

# Written in racialized bodies. Language, memory and (Post)colonial genealogies of femicide in Latin America

---

**Karina Bidaseca**

PhD in Social Sciences. CONICET/UBA and UNSAM  
karinabidaseca@yahoo.com.ar

## **Abstract**

Since 1993, the term femicide has referred to a continuous wave of crimes committed to women due to gender or race, a structural feature of our societies. This paper inscribes the question on the limits of the representation of the unutterable in our local post-colonial genealogies. How could we write a feminist narrative symbolically able to inscribe the losses within it, and question the world outside? This shows that all efforts in favor of Politics of Memory must be founded in the recovery of silenced First People languages, and in the cross-disciplinary junction of Art and Social Sciences.

**Key words:** femicide, colonialism and post-colonialism, racialized bodies, languages, memories.

**Submission date:** 2013-09-07

**Acceptance date:** 2013-11-06

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Gender violences have inhabited our world forever, and I confirmed it at an early stage in my life, when I read “The Bloody Countess” [*La condesa sangrienta*] (1968), by the Argentinian writer Alejandra Pizarnik. Later on, as I examined her “Proper Name Poem” [*Poema del nombre propio*], bearing the architecture figure of the tower of a medieval castle ruled by the Countess Erzébeth Báthory, I found that the abjection of violence within women victims of femicide is at the core of the falogocentric social order:

Alejandra, alejandra  
Debajo estoy yo  
Alejandra.

Literature is to thank, definitely. With the help of the Aesthetic Theory and Post-colonial Feminist Theory, I will attempt to parallel and analyze the languages of gender violence as represented by two dialogic artistic expressions, literature and visual art. Seduced by the alienating, “quite simply fascist” (Barthes, 1982:461) power of language proclaimed by Afro-American writers such as Toni Morrison and Marlene Nourbese Philip, and the First People's poet Liliana Ancalao, and aiming at sublimating the real violences, I will delve into excerpts from their work so as to elucidate the best way to articulate a cross-disciplinary Memory Politic.

Thus, I became fond of Alma López's art, a Chicana visual artist who works within the artistic political borders. Her outstanding work will not be able to overthrow the archaic power, but it *can* change the regime of visibility (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*).

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of the Proyecto CONICET “*Violencias en las mujeres subalternas. Representaciones de la desigualdad de género y la diferencia en las políticas culturales*” [Violences Against Subaltern Women: Gender Inequality Representations and the Different Cultural Politics], headed by K. Bidaseca at Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad Nacional de San Martín. A preliminary version of this research was presented at the “Tercer Feminismo y Arte: Políticas de la memoria y genealogías (pos)coloniales de la violencia en el XXXI” - International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington DC, 2013; in the Panel “Decolonial Feminisms: Art, Practice, and Scholarship Decolonial Feminisms: Art, Practice, and Scholarship, coordinated by Sonia Alvarez (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Tara Daly (Holyoke College) and Claudia J. De Lima Costa (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brasil). The author would like to express her upmost gratitude to two exceptional women, Liliana Ancalao and Rita Segato, for sharing her goals and dreams. This paper is dedicated to all women victims of femicide.

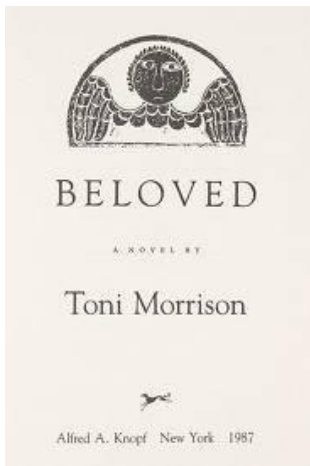
In her famous essay “*Under Western Eyes: Revisited*”, Mohanty (2003) points out that the neoliberal hegemony, the naturalization of capitalist values and the emergence of new ways of religious fanaticism with strong masculine and racist rhetoric makes need to reconfigure the maps of feminist practice more and more urgent. Categories such as First/Third World, the local/global and North/South become insufficient to explain the complexity of feminist struggles in the new geopolitical scenery (500-501).

The map of borderlands, an unstable map built from coloured women's inscriptions, turns us into map-makers of our own path, it immerses us in the inviting abyss faced by femicide. Since 1993, the term femicide has referred to a continuous wave of extremely cruel crimes perpetrated against women's bodies, the bodies of students and workers who produce global goods. No surplus labor gained from this work may ever be enough: the debt contracted with capital is always unaffordable. Its interpretation calls us to act in relation with the concept of femicide, which is being used by the new destruction technologies to inscribe bodies —instead of disciplinary apparatus— within the order of radical economy...

Some people deal with it in overt manners, others in more subtle terms, nevertheless we all face the ghosts and demons of our gender, looking for aestheticize death in order to sensitize a world that is plummeting hastily into a dramatic perception of borders and spectacle.

Where is the dividing line? What joins the ephemeral and arbitrary nature of any epistemic border together? When faced with the unutterable, how could we write a feminist narrative symbolically able to inscribe the losses within it, while also questioning the world outside? What are the reasons of Southern feminisms for developing Memory Politics based on the cross-disciplinary junction of Art and Social Sciences?

***Beloved***



***Sixty Million***

***And more***

“It was not a story to pass on.

They forgot her like a bad dream. (...) So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise. (...)

It was not a story to pass on.

So they forgot her. Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep (...).

This is not a story to pass on.

Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar. Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there.

By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather.

Certainly no clamor for a kiss. Beloved” (324).

