Disobedience: Feminist Resistance to Feminicidal Violence in Contemporary Narrative Literature from Latin America

By

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I examine how 21st-century novels and short stories written by women authors from Brazil and Argentina participate in the contemporary debates about feminicide in Latin America. Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde introduced the legal and political concept of feminicide to the murder investigations at Ciudad Juárez, at the US-Mexico border, in the 1990s. Feminicide addresses the killing of women because of their gender, and it has been studied in various disciplines, such as law, anthropology, sociology, and public health. Feminist scholars such as Rita Segato affirm that this extreme form of violence against women is structural and instrumental to maintaining a hierarchical social organization. Over the past decade, massive protests throughout Latin America helped popularize the concept, and several literary works focusing on this topic have been published. Although violence against women is an age-old problem that has always been present in literature, the conceptualization of feminicide has given contemporary writers a feminist framework to approach the topic anew. This phenomenon is only just beginning to be addressed by literary scholars.

My dissertation highlights the aesthetic dimensions of the political struggle against feminicidal violence while exploring the potential of literature to create knowledge, build community, and perform acts of disobedience to a patriarchal political order. In Chapter 1, I study the nonfiction novel *Chicas muertas* (2014) by Argentine author Selva Almada. I argue that *Chicas muertas* produces feminist theory about feminicide by exploring several narrative aesthetics, including journalistic chronicle, crime fiction, and autobiography. Moreover, *Chicas muertas* disrupts the national history of political violence by suggesting that feminicide is political and by centering on border towns in rural Argentina. In Chapter 2, I study how the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* (2019) by Brazilian author Patrícia Melo confronts the Myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil. By contrasting how the national justice system deals with violence against white middle-class women and violence against Indigenous women, this novel exposes the justice system's biases against women and against racialized communities. I argue that the novel suggests that confronting culturally constructed imaginaries about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women in Brazil is a necessary step in the feminist struggle to combat feminicide. In Chapter 3, I study the horror short

story “Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego” (2016), by Argentine author Mariana Enriquez. This story engages with the topic of female monstrosity as a response to feminicide. I argue that when women choose to transform themselves into she-monsters by walking through a bonfire and surviving, they are performing an act of embodied resistance to feminicidal violence.

Overall, this dissertation shows how feminist writers expand the conversation about feminicidal violence beyond simplistic victim-perpetrator paradigms that neglect systemic violence. Moreover, I contend that these works challenge national histories of political violence when they frame feminicide as political violence, exposing the biases of local and national justice systems against women and racialized communities. Finally, I sustain that feminist literature about feminicide co-create a counter-discourse about feminicide in dialogue with other feminist arts, scholarship, and activism.

To women everywhere.

And to the memory of my grandmother, Nena, who used to tell me lovingly to “close the book” when she saw me sitting with my legs wide open.

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Berkeley, California
June 10, 2024

Introduction

Naming Violence, Organizing Resistance

Y la culpa no era mía, ni dónde estaba, ni cómo vestía.
— Colectivo LasTesis, Valparaíso, Chile, 2019

Over the last decade, several massive protests have brought attention to the issue of violence against women in Latin America. In 2015, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Argentina to protest the murder of 14-year-old Chiara Páez and the hundreds of other cases of fatal violence against women and girls that had occurred the same year. The shared sense that things could no longer continue as they were led multitudes to the Argentinian marches. The use of the hashtag *#NiUnaMenos* (not one [woman] less) on social media helped spread the movement from Argentina to other countries across Latin America, where the grief and anger of Argentinian women resonated with their own. Although Latin American women's collective resistance to violence has a long history that predates the marches of 2015, the marches known by the slogan *Ni una menos* mark a shift in the conversation about violence against women and in the dimension of the feminist movements in the region.

A keyword for 21st-century Latin American feminists is *feminicidio* (feminicide), a legal and political concept referring to the killing of women because of their gender. Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos introduced the term *feminicidio* in the 1990s to describe the numerous murder investigations happening in Ciudad Juárez at the US-Mexico border. With the intention to offer a gender perspective to criminal investigations, Lagarde translated and reconceptualized the term femicide, originally coined by South African social scientist Diana E. H. Russel, who introduced the term in 1976 while testifying before the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women in Brussels. Since its introduction to the Latin American context, feminicide has been studied in several disciplines, including law, anthropology, and sociology. Feminist scholars and activists throughout Latin America have identified shared patterns and local differences, coming to understand feminicide as a structural violence that maintains a patriarchal political order and implicates all members of society.

The feminist conceptualization of feminicidal violence has given writers new vocabulary, leading to a growing number of literary works that name feminicide. As a researcher of literature written in Spanish and Portuguese, I have encountered depictions of violence against women in all periods of literary history. I began this research project by asking how the recent literature about feminicide differs from earlier works portraying violence against women. As I began to read feminist theories about feminicide, particularly in *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez* (2006) and *La guerra contra las mujeres* (2016) by Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato, I started to understand the connections between colonialism, capitalist exploitation of labor, and the patriarchal political order that mandates violence against women. Amidst the complexity of feminicidal violence, I wondered what literary works could offer to the understanding of feminicide. Moreover, in a world increasingly mediated by 60-second videos on social media, I asked how literature participates in the political struggle combating feminicidal violence.

Drawing from feminist traditions where storytelling is considered a form of knowledge production, especially from the work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015, posthumous), I approached contemporary narrative literature written by women as sources of knowledge with potential to

disrupt dominant discourses about feminicidal violence that blame the victimized women for what was done to them. Across three chapters, which I delineate below, my dissertation highlights aesthetic dimensions of the political struggle against feminicide, observing how literature functions as a creative space where familiar tropes of crime and horror fiction are reinvigorated to emphasize women's agency in resisting and changing oppressive power structures.

Being a woman author does not automatically result in literature informed by feminist theories. So, I have intentionally selected 21st-century narrative works that emphasize the systematic dimension of feminicidal violence from a gender-aware perspective while experimenting with literary form to anchor this project. These works include *Chicas muertas* (2014) by Argentine writer Selva Almada, *Mulheres empilhadas* (2019) by Brazilian writer Patrícia Melo, and "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" (2017) by Argentine writer Mariana Enríquez. The narrators and the protagonists of the selected narratives express an understanding of themselves as women and of feminicide as violence directed at women for being women. These works face questions of how to narrate feminicidal violence without revictimizing women, who can speak for those who were silenced by murder, and how to frame feminicide beyond individual cases of interpersonal violence. Moreover, these works dialogue with literary traditions that have historically excluded women authors and marginalized feminist perspectives.

My research is grounded on decolonial and transnational feminist theories that are necessarily intersectional. Besides the aforementioned feminist authors Rita Segato and Gloria Anzaldúa, my research also draws heavily from the works of Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) and María Lugones in "The Coloniality of Gender" (2008). These works support the idea, directly or indirectly, that violence against women is a fundamental piece of a political and economic order based on gendered and racial hierarchies. Moreover, they show how violence against women is not limited to interpersonal physical violence, but it also includes labor exploitation, which in Latin America is tied to racialization.

Although my theoretical framework can support research about feminicide in any Latin American country, I defined the scope of my research by focusing on the cases of Brazil and Argentina. As I discuss in the sections below, feminicide is a global issue demanding transnational feminist alliances to combat it more effectively. At the same time, each country has specific histories and different conditions affecting how each community makes sense of feminicide and what strategies of resistance are potentially more effective. Similarly, the literary traditions of each country are not closed systems and works circulate across borders. However, there are some differences that are evident in the works I selected for this study. For example, Argentina has a strong literary tradition dealing with the political violence of military dictatorships, and this theme reappears in both Almada's and Enriquez' works. On the other hand, Brazil has a strong literary tradition dealing with indigeneity and mixed-race identities, which reappear in Melo's work. By putting these two traditions together, I am able to explore different facets of feminicide.

Therefore, in this dissertation, I study how 21st-century novels and short stories written by women authors from Brazil and Argentina participate in the contemporary debates about violence against women in general and feminicide in particular. I argue that these feminist writers expand the conversation about feminicidal violence beyond simplistic victim-perpetrator paradigms that neglect systemic violence. Moreover, I contend that these works challenge national histories of political violence when they frame feminicide as political violence, exposing the biases of local and national justice systems against women and racialized communities.

Finally, I sustain that feminist literature about feminicide co-create a counter-discourse about feminicide in dialogue with other feminist arts, scholarship, and activism.

Feminicide: a Legal and Political Concept

The numerous murders of women and girls around Ciudad Juárez, a city at the Mexican border with the United States, have become a paradigmatic case of feminicidal violence for Latin American feminists. Many of the victims in Ciudad Juárez were young women, working class, mixed race, or Indigenous. Many of them worked in one of the *maquiladoras* near the border, foreign-owned factories producing goods for export. Activists and scholars such as Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, who participated in the criminal investigation of the murders in the 1990s, noticed the need for a gender perspective. The cases required the creation of specific terminology to address the gruesome torture, rape, and murder of women. In that context, Lagarde translated the English term femicide, originally coined by South African feminist Diana Russell, into *feminicidio*.

Russell started using the term femicide in 1976 while testifying before the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women in Brussels. She affirms that she first heard the term from American writer Carol Orlock, who told Russell in 1974 that she was preparing a collection of works about the topic (Radford and Russell xiv). Although Orlock's anthology was never published, Russell began using the term in her research and her activist work in California. However, it was only after the antifeminist massacre at the University of Montreal in 1989 that the term femicide began to be widely known among feminist scholars. Finally, in 1992, Russell and her colleague Jill Radford published the anthology of essays *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing*, which has become an important reference for the study of violence against women in contemporaneity.

In their 1992 book, Russel and Radford define femicide as "the killing of women by men because they are women" (xiv). Since then, feminists have been negotiating the meaning of femicide and how it can or cannot function within the legal justice system. Although the vast majority of the perpetrators of interpersonal violence against women are men, this may not always be the case. Moreover, the reliance on the category "woman" is another point of contention since the definition of who is a woman and what makes a woman continues to be debated inside and outside of academic circles[1]. When Russell and Radford used the term femicide in the early 1990s, they were not blind to the different identities, vulnerabilities, and privileges that each person who may fall under the category "woman" may have. The scholars speak of racist femicide, homophobic femicide, and marital femicide to specify the intersecting factors that may be at work in different cases (Radford and Russell 7). I consider transphobic femicide a crucial addition to Russell and Radford's examples of the different factors motivating violence against women[2].

[1] A recent example took place in December 2019, when British author J. K. Rowling published a comment on Twitter (now X) with transphobic views. Later in 2020 Rowling further developed her anti-trans remarks and she was labeled by many activists as a TERF (Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminist).

[2] The inclusion of trans women in this discussion should not erase the specific ways trans women are targeted, as Talia Mae Bettcher discusses in "Understanding Transphobia: Authenticity and Sexual Violence" (204). The specificities of transphobia only enriches the analysis of patriarchal violence and further exposes how the system harms all women.

In this dissertation, I use the term "woman," and I write about violence against women as a kind of gender-based violence. Mine is a political choice that aims to highlight the violent subjugation and control of those persons who experience life as a woman—regardless of sex assigned at birth—and the cultural inferiorization to the point of disposability of all that is considered feminine. It is an imperfect and thorny umbrella term that, in this discussion of violence against women, includes cis and trans women, as well as queer femmes, *travestis*[3], and other feminine gender identities.

Russel and Radford describe violence against women as a spectrum where femicide is at one end. As Russell and Radford affirm, "the notion of a continuum further facilitates the analysis of male sexual violence as a form of control central to the maintenance of patriarchy" (4). Moreover, they expand their concept of femicide to include "situations in which women are permitted to die as a result of misogynous attitudes or social practices" (Radford and Russell 7). According to this idea, when a woman dies from an unsafe, criminalized abortion, her death should also qualify as femicide (Radford and Russell 7). Thus, the idea of femicidal violence makes visible the multiple forms of violence employed to maintain a patriarchal social order besides murder. Their concept of femicide provides a lens into the practices that support positions of dominance and oppression.

In turn, Lagarde's translation and reconceptualization of *feminicidio* in the context of the murders of Ciudad Juárez gave name to an age-old problem and offered a conceptual framework to approach the issue throughout Latin America. Lagarde's concerns with institutional violence are one of the reasons why she chose to use *feminicidio* instead of *femicidio* in her translation of the concept into Spanish. Lagarde not only created a term specific to the Latin American context, but she also hoped to avoid people's misunderstanding of femicide as any homicide in which the victim is a woman (*homicidio femenino*). *Feminicidio* speaks of the motivation for the murder being rooted in the victim's gender, as it relates to the category "woman" within a patriarchal culture. Moreover, Lagarde wanted "to name the ensemble of violations of women's human rights" (xv). According to Lagarde, "the impunity that stems from the inaction, insufficiency, or complicity of state institutions with gender inequality contributes to feminicidal violence [...] This constitutes institutional gender violence by omission, negligence, or complicity of the authorities with the assailants when it is a question of violence inflicted on women by persons or groups" (xxi). Thus, *feminicidio* emphasizes the interconnected violence of institutions and social practices against women beyond interpersonal violence.

The terms *feminicidio* and *femicidio* are used interchangeably in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries. As the term became part of the everyday vocabulary of the general public, the nuances that Lagarde intended to create may have become lost in translation. In this dissertation, I am intentionally working with Lagarde's term *feminicidio* and its reverse translation into English, the term feminicide, for three reasons: to reaffirm the connections between interpersonal, institutional, and cultural violence; to highlight the ways in which the

[3] Sometimes translated into English as "transgender," other times as "crossdresser," *travesti* is a gender identity with a history of marginalization and resistance in Latin America. According to Lohana Berkins, founder of the Asociación de Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual, *travesti* is a political identity that has been appropriated and resignified by travestis themselves. In the past, doctors and other authorities described travestis as men who dress in clothes that correspond to women. However, Latin American *travestis* resist this definition. Instead, many *travestis* claim a position outside the gender binary and do not seek surgical procedures to "reacomodarse en la lógica binaria como mujeres o varones" (Berkins). T*ravesti* is a feminine identity and in many cases *travestis* adopt feminine pronouns and articles (*ela/ella, a/la travesti*) and a feminine gender presentation. Some may choose to identify as women, while others prefer to identify as *travesti*.

concept of feminicide blurs the borders between the public and the private spheres—which I will discuss below—; and to emphasize the contributions of Latin American feminists to the theorization of feminicide. I am following the lead of scholars Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, who also work with the term feminicide instead of femicide when writing in English. Their choice is a political move that underscores a feminist transborder perspective from the Global South and defines Latin America as a place where theory is produced (Fregoso 4). Feminicide, therefore, is a concept developed by Latin American feminists. It is historically tied to the US-Mexico border but not limited to any specific geographical space.

The emphasis Lagarde, Fregoso, and Bejarano place on the state's complicity with feminicide blurs the conceptual border between the public and private spheres. When the state's institutions fail to address the issue and hold perpetrators accountable, they are actively contributing to the problem. Violence against women, then, is not only interpersonal violence, but it is also state-sponsored violence grounded on broad social inequalities. The ways in which institutions such as the police, the courts, and the health care system deal with violence against women demonstrate the lower position of women in the social hierarchy. Feminicide, as Fregoso and Bejarano underscore, is "the murders of women and girls founded on a power structure" (5). In their work around feminicide, Fregoso and Bejarano highlight the "gendered nature of practices and behaviors, along with the performance of gender norms" (3). Thus, the concept of feminicide provides a lens of analysis of the intersection of gender, race, and class in local contexts in relation to global contexts.

In the legal field, the complexity of a term such as feminicide often raises disputes, highlighting the challenges in the classification of crimes as such. In order to classify a homicide as feminicide, it is necessary to recognize that citizens who fall under the category "woman" are targeted because they are women. The particularities of each case and the widespread misinformation about gender—often a total denial of the existence of gender—are frequently used against victims and their families during trials. As I write this introduction, there are two highly mediated cases that took place recently in Brazil and Argentina that exemplify the difficulty of reporting, investigating, collecting evidence, and condemning feminicide. The case of Julieta Hernández, a Venezuelan itinerant artist who was murdered in the north of Brazil in December 2023, and the case of Andrea Amarante, Pamela Cobas, Roxana Figueroa, and Sofía Castro Riglos, who were attacked in the neighborhood of Barracas, in Buenos Aires in May 2024.

Julieta's case has raised debates on social media months after the crime, in June 2024, because Brazilian courts in the state of Amazonas, where the crime took place, accused the perpetrators of rape, *latrocínio* (robbery followed by murder), and concealment of a corpse. The crime of *latrocínio* emphasizes material property, while feminicide stresses the gendered motives behind the violation of Julieta's human rights. Activists and Julieta's family affirm that her murder was feminicide because it was motivated by misogyny and xenophobia. The *Ministério das Mulheres* released an official note on June 5, 2024, in support of the efforts that Julieta's family and the *União Brasileira de Mulheres* are putting towards recognizing Julieta's murder as feminicide ("Nota"). Julieta was a professional clown who traveled by bicycle throughout Brazil, staging her performances.

The case of the four women from Barracas lies at the intersection of misogyny and homophobia, as the victims were lesbians. A male neighbor, who had been harassing the women for months, threw a molotov cocktail into the room where they were sleeping, killing three of the four women by burning. Only Sofía has survived. Many activists, including the Colectivo Ni una

menos, have been naming the crime as *feminicidio* and *lesbicidio*. However, on June 5, 2024, the judge of the case, Edmundo Rabbione, decided not to treat their murder as feminicides in spite of the men's proven history of harassment and threats against the women, as some of their neighbors testified ("Lesbicidio"). The horror of this recent crime echoes the fictional short story "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego," by Mariana Enríquez, which I study in the third chapter of this dissertation.

In Argentina, where the massive marches demanding "*¡Ni una menos!*" emerged, feminicide has been in the penal code as aggravated murder since 2012. The text of the Argentine law penalizes with life imprisonment men who kill women because of their gender. Although the text in Spanish uses the words "violencia de género", "orientación sexual," and "identidad de género o su expresión," the law addresses gender-based violence against women more specifically, constituting the crime of feminicide ("Ley 26.791"). On the other hand, in Brazil, feminicide has been a type of aggravated murder listed in the penal code since 2015. A homicide is qualified as feminicide when the motive is "a condição de sexo feminino," which can be verified when the crime involves domestic violence and when it involves "menosprezo ou discriminação à condição de mulher" ("Lei 13.104"). Although the Brazilian penal code had a law addressing domestic violence against women since 2006, *Lei Maria da Penha*, there was no way to recognize the gendered motivation behind the crime of murder prior to the inclusion of feminicide into the penal code. The 2006 law, which I discuss in more detail in the second chapter of this dissertation, addresses domestic violence against women without specifying that the motive is rooted in women's gender.

The challenges feminists face to work with feminicide in the legal field call attention the foundational role of patriarchal oppression in the configuration of power through all areas of society. Rita Segato affirms that "la manutención del patriarcado es una *cuestión de Estado* y, de la misma forma, que preservar la capacidad letal de los hombres y garantizar que la violencia que cometen permanezca impune es *cuestión de Estado*" (*La guerra* 134). The legal debates on feminicide move from local to national and international courts, where the different cases that could be framed as feminicide find difficulties around the imprecision of terms and procedures. Segato responds these difficulties by saying: "Si la ley no puede dar cuenta de las complejidades y transformaciones del accionar humano ni es capaz de valerse de las contribuciones de la antropología y de la sociología para formular derechos y garantizar protección debería desistir de su intento normativo y reinventarse como sistema" (*La guerra* 136). Segato calls for strategic definitions to properly address different forms of feminicidal violence in the justice and health systems while maintaining the focus on gender relations (*La guerra* 140).

Although feminicide is a type of violence that targets women as a generic group, the systemic aspect present in theoretical debates on feminicide is difficult to articulate in cases where the crime appears to be private, domestic, or familiar. According to Segato, these difficulties relate to the hierarchical constitution of public and private spheres, where crimes that take place in the home or crimes involving rape privatize violence (*La guerra* 143). Even describing rape in war contexts as "sexual violence" instead of "violence through sexual means" can be a problem because it denies victims the chance to treat this violence as torture (Segato *La guerra 145).* Working with the legal system, be it local, national, or international, requires navigating the way it is structured by and structures a patriarchal political order.

Feminicide and the Modern-Colonial-Patriarchal Order

Segato offers an important perspective on feminicidal violence that relates to the separation of the public and private spheres as a historical process. According to Segato, the patriarchy, "o la relación de género basada en la desigualdad, es la estructura política más arcaica y permanente de la humanidad" (*La guerra* 18). Segato affirms that the existence of low-intensity patriarchy (*patriarcado de baja intensidad*) in Indigenous communities in the Americas played a role in the European colonial project because the preexisting mandate of masculinity made men vulnerable to the exemplariness of victorious masculinity, turning the defeated men into a hinge piece between their community and the mandate of masculinity (*La guerra* 19). The low-impact patriarchy has been transformed into a highly lethal political order, a patriarchy of higher impact. Segato affirms that in this process, "el hombre con minúscula, de sus tareas y espacios particulares en el mundo tribal, se trasforma en el Hombre con mayúscula, sinónimo y paradigma de Humanidad, de la esfera pública colonial-moderna" (20).

Segato suggests that the expression "patriarcal-colonial-modernidad" is well suited to refer to the modern colonial period because it calls attention to the primordial role of the patriarchy in appropriating women's bodies as the first colony (*La guerra* 19). Segato dialogues with the decolonial thought of Latin American scholars such as Aníbal Quijano, who developed the concept of coloniality of power, addressing the legacies of European colonialism in Latin America. Quijano argues that the European colonization of the Americas established a hierarchical structure in which white European men have supremacy, access, and authority over the bodies, labor, and knowledge of Black and Indigenous people, as well as women. According to Quijano, the construction of race in the Americas played a fundamental role in the development of capitalism and the Eurocentric idea of modernity (203). The concept of coloniality of power has been further developed by scholars such as María Lugones, Walter Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, among others.

Both Segato and Lugones foreground the role of gender in the modern-colonial matrix of power. However, Segato disagrees with Lugones on some aspects of Lugones' theory about the origin of the gender hierarchy "man/woman" in Latin America. Lugones' theory draws from the work of Oyéronké Oyewùmí in *The Invention of Women* (1997) to argue that the gender system imposed by colonizers created a binary opposition in which humans without a penis were classified as women according to European parameters of womanhood. People who were classified as women lost access to power, to ritual leadership, and participation in the public sphere (8). Moreover, the modern-colonial gender system also imposed heterosexuality, which contributed to the control of women and the control over production, including knowledge production (Lugones 15). For Lugones, the category "woman" is a modern-colonial construction. In response to Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, Lugones highlights the role of gender as a fundamental organizing category along with race.

Lugones' theory of gender in Latin America underscores that the modern/colonial concept of "woman" is inseparable from the idea of race, as it attributes different characteristics to white women and colonized women of color. Lugones uses the terms "light" and "dark" to refer to different sides of the modern/colonial[4] gender system. She explains that "the characterization of white European women as fragile and sexually passive opposed them to colonized women of color, including enslaved women, who were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor" (Lugones 13). This differentiation allowed white bourgeois women to be constructed as hegemonic allies to

[4] Here I am using a slash in modern/colonial because that's how Lugones writes the term. Segato sometimes hyphenizes *patriarchal-colonial-modernidad* and other times uses the slash.

white bourgeois men and as reproducers of class and racial standing. However, this also meant white bourgeois women did not have control over the means of production, including knowledge production, and they were banned from the sphere of collective authority (Lugones 15). On the other hand, Lugones affirms that differently to white women, colonized women not only lost the rights to participate in leadership positions but were also reduced "to animality, to forced sex with white colonizers, to such deep labor that often people died working" (16). The racial component of the modern/colonial gender system points to the fact that the gendering and the racialization of people in the Americas happened simultaneously and that the two are not independent of each other nor from the organization of labor. Lugones' theory, therefore, contextualizes the category of "woman" within the coloniality of power.

On the other hand, Segato's theory is based on the preexistence of a patriarchal order that had a hierarchical structure where women and men had different roles and statuses. Segato affirms that Indigenous communities had a system in which men occupied what is now referred to as the public sphere while women occupied the domestic sphere. According to Segato, the spheres were complementary, and the domestic sphere was complete in itself. The domestic sphere was not devalued and excluded as it is today under the "high impact patriarchy." In the Indigenous system, both spheres participated in the community's political life. Thus, women had political power (Segato, *La Guerra* 117). The impact of European colonialism included the transformation of these spheres, the introduction of a new morality that reduced women's bodies to objects, the inflation of Indigenous men's political control within their communities, and the reduction of their power relative to white men (Segato, *La guerra* 116).

In the current configuration of the patriarchal political order, the public sphere defines what is universal, central, and political, while the private sphere has less importance, being marginal, minoritarian, and extrapolitical (*La guerra* 23). According to Segato, there is an abyssal hierarchy between the spheres, and she calls the present configuration a "totalitarismo de la esfera pública" (*La guerra* 114). What is considered political takes place in the public sphere, while actions taking place in the private sphere are marginalized. One of the consequences of this configuration is that violence against women is often considered a private matter or a family issue as opposed to political violence. The hierarchical separation of the public and the private, Segato states, helps mask the foundational role of patriarchal oppression in the configuration of society as a whole and as the base of all powers (*La guerra* 23). Segato affirms that the totalizing public sphere makes women more vulnerable to violence and turns the perception of violence against women into a marginal issue instead of central to society's political structure (*La guerra* 117).

In my view, Segato's theory does not disqualify Lugones' theory. Instead, Segato builds upon Lugones, adding nuance to the understanding that European colonization drastically changed the social structures throughout the Americas, including those we now call gender and sexuality. In combination, their theories about the configuration of gender relations in relation to the process of colonization provide a basis for feminists to understand how feminicidal violence is a form of political violence. The concept of feminicide questions the separation and hierarchization of the spheres and makes it possible to treat domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based violence as a social problem instead of a private or individual issue. The notion of feminicide brings violence against women from the margins to the center and locates it at the social structure's base. Therefore, using the term feminicide to typify a crime, whether it is in law or in literature, implies a recognition of the gendered structures of power in society.

