciones de herejía por el liderazgo novohispano de la Iglesia Católica porque la retórica de la humildad minimiza la percibida amenaza contra las doctrinas católicas. Sor Juana emplea estas estrategias en sus *Ejercicios devotos*: "…con que no le queda de mía sino la rústica corteza y el torpe estilo en que va escrita; de lo cual pido perdón a vuestra maternal clemencia (Juana 848). Cuando da explicaciones sobre su escritura, Sor Juana se dirige directamente a la Virgen María: "…pido perdón a vuestra maternal clemencia, no tanto por la rudeza de lo discurrido, como… haber tenido osadía de tomar vuestros altos misterios…Y así os suplico, ¡oh, Medio y Puerta de la Misericordia de Dios!" (Juana 848). Aquí no hay disculpas pedidas a un confesor o noble cortesano, sino a la Virgen María misma, y lo hace al decir que sus *Ejercicios devotos* no son "ofrenda sólo voluntaria, sino también restitución debida." (848) Desde el principio de sus *Ejercicios devotos* Sor Juana establece que la Virgen María tiene autoridad y le da permiso de escribir; es decir, la Virgen María es la "editora" de Sor Juana (Wray 33). La Virgen María es el "Medio y Puerta de la Misericordia de Dios," por consiguiente es "intercessor and, therefore, protector between the readers and Sor Juana" (Wray 34). La declaración que hace Sor Juana de María como intercesora/editora es una estrategia de retórica que emplea Sor Juana porque esclarece que tiene responsabilidad sobre sus pecados ante la Virgen María. La figura de la Virgen María es venerada por ser Madre de Dios, por ende al que Sor Juana se protege a si misma en sus escritos sobre la sabiduría femenina.

Sor Juana emplea esta estrategia de retórica al enfatizar sus percibidas deficiencias, mas su praxis feminista en hacerlo ante la Virgen María es lo que resalta como un acto subversivo y feminista.

Sor Juana tuvo cuidado de atribuirle a esta figura femenina poderosa la autoría de la creación del mundo junto al Dios Padre. Hace esto al explicar que al ser la Madre de Dios, estuvo presente en la creación; esta participación de la Virgen María en la creación permite la creatividad e intelectualidad de Sor Juana, ya que establece que la Virgen es su precursora intelectual, y sólo ante ella es responsable Sor Juana de lo que escribe. En la sección de la meditación del primer día de los *Ejercicios devotos*, Sor Juana narra el primer día de la creación, en que se creó la luz. Inmediatamente incluye la participación de la Virgen María en esto, indicando que la luz le obedeció, y hace una pregunta retórica: "Si la luz es vasalla de María Santísima, y ésta no pudo sufrir la compañía de la tinieblas, y Dios la segregó y apartó de ellas, haciéndola de naturaleza incompatible con la oscuridad, ¿cómo la reina de las luces y de todo lo criado pudo jamás compadecerse con la obscura tiniebla de la original culpa?" (Juana 849). Sor Juana establece que las tinieblas son simbólicas del pecado, particularmente el pecado original de Adán. Por consiguiente, la lógica de Sor Juana es la siguiente: si las tinieblas son el pecado, y la Virgen María es reina de la luz, es imposible que su naturaleza esté contaminada con el pecado original. La luz y las tinieblas son opuestos binarios; jamás podrán mezclarse. De igual manera, la Virgen María es el término opuesto del pecado original de Adán y por consiguiente no se le puede atribuir a la Virgen María la naturaleza pecaminosa de los demás seres humanos. Es muy importante notar el hecho de que Sor Juana coloca esta lógica al principio de sus *Ejercicios devotos*, porque después mostrará cuán efectivo será para la argumentación implícita de Sor Juana sobre los derechos de las mujeres.

Sor Juana atribuye a la Virgen María la creación del universo, y al hacer esto, está implicítamente declarando una equivalencia entre Dios Padre y la Virgen María. De este modo, construye el argumento de que una figura femenina venerada tiene autoridad divina absoluta. Cada día de los *Ejercicios devotos* contiene una narrativa de los acontecimientos de la semana en que se creó el universo. En el segundo día creó el firmamento, o el cielo, el cual explica Sor Juana que es siempre firme como la devoción de María Santísima, y en el tercer día se creó el mar y la Tierra, que muestran las virtudes de ella congregadas en un ser, igual como las aguas se congregaron para formar los océanos. Los cuerpos celestiales, el sol y la luna, fueron creados el cuarto día, y se le asigna a la Virgen

María la sabiduría por tener bajo su dominio estos cuerpos celestiales tan estudiados por ser humano. Los peces y las aves se crearon el quinto día, y ambos contienen características de la naturaleza perfecta de la Virgen María: los peces moran en la pureza del agua, igual que María mora en su pureza virginal, y las aves vuelan en lo alto, tal como María "siempre habitó las alturas del Cielo con el remontado vuelo de su contemplación" (855). Finalmente, en el día sexto se crearon los animales de la tierra, el primer hombre y la primera mujer, Adán y Eva. Sor Juana explica que Dios "le crió por monarca de todo lo criado en el mundo" (856) a Adán, mas su pecado al comer del Árbol del Conocimiento del Bien y el Mal causó que se rebelaran también las criaturas. La lógica de la Inmaculada Concepción entra de nuevo aquí, razonando que a María se le guardó del pecado original, y por consiguiente ella restaura la imagen de Dios en los seres humanos y obtiene ese derecho de monarca sobre la Tierra que perdió Adán en su rebelión.

La participación de la Virgen María le permite aun otro privilegio: tener dominio sobre los ángeles en el cielo. En la rebelión original, o la caída de Luzbel quien era "perfecto era en todos [sus] caminos, desde el día que [fue] criado, hasta que se halló en [él] maldad," Luzbel convenció a un tercio de los ángeles a que se rebelaran con él en contra Dios.[9] En el séptimo día los *Ejercicios devotos*, Sor Juana escribió que Dios Padre

> [Subió a María] en espíritu a aquellos alcázares eternos para que los ciudadanos celestaiales la diesen la obediencia a aquella reina, cuyo derecho y fueros, tanto, antes les hizo tomar las armas intelectuales contra aquel comunero espíritu que puso con su cisma, en discordia y lid a aquellos tranquilísimos reinos y a aquella pacífica y bien gobernada República de las Estrellas. (859)

Esta teología mariana feminista enseña que Dios Padre es el Creador pero la Virgen María dio instrucción a los "ciudadanos celestiales," y estos fueron los que no se rebelaron con Luzbel. La frase de Sor Juana de "tomar armas intelectuales contra aquel comunero espíritu" reverba porque esta teología mariana feminista de Sor Juana argumenta que el "armamento intelectual" en contra de Satanás proviene de la Virgen María, una figura religiosa femenina. Esto es una postura importante en la teología mariana feminista sorjuanina porque establece a María en una posicionalidad de poder porque Dios Padre decidió que ella instruya a los ángeles. Si María instruye los ángeles, ¿por qué la mujer no puede poder instruir, estudiar, y escribir? En su artículo "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Reclaiming the Mother Tongue," Arenal comenta sobre la enseñanza de la Virgen en la siguiente

cita: "Sor Juana pictures God as comprehending—understanding as well as encompassing—and the *Señora* his mother, the divine teacher/creator, *explaining*. After all, she has given birth to the Word; who might be better at its explanation?" (67). Mediante su teología mariana feminista, Sor Juana presenta al lector una María que instruye a seres celestiales, y tiene toda la autoridad de hacerlo porque ella engendró a Dios mismo.

Esta posicionalidad de poder y autoridad de la Virgen María es intencional por parte de Sor Juana, y esto refuerza su teología mariana feminista. La Virgen María ha restituido en los seres humanos la imagen de Dios que fue corrompida por el pecado original de Adán. Sor Juana declara a María la "verdadera Fénix, que de las muertas cenizas de Adán, salió de la hoguera de los ardores de la Gracia, tan hermosa y rica, a ser la sola privilegiada como ninguna" (Juana 855). Arenal esclarece el uso por parte de Sor Juana de la figura mítica del Fénix, ya que Sor Juana escribió un romance en que responde a un señor peruano que le llama el Fénix de México; un romance que se nota el enfado de Sor Juana en ser vista como un ser raro.[10] Según Arenal, "Sor Juana's employment of the Phoenix epithet is a vivid illustration of the very Mexican, wide-spanned, antithetical use of language for devotion as well insult, for praise as well as disparagement, and, in addition, for her canny reversals" ("Reclaiming the Mother Tongue" 67). Es evidente que en los *Ejercicios devotos*, la frase "verdadera Fénix" da a entender que Sor Juana quiere utilizar el nombre que se le dio a ella para exaltar a la Virgen María, y su propósito es mostrar una humildad, como la que demuestra Sor Juana en sus escritos, que luego se invierte. La inversión consiste en que hombres le han llamado la Fenix a Sor Juana, mas Sor Juana manifiesta en este pasaje que la que verdaderamente merece este nombre y la glorificación es la Virgen María.

La "Verdadera Fénix" que salió de las cenizas de Adán se relaciona a la enseñanza de la Inmaculada Concepción, porque a la Virgen María se le guardó del pecado original y por consiguiente es perfecta y tiene autoridad. El segundo día en que Sor Juana describe la creación del firmamento, señala los pecados que han cometido los *hombres*, mas la Virgen María se mantuvo firme: el "vaivén de la culpa original" de Adán, "las borrascas y tormentas de la dolorosa Pasión y Muerte de su Santísimo Hijo", "las olas de la incredulidad y dudas de los Discípulos", "los escollos de la perfidia de Judás" (Juana 850). Entonces Sor Juana hace una pregunta retórica: "¿qué cosa más asimilada a su milagrosa constancia? ¿qué cosa más firme?" (850). Sor Juana escribe que la Virgen María es la perfecta figura femenina en la doctrina católica. Arenal escribe que "Mary, the Phoenix born of the ashes of Adam represents her own

lineage" ("Reclaiming the Mother Tongue 68), lo cual indica que la Virgen María es perfecta imagen de Dios. Entonces Sor Juana declara que ella misma proviene de este linaje: "estimo y aprecio en toda mi alma ser de su linaje" (Juana 863). Por lo tanto la Virgen María tiene autoridad, perfección y sabiduría y Sor Juana establece que es parte de su linaje. Este linaje es el de ser mujer como la Virgen María, y de ser su devota. Esta retórica permite que Sor Juana escriba y desarolle su intelectualidad femenina.

El sermón escondido de Sor Juana

Esta intelectualidad femenina toma forma en el género del sermón escondido utilizado por Sor Juana para tácitamente argumentar que se les deben permitir a las mujeres estudiar y escribir. Anteriormente en este trabajo se mencionó cómo llegó a existir el género de los ejercicios de devoción, y que su propósito era "ejercitar" el espíritu. Sin embargo, Sor Juana toma géneros establecidos y los modifica en los *Ejercicios devotos*. En realidad porciones de estos ejercicios no son escritos para devoción para monjas, sino que es un "sermón escondido" para sus lectores masculinos ya que era prohibido que las monjas escribieran sermones. Wray explica en "Los sermones escondidos de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" que Sor Juana utiliza los *Ejercicios devotos* como "medios de experimentación con el género sermónico" y "un andamiaje para construir y elaborar algo prohibido a las mujeres de su época: un sermón" (73, 75). Sor Juana escribió y difundió su sermón, sin que percatara la jerarquía eclesiástica novohispana, ya que lo hizo bajo la guisa de ejercicios devocionales.

Para poder analizar el sermón escondido, es preciso tener un entendimiento de lo que es un sermón. En general, es un acto oratorio. Es decir, es una lección o discurso que se da a un público con temas religiosos, y en la tradición cristiana, con pasajes bíblicos. En la religión cristiana los sermones empezaron con Jesucristo mismo, ya que él daba sermones a multitudes (Wray 73). Es entonces importante esta definición básica porque Sor Juana instruye que algunos ejercicios se lean públicamente. Wray señala que Sor Juana instruye que se lea en público su escritura en el último día, el Día de Encarnación: "[e]ste día, más para un doctísimo panegirista, para un elocuentísimo orador, para un elegantísimo retórico" (Juana 864). Además, los *Ejercicios devotos* contienen aparatos literarios sermónicos entonces es plausible que la obra entera sea un sermón.[11] Uno de estos aparatos literarios es la manera en que se dirige Sor Juana hacia sus lectores:

> Sor Juana vuelve a capturar a sus lectores con frases directas: "Pero mirad, Señores,"…y empieza a presentar sus perspectivas con las autoridades de la iglesia, utilizando la introducción, la división, la presentación y la prueba de las partes de Basevorn. Cita a San Agustin y San Buenaventura y regresa a las preguntas retóricas mientras reta a los lectores a que encuentren otro ejemplo de una fineza equiparable con la de la Encarnación de Cristo en el vientre de María. (Wray 77)

El referirse a sus lectores masculinos, el citar a teólogos fundamentales a la fe, y sigue retando y explorando su propia postura sobre la fineza de Cristo demuestra que esta sección de los *Ejercicios devotos* es un sermón escondido.

No obstante, el uso del lenguaje de Sor Juana es muy importante, ya que ella tiene que tener cuidado de que no se detecte su sermón. Wray indica: "If Sor Juana worried about punishment for dabbling in sermonic style, which was the reason she was persecuted at the end of her life, she camouflaged it well" (40). Este camuflaje muestra la ingeniosidad de Sor Juana y su dominio del idioma castellano. Uno de estos camuflajes es el uso del subjuntivo, tal como lo señala Arenal, para dar sus instrucciones: "Juremos la obediencia a nuestra gran reina; besemos la sagrada mano a nuestra Soberana Emperatriz; aclamémosla por legítima Señora nuestra, por nuestra Madre y Abogada…" (Juana 857). Wray indica que Sor Juana utiliza la primera persona en singular y plural para incluirse a sí misma (*The Devotional Exercises* 36). De este modo la estructura no es como una predicación acusador, sino que Sor Juana está incluyéndose en ese grupo que precisa de "sanear en algo el torpe olvido" (35). Además, Sor Juana toca temas que eran apropiados para las monjas, tales como el tema de la humildad. Wray explica que los lectores no tienen otra opción más que aceptar la postura de Sor Juana porque se apoya en enseñanzas de la Iglesia. En el tercer día, Sor Juana escribe que la Virgen María, el ejemplo perfecto de la humildad "sólo hizo de la humildad como alarde, predicando de sí que era humilde" (852). La sugerencia de una mujer que predica está allí. Dinorah Cortés-Velez nos recuerda que en la *Carta Atenagórica*, "she admits that, given the choice, she would have become a theologian" (180). Entonces no es sorprendente que en una obra tan inocua como los *Ejercicios devotos* hubiese una motivación secreta por parte de la autora en términos de presentar una argumentación de que las mujeres deben ser incluidas en las actividades intelectuales En *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, Jean Franco encapsula la obra de Sor Juana de la siguiente manera:

> The resourcefulness of Sor Juana in finding ways to destabilize such constellations [to maintain power], especially when they involve the 'natural' association of women with ignorance and men with learning, is extraordinary, ranging from the camouflage of allegory, the disguise of parody, mimicry of what is accepted as feminine discourse (obeisance, self-denigration), to anonymity—and the reverse—the foregrounding of a gendered author. (25)

Sor Juana imita un discurso femenino y camufla su propósito con este discurso superficial "femenino." Su propósito es demostrar la intelectualidad del sexo femenino, y establecer como su aliada a la Virgen María, figura tan venerada. Incluso, Arenal explica que el sacerdote Alfonso Méndez Plancarte opinó que Sor Juana "skirted with the borders of the heretical" ("Reclaiming the Mother Tongue" 72). Sin embargo, no salió de esos límites por el camuflaje de su lenguaje.