In this touching manner, in the last pages of *Beloved*, the renowned Afro-American writer Toni Morrison<sup>2</sup> manages to recover in three heartbeats one single sentence made of fragmented phrases that interrupt the flow of the text; namely, the fact that Sethe's and Beloved's story was not (is not) a story to pass on. The negation turns the affirmation of a Women's Memory Politics for victims of brutal oppression, violent slavery, simultaneous corporal marks and experience of racism-sexism, economic exploitation and sexual slavery into an antithetical matter.

This marks a historical moment, the foundation of a fictional heightened erotization of the feminine black body on the one side, opposite to the antiseptic quality of a First People's body, uneroticized in the eyes of the sexual capitalist market (an avid consumer of feminine bodies).

What has to be quickly forgotten before being passed on? What must remain hidden, silenced, so as not to interrupt and painfully trouble the flow of present time? I asked myself these questions in a book I published three years ago<sup>3</sup>.

In her 1987 work, Toni Morrison narrates Sethe's decision, the decision of a slaved mother who, in an act of love, resolves to kill her daughter Beloved, a tender 2-year-old girl, to protect her from Sethe's master appropriation. She was an outcast in United State's post-slavery society. The wheathered house at Bluestone Road 124 was cursed, it was “full of a baby's venom” (3).

Sethe is a victim of social death. No-one visits the haunted house at 124. The novel depicts how enunciative contexts (colonialism and slavery) expose different ways of putting to death. There is no single way of dying, and death may well be an act of freedom. Sethe's narration changes our ethical sense the moment we understand that in North American society of the time, infanticide was a symbol

---

2 Toni Morrison was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her novels thematize the issue of blackness in the United States, especially centering in black women She published *Beloved* in 1987, which got her the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, and later on, in 1993, the Nobel Prize in Literature. Other famous works are *Blue Eyes* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1978), *The Knights Isle* (1981), *Love* (2004), and more recently, *A Mercy*. For the English version of this article, I have based on the 2005 Vintage edition.

3 Bidaseca, K. (2010). *Perturbando el texto colonial. Los Estudios (pos)coloniales en América latina*, Buenos Aires, Ed. SB.

of resistance against slavery<sup>4</sup>, when a mother knew that little girls, “neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye” (28).

Sethe was raped by her master, and by other Sweet Home's slaves. This was a misfortunate euphemism for naming the slavery-ruled plantation. If a woman slave tries to escape, then she bears a double punishment; leaving behind the workforce's reproductive capacity. Pro-slavery society, forced to permanently *produce* new slaves for its expansion, is thus threatened (Grüner, 2010).

“It was dangerous for ex slave woman to love something so much, especially if that something was her own children” says Toni Morrison.

The following has been my sustained stance on this issue throughout my years of study on Gender Violences: Sethe commits infanticide, but she is no child killer. Sethe's criminal narration becomes a narration of freedom. Sethe does not kill, she liberates (Bidaseca, 2010). She is put to death in every sense of the expression, her voice is relegated, silenced by the white master's voice.

“That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up (...), The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing —the part of her that was clean” (295).

### ***She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks***

#### ***150 and more***

*She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*<sup>5</sup> (1989), by the Canadian, Afro-Caribbean writer Marlene Nourbese Philip, falls into a new narrative aesthetics on “the lyricism of the Jazz-word (...), the fusion of Caribbean and English, very close to a creole mood” (George Elliott Clarke, in Daily

---

<sup>4</sup>Between 1882 and 1895, between one third and half of the average rate of black deaths were children under 5 years (Bhabha, 2002: 28).

<sup>5</sup> Born in the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago in 1947. *She Tries Her Tongue On, Her Silence Softly Breaks* received the prize of the Casa de las Americas in 1988 and international recognition. His prolific work also includes poems, essays, and plays: *Coups and Calypsos* (1996), *Harriet's daughter* (2000) *The redemption of Al Bumen: A morality play* (1994), *The Streets* (1994).

News, cited by <http://www.nourbese.com/reviews/she-tries-her-tongue-2/>). Her writing exists in a tension between father tongue (the white, euro-Christian male canon) and the mother tongue (black, African and feminine). The core of “Discourse on the Logic of Language” says:

“English  
is my mother tongue  
A mother tongue is not  
not a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
l/anguish  
anguish  
- a foreign anguish.” (She Tries 30)

Norubese Philip (1989) sets on an interesting phonetic word-play, turning the word “language” into “anguish”. Hers is an unrelieved anguish generated by the violence within the colonizer's act of imposing a foreign language over the local language... a foreign language she cannot reconcile with. Throughout her works, Philip questions the dominance of Western discourse and aims at re-visiting the past with a focus on collective memory and identity.

In *Zong!* (2008) she takes the reader through a walk along a dramatic pathline set in the late XVIII century. Back then, in November 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* ordered 150 African slaves to be murdered by drowning them in the ocean, so the ship owner could collect the insurance money.<sup>6</sup> *Zong!* is set in the context of plantation economy, African free men trafficking and then turned into slaves in America, African mysticism, and the primary violence of Capitalism. Building these stories in such a disjointed manner implies reuniting a past out of isolated pieces, palimpsests in which the individual (the Self) is faced with his/her past and present.

"I WEEP FOR THIS GAUNT RED WOMAN with the dread hair who, without much formal education, understood the workings of capital and empires. Who was pissed to hell that the product of her labours, her beloved cocoa, could only fetch one cent per pound. I weep for her. And I sing. For her... I

---

<sup>6</sup>The court decision *Gregson vs Gilbert* is the only existing public document in connection with the killing.

feel her anger all these years after her death. Know her anger. Own it as my own. And hers . . . In knowing her anger I know that she is kin. In ways more powerful than blood. . . Oh, but I will give an account of descent from ancestors. I am neither alone. Nor mutant, not a changeling. The current of resistance runs swift, runs deep, weaving its way through the genealogy of these people lurking in the half shadows. . ." (Genealogy of resistance).