Feminicide as a Language of Power

Among the many contributions Rita Segato makes to the conceptualization of violence against women in Latin America, one of the most prominent is the idea that feminicide is a form of writing on women's bodies. Segato developed this idea while studying the case of Ciudad Juárez, where many of the numerous cases of feminicide are not instances of domestic or intimate partner violence. Very often, these feminicide cases were tied to drug cartels and other politically and economically powerful groups disputing dominance among themselves and the state. For this reason, Segato affirms that the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez are "crímenes de segundo estado" perpetrated by a mafia-like group who seek to establish themselves as sovereigns, to control and to give shape to social life in parallel to the existing state (*La Escritura* 30). In order to achieve their desired social standing, the perpetrators turn the violence into a spectacle, which seals the pact among the group members while serving as an example for the others (Segato, *La Escritura* 29). Thus, Segato's analysis of the case of Ciudad Juárez suggests that feminicidal violence is a matter of power, authority, and sovereignty.

The type of violence against women happening in Ciudad Juárez is comparable to the violence of colonization. Because feminicide often includes rape, Segato draws from her previous studies with incarcerated male rapists in Brazil and affirms that "[l]a violación es el acto alegórico por excelencia de la definición Schmittiana de la soberanía: control legislador sobre un territorio y sobre el cuerpo del otro como anexo a ese territorio" (*La Escritura* 20). The violent appropriation of women's bodies through rape and murder directly relates to the appropriation of territory. Segato juxtaposes feminicide with genocide and states that the goal of feminicide is not to eliminate the entire female population but to demonstrate control over a territory and its population.

Segato's theory states that communication in the language of violence against women takes place on two axes: vertical and horizontal. The vertical axis is the communication between the perpetrator and the victim. In this axis, the discourse has "un cariz punitivo y el agresor un perfil de moralizador, de paladín de la moral social porque, en ese imaginario compartido, el destino de la mujer es ser contenida, censurada, disciplinada, reducida, por el gesto violento de quien reencarna, por medio de ese acto, la función soberana" (Segato, *La Escritura* 23). By "imaginario compartido" Segato is referring to all the ideas about gender, femininity, and masculinity within a society. Segato states that within a system where men have supremacy over women's bodies, the use of violence, particularly sexual violence, reinforces their position in such a system. Furthermore, it communicates to the victim that he, the aggressor, has the power to control and punish any perceived transgression.

The horizontal axis proposed by Segato is the communication between the perpetrator and his peers. Every act of violence against women, including rape, is an act of enunciation in which the perpetrator sends a message to his peers. Whether the interlocutors are present at the scene or not, they exist in the perpetrator's mind and are the intended receiver of the message (Segato, *La Escritura* 22). When men rape women, they are able to prove their masculinity within the modern-colonial-patriarchal order, and they are granted access to the "cofradía viril" (Segato, *La Escritura* 24). The notion of the horizontal axis further explains Segato's theory about the murderers of Ciudad Juárez using femicidal violence to establish and display territorial control, as mentioned above.

In addition, the horizontal axis suggests that masculinity is an acquired status that must be reconfirmed frequently through rituals that include offering women as a tribute (Segato, *La Escritura* 24). Segato affirms that the victimized person is not the primary receiver of the message. Instead, the privileged interlocutors are the perpetrator's allies and his competitors. In the case of Ciudad Juárez, the perpetrator's peers and enemies could include business competitors, local and federal authorities, activists, academics, journalists, relatives, and friends of the victims (*La Escritura* 25). Violence against women, therefore, is a language used to establish and maintain power. In the case of the modern-colonial-patriarchal order, the language of power is written on women's bodies.

The question of how domestic and intimate partner violence against women fit into the language of feminicide can also be answered through the idea of territorial domination. In the modern-colonial-patriarchy, the home is a territory where the men can abuse women because she is part of the territory under their control, while public spaces are a territory that can be disputed and can display power. According to Segato, "en uno, se trata de una constatación de un dominio ya existente; en el otro, de una exhibición de capacidad de dominio que debe ser reeditada con cierta regularidad y puede ser asociada a los gestos rituales de renovación de los votos de virilidad" (*La Escritura* 29). Even though there are distinct functions and characteristics between domestic violence and violence taking place in public spaces, Segato shows that in both instances, violence is connected to the control of a territory and its population. While the mafia-like group in Ciudad Juárez seeks to establish regional power, men in heteropatriarchal families seek to maintain their position within the family structure.

Feminist Aesthetics of Resistance to Feminicide

> *Cidinha não sabia como se explicar ao polícia. A língua do "p" não tinha explicação.*
> —Clarice Lispector, "A língua do 'p'"

In 1974, Brazilian author Clarice Lispector published a short story in which a woman named Cidinha escaped rape and murder by deciphering the coded language two men were using to plan a violent act against her during a train trip. Cidinha was an English teacher, and she noticed the men were speaking *a língua do 'p'*, a coded language formed from Portuguese by adding the letter P (*pê*) to the beginning of each syllable of every word in a sentence. When Cidinha understood that the men were planning to attack her, she figured she could escape by pretending to be a prostitute. So she raised up her skirt, and she started singing and making exaggerated sensual moves to the point of ridicule. The train's ticket collector noticed her when he was passing by and told the conductor. They informed the police, and Cidinha was arrested at the next station. Although she escaped the two men who were planning to rape and kill her, she stayed in jail for three days, accused of prostitution. When she finally was released, she found out through the newspaper that a young woman who entered the train while she was leaving had been raped and killed.

Lispector's story was published decades before feminists conceptualized feminicide, giving a name to a kind of violence that has affected women for centuries. There are many aspects of feminicide that "A língua do 'p'" bring to the surface, including the omission of the authorities to protect women on the one hand and the criminalization of sex workers on the other hand. These elements of the story deserve a long analysis, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I want to highlight how this story plays with the idea of language when narrating

about violence against women before feminicide had a name. The language the men were using is a popular language game that Brazilian children learn and play with in many contexts, even in school. So it is ironic that they would use this language to speak of rape and murder when it is not difficult to recognize *a língua do 'p.'* For Cidinha, however, the coded language was not a game. Cidinha could not explain to the police what had happened to her and what had not happened either because "a língua do 'p' não tinha explicação" (68). Lispector's story highlights the importance of having a language to describe, explain, and combat feminicidal violence.

Since the introduction of *feminicidio* to the context of Ciudad Juárez in the 1990s, feminist scholars, activists, writers, filmmakers, and artists have acquired a new vocabulary to discuss this age-old problem. Artists and writers have created many kinds of responses through fiction, documentary, or a mix of both. Mexican Filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, for example, investigates the cases of Ciudad Juárez in the award-winning documentary *Señorita extraviada*, released in 2001. Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño engages with this issue in the novel *2666*, published posthumously in 2004. More recently, in 2018, Mexican artist Teresa Margolles explored the topics of death and gender-based violence in the exhibition *Ya basta hijos de puta*[5], in which she paid homage to Karla, a transgender sex worker murdered in Ciudad Juárez in 2016. Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza has also engaged with feminicide in the memoir *El invencible verano de Liliana* (2021), where she tells the story of her sister who was killed in 1990 and explores the facet of feminicidal violence about intimate partner violence. As I was writing this introduction, Rivera Garza's novel received the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for this work, refreshing the conversation about feminicide and literature across the Americas.

As I mentioned above, feminicide is a concept historically tied to the US-Mexico border but not limited to that space. As the massive feminist marches that began in Argentina in 2015 have shown, feminists throughout the Americas resonated with the violence they experience in their own countries. In Argentina, the number of new publications on this topic has grown noticeably since then. According to literary critic Angélica Tornero, the ubiquitous presence of this subject in Argentina's recent literary production is evidence of the existence of a "*literatura del feminicidio"* (42). Literary critic Tatiana Navallo compiled a list of literary and academic works that discuss the subject while affirming that the typification of feminicide in the Argentine Penal Code in 2012 created the conditions for the production and consumption of material around this theme (69). Along similar lines, literary critic Leonardo Graná compiled a list of publications about the topic, including fiction, nonfiction, and scholarly work (79)[6]. All three critics comment that violence against women is not a new topic in Argentine literature. However, the way authors have portrayed femicidal violence over the past ten years differs from how others have done previously.

According to Tornero, in the recent literature about feminicide "los asesinatos de mujeres ya no son representados como actos perpetrados por quienes padecen alguna alteración mental o como daños colaterales de un móvil primario, por ejemplo, el robo, o como medidas correctivas, sino a la manera de actos cometidos por allegados (padres, esposos, novios, ex-novios, etc.) que

[5] Padiglione d'Arte Contemporaneo, Milan, Italy, March 28 - October 6, 2018.

[6] Some of the works that were listed by the aforementioned scholars include *La virgen cabeza* (2009) and *Beya (Le viste la cara a Dios)* (2011) by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, *Nación vacuna* (2013) by Fernanda Gacría Lao, *La chica pájaro* (2015) by Paula Bombara, *Hay cadáveres* (2015) by Lucila Lastero, *Mandinga de amor* (2016) by Luciana de Mello, *La guerra contra las mujeres* (2016) by Rita Segato, *Violencia de género: las mentiras del patriarcado* (2017) by Liliana Hendel, *Errantes* (2018) by Florencia Etcheves, *Mona* (2019) by Pola Oloixarac, *Filósofa Punk. Una Memoria* (2019) by Esther Díaz, among many others.

ejercen violencia contra las mujeres por el hecho de ser mujeres" (42). Tornero indicates a change in the way gender-based violence is portrayed in literature that resonates the feminist conceptualization of feminicide, as discussed above. Tornero's observation reinforces the idea that the development of feminicide as a legal and political category provides a different vocabulary and a new way to frame an old and familiar problem.

In Brazilian literature, violence against women is also a ubiquitous topic. A retrospective look under the lens of feminicide reveals many works that engaged with this theme before there was a legal and political vocabulary to address it. Short stories written by women authors, such as the aforementioned "A língua do 'p'" (1974) by Clarice Lispector and "Venha ver o pôr do sol" (1970) by Lygia Fagundes Telles, are examples of literature engaging specifically with feminicidal violence. However, differently from the case of Argentina, Brazil has not produced a "*literatura do feminicídio*" of high volume in the last decade. Among the literary publications that are closer in time to the massive feminist marches that renewed feminist movements in Latin America since 2015, the short story "Maria" (2014) by Conceição Evaristo is one of the few examples I have found that portrays a feminicide. However, many of the stories in the same anthology, *Olhos d'Água*, portray different kinds of violence against women, including economic and racial. Other examples are the novels *Mulheres empilhadas* (2019) by Patrícia Melo, which I study in the second chapter of this dissertation, the very recent novel *Caminhando com os mortos* (2023) by Micheliny Verunschk, and the lesser-known nonfiction novel *Em nome da filha* (2019), by Sulamita Esteliam.

The fact that feminicide has not been a central theme in many literary works over the last decade in Brazil does not mean that feminicide is not a relevant topic for Brazilian feminists. On the contrary, Brazil is one of the countries in Latin America with the highest numbers of feminicide. The presence of multiple forms of violence against women besides feminicide in the literary works of authors such as Aline Bei, Tatiana Salem Levy, Carla Madeira, Eliana Alves Cruz, and others attests to the relevance of the problem for writers and scholars. For this reason, I find it important to study this issue in the context of Brazil and to put it in dialogue with the Argentine context. I believe the experiences emerging in the Argentine context illuminate some of the shadows in the Brazilian context and vice versa.

Beyond the mere appearance of the term feminicide in the pages of the literary works that I selected for this research project, in the next pages, I explore how Selva Almada, Patrícia Melo, and Mariana Enriquez create an aesthetics of resistance to feminicidal violence. Their approach to feminicide as the central theme makes visible the multiple forms of violence at the intersections of class, race, gender, nationality, and coloniality. They expose how the violent assertion of dominance over women's bodies maintains a patriarchal social structure. But they also remove women from the position of victim, highlighting strategies of resistance on a small and large scale. Moreover, they build a counter-discourse on feminicidal violence that refuses the victim blaming of mainstream patriarchal narratives in journalism and the media.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1, I study the nonfiction novel *Chicas muertas* (2014) by Argentine author Selva Almada. Drawing from the concept of *autohistoria-teoría*, developed by feminist Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, I observe how this nonfiction novel continues a feminist tradition of writing the female self, demonstrating that the personal is political. At the same time, Almada's book weaves in the stories of several women and inserts critical reflections about the position of

women in Argentine society. Therefore, I argue that *Chicas muertas* produces feminist theory about feminicide by exploring several narrative aesthetics, including journalistic chronicle, crime fiction, and autobiography. Moreover, *Chicas muertas* disrupts the national history of political violence by suggesting that feminicide is political and by centering on border towns in rural Argentina. Ultimately, *Chicas muertas* disobeys patriarchal epistemologies that deny women's authority and produce theories and methodologies that degrade women.

In Chapter 2, I study how the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* (2019) by Brazilian author Patrícia Melo confronts the Myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil by reinvigorating detective fiction. By contrasting how the national justice system deals with violence against white middle-class women and violence against Indigenous women, this novel exposes the biases of the justice system against women and against racialized communities. It highlights the linguistic and financial challenges Indigenous people face when seeking legal justice, and it reveals the limits of laws created to protect women from gender-based violence, such as Lei Maria da Penha. The novel dialogues with the Brazilian literary tradition that represents mythical Indigenous persons as the Brazilian past and origins, ignoring the present-day conflicts faced by the original peoples of South America. I argue that the novel suggests that confronting culturally constructed imaginaries about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women in Brazil is a necessary step in the feminist struggle to combat feminicide.

In Chapter 3, I study the short story "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" (2016), by Argentine author Mariana Enriquez. In this horror fiction piece, Enriquez explores monsters' power to challenge the modern-colonial-patriarchal order. I argue that when women choose to transform themselves into she-monsters by walking through a bonfire and surviving, they are performing an act of embodied resistance to feminicidal violence. Enriquez's she-monsters challenge patriarchal standards of femininity in appearance and behavior. They not only refuse to be killed, but they also choose how to live and how to inhabit their bodies. The story works with societal fears about women's sovereignty over their bodies by pushing them to an extreme. As a result, the story transforms acts otherwise understood as self-harm into disobedient performances of self-making and world-making.

Chapter 1

Challenging Patriarchal Epistemologies: a Feminist Narration of Feminicide in *Chicas muertas*

In August of 2018, my aunt told me stories about domestic and sexual violence that had harmed women in my family. When she shared these family stories with me, the two of us had been traveling through bumpy roads in the south of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina for a few days. It was winter and we were traveling alone, taking turns on the driver's seat of a small car. I do not remember exactly where we were when she revealed the violent events that had happened to people close to me. But whenever I remember that moment in my life, the images of the flat landscape of the pampas I saw through the car's windows come to my mind.

At that time I did not know yet about the existence of the nonfiction novel *Chicas muertas* by Argentinian author Selva Almada, which is set in the Entre Ríos province of Argentina, the same region my aunt and I drove through when we were on our way back to Brazil in 2018. Almada's journalistic novel discusses violence against women in many forms, including feminicide, the killing of women because of their gender. Several months after that road trip through South America, I began to read Almada's book and the visual memories of the flat grasslands on the roadside would return to my mind along with feelings of vulnerability, pain, and anger.

Chicas muertas is narrated by an unnamed woman who travels through the Entre Ríos province investigating unsolved murders from the 1980s, a time before the term feminicide had become well known throughout Latin America. It was also a time when Argentina was going through a redemocratization process, after being under a military dictatorship for years. The narrator is a writer looking for answers to murder cases she had heard about when she was a teenager growing up in that same region. In the present, as an adult, she visits the small towns where the crimes happened, consulting police archives and interviewing the family and friends of three teenage girls whose murders were never solved. She narrates the investigation in the first-person and she mixes her personal memories and anecdotes with the stories of the three girls. Thus, the book offers an account of her experience as a girl in that region and a general account of girlhood in a feminicidal society at the same time.

Almada published *Chicas muertas* in 2014, about a year before the first protests using the slogan and hashtag "Ni una menos" (not one [woman] less) took place in Argentina. In 2015, the murder of Chiara Páez, a 14 year old girl who was a few weeks pregnant, by her 16 year old boyfriend, was the catalyst for the first massive marches. In 2016, thousands of women and allies took to the streets of Buenos Aires to protest the ghastly rape and murder of another teenage girl, Lucía Perez, and the subsequent treatment of the case by the media and the criminal justice system. The media coverage described the extreme violence with graphic detail and reproduced common patriarchal discourses that blame the victim for her fate[7]. Lucía's case was a turning point for many feminist groups in Argentina because it created a widespread sense that it was impossible to go on under such circumstances. Drawing from a historical tradition of women's

[7] Some common ways victims of feminicidal violence are blamed for their fate is by having their sexual life scrutinized publicly and consequently being construed as *putas* (whores), as well as being portrayed as troublesome due to drug use. This kind of discourse was ever-present in the case of Lucía Perez.

protests such as the Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo[8], on October 19, 2016, more than 100,000 women and allies took to the streets to protest feminicidal violence.

The massive 2016 protests used the language of the workers' strike to organize collective action while highlighting women's many roles in society. With the help of social media, in a matter of days, the Argentine feminist strike (Paro Nacional de Mujeres) gained international proportions. The indignation with the ongoing violence against women in Argentina resonated with the violence taking place in many parts of the world. People started sharing news reports and sending messages of support while using hashtags such as #NiUnaMenos (not one [woman] less) and #VivasNosQueremos (we want ourselves alive) throughout Latin America and in many other parts of the world. Within a week from the march in Argentina, feminists in twenty-two countries had organized their marches under similar banners (Gago 662).

The extensive media coverage of the protests and the strong social media presence of protesters, reporters, and observers made feminicide and violence against women in all forms an almost unavoidable topic in Latin America. As a result, the term feminicide spread beyond feminist activist and academic circles, finally reaching the general public. Moreover, feminism gained momentum in Latin America, with more people identifying as feminists and engaging in feminist collective action. The growth of feminist movements transformed them into one of the most important forces with potential to push for social change throughout the region (Palmeiro 561). An example of the renewed strength of feminist movements is the victory of the law decriminalizing abortion and making it more accessible in Argentina, which passed in December 2020, after years of feminist activism.

Feminicidio had been discussed in the social sciences since the 1990s[9], and the paradigmatic case of Ciudad Juarez, at the border between Mexico and the United States has been portrayed in documentary films such as *Señorita extraviada* (2001) by Lourdes Portillo. In the literary arts, one of the most widely known narrative fiction works that was published since the feminist conceptualization of *feminicidio* is the novel *2666*, by Chilean author Roberto Bolaño. *2666* is a 900-page novel that was published posthumously in 2004. The fourth section of Bolaño's novel is titled *La parte de los crímenes* (The Part About the Crimes) and it narrates dozens of feminicides that took place in the fictional city of Santa Teresa, which most critics suggest to be a fictionalization of Ciudad Juarez. The feminicides are narrated alongside crimes of church vandalism, which often seem to demand more of the population's attention than the crimes against women. Bolaño's work offers a view of feminicide as systematic violence related to the capitalistic exploitation of labor and resources by the *maquiladoras* at the border of Mexico and the United States. It also offers a critical perspective of how the media and the criminal justice system treat violence against women.

In turn, Almada's nonfiction novel transposes the issue of feminicidal violence from the US-Mexico border to the Argentina-Uruguay-Brazil border. Moreover, Almada offers a feminist perspective embodied by the woman narrator. As my analysis will show, the narrator speaks about gender violence as a woman who has critically reflected about her own condition as a woman within a society with hierarchical gender structures. Throughout the novel, she explores

[8] In 1977, during the period known as *Guerra Sucia* (1976-1983), a group of women started to perform peaceful protests around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. The group, known today as Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, demanded information on the whereabouts of their children and grandchildren who had disappeared at the hands of the military government. While those women did not identify their protest as feminist, their act of defiance of an authoritarian regime has become a symbol of women's resistance in Argentina.

[9] A discussion of the history of the term feminicide can be found in this dissertation's introduction.

the idea that women experience gender oppression as a group. Her embodied point of view is of particular relevance because the narrator's positionality gives her information through lived experiences as a potential target of feminicidal violence in addition to the information she gathers from research.

As a recent example of literary journalism, Almada's book responds to questions of how to write about violence in general and how to frame violence against women in particular. In a context where blaming the victims and sensationalizing their stories are predominant practices, Almada's nonfiction novel faces questions about what are the ethics of narrating feminicidal violence, how to employ the aesthetic use of language to discuss bodily harm, whose voices to include, and how to speak about those who have been silenced by murder. As a work that investigates unsolved cases from the 1980s, the novel explores the limits of criminal justice's methods of investigation by interrogating what constitutes evidence, how evidence is collected, who evaluates evidence, and who makes decisions about crimes against women. Furthermore, by revisiting police archives of the transition period, *Chicas muertas* raises questions about what constitutes political violence and how national histories about political violence are formed.

In this chapter I study three aspects of Almada's nonfiction novel that I consider its most relevant contributions to the understanding of feminicide. First, the first-person narration continues a feminist tradition of writing the female self, demonstrating that the personal is political. Second, the novel challenges criminal investigation methods by looking for answers outside of scientifically accepted terms. Third, the novel disrupts the national history of political violence when it suggests that feminicidal violence is political violence, and when it centers on border towns in rural Argentina, displacing the capital of Buenos Aires as the privileged location of political violence of national importance. Although the formal choices that Almada makes to construct this nonfiction novel are not completely innovative on their own, this work confronts misogynistic literary and journalistic tropes while conceptualizing feminicidal violence through a situated and collective narrative. Ultimately, I argue that *Chicas muertas* disobeys patriarchal epistemologies.

By patriarchal epistemologies, I mean dominant conceptions of knowledge, knowers, and practices that devalue symbolically "feminine" values and cognitive styles, deny women's authority, and produce theories and methodologies that degrade women. These dominant conceptions of what constitutes knowledge are tied to Western modernity and are centered on an idealized scientific rationality that is considered universal, objective, and academically rigorous. According to Sandra Harding, "the institutions of Western modernity and their scientific and political philosophies, designed by and for men in elite classes, persistently create meanings and practices of modernity which create fearful specters of 'the feminine' and 'the primitive'" (2). Harding hones in the modern/traditional binary, where the feminine and the primitive are tied to the traditional, and she adds that "objectivity, rationality, good method, real science, social progress, civilization—the excellence of these and other self-proclaimed modern achievements are all measured in terms of their distance from whatever is associated with the feminine and the primitive" (3). Furthermore, the dominant narrative about Western modernity supports the idea that only modern Western sciences "are capable of grasping reality in its own terms" (Harding 3). In this sense, non-Western and symbolically "feminine" forms of knowing are de-legitimized and marginalized.

In Western/Westernized cultures, symbolically "feminine" cognitive styles often mean intuitive and holistic styles, while symbolically "masculine" styles often mean deductive and analytic. Moreover, symbolically "feminine" values are associated with traditional gender roles

such as caring and nourishing. In the context of Argentina and Latin America, more broadly, what I am referring to as patriarchal epistemologies relates to Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality of power. That is the interconnected structural legacies of colonialism around gender, race, labor, economy, knowledge, and authority.

Narrating from the Body

As mentioned above, the narrator of *Chicas muertas* weaves her personal life's story with the stories of three girls who were murdered in the 1980s, when she was a teenager living in the small town of Villa Elisa. She travels through the Entre Ríos region interviewing relatives of the victims and researching police archives. She does not find enough evidence to incriminate anyone for the murders, so her investigation does not lead to any form of legal justice at the end. In some ways, the book brings up more questions than answers to the crimes. However, her storytelling work creates a map of violence against women that makes a clear statement about how gender violence functions in society. The information she collects about these cases are recorded in writing alongside her impressions and accounts of how she personally relates to the cases. She dramatizes the lives of the murdered girl based on the information she gathered. She also includes many anecdotes about violence against women in her family and in her neighborhood, creating connections between all the stories she recalls as she investigates. Moreover, she includes details about her visit to a spiritual medium who contacts the dead girls. The medium tells her the story of *La Huesera*, a wild woman who gathers bones and brings them back to life, suggesting that this might be the narrator's mission.

The literary approach to investigative journalism in *Chicas muertas* allows Almada to fill in the gaps of information through creative imagining, and to explore different forms of knowing that would be off limits in the fields of law and the social sciences. However, Almada's book is difficult to classify within common literary genres such as crime fiction or autobiography, and even the literary journalism category cannot fully contain what this book does. The question of genre is relevant because it informs readers about how to process the stories and what to expect in relation to truth and plausibility. It also establishes formal guidelines that may be reproduced or broken. Since *Chicas muertas* faces the question of how to narrate violence against women in opposition to patriarchal narratives that re-inflict violence, the acts of disrupting tropes, genres, and traditions becomes an important part of the writing process.

I see Almada's genre-bending book as a form of disobedience to patriarchal narratives and epistemologies because it resists single categories while exploring mixed methods for knowledge production about feminicidal violence. In my view, *Chicas muertas* elaborates the concept and practice of *autohistoria-teoría* created by Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa. According to Anzaldúa, "writing is a process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and conocimiento (insight)" (1). *Autohistoria-teoría* is a hybrid genre in which Anzaldúa connects personal experiences with social realities and theorizes about the process, blurring private/public borders (Anzaldúa *Light* 6). The mixing of methods and sources is important for Anzaldúa because she sees her job as a writer as "not just to interpret or describe realities but to create them through language and action, symbols and images" (*Light* 7). Although there are marked differences between Anzaldúa and Almada as women writers from North and South America respectively, Almada's work in *Chicas muertas* resonates with Anzaldúa's project in the formulation of new objects of knowledge that seeks to avoid reinforcing dominant modes of knowing and producing knowledge.