Sor Juana publicó sus *Ejercicios devotos* y aparentemente se divulgaron sin ningún problema. Sor Juana presenta al Dios Padre con un lente femenino, e implica que "God [is a] staunch defender of women's dignity" (Cortés-Velez 198), ya que Él coloca a la Virgen María, su Madre, en una posición sin pecado y con poder. Desde esta posición Sor Juana la mira y "makes Mary the generatix of enlightenment" (Arenal 73); de igual manera que María engendró al Salvador, también ella engendra la inteligencia, y Sor Juana se apropia de esa inteligencia para presentar su caso. Al ser de linaje de María, Sor Juana ahora tiene ese derecho proveniente de su Santa Madre, ¿y quién se lo podrá quitar?

Notas

[1] Aunque el feminismo como movimiento de los siglos diecinueve, veinte, y veintiuno no existía en el mundo novohispano de Sor Juana, su praxis teológico en desarrollar teología sobre la Virgen María son actos feministas. Además, la teología mariana de Sor Juana contiene ideologías básicas del feminismo como el de la paridad de sexos.

[2] Josefina Muriel escribe en *Cultura Femenina Novohispana* (1982) que hay evidencias de devocionales impresos en la Nueva España desde 1559. Además, la práctica de escribir ejercicios devotos no sólo existía en España y Nueva España, sino que también en otras tradiciones como la de los ingleses católicos y protestantes. Algunos artículos han tratado sobre el tema de devoción como género femenino en el siglo diecisiete, como Anne Kelley sobre las devociones de Elizabeth Burnet y poesía devocional inglesa por Helen Wilcox.

[3] Según *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Santo Tomás de Aquino (1225-1274) fue un teólogo italiano dominicano cuyas enseñanzas fueron, y siguen siendo

influyentes en la doctrina católica. Escribió *Summa Theologica* entre 1265 y 1274, el cual contiene enseñanzas del cristianismo y los cinco famosos argumentos que apoyan la existencia de Dios. Aquino fue canonizado el 18 de julio de 1323 por el Papá Juan XXII.

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Vol. III. Suppl. Q39. A1.

[5] Estos documentos son "Declaración *Inter Insigniores*: Declaración sobre la cuestión de la admisión de las mujeres al sacerdocio ministerial" de *Congregación para la doctrina de la fe* de 1976, los que Raab indica son "the ensuing four drafts of a pastoral letter on women," y una carta apostólica del Papa Juan Pablo II titulada "Carta apostólica Ordinatio Sacerdotalis del Papa Juan Pablo II sobre la ordenación sacerdotal reservada sólo a los hombres" en 1994.

[6] "Declaración *Inter Insigniores.*"

[7] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.

[8] I Reyes 10:1-13, Versión Reina Valera 1960: La Reina de Sabá visita al Rey Salomón después de oír de su gran sabiduría. Indica que "ella propúsole todo lo que en su corazón tenía. Y Salomón le declaró todas sus palabras: ninguna cosa se le escondió al rey, que no le declarase." Esta es otra figura bíblica femenina que busca la sabiduría.

[9] Ezequiel 28:15, Versión Reina Valera 1960. La alegoría bíblica en Apocalipsis 12 es de un gran dragón que arrojó a la tierra con su cola un tercio de las estrellas del cielo representa este evento de rebelión.

[10] Romance #49, *Obras completas*, páginas 68-59, Editorial Porrúa.

[11] Wray provee una lista larga de aparatos sermónicos, lo cual él llama "adornos," en "Los sermones escondidos de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" que proviene de *Forma praedicandi* (1322) por Robert of Basevorn en las páginas 74-75.

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Feminista y *queer* en Guinea Ecuatorial: la vulnerable persistencia de Melibea Obono

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Este estudio tiene como punto de partida la preocupación política y crítica por el hecho de que la homosexualidad y las sociedades africanas poscoloniales se hayan considerado mayoritariamente antagónicas en el siglo pasado y en este, envolviendo con frecuencia planteamientos nacionalistas y religiosos. Dicha controversia parece tener inicio en la década de los noventa en el siglo pasado.[1] El resultado, como destacaba Chantal Zabus, es que la homosexualidad es considerada mayoritariamente como algo ajeno en las culturas y sociedades del África subsahariana, inexistente o forzado artificialmente desde otros países. En este contexto, el siguiente estudio analiza la pertinencia y funcionamiento de un discurso feminista y queer en la Guinea Ecuatorial de hoy, muy particularmente en la producción narrativa y la crítica cultural realizada por Trifonia Melibea Obono (1982-). Tras el análisis y aun faltando más estudios en profundidad, se concluye que la perspectiva feminista y *queer* aplicada a sujetos femeninos en el contexto guineoecuatoriano es tan necesaria y pertinente como en otros países y, concretamente, en otros países africanos. Junto a este enfoque feminista y queer, se destaca el engarce creativo que la autora analizada realiza entre discurso político, cultural y económico patriarcal y su deconstrucción crítica ecofeminista.

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El elemento aglutinador en la obra publicada hasta el momento por la narradora y ensayista Melibea Obono se presenta encauzado por unas mujeres protagonistas que encarnan una cierta vulnerabilidad como forma de persistencia, sujetos femeninos que ponen en riesgo su bienestar físico y mental con objeto de demandar una vida vivible en su país. Estos personajes femeninos exigen un tratamiento justo por parte de su comunidad, pero para ello y como defiende Judith Butler para el activismo político (115), encarnan una vulnerabilidad que se expone al rechazo y la censura más o menos violentos, y al mismo tiempo persiste en abrirse a los otros guineoecuatorianos, reconociendo la interdependencia como única posibilidad de avance. Sus personajes ficcionales y la autora misma en su labor activista, feminista y queer, insisten en persistir, creando o reforzando espacios simbólicos posibles para pensarse en tanto mujeres y/o personas LGBTQ.

En un sentido global, las tres novelas publicadas por Obono claramente representan una importante contribución a las luchas feministas: *Herencia de bindendee* (2016), *La bastarda* (2016) y *La albina del dinero* (2017) coinciden en denunciar la discriminación sistemática sufrida por las mujeres en una sociedad tradicional, guineoecuatoriana y fang. Las novelas inciden en concreto en la conexión entre heterosexualidad compulsiva y organización social patriarcal, y en el caso de *La bastarda*, la protagonista y su tío, así como su grupo de amigas, consiguen crear en los márgenes un espacio vital para sujetos LGTB, una propuesta de vida *queer* en tensión con el sistema social y cultural imperante.

De acuerdo a las experiencias y el análisis que aporta la autora guineana analizada, la relación excluyente descrita entre africanidad y homosexualidad tendría una clara ejemplificación en Guinea Ecuatorial: "se piensa en Guinea Ecuatorial que la homosexualidad es contagiosa, un virus de los blancos" ("Nuestro reto"). Por otro lado, la existencia de movimientos transnacionales de todo tipo, entre ellos el político (ecologismo, derechos humanos, feminismo), facilitaría o posibilitaría la constitución política de agrupaciones y redes de ayuda, así como la formulación propia de reivindicaciones en los distintos países africanos, a pesar de las dificultades enfrentadas, y al mismo tiempo que, como señalaba Anna Tsing, el capitalismo global también consolida la hegemonía de los países más ricos. En este sentido, sí existiría un mismo marco transnacional que parece haber facilitado que se haya celebrado el Orgullo LGTBIQ en Guinea Ecuatorial por tercer año consecutivo, en centros culturales extranjeros dependientes de la cooperación internacional y con distintas actividades culturales. Los organizadores guineanos no habrían

podido portar pancartas ni marchar en manifestaciones, pero estarían iniciando también un debate social muy necesario, como destacaba Obono ("Nuestro reto") y, por cierto, en un breve plazo de tiempo en términos comparativos.

La homosexualidad actualmente y a lo largo del siglo XX ha sido marcadamente reprimida en los países subsaharianos a pesar de la labor legislativa en Sudáfrica (cláusula de orientación sexual en su declaración de derechos; reconocimiento de matrimonios del mismo sexo en 2006) y en otros países, de forma que junto a países de Oriente Medio constituyen mayoría en el grupo de países que criminalizan la homosexualidad.[2] No obstante, según el informe anual de ILGA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), el número de Estados que promueven institucionalmente la homofobia ha descendido en un 22% desde el año 2006, en el caso del continente africano con resultados diversos. Al respecto, Guinea Ecuatorial, como bien resalta la autora analizada en este estudio, no tiene una ley que castigue la homosexualidad, a diferencia de otros países subsaharianos, pero tampoco la homofobia.[3] Existiría represión en la familia y en la calle, sin que nadie la castigue, ella y otros corren riesgos al manifestarse públicamente ("Melibea"). No hay apenas datos oficiales que corroboren o contradigan el relato de esta escritora y activista, que describe las dificultades para ser aceptados en la familia y en la escuela, el rechazo a pagarles los estudios, la posible expulsión a la calle o la paternidad/maternidad forzada ("Nuestro reto"). Sin embargo, resultarían plausibles si atendemos a las estadísticas oficiales de Naciones Unidas de violencia contra la mujer causadas por un sistema social patriarcal, basado en una superioridad masculina supuesta y plasmado en patrones tradicionales machistas de comportamiento sexual y de género.[4] Ese mismo sistema patriarcal se enfrentaría a identidades sexuales y de género amenazantes al hacerse más o menos visibles sujetos LGTB. La supervivencia en la calle sería aún más difícil sin redes de protección institucional.

No hay organizaciones LGTBIQ en Guinea Ecuatorial, pero sí reuniones en casas particulares, además de las mencionadas jornadas LGTBIQ y otros proyectos concretos, y la clara conciencia de un movimiento propio a tenor de las últimas entrevistas, aunque no estén constituidos formalmente. Siendo un movimiento organizado reciente, quedaría trabajo por hacer para ir ensanchando las alianzas y la comprensión de una necesaria lucha activa contra la homofobia. Quizá el incidente ocurrido con la exposición de fotografías en el Centro Cultural Francés de Malabo en junio de 2017 a propósito de la celebración del Orgullo LGTBIQ, podría

adquirir un reflejo simbólico de la disputa por el espacio, aún inestable o precario.[5] Se exhibía una colección de cincuenta fotografías, preparada a lo largo del año y con cuerpos negros con identidades sexuales y lemas tales como "soy lesbiana, amo África" o "soy normal", pero las fotos fueron rotas en pedazos y se escribieron en su lugar amenazas de muerte e insultos homófobos. A pesar de este incidente, los centros culturales francés y español dependen de las embajadas respectivas y, por tanto, ofrecen un lugar aparentemente seguro y de gran importancia en la vida cultural de Malabo. Serían espacios intermedios, que ofrecen cierta protección para desarrollar ideas y tendencias, pero al mismo tiempo también reflejarían una cierta dependencia, aunque no deseada, de los intereses y la buena o mala voluntad de países extranjeros. Además, más allá de su puerta, la posible homofobia no contaría con la protección social o institucional.

Melibea Obono conecta de manera natural y significativa el feminismo y las reivindicaciones del movimiento LGTBIQ y se considera parte de una generación de mujeres con estudios superiores que cuestionan los roles de género.[6] Considera que ser feminista en Guinea Ecuatorial es difícil, pero aún más salir del armario, ya que eres una vergüenza para tu madre y tu tribu ("Las guineanas"). De forma general, las mujeres guineoecuatorianas que refleja la autora aparecen altamente determinadas por su función sexual normativa, siendo fuertemente presionadas para que su supervivencia dependa de la satisfacción de un hombre, con su trabajo en la casa y los hijos, y su permanente disponibilidad sexual. Melibea Obono tomaría el relevo en la denuncia de la situación de la mujer guineoecuatoriana de María Nsue Angüe, cuya novela *Ekomo* (1985), como sabemos, reflejaba cómo las voces y deseos de las mujeres fang en Guinea habrían quedado fuera en buena medida del discurso público, al menos del discurso político o de prestigio y así sin agencia en el devenir de su comunidad y, por tanto, su destino normativo sería el silencio exterior. Las dos escritoras reflejan el sufrimiento para las mujeres como destino ineludible, el llanto y también su tradición de resistencia. Nnanga y su largo lamento en *Ekomo*, recoge un sufrimiento colectivo: ¿Por qué no han de llorar las mujeres, si sus vidas no son sino muertes? (247). Esas mismas mujeres fang cantan y lloran la muerte y la vida en *La albina del dinero*; "las mujeres fang lloran cantando" (13).

Recordemos que Nnanga en la novela *Ekomo* reflejaba una organización social marcadamente patriarcal: "los hombres hablan, las mujeres callan, los jóvenes escuchan y los niños juegan" (20). Nnanga incluso se definía como una "presencia-ausencia, cuya importancia nada

tiene que ver con el proceso normal de los acontecimientos" (23-24). Por su parte, en las novelas de Melibea Obono no hay cambio sustancial en los principios sociales dominantes. Así la joven Okomo, en *Herencia de Bindendee*, escucha que "la mujer nace de la costilla del hombre, no deberías contestarle cuando te habla" (46-47) y observa que "en la cultura fang, cuando surgen los problemas se espera que una persona mayor de sexo varón enjuicie" (142). Asimismo, Obono, en *La bastarda,* constata que en el origen épico de su comunidad solo hay héroes masculinos (36), según las enseñanzas de su abuelo, que establece que puesto que es hombre, en su casa manda él (53).