Also, in "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty of the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones" (1989:52-53):

In whose language

In whose language

If not in yours

Am I Am I not AmI I am yours Am I not I am yours AmI I am [...]

Am I

Beautiful (53)

Again, the author summons a game of negations that outline the idea of language as a mined field for women (Bidaseca & Sierra, 2012). Vietnamese feminist thinker Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), born in 1952, Hanoi under Indochina's French dominion, raised in South Vietnam during the war and then having then migrated to the United States in the 1970s, articulates the issue quite successfully. Woman is at war with two linguistic conceptions of the Self, a "Mayor I" (the master individual, the deposit of cultural tradition), and a "minor I" (the personal individual, owner of a specific race and gender) (6). The writing process represents an act of violence: in order to write clearly, we need to trim, erase, purify, and give shape to this minor "I", we have to fit it into a tradition, locate it (17). Woman needs to distance herself, as a way of alienating, or adapting the stolen or borrowed voice to her own self, but most importantly, as a way of internalizing the language of the master subject (27). On the contrary, Minh-Ha argues in favor of a map of enunciative relations where language multiplies, subverts, and reflects the contradictions of the notion of the original "I" most spread by Cultural Gender Theories (22).

In her introductory essay "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy", Philip (1989) states that "For the many like me, black and female, it is imperative that our writing begin to recreate



our histories and myths, as well as integrate that most painful of experiences -- loss of our history and our word. The reacquisition of power to create in one's own i-mage and to create one's own i-mage is vital to this process; it reaffirms for us that which we have always known, even in those most darkest of times which are still with us, when everything conspired to prove otherwise -- that we belong most certainly to the race of humans." (<http://mnourbesephilip.wordpress.com>) The power, and the danger of the artist, poet or writer, rest in his or hers ability to create images, i-mages. Philip (1989) divides the word image in i-mage so as to isolate the I, and thus campaign for a vindication of what is private, identity, individuality, and difference. The challenge lies in "recreating the images that give rise to the colonizer's language" (21) so as words be used in alternative manners and in doing so, "modifying the ways society sees itself, and even, its collective consciousness" (12) (Bernoiz, 2012:5).

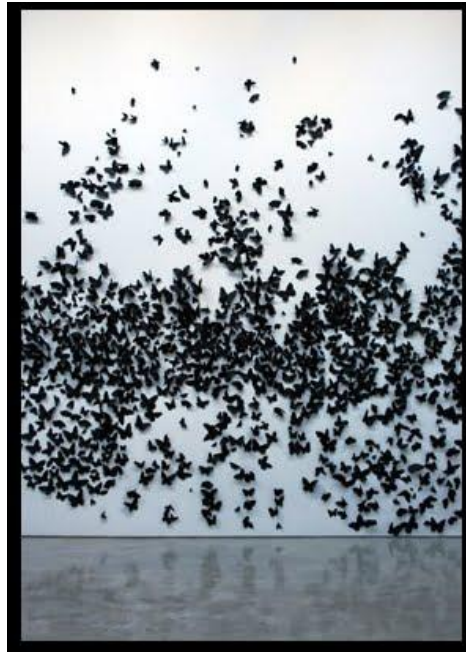
...When silence is  
Abdication of word tongue and lip  
Ashes of once in what was  
...Silence Song word speech  
Might I... like Philomena... sing  
continue  
over  
into...  
pure utterance.  
(She Tries Her Tongue)

The author remarks that the history of the Afrodiasporic people is a land of "massive, traumatic and fatal interruptions", and thus that "writing about the events in a logical and linear manner would be committing a further act of violence" (Bernoiz, 2012). For this reason, her prose does not obey Western shapes, but finds inspiration in jazz compositions, a music bearing strong African roots<sup>7</sup>. With her unique aesthetics, Philip leaves her own identity mark, her own winding road ends up generating a

---

<sup>7</sup> "Jazz is a musical art form that originated in the United States through the confrontation of blacks with European music. The instrumentation, melody and harmony of jazz are derived primarily from the Western musical tradition. The rhythm, phrasing and sound production, and the harmony of blues elements derived from African music and African-American musical concept". Joachim-Ernst Berendt in *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond* (1981).

parabasis<sup>8</sup>, sabotaging like Toni Morrison the central stage from the margins, and trespassing the borders of language. From an idea triggered in the warmth of her own “house” that moves out, into the stage of world literature, the erratic and multifaceted cloud of black letters provokes anguish. This actually reminds me of *Black Cloud* (2007), mexican artist Carlos Amoraes' installation work based on a group of 30.000 butterflies in black paper, gathered from South to North Mexico, and exhibited at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in New York, in the Philadelphia Art Museum, and finally, after a transoceanic journey, in Murcia, Spain. The artist says that he came up with the idea during a sleepless night, under the suggestion of imminent death at his grandmother's house in Northern Mexico (*Atlas Portátil*, 214).