Because the main topic of *Chicas muertas* is the re-investigation of unsolved murder cases, I first approached this book as a piece of crime fiction. In some ways, this book does play with the detective novel genre. It has the story of a crime and the story of an investigation of the crime, which resembles classic detective fiction, as studied by Tzvetan Todorov[10]. The first-person narration is also a common choice in crime fiction, especially as the genre developed into hard-boiled narratives through the 20th century. In these types of narrative, the limited point of view of a first-person narrator forces the reader to follow along with the protagonist's adventures as they unfold, which creates suspense. However, the role of the first-person narration in Almada's book differs from hard-boiled detective narratives because instead of producing action-packed and suspenseful stories, the narrator tells personal stories in which she expresses her vulnerabilities as a woman living in a world that keeps hurting and killing women for being women. *Chicas muertas* is not so much about action as it is about insight and connection.

The narrator sets an intimate tone at the novel's beginning when she first hears about the murder of Andrea Danne, one of the cases she investigates in the novel. She says: "Yo tenía trece años y esa mañana, la noticia de la chica muerta, me llegó como una revelación. Mi casa, la casa de cualquier adolescente, no era el lugar más seguro del mundo. Adentro de tu casa podían matarte. El horror podía vivir bajo el mismo techo que vos" (Almada 17). In this example, the narrator's subjective view of the world not only creates a personal connection to one of the cases she will eventually investigate but it also offers an insight, or, as Anzaldúa would call it, a *conocimiento*. The narrator identifies with the dead girl as a girl herself, and she understands that being a girl/woman is a risk factor. She also understands that the home is not always the shelter, the safe space that it is supposed to be.

Prior to sharing this realization, the narrator does not give many details about Andrea's murder besides the fact that she was killed in her bed, while she was sleeping. Instead, she first describes how she experienced the morning before hearing the news. She narrates the early hours when it was dark and she was still in bed: "Esa madrugada me había despertado el ventarrón que hacía temblar el techo de la casa. Me había estirado en la cama y había tocado algo que hizo que me sentara de golpe, con el corazón en la boca. El colchón estaba húmedo y unas formas babosas y tibias se movieron contra mis piernas" (Almada 14). The narrator builds suspense by emphasizing her bodily sensations before revealing that her cat had given birth at the foot of her bed and describing the scene: "A la luz de los relámpagos que entraban por la ventana, la vi enrollada, mirándome con sus ojos amarillos" (Almada 14). The image she saw in bed created an atmosphere that evokes horror fiction. The horror atmosphere in the scene of the cat giving birth foreshadows an internal state of horror that the narrator will find herself in once she learns about Andrea's murder.

The horror atmosphere in the scene of the cat's birth forms a parallel with the murder scene that would be taking place in another girl's bedroom not too far from the narrator's bedroom. In contrast to the birth of kittens on the narrator's bed, Andrea's mattress became wet with her own blood when she was murdered with a stab in her heart. The contrast of life and death actually suggests a continuity between the opposing ideas. It also offers symbolic elements traditionally associated with the feminine: giving birth, cats, and the domestic environment. Considering the narrator's age at the time of the incident - thirteen years old - and the fact that she wakes up in the middle of the night, the scene also alludes to a metaphorical awakening to womanhood. In contrast to the cat's birth, the scene of Andrea's murder is not narrated in real

[10] Tzvetan Todorov studied this aspect of detective fiction in the essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (*The Poetics of Prose*, 1971).

time. Instead, the narrator filters the moment of Andrea's feminicide through her thoughts and feelings, as she learns more details about the case. It is the narrator's experiences, sensations, and thoughts that guide the reader into imagining horror, without showing it. Thus, the narrator writes from the body, and she puts her body in the story as a source of knowledge about the world and about who she is as a woman in the world.

Her place as a woman becomes clearer in contrast to her father's reaction to the news of Andrea's murder. The scene when they hear the news contrasts sharply with the scene of the cat giving birth because the narrator describes it as a regular warm and sunny Sunday morning, when her father was making a *parrillada* outside. They both hear the news from the radio and the narrator says: "Mi padre y yo seguimos en silencio" (Almada 15). While she was watching him quietly, he continued moving the charcoal and grilling the meat until a neighbor invited him to go for a few drinks at the bar around the corner. He goes and leaves her in charge of the barbecue (Almada 16). After he left, she picked up a glass with a few ice cubes inside, she fished the ice with her fingers and put it in her mouth. When she placed her hand on her leg, she was surprised because her hand was cold: "Como la mano de un muerto, pensé. Aunque nunca había tocado a uno" (Almada 16). Although she does not elaborate on her father's reaction, this experience suggests that the narrator was emotionally impacted by thoughts of death while her father continued living his life as usual, seemingly unaffected. The narrator realizes that the dead girl could have been herself. The story of Andrea's murder became a strong presence in the narrator's memory, returning with each new murder of women and girls she heard about.

That morning was a turning point for the narrator, when some of her beliefs about home and girlhood were shaken and began to transform. In Anzaldúa's terms, these would be the first stages of *conocimiento*, of gaining awareness. Anzaldúa's process moves through seven stages, from the first *arrebato* into what she called *nepantla*, a "liminal, transitional space, suspended between shifts, you're two people split between before and after" (*Light* 122). For Anzaldúa, the *nepantla* stage was full of possibilities because one would be exposed to other perspectives (122). Then, one would move into "the Coatlicue depths of despair, then a stage of ordering and making meaning. The sixth stage would be one when "you take your story into the world, testing it" (Anzaldúa *Light* 123). Finally, the final stage would be developing "an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others"(Anzaldúa *Light* 123). According to Anzaldúa, by incorporating this practice into our lives we would be "enacting spiritual activism" (*Light* 123). In many ways, the narrator of *Chicas muertas* goes through a similar process when she is shaken by an event that leads her to reflect, reorganize, and build a story that she shares with others. The narrator of *Chicas muertas* may not follow all seven steps, but Anzaldúa's "path of conocimiento" is a useful concept that helps us recognize how the narrator of *Chicas muertas* produces a kind of *autohistoria-teoría.* Through a process of self-reflection, from and through her body, the narrator builds knowledge in the form of storytelling not only about herself, but also about collective oppression.

The narrator reflects upon the accumulation of cases of feminicidal violence she hears about through her lifetime, then she offers another insight: "No sabía que a una mujer podían matarla por el solo hecho de ser mujer, pero había escuchado historias que, con el tiempo, fui hilvanando. Anécdotas que no habían terminado en la muerte de la mujer, pero que sí habían hecho de ella objeto de la misoginia, del abuso, del desprecio" (Almada 18). The narrator comes to the understanding that each case of feminicide is not an isolated incident, but part of a culture of domination and disdain for women. The verb she uses to describe how she links the stories together in the quote above, "hilvanar" (to weave), is related to sewing, which evokes

traditionally feminine work that is performed with the hands. Making mental connections between stories, then, appears as an embodied action that she performs as a woman, thinking about herself and about women collectively.

The quote above also adds the notion of feminicidal violence as a spectrum. Although feminicide, as a legal term, only refers to murder, the concept of killing women because they are women allows the narrator to understand that all acts of misogyny are part of the same logic that can potentially lead to murder. This way, the narrator is able "to weave" the fragments together into a whole. *Chicas muertas*, therefore, is not a story about the three cases the narrator investigates and it is not only about murder. It is a sort of patchwork quilt of stories, big or small, involving many different kinds of violence, from verbal aggression to murder. The collection of stories that are linked together make a statement about gender violence as a structural social problem. *Chicas muertas*, therefore, is a collective and plural story in which the narrator is not only creating, but she is also putting herself and her body into the fabric.

Writing from the "I" and theorizing about oppressive structures through this act is a feminist/queer practice with a strong tradition, particularly among women of color such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and more recently Christina Sharpe and Sara Ahmed. In recent years, the term "autotheory" has gained attention in academia through the works of Maggie Nelson (*The Argonauts*, 2015) and Paul B. Preciado (*Testo Yonqui*, 2008), which integrate the personal and the conceptual, and are often described as genre-bending. According to Lauren Fournier, "autotheory is the integration of the *auto* or 'self' with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware— especially so in those practices that emerge with postmodernism" (6). Fournier points out that autotheory as we understand today is an expression of the early 21st century, but she recognizes the long tradition of women writing from the "I", from their bodies, and in between disciplines and media, including names such as Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, U.S. abolitionist Sojourner Truth, and British writer Mary Wollstonecraft (Fournier 8).

Feminist autotheory is a provocation to Eurocentric patriarchal epistemologies that claim neutrality and objectivity while hiding behind the perspective of white cis-gender men. Moreover, autotheory is not autobiography, although there are often autobiographical elements. According to Fournier, "that women and queers are given space to write fiction but not theory demonstrates one of the stakes of autotheory. It also provides insight into the growing tendency for women, trans, and gender-nonconforming writers and artists to explicitly frame their work *as* theory—even works that move across genres and could be described using different terms, such as manifesto or memoir" (58). On the one hand, embodied writing, creating and thinking exposes the fallacy of neutrality and universality. On the other hand, women and racialized people who have been historically overdetermined by the body, which was understood as inferior to the mind, can challenge the Cartesian split through embodied thinking and disrupt the notion of "theory" as established in White, Eurocentric patriarchal institutions (Fournier 53). Autotheory allows historically marginalized voices to intervene in politics, epistemology, and other areas from an embodied perspective.

I am placing Selva Almada's book in the realm of autotheory, but I am choosing to highlight Anzaldúa's *autohistoria-teoría* because of Anzaldúa's concern with spirituality and her foundational role in conceptualizing borderlands, which I discuss below. Both of these aspects of Anzaldúa's work are also present in *Chicas muertas*, and I see them as crucial in the production of knowledge about feminicidal violence in the Americas.

Narrating from the Borderlands

Anzaldúa saw the act of writing as "a gesture of the body" (*Light* 5). She also affirmed that "our bodies are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering, and overlapping 'countries'" and that "as our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into, our identities" (Anzaldúa *Light* 69). As a bilingual queer Chicana woman, Anzaldúa theorized about identity as plural, intersecting, shifting, and relational. She also highlighted the role that the places where we live impact who we become (Anzaldúa *Light* 68). The U.S.-Mexico border where she grew up played an important role in how she made sense of the world and in her *autohistorias-teorías*.

Before Anzaldúa conceptualized *autohistoria-teoría*, she conceptualized the borderlands. According to Anzaldúa, "a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (*Borderlands* 17). While the border divides violently, the borderlands are undefined spaces of ambivalence and movement. The U.S.-Mexican border in particular is defined as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again" (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 17). In spite of the violence of the border, the queer space of the borderlands produces a new culture from the merging of cultures. From this idea, Anzaldúa develops the concept of "a consciousness of the Borderlands" or a "new *mestiza* consciousness" (*Borderlands* 77). The new *mestiza*[11] tolerates ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradictions. She "operates in a pluralistic mode," and her thinking "includes rather than excludes" (*Borderlands* 79). According to Anzaldúa, this consciousness breaks down subject-object duality and transcends binary thinking (*Borderlands* 80).

Anzaldúa's consciousness of the borderlands is also relevant for this study of *Chicas muertas* and feminicide because of the specific physical borderlands where the idea emerged. The U.S.-Mexico border is vital to the study of feminicidal violence throughout the Americas. Although *Chicas muertas* is situated in the geographical and historical context of Argentina, the problem is *feminicidio* is feminist concept rooted in the U.S.-Mexico border that simultaneously transcends those borders. As I discuss in this dissertation's introduction, the paradigmatic case for Latin American feminists is located in the U.S.-Mexico border. So, the border as a concept and a material reality spills into the feminist conceptualization of feminicide and into feminist activism against gender violence.

The "Ni una menos" movement, which started in Argentina in 2015 and spread across the region, mobilized around feminicide and developed a comprehensive idea of patriarchal violences, in plural. The Argentine Women's Strike in 2017, for example, articulated issues of economy and labor together with other forms of gender violence, including feminicide. Political

[11] Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza* aims to give new meanings to many established ideas about nationality, race, gender, and sexuality. She affirms: "As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races" (80). However, I must point out that Alzaldúa speaks of the U.S. context, where *mestizaje* was not a national ideology. In Latin American contexts, the discourse of *mestizaje* has been used to homogenize populations while attempting to erase undesirable traits and keeping racialism unchallenged (Martinez-Echazabal 24). For that reason, I find the use of words such as *mestiza* and *mestizaje* problematic when applied to Argentine and Brazilian contexts. However, I subscribe to the idea of pluralistic thinking in Anzaldúa's "consciousness of the Borderlands," as it aims to rise above patriarchal and colonialist binary hierarchies.

scientist Verónica Gago theorizes about the strike and recognizes the importance of the U.S.-Mexico border for the feminist struggle in Latin America:

> Perhaps the 2017 strike started taking shape in the *maquilas*, those enormous assembly plants dotting the border between Mexico and the United States. [...] There is no international women's strike without the expanded geography of Ciudad Juárez, without our fears and desires, which are all mixed up there, to the rhythm of flexibilized production and the border, escapes, and conditions of exploitation that we never imagined we would be able to handle of confront. (660)

Gago affirms that when feminists read about the murders in Ciudad Juárez through the works of Rita Segato and others, the geography of that city expands throughout Latin America "because something of that geography is replicated in a peripheral urban neighborhood, in a slum that is also dotted with informal textile workshops, in a nightclub, in homes imploding with domestic violence, in the risks taken by migrants, and in the communities are being evicted by transnational capital's mega-enterprises" (Gago 661). The connection Latin American feminists feel/think creates a common body, "a politics that makes the body of one woman the body of all" (Gago 661). Finally, Gago affirms that Ciudad Juárez functions as a laboratory where transnational capitalist interests exploit women's desire for autonomy beyond the domestic space (Gago 662).

Chicas muertas expands the geography of Ciudad Juárez in space and time. The narrator of *Chicas muertas* inhabits the borderlands. She narrates from material and metaphorical borderlands. As discussed above, the narrator's embodied point of view constantly shifts between narrating her experiences and narrating the stories of other women. On some occasions she retells anecdotes she heard from her mother or from another woman. Other times, she dramatizes the lives of the three girls whose murders she is investigating. Her position within the book seems to oscillate between being the speaking subject and object about which one speaks. In fact, her positionality is more complex and less binary than subject-object. Her position within the book is hybrid and blended in a way that leads me to the idea of a consciousness of the borderlands.

The genre-bending aspect of *Chicas muertas* is also a reflection of borderlands consciousness. The novel plays with the readers' expectations about literary genres while resisting patriarchal narratives about violence against women. Besides twisting crime fiction, which has its origins in bourgeois ideologies of law and order[12], several literary critics have noted that *Chicas muertas* shares formal and thematic characteristics with *crónica*, *testimonio*, and autobiography. The careful work with language use and the crafting of stories in *Chicas muertas* blends more objective investigative journalistic writing with subjective and expressive writing.

I started exploring the autobiographical aspects of the book in the section above, when I explored the embodied first-person narrative in this book. Since Almada's book is an example of nonfiction, it is easy to assume that the narrator is the author herself. Although Almada does not

[12] Ernest Mandel, a Belgian economist, traces a social history of crime stories with origins in 19th century English and French societies. Mandel argues that "good bandits" from earlier stories challenging the feudal order became evil scoundrels in the 19th century. Mandel affirms that this transformation takes place "in a particular point in the development of capitalism, pauperism, criminality, and primitive social revolt against bourgeois society" (10). According to Mandel, "the rising need of the bourgeoisie to defend instead of attack the social order, the noble bandit is transformed into evil criminal" (10). The genre has changed considerably since its origins, and it has been used by Latin American authors in the 20th century to denounce widespread corruption.

mention the narrator's name in the story, the association between narrator and author is possible because of information that the narrator reveals about herself, such as the place and period when she was born.The idea that the narrator could be the author herself creates a new set of expectations for the reader about the veracity of the narrated events. The fact that Almada grew up in the Entre Ríos region gives a certain level of legitimacy to the portrayal of rural Argentina. Moreover, as a well established author in Argentina, she can use her privileged position to confirm the stories told by witnesses and to expand their accounts with cultural, social, and historical information acquired through lived experience and research.

However, autobiography as a genre cannot contain what *Chicas muertas* achieves. Although some of Almada's personal stories are present in the text, narrating her life is not the point of the text, but a tool. As I said earlier, Almada integrates autobiography and social criticism into producing *autohistoria-teoría* about feminicidal violence. Literary critic Angélica Tornero states that Almada does not write an autobiography but fictionalizes her "yo autoral" (Tornero 51). According to Tornero, the author's inclusion of herself in the story contributes to the book's aim of denouncing violence against women as it interweaves testimonial and documentary discourses. Additionally, Tornero affirms that *Chicas muertas* "también es un relato ficcional en tanto existe un espacio de libertad para configurar desde la imaginación no solamente acciones relacionadas con los feminicidios de las chicas, sino también con la violencia de género de la que la narradora/autora y algunas allegadas han sido víctimas" (51). The fictionalization of herself as the narrator and the fictionalization of many other women, including the three murdered girls, is crucial because it allows her to fill in gaps of information that no police archive could contain.

An example of how Almada explores the imaginative potential of the novel is the dramatization of the day María Luisa Quevedo, one of the victims of feminicide, disappeared. The narrator begins the second chapter as follows:

> Desde la mañana temprano, el sol calentaba las chapas del techo de la casa de los Quevedo. [...] En el sopor de su pieza, María Luisa abrió los ojos y se incorporó en la cama, lista para levantarse y salir a su trabajo en lo de la familia Casucho. [...] Para vestirse, eligió prendas frescas pero bonitas. Le gustaba andar arreglada en la calle, aunque, para trabajar, usara ropa de fajina, una remerita y una pollera viejas, desteñidas por el sol y las salpicaduras de lavandina. (Almada 23)

The narrator employs literary techniques to create an atmosphere, describe the environment, and to build María Luisa as a character with a specific personality, including her likes and dislikes. The narrator also includes information about how the girl was feeling: "Estaba contenta porque era su primer trabajo" (Almada 24). All of this information could have been gathered from interviews with relatives and from the police archives. But in this example, Almada is clearly crafting a story as a third-person omniscient narrator. Moreover, she is emphasizing who María Luisa was as a living, breathing girl, and portraying her under a positive light.

A few paragraphs into the chapter, the narrator gradually starts to disclose the limits of what she can narrate. First she expresses uncertainty with an "if" clause: "Si ese día pensaba quedarse por ahí, aprovechando el feriado, no se lo confió a su madre" (Almada 24). Then, she starts to narrate how her relatives experienced the girl's disappearance and gives more background information about her family. Finally, the narrator exposes the larger gaps in her knowledge: "Ni testigos ni la investigación policial pudieron determinar nunca qué pasó ni dónde estuvo la chica entre las tres de la tarde que salió de su trabajo, el jueves 8 de diciembre de 1983, y la mañana del domingo 11 cuando hallaron su cadáver" (Almada 25). The narrator does

not attempt to narrate what could have happened during these days in a similar manner to how she narrated María Luisa's last morning before disappearing. This attitude shows how the narrator is narrating from the borderlands of fiction and nonfiction and balancing how much of her imagination she can use to bring a dead girl back to life on the pages of her book.

Fictionalizing, in this case, does not undermine the truth of this book. Truth here is not limited to finding the culprits of the three unsolved crimes, even though this is important. The truth of this book is in showing that feminicide is a structural problem affecting all areas of society. It is about explaining how gender hierarchies oppress women to the point of physical violence and murder. It is also about showing that as a structural issue, feminicide and other forms of violence against women involve the state and its institutions. Finally, it is about raising the issue of feminicidal violence into the status of political violence, which requires showing how this violence contributes to the destruction or the maintenance of the patriarchal social order.

According to Tornero, Almada's book is linked to the *testimonio* tradition from Latin America and, more specifically, to the work of Argentine writer Rodolfo Walsh in *Operación masacre* (Tornero 44). Walsh's nonfiction novel was published in 1957 and it was one of the first examples of literary investigative journalism, ahead of the famous U.S. American nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* (1966) by Truman Capote. In *Operación masacre*, Walsh offers an account of the clandestine execution of a group of alleged participants in a Peronist uprising against the dictatorship that lasted from 1955 to 1958. Walsh tracked down survivors, collected evidence and witnesses accounts, and wrote the nonfiction novel using the formulaic genre of crime fiction to structure his prose. *Operación masacre* exposed the clandestine execution to the public.

Chicas muertas shares with *Operación masacre* the investigative journalism's commitment to narrate real crimes based on evidence and witness accounts. It also shares the drive to denounce those crimes. However, *Chicas muertas* faces unique challenges because of the ways in which gender functions at the base of social structures. The biggest challenge is making the case for feminicide a political crime. In *Operación masacre* the state was directly involved with the clandestine execution and the executed was suspected of conspiring against the government, so the political implications are obvious regardless of which side readers may take. Stating that feminicide is political violence requires a paradigm shift about how we understand politics. Feminicide that takes place among strangers in public spaces such as the crimes of Ciudad Juárez have been framed as sexually motivated crimes for years until scholars such as Rita Segato and Marcela Lagarde began to explain how they function to maintain social structures[13]. Segato states that they are "crimes of second state," serving power disputes between criminal gangs and the state in Mexico (*La escritura* 30). Thus, Segato makes visible how these crimes are political. On the other hand, feminicide that happens in the home and are perpetrated by intimate partners or former partners have been framed as crimes of passion and even crimes of honor for centuries. How does one show that these are indeed political crimes?

The second challenge that Almada faces is the impossibility of gathering witness accounts from dead women. There are no survivors of feminicide, in the legal sense. There are survivors of domestic or sexual violence. Even when the severity of the case is one of attempted murder, the survivor is not technically a victim of feminicide. In a society where women's thoughts and opinions have been historically dismissed and discredited, how much do women's

[13] A more in depth discussion of Segato's and Lagarde's theories about feminicide can be found in the introduction of this dissertation.

witness accounts weigh against the account of men? In order to fill gaps of information, Almada collects witness accounts of relatives, friends, and neighbors. However, in many cases the crime of feminicide does not have eye witnesses, only victims and perpetrators. Who can speak for the dead woman? In police investigations, the expectation is that the crime scene will contain material evidence leading to answers about how, when, and more importantly, who. The material evidence is supposed to "speak" for the dead, but the "translating" efforts of the investigators depend on their motivation to solve the crime. Moreover, Almada is dealing with crimes from the 1980s, a time when there was no such thing as DNA evidence. In a society where the lives of working class women from rural towns are not considered of much social importance, how much can material evidence "speak"?

Questions of voice and authority are some of the issues surrounding *testimonio* as a genre. Driven by a need or desire to denounce crimes against an oppressed group, *testimonio* is often crafted from interviews and the resulting text, often written by an intellectual from a privileged position, hopes to give voice to marginalized and silenced individuals or groups. *Chicas muertas* denounces the unresolved crimes that victimized working-class women from the Argentine countryside in the 1980s. In many ways, the three murder stories could be perceived as a "relato de las derrotadas," as Tornero puts it (47). From this perspective, the novel fits in the general characteristics of the *testimonio literario* because it amplifies the stories of marginalized women while searching for the truth about the cases and challenging the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. The book also shows the state's role in the perpetuation and impunity of gender-based violence when it mentions the inefficacy of the police and the judiciary in the investigation and the community's distrust of the police. However, the presence of the narrator in the text complicates the notions of voice, authority, and positionality.

Narrating from the borderlands, the space of ambivalence and plurality, as I have stated earlier, becomes a viable alternative to facing the challenges delineated above. *Chicas muertas* takes advantage of the potentiality of different genres to intervene in a socio-political reality while pushing through established forms of knowing and producing knowledge. Although *testimonio* is necessarily a hybrid genre bordering journalism, ethnography, history, and literature, Almada pushes through these modes of producing knowledge by bringing her fictionalized self into the text and by exploring spiritual methods, which will be discussed in the section below. The denunciation act in this text cannot be accepted in the criminal justice system, which requires a kind of precision that feminicidal violence, as a structural issue, overflows.

Instead of approaching *Chicas muertas* as an example of *testimonio*, it is useful to consider how contemporary feminist narratives continuously flow in and out of traditional genres and modes of producing knowledge. According to Mariana Peller and Alejandra Oberti, contemporary feminist narratives create "una serie zigzagueante e inestable donde las mujeres toman la palabra y les dan la palabra a otras, no en el sentido de darle la palabra al subalterno erigiéndose en superior, sino a través de la propia experiencia, en una horizontalidad verdadera y no artificiosa" (Peller 10). In *Chicas muertas*, the narrator creates horizontality between all stories, including her own. Even though the horizontality is limited to the fact that the murdered women cannot speak for themselves, the narrator thinks through her own lived experiences as a woman to avoid a detached, hierarchical, and masculinist form of narrating violence. Her positionality diminishes the distance between herself and the women she writes about. By carefully interweaving the three main stories with her own and many more anecdotes she heard from relatives, friends, and acquaintances, the narrator creates a collective and plural story about womanhood in a femicidal society.

The horizontality in *Chicas muertas* can also be understood through Anzaldúa's notion of writing about *nos/otras*, with emphasis on the slash. Anzaldúa states that "la rajadura gives us a third point of view, a perspective from the cracks and a way to reconfigure ourselves as subjects outside binary oppositions, outside dominant relations. By disrupting binary oppositions that reinforce relations of subordination and dominance, nos/otras suggests a position of being simultaneously insider/outsider, internal/external exile" (*Light* 79). This is the positionality of the narrating voice in *Chicas muertas*. She is simultaneously an insider and an outsider who creates a story about women's oppression without erasing personal differences.

Narrating through the Spiritual Realm

Many journalistic reviews of *Chicas muertas* in Spanish use the word "crónica" to describe the book. As the name suggests, the chronicle is associated with the narration of events through time. In the Spanish language, *crónicas* are usually divided into three main types: historic, journalistic, and literary. However, these divisions are not very marked. As a hybrid text, *Chicas muertas* benefits from its ties to the *crónica* because readers can approach the text as an account of historic or real events. As Martina López Casanova points out, "en contacto con las potencialidades de la novela, la crónica tiene la potestad de hilar todas las voces (textos, discursos) en un corpus cuyo centro gravitan los cuerpos violentados. Un sistema de discursos, un corpus del delito, confeccionado por el relato" (52). Through its contact with journalism, *Chicas muertas* presents itself as urgent and tangible in that it asks the reader to face history. At the same time, through its contact with the novel, the book distances itself from hard news reports and uses literary devices such as nonlinear time and figurative language.