Las novelas de Melibea Obono, como es lógico por el tiempo transcurrido, hacen críticas más explícitas y consecuentes a la jerarquía social existente y además no se produce la muerte —recordemos el destino final de Nnanga en *Ekomo*, sino la posibilidad creciente de huida. En *Herencia de Bindendee*, Obono y su hermana creen que por fin se pueden marchar de la aldea tras la muerte del padre, pero su madre les conmina a cuidar de Sufrido, el varón, para que herede (215). La novela termina entonces, así que no queda claro lo que ocurrirá. *La bastarda* va más allá, ya que Okomo deja su aldea y termina viviendo en el bosque con su tío Marcelo, homosexual, y sus amigas lesbianas. Y finalmente, en *La albina del dinero*, la novela más reciente, la narradora y protagonista lleva largo tiempo viviendo fuera del pueblo paterno, más alejada de la imposición masculina directa, viviendo en Malabo con su tía y estudiando. Consigue sobrevivir los intentos familiares y comunales por destruirla con brebajes y maldiciones tras la muerte de su hermana, gracias a su resistencia y la ayuda de su enamorado, un joven universitario de origen bubi, que forma parte como ella de una comunidad igualitaria de estudiantes:

> A las cuatro de la madrugada llegó el bubi con amistades y colegas de la universidad, Me buscaban. Y una médica blanca con la aguja. Una inyección me hizo vomitar y evacuar, luego otra medicación administrada, en su casa, hasta que me dormí. (130)

Junto a un espacio feminista, la autora también construye en su novela *La bastarda* (2016), así como en sus manifestaciones e iniciativas públicas, un espacio simbólico posible para la existencia plena de gays y lesbianas en Guinea Ecuatorial. Son pocos los testimonios literarios de personajes femeninos queer en la narrativa africana subsahariana, lo que concede aún más valor a la novela de Obono.[7] Ya en años recientes, debe destacarse la antología *Queer Africa: New and Collected Edition* (2013),

significativamente editada en Sudáfrica y con una traducción al español en 2014. En 2017 las mismas editoras publicaron en la misma editorial una segunda antología, *Queer Africa 2: New Stories*. Algunos de estos autores y autoras han podido publicar individualmente, pero con dificultades, pudiendo recurrir a la autoedición.[8]

También merece destacarse el relato breve, *Jambula Tree*, de la escritora ugandesa Monica Arac Nyeko y que ganó el prestigioso premio literario Caine en 2007. En este relato, incluido posteriormente en la antología mencionada y que cuenta la historia de amor y amistad entre dos chicas jóvenes, se basa la película *Rafiki*, de la directora keniana Wanuri Kahiu, que ha sido prohibida en su país, a pesar de no haber sexo explícito o implícito. Al respecto, debe recordarse que en Kenia las prácticas sexuales homosexuales pueden acarrear penas de cárcel de hasta catorce años. Por otro lado, el hecho mismo de haber realizado la película, con una directora africana ya de cierto nombre, el gran recibimiento en el festival de Cannes de este año 2018, y cómo el conflicto en torno a las protagonistas nos presenta la homosexualidad como un conflicto azuzado artificialmente por fuerzas políticas nacionalistas y populistas, hace concluir que existe una realidad en disputa y una resistencia creciente también desde concepciones africanas de género y sexualidad no patriarcales. Los padres de las jóvenes en esta película, autodenominados "A Man of Action" y "People's Choice", son políticos populistas que no pueden enfrentarse al conflicto planteado por sus hijas, ellos mismos estarían a favor de incitar la homofobia como forma de fortalecer la adhesión en sus votantes, apelando a liderazgos masculinos fuertes identificados con la esencia nacional africana.

Por su parte, Guinea refleja igualmente fuertes tensiones, pero también como ha observado la autora que nos ocupa, los activistas LGTBIQ han conseguido abrir un debate entre las personas cultas y principalmente en Malabo. Aún más, todas las novelas de Melibea Obono pueden describirse como narrativa "queer" por su potencialidad, según definición de Judith Halberstam, para describir relaciones personales alternativas de género y sexualidad en el tiempo y en el espacio, que se insertan dentro del discurso patriarcal a modo de recovecos, interrupciones, cuando no en constante pugna por hacerse un lugar, evidenciando las contradicciones de la misma heteronormatividad patriarcal (4-6).

En las novelas de Melibea Obono a diferencia de lo planteado en *Ekomo* de María Nsue, el movimiento introspectivo radical conduce no tanto a una experiencia vivida que busca proteger la identidad africana,

sino al colapso de lo simbólico y su reconstrucción desde los márgenes. Por ejemplo, cuando la hermana de la protagonista de *Herencia*, Angué, cuestiona la misma existencia del dios que le han enseñado, que permitiría "las agresiones del padre, el que madre trabaje como una burra embarazada de nueve meses mientras su esposo vagabundea" (62). Por un lado, en todas las obras narrativas de esta escritora aparecen espacios de alegría y gozo; "La noche de luna llena era una belleza que invitaba a salir, jugar y conversar (50), se dice en *Herencia de bindendee*, primera novela de Obono. Por otro lado, los cuerpos femeninos son inmediatamente constreñidos por el ejercicio del poder: "Las mujeres y las niñas por un lado, los niños por el suyo y los hombres en la Casa de la Palabra hablando en voz baja de mujeres" (50). Los cuerpos de las mujeres no son suyos, así que cuando Obono en *Herencia* se libra del casamiento con el cura o el catequista es consciente de que "por el momento no lloraría por las noches, madrugadas, en los ríos, como Tecla y las mujeres de su pueblo si se negaba a cumplir los deberes nocturnos de esposa fang" (12).

En la segunda novela de Obono, *La bastarda*, son más frecuentes y amplios los espacios de felicidad, también los riesgos, y la posibilidad de escape femenino se convierte en una realidad, al menos en el plano ficcional, simbólico. Los tímidos escarceos de Obono y el Chico de la Mochila de la novela anterior, con un único beso final, pasan a ser relaciones completas en *La bastarda* desde una perspectiva ingenua y ausente de culpa: "mientras hablábamos, me acosté sobre ella, con mi cabeza puesta encima de sus senos que tanto me excitaban" (94). Okomo abandona su comunidad para construir un refugio en la frontera junto a otras lesbianas y su tío homosexual, "la única familia que la vida me ha dado" (116); el bosque se convierte en hogar simbólico, "único refugio de las personas que no encontraban sitio en la tradición fang como yo.

El bosque no parece ser un espacio ideal para esta pequeña comunidad LGTB por la obvia dificultad material para sobrevivir, pero sí un espacio habitable en el imaginario para subjetividades alternativas. No está exento de riesgo: su amiga lesbiana, Linda le dice que son "libres y felices en la selva" junto a sus otras amigas y el tío Marcelo, pero también trabaja de prostituta ocasionalmente, de forma que no se libra de la servidumbre sexual, aunque también se produzca una reinscripción del espacio que dotaría de significado el deseo subjetivo de un sujeto femenino y lésbico. El tío Marcelo recuerda a su sobrina, que no existe palabra, y de este modo existencia conceptual naturalizada, que nombre a las lesbianas en lengua fang (95-97). La autora estaría participando

activamente en dicha naturalización, elaborando una adaptación en el lenguaje, un nuevo constructo del espacio físico y el simbólico.

Debe destacarse que ese espacio simbólico "vivible" para las personas LGTBQ representa una reelaboración del bosque fang, descrito por Nsue en *Ekomo* como el lugar que encierra la identidad pasada y presente de los/as africanos/as, virtualmente todas las respuestas. Así lo manifiesta, la protagonista de *Ekomo*, Nnanga, ante las desgracias que les acechan: "La selva, estática a nuestro alrededor, parecía esconder la respuesta a todos esos misterios que necesitábamos saber y, encerrada en sí misma, gozaba al ver nuestra incertidumbre y nuestro desasosiego" (74). También en *Ekomo*, el joven Nfumbá'a, que había dejado abandonada su tradición entre los libros de los europeos, se adentra en la selva para aprender la esencia del pasado y el presente fang:[9]

> Miles y miles de ánimas venían cerrándome el paso, cantando alabanzas a un Dios que no era el Dios de la Iglesia. A través de sus cánticos vi al mundo con todos sus misterios y entendí cosas jamás entendidas. Oí sonidos nunca oídos y anduve años y años sin que pudiera detenerme, mientras me iba haciendo viejo. He visto el milagro de la muerte y de la vida y he conocido la ciencia de la creación. Después de esto he vuelto a vosotros para contároslo, y resulta que no existen palabras para expresar todo lo que vi allá en la selva. (112)

En contraste con *La Bastarda*, en la última de las novelas publicadas por Obono, *La albina del dinero*, el espacio vivible para la mujer ya solo puede construirse en la ciudad en parte por el camino escogido por la coprotagonista y narradora, el estudio en la universidad. Recibe el sobrenombre de "la hermana de cerebro robado por la sabiduría blanca" (17) y consigue estudiar en la universidad en Malabo y llevar un paso más allá a la mujer posible, gracias en cierta medida a que vive con una de sus tías, y a pesar de la resistencia de su padre y la familia paterna. Este recorrido está plagado de riesgos, hasta el punto que parece correr peligro físico, ya que la culpan de la muerte de su hermana a través de la brujería (127-30). La hermana albina también había acudido a la ciudad, huyendo en este caso de la explotación económica por parte del padre, pero su vida corría peligro tanto en su comunidad rural como en la ciudad y terminó siendo violada y asesinada en esta última. Con destino desigual, tanto ella como su hermana han debido enfrentar la amenaza del sometimiento sexual y de género a la autoridad masculina. El padre aconseja que la hermana dedicada al estudio, que vive "sin tribu", "a gusto en medio de bibliotecas y amistades", asuma la maternidad de sus

hermanos menores y acepte el marido que le busquen y su salvación a través de la fe católica (101-03).

La vulnerabilidad de las protagonistas tanto en *La bastarda* como en *La albina del dinero* incorpora un rasgo político asumido voluntariamente que resulta clave para entender la posición discursiva feminista de la autora en sus novelas y ensayos. En el caso de estas dos novelas, las protagonistas se dirigen a la autoridad masculina en algún momento u otro de la narración en busca de interpelación, a pesar del daño que pueda sobrevenir. En la primera de las novelas de Obono, *Herencia de Bindendee*, no existe siquiera esa posibilidad, no habría resquicio en la autoridad masculina de del padre: "nada se hacía sin su autorización, controlaba incluso las miradas (15). La joven protagonista de *Herencia*, sin embargo, coincide con la protagonista de *La albina*, en considerar la educación como camino para obtener una voz propia, ser importante: "quisiera ser ministra de educación para cambiar la escuela" (119).

Como se apuntaba, sí se produce el intento de interlocución con la autoridad masculina en las dos novelas más recientes de Obono. En *La bastarda*, la hija ilegítima abandona su comunidad y va en busca del padre que nunca quiso buscarla y que, efectivamente, la rechaza. En el segundo caso, la coprotagonista de *La albina del dinero* deja la ciudad y vuelve voluntariamente a su comunidad para ser sometida a su juicio tras la muerte de su hermana, poniendo literalmente su vida en peligro por los brebajes suministrados en la ceremonia. Aun admitiendo un posible efecto dramático en las acciones de estos personajes femeninos o la importancia de la jerarquía en los lazos familiares, resulta igual o más importante resaltar que persisten en mostrarse frente a su comunidad y buscar su reconocimiento. Se trata entonces de persistir tanto como de mostrarse vulnerable ante la comunidad, exponerse a su rechazo para que también sea posible en algún momento el entendimiento. En última instancia, esta posición subjetiva de los personajes, emparentada con el modelo político propugnado por Butler, es la misma posición discursiva que Obono, como estudiosa y activista, encarna en sus charlas o ensayos: persistir en ser y en dialogar,[10] resumido bien por la feminista negra Bernice Johnson Reagon a principios de los ochenta y citada también por Butler: "Cause I ain´t gonna let you live unless you let me live" (116).

Asimismo, en *La albina del dinero* la construcción social sexista de la mujer aparece entrelazada con la racista, de forma que el padre afirma repetidas veces que quiere vivir del dinero que recibiría de su hija albina (48-49). A la joven albina se le asigna desde la tradición un valor especial

para las actividades de brujería (108), pero también desde la asimilación de un racismo de origen europeo (48-49), que adjudica mayor valor de intercambio a la mujer cuanto más blanca sea, "esperanza sexual y rentabilidad económica de la familia" (25). Sin embargo, es su hermana, descrita despectivamente como "una negra" que se empeña en estudiar (25), la que ofrece un modelo sexual y de género diferente al tradicional. Así, esta joven universitaria tiene una relación amorosa con un joven bubi, que se caracteriza por su carácter amistoso y estar al margen del intercambio monetario o la imposición masculina (130).

Como vemos, Obono incluye también como subtema en esta última novela, las relaciones interétnicas como conflicto social existente, pero con una aceptación más natural entre generaciones más jóvenes. Las protagonistas son hijas de padre fang, pero la narradora vive con la familia de su madre en Malabo y tiene un novio bubi, lo que es una fuente de conflictos. Su tía Angelita, hermana del padre, amenaza a la narradora con una muerte como la de su hermana por vivir con la tribu equivocada en Malabo: "vives en una tribu equivocada, y eso es causa de muerte; ¿Quién te protegerá entonces? ¡Ignorante de la tradición! " (27). A ella "le gustaría entrar en el corazón" (85) de su "chico bubi" (27), pero él aparecerá con una pierna escayolada como resultado de un encuentro con el padre de la narradora (97). Este mismo chico, la lleva a su casa junto a sus amigos de la universidad, mostrando una relación de afecto solidario entre jóvenes, y en ese mismo lugar se recupera durante tres semanas, después de los brebajes y manejos de una curandera a petición de la tribu de su padre (127-31).

Aparece también en *La albina del dinero* una coincidencia, planificada o no,[11] con una lectura ecofeminista y queer de la realidad guineoecuatoriana, una primera y evidente conexión tradicional entre patriarcado y relación destructiva con la naturaleza, una naturaleza que ha servido para justificar la superioridad masculina sobre las mujeres. Siguiendo la definición de Alicia Puleo, podemos decir que el feminismo aporta a la ecocrítica el enfoque necesario en las relaciones de poder, puesto que estas configuran el modelo androcéntrico de desarrollo que mantenemos, de conquista y explotación destructivos. Incorporando la conciencia de la insostenibilidad de ciertos modos de vida de las sociedades industriales, el ecofeminismo propone desarrollar conjuntamente la razón y la emoción y abandonar lo que ha llamado la "lógica del dominio" y construir un nuevo modelo de desarrollo humano (17, 21). Por último, una ecrocrítica queer plantea que existe una relación

entre el sexo y la naturaleza que es institucional, discursiva, científica, espacial, política, poética y ética, y corresponde interrogarnos sobre estas relaciones para llegar a una mayor comprensión sexual y ambiental (Mortimer and Erickson 5).