*Fig. 1 Black Cloud (2007).*

### ***Huesos en el desierto [Bones in the Desert]***

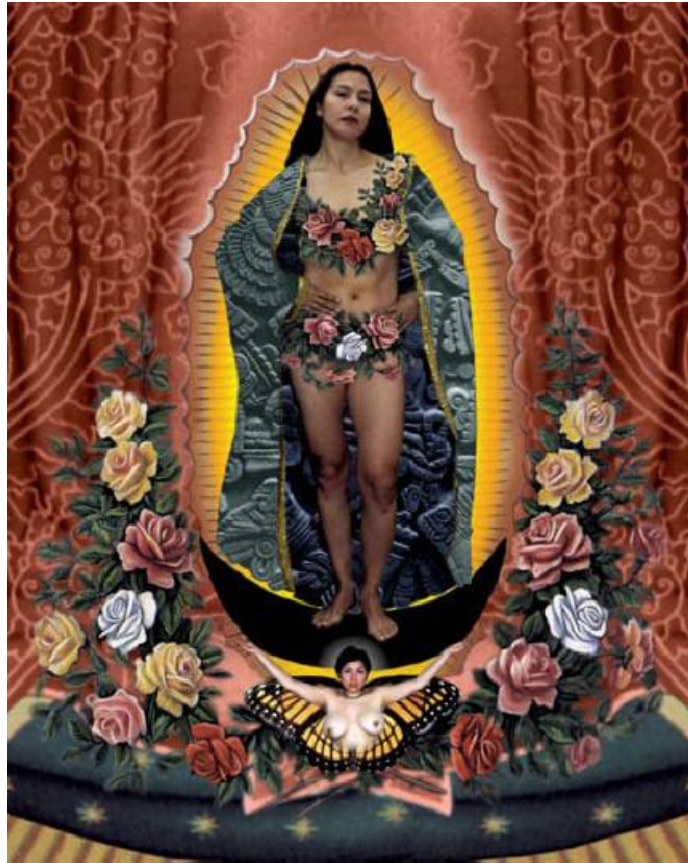
***400 names and more***

---

<sup>8</sup> "Digression" (from the ancient Greek, "parabaino approach ") was one of several moments of the old Attic comedy . It is a figure that represents the margin of ancient Greek drama in which a character or chorus tries to sabotage the main scene, even taking off the masks, to interpellate the distinguished audience that sits in the front rows. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, migrant intellectual known for his critical postcolonial woman Indian and Hindu, Marxist, deconstructionist, feminist, speaks of a "subaltern parabasis". In his book *Critique of postcolonial reason*, write a chapter titled "Culture" which describes the act of review as follows: "At the most we can hope for an academic review responsible is a caution, vigilance, takes away a persistent , always out of date, with respect to the full involvement , a desire for permanent digression . Any subsequent claim within the academic enclosure is a trap" (352).

Covered by a blue cloak, textured with Prehispanic figures in a clear allusion to the Goddess Coyolxauhqui's dismembered body parts, her slender and seductive figure appeared.

The black crescent moon that seems to crown her, bearing pagan traces, is held by a female figure of naked breasts and by the open wings of a butterfly. These are the wings of the Monarch butterfly, the symbol for the Mexican State of Michoacán" (Buigues, 2010).



*Fig. 2 Our lady (1999).*

Chicana artist Alma López is well known for her critical interventions against the inherited culture of the conquest and feminine re-signification of Catholic symbols, like in her most controversial work, *Our Lady*, a representation of the new Virgen of Guadalupe. The Monarch butterfly, characterized by their long annual migration, habits the US/Canadian border during summer. When fall comes, they travel to the Michoacan Woods at Oyamel and Mexico, where they stay until they begin their journey back to Northern lands in spring.



*Fig. 3 Santa Niña de Mochis, 1999.*

Let us take a closer look at this work, part of a bigger series entitled 1848 Chicanos in the U. S., set after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe.

“The space portrayed was created after the Treaty. The U. S. Manifest Destiny myth of conquest has attempted to erase, to make invisible those who were/are in that land and I make them visible. So it is a counter-narrative that has a political theme.” (Román-Odio, 2013:15). In an interview, Roman-Odio says that this piece was a tribute for her grandmother after a trip to Mochis, where she was buried, on El Día de los Muertos. “We were at the cemetery, where many Mexican families go at this time of the year, and I saw this girl, dressed like an angel, and I asked her parents if I could take a picture of her. She was so beautiful! And she came to represent the spirit of my grandmother—of that energy the Santero talked about. As people in Tijuana made Juan Soldado a saint for helping so many people cross the border, I made my grandmother a saint—the Santa Niña de Mochis” (Román-Odio, 2013:15).

The 5,000 kilometer long journey of the Monarch butterflies far exceeds their volatile life span from two to three weeks. This is a metaphor for the Northward migration journeys and the precarious corporal politics of Justina and Domitila Juárez López, two Oaxaca girls that decided to migrate to the United States through the most watched border in the world, to fulfill the American Dream. A border that, for migrant women, turns into a living hell. They offer their bodies to that long walk through the desert, guided only by the coyotes, so as to start living in their flesh the dramatism of exile and diaspora that characterizes global nomadism. Not long after, the Embassy tells the girl's family that Justina and Domitila came to a fatal end; they dehydrated while trying to cross the burning desert at Tucson, Arizona. Their deaths left three children orphans.

In Cristina Pacheco's (2005) fiction "El oro del desierto/The Gold of the Desert", the plot revolves around the wait for the paper, which arrives twice a week, where a list is published with the names of Mexican repatriates and of dead people. The return of Julia, the absent mother is mostly awaited. Aware that in the search of the long awaited improvements in living they could find death, before leaving for the United States both women place gold incrustations in their teeth. The gold will be the clue to identify them, may the desert eat through their bones —similarly to González Rodríguez's (2004) narration.

### *Memento Mori*

The confusing evanescence of the desert mirage is interrupted by the bronze sculpture Flor de arena [Sand Flower] (2012), by Chilean artist Verónica Leiton, built as a Memorial Site at Campo Algodonero in honour of women victims of femicide, in accordance with the Inter-American Human Rights Court sentence against the State of Mexico. A commemorative name panel reads: "In memory of women and girls victims of gender violence in Ciudad Juárez".