Even though the *crónica* is a hybrid genre, it cannot fully contain *Chicas muertas* because of the unorthodox methods of investigation she employs in search of answers for the feminicide cases of Andrea Danne, María Luisa Quevedo, and Sarita Mundín. The narrator consults La Señora, a medium and tarot reader who offers advice and connection with the victims' spirits. The narrator says she found La Señora through writer friends who "la consultan cuando deben tomar decisiones importantes" (Almada 46). Although she has had experiences with a *curandero* in her childhood, the narrator reveals that she is nervous about consulting a tarot reader because she is afraid of knowing the future. When she tells La Señora that she is there to find information about the girls who have been murdered, La Señora says that this is a very common reason for people to consult her. Her response implies that the social system is failing women when so many are killed and so few cases are solved through the police investigation.

The narrator's visits to La Señora offer important clues for the readers about what *Chicas muertas* can do as a genre-bending narrative about feminicide. In one of the conversations between La Señora and the narrator, the relationship between form and content becomes evident: "Yo creo que lo que tenemos que conseguir es reconstruir cómo el mundo las miraba a ellas. Si logramos saber cómo eran miradas, vamos a saber cuál era la mirada que ellas tenían sobre el mundo ¿entendés?" (Almada 109). Besides giving purpose to the investigative work being done by the narrator, the quote above exemplifies how the narrator plays with voice throughout the novel. The narration of *Chicas muertas* frequently relies on free indirect speech, and in the quote above, it is not entirely clear who is speaking. I read it as advice from La Señora to the narrator, but the ambiguity is more important than a clear definition here. The uncertainty about who is speaking, La Señora or the narrator, blurs the distinction between the characters' voices. The

confusion between voices offers a message in itself. Whether La Señora is speaking to the narrator or the narrator is speaking to the readers is less important than saying it and allowing everyone to see how the world sees the girls.

Through La Señora, the narrator finds a way to access the voices of those who cannot speak because they were murdered. Feminist scholar Jill Radford, who was one of the first to describe the concept of femicide as an extreme form of violence in a spectrum of patriarchal violence, explains that feminists had been reluctant to acknowledge femicide because its finality "puts it outside of traditional feminist modes of working" (4). Radford was referring to the fact that many feminists in the 1990s had been working with rape as the most extreme form of violence against women and focusing on survivors. Working with femicide posed a challenge for feminists: "When a woman is killed, there may be no survivor to tell her story. There is no way of sharing the experience of violent death; all that can be shared are the pain and anger of those who have known such a loss" (Radford and Russell 4). Despite this challenge, Radford stated that feminists must name and address femicide. The question of how to address femicidal violence is part of what feminist academics, artists, and writers have been trying to answer since then. Almada's non-fiction novel offers one of the many possible answers by narrating through the spiritual realm.

The confusion between voices, as mentioned above, is crucial. However, it is also relevant how the spiritual encounters exceed verbal language. La Señora makes direct contact with the dead girls and feels what they felt, but she does not ventriloquizes the girls during the sessions. The narrator describes: "Una tarde dice que le falta el aire y se lleva una mano a la garganta. Se queda así con los ojos cerrados. Yo me quedo quieta" (Almada 107). The narrator observes the connection between La Señora and the dead girls without questioning its veracity. In the next paragraph, La Señora says: "No podía respirar, me estaba ahogando, fue tan vívido" (Almada 107). The spiritual medium channels the girls' feelings and physical pain. Their communication happens through bodily senses and movement instead of words. Speech, the privileged mode of rationality under patriarchal rule,[14] takes place in this event. However, its supremacy is displaced by feelings and sensations. Contacting the spirits of the girls does not give the narrator names and clues to solve the crimes, but access to emotional connection.

The narrator is not the only person who consults a clairvoyant in the novel. She includes a few examples of people who were searching for disappeared girls and consulted clairvoyants when the police could not give them any answers. After María Luisa disappeared, the Quevedo family got tired of being told by the police "que esperaran, que seguro se habría ido con algún noviecito y que ya iba a volver" (Almada 41). So they consulted a Paraguayan clairvoyant who did not tell them much besides affirming that María Luisa would reappear in a couple of days (Almada 42). Similarly, Andrea's boyfriend, Eduardo, also visited two fortune tellers. One of them told him that "con las cosas del diablo no se metía" (Almada 42). The other fortune teller, who lived in Uruguay, told Eduardo "sólo frases ambigua, entrecortadas por el trance" (Almada 43). In spite of the lack of answers, the narrator does not dismiss their visits to clairvoyants. On the contrary, she normalizes their actions and shares a personal story about the *curandero* that she used to visit with her grandmother when she was a child.

The anecdotes the narrator tells and her visit to La Señora show that feminicidal violence is a problem that exceeds the criminal justice system not only because of its limitations to

[14] Here I am thinking through the concepts developed by Adriana Cavarero in *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005). Although Cavarero's central concern is the sonic aspect of voice that decenters logos, her emphasis on the body helps us think of how we communicate without words.

provide answers, but also because it does not meet the spiritual dimension of human's relationship with death. Cartomancy, palm reading, *curanderismo*, and communication with the dead are methods to obtain information and solutions that are included in the novel, but they sharply contrast with criminal investigation procedures and to traditional investigative journalistic research. On the surface, including spiritual sources of information seems to create a contradiction and even a problem for *Chicas muertas* as a *crónica* or as nonfiction. However, a closer reading reveals that this book questions the limits of scientific methods and legal procedures to address the problem of femicidal violence.

Literary critic Zulema Moret recognizes the role of La Señora in the search for truth and affirms that the investigation in *Chicas muertas* moves between two zones "que no son antagónicas, pero sí diferentes: las barajas del tarot que hablarán de registros imaginarios y las fotos que son representación de la realidad, de lo vivido" (87). According to Moret, the multiplicity of perspectives and diverse sources of information in *Chicas muertas* make it impossible to find the truth, in the sense of finding out how the crimes happened and who the perpetrators are (88). Thus, Moret states that *Chicas muertas* aims to expose the archive (88). María Verónica Elizondo Oviedo uses the terms "exhumación del archivo" and suggests that exposing the archive of the three cases is a way of giving the murdered women "un relato vivificador" and to "devolverles cuerpos deseantes" (8). While I support the idea of this book's role in exposing the archive, I find it necessary to explore further the different meanings of having a spiritual element become part of the archive in the first place.

Anzaldúa's concept of *conocimiento*, which encompasses forms of knowledge outside of scientific rationality, such as those acquired through dreaming, intuiting, and sensing provide a useful frame for this book's narration through the spiritual realm. According to Anzaldúa, *conocimiento* is a form of spiritual inquiry that "is reached via creative acts - writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism - both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as a site of creativity)" (*Light* 119). The spiritual inquiry has a role in building knowledge and transforming reality that connects deeply to the acts of imagination. Anzaldúa does not understand imagination in opposition to reality. Instead, she sees imagination as "another type of reality" (Anzaldúa, *Light* 37). When referring to shamanic journeys, for instance, Anzaldúa affirms that it does not matter if the shaman's "journey comes from a waking dream, the unconscious in symbolic representation, or a nonordinary parallel world" because what matters is that the acquired information "makes positive changes in a person's life" (*Light* 37). Thus, the primary function of spirituality, according to this view, is healing and transforming.

Although criminal justice systems cannot use information gathered through spiritual means, the type of knowledge that is produced through spiritual practices can have important social implications because they can alter individual and collective narratives. For this reason, the narrator's multiple visits to La Señora add an important dimension to the *autohistoria-teoría* that Almada produces in *Chicas muertas*. The details La Señora finds about the dead girls through the tarot cards or through spiritual channeling may or may not be true in the scientific sense. But the contact with spiritual realms creates emotional connection and healing. The tarot is a form of reading and interpretation based on archetypes. Each card of the deck that the cartomancer places on the table functions as building blocks of a narrative constructed at the reading time. In contrast to the photos of partially decomposed or destroyed dead bodies that the police archives keep, the tarot cards allow the imagination to create a reality that exceeds the material body.

During the narrator's first visit to La Señora, however, the focus of their conversation is not what the tarot cards are saying. Instead, the psychic tells the narrator the story of La Huesera. According to La Señora, La Huesera is "una vieja chúcara que cacarea como las gallinas, canta como los pájaros y emite sonidos más animales que humanos" (Almada 50). This wild woman has the task of collecting bones, putting them together, and breathing life into them by singing a song. The bones become a wolf, and the wolf eventually becomes a woman who runs freely "riéndose a carcajadas" (Almada 50). La Señora concludes the story by speaking directly to the narrator: "Tal vez esa sea tu misión: juntar los huesos de las chicas, armarlas, darles voz y después dejarlas correr libremente hacia donde sea que tengan que ir" (Almada 50). The poetic expression evoking freedom does not give concrete answers, but it opens multiple possibilities.

The inclusion of this story in Almada's book adds another dimension to the purpose of investigating these crimes. The narrator does not clearly state in the text why she was investigating these unsolved crimes or what she intended to do in case she found the truth about them. She seems to be motivated by a curiosity emerging from her emotional connection to the stories of the girls, especially to the case of Andrea, whose murder caused an impression on the narrator who was only thirteen years old when she heard the news. La Señora's suggestion that the narrator's mission was similar to that of La Huesera is the only purpose that is clearly stated in *Chicas muertas*. Even though the re-investigation of the crimes does not lead to finding a culprit and obtaining legal justice, *Chicas muertas* symbolically brings the girls back to life when she remembers them, names them, and tells their story. Moreover, the book is also an act of individual and collective healing through the path of *conocimiento* (awareness/insight).

The story of La Huesera also contributes to the expansion of the geography of feminicide, as I discussed earlier, because it ties *Chicas muertas* back to the space of the U.S.-Mexico border. The story is based on an Indigenous myth originating on the borderlands between the US and Mexico. The myth became widely known in the 1990s through the work of Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés in her bestseller book *Women Who Run With Wolves*. Estés, who is also a poet and a *cantadora*, reproduces a version of the story in her book, along with many other stories and fairy tales. By doing so, she offers a tool for readers, especially women, to heal their psyches. Estés believes that "stories are medicine. [...] Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life" (15). In addition, Estés affirms that such medicine (stories) strengthens both the individual and the community (19).

According to Estés' interpretation of the myth, La Huesera represents the archetype of the Old Woman, also known in some regions as *La Que Sabe* (27). I find it relevant that the Old Woman archetype connects to the idea of knowledge, The One Who Knows, and The Wise Woman. Her knowledge, however, cannot be tamed by Western science. Her knowledge is ancestral and encompasses the past, present, and future. As Estés points out, she inhabits "the place where mind and instincts mingle" and she "stands between the worlds of rationality and mythos" (Estés 28). Similarly to what Anzaldúa proposes in the path to *conocimiento*, Estés believes that people, particularly women, can access this place through "deeply creative acts, through intentional solitude, and by practice of any of the arts" (30). La Huesera, much like the narrator of *Chicas muertas*, inhabits the borderlands of narration. By embodying the myth of La Huesera, the narrator of *Chicas muertas* produces healing through writing.

In Estés' version of the myth, La Huesera "collects and preserves especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world" (25). In this sense, Almada's retelling of this myth and the suggestion that the narrator's task is similar to La Huesera show a concern with building a collective memory through storytelling. Building on and transforming the Argentine *testimonio*

tradition that flourished during the military dictatorship of the 20th century, Almada's book contributes to the construction of a social memory about gender-based violence. According to María Celeste Cabral, Almada's book shows a different form of writing about memory compared to the *crónicas* and *testimonios* of state violence in Argentina. One of the differences is the time it took for the stories about feminicide to be incorporated into the hegemonic collective memory. Even though feminicide has been happening continuously throughout Argentina's history, it took much longer for *testimonios* denouncing gender-based violence to become a prominent theme on national and international conversations compared to testimonies about the state-sponsored violence that took place during the military dictatorships.

While the violence of military dictatorship has been widely represented in literature, arts, and film since the second part of the 20th century, feminicidal violence is only now achieving a similar magnitude. According to Cabral, *Chicas muertas* rescues "memorias subterráneas," that is, "versiones sobre el pasado que sectores minoritarios de la sociedad no logran incluir en la memoria colectiva en disputa" (Cabral). The act of digging out and exposing these memories became possible "una vez que las condiciones sociales de escucha habilitaron el surgimiento de nuevos testimonios que visibilizaron las formas naturalizadas de la violencia contra las mujeres" (Cabral). As Cabral points out, these social conditions exceed the literary realm to include other cultural interventions also affected by a new sensibility around the topic. A significant factor contributing to these new social conditions was the growth of feminist movements in the first decades of the 21st century, allowing feminicide to become prominent in the agenda of transnational movements mobilizing women online and on the streets.

Transforming histories of political violence

Almada's book not only brings the memory about feminicide from the underground to the surface, as Cabral suggested, but it also spreads stories from the geographical borderlands of Argentina and its rural communities through the national center of power in Buenos Aires and beyond. As López Casanova points out, *Chicas muertas* reveals the tension between discourses from the center and the peripheries by mentioning the differences between crimes told by local versus national newspapers and how the distribution of information "consolida la lógica del Estado, su Ley y su connivencia con el mercado" (53). The movements in space and time in *Chicas muertas* transform local, national and transnational histories of political violence that include feminicidal violence.

The narrator in Almada's book comments that the story of María Luisa Quevedo's murder had to compete with the agenda of the new democratic government of the early 1980s, which included "la apropiación ilegal de bebés y niños en la dictadura, el hallazgo de cadáveres no identificados en el cementerio de Sáenz Peña, las primeras citaciones a jerarcas militares para que declarasen en causas de secuestros y desapariciones durante el periodo 1976-1982" (Almada 151). At the local level, however, the "Caso Quevedo" seems to have displaced the national agenda. It was narrated as a *folletín* in newspapers and on the radio, quickly becoming "la serie de horror y misterio del verano chaqueño de 1984" (Almada 151). According to the narrator, it even spread paranoia among parents of teenage girls in the region (Almada 154). Thus, when it comes to reporting crimes in the 1980s, there was a clear separation between the capital city and the rural peripheries, as well as national and local agendas. When Almada's book recovers these stories in the 2010s, it brings them from past to present, from the borderlands to the capital. She brings stories from the peripheries to the center.

These movements in time and space highlight the continuity of feminicidal violence through historical time. It also raises a meaningful conversation about the intersections among gender-based violence, democracy, dictatorship, and the state. *Chicas muertas* suggests that while dissidents of the military regime were being kidnapped, tortured and killed, women everywhere were also disappearing, being beaten, raped, and murdered. Women have suffered gender-specific forms of violence under the hands of the military governments and dictatorships throughout Latin America. As Fregoso and Bejarano affirm, "the pervasive specter of civil wars and Latin America's Dirty Wars must also be factored into the architecture of feminicide, for the sexual degradation and dehumanization of feminicidal violence echo the repressed history of regimes of punishment designed for women under military regimes" (12). Gender-specific forms of torture included gang rape, sexual slavery, and forced abortions, among other cruel practices. According to Fregoso and Bejarano, "the unbridled misogynist practices of military regimes illuminate the intersections of 'political repression' and 'patriarchal culture' as mutually constituting forces" (13). Militaristic violence boosts the idea that men have sovereignty over women's bodies and vice versa.

Scholar Barbara Sutton has studied the relationship between large-scale brutality of the military regime in Argentina and gender-based violence. Sutton affirms that "such a violent political regime was infused with gendered meanings that fueled ideological justifications to the practices and power of the military, an archetypical male-dominated institution" (135). Drawing from the work of Diana Taylor, Sutton maintains that torturers used gendered discourses as resources for their practices. Thus, based on the gender ideology that perceives masculinity as "insertive" and femininity as "receptive," torturers sought to feminize those whom they wanted to subjugate (Sutton 136). Moreover, Sutton highlights that women who were kidnapped and tortured were perceived as "double transgressors" because they not only challenged the military regime but they also challenged women's place and role in society (136).

However, *Chicas muertas* does not state that feminicidal violence is only a problem of the dictatorship. Instead, it states that feminicidal violence exceeds the dictatorship. Writing in 2014, when Argentina was under a democratic government, the narrator says: "Hace un mes que comenzó el año. Al menos diez mujeres fueron asesinadas por ser mujeres. Digo al menos porque estos son los nombres que salieron en los diarios. Los que fueron noticia" (Almada 181). Case after case, women continue to be killed for being women in times of democracy. So, the narrator reflects upon the dimension of the problem and concludes: "Ahora tengo cuarenta años y, a diferencia de ella [Andrea] y de las miles de mujeres asesinadas en nuestro país desde entonces, sigo viva. Sólo una cuestión de suerte" (Almada 182). The process of investigating and writing this book leads the narrator to understand that being a woman is a risk factor, regardless of forms of government.

Feminist scholars studying gender-based violence in other regions of Latin America with high rates of feminicide have arrived at similar conclusions. For instance, Gabriela Torres and David Carey have traced a continuum of violence against women in Guatemala through case studies that highlight similarities between how the state relates to its citizens and how cis-men relate to their wives and families. According to Torres and Carey, "The same obedience that authoritarian (and even democratic) regimes demanded from their citizens was reflected in gender relations" (146). The Guatemalan legal system supported socially constructed notions of womanhood that perpetrators of domestic violence used to justify abuse, including talking back to their husbands or not taking care of the house (Carey and Torres 148). Moreover, politically engaged women who joined guerrilla groups during the period known as *La Violencia* were

represented in the press as transgressing their societal roles as women. For this reason, they became dispensable, and surveillance and violence against these women became acceptable (Carey and Torres 155).

On the other hand, Jelke Boesten draws a parallel between violence against women during periods of democracy and authoritarian regimes in Peru. Boesten affirms that "patriarchal authority over family, and thus women, was not necessarily weakened by secularization after independence"(365). She affirms that although the legal system was modified over time, Catholic morality continued to exert heavy influence (Boesten 365). During the internal conflict in the late 20th century, both the armed forces and the guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso were responsible for committing sexual violence against rural and Indigenous populations. According to Boesten, the Sendero Luminoso "in its zeal to promote a new moral society, imposed strict rules upon communities, whereby adulterers and rapists, gays, transsexual people, and prostitutes were publicly and violently punished" (367). In addition, Boesten states that there is evidence linking the activities of Sendero Luminoso with forced marriages and pregnancies, as well as sexual torture and sexual slavery (367). Even though sexual violence was widespread, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has found that the armed forces committed 83 percent of the crimes.

According to Boesten, gathering evidence to convict and punish military perpetrators was a challenging task, since the Ministry of Defense did not cooperate, refused to open archives, and incinerated files (369). Boesten's suggests that the state continuously fails to address gender-based violence before, during, and after the internal conflict. Boesten states that current legislation[15] "does not focus on women's rights, but on a male-headed family unit" (364). Consequently, attitudes towards women are bound to conservative Christian values about family and sexuality. And these are the values illuminating the way front-line personnel and the judiciary deal with cases of gender-based violence in Peru.

Studies from different contexts in Latin America support the idea that feminicidal violence in Latin America is a structural problem beyond left and right politics and democratic and authoritarian regimes. They do, however, reinforce the notion that the way the violence happens in the home closely resembles violence inflicted by Latin American states under authoritarian regimes. According to Sutton, "the private, invisible violence that many Argentine women undergo in their homes may not look too different from many of the methods utilized by state-sponsored torturers" (141). Although Sutton does not establish a causal relationship between the military dictatorship and violence against women, she does state that "broad contexts and histories of institutionalized violence feed current individual actions" (139). On the one hand, when Almada establishes a connection between authoritarian and democratic governments, she shows that women's bodies continue being violated, exploited, and disappearing through history. On the other hand, together with the studies mentioned above, *Chicas muertas* supports the idea that violence against women is foundational to the state.

As I discuss in the introduction of this dissertation, the feminist theorization of feminicide blurs the borders between the public and the private, transforming simplistic victim-perpetrator paradigms of interpersonal violence into structural violence. State violence becomes interconnected with domestic violence and other kinds of violence, including economic violence. Lagarde assertively affirms that "feminicide is a state crime" (xxii). In addition, according to Rita Segato, "se trata de crímenes del patriarcado colonial moderno de alta intensidad, contra

[15] At the time of publication (2012).

todo lo que lo desestabiliza, contra todo lo que parece conspirar y desafiar su control, contra todo lo que se desliza hacia fuera de su égida, con las varias estrategias y tácticas diarias con las que muchos de nosotros, a propósito o inadvertidamente nos deslizamos y escabullimos de la vigilancia patriarcal y la desobedecemos" (*La guerra* 96). Feminicide, then, is an expression of power and a tool of punishment and control within a patriarchal social order that does not end with democracy.

In her study, Sutton uses the palimpsest as a metaphor to show "how layers of the past are inscribed in the present" (139). The presence of the past is also crucial in *Chicas muertas*, as I have been discussing. However, instead of the palimpsest, Almada includes the story of *La Huesera* to highlight that idea. As mentioned above, *La Huesera* collects bones in the desert, puts them together, then returns life to them by singing. In turn, the narrator in *Chicas muertas* investigates cases in which the bones of the dead women are material evidence to feminicide. According to López Casanova, the task of *La Huesera* is comparable to the task of the narrator on a metaphorical level: "la tarea de la narradora/investigadora consiste en juntar discursos, "huesos" del discurso social como espacio privilegiado de intervención de la imaginación pública" (López Casanova 54). The idea suggested by López Casanova complements what Moret and Elizondo argue about this book's function of exposing the archive.

I argue that *Chicas muertas* not only exposes, but it also disrupts patriarchal archives of political violence. Almada's nonfiction novel makes visible the stories that had been hidden, marginalized or forgotten. She sings them to life like La Huesera. She also assembles them into a specific shape, a genre-bending *autohistoria-teoría* that challenges patriarchal narratives and patriarchal epistemologies. Just like the blowing wind can be a "música de una pequeña victoria" when the narrator's aunt survives an attempt at feminicide, Almada's novel can be a song of women's resistance to feminicidal violence. *Chicas muertas* does not solve crimes, but it shows the world how the world sees women and girls. It produces knowledge, transforms realities and fosters healing.

Chapter 2

Confronting Imaginaries of Race and Gender in *Mulheres empilhadas*

Brazil is one of the countries with the highest rates of feminicide in the world. The crime of feminicide was included in the Brazilian penal code as first-degree murder in 2015, nine years after the *Lei Maria da Penha* was sanctioned in 2006. Named after a survivor of domestic violence who became paraplegic for life, the Maria da Penha Law established stricter sentences for perpetrators of domestic violence against women and created special courts, police stations and women's shelters. In spite of the stricter law, a report from 2019 states that 1,326 women were killed because of their gender that year, and that perpetrators were romantic partners or former partners of the victim in 89,9% of the cases (Fórum 13). It was only in 2023 when the Brazilian Supreme Court declared the argument of "legitimate defense of honor" unconstitutional to justify the behavior of the defendant in cases of feminicide and violence against women. The thesis of *legítima defesa da honra* had been used in Brazil since colonial times to acquit husbands who killed their wives by stating that men's physically violent actions were justified when the women's behavior hurt their honor.

Although recent legislation addressing violence against women shows some progress towards gender equality in Brazil, the very categories of "gender" and "woman" continue to be insufficient to explain the complex web of oppressive social structures generating violence. For Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women, their race has always played an important role in how they experienced life and navigated Brazilian society. Brazilian Black feminist Djamila Ribeiro affirms that "mulheres negras vêm historicamente pensando a categoria 'mulher' de forma não universal e crítica, apontando sempre para a necessidade de se perceber outras possibilidades de ser mulher" (123). Ribeiro reminds her readers that the category "woman" alone may not encompass the experiences of Black women, who live through race-based and gender-based oppression simultaneously. In dialogue with the Black feminist thought of scholars and activists such as Lélia Gonzales, Sueli Carneiro, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Grada Kilomba, Ribeiro invites us to practice an intersectional feminism where one category does not have priority over the other (123). The contributions of Black feminists and other feminists of color highlight, among many other things, that it is not enough to speak of patriarchal oppression while ignoring its interconnectedness with white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, and colonialism.

When working with a legal and political category such as feminicide, which is defined as the killing of women because of their gender, the use of the words "women" and "gender" is strategic. It emphasizes a particular set of shared experiences of a diverse group and allows members of this group to organize around this set of experiences to promote change. It also allows for the understanding of feminicidal violence as a form of political violence, as it is directed at a group in a systematic manner to control such group. Even though all women are potential targets of feminicidal violence, an intersectional feminist approach to this structural problem demands a recognition of the multiple forms of oppression that different women may experience simultaneously. A woman's vulnerability may be aggravated by her status in such a racialized and classist society as Brazil is.

As I continue to explore how narrative literature contributes to the political work of combatting feminicide, in this chapter I focus on the intersection of race and gender in relation to the justice system in Brazil. The literary work I chose for this discussion is the 2019 novel *Mulheres "empilhadas*, by Patrícia Melo, an internationally recognized author and winner of the

prestigious *Prêmio Jabuti* in 2001 for the novel *Inferno*. *Mulheres empilhadas* is one of the first literary works in Portuguese to directly address feminicide since the Latin American "feminist explosion" that have been bringing women and allies into the streets on a massive scale since 2015. The expression "feminist explosion" is a nod to the title of a collection of essays edited by Brazilian literary critic Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, published in 2018. In the Introduction, Hollanda narrates the rise feminist protests in 2015 from her perspective as a woman who participated in feminist movements of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. She points out this generation's intersectional approach to multiple forms of oppression and their non-hierarchical organization based on "narrativas de si [...] que ecoam coletivas" (10). These characteristics of contemporary feminist movements from Latin America find resonance in Melo's novel, as I will discuss in the pages below.