De modo similar a lo que ocurre en las sociedades europeas, no necesariamente idéntico, el padre de la narradora en *La albina* predica un modelo tradicional con pretensiones de discurso único, unas relaciones sociales como lucha y control sobre otros hombres, las mujeres o un otro animal o materia asociado a la naturaleza:[12]

> Era mi padre. Nunca me citaba sin levantar la voz. Era el jefe de nuestra familia fang. Lo sentía todo el mundo. Y padre presumía la herencia del cargo en todas partes, pero uno de los orgullos más destacados de su vida se acercaba en la profesión de cazador de elefantes. La guerra en los bosques con animales salvajes centraba la narración de sus conversaciones, daba igual con quien. (77)

> —¡Un cazador de elefantes! A ver si enseña a los maricones del ejército del aire el arte de la guerra—se expresaron en grupo los agentes. (108)

Más allá de la supervivencia alimentaria o de las conocidas relaciones de solidaridad entre los miembros de la tribu fang,[13] como en otros contextos culturales no africanos,[14] el análisis ecofeminista evidencia aquí también una misma concepción social, que elogia o ignora la violencia contra los otros animales y que igualmente ensalza y/o normaliza la violencia contra las mujeres. A propósito de la muerte de la hermana albina de la protagonista, un honrado y voluntarioso juez lamenta que no tengan "recursos para hacer exámenes con el semen del violador, una autopsia", pero más allá de la falta de medios, apunta a que la causa reside en una violencia sistemática, todavía culturalmente asentada: "No hablo de brujería, soy juez, no curandero. A la niña la ha asesinado un varón de la familia, del vecindario, de la escuela. Ha fallecido de asfixia y violencia sexual" (116). Junto al conflicto religioso con la tradición fang, representado en el tratamiento de los albinos y el uso de la brujería, Obono también resalta en las vidas de sus personajes el resultado de una violencia colonial, que ha dejado como herencia una versión particularmente represiva del cristianismo, en concreto del catolicismo, y que perpetuaría la superioridad del blanco sobre el negro africano y el sometimiento de las mujeres a través del control de su comportamiento sexual y de género. Alogo, padre de la protagonista en *Herencia*, dice estar decepcionado de que su hija, católica y fang, cometa actos impuros (20). Cree que si

sus hijas aprenden las costumbres de los blancos, multiplicaciones, gramática o la lectura de la Biblia, sus dotes serán más altas (54-55), es decir, el dinero que reciba por ellas. Después de una paliza de su marido, Alogo, y mientras se reúnen los hombres en La Casa de la Palabra, otras mujeres del poblado le recuerdan a Mikue que la mujer nace de la costilla del hombre, no debería contestarle cuando habla (46-47). La violencia sobre la mujer constituye un hecho lógico y natural, sancionado por el presidente del Consejo de Poblado y acompañado de "risas a carcajadas": "Golpea pero, ojo, sin desfigurar a tu esposa" (47). Se produce además un solapamiento de esta rígida visión heredada del cristianismo traído por la colonización española con un régimen autoritario cristalizado, y así se habla en *La albina del dinero* del Generalísimo negro (11), aplicando al contexto político guineano el título frecuentemente asociado al dictador Francisco Franco.

En lo que se refiere a la religión, también en *La albina del dinero*, la autora incorpora una realidad más reciente y de gran importancia cultural y política en muchos países africanos, la presencia creciente de nuevas iglesias cristianas, en concreto evangélicas, de carácter ultraconservador y populista, con origen directo en iglesias de Estados Unidos o indirecto en iglesias evangélicas latinoamericanas. Las dos tías de la protagonista y su hermana albina son cristianas evangélicas, en ambos casos con prácticas que ejemplifican la importancia del dinero como reflejo del éxito personal y la incitación a la exaltación o arrebato emocional con planteamientos no racionales en el ámbito moral. La Ntangan,[15] que se ha blanqueado la piel y con quien vive la narradora y joven estudiante en Malabo, paga la mitad de su sueldo al pastor de su Iglesia durante doce meses y una botella de agua bendita, a cambio de que no vuelvan a producirse muertes en la familia (18). La nueva religión no la salva del racismo propio o ajeno y muere de un cáncer de piel: "Negra es el insulto que más repitió el colegio, la familia, el pueblo… Me sentía mal siendo negra. Soy una mujer. Ahora estoy guapa. Ahora estoy bien. Ya nadie me insulta "negra". Los hombres ya me quieren. ¿Por qué me quieres, no?" (131). También busca salida en la Iglesia Evangélica su otra tía, hermana de su padre, casándose con el pastor de una nueva Iglesia, "quien llegó a Guinea Ecuatorial sin calzoncillos", pero que "en poco más de dos años fundó un templo de dos mil creyentes, un buen grupo de gente con muchísimos recursos económicos (29). Este mismo pastor, su esposo, "predicaba la llegada precipitada de Dios por la producción de matrimonios de mujeres con la virginidad perdida" (29), haciendo bandera de un cristianismo marcadamente conservador, acentuadamente patriarcal,

comparable con la tendencia católica más extrema, pero aderezado con otros reclamos o atractivos. Obono refleja así en *La albina* una nueva barrera social en Guinea Ecuatorial, la que construyen y extienden iglesias evangélicas ultraconservadoras en contra de sociedades más igualitarias en un sentido amplio; un problema que resulta muy real en el presente de muchos países subsaharianos.

A propósito de algunas iglesias evangélicas de implantación reciente en África, puede destacarse que muchos países africanos han sido objetivo en las últimas décadas de una caridad y proselitismo cristiano que lleva incorporada una agencia social conservadora. La superación de las desigualdades sociales en algunos países africanos sería dificultada con el exitoso proselitismo de este tipo de iglesias de principios retrógrados. De manera destacada, buen número de iglesias evangélicas de Estados Unidos pretenden ganar guerras culturales que han perdido en casa ("US Evangelicals"). Muchas de estas iglesias evangélicas pretenden imponer su perspectiva intolerante, teocrática, como se concluía en un estudio de 2014 apoyado por Desmond Tutu el sacerdote anglicano de origen zambiano Kapya Kaoma.

En esta investigación iniciada en el año 2008 y encabezada por Kaoma, se apreciaba la existencia de una cruzada global desde ámbitos religiosos conservadores de Estados Unidos para condenar, castigar y perseguir los derechos reproductivos y sexuales de las mujeres y de las personas LGTB (5-6). En el crecimiento explosivo del cristianismo en el África subsahariana tiene un papel preponderante la evangelización desde intereses conservadores, aportando una nueva narrativa para regímenes autoritarios. Algunos de esos líderes autoritarios, muy destacadamente en África, usan hoy las guerras culturales de Estados Unidos, denunciando los derechos reproductivos y la homosexualidad como imposiciones americanas u occidentales. Al hacer objeto de interés central sectores de la población minoritarios, homosexuales, feministas, se desvía la atención de sus propias insuficiencias como líderes y se ganan nuevos seguidores a través de los nuevos líderes religiosos dentro y fuera del país (6-7). En el caso de Guinea Ecuatorial, cabe la misma hipótesis, siquiera parcialmente debido a la falta de competencia entre diferentes partidos, pero neutralizando, o al menos transformando, reivindicaciones ciudadanas en proclamas religiosas.

A modo de conclusión, Obono afirmaría con su discurso público y obra creativa los derechos individuales de las mujeres negras y africanas, en un sentido positivo, sus deseos y experiencias, sin olvidar los abusos y la victimización. En esos derechos tendría un papel destacado los derechos

sexuales, el acceso al estudio y la autonomía personal. Aparecerían también de manera distintiva otras preocupaciones y perspectivas alternativas a la norma social predominante, la defensa de las parejas interétnicas, el rechazo a las nuevas iglesias evangélicas, reaccionarias y populistas, o la relación con otros animales y el entorno natural, como inquietudes propias de su tiempo, pero en su versión más abierta y crítica. Estas inquietudes políticas y sociales desvelarían la conexión intrínseca entre un modelo social, económico y cultural dominante y un determinado paradigma patriarcal de género y sexualidad. Sus novelas, sus declaraciones o participaciones activistas encajarían en la propuesta de Judith Butler de una cierta vulnerabilidad como forma de activismo: una forma deliberada de exposición y persistencia, la encarnación de una demanda por una vida vivible (116). Se trataría de una vulnerabilidad no solo como susceptibilidad al daño sino como apertura a los otros en interdependencia (115). Probablemente, uno de sus mayores logros sería su contribución a través de sus personajes, sus historias de ficción, de nuevos espacios simbólicos en el arte y sociedad de Guinea Ecuatorial para la igualdad de género y la libertad sexual.

Notas

[1] Según Neville Hoad, la controversia acerca de la naturaleza no africana de la homosexualidad posiblemente empezó con la expulsión de la organización GALZ de la feria nacional del libro en Zimbaue, de 1995. Este país tiene leyes contra la sodomía que datan del periodo colonial, así que es difícil ubicar el retraso y el progreso claramente según el autor (xi-xii).

[2] En la actualidad, 74 países prohíben la práctica de sexo homosexual, 33 de ellos en África; posiblemente los recursos interpuestos hagan que pronto India y Kenia dejen de formar parte de este grupo. Mozambique ya lo hizo en 2015.

[3] Miguel Edu Edu Ncham, representa el único caso de concesión de asilo en España debido al rechazo y la persecución sufrida en Guinea Ecuatorial. Perdió el trabajo y su vida corrió peligro a manos de familiares y vecinos. Con respecto a detenciones relacionadas con la homosexualidad, *Diario Rombe* cita dos casos en 2014, al parecer exhibidos por Radio Televisión Asonga. Ambas instancias serían muestra de probable riesgo al manifestarse públicamente como persona LGTB, aunque no existan leyes que lo prohíban explícitamente.

[4] En 2012, la base de datos globales de Naciones Unidas sobre violencia contra las mujeres indicaba que la violencia física y/o sexual sufrida por las mujeres guineanas a manos de sus parejas masculinas a lo largo de su vida alcanzaba el 57%; la misma violencia sufrida en los últimos doce meses representaba un 44% de las guineanas. Asimismo, que el CEDAW, comité por la eliminación de la

violencia contra las mujeres de Naciones Unidas, expresaba en su informe de 2012, /C/GNQ/CO/6, con respecto a este país "su honda preocupación por la persistencia de actitudes patriarcales y estereotipos profundamente arraigados respecto de las funciones y responsabilidades de la mujer y el hombre en la familia y la sociedad". Entre los distintos problemas que destacaba este último informe podría mencionarse la baja tasa de escolarización de las adolescentes, y entre las que conseguían cursar educación secundaria, la presencia de acoso sexual, embarazos o matrimonios a edad temprana que impedirían la finalización de los estudios. Las decisiones en la familia no se tomarían en pie de igualdad entre hombres y mujeres y la presencia de mujeres en la política era muy escasa, lamentaba el CEDAW.

[5] La autora cuenta el incidente en una entrevista reciente ("Nuestro reto"), que circunstancialmente pude ver en persona.

[6] Posiblemente, la autora se refiere a mujeres formadas en Guinea Ecuatorial y/o España, que como ella pueden enseñar en la UNGE, la Universidad Nacional de Guinea, fundada en 1995, o simplemente tener una presencia intelectualmente activa dentro y fuera del país. Seguirían siendo una minoría, según los datos mencionados antes.

[7] Chantal Zabus ha estudiado gestos o personajes femeninos queer en la narrativa de autoras africanas existentes desde los años 70, Rebeca Njau (Kenia, *Ripples in the Pool* (1975); Ama Ata Aidoo, aunque sean patologizadas (Ghana, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977)); y también desde una postura más implícita, de escritoras nigerianas de los años 90, Unoma Azua, Lola Shoneyin y Temilola Abioye, y Helen Oyeyemi. Una de las escritoras más conocidas de Zimbaue, Tsitsi Dangarembga también incluyó un lesbianismo implícito en *Nervous Conditions*, 1989, (265-66).

8 Es el caso de Dolar Vasani con *Not yet Uhuru: Lesbian Flash Fiction* (2013).

[9] Véase mi artículo "Fricciones culturales en la novela afro-hispana Ekomo, de María Nsue Angüe", en *Afro-Hispanic Review*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2011, pp. 41-58.

[10] El rechazo e incomprensión que Obono recibe en charlas y ponencias dentro y fuera de su país por una parte de sus paisanos es muy llamativo si lo comparamos con el tratamiento a otros escritores. Puede acudirse a las ponencias de Obono accesibles en Internet para comprobarlo.

[11] No se han encontrado hasta el momento referencias teóricas concretas al ecofeminismo por parte de la autora en entrevistas o análisis críticos, aunque por su formación universitaria y sus frecuentes intercambios intelectuales dentro y fuera de Guinea, debe tener cierta familiaridad. La crítica implícita que se hace del cazador como héroe de rasgos hipermasculinos y, como consecuencia, líder, familiar y social, muestra, sin embargo, una reflexión propia de la autora.

[12] No se encuentran elefantes en la isla de Bioko, pero sí en la parte continental de Guinea Ecuatorial. A comienzos de este siglo y según el CSIC, los elefantes de bosque estaría presentes en Río Muni, menos de 500 ejemplares en poblaciones alejadas de las asentamientos humanos ("Biodiversidad"). Su caza está prohibida en la actualidad, si bien debe decirse que, según un estudio de 2013,

la existencia de elefantes ya estaría en grave peligro en África Central, ya que su número habría disminuido en un 62% en diez años ("El elefante").

[13] Nsu Angüe ofrece ejemplos de esta hermandad con gran belleza e impacto simbólico en su novela *Ekomo*: "Con el cuerpo pintado buscaré entre los hermanos a aquel que es mi amado"; "le preguntaré al son de los tambores, ¿eres mi hermano?"; "hueles a fuego, hueles a lanza, hueles a tótem, a tabú y a hierba… eres mi hermano" (33).

[14] Un ejemplo paradigmático y de gran calidad literaria sería la novela española *En la orilla* (2013), de Rafael Chirbes, que además incorporaría la conexión de un modelo social machista con un modelo económico neoliberal.

[15] En Guinea Ecuatorial se llama Ntangan o Mitangan a los blancos españoles del periodo colonial y, actualmente, a todas las personas de piel blanca.