"The sculpture portrays a young woman," adds Leiton (2012) "with her eyes set in the sky, with a thoughtful, and fully liberating stare, the figure comes out of an enormous desert flower (a rock shaped like a flower) found in the desert Southwards from Ciudad Juárez. One of the petals of the flower becomes a cloak, suspended in air. Written in it are 400 women name representing all missing women".



*Fig. 4 Flor de arena, Verónica Leiton (2012).*

***Tengo todavía arena en las coyunturas y no hay palabras***

“Like an echo of silence I will be” writes Mapuche poet Liliana Ancalao (Comodoro Rivadavia, 1961) in her book of poems *Mujeres a la intemperie - Pu zomo wekun tu mew* [Women out in the Open] (2010). A silence that does not always entails absence. First People's women voices have been excluded by the Argentinian narrative; as they were from the racial-sexual map of globalization and urban white feminist policies. However, this words manage to break the silence by recreating a writing made of two languages/memories (Mapuzungun and Spanish), very similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's chicana writing blending Spanish/English/Náhuatl. “Mapuzungun is the language of reappropriation of pride, the language of reconstruction of memory” writes Ancalao (2010:1) in *El idioma silenciado* [The Silenced Language].

“From November, 1978 to January, 1885, the Argentinian State put forth the structural invasion of the Southern peoples through a genocide also known as “Conquista al desierto” [Conquest of the Desert]<sup>9</sup>, except there was no desert to conquer, only a vast land populated by ancient nations, cohabitant with the Mapuches: the Aonikén, known as Tehuelches, and the Southern Onas, Yámanas and Alalkalufes. At the same time, the other side of the border was going through a similar nightmare with a different

---

<sup>9</sup> These racial genocides are known in Argentina as *Campaña del Desierto* [Desert Campaign] and *Pacificación de la Araucanía* (Pacification of the Araucania) in Chile.

name, *Pacificación de la Araucanía* [Occupation of Araucanía]. Concentration camps and death camps were built, at them hundreds of families were kept under inhuman conditions and became victims of the most heinous humiliations and tortures. The biggest concentration and death camps were Valcheta and Chinchinales (Río Negro Province)” (Millán, 2011).

Ancalao’s poetry is a metaphor for the home, the home of “women out in the open” (in *El frío – Wutre/La lluvia – Mawün/El viento- Kürüf*, the cold, the rain, the wind). Her book, divided in four sections, represents “the concept of the *Meli Witran Mapu*, the four orientations and facets which organize Mapuche world view and land; similar to representations also found in the *kultrún* (a ceremonial musical instrument) of the four features of the high deity, *Kuse*, *Fücha*, *Üllcha* and *Weche*, the four elements, the four annual nature cycles, the Moon Calendar, the four land orientations in Mapuche World and ancient identities.” (Spíndola, 2012)

At the beginning, the cold represents childhood, the rain, and fertility; the wind stands for the supernatural; and finally, the end of the lifeline, which is the “great beyond”, is represented by the encounter with other women (the old woman in the raft and her little sister). Ancalao (2010) names this condition as “women out in the open”, invisibilized women whose inaudible voices were trapped within the labyrinth of gender colonization, in the covenant where colonizing and colonized men pass power on among each other (Bidaseca, *Sitios liminales*, in press). Ancalao (2010) portrays once again the Wind – Kürüf:

como un tremendo viento  
dicen que fue el malón  
un torbellino en contra de los días  
y eso que los antiguos eran duros  
como rocas  
firmes  
ahí quedó su sangre  
desparramada  
me decías abuela  
y tu recuerdo es el lago



al que me asomo  
para sorber un trago (30).

The Wind, or Kūrūf, brought the eclipse “but it will also go away” (Mujeres a la intemperie, 30), and will give room for the blossoming of contemporary Mapuche poetry, which is being built over “the blue time of memory, that which whirls below the earth, carrying the ancient elders' whispers about a blue dream” (Colipan, 2000, in Spíndola, 2012). The woman poet continues: “I still have sand in the joints and no words” (Ancalao, 2010).

The poet's voice is spoken by other Mapuche women: “There goes the prayer of Ignacia Quintulaf” (30). These are the women that are zumo kimche, or wise women, to whom Ancalao summons and dedicates her book, naming them in one group in the first page of her poem book. By doing this she is making a map of her own subjectivity which covers, from top (her ancestors which left this earth) to bottom (grand-grandmothers, maternal grandmother, great-aunts, mother, ñañas (yem)<sup>10</sup>; lamngen, zomokimche, cousin-aunts, nieces, daughters, grand-nieces, and finally, the earth that breaths under their delicate and firm steps” (Ancalao, 2010)

“Cuando me muera-Feichi Lali” [When I Die] is the last poem, which starts with an excerpt of an oral narrative:

“Disparen nomás, estoy  
acostumbrado a morir”.

Ancalao speaks about a long history of racism, colonialism and violence. The poem mourns:

cuando me muera deberé cruzar el río  
cuando me muera deberé cruzar el río  
qué perro hará de guía si no tengo  
un perro flaco que olerá mi cobardía  
irá a mi lado  
y estará la vieja en la balsa  
le entregará dos llankas

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Mapuche conception, the dedicatory is first, to the top order of ancient women, kuifikeche, who have already left the Nagmapu, this earth. “Yem” is the alternative way of “em” to name the deceased” (Poesía mapuche 133).



para que me cruce  
las piedras arrancadas de cuajo  
de mi garganta  
de mi estómago  
crecidas en los dolores  
en los gritos que no pude gritar  
cuando se agrandaban mis ojos  
y hacía que vivía

entregaré esas piedras  
y no habrá más  
seguro lágrimas  
porque no pude encontrarle el secreto a esta vida  
porque me fui  
detrás de los fantasmas  
buscando tramas  
y arañas  
y cántaros  
y hojas  
reconocerá la vieja su valor?  
Subiremos con mi perro  
la balsa se deslizará en la tarde  
hacia el oeste (...) (36-40)