Although examples of what we understand today as feminicide can be found in literature from all periods of literary history, it is relevant that contemporary works such as *Mulheres empilhadas* narrate violence against women with the language and the framework provided by the feminist concept of feminicide. That is, the victimization of women is understood as a systemic and generalized issue that targets all women on the basis of gender. These crimes are not isolated even when they seem very different from each other. Melo's novel creates space for the exploration of individual cases that contribute to the creation of a collective story without dismissing racial and class differences. Thus, one of the most important aspects of this novel is the juxtaposition between two women characters: the woman who narrates and the woman who was silenced by murder. One is a white bourgeois woman from São Paulo and the other is an Indigenous woman from an Indigenous village in Acre, at the border of Brazil and Peru. Both women were victimized by patriarchal violence, but as my analysis will show, the justice system and society as a whole treat them differently because of their race, language, class, and level of formal education.

The contrast between the two characters in Melo's novel not only highlights the need for intersectional feminist approaches to feminicide, but it also demands a dismantling of the Brazilian Myth of Racial Democracy, which dispels the idea of racial hierarchies because of the miscegenation that took place in Brazil, as I will explain below. For this reason, in this chapter I study how this novel confronts the Myth of Racial Democracy. I also study how the myth affects women and I consider specific ways in which Indigenous women have been racialized in Brazil. This study is based on the notions of coloniality of power, introduced by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, and coloniality of gender, introduced by Argentine philosopher María Lugones as a response to Quijano. These notions suggest that among the legacies of colonialism in the Americas are interrelated organizing structures such as gender, race, and capitalism. Based on the understanding that feminicidal violence supports the colonial matrix of power[16], I argue that dismantling culturally constructed imaginaries about Indigenous peoples in Brazil is a necessary step in the feminist struggle to eliminate feminicide.

Historical Context

[16] According to Argentine scholar Walter Mignolo, who draws from Quijano's work, the colonial matrix of power "is a structure of control and management that operates in four domains. [...] Knowledge and Understanding, Governance, Economy, and the idea of the Human or Humanity" (43). Mignolo maintains that the CMP is the "unconscious of Western civilization" (40).

Mulheres empilhadas touches deep wounds in Brazilian society about racism and misogyny. In the years ahead of the novel's publication, the ascension of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency exposed and pressed these wounds even more. By the time of Bolsonaro's inauguration in January 2019, the Brazilian population had become highly polarized around several issues, including the role of women and the question of race in Brazilian society. In 2017, when Bolsonaro was still a *deputado* (member of parliament), he made a speech at an event in Rio de Janeiro where he said: "Quem é o índio? Ele não tem dinheiro. Não fala a nossa língua. Como ele consegue grandes espaços de terra? [...] Isso vai mudar," (Bolsonaro qtd. in Ramos). Bolsonaro was formally accused of racism because of the discriminatory ideas against Indigenous and *quilombola*[17] populations in his speech. Bolsonaro was taken to court and found guilty. However, in 2019, as president of Brazil, he was found innocent in that case. Besides giving that racially charged speech in 2017, Bolsonaro had a track record of making misogynistic and homophobic commentary, including some about his own daughter, the younger sibling of four men. Bolsonaro told reporters that the conception of his female child had been the result of a "fraquejada," a moment of weakness in his performance (Bolsonaro qtd. in Grego).

Comments similar to the two highlighted above are not exclusively said by Bolsonaro or by other members of far-right political parties. They commonly take place in everyday conversations throughout Brazil. However, when these types of ideas are said loud and clear by an elected official at the highest rank, they are widely disseminated and amplified by multiple media outlets, including social media. Consequently, the symbolic violence that already existed in Brazilian society against historically marginalized groups becomes blatant. It is in this context that the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* discusses situations of racial and gender-based violence in Brazil. The novel brings forth historic tensions and structural problems that are being loudly reproduced in other media around the time of the novel's publication in 2019, and are still unfolding today. Thus, the novel invites readers to examine what these problems are, how they are discussed, and by whom.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, one of the major themes that Melo's novel brings forth is the persistence of the myth of racial democracy in Brazil. In 2018, a year before the publication of Melo's novel, Bolsonaro made a statement that is actually quite common among Brazilians: "Aqui no Brasil não existe isso de racismo, tanto é que meu sogro é Paulo Negão e quando eu vi a filha dele não queria saber quem era o pai dela" (Bolsonaro qtd. in Ramos). When referring to his family members as Black, Bolsonaro is evoking the common idea that in Brazil there is no racism because Brazilians are racially mixed. As such, Brazilians of all colors and races coexist in harmony in the same family and share the same spaces. Thus, according to this idea, everyone is on the same level and there are no social conditions for discrimination based on race. Brazil, therefore, is a racially mixed paradise where race is not a factor determining economic, symbolic, or physical violence.

The sharing of spaces and the existence of racially mixed families does create an appearance of racial harmony that contrasts to visibly racially segregated societies in the United States and South Africa, for example. However, Brazilian historian Petrônio Domingues states that some spaces were conceded to Black persons since the colonial period in Brazil as long as they did not threaten the authority of whites (119). Domingues adds that "o mito da democracia

[17] According to a presidential decree from 2003 (Decreto nº 4.887, de 20 de novembro de 2003), *quilombolas* are the descendants of the inhabitants of *quilombos*, maroon communities created during the colonial period and through the 19th century. The decree specifies that *quilombolas* are an ethnic-racial group with specific historical trajectories and relationship with the land. Thus, the decree granted land rights to these communities.

racial inverteu o eixo da questão: transformou a exceção em regra; o particular em universal; casos isolados em generalizações" (119). The fact that Brazil did not have official segregation policies after the abolition of slavery, as the United States had, has been used in the consolidation of a masked type of racial discrimination where people had equal rights and opportunities, if only in theory.

The Myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil

The myth of racial democracy was built slowly from the 19th century into the 20th century, when it solidified. Its creation was stimulated by governmental policies and supported by cultural production, including visual arts, literature, radio and television programming. According to Domingues, the origins of the myth are tied to several factors including travel literature written by foreigners, the process of racial mixing that took place in Brazil, the ideas produced by intellectual and political elites, the comparison between the racial systems in Brazil and the United States, among others (119). Domingues says that foreigners such as the French physician Louis Couty were impressed by the apparent racial integration in Brazil, so they reported a romanticized vision of Brazil's racial system in their writings (Domingues 119). Moreover, according to Domingues, Brazilian abolitionists such as Joaquim Nabuco described in their writings the existence of a fraternal climate amongst the population, even in the context of slavery (120). On the one hand, intellectuals and politicians often sustained the idea that the high level of racial mixing in Brazil was an indicator of tolerance among races, which conveniently ignored the violence of the white colonizer against the Black and Indigenous populations. On the other hand, the persistent denial of the existence of conflict allowed not only the construction of the myth, but also contributed to the disarticulation of anti-racist struggles "pois não se combate o que não existe" (Domingues 122). Thus, the construction of the myth relied on the virtual erasure of racial conflict at the same time it highlighted cordial relations.

The emphasis intellectual and political elites placed on supposedly harmonious racial relations in Brazil through the 20th century does erase the concern that the 19th century elites, who were mostly white, had about the fact that the majority of Brazilians were mixed-race. According to anthropologist Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, since the 18th century European intellectuals such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the count de Buffon have discussed the "homem americano" (16). However, Schwarcz affirms that "foi só no século XIX que os teóricos do darwinismo social fizeram dos atributos externos e fenotípicos elementos essenciais, definidores de moralidades e do devir dos povos" (20). European intellectuals from the 19th century such as the English historian Henry Thomas Buckle and the French anthropologist Arthur de Gobineau, among others, developed pseudoscientific theories that explained the economic success of northern European countries through ideas of racial superiority and regional climate. According to historian Thomas E. Skidmore, these theories "carried the implication that darker races and tropical climates could never produce comparable civilizations" (28). The intellectual authority of European thought over Latin American thought translated into the concern that Brazilian elites had over the possible negative impact of having a racially mixed population into the economic and cultural development of Brazil.

Even though 19th-century Brazilian elites considered Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race groups inferior to whites and a threat to progress and civilization, it is note-worthy that state policies and the arts treated the Indigenous populations quite differently from Black populations since the colonial period. Anthropologist Manuela Carneiro da Cunha points out that in the 18th

century, the Portuguese statesman Marquês de Pombal established that Portuguese men who married Indigenous women and had mixed children would not lose the status of pure blood and would be able to receive titles and privileges reserved for the Portuguese ("Índios" 284). Portugal had a small population and policies such as Pombal's aimed at creating a population of free people in the Portuguese colony. This was a state-sponsored project of miscegenation that lasted for more than two centuries. However, Pombal's miscegenation project was specific to Portuguese men and Indigenous women, creating specific gender roles and excluding the Black population. Besides the fact that Pombal's miscegenation project was created to advance the Portuguese crown's interests in Brazilian territory, not the Indigenous peoples' interests, Pombal's policy assigned the role of giving birth to a population of free Brazilians to Indigenous women, therefore contributing to sexual violence and to the slow erasure of Indigenous populations who would be whitened in the process.

In the mid-19th-century, a group of intellectuals associated with the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro began to celebrate an idealized Indigenous person as a model for Brazil that was based on Rousseau's "noble savage" (Schwarcz 26). This romantic idealization conceived the "uncivilized" peoples a symbol of goodness not yet corrupted by civilization. On the other hand, many intellectuals such as the medical doctor Nina Rodrigues adopted the pseudoscientific beliefs that racial miscegenation led to degeneration (Schwarcz 21). Even though opinions oscillated, Schwarcz affirms that "na vertente mais negativa de finais do século XIX, a mestiçagem existente no país parecia atestar a própria falência da nação" (20). Since many members of the political and intellectual elites perceived the racial composition of the population an important factor standing in the way of Brazil's social and economic progress, it is not surprising that physicians such as Nina Rodrigues would affirm that not all races were capable of following the penal codes of "civilized peoples" and therefore criminal liability should be relative in Brazilian law (Schwarcz 24). Nina Rodrigues' intervention in the legal field works in consonance with other interventions, including that of physician and anthropologist João Batista Lacerda in the First Universal Races Congress, which took place in London in 1911. As a representative of Brazil, Lacerda used the painting *A redenção de Cam* (1895), by the Spanish painter Modesto Brocos, to illustrate his theory about racial miscegenation. Lacerda envisioned a future for Brazil where Black and mixed race people would have disappeared through the process of miscegenation (Schwarcz 25). Although Lacerda celebrated the contributions of mixed race people to Brazil throughout its history, he saw racial mixing as a tool to whiten the population.

Lacerda's use of Modesto Brocos' painting in his 1911 presentation reveals that the whitening project is as much a question of race as it is a question of gender and sexuality. The painting makes visible the role of women in the whitening project for the Brazilian population. In the image, the white man is the agent responsible for whitening the population while the Black and *mestiça* women are tools responsible for giving birth to whitened children. The image suggests that the whitening project requires a heterosexual family to be executed. It also suggests that women's destiny is to be mothers. Moreover, the painting is embedded in religious symbolism from its name to the positioning of the woman's body with a child on her lap. On the one hand, the painting's title evokes the biblical story of Noah's son Ham, which has been historically used to justify the subjugation of a people under another. On the other hand, the woman's representation evokes hundreds of images of the Virgin Mary with Jesus on her lap. Thus, in Lacerda's whitening project it is implicit that women receive a sacred-like status when they fulfill their function as an incubator of a whiter future. Finally, this whitening project clearly

defines what must be rejected in the process: Blackness. The white baby the brown woman holds represents the triumph of whiteness and the erasure of Blackness. Therefore, racial mixing as a whitening project brings a heavy load of violence against women that is both physical and symbolic.

Through the 20th century, the political and intellectual elites shifted the debates about race, culture, and nationality to celebrate racial mixing and to idealize the *mestiço* as an icon of Brazilianness. According to Ruben George Oliven, it is in the 1930s that a more centralized state takes the task of building a national identity, the so-called *brasilidade*, in its own hands (261). The authoritarian regime led by Getúlio Vargas from 1937 to 1946, a period known as *Estado Novo*, promoted a populist nationalism based on a homogenous national identity capable of suffocating internal tensions. Oliven affirms that "caberia ao recém-criado Ministério da Educação e da Cultura um papel fundamental na constituição da identidade nacional, o que deveria ser feito através da impressão de um conteúdo nacional à educação veiculada pelas escolas, da padronização do sistema educacional e do enfraquecimento da cultura das minorias étnicas" (261). Besides directed efforts in the educational and cultural realms, the state also created the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda*, which was responsible for censoring and controlling the circulation of information. The model of Brazilian identity that was being constructed through formal education, the press and the arts was heavily based on the idea that Brazil is a "nação mestiça, fruto da mistura de três raças, que vivem num país tropical de dimensões continentais e com uma natureza generosa e abundante" (Oliven 262). Thus, the mestiço became a symbol of Brazilianness and the myth of racial democracy was propelled forward.

It is relevant to note that the hegemonic debates around national identity, which clearly involved race, remained grounded on the perspectives of white men through the 20th century. The most influential "intérpretes do Brasil" from the first half of the 20th century were white male scholars such as Gilberto Freyre, Caio Prado Júnior, and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. Although the creation of the myth cannot be attributed entirely to the sociologist Gilberto Freyre, Schwarcz reminds us that Freyre's work formulates the myth "de maneira exemplar" (28). In *Casa grande e senzala*, published in 1933, Freyre does not defend the degeneration thesis that Nina Rodrigues supported in the previous century. Instead, Freyre values the contributions of Black and Indigenous populations to Brazilian culture. However, his writing promotes a romanticized version of the interactions between these groups that is based on racist and misogynistic ideas. His descriptions of social and sexual relations across racial lines minimizes power imbalances and emphasizes harmony.

Particularly around his description of sexual relations, Freyre seems to be oblivious to the fact that in many cases white men raped Black and Indigenous women. It would be impossible to determine specific instances when there might have been mutual interest and consent because women were not in the same social and legal position as white men to have full freedom of choice. In Freyre's work, the *mestiça* population is considered a positive outcome, regardless of the violence through which they were formed, because Freyre considers the *mestiços* a group well adapted to the tropical environment of Brazil. However, embracing the *mestiça* population in this manner does not translate into the existence of a racial democracy. As Skidmore affirms about Freyre's work, "the practical effect of his analysis was not, however, to promote such a racial egalitarianism. Rather, it served to reinforce the whitening ideal by showing graphically that the (primarily white) elite had gained valuable cultural traits from their intimate contact with the African (and Indian, to a lesser extent)" (192). The celebration of miscegenation in 20th-

century Brazil masked racial and gender-based violence in the past and in the present. It also contributed to the maintenance of social hierarchies, including those around knowledge production.

The role of literature, arts, and mass media

Brazilian arts, literature, and mass media have often promoted a kind of national identity based on racial and cultural *mestiçagem*, which further contributed to the consolidation of the myth of racial democracy in the 20th century. According to the art historian Rafael Cardoso, "under the dictatorship of the Estado Novo, modernist celebrations of the folkloric and the people often functioned as a cover for the very real suppression of regional difference and popular self-determination" (15). There was a contrast between the celebration of an idealized *mestiça* nation and the violent rejection of specific elements that did not fit in the dominant narrative about Brazil and Brazilians. While Cândido Portinari's paintings such as *O mestiço* (1934) highlighted the mixed-race workers during the Vargas regime, the mixed-race bandit Lampião and other members of his group of *cangaceiros* had their decapitated heads exhibited publicly for decades[18]. Cardoso argues that the spectacularization of Lampião's death is an example of how the Brazilian government manipulated the image of the "Brazilian race." Cardoso affirms that "the severed head of the popular anti-hero Lampião stands in instructive contrast to the idealized portrait of the 'mestizo', not a person but an imaginary racial type" (203). The *mestiço* from Portinari's paintings personified the Brazilian men only as an imagined ideal, and not as real persons who could be indisciplined or who could fight for their rights.

Besides supporting a Brazilianness based on the image of the *mestiço*, many cultural products also participated in the construction of other racial types and gender roles. Literature and print journalism, which are older media forms that have circulated for longer, played an important role in 19th century nation-building efforts. The idea that print culture had a fundamental role in the construction of national identity was articulated by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). According to Anderson, the narrative structure of the novel and the daily rituals of reading the newspaper contributed to creating a sense of community that moved together through time (35). The nation, according to Anderson's central arguments, was not a fact based on a common language, a common bloodline or a shared territory. The nation was a community imagined with the help of print culture.

In resonance with Anderson's ideas, literary critic Doris Sommer affirms in *Foundational Fictions* (1991) that 19th century canonical novels from Latin America established a dominant narrative about national identity and values based on the heterosexual family. To illustrate the Brazilian case, Sommer chose two novels by José de Alencar: *O Guarani* (1857) and *Iracema* (1865). Sommer states that these novels have been widely used in formal education of Brazilian youth through the 20th century, which justifies their status as canonical and influential (141). It

[18] Lampião is the most famous *cangaceiro*, a rural bandit, in Brazilian history and a controversial figure. He led a group of outlaws who acted throughout the Northeast of Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s. The *cangaço*, which is often translated as rural banditry, started in the 19th century and reached its peak in the first half of the 20th century. The *cangaceiros* opposed the land owners, the wealthy business owners, and the state. In spite of their violent tactics, which included kidnapping and torture, they had some support among specific sectors of the population, particularly the poor working class, for whom the police were often a source of violence. Lampião, his wife Maria Bonita, and nine members of his armed band were captured in 1938 and decapitated. Their heads were exhibited in the public squares of a few different cities, then they remained in exhibition in the museum Nina Rodrigues, in Salvador, for decades.

is relevant that both works Sommer selected are part of Alencar's *indianista* phase, portraying Indigenous protagonists. The novels narrate heterossexual and interracial love stories, which solidifies Sommer's arguments about the promotion of national ideals based on the naturalization of heterosexual love and the absence of violence in the resolution of internal conflicts (Sommer 6). According to Sommer, the erotic desire between the protagonists directly relates to the political desires of the national elites for the nation. While most of the population in Brazil was illiterate, the literature produced by 19th century intellectual and political elites reflected their values, including the white patriarchal heterosexual family as an aspirational ideal.

Although Anderson's and Sommer's works have been highly influential in Latin American literary studies, many scholars have criticized their limitations since their publication in the late 20th century. Literary critic Mary Louise Pratt, for instance, has criticized Anderson's androcentrism in the language he uses to discuss the nation. As an example, Pratt highlights the idea of fraternity and the metonymic associations with the figure of the citizen soldier (30). According to Pratt, women have been excluded from the national fraternity and they have been given the role of producers of citizens, a function known as "republican motherhood" (30). Women, Pratt argues, "are precariously other to the nation. They are imagined as dependent rather than sovereign; [...] being obsessively defined by their reproductive capacity; their bodies are sites for many forms of intervention, penetration, and appropriation" (30). Finally, Pratt affirms that even though women have been excluded from the national fraternity, they have actively participated in national debates, particularly those from the upper classes, who had access to writing and the press (31).

Another important criticism of Anderson's work pertains to the exclusion of specific racial and ethnic groups from the imagined community. According to Anthony W. Marx, the nation as imagined through Anderson's theory implies a more inclusive process than that which actually happened. Marx affirms that "[o]fficial boundaries purposefully defined and enforced who was imagined as part of the nation and who was not. Such imaginings were often not benign. Where states were formed before a nation emerged, the explicit efforts of the state to limit and encourage selective nationalism are particularly evident. Specified exclusion has provided a crucial referent demarcating those included" (5).The imagined community was actually formed through a process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Besides, according to Marx, citizenship has been used as a mechanism to establish and reinforce racial categories (5). These exclusionary processes harmed specific groups while also giving legitimacy to the formation of social identities that can serve to mobilize these groups politically and to function as a legal basis for demands over rights (Marx 6).

Sommer arguments about interracial heterosexual love seem to complicate the processes of exclusion and inclusion that Marx proposes by bringing forth the romantic union of races and the birth of a *mestiça* population. Yet, it is relevant that in *Iracema,* the Indigenous woman dies and the *mestiço* child is raised by his European father. As I will discuss in more detail in the section below, the death of Iracema symbolically aligns with the invisibilization of the Indigenous population that resisted in the 19th century. Moreover, the survival of the *mestiço* baby who is raised by the white father aligns with the national whitening project delineated in the previous section. Although the Indigenous and *mestiça* populations of Indigenous ancestry received a different treatment in Brazilian law and social imaginary in comparison to the Black population, their elimination and erasure was also part of the nation-building process.

According to literary critic Lee Skinner, Doris Sommer's work is still relevant today, as it has created a paradigm for the study of 19th century Latin American literature. However,

Skinner underscores the importance of exploring different ways of studying that period (601). Skinner observes that defining the canon is a pending question, as there is no unanimity about the constituting works (588). Moreover, Skinner affirms that specialists in the 19th century today are interested in topics other than nation-building and national identity, having moved on to study the circulation of ideas and objects (592). According to Skinner, recent studies try to understand how members of a community were thinking about specific issues, how they processed certain ideas, and what were the meanings given to specific objects in their life experiences (595). Finally, Skinner suggests thinking of community beyond the national community, allowing for the study of regional and local groups, as well as racial or social class groups.

The limitations of *Foundational Fictions* and *Imagined Communities* do not eliminate the possibility of exploring the role of literature and print culture in building myths about the nation and even stereotypes about specific groups within the national community. Literature can be understood as a means of communication among others, through which ideas may circulate. Although literature that is widely taught in schools such as Alencar's novels may reach larger audiences and support dominant narratives, non-canonical or marginalized literature may support alternative views that can create disruption. When discussing the circulation of ideas in 19th century studies, Skinner brings up the notion of "cultural field as an area of position-taking and exchanges," borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (592). Thinking through this concept, it is possible to approach literary works from the past or the present as part of the circulation of ideas. Therefore, it is possible to think of literature as a tool that marginalized groups can use to question myths, disobey norms, and challenge established power structures.

Based on the idea above, this dissertation considers literature as one of the tools that can be used for social, political, and cultural transformation. Considering that literature participated in the construction of the myth of racial democracy, this chapter interrogates how contemporary feminist literature may contribute to breaking down this myth by exposing its fallacies. This analysis of the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* engages with larger debates around feminicide, the myth of racial democracy in Brazil and in Latin America, and the situation of Indigenous peoples in the American continent. As I have previously affirmed, this novel emphasizes the partiality of the law and the biases of national justice systems against women, especially racialized women. The novel raises questions about the need to deconstruct the myth of racial democracy in order to address structural racism as it relates to combatting feminicide. Finally, it makes visible how myths and stereotypes about Indigenous people and Indigenous women in particular must be recognized and challenged to address the specific ways in which gender-based violence affects Indigenous women.

The Mythic Indigenous Person in Brazilian Imaginary

Melo's novel interweaves the stories of several strong female characters who develop relationships based on work, friendship, and family ties. The most relevant, in the context of this dissertation, is the relationship between the protagonist, a white lawyer from São Paulo, and Txupira, an Indigenous teenager who was brutally murdered by the sons of a wealthy local family. Although the two women never meet, when the protagonist participates in the trial of Txupira's murder, she becomes emotionally and intellectually connected to Txupira's case. The juxtaposition of these two characters makes visible some similarities between the violence to

which they were subjected. However, the contrast between them highlights the abysmal differences on the way the justice system and society in general treat the two.

In *Mulheres empilhadas*, the protagonist is also the narrator of the novel. As a white middle class woman, her voice echoes various canonical works of Brazilian literature and arts. In some ways, she reproduces the white, urban middle-class view of the Indigenous population in Brazil. However, as the story develops, the narrator has to face her ignorance about the Amazon region and the Indigenous population. She learns about the history and the realities of the population in the state of Acre through her lived experiences in the border town of Cruzeiro do Sul, including conversations with her new friends, locals and transplants.The narrator's self-reflection, albeit limited, challenge stereotypes about the North of Brazil and about the Indigenous population that were created with the help of non-Indigenous writers, artists, politicians, and journalists, most of whom inhabit large urban centers on the Atlantic coast.

As mentioned earlier, literature has played a role in creating national myths and types. Thus, literature and other arts and mass media such as telenovelas had an impact in the creation of a mythic Indigenous person that would become a symbol of Brazilianness. The 19th century was an important moment in the creation of an idealized image of the Brazilian Indigenous person. In the arts and literature from the Romantic period, which coincided with the first decades after political independence from Portugal, ideas that had been forged during the colonial period were reinforced and popularized in novels such as those by José de Alencar, mentioned above. In many of the novels and poems of that period, Indigenous characters were the protagonists. However, the Indigenous characters were often based on the Tupi peoples who had inhabited the coastal regions since the colonial period, but in a rather idealized and outdated version. According to anthropologist Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, in the literature of that period "há uma dissociação radical entre o índio de carne e osso e o índio simbólico. Não se põem em cena na literatura índios contemporâneos" ("Índios" 285). Not only the Indigenous protagonists were based on an idealized version of the past, but they were also created through the imagination of white men.

The disconnection between the present-day reality and the imagined Indigenous person strongly affected the way the Brazilian government dealt with Indigenous rights to their land in the 19th century. Indigenist policies of that period became more concerned with land management and territorial rights than with enslavement and labor exploitation ("Índios" 286). Cunha states that when a real Indigenous person did not match that idealized image portrayed in literature, they were considered "assimilated" and no longer Indigenous. Therefore, they would lose any rights to Indigenous land (Cunha, "Política" 145). According to Cunha, "inaugura-se uma prática que subsiste até hoje e que nega a condição de índios para se apropriar de suas terras: exige-se dos índios que se pareçam com a imagem que se forjou deles, a do século XVI, como se a história, a eles, não os tivesse atingido" ("Índios" 286). Thus, the expectation for Indigenous people to look and act like the mythical Indigenous person portrayed in literature and arts had material consequences harming Indigenous communities while benefiting Brazilian elites.