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Prosthetic Memory and Genetic Coding of Trauma in *La historia oficial*

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On April 8th of 2019, the organization Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo identified grandchild #129 as the daughter of Norma Síntora and Carlos Alberto Solsona. Of the two parents, the father, Carlos, survived after fleeing the country; he met his daughter once DNA testing confirmed her parentage (Abuelas). The mother, Norma, was never found. The group Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo has continued its decades-long mission to match children to their remaining relatives, relying on a constantly evolving database with information on the parents, details of their capture and detention, and the approximate birth date of the missing child. Argentina also funds and maintains the Banco Nacional de Datos Genéticos (BNDG) which provides the genetic information used in matching children of the Disappeared with their grandparents. The Abuelas estimate 500 babies were taken as what the Abuelas refer to as "botín de guerra," a particularly cruel and inhumane view by the military junta of children as the spoils of war. The impact on Argentine society is clear: The Dirty War is not only remembered, but it currently disrupts the status quo and renders the past present. The work of the Abuelas and the results

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of genetic testing inextricably and irrefutably link present-day Argentina to the trauma of The Dirty War.

The film *La historia oficial* (1985) offers a prefigurative rendering of this nexus between contemporary Argentina and its brutal past. In *La historia oficial*, both the protagonist, Alicia, and her young daughter, Gaby, posit for the viewer alternative ways to know and embody the truth of the Disappeared. Gaby represents the same biological certainty that guides the work of the Abuelas. Her body is physically encoded with the presence of her missing parents. Alicia, in contrast, manifests physical embodiment of societal truth as a witness; she does so by developing prosthetic memory of the collective struggle of the Disappeared.

Women imprisoned during The Dirty War in Argentina were subject to state-sponsored gendered violence; often this took the form of specialized torture, such as rape and shock treatments to the abdomen with electric prods. Pregnant women were treated as vessels and allowed to carry their child to term, yet they were viewed as unworthy mothers. Pregnant prisoners were sent to birthing centers, where they bore a child that was kidnapped just before the mother's murder: "It was rare for a pregnant detainee to survive; most were killed soon after giving birth, and their babies sold to 'proper' couples…" (Feitlowitz 78). Susana Kaiser analyzes the impunity of the *represores* in Argentina and states that they, "are even considered good parents of the children they kidnapped after 'disappearing' their biological parents" (500). According to the report on the Disappeared, *Nunca Más*:

> en la mayor parte de los casos eran sometidas a operaciones de cesáreas y que después del parto el destino de la madre y el hijo se bifurcaba, desconociéndose totalmente el lugar adonde eran trasladados... La plena coincidencia de los testimonios en estos puntos revela la gravedad de los hechos que derivan no sólo de la privación ilegal de la libertad de las personas que se encontraban recluidas en determinado sector del Hospital de Campo de Mayo, sino que dichas personas eran mujeres embarazadas que dieron a luz secretamente. (CONADEP)

Nunca Más relates not only the testimony of prisoners that were held captive with pregnant women, but also that of the officers and guards that confess the secrecy and trauma of childbirth in the detention centers, the separation of new mothers and their babies, and the subsequent murder of the mothers and the kidnapping of their children: "Los represores que arrancaron a los niños desaparecidos de sus casas o de sus madres en el momento del parto, decidieron de la vida de aquellas .criaturas con

la misma frialdad de quien dispone de un botín de guerra" (CONADEP). These are the traumatic and authentic experiences that underlie the central questions posited by the film *La historia oficial*.

The script for *La historia oficial* was written during the final moments of The Dirty War in Argentina and Bortnik reports that she felt an obligation to tell the story: "I feel absolutely responsible… I must do something for these conditions to change" (Bortnik, qtd. in Meson 34). Bortnik accepted a challenge to reassert humanity in the face of the military junta's campaign to dehumanize and vilify oppositional forces in society. Bortnik desired connection with the audience and sought to move them along a trajectory of awareness, empathy, and, ultimately, obligation. Her art form proceeds from a social conscience and leads to political compromise. As Bortnik herself explains:

> The Argentine tragedy has been sufficiently violent to make it necessary to address it as soon as possible, and to deal with it in a way that would reach people… in order for them to be truly involved in these considerations. It was important to make it impossible for indifference or impunity. (Qtd. in Meson 31)

Bortnik crafts a story from the vantage point of a mother that appears indifferent to or ignorant of the tragic events unfolding around her. Her daughter, Gaby, seems to dwell within an uncomplicated and privileged existence. The family, on the surface, lives a life of luxury and comfort while appearing to keep to the periphery of the chaos in their society. *La historia oficial* requires the viewer to walk with the main characters as the violence and trauma around them, and even caused by them, shatters the façade of familial tranquility. Roberto's nebulous government position takes on a more sinister edge as the movie progresses; when Roberto interacts with Ana and his extended family, the viewing public observes a sense of entitlement and his concomitant anger at anyone that would question his absolute right to order society according to his own world view. Alicia's awakened political consciousness will force the collapse of the barriers that conceal from her the ugly truth, that a choice to maintain the mythology of her idealized family life comes at the expense of her humanity.

For Bortnik to be successful in her stated artistic purpose, she must effectively transmit the trauma of The Dirty War and draw in the audience on a personal level. Alicia and Gaby both access the experiences of the Disappeared without directly suffering imprisonment and torture

themselves; they do so by channeling memory in quite distinct ways. Gaby accesses what Bortnik calls a "prenatal memory" of violence (Bortnik, qtd. in Meson 33) through epigenetic inheritance, and Alicia builds a prosthetic memory through which she embodies the suffering of others. The two types of memories together access bodily pain and loss; the characters live those experiences on the screen and transmit them to the audience as witnesses and collaborators in the production of meaning.

Bortnik and Puenzo establish Gaby as the character that motivates the protagonist and launches her quest, even from the extra-cinematic moment of her shadowy and uncertain birth. Her origin, a link to the concrete referent of missing parents, provides the mystery that propels the plot and instigates Alicia's transformation. Gaby literally embodies the trauma of The Dirty War, something slowly perceived by Alicia, a realization, a dawning of comprehension experienced vicariously by the audience of the film. During one key moment on screen, Gaby is celebrating her birthday with a party in her home; she is cradling a baby doll in her room when she is interrupted by her cousins, who are yelling and shooting at each other with toy guns. Gaby is immediately and profoundly terrified, screaming and entering a heightened state of stress and fear. Bortnik describes the scene in detail and its implications for her work:

> Gaby was apparently born while her mother was incarcerated. Therefore, her memory of violence, as seen when her cousins break into her room, is a prenatal memory… I have thought about it artistically. I believe that the memory of violence is inscribed in all of us from before birth. (Qtd. in Meson 33)

Bortnik's view of prenatal inscribed memory anticipates subsequent research in the, at the time, incipient field of epigenetic inheritance.
A recent neuro-psychology study positively identifies epigenetic inheritance in the offspring of mothers that experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) during the gestation period of their pregnancies:

> Our findings show that prenatal exposure to IPV is associated with a sustained increase in methylation of the human *GR* promoter in the blood. Prenatal stress is known to alter HPA-axis regulatory function later in life gestational marital discord is associated with psychopathology of the offspring... This is the first demonstration that gestational exposure to psychological stressors can have a lasting impact on methylation status in human offspring... This mechanism opens up many new avenues

> for research on the transgenerational epigenetic effects of stress and aggression on human behavior. (Radtke)

A significant aspect of the findings situates the epigenetic tagging event during the in vitro period, rather than before or after pregnancy. This offers support for the concept that a woman who experiences violence during her pregnancy will alter the genetic inheritance of her child. The conclusions also indicate that the effect of the violence will be observable into adulthood. While the study is not large in scope, the researchers effectively narrow their focus on exposure to violence, which corresponds with the theory set forth decades before by Bortnik.

When a person experiences trauma, their enzyme production at the cellular level may be changed to accommodate the stressful environment. This change can result in epigenetic tags being attached to cells, functioning like "cell memory" and turning the cell on or off, as needed. These tags do not alter the DNA, but they are passed on in vitro the descendant(s) in the subsequent generation (Rodriguez). According to early studies, a mother's experience of trauma, and her body's natural defenses against it, are encoded and passed directly to her offspring. A child born to a woman suffering trauma may carry with them a biological imprint of that experience. In the film, the "prenatal memory of violence" alluded to by Bortnik manifests itself in fear and a visceral reaction that the child, Gaby, has to the agressive play of her cousins. Gaby screams in terror at the boys' intrusion and their wielding of plastic toy guns; she is not well equipped to handle the stress of the situation and she has a heightened physical and emotional response to violence. What the screenwriter detailed as non-scientific in her script is today grounded in solid neuro-psychological studies.

Gaby's character seems to anticipate future studies on the genetic inheritance of trauma. Her body contains genetic material that traces her origins to the violence of her mother's experience. The character of Gaby also predates positive DNA testing and matching of grandchildren to their biological grandparents. The inability, yet persistent desire to know the truth or to confirm facts lies at the heart of Alicia's search in the film. It's interesting to note that verifiable biological data would soon be available in Argentina. When the film was already written and in the production stage, the Abuelas initiated DNA testing to identify children of the Disappeared. In an article in *The New Yorker, Francisco Goldman explains the advent of DNA testing in the work of the Abuelas. Mary-Claire King from the United States and Ana María di Lonardo from Argentina*

collaborated on the "Grandparents' Index, a human-leukocyte-antigen test" that would ultimately match grandparents with their missing grandchildren (Goldman). Gaby holds the secrets of the past within her DNA, but Alicia has no means to access that information. The character of Gaby juxtaposes innocence and naivete with a history of violence that has been inscribed in her at a cellular level. Alicia, on the other hand, abandons innocent ignorance and seeks truth, although it resides initially outside herself.

Within the collection of essays entitled, *Performing Processes,* Karen Malpede introduces the concept of the, "theatre of witness," which exists in the social space created by the fusion of politics and art (122). Malpede defines the function of the theatre of witness in the following manner: "to set the elements of the witnessing imagination before the public, so that they might be considered and, perhaps, embraced as actions within the realm of human possibility" (131). *La historia oficial* creates a theatre of witness, according to Malpede's conceptualization of this art form, by presenting to the public the "witnessing imagination" of Alicia. An essential component of Malpede's vision for successful theatre of witness is the emphasis on receiving the witness testimony that is offered by the creator of the production. Malpede finds it paramount to the art form that the words of witness testimony be granted meaning through their reception by another, and by their power to transform this other through the process of listening. Malpede states: "If inside the play itself there is no one capable of bearing witness, no one who hears, sees, and takes into the body the truth of the other's story, the audience is let off the hook, so to speak, since it can then perceive no possibility of witnessing, and hence no real resistance to violence" (132). Alicia is this listener that will receive the testimonies of Ana the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and, later, Sara, and begin to formulate a political consciousness. Alicia so fully embodies the truth of the other women's lives, that she formulates a prosthetic memory of the trauma. What the other women share with her becomes her own imported memory of struggle and survival.

The defining moments in Alicia's transformation into a witness involve intimate conversations and very personal information on public display; the director juxtaposes highly individual stories with revelations of vast, universal truths. The first step occurs when Alicia listens to Ana's story about her imprisonment and torture. Ana implicates the viewing public with her intimate recollections; her story binds the audience to her and practically ensures their political engagement. To establish a personal

tone, the director chooses low lighting and a scene first situated within bonding rituals of female friends. Alicia and Ana relax, have drinks, laugh, look at old photographs, and share details about their lives. The ambience is comfortable and cozy, with nostalgia and camaraderie framing their conversation. When Ana reveals her experience of imprisonment and torture, her friend at first continues to laugh and fails to comprehend the brutal reality of Ana's confession. As comprehension sets in, precisely when Ana states, "Me desperté y estaba desnuda arriba de una mesa donde empezaban a picarme." Alicia listens in rapt silence, empathizing with the pain Ana communicates. Alicia takes on the role of listener who "takes into the body the truth of the other's story" (Malpede 132). Alicia models the actions the viewing public is tasked with as receivers of such a testimony; nothing less than an awakened political consciousness is demanded of the audience, and subsequent political action is implicit in the privileged exchange. The goal of an act of witnessing is solidarity of the public with the speaker and understanding of the root cause of her suffering. Alicia receives Ana's memories and begins to unravel her faithful allegiance to the official story of her country's recent past. Her political transformation is predicated upon her role as listening public in the theatre of witness Ana involves her in.

During the scene between Alicia and Ana, the director maintains a hushed tone and Ana strains against traumatic memories to deliver information in imperfect and incomplete glimpses bodily pain and loss. Ana's ability to testify hinges on trust and transmutation of her feelings and memories into a message that may be seized on and internalized by her listener within the film. Alicia discovers truth and embodies the experiences of loss and suffering of her friend; in so doing, she begins to develop a prosthetic memory of the collective struggle happening in her country. This memory will become her own and propel her to act. The final step in the transformation cannot happen, however, until Alicia grapples with the truth of Gabby's origins. When Ana mentions the cries of the women that gave birth in the detention centers, and the children that were sold to wealthy families, Alicia alters her countenance and physically demonstrates rejection of her friend and her narrative. The nature of the encounter changes and Alicia no longer acts as empathetic and receptive witness. Alicia cannot yet consciously articulate what she already has begun to intuit. After her encounter with Ana, Alicia will, for the first time, truly hear her students and actually watch the women marching in the Plaza de Mayo. Ana sets her on the path, but Alicia will require the testimony of others to complete her transformation.

Alison Landsberg proposes the development of memory by which a person "sutures himself or herself into a larger history" (26). According to Landsberg: "Prosthetic memory… enables the transmission of memories to people who have no 'natural' or biological claims to them" (18). In *La historia oficial*, Alicia interacts with the memorializing agents and spaces of her moment, the protests of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and their the staged "presence" of the Disappeared. In the film, Alicia observes women holding placards with the names of photos of the Disappeared, and she notices the white kerchiefs the women wear on their heads as symbols of missing children. She observes the marchers anew, with a newly formed question in her mind about Gaby's origins. Because of Ana's confession, Alicia encounters the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo with empathy and a keen interest in their loss. Diana Taylor identifies survivor testimonies as one of the earliest approaches to contesting national memory by telling individual stories. She locates in first-person narratives the ability for survivors to "persuade us that our support can indeed change the way human beings are treated the world over" (Disappearing Acts 141). Taylor understands that the emotive power of an individual storyteller alters the listener and compromises them to not "just watch." The marches of the Madres group also function this way in Argentina: "When the Madres took to the street to make the disappearances visible, they activated the photographs, performed them. This, like all performances, needed to engage the onlooker" (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 177).

La historia oficial facilitates new "memories" of The Dirty War by re-visualizing the Disappeared, and by evoking the missing language lying in the gaps of national historical discourse. What was silent and forgotten, the memories of individual survivors, is given presence by the film. The viewing public and the film's creators collaboratively shape Argentine culture by staging a dramatic remembering of the country's past. Landsberg sees great possibility for memory formation in the age of mass media, "With prosthetic memory, people are invited to take on memories of a past through which they did not live." She envisions a transferal by which the receiver might, "incorporate them into their own archive of experience" (26). As Alicia uncovers information, she begins to inhabit an authentic space of personal suffering, first in solidarity with other women, and, later, through her own losses and sacrifices. Because she gains the vantage point of an insider to the tragic events unfolding before her, Alicia takes them into her own consciousness and acts as if they have become a defining feature of her own past. Alicia is

demonstrably moved by what she observes, the performances of the mothers as they present their loss to a viewing public.