At this point, the old woman in the raft comes to scene, as well as the concept of memory and the pouring rain which prevents the earth from swallowing the woman.

hasta cuándo aguantaremos  
pará la lluvia dios es demasiada  
no la bebe la tierra se atraganta  
y somos casi nada

trozos de tiza borrados por el agua. (24)

### **Memory Politics for *feminicidio***

The concept of “*feminicidio*” [in Spanish, different from *femicidio*] was developed by United States' writer Carol Orlock in 1974, and first used in public by the feminist Diana Russell before the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women at Brussels. It is a political concept with high recognition in Latin America. It has been translated in Mexico by Lagarde (2006) as *feminicidio* to refer to “femicide violence”:

“*Feminicidio* spreads in an ideological and social climate of 'machismo' and misogyny, of normalized violence against women, and in the absence of legal and government policies; conditions that generate an insecure environment for women, putting their lives in danger and favoring the conjuncture of crimes which we demand be clarified and eliminated”. (Cited in Healy, 2008)

The concept, created to define women's violent gender-based killings, aimed at challenging neutral words like “homicide” or “murder”, and extract them from the private sphere and individual pathology. Ever since the 2009 ruling of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights (IACHR) on November 16th, femicide —along with its attempt to be classified as a subcategory of genocide— has suffered a direct blow. The concept has not been able to gain recognition within the Court's decision in the case of “*Campo Algodonero: Claudia Ivette González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal and Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez against the United Mexican States*”. Abramovich (2010) states that the Court does not follow the theory of a systematic violence pattern, but seems instead to prefer a more lenient State responsibility based on the created risk doctrine with the addition of due diligence prevention duty, an obligation reinforced by Article 7 of the Convention of Belém do Pará (2011:14).

The decision recognizes the existence of “a culture of discrimination against women” and is exhibited as an “emblematic precedent in Human Rights Inter-American System case-law development”. This was the first time the IACHR looks into a case of structural, gender-based violence against women, i.e., the type of violence defined in Article 1 in CBDP. In its final ruling, the IACHR states that the three victims' murders (Laura Berenice Ramos, Claudia Ivette González, and Esmeralda Herrera Monreal)

were “gender-based”, namely, they are consistent with “feminicidio”<sup>11</sup>, and are part of a larger context of violence against women in Ciudad Juárez (p. 1).

Anthropologist Rita Segato (2010) contributed to the challenge of conceptualization which, one way or another, questioned us as scholars and feminist activists after the Court decision. I quote: “Que, a pesar de que toda violencia feminicida o femicida es un epifenómeno de las relaciones de género, pueden y deben distinguirse dos tipos de la misma: 1. la que puede ser referida a relaciones interpersonales – violencia doméstica - o a la personalidad del agresor – crímenes seriales -; y 2. las que tienen características no personalizables – destrucción del cuerpo de las mujeres del bando enemigo en la escena bélica informal de las guerras contemporáneas, y en la trata” (p. 11). She suggests using the term “geno-femicide” [femigenocidio] for systematic and impersonal crimes on women (and feminized men) with the sole objective of destroying them because they are women, and which prevent us from personalizing or individualizing the motive of the perpetrator, or the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (...). Thus, we would use feminicidio to describe “all misogynistic crimes against women, whether associated with interpersonal or impersonal gender relations. We would add the prefix “geno” to name those feminicidios oriented towards women as genus, that is, as an impersonal gender” (5).

Some Latin American countries have already passed on legislation on these issues: Costa Rica did so in 2007, followed by Guatemala in 2008, Chile in 2008, and Perú and Argentina in 2012; though it is true that the long-term conflict at Guatemala prevents any comparison with political contexts at the rest of the countries. If the blurriness governing gender crimes is such that recognition in local legal precedents becomes impaired, we will probably be advised against the even more ambiguous categorization of the term feminicidio as a “war”. However, Maldonado (2009) states that, in Guatemala's case “one of the clearest weaknesses in the investigation was lack of scientific grounds and technical techniques in the handling of evidence, the victim's and perpetrator's profiles”. This is actually the rule in all our countries.

---

<sup>11</sup> “The Court states that use the term” killing of women in gender-also known as “femicide” (quoted by Abramovich, 2011: 2).

At Ciudad Juárez, the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights forced the Mexican State to, among other things, build a memorial for the murdered women that were raised in August, 2012. At Quebrada de San Lorenzo, Salta (Argentina), the father of Cassandre Bouvier, a woman who was murdered with her best friend on August 15, 2011, took it upon himself to formally ask the President of my country to build a memorial in the place where they were killed. "I dream this to be the reflection of Franco-Argentine friendship against the crime of femicide" he states in an interview.

Fifteen years have passed since the murder of María Soledad Morales in Argentinian Province of Catamarca. She was a young, 17-years-old girl, and the implications of her crime echoed so strongly as to overthrow a feudal institution, shaken society with *marchas del silencio* [Silent Walks]. This was a crime we had no name for back then, but we do now. At present, we must also address the reality of the guilty parties being free of charge, the fact that the thirty-two people accused of cover-up never made it to trial stage, and that the memorial bronze panel at Colegio del Carmen, the school María Soledad attended, passes unnoticed to most youngsters. The gorge where her mutilated and disfigured body was found now has a monolith, made by a local artist, that curious tourist stop to inspect and where some of the local people leave letters asking for miracles.