The image of an ideal "*índio*" that represented Brazilianness did not translate into citizenship rights for existing Indigenous people and a sense of belonging in the national society. A mythical Indigenous person continued to be portrayed through the 20th century in Brazil even though the "noble savage" of the 19th century was replaced by the cannibal in early 20th century arts and literature. The cannibal represented a rebellion against bourgeois values such as capitalism and the monogamous nuclear family. However, the cannibal of the first Modernist

phase in Brazilian arts was not an Indigenous person who fought for land rights, nor a creation of the Indigenous people themselves.

The minds behind the creation of the cannibal as symbol of Brazilianness were non-Indigenous people such as Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, and Mário de Andrade[19], who would incorporate Indigenous characters and Indigenous thought into their art and thought without necessarily contributing to land demarcation and ending violence against the Indigenous populations from whom they learned. Articulated by members of the São Paulo elites, the modernist cannibal can be thought of as a mask that non-Indigenous Brazilian artists used to position themselves in a global art stage set up according to European standards[20]. The modernists, then, enacted a kind of cultural *mestiçagem* centered on white men. As mentioned earlier, the emphasis that Brazilian intellectuals and politicians gave to the *mestiço* throughout the 20th century harmed both Black and Indigenous populations, who were pushed towards the margins with the expectation that they would eventually disappear through *mestiçagem* and the whitening process.

In spite of the creation of the rebellious cannibal in the early 20th century, the mythic Indigenous person centered around the noble savage from 19th century arts persisted as an expectation for governmental and non-governmental institutions when dealing with existing Indigenous communities. In the 19th century, Indigenous assimilation into the hegemonic culture allowed for a loss of their rights to their land. On the other hand, in the late 20th century, indigenist institutions played with the image of a domesticated Indigenous person in order to offer institutionalized support. In a study about nongovernmental organizations dedicated to support Indigenous groups in the 1980s, anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos proposed the concept of a "hyperreal indian" as "the NGOs ethical hologram" (277). According to Ramos, "flesh-and-blood Indians would either have to be kept at arm's length or have the wild otherness – a potential source of disorder – filtered and tamed and be transformed in model Indians" (274). According to Ramos, "the simulacrum results from the perhaps totally unconscious construction of a simulation of the real Indian, the model that by anticipation replaces the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. It is a model that molds the Indians' interests to the organization's shape and needs" (275). The "hyperreal indian" was a model Indigenous person who would be virtuous, pure, and "willing to die heroically for cherished ideals" (Ramos 276). The domesticated Indigenous person could be defended by professional activists in Indigenous rights organizations.

The imagined Indigenous woman

An intersectional feminist analysis of the mythical Indigenous person in Brazilian literature and culture demands a closer look at the women characters that formed part of this imaginary. The aforementioned 19th-century novel *Iracema*, by José de Alencar, is a prime example of a literary work that helped solidify stereotypes about Indigenous women in Brazil

[19] Among the artists who participated in the group of *Antropófagos*, Mário de Andrade stands out as someone who did not come from the elites and as a *mestiço* with Black grandparents. However, during his lifetime he did not claim his Blackness. Scholar Zita Nunes delineates the complex relation of Mário de Andrade with race in his most famous novel *Macunaíma*, which is considered an example of Anthropophagic aesthetics. Nunes affirms that in *Macunaíma*, the "proper" direction to where the characters' racial fluidity must flow is towards whiteness (51).

[20] For an in depth study of how Brazilian modernists negotiated their status as artists with Europeans through the symbol of the cannibal, see *Cannibal Angels: Transatlantic Modernism and the Brazilian Avant-Garde* by Kenneth David Jackson.

that obscures the diverse realities of living Indigenous women. Alencar's female protagonist falls in love with a European colonizer, seduces him, and has a child with him. However, Iracema's death at the end of the novel makes both the romance between her and Martin and the mothering of her son Moacir impossible experiences. Thinking along with Sommer arguments based on the influence this novel has exerted in Brazilian formal education, it is possible to see how Iracema has become a symbolic mother of a *mestiça* nation. At the same time, the fact that she leaves her community and that she dies as an outcast eliminates the possibility of raising her son as an Indigenous person. Instead, Moacir, the child of Iracema's pain and suffering, will be raised by Martin alone. Symbolically, then, the *mestiça* population is to be guided away from their Indigenous roots and towards their European heritage.

Moreover, the story of Iracema erases the sexual violence against Indigenous women that took place during the colonization process and continues happening today. In Alencar's novel, Iracema not only chooses Martin out of her own free will, but she also uses the *jurema*, a traditional herbal preparation, to have sexual relations with him while he is under the influence of the psychoactive beverage (Alencar 45). Iracema is physically strong and she acts on her sexual desires. As Sommer points out, the male colonizer in Alencar's novel is shown as passive and incapable of resisting the seduction of the aggressive Indigenous woman "even though the victims of the conquest were self-evidently the Indians in a country where they were quickly becoming extinct, and even though sexual exploitation was quite literally a tactic of conquest" (169). Thus, Alencar's *Iracema* portrays a perverse inversion of the direction of colonial violence at the intersection of gender and race.

Although representations of strong women who are in touch with their sexuality can be very powerful challenges to the feminine ideal that has been constructed in Brazilian society, it is important to notice that femininity has been shaped along gender, racial and class lines. Feminist scholar Maria Lugones argues that gender, race, and class were co-constructed through the colonization process, resulting in what she calls the Colonial/Modern Gender System. Lugones affirms that the idea that women are passive and fragile is attributed to white bourgeois women, while Black and Indigenous women do not receive such markers of femininity. Instead, they were characterized as sexually aggressive and strong enough to perform physical labor (Lugones 13). Such a gender system created hierarchies not only between genders, but also between races and social classes. Under this system, white women were assigned domestic roles that supported the white patriarchs by raising their families. On the other hand, racialized women were forced into different forms of physical labor. While all women were treated as property and forced to be sexually available, the children of white women were to inherit the father's property and the family's social status. Therefore, white women's sexuality outside of reproductive purposes was repressed while the sexuality of women of color was exploited for the white man's pleasure. Far from creating a sexually liberated woman as we have come to understand the idea in the 1960s and 1970s, Alencar's *Iracema* contributes to the hypersexualization of Indigenous women in a way that supports the Colonial/Modern Gender System.

The concept of controlling images, developed by U.S. Black Feminist Patricia Hill Collins, is useful for this discussion about stereotypes of Indigenous women. Although Collins' work addresses specifically Black women in the United States, it allows us to understand how stereotypes affect racialized women in societies marked by racial and gender hierarchies like Brazil. In the case of U.S. Black women, Collins highlights the mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas as controlling images "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday

life" (69). Similarly to what Lugones affirms, Collins states that "true womanhood" associated with "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" was an ideal that white women were encouraged to partake in, while Black women had to face different controlling images (72). According to Collins, the controlling image of jezebel relegates Black women "to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women" (81). The contemporary iteration of jezebel is the "hoochie" or "hot momma," which is a deviant female heterosexuality because her sexual appetite is viewed as excessive, thus masculine (Collins 83). Even though the controlling images of Black women in the US and Indigenous women Brazil respond to different histories, there is a similar process of producing and reproducing controlling images at play in both cases.

It is also important to note that most of the literature published in Brazil up to this point has been produced by white (or whitened) men. Controlling images about women of all races that appear in literature and other cultural products are still built from the perspective of white men. Many women writers have challenged these controlling images through time, from Maria Firmina dos Reis and Nísia Floresta in the 19th century to Micheliny Verunshk, Conceição Evaristo, Eliane Potiguara, and Truduá Dorrico today. However, most of the women authors published in Brazil over the centuries have been white women. While this panorama has been rapidly changing since the last decade, it is still relevant to take into account the fact that "Brazilian literature," that which is often considered canonical and is traditionally taught in schools, has been molded from a white middle class male perspective.

To counteract the dominance of male authors from the publication and to the study of literature in Brazil, the Fundação Universitária para o Vestibular (Fuvest), which is responsible for creating the college entrance exams for the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), announced in 2023 that the list of required literary works for the 2026-2028 exams will be composed of exclusively women authors writing in Portuguese. Their list not only highlights women authors, but their choices also reflect a concern with racial and national diversity. These kinds of initiatives promote change for the future as they demand schools to revise their curriculum. At the same time, they demand recognition of a past and a present where women's voices, particularly women of color, have been silenced.

Mulheres empilhadas: learning and unlearning

In Melo's novel, the narrator observes Txupira's community, the Kuratawa, and other cases of feminicidal violence taking place in Cruzeiro do Sul as an outsider. She is the voice controlling a first-person narrative, and she is a white middle-class woman from São Paulo. Her place of enunciation[21] coincides with that of the predominant voices in Brazilian literature through history, as mentioned above, except on the fact that she narrates as a woman who is also a survivor of domestic and intimate partner violence. Her move to Acre was motivated not only for a job opportunity, but it was also a way for her to escape a romantic relationship that had

[21] As I write in English and I work with Latin American texts written in Portuguese and in Spanish, when I say "place of enunciation" I am thinking simultaneously of "*lugar de fala*" as articulated by Djamila Ribeiro in Portuguese, and "*locus de enunciación*" as articulated by Walter Mignolo and other Latin American scholars working in the US mainly in Spanish/English. In my understanding, we are all referring to a similar idea. However, Ribeiro's work is rooted on Black feminist thought while Mignolo's work is rooted in postcolonial and decolonial theories that may draw from, but not necessarily center on Black feminism.

turned physically and verbally violent. This is a crucial characteristic of the narrator, who walks a fine line between an oppressor's gaze and a survivor's gaze. Her positionality creates the effect of continuing the tradition while disrupting it at the same time. The tension that rises from her point of view allows for a critical review of historical representations of the Amazon and Indigenous peoples and cultures created by non-Indigenous travelers from other regions, especially from São Paulo. This tension calls for a process of unlearning stereotypes and changing perspectives.

As a person who arrives in the Amazon from a distant region of Brazil, the southeast, she recognizes her limited knowledge of Acre's history. She is a lawyer who received formal education about Brazilian history and geography, but her ignorance about Acre reveals the limitations and biases of the school system in Brazil. Instead of relying on what she may or may not have learned in school or through the media, her recent lived experiences in Acre become her best teachers. On several occasions the novel portrays learning moments where people who are from Acre or who have been living there longer than the narrator speak up about Acre's violent history of colonialism and extractivism. For example, Marcos, who is a local new friend of the narrator, explains that the poor condition of Indigenous people in the region is a consequence of the occupation of Acre: "Os seringalistas chegavam ali armados até os dentes, vindos do nordeste, com o firme propósito de escravizar os indígenas para o trabalho de coleta da borracha. Os rebeldes eram mortos ou expulsos. Dezenas de aldeias foram dizimadas" (Melo 140). Marcos' perspective is critical of the history of rubber extraction in the Amazon region beyond Brazilian territory. He was personally affected by this violent past and present, as a descendant of an Indigenous woman and a non-Indigenous Peruvian man. His conversations with the narrator occasionally turn into long explanations about Acrean history and current events. Although communicated to the narrator, these speeches have a pedagogical function for the readers as well. As the narrator learns and unlearns about the Amazon region, readers who may identify with her also learn.

Besides learning about the history of Acre, the narrator also learns about the reality of many Indigenous peoples living in *aldeias.* One of the most important learning experiences takes place in the *aldeia* Kuratawa, as part of the investigation of Txupira's murder that she joins informally. When she visits the village for the first time, she is baffled by what she sees because the reality she encountered did not match the image she had in mind. She says: "eu não era uma turista entusiasmada esperando um espetáculo folclórico de pingentes e penachos. Já estava em Cruzeiro do Sul tempo suficiente para saber das dificuldades que as comunidades indígenas enfrentavam" (Melo 140). The thought process she describes in the narrative reveals her place of enunciation and at the same time it creates room for a critique of the ways most non-Indigenous Brazilians, particularly those from large urban centers near the Atlantic coast, relate to Indigenous peoples. The contrast between what she imagined and what she saw suggests that accurate information and awareness of the reality of present-day Indigenous peoples is severely lacking. This implies that formal education and the mainstream media in other regions of Brazil, as major sources of information about the nation's history and current affairs, are inadequately addressing this topic. She is also suggesting that schools and mass media are communicating a "folkloric" imaginary about Indigenous people, which, according to her commentary above, is the imaginary an enthusiastic tourist would expect to find.

The narrator's comments contrast an imaginary spectacle full of feathers with the precarious conditions the Kuratawa lived in their *aldeia*. She continues describing her impressions: "mas os Kuratawa sequer pareciam indígenas. Eram apenas pobres. Abandonados"

(Melo 140). In the mind of the narrator, the absence of exuberant objects and the presence of scarcity of resources is a surprising combination that could bring into question these peoples' identities as Indigenous. The tension between *ser* and *parecer* echoes Cunha's affirmation, mentioned above, that the idealized Indigenous person in 19th century arts and literature became the measure against which a person would have their Indigenous identity granted or denied for the purposes of land grabbing ("Política" 145). The poverty the narrator found at the Kuratawa village did not coincide with the mythical Indigenous person from *Iracema* or *O Guarani*, nor from the *Manifesto Antropofágico* or *Macunaíma.* In her view, the Kuratawa were "just poor," which, in my understanding, contrasts to heroic "noble savages" or brave and playful "cannibals." Controlling images of Indigenous peoples formed the narrator's imagination about what the Indigenous people should look like in the 21st century. Whether it was a noble savage or a cannibal, none of these images reflected a rounded view of Indigenous identity and the present day circumstances of Indigenous peoples.

On the other hand, the narrator confronts the ways in which the poverty afflicting the Kuratawa came to exist when she affirms that they were "abandoned." Her choice of words suggests that their precarious conditions are not created by their own doing, but that someone else or something else abandoned them. At the same time, the narrator observes that the village does not have much space to plant food and that most people would only eat store bought products with money from *Bolsa Família*, a government program that provides financial assistance to low income families. With this observation, the narrator engages with a popular discourse among sectors of the white middle classes who are critical of welfare programs, particularly when it comes to the impoverished population in the North and Northeast of Brazil receiving assistance. When the narrator's opinion oscillates ever so slightly, Marcos' voice reappears to explain the history of Acre in relation to land grabbing practices by agribusiness and their stance against the demarcation of Indigenous territories (Melo 140).

In the context of the novel's writing and publication, the conversations between the narrator and Marcos become a pedagogical tool not only for the narrator, but also for the readers who may identify with the narrator on some level. Without directly opposing the discourse of far-right politicians such as Bolsonaro, who have said that Indigenous peoples and *quilombolas* were unproductive and lazy, the novel builds a critical discourse about the role of state institutions and the economic exploitation of the land around Indigenous territories as factors generating poverty.

Feminicidal Violence and Coloniality

Patriarchal violence in the form of sexual violence and feminicide are certainly affecting Indigenous women living in *aldeias* and in urban settings. It is important to note that patriarchal violence against Indigenous women has a specific history tied to colonialism. Lugones, mentioned above, described the simultaneous process of gendering and racialization that occurred in the Americas through colonialism and its relation to labor exploitation (12). For Indigenous women, the issue of land and the overall well being of their community have always been at the forefront of their struggle. According to Guarani scholar Marize Vieira de Oliveira, Indigenous women's associations have been historically concerned with women's access to health services and the demarcation of their territory (240). Sônia Guajajara, one of the most prominent Indigenous leaders in Brazil today, also underscores the issue of land when asked about women's leadership in the Indigenous movement: "A luta pelo território, por exemplo,

sempre foi e continua sendo a principal bandeira de luta do movimento indígena. Independente de ser homem ou mulher, o território é fundamental, inclusive para a gente continuar a ser indígena. É um tema que une" (19). The concern with their territory is at the base of the multiple forms of violence that Indigenous people have been resisting for centuries, including feminicidal violence.

Indigenous movements of resistance see the struggle for the land as directly connected to other struggles. As Oliveira points out:

> As violências são muitas, desde a associação do setor [do agronegócio] à política (como a bancada ruralista), com leis de retirada de direitos dos seus territórios tradicionais (como a PEC 215), ao conluio com o judiciário, que impede por anos o avanço de demarcações de terras, passando pelo banditismo promovido por capangas do agronegócio, que para estabelecer o terror e a desesperança nas comunidades, estupram as mulheres indígenas, espancam e assassinam jovens, idosos e idosas e crianças. (240)

Indigenous women are victimized in gender-specific ways that reflect the conception of women's bodies as resources for sexual exploitation. Yet this gender-based violence is one of the multiple forms of violence affecting the whole community simultaneously. Oliveira collected many stories by Indigenous women of multiple ethnicities that involved rape, which reinforces the idea that Indigenous women's vulnerability to rape and feminicide is directly related to the exploitation resources on their territories.

Violence against women in the form of rape has been used historically as a weapon of war around the world to demoralize the enemy under a patriarchal logic of domination. Oliveira highlights that Indigenous women are the main victims of the violence practiced against Indigenous communities, according to statistics from the United Nations (300). She adds that "a violência [contra as mulheres indígenas] é uma estratégia de desmoralização da comunidade" (Oliveira 301). Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato maintains that feminicidal violence, which may encompass rape, is also a tool of domination (142). For this reason, it is relevant to think of both feminicide and rape in combination, even though each of them is a specific crime in the legal field. According to Segato, in order to facilitate the investigation of feminicide, it is important to have clear definitions to what constitutes the crime depending on the context (within the family/relationship, among strangers, during war). Thus, she advocates for the inclusion of subcategories in legislation differentiating the cases that take place in the domestic realm and the cases that take place in the public realm and in the context of war (149).

At the same time, Segato underscores the importance of understanding all subtypes of feminicide as part of the same logic because "es precisamente la percepción de las violencias de género propias de esas otras escenas, públicas y bélicas, que presionan para transformar la imaginación socialmente compartida y la orientan hacia una comprensión del género como una dimensión no particular, no privada de la existencia humana, sino pública, política y de impacto general en la historia de las colectividades" (143). Feminicidal violence, rape, and other forms of gender-based violence that take place in domestic/familiar contexts have historically been understood as a private matter and minoritized as "women's issues" (Segato 96). According to Segato, it is important that domestic violence and sexual violence be removed from the private sphere so that "la mirada pública se habitúe a percibir todos los crímenes contra la mujer como problema de alcance general" (149). By merging the public and private spheres under the concept of feminicide, violence against women becomes a political act regardless of whether it takes place in the context of war or inside the home.

Melo's novel dwells in the intersection between the public and the private spheres when portraying multiple cases of gender-based violence that are interconnected. Txupira's case constitutes an example of violence against women that cannot be classified as domestic because the perpetrators and the victim had no relationship. She was kidnapped in the forest, near a road, while she was looking for plant medicine for her mother. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that the perpetrators were involved with drug traffic across the border between Brazil and Peru. Txupira noticed what the men were doing and recorded a video on her phone. She was then captured, tortured, raped, and killed. The investigation and trial of Txupira's case leads to no arrests, but a few more murders of journalists, lawyers, and the suspects themselves. Such a complex web of crimes tied to narcotraffic could raise doubts about whether Txupira's case is a case of feminicide.

On the other hand, the narrator's case is formed by multiple situations involving feminicide, domestic/intimate partner violence, and cyberviolence. First, she narrates how she was cursed and slapped on the face by her boyfriend. Then, as the novel progresses, she reveals how being slapped released her traumatic memories from childhood, when her father killed her mother inside their house after she had been sent to sleep in her bedroom. Later, the narrator's ex-boyfriend releases intimate videos and photos of her to the internet, which had been recorded and published without her consent, constituting a crime known today as revenge porn. The novel, then, offers three situations around the same character who pose different challenges to the law. Her mother's murder is more easily identified as feminicide as the motivation of domestic violence leading to murder can be traced to hierarchical gender relations (not without disagreements though). The crimes the narrator's ex-boyfriend commits, however, cannot be classified as feminicide as they did not involve murder.

The different forms of violence against the narrator and against Txupira can be understood as stemming from the same root. Feminist scholars Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russel, who were among the first to name and study femicide (feminicide[22]) in 1992, provide a broad understanding of feminicide:

> Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly prostitution), incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office, and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood (by criminalizing contraception and abortion), psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides. (15)

Although many feminists would disagree about the inclusion of cosmetic surgery on the extensive list of patriarchal violence against women that Caputi and Russel created, the list serves to affirm that violence against women occurs in a spectrum and murder is at one extreme. In this sense, rape, torture, revenge porn and physical battery can be understood as crimes operating under the same logic of feminicide and, in many cases, leading up to murder.

While these distinctions are extremely important in the legal field, narrative literature such as *Mulheres empilhadas* can portray the multiple forms of violence against women as a

[22] An in-depth discussion about terminology (femicide/feminicide) is included in the introduction of this dissertation.

mosaic revealing gender relations in its complex interconnection to other power structures. The characters in this novel reveal oppressive gender relations within the heterosexual family structure, between husband and wife, and within romantic relations between boyfriend and girlfriend. The stories in the novel expand the critique from the nuclear family structure to the larger society when it discusses Internet-based crimes against women. The narrator describes the feeling of being burned as a witch when her ex-boyfriend published intimate images of her online. She affirms that her ex was not able to kill her physically, so he was trying to kill her on a virtual bonfire (Melo 159). The Internet, then, appears as a public (virtual) space where strangers perform violence against women on a massive scale. Revenge porn blurs the imaginary lines between private and public spheres, as the first act of violence comes from an intimate partner, but the full expression of violence is performed collectively by a misogynistic society.

Furthermore, the case of Txupira reveals how both gender and racial violence are inseparable from economic violence. As mentioned above, Txupira was abducted when she was looking for medicinal plants for her mother in an area not far from her village. The narrator notes that the conditions of the Kuratawa village were very poor. She compares Txupira's village to another Indigenous village she had visited before, the *aldeia* Ch'aska. Marcos had taken the narrator to the Ch'aska village, where his mother was from and where they met Zapira, a cousin of Marcos' mother and the first woman shaman in their village. When the narrator arrived in the Indigenous community, she said: "fiquei maravilhada com o ar da floresta que, de tão denso, parecia uma fruta carnosa, a ser comida em gomos" (Melo 64). The experience described as a fleshy fruit highlights the narrator's pleasant bodily sensations. Her impressions could not be more different when she visited the Kuratawa and saw trash everywhere: "Do velho tambor de combustível que servia de lixo, junto ao mato que crescia por toda parte, transbordavam pets de refrigerantes e embalagens plásticas" (Melo 139). The contrast between the two villages does not serve as a criticism of the people's innate characteristics, but of how much their territories were threatened by capitalistic exploitation.

The narrator's observations lead up to a critical perspective on the capitalistic exploitation of resources in the Amazon region and the weak policies around Indigenous territory demarcation. She says: "Até então, eu só havia visitado a aldeia dos Ch'aska, cujas terras maiores e mais isoladas proviam caça abundante para seus membros. Na aldeia dos Kuratawa, cortada pela BR-364 e cercada por ocupações agrícolas, a situação era outra. De madeira nobre ali não tinha mais nada. Nem espaço para roça. Ou para os animais" (Melo 139). Her friend Marcos adds that although there are still fish, the rivers are contaminated with pesticides: "Somos uma sopa de agrotóxicos," he said while they swam in the polluted waters with the Kuratawa children. These passages from the novel highlight the harmful impacts of agribusiness in the Amazon region, particularly in how they negatively affect the people living there. The Indigenous communities that are surrounded by large scale agriculture not only have to deal with contaminated water, but the reduction of animals living in the patches of forest land forces them to consume more industrialized products. In turn, they have to deal with non-compostable trash and poor nutrition.

Melo's novel shows that the economic violence affecting Indigenous communities is tied back to a colonialist logic of exploitation that disregards human and non-human life. The fact that Txupira was abducted, raped and killed by landowners is a small visible part of a much larger problem with centuries of history. She was killed because she was a woman. The murderers saw her alone near the road as "desfrutável" (Melo 36). She was also killed because she was Indigenous, a "selvagem" who did not understand the murderers' language (Melo 36).

She was also killed because her community was encroached by large agricultural estates on land that was purchased by the Brazilian government in 1903 from the Bolivian government for 2 million pounds sterling. In my understanding, Txupira's murder exemplifies how feminicide reflects coloniality written on women's bodies.

Feminicide and the Criminal Justice System

As mentioned above, the narrator in *Mulheres empilhadas* moves to Acre from São Paulo for a job opportunity and to escape from a violent boyfriend. She works in a law firm where the senior partner, Denise Albuquerque, is working on a book project about feminicide, more specifically about "a forma como o estado produz assassinos ao sancionar a assimetria nas relações de gênero" (Melo 24). The narrator also refers to the book contents as being about "a matança autorizada de mulheres" and the "dez mil casos de feminicídios nos tribunais, sem solução" (Melo 24). These definitions are important because they define a clear point of view about feminicidal violence. The role of the state is at the forefront of the book project, particularly in "sanctioning" or "authorizing" the killing of women, which reflects a negative view of the state. The thousands of cases in the courts without solution are the point of entrance for Denise and the narrator. Denise asks the narrator to go to Acre to observe a task-force dedicated to process cases of feminicide and collect data for the book. Considering the timeliness of the trip, right after the narrator's boyfriend showed up to be physically violent, she gladly accepts this opportunity to change her environment by moving thousands of miles away from São Paulo.

The narrator recognizes the similarities and differences in the way the justice system operates among the multiple court cases of feminicide she is there to observe. While she accompanies the trials in Cruzeiro do Sul, she displays a very critical perspective on the justice system: "É bobagem pensar que o assassino deveria se preocupar com autópsias. O sistema é feito para não funcionar. Lá na ponta, quem investiga olha a vítima com desprezo, é uma uma mulher, pensa. Uma preta. Uma puta. Uma coisa. Se for possível, ele nem atende a chamada quando o telefone toca no covil onde trabalha" (Melo 19). After years working as a lawyer, she has an insider's view on how the system works. The narration of her thoughts exposes a frustration with the way the police deal with violence against women in the word she chooses to refer to the police station: *um covil*, a predatory animal's den. The police do not provide safety for women, but danger. She highlights that evidence is almost irrelevant when women's lives are not valued. Moreover, she enumerates three ways the police would define the victim, starting with "only a woman," moving to "a Black woman," and ending with "a whore." This list suggests that all women's lives are not valued, but the lives of Black women and sexual workers are looked down even more. This idea is reinforced when she recognizes that her mother's case received due process because her mother was white and she was not poor (Melo 19). Thus, the narrator's thoughts suggest that legislation and law enforcement do not work for women nor for racialized and other marginalized communities.