Prosthetic memory "derives much of its power through affect" (8). The protesting mothers project their loss and render it unto the public. For Landsberg, museums, marches, films, and other memorializing sites and media provide the material from which future generations will subsume past collective traumas in their society, own them as part of themselves, and launch into action. In *La historia oficial*, the most immediate and referential staging of memories involves the scenes with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Debra Castillo describes the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo as a group protesting the state system that would perpetuate acts of violence against its citizens and she emphasizes their identity as mothers: "the protest was organized as the outrage of mothers, taking advantage of all the particular resonances of that word in Latin American societies and the culturally ingrained reverences surrounding these traditionally silent and self-sacrificing women" (14). The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo blend public spectacle with political performance. They offer up the memories of their Disappeared as they bear witness to a national trauma; this group of mothers perform intimate personal pain to politicize the loss of a child into public mourning for all the Disappeared. "The potential of prosthetic memories lies in their power to unsettle, to produce ruptures, to disfigure, and to defamiliarize the very conditions of existence in the present" (Landsberg 106). Alicia demonstrates actions future generations might take, to formulate a prosthetic memory of The Dirty War, to subsume the experiences of those most affected and subsequently feel compelled to actualize their imported memories into political action in the present.

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo enter the political arena as a clearly defined and determined group; what motivates their activity is the desire to make the absent body of the child palpable in the national dialogue and alive again, at least in the retelling of their memories. Amy Kaminsky defines presence as "the making visible of the invisible, the continued life of those that have been murdered, the appearance of the Disappeared" (25). The mothers seek precisely this presence of their lost child, a re-creation in words, photographs, and gestures of the body of the child, as an iconic representation of the story of their absence. In *La historia oficial*, Alicia discovers that Sara, an Abuela de La Plaza de Mayo, could possibly be the grandmother of Gaby. Alicia and Sara meet in a small café, where Sara places her Disappeared child and child-in-law before the witness, using photographs and recollections. The

film places mere fragments of a life on display, but these are sufficient to activate Alicia's "witnessing imagination" (Mock 131). Sara completes the presentation by performing loss in front of Alicia, through visual cues. The screenwriter, Aida Bortnik, comments on Sara's filmic enactment of loss: "She only does what in my view is unbearable, and what should be unbearable for any human being: that is, she shows the pictures of these people when they were children, adolescents, young and in love... If one can imagine that these were the people called 'subversives,' the whole notion becomes completely absurd" (Bortnik, qtd. in Meson 35). Sara offers a warm and evocative portrayal of her child for Alicia. For full effect and affect, Puenzo's camera points us to Sara's soft smile, emoting eyes, and the silent tears that fall, "esa niña que Usted tiene bien podría ser mi nieta" (Puenzo).

The viewer, director, and both actresses enact a weighty, significant presence of a lamentably, demonstrably absent person. The evocation of innocence and youth on display in the four photos stand in stark contrast to the horror of the government's repressive acts. To Bortnik, the intimate focus on individuals disallows dehumanization, "I tend to personalize and rescue human beings one by one: a very powerful weapon, indeed. Nobody can withdraw from this experience" (Bortnik, qtd. in Meson 35). Bortnik envisions a compromised viewing public, forever changed by accompanying Alicia as she bears witness to Sara's memories and experiences. The script for *La historia oficial* carefully crafts the evocation of absence. Often, what the characters bear witness to is a non-presence that eludes full expression in language. Bortnik and Puenzo create a world accessible to Alicia only through vicarious and empathetic reception of other's memories; her prosthetic memory derives from her role as witness.

Language can only sketch a shadowy profile of trauma; narrative must rely on gaps and silences to fully convey the inexpressible experiences of physical human suffering. Film has an advantage with its ability to render an experience knowable through visual cues. However, the film's director, Luis Puenzo, must grapple with the intensity of individual experience as it relates to an overarching need to universalize personal testimonies in the service of memory creation. Puenzo negotiates personal experience as an expression of transmittable collective trauma, by dwelling in the realm of ambiguity. The fact that the shadowy stories behind the characters' interactions are never fully explained allow the viewer to reflect on the film's message, while not being able to relegate the experiences of the characters to a tidy list of plot devices related

only to their own circumstances. It is clear the characters are enacting a spectacle much greater than their own storylines, one saturated with symbols and allegorical representations of universal truth. The medium of film treats its audience as fellow travelers and "transports people into lives they have not lived... that they are invited to experience and even inhabit" (Landsberg 24). The symbols and allegories of the marching mothers, the confessional narrative of the survivor, and the purposeful remembering of a distraught grandmother, facilitate the transference of lived experience into the memory of the witness.

Bortnik refers to *The Official Story* as an "artistic," "moral," and "ideological event." For her, the film represents, "taking action" (Qtd. in Meson 35) against what happened to the Argentine people. To this end, she purposely creates, "notorious ambiguities in the movie" (32). The viewer is invited to construct meaning from eyewitness accounts, while moving beyond individual experience to understand a collective moment of national trauma.

Alicia progresses from ignorance to enlightenment by moving from one illuminating moment to another; the film charts her course as a series of encounters that reveal an alternate reality piece by piece. As Alicia travels, she moves away from the particularity of her role as mother to Gaby. Eventually, when she has shifted her focus entirely to issues of "collaborative survival," she abandons the role of wife, and expands her role as universal mother. Alicia progresses from a sheltered and protected status to a destabilizing political activism. She also transgresses the social barriers that would confine her to an elite and unexamined existence. According to Carolyn Pinet, there is a progressive dissolution of class boundaries throughout Alicia's political transformation. "The oppressed in this story, Alicia and Sara, are not merely victims but cross class lines to join in solidarity and insist on challenging the official story" (94). A feminist analysis of Alicia's process discovers in it more than a budding political consciousness born of empathy and a desire for universal truths; it also includes collaboration amongst women that in and of itself defeats the social construct of class and highlights the shared experience of oppression. When Alicia incorporates memories of the other, she also co-opts their political activism and operates from a place of awakened consciousness that she has internalized as her own struggle.

The final moment of revelation happens intensely, in a scene imbued with an even greater level of intimacy. Ana informs Roberto that Gaby isn't at home, and she leads him to briefly experience firsthand the loss of a parent of a Disappeared child. When Roberto reacts violently

and physically harms Alicia in response to the absence of his daughter, the viewer cannot even consider empathy for him as a father or husband. Alicia, suffering violent repercussions for her adherence to truth, remains in solidarity with the audience and thus elicits political participation from the viewing public. Roberto and Alicia are a man and a woman whose marriage crumbles under the weight of Alicia's complete faithfulness to universal human rights; their personal story as a married couple and family must be sacrificed. Within the film, Alicia has so fully formed her prosthetic memory that she can "experience a bodily, mimetic encounter" with the past traumas of the Disappeared (Landsberg 14). The memory has become such a part of her that she physically immerses herself in the violent repressive tactics of the ruling regime. The referent of the memory she embodies reaches out to impact her life directly.

In her essay, "To Speak the Unspeakable," Deirdre Lashgari comments on women's writing that transgresses boundaries of social acceptability, in terms of what must remain silent. Lashgari also describes the political potential in speaking out and in the subsequent successful embodiment of another's story: "At its most powerful, their work often impels us to in-corporate the pain of violation, to take it into our own bodies where it can force us to respond. It implicates us, along with its characters and narrative speakers, in the struggle to give voice to the horror and the determination to end it" (2). With their film, Aida Bortnik and Luis Puenzo challenge the silence in Argentina and transgress the limits placed on free speech. They engage the viewer through personal, intimate scenes that lead to embodiment of others' pain and suffering. Once a film audience feels empathy and truly inhabits a space of authentic human suffering, the theatre of witness has been realized and the viewing public walks away with a prosthetic memory of another's lived experience.

La historia oficial was created in response to The Dirty War, soon after its conclusion and during the work of the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADAEP), which would soon publish its official report, Nunca Más (1984). Aida Bortnik lived in exile before returning to Argentina and collaborating with Puenzo, who, himself, had kept the film project secret during the years of Videla's reign. The work conveys an urgent and authentic truth, told in the moment, with its creators involved directly in the political milieu. The work is not only relevant today, however, because of the time and place of its creation. Rather, La historia oficial remains current and prominent because it offers the audience a means to understand the steady presence of The Dirty War

in Argentine society today. La historia oficial provides current generations dual pathways for accessing truth and animating the past; one, with genetic and epigenetic links to the Disappeared, and another, through the formation of a prosthetic memory by absorbing the testimony of those that struggled and claiming their experiences as one's own.

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Home Revisited: Josefina Báez Performs Radical Domesticity

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> houses belonged to women, were their special domain,
> not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered
> in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter,
> the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls.
>
> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, 41

Throughout history, the domestic sphere—the home, the household, the private sphere—has frequently been a space assigned to women. In *The Human Condition,* Hannah Arendt recalls that since antiquity the house is where women fulfill their family duties through "the labor of giving birth" (30). She adds that is the place where men return from the public sphere, the *polis*, for nourishment, and to preserve life; she describes that it is where community is formed. The woman's role can be understood as that of keeping and maintaining the private sphere, of providing not just a house, but also a home for nourishment, and to ensure the survival of the species. But also, as bell hooks points out, the domestic, or the "homeplace" is the site where resistance occurred (42). From here she describes that women have developed modes of resistance

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through writing, reading, educating, cooking, and story-telling. This is particularly true of women of color, who, severed from society due to their gender, but also their race and socio-economic backgrounds, have remained in the household, working, providing, and still today finding modes of resistance from within. They resisted through the production and preservation of culture, beliefs, and education. Moreover, in the context of today's continual migration of people, the home remains the primary site where many women—not just black, but also brown and migrant—carry out most of their family (and also economic) duties. These include upholding cultural identities through their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters; all in spite of being uprooted from places of origin, removed from their languages, and often cut off from public life.

However celebratory the notion of the home as a site of culture and education may be, numerous theorists are wary of the ways in which the domestic space rarely does justice to women of color (frequently migrant women) who find themselves in precarious situations. In their essay "What's Home Got to Do with It?" Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Biddy Martin remind us that the traditional ways in which women have been subsumed within the concept of "home" is often inattentive to the experiences and specificities of women of color. The home, a demarcated architectural place, closed off from the outside world, can also easily lend itself to violence and imprisonment. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander shows that domestic violence as a legal construct "aims to discipline and even to foreclose an emancipatory praxis that might demystify patriarchal power within the home" (39). In this sense, the state often legitimizes the violence that occurs within the domestic space, rendering it a problematic site for women who may attempt to resist from within.

Keeping in mind that the home is both a site of cultural protection and gender and sexual violence, this paper considers how migrant women of color disrupt the traditional notions of home by reclaiming and transforming the domestic space and the ideas associated to home. The "Crossing" in Alexander's title evokes the crossing of African slaves through the Middle Passage, but it also "evoke[s]/invoke[s] the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibilities, the place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary" (8). Our reading of the domestic space then, relates to this idea of the crossing, rather than a specific location or a closed architectural space. As an opening, the domestic offers a threshold

where people, languages, and identities may converge. As such, the domestic has the potential for women to resist and assert their identities and realities.

Reminding us of Gloria Anzaldúa's presentation of home in *Borderlands*, "This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire" (25), Alexander and Mohanty both underscore that traditional notions of home do not accurately account for immigrant women, whose homes are extremely precarious (if they still exist at all). This paper then, complicates some of the meanings and problems of home when it appears as an unstable reality through an examination of narrative and performance writing by Josefina Báez. In our reading, home will be understood in light of migration and displacement from the Caribbean to the US metropole. In nuancing the concept of home, we will reflect upon some of the aforementioned feminist theoretical approaches. Closely linked to "home," the second part of this paper will connect with the idea of community in Báez's work. Evoking Anzaldúa's view of community as "people on a similar quest/path," (557) we will demonstrate how Báez's use of the domestic enunciates new possibilities and realities in community making in the diaspora.

A performer, writer, and educator, Báez is a multivalent artist whose work interrogates notions of home, the domestic, and the feminine as they intersect with the realities of migration, identity formation, and language. Rather than examining the specific roles women perform within the house, we will consider the concept of home in a twofold manner. First home will be examined as a denationalized idea that moves away from the notion of a home country and a host country—home in the broad sense as a place of origin. Then we will approach the house, household, domestic space, or private space, frequently occupied by migrant women and used for preservation and survival of the self and the community, to understand how Báez interrogates the domestic and transforms this space into a stage where women assert their identities.

De-Nationalizing 'Home': "Yo soy una Dominican York"

Born in La Romana, Dominican Republic, and having migrated at a young age to New York, Báez identifies as Dominicanyork.[1] Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof traces the epithet *dominicanyork* to its emergence in the 1970s and 1980s in the Dominican Republic as it was used to "deploy a range of insulting stereotypes about migrant acculturation" (7). By taking hold of this term, however, Báez connotes the realities of what it means to inhabit multiple spaces, cultures, and languages. Moreover,

embracing a working-class background, the term encompasses Lorgia García-Peña's definition of "[w]orking-class Dominican migrants and their descendants who live in United States urban Dominican enclaves" (2016, iv). Emilia María Durán-Almarza reminds us that as Norma Alarcón suggests, the term Dominicanyork "offer[s] a critical space to articulate divergences and convergences of the two components of the dyad" (146). In Dominicanyork, Báez's birth, history, and cultural background in the Dominican Republic are coupled with her immigrant experiences in the United States. The performer's identity therefore is made up of multiple intersecting cultures and experiences. Positioning herself as Dominicanyork, Báez also shows that her identity is not located in one place or another, home is neither here nor there, making her "ni de aquí, ni de allá" (*Dominicanish* 47). Instead, the migrant's home, is itinerant, constantly shuttling back and forth, never quite taking root in one place or another, but instead constantly becoming at the fissures of those realities.

For many migrants the idea of home, once located in the country of origin, in the "native land" (Aimé Césaire), ceases to exist upon arrival to the host country since the place considered home is left behind and the new location never fully becomes a home. Báez's writing suggests that once one becomes a migrant, one remains always a migrant. The term 'migrant' itself transmits a very different message to the term émigré. The active and present nature of (being) migrant implies still moving, still arriving, and still departing, whereas émigré denotes an accomplished migration and settling into the new country. In an interview with Joshua Deckman, Báez asserts "I was always a migrant, and I think that all migrants have been migrants in their dissenting communities." Wherever one arrives, Báez suggests the migrant condition always continues to exist. Home, whether present of absent, becomes an important element in the migrant's identity, since the very nature of migration has to do with the loss of the place of origin. But as Báez points out, for the migrant, home is always becoming, moving, arriving, and departing.