In addition, we are faced with the issue of not being able to account events in a non-horrid manner. The very concept of violence is a word bearing a strong emotive charge, somewhat unpleasing when said aloud. What follows is the spectacularization of everything related to Juárez. As speakers from the Ivory Tower, we are committed to these issues, but at the same time distance makes us insensible, while real women continue to live their lives down there. We are faced with a difficult and complex point of view: the point of view of a woman of a stigmatized origin, much like the violent Juaritos, who sees her life grow harder each time her town is perceived as the only place in the world where these crimes occur, and every time she is portrayed as a barbarian. In other words, scholarship is criticized for being a generator of universal victims, under the "savior rhetoric" of Northern feminism, which recently has made a conservative turn by depicting Third World women as people in need of "saving" (from whom?).

Rojas (2005) speaks of a "rhetoric of contempt", in relation with the disrespect, negligence or invisibility of gender violence, which can only be explained by its deep roots in a local sexist culture, deroga-

tive of women, which has a profound impact on Mexican society. Of course, the same situation occurs in any of our societies. Following Rita Segato, the greatest danger is for violence to become a lingua franca, that is, a common language between human beings, marked in bodies that function as extensions of geographical sovereignty. Just like texts, messages of cruelty, mutilation and assault can be written on and read on them, and exhibited as a morbid spectacle. We are dealing with a type of violence whose intelligibility is told in our colonization history. Further on to the South, Mapuche feminine poetry reinscribes other geographies in the memory of violence. Liliana Ancalao says:

“It happened only a hundred years ago, however, in the eyes of my generation it seems to have happened in a mythical time. The Mapuche people could walk freely in their own land, and people talked to the mapu spirits. Mapuzungun means the language of the land (...). Mapuzungun became a language used to describe pain, the language to express the heartbreak of watching men, women and children being enslaved” (Ancalao, 2010).

This primary violence engages in dialogue with *Beloved*, and can also be found in *Zong!*, *Huesos en el desierto*, and in all artistic interventions.

## **Final Thoughts**

This text, which is a set of thoughts, may be seen as a memorial. Since the beginning, writing is a type of rupture or sculpture on a text, be it a stone, a vessel, a paper, a body or many bodies, a name or many names carved into a bronze panel. Even if there is no body, neither found nor missing, or we are only faced with “bones in the desert”, our strength relies in having been able to reunite them all and having cracked the grounds of common-sense; successfully altering the regime of what is visible and claimable, by joining together Art and Politics.

The list has no end, but we are hopeful that one day it will have one. At present, Southern Feminist Movements need to be noisy enough as to resist the silence spiral and the dead-end of time. We postulate a Third Feminism that challenges Northern conservative Feminism, and the whole of society on the issue of gender-based violences as the sole reason for our domination, inscribes itself within a genealogy of post-colonial memory from our South, and pieces together the voices of women oppressed for existing in the world (for sex/gender, ethnia, or class reasons).

It is for this reason that writing from a Southern de-colonizing feminist point of view is now a pressing matter. In *Beloved*, Christian (2007) sees that visibility is only understandable from African perspective, that is, from the perspective of Afrocentrism, according to which slavery, human trafficking and slave trafficking across the Black Atlantic add an interpretation to the psychoanalytic, marxist or formalist versions. In her critique to the Eurocentric legacy which de-nigrates (to become black) African religious traditions and turns them into mere superstitions, she explains the dialogue between Sethe and Beloved's spirit. In order to sustain this new approach of the novel, Christian talks from her “own Caribbean culture” (Christian, 2007).

“Poetry and thought are only joined when each of them keeps its own separate being” states Paul Celan, the Romanian writer who inspired Salcedo's work (cited in Speranza Atlas portátil 160, original in Spanish). On the language Celan chooses to write on —German—, Speranza notes that it coincides with the language that marked the horror of the Shoah where Celan's parents died. “In order to keep on writing after Auschwitz, it was necessary to expropriate oneself from language and self-translate into a new estranged language with a change of heart that recreates it (“All of Celan's poetry is a German translation”, wrote George Steiner, quoted by Speranza, 2013: 160)

This is well known for writers who, struggling between the “Major I” [*Yo mayúsculo*] and the “minor I” [*yo minúsculo*] publicly say that literature will not free its readers, nor metaphors will “overthrow fossilized powers”, but it will merely introduce a change in the ordinary pace of our lives. Still inhabited by the anguish of the Master's discourse, and the metaphor of the desert, the Mapuche woman poet writes: “I still have sand in my joints and no words left” [*Tengo todavía arena en las coyunturas y no hay palabras*] (Ancalao, 2010). Philip explains that her search is aimed at finding ways of “not telling” a story (Zong' story), echoing Toni Morrison's statement “This is not a story to pass on”. Thus, she manages to solve the conflict of an apocalyptic climate of primary violence, but even more importantly is the fact that the hypnotic imagery brought about when reading her will forever engrave our memories. Word becomes i-mage (imago), and follows the borders of a particular silhouette that will then transfigure. She is, in a way, inviting her readers to imagine other disjointed silhouettes (known in Statistics as “point clouds”, which may become tridimensional data) to live on through the narration. She

strengthens the boundaries of writing and even of her own art, to allow us to confirm, us alone, that “this is not a story to pass on”.

Imprescriptibility, Memory Politics, and fights against impunity have become counter-narratives mapped in our geographies; blindly testing alternative paths in the outskirts of the consecutive transformations of our intuitive mappings, consequences of our attempts to strengthen the weak corners of feminist praxis. Indeed, *Beloved* suggests that when we follow their footsteps we realize that women's lives have not disappeared entirely, and that we need to advocate in favor of public policies that help us claim those lives and never forget. A day will come when there will be *no more dead women because of femicide*.