The statements the narrator makes about the justice system align with feminist theories about feminicidal violence in Latin America. When Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde introduced the term *feminicidio* into the investigations taking place in Ciudad Juárez[23] in the 1990s, one of the aspects of these gender-based crimes that she highlighted was the impunity of

[23] A more in-depth discussion of the importance of the crimes of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to the theories and practices around feminicide in Latin America can be found in the dissertation's introduction.

the perpetrators. In a later study, Lagarde states that "the impunity that stems from the inaction, insufficiency, or complicity of state institutions with gender inequality contributes to feminicidal violence – and, therefore, to violence against girls and women. This constitutes institutional gender violence by omission, negligence, or complicity of the authorities with the assailants when it is a question of violence inflicted on women by persons or groups" (Lagarde xxi). Lagarde criticizes the normalization of structural inequalities by the institutions that should provide protection, but reproduce violence instead. She highlights the ideological and political complicity between the authorities and perpetrators, concluding that "there is a clear absence of democratic rule of law in relation to women" (Lagarde xxi). Along with other forms of discrimination such as racism and lesbophobia, the patriarchal culture in state institutions not only fails to promote legal justice but it also contributes to further oppression.

For feminist scholars and activists, the issue of legal punishment, or lack thereof, has always been an important aspect of the issue of violence against women in Brazil as well. According to Cecilia McDowell Santos, the feminist movement in Brazil started to emphasize domestic violence in the 1980s, during the transition from the dictatorship towards a democracy, as a common experience among all women "atravessando as fronteiras de classe, raça, cor, etnia e ideologia" ("Da delegacia" 156). In a context when domestic violence was not yet widely recognized as such, and perpetrators could be considered in their right to behave violently towards women, part of the feminist demands included making sure abusers and murderers received adequate punishment. However, the criminalization of domestic violence was not the only objective of the feminist activists at that time. From the creation of *delegacias da mulher* (women's police stations) to the drafting of the Maria da Penha Law, criminalization was the facet of the feminist demands that the state chose to emphasize in its response to the negotiations with the feminist movements in the last decades of the 20th century.

The Maria da Penha Law (2006) was a big win for feminist movements because it stipulated, at least in theory, a more comprehensive approach to domestic violence against women. The law was named after Maria da Pena Maia Fernandes, a biopharmacist from the Northeastern state of Ceará who became paraplegic in 1983 after her husband, a Colombian living in Brazil, shot her while she was asleep. The legal process against her husband took almost 20 years in court. In 2001, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned the Brazilian state for omission and negligence in her case. The international pressure along with Penha's persistence have led to the creation of the law in 2006 and to her win in the legal battle against her violent husband in 2002.

Some of the important changes that the Maria da Penha Law made include the pre-trial detention of suspects at the crime scene, which can prevent further harm to be done. The law also ended alternatives to incarceration as punishment, such as the payment of small fines and the giving of food parcels (*cestas básicas*) to the victims, which would keep the victims in harm's way. Santos states that this law "reforça a abordagem feminista da criminalização e propõe, em simultâneo, um tratamento multidisciplinar, estabelecendo medidas protetivas e preventivas – além das criminais – para o enfrentamento da violência doméstica" ("Da delegacia" 162). It is relevant to point out that feminist movements demands went beyond criminalization of domestic violence to include psychological and legal assistance, among other things. However, as Santos affirms, criminalization is the most translatable aspect of feminist demands into public policies ("Da delegacia" 167). Considering that some portions of the population still accept physical violence against women as actions within the rights of the husband even today, the emphasis on legislation establishing guidelines for the punishment of abusers is important. The Maria da

Penha Law removed violence against women from the status of misdemeanor and turned it into a felony.

Although the 2006 law mentions race and disability in its text, Santos points out that gender is the only social category used in the Maria da Penha Law's definition of violence and that "uma concepção binária e fixa desta categoria (homem-mulher cis) foi incorporada à lei, foi normatizada, embora mais recentemente os tribunais tenham estendido a aplicação da lei também a mulheres trans" ("Para uma" 49). Moreover, Santos affirms that domestic violence is narrowly defined as interpersonal violence. According to Santos, one of the consequences of the non-intersectional approach to violence in the original law is that it makes it difficult to recognize structural violences beyond gender oppression that simultaneously affect women's lives, the conditions in which domestic violence takes place, and women's access to legal justice ("Para uma" 51). Structural violence frames interpersonal domestic violence against women, operating before and during situations leading up to feminicide. For instance, Santos reports that low income women in São Paulo revealed during interviews that part of their hesitation to formally denounce domestic violence stems from their fear of police violence. since many of them live in neighborhoods where police violence is frequently carried out against their communities ("Para uma" 52).

The interviews that Santos conducted reinforce the already well documented abusive practices that the police conduct against the population living in Brazilian *favelas* and other low income communities. Because of Brazil's history of slavery and labor exploitation based on race, a large portion of the low income population in Brazil is Black, which makes race a relevant trait of the communities victimized by the police. Police violence in Brazil has been framed as a genocide of the Black population. According to Mariana Paganote Dornellas and Maria Priscilla Santos de Jesus, "trata-se de um genocídio em andamento, não como uma ação pontual e recente, mas sim como parte de um processo histórico iniciado na colonização e que se atualiza a partir do controle punitivo estatal sobre a população negra" (231). The genocide of the Black population supports the colonial matrix of power in connection with feminicide.

Indigenous women have their own historical struggle with the police and other state institutions, including those that were created to "protect" them such as the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI). Brazilian law has also harmed Indigenous communities by failing to grant them land rights, by limiting the expression of their culture, and even by determining who is and who is not Indigenous. Getting the police and other non-Indigenous authorities involved in cases of domestic violence may pose an issue for Indigenous communities who have been historically stripped of agency. Moreover, non-Indigenous feminists may create demands centering on individual rights, which may not coincide with the needs of Indigenous women and may not benefit Indigenous communities. According to Valéria Paye Pereira Kaxuyana and Suzy Evelyn de Sousa e Silva, "nas sociedades indígenas, os indivíduos estão subordinados aos interesses de sua sociedade: não há direitos individuais no sentido da sociedade 'democrática.' As mulheres compartilham com a sua sociedade a visão do papel que essa sociedade reserva às mulheres" (39). There is a risk in generalizing the values of Indigenous communities, as the Americas are home to a wide diversity of ethnicities with different world visions. Yet, Indigenous leaders in social movements often underscore the centrality of community above individual rights.

Ayamara feminist Julieta Paredes, for instance, proposes a *feminismo comunitario* as opposed to Western feminisms to fight against oppression. Paredes affirms that to build a communitarian feminism "nosotras partimos de la comunidad como principio incluyente que cuida la vida" (78). Caring for all life in relation to each other, including non-human life, is a

principle that guides the communitarian feminism emerging in Bolivia. Instead of framing the struggle as a woman's struggle for equality in relation to men, Paredes affirms the importance of women and men thinking together in relation to their community (79). This paradigm is different from the principle of individual rights before the law. Thus, the feminist struggle against feminicidal violence operating within the parameters of Western and Westernized societies may have several blindspots regarding how to address gender-based violence.

The Maria da Penha Law is one of the examples that highlight the need for non-Indigenous feminists to engage in better dialogue with Indigenous women. According to Kaxuyana and Silva, the lack of information about the Maria da Penha Law leads many Indigenous women to be afraid to be taken away from their communities and into a shelter if they denounce domestic violence to non-Indigenous authorities (34). Moreover, survivors of domestic violence may not necessarily expect that the problem be solved by imprisoning their partners. Kaxuyana and Silva comment on the troubles of removing Indigenous people from their communities: "Seus maridos e filhos terão de responder, nas cadeias e prisões das cidades, pelo abuso cometido? Quem irá caçar? Quem irá pescar? Quem irá ajudar na roça? Talvez o que elas queiram é ter mais informações sobre essa Lei, para poderem decidir se tal instrumento legal serve para elas ou se preferem a utilização dos códigos de conduta já estabelecidos pelos seus povos" (43). There is no denial that Indigenous women also suffer interpersonal gender-based violence within their communities, practiced by Indigenous men. However, Kaxuyana and Silva question the effects of criminalization when it comes to the complex relations of non-Indigenous law in Indigenous communities. They highlight principles of self-determination and suggest that there is a need for hosting forums and assemblies to discuss this issue with Indigenous women and men.

In *Mulheres empilhadas*, the issue of non-Indigenous feminist perspectives on the situation of Indigenous women shows up with tints of white saviorism[24]. When the narrator visits the *aldeia* Kuratawa, Txupira's village, for the first time, she meets a teenage girl of about 15 years old who had bruises on her arms and back (142). Once the narrator notices that the girl tried to cover the bruises up while she guided the narrator to the location where Txupira had been abducted, the narrator asks: "Foi seu marido?" (Melo 142). The narrator was very direct towards a girl she had just met. In spite of the fact that the girl ignored the narrator's question, she continued speaking and explaining to the girl, Naia, that her husband cannot do that. Not satisfied with talking to Naia, the narrator goes after Naia's husband, a teenager of about 18 years old, and she threatens to arrest him by saying "Da próxima vez que bater na Naia – disse – venho aqui e prendo você" (Melo 143). She also threatens him with chemical castration in case he hits Naia again, echoing a popular discourse that had been circulating around the time of the novel's publication about how to deal with rapists[25].

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[24] Sometimes referred to as the "white savior complex," white saviorism is the belief that white people can rescue or liberate people of color while disregarding systemic inequalities. Kanakulya Dickson, Themrise Khan and Maïka Sondarjee define it as "simultaneously a state of mind and a concrete unequal power structure between the Global North and the Global South. [...] White Saviorism is a structure of racial hierarchy that not only strips the agency of racialized people but also falsely implies that White agents need to save them from their positions as victims" (4).

[25] One of the few legislative projects that Jair Bolsonaro proposed when he was still a member of the house of representatives, included the chemical castration of rapists. Although the law project was archived, the idea occasionally ressurfaces among Bolsonaro supporters. The irony in Bolsonaro's law project, is that he infamously told a fellow member of the House of Representatives, Maria do Rosário, that she is ugly, so he would never rape her because she "does not deserve it" (Calgaro).

The case of Naia in Melo's novel is very complicated because of the positionality of the narrator. As a survivor of domestic violence and a lawyer who works with cases of feminicide, she is genuinely concerned with Naia and she acts out of indignation with this kind of violence. On the other hand, she ignores the implications of her behavior as a white woman who comes into an *aldeia* for the first time and threatens a member of the community without first having a two-way conversation with Naia. The narrator's behavior borders with the white savior trope, as someone who acts from a place of superiority to rescue an underprivileged person while removing their agency.

One of the difficulties of dealing with cases of violence against women coming from inside the community is the argument that the hierarchy between Indigenous men and women is part of the traditional customs that have kept the community functioning as it has always been. Indigenous women such as Julieta Paredes have been denouncing this kind of argument. Paredes offers a critical perspective on one of the guiding principles in her community about the complementary pair *chacha-warmi* (*hombre-mujer*, man-woman). According to Paredes, the concept naturalizes hierarchical general roles while making invisible the oppression of Indigenous women (80). Although both Indigenous men and women are oppressed under colonial rule, Paredes points out that men have certain privileges such as more time, schooling, higher salaries, and their words receive more respect (80). Paredes re-conceptualizes the *chacha-warmi* into *warmi-chacha*, which is more than an inversion of the word order. The *warmi-chacha* in communitarian feminism is not a hierarchical complementarity, but a horizontal duality. Emerging from the inside of Indigenous communities, Paredes' communitarian feminism is an example of Indigenous women's agency in addressing gender oppression that stands in opposition to the situation played out in Melo's novel.

The debate about whether hierarchical gender relations is a product of colonialism or a traditional element in Indigenous cultures is important in this study of feminicidal violence because, as mentioned above, the legacies of colonialism in Latin America are directly linked to systems of authority and governance, and the organization of families. According to Anthropologist Rita Segato, European colonialism changed the internal organization of Indigenous communities. Although a hierarchical organization of gender already existed in many Indigenous communities, Segato affirms that colonizers co-opted Indigenous men by turning them into intermediaries with more power than Indigenous women within a different kind of patriarchal rule, which Segato considers of higher intensity. Even though men have traditionally had the role of intermediaries with the world outside of their communities, Segato affirms that colonialism changed the script, that their lexicon was captured by a different grammar (115).

According to Segato, Indigenous communities had separate spheres of influence for men and women, but they were complementary in the exercise of politics within the community. On the other hand, the system imposed by European colonizers created what Segato calls "totalitarismo de la esfera pública" (114). Under this system, all politics that deliberates on the community was moved into a public sphere while the domestic space, where women had major influence, was pushed to the margins. Considered a private sphere, the domestic space was no longer a space of political power because decision making that would affect the whole community could not be practiced from that sphere (Segato 116). The destruction of the political power of the domestic space was particularly harmful for Indigenous women because of "la ruptura de los vínculos entre las mujeres y del fin de las alianzas políticas que ellos permiten y propician para el frente femenino fueron literalmente fatales para su seguridad, pues se hicieron progresivamente más vulnerables a la violencia masculina, a su vez potenciada por el estrés

causado por la presión sobre ellos del mundo exterior" (Segato 116). Thus, as a result of a process of colonialism, Indigenous women lost the spaces of power not only in relation to the colonizers, but also in relation to the male members of their own communities.

Melo's novel also portrays this issue when the narrator observes the position of women in relation to men inside the Kuratawa village: "o fato de apenas os homens falarem português naquela aldeia mostrava claramente onde estava o poder entre os Kuratawa. Ali mesmo me ocorreu que não havia denúncias de mulheres indígenas no Acre. Elas não reportam? Não denunciam?" (Melo 142). The narrator sees the fact that women do not speak Portuguese as a problem because they would be at a disadvantage to relate to the world outside of their village, particularly when it comes to the justice system. The narrator understands that speaking the language of the majority is a form of power, and that power was reserved to the men of the village.

The narrator's observations around language are related to what she had been observing in court as she attended the task-force trials of feminicide cases in Cruzeiro do Sul. Txupira's family encountered several barriers while trying to achieve legal justice after Txupira was murdered. Besides the power imbalance between Txupira's family and the families of the accused, who are white landowners in Acre, one of the challenges the narrator observed was the language and culture barrier to navigate the Brazilian court system. The courts only use Portuguese language and nobody at the court could speak the Kuratawa language. Janina, Txupira's sister, relied on an activist from the c*entro da juventude indígena* to translate her witness account of the day her sister was kidnapped (Melo 35). The translator was not able to remain unmoved emotionally while translating, which led to a few interruptions due to crying.

This briefly mentioned detail of the trial speaks of the complex web of structural violence surrounding a case of feminicide. Many Brazilian courts are not prepared to support Indigenous communities through language accessibility, which emphasizes the marginalization of Indigenous peoples from the rest of Brazilian society. As linguist Julia Izabelle Silva points out, "do processo de extermínio dos povos indígenas que ocorrera no Brasil e das políticas linguísticas de assimilação e integração que caracterizam o indigenismo do Estado Brasileiro, restaram hoje cerca de duzentas e setenta e quatro línguas indígenas, faladas por 315 etnias distintas" (224). Silva adds that besides the Indigenous languages, there are 70 other non-Indigenous languages currently spoken on a daily basis in Brazil among immigrant communities, *quilombolas*, and deaf communities. A monolingual justice system only reinforces the myth of Brazil as a monolingual nation, which Silva sees as a product of a 19th century nation building project.

The Brazilian myth of monolingualism also promotes neocolonialist attitudes towards Indigenous populations that affect Indigenous women in gender-specific ways. Silva affirms that several towns in Brazil have managed to make other languages co-official along with Portuguese. However, there are many challenges in the implementation of the law that establishes that public institutions must offer services in other languages. According to Silva, one of the challenges for Indigenous communities is the stigma, fear and shame around speaking an Indigenous language in public (233). The stigma around Indigenous languages reflects a larger cultural issue tied back to the colonial matrix of power.

The Portuguese language was imposed onto the native population by the colonizers who claimed the land as their territory in 1500. In the 16th century, Jesuit missionaries used Nheengatu, a *língua geral* based on the Tupi languages spoken on the coastal area of today's Brazil, for catechism and general communication. In the 18th century, after the expulsion of the

Jesuit missionaries from Brazil, the Portuguese statesman Marquês de Pombal enforced the teaching of the Portuguese language throughout the colony. In the 19th century, after political independence from Portugal, Brazilians debated the case for a "Brazilian language," with figures such as the writer José de Alencar as one of the main supporters. Debates on Brazilianness and the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil continued through the 20th century, with figures such as Mário de Andrade as one of the advocates. In the 1940s, under the Vargas dictatorship, a concern with the "nacionalização dos imigrantes" prohibited immigrant communities from speaking languages other than Portuguese in public (Paiva 8). Finally, the 1988 Constitution declared Portuguese the official language of Brazil.

This brief overview of the history of the Portuguese language in Brazil allows me to make connections between European colonialism and the coloniality of power maintained by Brazilian elites after independence. While searching for a Brazilianness distinct from the Portuguese, non-Indigenous Brazilian elites developed a form of nationalism around the language of the colonizers, albeit transformed or cannibalized, to use the metaphor created by the Avant Garde Modernists. National projects of cultural and racial identity continued to oppress the living Indigenous populations even though Brazilian elites claimed mixed-race heritage (biological and/or cultural) for Brazilians. The aforementioned Myth of Racial Democracy masks a whitening project that included the whitening of bodies and the erasure of cultures and languages.

Throughout these changes and continuities, women were required to conform to specific gender and sexual roles. In a colonialist patriarchal society, Black and Indigenous women were expected to birth whiter children while erasing themselves and their cultures. White women were expected to maintain the status quo. The oppression of women in the extreme form of feminicide is an important tool of the colonial matrix of power as it supports the maintenance of social hierarchies beyond gender. Feminicide serves to control women who disobey their gender, sexual, racial, and class roles. It also serves to display and reinforce positions of power.

Finally, Patrícia Melo makes these tensions visible in the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* when she juxtaposes the white narrator and the Indigenous woman who was murdered by white landowners. The novel portrays different murder cases under the umbrella of feminicidal violence, and expands the debate of violence against women beyond the perpetrator-victim paradigm. The novel exposes the limits of the law and the failures of the criminal justice system that harm women and communities of color. By centering on the first person account of a white woman from São Paulo who is pressed to learn and unlearn about Indigenous realities and the history of the Amazon, the novel highlights the urgent need to challenge the Myth of Racial Democracy and the stereotypes of Indigenous people that literature helped build. Moreover, *Mulheres empilhadas* shows that gender is an important lens to approach violence, but it is not sufficient as a single category to encompass the interconnected systems supporting the colonial matrix of power.

Chapter 3

Becoming Monsters: Embodied Resistance to Feminicidal Violence in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego"

A completely disfigured person approaches people on the subway in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She makes eye contact with passengers with her one eye, and kisses them on the cheek with her lipless mouth before telling them her story. She is a survivor of attempted murder by burning. The opening scene of "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego," a short story by Argentinian author Mariana Enriquez, portrays the disturbing image of a severely scarred human who walks around a public space and creates terror among those who witness her storytelling act. The person with a monstrous appearance is a woman known in the story as *la chica del subte*. As a survivor of attempted feminicide who makes sure she is seen in public, she becomes an icon for a woman's movement against feminicidal violence in Argentina.

Published in 2016, one year after the first massive feminist protest under the slogan *Ni una menos* in Argentina, "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" is a story about collective disobedience and world-making where women reclaim power over their bodies by extreme means. Fed up with the numerous cases of feminicide by burning, women start an organized movement where they voluntarily walk into large bonfires as part of a transformation ritual. They survive the fire with the help of other women who witness the ceremonial burning and set up clandestine hospitals. Their scorched bodies become horrifying displays of their deliberate acts of self-injury when they return to their daily lives as monstrous survivors. The women's actions disrupt Argentine society and trigger a state of siege. However, the increased surveillance targeting unaccompanied women does not stop them from fulfilling their desire to become someone or something else: *monstruas*, she-monsters.

Enriquez explores the aesthetics of fear and disgust in horror fiction, while touching on taboos about self-harm. She engages with the problem of feminicide while identifying social anxieties about women's autonomy and sovereignty over their bodies without attempting to provide definitive answers. As a genre that aims to elicit fear and other embodied reactions such as horripilation, horror inevitably expresses contemporary fears based on social anxieties. As literary scholar Daryl Jones states, "our fears are not fixed, but mutable and contingent, a product of historical context" (18). In this story, Enriquez plays with the idea that women's freedom to choose how to live and how to present themselves to the world is horrifying for those who benefit from their submission to the patriarchal order in its contemporary form, which is highly violent and lethal. She pushes these fears to an extreme when women choose to put themselves through the pain of burning in flames to create a new bodily form for themselves and no longer live as women, but as *monstruas*.

By patriarchal order I mean a political structure based on a hierarchical gender binary configuring relations of power and prestige. According to feminist anthropologist Rita Segato, the patriarchy is the oldest and most permanent political structure in human societies, in which women's bodies are appropriated as the first colony (18). According to Segato, gender is "la forma o configuración histórica elemental de todo poder en la especie, y por lo tanto, de toda violencia, ya que todo poder es resultado de una expropiación inevitablemente violenta"(19). As the fundamental form of power and violence, the patriarchy precedes the European colonization of the Americas (Segato 19). However, Segato affirms that the "low impact patriarchy" that existed prior to the European colonization was transformed into a "high impact patriarchy" where the role of men within Indigenous communities was hyperinflated and women's political

participation was devalued and marginalized along with the domestic sphere, where Indigenous women used to participate in decision-making for the whole community (113). Indigenous men became subordinate to white men in the public sphere, which became the space of prestige for all decisions regarding society at large.

According to Segato, the domestic sphere and the women who inhabit it have become "meros restos" at the margins of what is considered of universal relevance (117). In this context, what used to be a hierarchy has become an abyss (Segato 118). As a result, feminicidal violence becomes a tool and a symptom of the modern-colonial-patriarchal order. Segato affirms that feminicides, "como prácticas casi maquinales de exterminio de las mujeres," are an invention of the modern-colonial-patriarchy (117). In the present configuration of the patriarchal order, which is one and the same with the apocalyptic phase of capital, a psychopathic personality structure seems to be "lo indispensable para funcionar adecuadamente" (Segato 102). Segato is referring to the present time's absence of limits to grabbing, colonizing, and extracting from bodies and territories, which requires detachment from pain—one's own and other's—and estrangement from collective ties (Segato 102). It is in this context that women in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" exist. So, it is this kind of patriarchal order that the women in Enriquez' story resist.

Based on this idea, in this chapter I argue that the creation of she-monsters in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" is a form of embodied resistance to feminicidal violence and an act of disobedience to the patriarchal order. I explore the role of monsters and monstrosity in literature and culture. Then, I examine what monsters reveal about gender and sexuality, particularly in the cultural construction of what a woman must and must not be within the patriarchal order.

The Ambiguity of Embodied Resistance

Scholars Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan define embodied resistance "as oppositional action or nonaction that defies contextual body norms" (2). Context is essential for recognizing a specific act as a form of resistance, as body norms vary across cultures and may change through time. For this reason, Bobel and Kwan affirm that acts of embodied resistance often contain ambiguous elements of resistance and accommodation to the norms (2). In the present time when Enriquez' story is set, women are being killed by men for the reason of being women who threaten men's sense of property and superiority over women. The examples in the story include women who choose to leave a relationship with a man for another person (Enriquez 186), and women who make money and are smart and outspoken (Enriquez 188). These women challenge patriarchal order and its norms. As I will discuss below, patriarchal norms are inscribed on women's bodies, and therefore when women change their appearance and their behavior into what is considered monstrous, they are performing embodied resistance.

In the patriarchal order, the production and reproduction of "woman" as a biocultural entity[26] is inscribed on the body. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, affirms that "through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity" (91). Bordo adds that "female bodies have become docile bodies," in Foucault's terms, "through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring

[26] I am using a definition of woman by feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti. In the essay "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," Braidotti explains: "by women I mean not only the biocultural entities thus represented, as the empirical subjects of sociopolitical realities, but also a discursive field: feminist theory" (61).

that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion" (91). Moreover, women's docile bodies are "habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement'," and the most extreme practices of femininity may lead to death (Bordo 91).

In her study, Bordo is concerned with gender-related disorders such as anorexia, agoraphobia, and hysteria. One aspect of Bordo's study that is particularly relevant for this chapter is the idea that these disorders have been interpreted by feminist scholars as a protest and a retreat in the same gesture (97). She observes how these disorders relate to the practices of femininity for women in each of the periods these disorders reached a peak—1990s, 1950s, 19th century. These were also periods of cultural backlash against redefinition of gender roles. In the period closer to the present context, the 1990s, the aesthetic ideals for women in the United States[27] involved extreme slenderness (Bordo 95). According to Bordo, "the emaciated body of the anorectic, of course, immediately presents itself as a caricature of the contemporary ideal of hyperslenderness for women" (95). A smaller body that occupies less space and carries a connotation of fragility is a feminine ideal in that context along with the idea that self-control and discipline are masculine ideals that women of that period were encouraged to embody (Bordo 96). The anorectic, according to Bordo, embodies these values "in a particularly painful and graphic way" (Bordo 97).