The term Dominicanyork refers not only to the people originally from the Dominican Republic, now living in New York and unable to truly recover the home they left behind, but also to people with Dominican backgrounds, born and raised in New York. Neither here nor there, neither American nor Dominican, neither English nor Spanish-speaking, but rather, all of these appear together in Dominicanyork identities, although experienced differently. Dominicanyork carries the "mark of exclusion" (Stevens) from homeplaces and instead creates a sense of belonging

among a community with shared cultural backgrounds and histories. In this way, the idea of home is transposed from any national context and onto the migrant's itinerant body, as Gloria Anzaldúa famously described, "I am a turtle, everywhere I go I carry "home" on my back." (1987, 43) Similarly, Báez describes in an interview with Durán Almarza, "home is where you are born, where you are, where you have been. It is what you carry with you. I am my home" (53) For both Anzaldúa and Báez home is "portable and mutable" (Sandoval-Sánchez and Saporta Sternbach, 153), existing within the subject and not in a geographical location.

Asserting herself as Dominicanyork, Báez draws our attention to the challenges of belonging and identifying as an immigrant, while at the same time claiming identity as a fluid concept that exists within the subject. When she declares "viva, cambiante, llena de contradicciones y posibilidades, estoy en camino a la casa de lo constante," (7) Báez embarks on a journey where conflicting places, contradictory histories, and painful experiences converge, allowing the performer to uproot the idea of home from its historical, familial, and hegemonic locations, and imagines it elsewhere, everywhere, carried on the body and exposed wherever she goes. "For me, 'home' is that *is* that is always present. I prefer to dwell in not what I have lost but what I have gained—what it has given me. Migration is not a burden, I am a builder. So my home, then, is *el ni'e*. My home is 'the neither' that I know, that I have built." (in Deckman) Although Báez claims both the Dominican Republic and New York as aspects of her identity, she also complicates the acceptance of belonging here *or* there or here *and* there.

Báez's adoption of the term Dominicanyork transforms the negativity historically inscribed in it. She imbues the term with her own artistic identity. Echoing Alexander, she "destabilizes existing practices of knowing and thus cross[es] the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization" (7), She does not empty the term from its working class association, but instead complicates it by shedding positive light on those aspects that have been otherwise negatively represented.[2] Under the pseudonym Nury, Báez tells Juan Flores in *The Diaspora Strikes Back*, "I like the word, partly because it carries so much of me in it, including not only Dominican, but also working class, and the 'receiving' place, too. And besides, for a poet, Dominicanyork is like Nuyorican, it's poetic, and has its own beautiful rhythm" (114). Báez's transformation of Dominicanyork resonates Anzaldúa, "if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist

architecture." While Dominicanyork does not reflect Báez's loss of home, it affirms the poetic possibility of creating and imagining home.

The concept of home, similar to that of identity, exists in Báez's work outside of nationalisms. Some scholars, including Camilla Stevens, identify New York as Báez's home location, pointing out that she makes a "bicultural home in New York," (40) however, as Danny Méndez and García-Peña suggest, New York City is better understood as a stage, a "space of intersection" (García-Peña 35), "where all experiences are ephemerally juxtaposed" (Méndez 155). Thus, reading New York as a stage allows us to remove Báez's idea of home from the geographic location. By framing home beyond a geographical or national space, Báez is able to locate home within her corporeality. Her "casa de lo constante" (house of constancy 7)[3] is not found within an architectural space, but it is a metaphorical house found within the self. This can be understood through her frequent iterations of the search for constancy throughout her body of work. Constancy in Báez is not permanence in the sense of immobility, rather, it is fortitude and strength. Constancy is also the loyalty she finds in her "constantes," her audience, as well as the loyalty and truthfulness she strives to achieve. We can read the pursuit of the "house of constancy" in the personal search of her migrant characters, who move from one country, house, or stage to another, in a journey to find their own truths. This is the case of the protagonist in *Dominicanish*, a young girl, who describes arriving in New York from the Dominican Republic, as she seeks to express her identity through music "In an LP jacket I found my teachers" (26), in school with boys "me chulié en el hall" (43), and in her interactions with the "crooked city" (42). In her articulations of identity, home does not appear here nor there, it is emptied of the nation, focusing instead on the journey to self-discovery: a young girl who learns to speak Spanglish "chewing English and spitting Spanish" (49), coloring her identity in the United States with her Dominican cultural background and her newly acquired taste for American music.[4]

The New York space the young girl inhabits need not pose a threat to the development of her understanding of home, since Báez shows that home can be claimed by the subject and carried on the body. Instead of oscillating between the country of origin and her host country, Báez demonstrates that traditional binary categories no longer suffice for the diasporic individual. There are different spaces and cultures informing her identity and her practice, thus underlining that migrant individuals cannot simply be subsumed into one category or another. For Juleyka Lantigua, Báez exists "between two geographical locations and the ephemeral

cultures they create" (6). But Báez complicates this by adding layers of complexity to identity through the intermingling presence of even more cultures. Stevens describes that Báez's "bicultural condition uniquely positions her to be open to the world of cultural influences surrounding her, implying that her identity can never truly be fixed and is always on the move" (40). Indeed, by using New York City as stage, rather than home, Báez moves, she "wanders and creates" (Báez in Deckman).

One way in which Báez complicates the Dominican/New York dyad is by interpolating these spaces by yet another location. This third space affords Báez a different imaginary for constructing her identity outside of the binary.[5] The third space, India, is where Báez spent time learning and practicing the traditional *kuchipudi* dance, which she often incorporates into her performance work. As García-Peña describes, "[t]he feet travel in small circles, keeping her, while moving, locked within the same space. The limits of mobility exemplify how the immigrant becomes trapped within a social order that demands assimilation and conformity" (2008, 31). By including Indian tradition in her performance, not only does Báez destabilize the duality of New York and the Dominican Republic, but also calls for thinking identities and performance in transnational contexts, demonstrating that her identity lies at a juncture of multiple categories.

By acknowledging the existence of multiple geographical and cultural intersections, Báez's work sets out to interrogate notions of identity and culture beyond national frames. Her work calls for imagining identities and cultures in flux, outside of nationalisms, and in their porous and ever-changing realities. The addition of a third space not only complicates the notion of identity, but also allows Báez to challenge the anxiety of belonging to either one space or another. She presents an alternative relationship to place. In this relationship, the national space does not constitute Báez's identity, but instead each of the places evoked take part in her ongoing process of becoming and belonging. As Roberto Irizarry describes, "she finds status but not stasis" (81) in taking distance from fixed categories. Although Báez's work speaks to and about the Dominican diaspora to which she belongs, her practice allows her to also embrace multiple cultures in her making of home.

The different spaces informing Báez's work allow her to unsettle traditional notions of home by not claiming it within any geographical location. Merging places and cultures in her performances, Báez shifts the concept of home away from specific localities and instead emphasizes her ephemeral performances and theater as home, thus asserting in *Dominicanish*, "home is where theater is" (37). Cultural and

national spaces are not absent from her work, but their association to the idea of home is removed and in doing so, the nation does not figure as a defining element of identity. Báez draws attention to the possibility of escaping the frequent immigrant identification with nation spaces and instead shows that identities can be multiple, porous, and in frequent transformation. Destabilizing the concept of home, even removing it from the categories frequently associated to it (place, nation, etc.), Báez addresses immigrant individuals in their search for identifying with a place, and instead suggests celebrating the multiple places that participate in identity formation rather than longing for the lost home.

When Báez claims, "home is where theater is," it appears in large, bold typography, jumping at the reader and inviting one to reflect on its meaning. Báez playfully transforms the proverb "home is where the hearth is," as well as its variant "home is where the heart is." In doing so, she does not suggest that theater is necessarily located in a physical place, but that in fact theater is her home. Báez's theatrical and performance practice is itinerant, making stages wherever it goes, and moving from one stage to another. Her theater is both performed and appears in written text. Thus, in our reading of Báez, we refer to theater in a broad sense of theater practice, but not to the place where one attends performances: the theater. Therefore, moving from one stage to another, making spontaneous stages, theater encompasses a practice. In the phrase "home is where theater is," theater is a stand-in for both hearth and heart, providing both the warmth and nourishment of the hearth, as well as the emotional protection and love attributed to the heart. From the hearth that theater represents in Báez's work, she is able to claim the home that she carries.

Báez's theatrical home is a shifting one, because instead of remaining within the confines of a given theater space, she stages her performances in multiple geographical locations as well as in different theatrical spaces. Báez has performed her pieces in her multiple homes: La Romana, New York City, India, as well as in many parts of the world: Spain, Chicago, North Carolina, etc. By performing a Dominicanyork piece in Spain, for example, Báez displaces the performance from the spaces associated to her Dominicanyork context, allowing it to acquire a different meaning to the ones that may typically be associated within the migrant environment. In this way, Báez's work claims a space of its own that is not tied to location or nationality. Instead, the movement between geographical spaces of representation reminds us that her work is transnational and in constant flux. It does not linger on national identities

but demonstrates how cultural aspects of those multiple nations come together in her identity. The artist offers an alternative for defying the anxiety of identity based on belonging to spaces or nations, where too frequently belonging is not achieved.

For Báez, location and nationalism are less important in defining an identity than the entire mosaic of cultures and experiences that makes up an individual. In stepping away from the frequent discussions of national identity categories, and instead embracing the complexity of cultures that come together in multiple places and experiences, Báez's work interrogates and politicizes the notion of home as it exceeds the national or geographical aspects typically associated to it. Home is not just a place where one seeks to return to for warmth and safety, but it can also be a figurative space within oneself or a community, where one finds safety in other ways. As Báez's affirmation demonstrates, home can be found in creative expressions, including cultural and individual experiences that occur in creating/claiming identities and houses outside of nationalism and geography. In doing so, there is a politicizing aspect in the concept of home since it engages with identity (migrant, race, gender) without referring to locations or nations, but instead claims identities built on the exchanges of culture and migrant experiences.

"Home Is Where Theatre Is": Subverting the Domestic Sphere

When politicizing the notion of home in Báez's performance, we must also consider that home or the house is where theater is located. In some of her performances, such as *Apartarte/Casarte,* Báez brings theater into the domestic sphere, transforming the house into a theatrical stage. In transforming the house, it shifts from being a private space to a public space. This practice subverts both the traditional intimacy associated to the house, as well as the open, public aspects of a theater, which can be easily accessed by anyone. What both spaces share is the capacity to represent a performance and both can nourish, share stories, and preserve cultures among their audiences and inhabitants.

The constraints and possibilities of these nontraditional stages include the limit in number of spectators and distribution of space, often a house has less open space for a large audience and the architecture limits the number of people who can view from any given position, in contrast many theaters are built like auditoriums, offering multiple vantage points for viewers; stage décor also may be limited in a living room where furniture is less mobile than in a theater; and technical devices such as light and sound cannot be altered as much in a house.

The domestic performances, therefore still have a very intimate quality. By rendering the private space public, Báez draws attention to the traditional role of the home and it allows her to highlight elements of the domestic in a public realm.[6] Constantly moving from one home to another, the domestic performances shed light on the convergence of home and performance to displace the traditional theater, affecting both the spectator and the performer differently.

Báez disrupts the traditionally privacy of the domestic sphere by inviting people from outside to a performance in a living room. The disruption of socially established boundaries between the private and the public is evidence of Báez's politicizing gesture in questioning domestic roles and identities. According to Arendt, in ancient Greece, "the distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms" (29). The public sphere was also the political sphere and the private sphere was meant for the (public) man to nourish himself and preserve life. The private sphere was also where women were to assume their tasks of "species reproduction" (30). Placing the two spheres in opposition renders the public sphere one that represents freedom and political action. The home could be seen as a pre-political space, where man ruled over his family, providing a social space before he would become a political being in the public sphere (31). However, while these two spaces were separated in ancient times, Arendt argues that in our era they flow into one another and are dependent on each other.[7] While the private and the public intermingle in Báez's work, it is also true that modern society continues to reproduce some of the distinctions between the private and public spheres described by Arendt. So, in engaging with this dichotomy, and merging the private and the public by way of bringing theater into the house, Báez makes the private sphere a political one too. The private sphere becomes a place where identities and society can be examined, interrogated, and resisted from within.

Báez's work proves to be doubly domestic: on one hand the venue is often an intimate home, on the other, the themes addressed in many of her performances also reflect upon the domestic realities of women of the Dominican diaspora in New York. In creating domestic performances (both because of where they take place as well as the content they portray), Báez's work attempts to shed light onto issues that tend to be left out of the public and political eye. "Home is where theater is" can be understood since part of Báez's theatrical innovation consists in interrogating the boundaries of the home as well as the privacy that such

a space represents. By showcasing domestic scenes in her performances, Báez invites external viewers into an event that includes not just seeing where and how someone else lives, but also experiencing domestic realities of migrant female subjects. Báez makes domestic scenes public while also making theater intimate. Her work points to the fine line separating the public and the private, demonstrating that these do not always have a clear boundary, and when they do, it can always be shifted or erased. This kind of "radical transformation of the theatre" breaks the fourth wall of the theatre in Bertolt Brecht's sense of epic theatre.[8] By creating a more intimate atmosphere and convening in an unlikely setting, Báez's performance involves audiences in the intimate space where they are invited to "come to grips" (Brecht 23) with the reality of migrant female subjects and as explore "the pains and pleasures of the Dominican immigrant experience" (Rivera-Servera 110). The socio-political commentaries in Báez's performance insist that we consider the reality of women's domestic roles (in a public light) by portraying images that engage spectators in thinking critically with the performance.

One veil that Báez's performance lifts is the boundary between public and private presentations of social norms. That is, she shows that public gender roles are still upheld within the house and suggests that we interrogate the domestic social expectations of women in the domestic space. In *Apartarte/Casarte*, Báez appears at first wearing a long wedding veil in the colors of the Dominican flag. Throughout the performance, she carries out a series of domestic routines: "peeling oranges, mopping, cooking" (Rivera-Servera 111). The roles recreated in this piece remind us that social and public roles are also reinforced inside the home. But by parodying such roles, Báez underlines the link between domesticity and imprisonment. While the woman may first appear donning the Dominican flag, the preservation of culture, history and family education is mired in a social reality where women often succumb to social and authoritative oppression, thus it is through a domestic parody that Báez highlights this and other contradictions faced by migrant Dominican women and creates a distancing effect among spectators who are invited to think critically about the reality of the women portrayed.