## References

- Abramovich, V. (2010). “Responsabilidad estatal por violencia de género: comentarios sobre el caso “Campo Algodonero en la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos”, en Anuario de Derechos Humanos del Centro de derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Chile.
- Ancalao, L. (2010). *Mujeres a la intemperie - Pu zomo wekuntu mew*. Buenos Aires: El Suri Porfiado ediciones.
- Ancalao, L. (2010). “El idioma silenciado”. En *Boca de Sapo. Revista de Arte, Literatura y Pensamiento*, Año XI, N° 6, Buenos Aires.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1983). *Borderlans/La frontera. The New Mestiza*. San Francisco,.
- Barthes, R. (1982). “Inaugural lecture, College de France”, in Susan Sontag (Ed.), *A Barthes Reader* New York: Hill and Wang, pp. 457-478.
- Berendt, J. (1981). *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond*. Translated by H. and B. Bredigkeit with Dan Morgenstern. Lawrence Hill Books.

- Beroiz, L. (2012). “Las “heterotopías” retóricas de Marlene Nourbese Philip y Giannina Braschi: Intersecciones de lo posmoderno y lo poscolonial en *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* y *El imperio de los Sueños*”. Presentada al I Congreso de Estudios Poscoloniales y II Jornadas de Feminismo Poscolonial, Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires, 5 al 7 de diciembre.
- Bidaseca, K. (2013). “Feminicidio y políticas de la memoria. Exhalaciones sobre la abyección de la violencia sobre las mujeres”. En Alejandro Grimson y Karina Bidaseca (Coord.) *Hegemonía cultural y políticas de la diferencia*, Bs. As. Ed. CLACSO.
- Bidaseca, K. & Sierra, M. (2012). *Postales femeninas desde el fin del mundo. El Sur y las políticas de la memoria*, Buenos Aires, Ed. Godot.
- Bidaseca, K. (2010). *Perturbando el texto colonial. Los Estudios (Pos) coloniales en América latina*. Buenos Aires: Ed. SB.
- Bidaseca, K. (2012). “Sitios liminales entre cordilleras invisibles. Cartografías poscoloniales del Tercer Feminismo”. En Sierra, Marta (Coord.) *Geografías imaginarias: Espacios de resistencia y crisis en América Latina*. Chile. Ed. Cuatro propio. En prensa.
- Buigues, I. (2010). “Desde el empoderamiento Imágenes extremas contra el capitalismo patriarcal globalizador: combatividad y resistencia frente al feminicidio mexicano y la desterritorialización chicana”. En *Arte y políticas de identidad*, Murcia, España. Vol. 3, diciembre. <http://revistas.um/esp/ap>
- Christian, B. (2007). *New Black Feminist Criticism, 1985-2000*. Ed. Gloria Bowles, M. Giulia Fabi y Arlene R. Keizer, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- González, S. (2005) *Huesos en el desierto*, Ed. Anagrama.



- Grüner, E. (2010). *La oscuridad y las luces. Capitalismo, cultura y revolución*, Buenos Aires, ED-HASA.
- Healy, T. (2008). *Gendered Struggles Against Globalisation in Mexico*, London: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Lagarde, M. (2006). “Feminicidio”. Conferencia pronunciada en la Universidad de Oviedo.
- Maldonado, A. (2008). “Feminicidio en Guatemala”, en Red Chilena Contra la Violencia *Tipificación del femicidio en Chile. Un debate abierto*, Santiago de Chile.
- Minh-Ha, T. (1989). *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2008). “Al borde del mundo. Fronteras, territorialidades y soberanía en África”, en Mezzadra, S. *Estudios postcoloniales. Ensayos fundamentales*, Madrid: Traficantes de sueños.
- Millán, M. (2011) “Mujer Mapuche. Explotación colonial sobre el territorio corporal”, en Bidaseca, K. (co-comp). *Feminismos y poscolonialidad. Descolonizando el feminismo en y desde América latina* Buenos Aires: Ed. Godot.
- Mohanty, C. (2003). “Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles”. Duke University Press in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*.
- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved* [2005 re-edition], London: Vintage.
- Pacheco, C. (2005). *El oro del desierto*. México: Random House Mondadori.
- Philip, M. (1989). *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press.

Pizarnik, A. (1968). *La condesa sangrienta*. Buenos Aires, Libros del Zorro Rojo.

Ranciére, J. (2009). *The Emancipated Spectator*. Verso Books.

Rojas Blanco, Clara (2005) “Voces que silencian y silencios que enuncian”, en *Nóesis, Género, feminismo(s) y violencia desde la frontera norte*, Vol. 15, nº 18. Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, México.

Román-Odio, C. (2013). *Sacred Iconographies in Chicana Cultural Productions*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Sandoval, C. (2000). “U.S. Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement” *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, pp. 40-63

Segato, R. (2011). “Género y colonialidad: en busca de claves de lectura y un vocabulario estratégico decolonial”. Bidaseca, K. (Co-comp.). *Feminismos y poscolonialidad. Descolonizando el feminismo desde y en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Godot. 16-47

Segato, R. (2010). “Femi-geno-cidio como crimen en el fuero internacional de los Derechos Humanos: el derecho a nombrar el sufrimiento en el derecho” Publicado en Rosa-Linda y Cynthia Bejarano: *Una cartografía del feminicidio en las Américas* México, DF: UNAM-CIIECH/Red de Investigadoras por la Vida y la Libertad de las Mujeres.

Speranza, G. (2012). *Atlas portátil de América Latina. Arte y ficciones errantes*, Buenos Aires, Anagrama.

Spíndola, J. (2012) “Poesía mapuche: memorias y fronteras culturales. *Liliana Ancalao y Adriana Paredes Pinda, dos poetas mapuche contemporáneas*”. Tesis de grado. Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia - Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales. Sede Trelew.

Spivak, G. (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*,  
Harvard University Press.