The performance of the domestic space demonstrates how the home is also another social stage where one is expected to perform a role. But by rendering daily scenes of women carrying out domestic chores theatrical, and staging them in different homes of the Dominican diaspora, Báez places her work at the center of the community. Rivera-Servera points out that in *Apartarte/Casarte,* "Baez opens up the space

of home to explore publicly the Dominican experience in New York City, making her piece about the struggles of everyday life and the hope of survival through community" (112). Indeed, the transformation of the home from private to public is most significant here because it creates a necessary space for community convergence and dialogue. In the diaspora, where migrants are often marginalized, welcoming public spaces are not always available, therefore, the opening of the home is essential for the survival of many members through building community.

For Anzaldúa, community is "people on a similar quest/path," while Talpade Mohanty describes it as "the product of work, of struggle," "inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities," but it is also "related to experience, to history" (104). Community is plural, it is made up of people with shared realities. Community can offer solidarity, it has the potential to assist in survival, but it is also full of movement and with this there are also challenges. Each member experiences life differently, and while they may be on similar paths and share histories, tensions and differences also arise in communities. However, it is important to note that as Báez asserts her portable home, and uses the domestic space for staging her work, there is also a frequent reflection on the community. In an interview with Ana-Maurine Lara, Báez says,

> Hay una comunidad visible, una comunidad invisible. I talk with them both.
> Hay una comunidad elegida, hay otra comunidad impuesta.
> Hay otra comunidad heredada, imaginada.
> Hay un montón de comunidades. Algunos se entrecruzan.
> Hay segmentos de la comunidad que es para reírte hasta orinarte-reírte que te duelen las costillas, para tomar té, para comer, para hacer familia y donde te sientes como en familia. Siempre estoy. Siempre soy.
> Yo soy mi propia comunidad, también.

Community is multiple, there is not one community, but numerous communities to which one may belong. Báez shows that the relationship to community is not always smooth, but requires work, as Talpade Mohanty suggests. And while nuancing the different relationships with communities, Báez also points at the importance of making family and making community a home. Báez transforms the intimate domestic space into a shared space of convergence where the public and the private merge in the process of community-making.

The domestic as a space for community, is where people are able to gather strength and support from family and friends to confront the many challenges they face through migration. Different migrant peoples (and especially seen here through a Dominican diaspora) build communities around the domestic space. For Báez, it is therefore neither a private nor a public space, but a point where the two come together, as houses open up to the community. The merging of public and private spaces can thus be represented by the idea of community, which socially brings together aspects of both public life – where one is able to act and interact with others, as well as the private space where life and culture are maintained.

Throughout her performance texts, and more recently in narrative pieces, Báez evokes communities within shared living spaces. While individual families may have their own private spaces, some diasporic communities also tend to live within close quarters. Such is the case of the Washington Heights neighborhood described in her work, which is home to a large Dominican population in New York. Báez speaks about this neighborhood autobiographically since it is also the place where she arrived upon migrating. The neighborhood is the place where communities are created in the new country. Migrant individuals find a sense of home in the community through their shared values, cultures, history, and experiences of migration. García-Peña describes this space as one of "dual marginality belonging to neither nation" (4). It is in this dual marginality, the 'ni aquí ni allá' discussed earlier, that she locates Báez's "El Nié," as an "imagined space inhabited by the immigrant where memories and the present are intertwined with the experience of oppression" (194). El Nié can also be understood as an imagined building where the collective stories of its inhabitants come together.[9] Báez describes El Nié in *Levente No. Yolayorkdominicanyork* (2011), "Microrrelatos del macro cosmo que es el Ni e'. Bucle interminable. Eros con un pa'ca y un pa'llá buscando lo que no se le ha perdido. Una isla-pubelo-barrio-mundo-edificio." It is a space that seeks its own identity, often connected to ideas and traditions from the country of origin. However, the community of El Nié also represents a newly created home, much different to the place of origin. In the absence of the home left behind, individuals find and define their identities once again alongside their kin. While they do not recuperate a lost home, the close proximity to family and friends who encounter similar struggles allows individuals to create networks of support to help each other overcome adversity.

García-Peña argues that "solidarity becomes the norm and the only way of survival" (195) in El Nié. In *Levente No* Báez depicts a residential building in which neighbors seem to know absolutely everything that goes on in other peoples' lives. The narrator tells the lives and secrets of residents (which seems to be common knowledge in the community), showing just how word spreads, and how the diasporic experiences proliferate within the reduced space of their close living quarters. Gossip is a thread that connects this community. By speaking to each other about other neighbors, and watching the lives of others, the residents and characters are able to confront realities and offer each other support. Moreover, rumor and gossip align Báez's writing in a Caribbean continuum, where *chisme* appears often as a mode of resistance and survival. As Caribbean critics such as Antonio Benítez Rojo, and more recently Raphael Dalleo and Ana Rodríguez Navas show, rumor and gossip have an important role for circulating information ignored by main or official sources of communication as well as offer a "sort of counterpublic where those excluded from the dominant public sphere pass along knowledge" (Dalleo 90).[10] It facilitates the movement of information beyond master narratives, and as Rodríguez Navas argues, "gossip constitutes a potent leveling force and tool for dissent, allowing the challenging of narratives imposed by the powerful on the subordinated" (65). Gossip is thus a useful instrument of expression for the inhabitants of El Nié who not only use it to challenge master narratives, but also affirm their realities and express their own versions of their stories and experiences from distinctive perspectives, "Aquí en el Ni e' se reescribe la novela."[11]

Although gossip is not exclusive among women, Dalleo insists on its importance among them. This proves to be true in *Levente No*, where the narrator describes the lives of the women of El Ni e', "Tenemos a Ramona la que vende ropas de marca… Doña Altagracia la que cuida niños… Docra, la convertía que hace cortinas y cubrecamas." In addition to offering alternative narratives and resistance, gossip creates networks of support for women in communities like El Nié: "Daniela es una madre joven […] Trabaja y atiende a su muchacho con un amor. Las muchachas no la han dejado sola nunca. El Viejo que la preñó nunca más se vio." Gossip allows characters to interrogate the social roles assigned to women, but more importantly, in this text, Báez shows that gossip functions as an instrument to make women aware of the problems in their society and empowers them to take action. "Voy a subir solo a recordarle a José que aquí no aceptamos maltrato ni mucho menos la muerte de la Carmen. Que arranque en fa'. Pero la violencia no va." Báez's focus on

migrant women is significant, because giving them voice, she creates a space for visibility. Far too often invisible from public life, many migrant women remain within the domestic sphere, either in their houses or through employment (domestic jobs such as cleaning, baby-sitting, etc.) Frequently they don't speak English, "no entiendo nada de lo que dicen en las calles. Todo el mundo hablando su inglés. Y yo en Babia" says one character in *Levente No*.[12] Therefore, for many women portrayed, the main social networks and methods of communication are the ones they create with other women from their communities, including the use of gossip.

The sense of community established here echoes Rivera Servera's view of Báez's work as an articulation of hope for survival through community. Most importantly it draws awareness to women in the community and the ways in which they support each other. A recurrent theme in Báez's writing is the sense of solidarity and survival that can be found among women in El Nié as they relate to each other in the semi-private sphere of the domestic. In her performance and narrative texts, Báez chooses the house, the space which is most associated to women, in order to represent and problematize their lives. She reminds us that the house is where women gather, exchange experiences, and celebrate life. It is the place where communities are built and where strength for survival is found. She demonstrates that women are indeed the backbone of those communities, "Mi isla, mi pueblo, mi barrio, el pueblo-mundo que es mi building es hecho de women as heads of the household." Báez's sense of community is unique because she emphasizes the role of the migrant woman within not just her family, but also her community.

The relationship between home, gender, and community seen in *Levente No* is significant in understanding Báez's performance work and how it seeks to destabilize social perceptions. If home is the space that provides a form of survival for the migrant individual, Báez explores and unsettles the different meanings of home, problematizing the social realities of such a space. Her dissatisfaction with the boundaries between categories such as the public and the private, country of origin and host country, as well as English and Spanish, pushes the performer to confront and erase those boundaries. Her work renders them porous, suggesting that instead we conceive these categories through their constant movement. By reimagining home beyond geographical locations and asserting home *in* theater and home *as* theater, Báez offers an alternative way to think of home, identity, and community. Whether imagined or becoming, inscribed on the body, in theater, or in a building known as

El Nié, home is an idea that most immigrants pursue and rarely find in new geographical locations. She reminds us that "once a person is an immigrant, she will always be an immigrant, defined only by the action of leaving, moving, and never fully belonging to a location" (García-Peña 193). Thus, rather than viewing this reality as a loss of home, Báez chooses to embrace the perpetual becoming of home, and finds home wherever she is.

Notes

1 Here we use the term Dominicanyork, which also appears in the variation "Dominican York" (used by Báez in *Dominicanish*, which is why it has been kept separate in the title of this subsection). We use the common scholarly variation, seen in the works of Lorgia García Peña, Ramón Antonio Victoriano-Martínez, Emilia María Durán-Almarza, Camilla Stevens and many others for consistency. Dominicanyork may appear cited with a lowercase 'd,' when such variation is employed but in general use, this paper opts for the capital 'D.'

2 See Hoffnung-Garskoff and Victoriano-Martínez for a discussion on the stigma around Dominicanyork.

3 My translation. All further translations of Báez's work cited here are my own.

4 Numerous scholars have addressed Báez's language choices and wordplay in *Dominicanish*, esppecially as they relate to identity. Durán Almarza's article "Chewing English and Spitting Spanish: Josefina Báez Homing Dominican New York" offers an in-depth analysis of how Báez's linguistic fragmentation echoes the fragmentation that people experience through geographical migration (75).

5 Our use of "third space" simply refers to the geographical space and not to Homi Bhabha's concept, elaborated in *The Location of Culture* which refers to an ambivalent space of enunciation where two or more cultures come together.

6 We refer to Báez's work performed in private homes as her 'domestic performances.' Although here there is a focus on these pieces, her work expands beyond the private sphere and she also performs outdoors.

7 The dependency of the private and the public spheres is problematic in Arendt's view. In her position, there should still be a separation between the two. While her concern is less related to mine with regards to the gender-role divide produced by the distinction of the two spaces, it is important to keep a critical view upon the problems that may arise in merging the two spaces, or in Báez's representation as a mode to raise concern about gender roles in contemporary diasporic societies.

8 In Brecht's description of "epic theatre," he argues that when the imaginary wall that separates the audience from the actors is taken down, the audience

becomes an active participant that thinks through the performance. See "The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties" in *Brecht on Theatre* (1964).

[9] El Nié also appears with the variations El Ni e' (See *Levente No*) and El Ni'e (See Báez interview with Deckman). Here we will follow the use cited by García-Peña except when cited from one of the sources mentioned here.

[10] Gossip is a common thread across numerous Caribbean texts including Rosario Ferré's *Maldito Amor* (1986), and Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove.* For more on this, see Raphael Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, pp. 90-91, as well as Ana Rodrígez Navas's *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk: The Uses of Gossip in Caribbean Literature* (2018).

[11] "Here in *El* Nié the novel (soap opera) is rewritten." *Levente No* is published without page numbers.

[12] "I don't understand anything they say on the streets. Everyone speaking their English. And I'm in La-la land."

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Creación

Irene Gómez Castellano

Nanas de lo profundo

Para Tahlequah/J35

Variación 1

La descubres en la peluquería
y te conmueve de tal modo
que arrancas la página
y te la metes en el bolso
como si estuvieras robando
un gran secreto que nadie
debería haber visto nunca.
Para ti ya es tarde.

No poder olvidarla
es un misterio tan grande
como el del negro baile
de la madre orca arrastrando
el cadáver de su criatura
muerta. Y no es pena.

Irene Gómez-Castellano estudió Filología Hispánica en la Universidad de Valencia y obtuvo su doctorado por la Universidad de Virginia en 2008. Desde entonces trabaja como profesora de literatura española en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte, Chapel Hill. Su primer poemario, *Natación*, recibió en 2015 el Premio Victoria Urbano de Creación y su traducción al inglés, *Swimming*, está a punto de publicarse con Valparaíso Ediciones, USA. Su poema "Pool" ha sido nominado a un Pushcart Prize, y sus textos han aparecido en numerosas revistas. Gómez-Castellano es autora del libro *La cultura de las máscaras, un estudio sobre identidad, masculinidad y poesía en el siglo XVIII español* y co-editora, con Aurélie Vialette, de *Dissonances of Modernity: Music, Text and Performance in Modern Spain*. Desde 2018 ejerce de editora de la revista académica *Romance Notes*.

Es comprensión y ganas
de decirle que pienso
en ella todo el día.

Variación 2

Ahora mismo, allá abajo
la madre orca sigue
empujando a la cría
muerta en lo profundo.

Si la cría desciende
ella vuelve a buscarla
y la lleva como la foca
iza la pelota de colores
desinflada y triste.

Días y días nadando
juntas una blanca y negra
y la pequeña negra toda.

Variación 3

Intentas sustituirlas
por la imagen que viste
aquel día en el acuario:
la beluga amamantando
a su bebé, nadando juntas.
La vida tiene sentido.
Como el fractal copo
de nieve. El perfecto
huevo. La sutil
bellota.

Y una imagen
se vuelve el negativo
de la otra y siempre
ahora van juntas

en la historia:
la blanca beluga láctea
y con ella la negra orca.

Variación 4

Estoy cansada de no dormir
y de jugar yo sola con las fichas
de este dominó siniestro.

Variación 5

Me pongo el traje de buzo
y me decido a bajar con ellas.
Y es como llamar a tu abuelita.
Le acaricio el lomo
con cuidado de no hacer
ruido ni cambiar las
corrientes. Le hablo
en silencio. Le digo
no hay consuelo
no hay consuelo
estamos contigo.
Aunque no lo entiende
la llamo guapa como
las enfermeras a los que
están a punto de morirse.
Le recito los versos:
pegasos lindos pegasos
caballitos de madera
yo conocí siendo niño
la alegría de dar vueltas.
Casi la llamo (mejor me callo)
Sísifo de las profundidades.
Y luego en mi sueño
como una enfermera letal
las atravieso a ambas
con una lanza larga

(el agua se vuelve roja)
para que se queden
ancladas en las olas
las jaulas de sus esqueletos
bailando madre e hija
entre los peces y su plancton
juntas para siempre.

Variación 6

Käthe Kollwitz, *Tod und Frau um das Kind Ringend*, 1911

Variación 7

Francisco de Goya, Grabado 54, *Desastres de la guerra*: "¡Madre infeliz!", 1812-1814

Variación 8

De profundis clamavi ad te.