On the one hand, anorexia has been interpreted by feminists such as Susie Orbach as a protest, a form of hunger strike against a culture that "makes women ashamed of their appetites and needs, and demands that women constantly work on the transformation of their body" (Bordo 98). The destructive potential of these ideals for women become visible on their bodies. On the other hand, feminists such as Kim Chernin interpret anorexia as a sign of retreat because the debilitating effects of anorexia "assuages this generation's guilt and separation anxiety over the prospect of surpassing our mothers, of living less circumscribed" (Bordo 98). Moreover, this type of protest is "tragically self-defeating" as "the symptoms of these disorders isolate, weaken, and undermine the sufferers" (Bordo 99). The ambiguity that Bordo finds in this kind of embodied protest reinforces what Bobel and Kwan suggested above regarding contextual resistance and accommodation to body norms being a characteristic of embodied resistance.

The case of anorexia as embodied protest is especially relevant to the study of "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" because of the destructive aspects of the disorder to the body that resonate with the metamorphosis of women into monsters. In Enriquez' short story, the women who decide to transform themselves in the fire risk their lives and put themselves through a lot of pain to become *monstruas*. This issue appears in the story when the number of ceremonial bonfires grows to one per week and the state begins to control women's whereabouts. Silvina[28], a young woman whose point of view guides the free indirect style of narration throughout the story, struggles to decide what to think of the ceremonial bonfires. She reflects on this topic while she is on her way to visit her mother. She remembers a conversation with an anorectic

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[27] Bordo recognizes racial and ethnic differences, but she chooses to perform a gender-focused reading of slenderness as an aesthetic ideal for women in her analysis of anorexia. I would add that the extreme thinness aesthetic ideal of the late 20th century in the United States spread across the Americas and intersected with whiteness as an ideal in many parts of Latin America. The specific case of the United States is beyond the scope of the current work. However, in my second chapter I discuss the whitening project in Brazil and how it affects women. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how whiteness is an ideal for women in Argentina.

[28] Silvina's name evokes Silvina Ocampo (1903-1993), a renowned Argentinian writer. Her works are known for their use of fantastic and uncanny elements, as well as of cruelty. Many of her short stories have women and children as protagonists, and some of them, such as "La muñeca," portray women and girls with supernatural powers.

friend: “no pueden obligarte a comer. Sí pueden, le había contestado Silvina, te pueden poner suero, una sonda. Sí, pero no pueden controlarte todo el tiempo. Cortás la sonda. Cortás el suero. Nadie puede vigilarte veinticuatro horas al día, la gente duerme. Era cierto. Esa compañera de colegio se había muerto, finalmente” (Enriquez 189). Silvina makes a connection between anorexia and the women’s bonfires, which begins to guide the readers into a reflection about the limits of a person’s rights over their bodies.

This issue reappears in a more extreme form during a conversation between Silvina and María Helena, a friend of Silvina’s mother who manages a clandestine hospital for women burned in the ceremonial bonfires. When they are talking about a case of a woman who burned herself in the Patagonian desert alone and died, María Helena says: “Yo no sé por qué esa muchacha, en vez de contactar con nosotras, hizo lo que hizo, pero bueno: a lo mejor se quería morir. Era su derecho” (Enriquez 191). In this case, their conversation leads Silvina and the readers of the story into a reflection about the right to end one’s own life, which clearly pushes the idea of rights over one’s own body to the limit. The topic of suicide is complex and nuanced, as all issues related to mental health. Moreover, in Christian cultures—Catholic, Protestant, and others—suicide carries a religious stigma. Still, as I study the topic of feminicide in this short story, I find it relevant to point out that suicide is often related to violent interpersonal relationships and other systemic violences. When the story brings these topics together, it pushes the reflection beyond the individual into the collective. It also emphasizes mutual support, as shown in the support “las Mujeres Ardientes” provide each other.

The conversations between characters about anorexia and suicide allows Enriquez’ short story to build an argument in literary form about women’s rights over their bodies and their lives. While young Silvina is not sure what to think, the older María Helena is sure that the woman who committed suicide had the right to do so. This debate is enriched by the context in which the suicide happened. The woman took her life by fire while other women have been burning themselves and surviving as a direct response to women being killed for being women. Silvina asks herself: “¿Desde cuándo era un derecho quemarse viva?” (Enriquez 193). Her doubts towards the women’s movement known as “las Mujeres Ardientes” contrast to the posters saying “BASTA BASTA DE QUEMARNOS” that women had held during their protest in front of the hospital where one of the victims of feminicidal violence was under care (Enriquez 190). The story initiates a debate around the taboo of self-harm and suicide that contrasts to the everpresence of feminicide in Argentine. When women are murdered, their choices are taken away from them by force. In the case of anorexia and suicide, the story suggests that “choice” or “rights” are more ambiguous ideas and that context can offer clues for understanding.

Although *la chica del subte* did not choose to have a monstrous appearance, she decided to make a spectacle out of her monstrosity. When “las Mujeres Ardientes” go into the bonfires, they have decided to change their bodies. Moreover, they have decided to live as opposed to letting men kill them for being women. María Helena’s conversation with Silvina suggests that they are aware of what they are doing: “Las quemas las hacen los hombres, chiquita. Siempre nos quemaron. Ahora nos quemamos nosotras. Pero no nos vamos a morir: vamos a mostrar nuestras cicatrices” (Enriquez 192). The “Mujeres Ardientes” are not looking to die, they are looking to live. Moreover, they are looking to show the rest of society that they have a choice. They are looking to be seen and heard, while showing material evidence of their actions. They are actively engaging with the problematic ways their society treats victims of gender-based violence and survivors of attempted feminicide. That is, by not listening, not seeing, and not believing them. María Helena’s example shows how “las Mujeres Ardientes” articulate their

behavior as an opposition. Based on this idea, I argue that they are performing embodied resistance to the patriarchal order.

Bordo's study about gender-related disorders considers the possibility of protest through the body in the case of anorexia. Bordo affirms that "the anorectic, of course, is unaware that she is making a political statement" (98). The idea that the anorectic is partaking in a hunger strike, as some feminists have stated, is an interpretation of the symbolic aspect of the act of food refusal. According to Bordo, the focus of the symbolic without a closer look at the practical aspects can distort the understanding of the issue, whether it is anorexia, hysteria, or agoraphobia: "This tension between the psychological meaning of a disorder, which may enact fantasies of rebellion and embody a language of protest, and the practical life of the disordered body, which may utterly defeat rebellion and subvert protest, may be obscured by too exclusive a focus on the symbolic dimension and insufficient attention to praxis" (Bordo 102). Bordo is critical of some interpretations of hysteria, particularly Lacanian readings performed by American and French feminists[29], because these readings risk romanticizing "the hysteric's symbolic subversion of the phallocentric order while confined to her bed" (Bordo 102). Although Bordo recognizes that being confined to bed can be interpreted in ways other than powerlessness, she invites us to remain skeptical of actions that seem like liberation but may be reproducing gender oppression (Bordo 105).

Bordo's invitation into a skeptical attitude reminds of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of a consciousness of the borderlands, which I have discussed in my first chapter. There are advantages to dwelling in ambiguity. According to Anzaldúa, from the assembly that occurs at the juncture "where phenomena tend to collide" a new consciousness that is continuously in motion emerges (85). In other words, from the indeterminate space of the borderlands, where multiple ideas encounter each other, including opposites, a plural mode of thinking emerges. In my view, the ambiguity of embodied resistance is an opportunity for the creation of something new. Of course, I am not arguing that the solution that women found to combat feminicide in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" is applicable in a literal sense to the feminist struggle against feminicide in Latin America. Rather, I am arguing that the contribution of literature to the understanding of feminicide and feminist resistance is unique in its invitation to dwell in ambiguity, experiment with imagination, and play with language.

The aesthetic elements of horror fiction present in Enriquez' story, particularly the creation of monsters and the provocation of discomfort on characters and readers, help transform acts otherwise understood as self-harm into powerful performances of self-making and world-making. When Argentinian women organize and begin to forge their monstrous selves in ceremonial bonfires spread through the pampas, they intentionally reject conventional femininity[30] as a group. Their shocking behavior and monstrous appearance expose the patriarchal economy that strives to maintain women as a decorative object owned and exchanged by men. At one point, the narrator asks: "¿Cuándo llegaría el mundo ideal de hombres y monstruas? (Enriquez 196). Although the *monstruas* that "las Mujeres Ardientes" create retain a

[29] Bordo dialogues with Dianne Hunter, Catherine Clément, and Hélène Cixous.

[30] What constitutes conventional femininity changes through time and space. In Bordo's study, she discussed extreme slenderness as an ideal of femininity in the 1990s, and the extreme hourglass figure of the Victorian Era. She also discusses behaviors such as domesticity and caretaking roles. In addition to these ideas, María Lugones highlights that sexual passivity and fragility were constructions of femininity imposed on white women, while women of color were constructed as sexually aggressive and physically strong (13). The different constructions of femininity function hierarchically, with white femininity as the privileged form, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

female identity, at least in the grammatical/linguistic sense, they escape the body norms for women and forge a new embodied identity.

Monsters, Bodies, and Cultures

Common knowledge about monsters spotlights their ugly appearance and frightening behavior, which are usually considered negative traits. For example, werewolves have a physically strong human-wolf hybrid body with long and sharp teeth, so they are considered threatening and provoke fear. Most zombies have visibly decomposing flesh that is considered ugly and provokes disgust. On the other hand, there are beautiful and seductive monsters such as Anne Rice's vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) who are so extraordinarily beautiful that they provoke awe. Whether they present an excess or absence, monsters materialize body shapes and behaviors that challenge the limits between human and non-human, as well as the natural and the supernatural.

Monsters are as diverse as the cultures in which they appear. Literary scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen affirms that "the monstrous body is pure culture" (4). Culture not only gives shape to the monstrous body, but without a socially constructed understanding of monstrosity, the monster would not exist. Cohen further highlights the interconnection between monstrous bodies and the specific culture in which they come to existence when he states that monsters emerge "as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). Each society gives birth to its own monsters, depending on contextual anxieties, fears, expectations and norms. Therefore, as products of a culture, monsters and monstrosity are negotiable concepts that have changed over time and from place to place.

Although the specific characteristics of what constitutes a monster vary according to the context, monsters often represent that which is considered different, abnormal, pathological, and even criminal[31]. According to Cohen, "the monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" (7). As such, monsters in literature and film often are metaphorical representations of historically marginalized populations such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, Black and Indigenous peoples, Jewish people, the working class masses, etc. Cohen adds that "in its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (7). Monsters represent the margins and that which is rejected, but they reveal the inner workings of the society where they emerge. They are relational in the sense that they exist as monsters in relation to a specific set of cultural concepts and practices that are normalized.

The embodiment of difference represented by the monster is particularly important for feminist theory, with contributions from scholars such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Barbara Creed, among others. According to Braidotti, "the association of women with monsters goes as far back as Aristotle" (63). Aristotle studied malformation in human and nonhuman fetuses and babies before coming to several conclusions about normality and abnormality based on the male body. Literary scholar Persephone Braham explains that Aristotle defined monstrosity as that which was contrary to Nature, and he claimed that females were "essentially an aberration from the perfection of Nature as embodied in the male" (Braham 3). Aristotle's

[31] Michel Foucault has discussed the intersection of monstrosity and the law in *Abnormal: lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*. Foucalt's work is considered foundational for contemporary monster studies because "it insists that we consider the label of monster as a mechanism of social control and forms of oppression" (Weinstock 28).

observations about Nature and bodies were not only biased by the culture he was a part of, but they also produced long lasting socio-cultural impacts. Braidotti points out that "the *topos* of women as a sign of abnormality, and therefore of difference as a mark of inferiority, remained a constant in Western scientific discourse", including in theories of conception where the active principle was the sperm and the female body was a passive receptacle (63).

Cultural pillars of today's Western societies, ancient Greco-Roman philosophy and religion expressed anxieties around physical integrity associated with hybridity, excess or absence of body parts. Many of their myths depicted monsters that were part human and part animal. They were also preoccupied with the animal/human processes of eating, excreting, and copulating. According to Braham, "the realms of the mythical and the empirical came together in the works of natural philosophers such as Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE)" who, in *Natural History*, described the existence of monsters in distant places (5). The monstrous races described in works such as Pliny's not only inhabited other lands, but they also had customs around eating and sexuality that were unfamiliar or cultural taboos to ancient Romans. Consequently, these peoples (or creatures) and their behaviors were considered aberrant.

The Hebrew Bible has also become a pillar of Western and Westernized cultures after being incorporated into European culture through the expansion of Christianity, since the first centuries of the Current Era into the Middle Ages. Similarly to Greco-Romans, the Old Testament expressed several cultural anxieties around eating and sexuality. Using the language of sacredness and holiness, it contained many rules determining what was acceptable, normal, and desirable. Braham indicates that the rationale was not only a pragmatic hygiene of the physical body, but also a concern with social, moral, and aesthetic orders (5). Thus, deviations from the norm would be considered unholy not only in the context of religion, but also socially abominable. According to Braham, the moral aspect of monstrosity became increasingly relevant with the rise of Christianity (6). Christian theologians during the Middle Ages disagreed about what monsters could represent in light of God's power and intention; however bodily abnormalities often functioned as signs of moral inadequacy (Braham 7). Moreover, "Christian criteria for separating monsters from non-monsters included language, reason, and especially spirituality" (Braham 7). That is, potentially any cultural difference could become the basis of monstrosity.

In the transition to the Renaissance, the supposed existence of monsters in the New World played a supporting role in the colonial project. The first letter that Cristóbal Colón wrote for his financier Luís de Santángel about his voyages included descriptions of the land as bountiful and of the natives' physical appearance as "well made" without bodily deformities. As a document crafted to gather more support for his voyages, Colón's letter depicts the Indigenous population under a positive light as potential Christians and subjects of the Spanish crown. However, he includes a comment about monsters, as their existence in faraway lands still remained in European imagination: "Ansí que monstruos no he hallado ni noticia, salvo de una isla ques aquí en la segunda cala, entrada de las Indias, ques poblada de una gente que tienen en todas las islas por muy feroces, los cuales comen carne viva" (Colón 191). The letter confirms to the Spanish monarchs that their investment was worth it while at the same time enticing their curiosity for further exploration. It also initiated the construction of some native peoples in the Americas as cannibal monsters.

The Christian mandate to evangelize people all over the world and the commercial venture driving the maritime explorations were two sides of the same colonial project in the

Americas[32]. On the one hand, Europeans believed they had a duty to integrate Indigenous peoples into Christendom. In order to do so, missionaries thought of the natives as human beings who could convert to Christianity as long as they received the proper guidance. On the other hand, colonizers were seeking to profit off the seized land and to exploit the natives' labor. Consequently, the institutions they established in the New World dehumanized Indigenous peoples to justify their enslavement. Narratives and letters by European explorers affirming the practice of cannibalism among Indigenous groups throughout the Americas reinforced preconceived ideas about monstrous races inhabiting faraway lands[33]. Although some of the claims may have been true, the rituals and the worldview of Indigenous peoples were interpreted unfairly from an external perspective that strongly believed in its utmost superiority. Ultimately, these reports served to rationalize the violent treatment colonizers gave to the natives as morally acceptable.

The representation of Indigenous peoples as monsters, along with the dehumanization of African peoples brought into the Americas, continued to support policies and practices such as slavery and land grabbing throughout the colonial period. After the independence wars of the 19th century, the imaginary around racialized monsters helped to maintain power at the hands of local elites of mostly European descent. According to Mabel Moraña:

> La construcción conceptual de lo monstruoso fue un *leitmotiv* en los discursos que elaboration la idea del mestizaje como hibridación que desnaturaliza los tipos étnico-raciales originarios y produce modelos desviados de la normalidad dominante, concebida como representación de una *humanidad* pura. El valor biopolítico de lo monstruoso se reafirma así en los contextos nacionales en los que el ensamblaje de distintos niveles sociales y vertientes étnicas aparece como un constructo amenazante desde el punto de vista social, cultural y político. (*El monstruo* 295).

The large Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race population that existed in Latin America was considered monstrous based on pseudoscientific theories on racial hierarchies and degeneration proposed by European thinkers such as Comte de Buffon and Arthur de Gobineau, among others. White supremacist racial theories gained terrain among Latin American elites, leading to whitening projects that were carried out through different methods including the genocide of Black and Indigenous communities, state-sponsored massive immigration from Europe, and miscegenation. In contexts where the mixed-race population and a mixed culture came to be celebrated as representative of the national identity, such as in Mexico and in Brazil, the monstrosity of unassimilated Indigenous and Black populations was reinforced in order to justify the genocidal violence employed against them[34].

Monstrous Women

As I mentioned earlier, since the times of ancient Greek philosophers, monstrosity played a part in the construction of what we refer today as gender. Bodies that do not meet the expectations for femaleness or maleness can be deemed monstrous. For example, transgender

[32] This idea is widely accepted in Latin American Studies today, with contributions by scholars such as Bolívar Echeverría and John Beverley.

[33] Besides the letters of Cristóbal Colón, other well known examples of these narratives are the *Cartas de relación* by Hernán Cortés and Hans Staden's *Duas Viagens ao Brasil*.

[34] In my second chapter, I offered a discussion on miscegenation, indigeneity, and national identity in Brazil. I addressed how women fit into the national whitening project through miscegenation.

and *travesti*[35] bodies are often considered monstrous as they do not conform to strict sociocultural standards for female and male bodies. Spanish philosopher Paul Preciado, who is a transgender man, addresses this issue in his writings and speeches. In a speech at the École de la Cause Freudienne, he describes how his mere existence as a trans man challenges many assumptions of psychoanalysis. He speaks of his body being marked by the legal and medical discourses as "transexual" and of himself being diagnosed as an "enfermo mental" or "disfórico de género" by psychoanalysts, and affirms: "Yo soy el monstruo que os habla. El monstruo que vosotros mismos habéis construído con vuestro discurso y vuestras prácticas clínicas" (Preciado 18). He embodies the monster as a strategy to question hegemonic discourses on gender. Preciado plays with the outsider status of the monster to shed light on the troubled foundations of the inside where the monster originates.

Humans who have been categorized as women and socialized as such have been historically monstrified based on their disobedience to the norms of the patriarchal order. According to Cohen, "the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith ('die erste Eva,' 'la mère obscuré'), Berthan Mason, or Gorgon." (9). Based on ancient myths and literary monsters, Cohen observes how the stories told in a society reflect expectations for gender and sexual behavior. Along similar lines, feminist scholar Jane Caputi observes the transformation of ancient goddesses into monsters in patriarchal mythology through the analysis of contemporary film and pop culture. Building on previous feminist scholarship, Caputi explains the monsterization of goddesses:

> The paradoxical nature of female divinity is no longer respected; 'goddess' is split into two aspects. Sovereign, complex, and wild deities are simplified, chastened, straightened, married off, raped, degraded, abused and demoted in stature. At the same time, in the religious and popular imaginations, the unpacified, insubordinate, and uncontrollable goddess appears as 'whore,' femme fatale, dragon, beast, devil, and monster. (Caputi 318)

The splitting of the goddess in patriarchal myth creates reductive models of femininity for humans that do not sustain the complexity of being. Some of the models, such as the devoted mother and the fertile young beauty, are held in high esteem while the disobedient and sexually free woman are cast aside. In order to belong in society, those who are socialized as women must follow the celebrated models while avoiding the monstrous ones.

Several feminist scholars have studied how Christianity has influenced transformation of female divinities into monsters in Europe and in colonized territories. As Chicana scholar Irene Lara points out, "the spread of Christian evangelization replaced pagan goddesses with a patriarchal God and a mostly male pantheon of saints, attempting to repress the female deities' positive link to sexuality and the body in the process" (111). Focusing on the region where today is Mexico and southern United States, Lara observes the transformation of Indigenous goddesses by Spanish colonizers[36] who split them into completely good or completely evil. In the process,

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[35] According to Lohana Berkins, founder of the Asociación de Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual, *travesti* is a political identity that has been appropriated and resignified by travestis themselves (Berkins). In the past, doctors and other authorities described travestis as men who dress in clothes that correspond to women. However, Latin American *travestis* resist this definition. Instead, many *travestis* claim a position outside the gender binary and do not seek surgical procedures to "reacomodarse en la lógica binaria como mujeres o varones" (Berkins). In most cases, *travestis* adopt feminine pronouns and articles (*ela/ella, a/la travesti*) and a feminine gender presentation.

[36] Lara also recognizes the role of the Aztecs, as an imperial force, in transforming goddesses prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. She supports the idea proposed by several Chicana scholars, including Gloria Anzaldúa, that the

the complementarity between life and death that was important in Nahua culture got erased. Moreover, the connection between spirit, mind and body was broken. Since female sexuality was to be tamed, for it was sinful, sexual goddesses were monsterized. In their place, colonized peoples received a European female divinity who modeled an asexual type of womanhood: the virgin Mary, mother of God.

In Latin American cultures today, the hegemonic models of femininity are still based on the virgin/whore dichotomy. This binary establishes a hierarchy between the opposing models of proper and deviant womanhood. Since Iberian colonizers imposed Catholic values on colonized populations, the most well regarded model follows the Virgin Mary as a devoted Christian, non-sexual being, and sacrificial mother. This model imposes heterosexuality and motherhood within the institution of marriage. At the same time, it requires women to repress sexual desires, which are considered sinful. Moreover, it values passivity and submissiveness to male authorities such as husband, father, and priest. On the other side of the binary would be women who express their sexuality outside of these parameters. The "whore" side of the dichotomy is considered a monstrous kind of femininity. This category includes sexual behavior, but it also encompasses women who show independence of thought, those who are self-sufficient, and those who pursue the fulfillment of their desires in general.

These models of femininity did not affect all women in Latin America equally. As I discussed in previous chapters, feminist scholar María Lugones proposes the idea that the processes of gendering and racializing were intermixed during European colonization of the Americas. As a result, white bourgeois women were expected to be sexually pure and mentally and physically fragile, while Black and Indigenous women were hypersexualized and forced to perform hard physical labor (Lugones 16). Black and Indigenous women were stripped off of their humanity in order to justify their economic, physical, and sexual exploitation. They were monsterized. On the other hand, white women were expected to become sexually pure mothers who would "reproduce the class, and the colonial, and racial standing of bourgeois, white men" (Lugones 15). The virgin/whore dichotomy, therefore, worked differently across racial and class lines. However, it was always in favor of white male property owners who had access to women's bodies and labor.

Undead She-monsters

While stories about monsters, broadly speaking, can describe and prescribe standards for gender roles, they can also be a tool for challenging such roles. Monsters are ambivalent figures. They provoke both awe and fear; they hide and they reveal threats. Moreover, their symbolic presence in stories requires critical interpretation. As Cohen points out, "a polysemy is granted so that a greater threat can be encoded; multiplicity of meanings, paradoxically, iterates the same restricting, agitprop representations that narrowed significations performs. Yet, a danger resides in this multiplication: as difference, like a Hydra, sprouts two heads where one has been lopped away, the possibilities of escape, resistance, disruption arise with more force" (Cohen 11). The multiplicity of meanings inherent to literary monsters has the potential to lead readers into a critical reflection about the conditions that created these monsters and about what is rejected in a

Aztec imperialist culture had already transformed Nahua myths about female divinities to privilege patriarchal power and to subject women. This idea reinforces Segato's theory about the patriarchal order as the oldest form of political organization, existing in the Americas prior to European colonization.

given culture. The polysemic quality of monsters can contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic powers or to its disruption.

Going back to "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego," Mariana Enriquez defamiliarizes readers of horror and gothic fiction by transforming classic monsters and flipping classic tropes. In the fictional world Enriquez creates, "las Mujeres Ardientes" turn themselves into monsters by voluntarily walking through large bonfires in the company of other women who witness the ceremony while singing songs of encouragement: "Ahí va tu cuerpo al fuego, ahí va. / Lo consume pronto, lo acaba sin tocarlo" (Enriquez 193). Then, two of the witnesses, wearing protective clothing, remove the woman from the bonfire and take her to a clandestine hospital set up by women such as María Helena and Silvina's mother (Enriquez 194). Monsterization, here, acquires a positive meaning. Instead of being outcasted and monsterized by force, they actively turn themselves into terrifying creatures of their own making. They refuse to stay victims in a violently oppressive gender system, so they choose to exist ambiguously outside/inside of it, as monsters.

It is important to reiterate that the women chose to become monsters. This idea is repeated several times throughout the story, including in narration of the scene mentioned above, where Silvina films the ritual to prove to Argentine society that they were not coerced into burning themselves. The narrator says: "La mujer entró en el fuego como en una pileta de natación, se zambulló, dispuesta a sumergirse: no había duda de que lo hacía por su propia voluntad; una voluntad supersticiosa o incitada, pero propia" (Enriquez 193). Silvina decided to film the ceremony, with consent, because people did not believe that "las Mujeres Ardientes" were acting out of their desire to create a new form of existence. Their painful transformation into *monstruas* could potentially unbind them from the status of women in a patriarchal order, where they are vulnerable to feminicidal violence.

In some ways, the choices of "las Mujeres Ardientes" reverberate Preciado's narration of his transition. He says: "como en el circo del régimen binario heteropatriarcal a las mujeres les corresponde el papel de la bella y de la víctima y yo no era ni me sentía capaz de ser ninguna de las dos cosas, *dejé de ser una mujer*. ¿Por qué no podía ser el abandono de la feminidad una de las estrategias fundamentales del feminismo?" (Preciado 27). He explains that being reassigned as male was a strategy to survive (Preciado 31). Preciado adds that he "no quería ser hombre; yo buscaba una salida" (28). Preciado highlights that his transition was not freedom, as something that could be demanded from those in power, but a way out, a tunnel or a path that he manufactured (30). The act of manufacturing (*fabricar*) the way out of the place of oppression that Preciado underscores is echoed by the women's act of manufacturing their new bodies and identities in Enriquez' story. However, in their case they choose to inhabit the linguistically feminine, but aesthetically and behaviorally ambiguous identity of *monstruas*.

The monsters in Enriquez' story emerge in a context of patriarchal terrorism that has been killing women by fire. I am using the term "terrorism" broadly as a reference to violent acts perpetrated by individuals and groups to further ideological and political goals. As discussed in previous chapters, the conceptualization of feminicide put forth by several feminist scholars since the 1990s, including Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos and Rita Segato, asserts that individual murder cases – formerly addressed as crimes of passion, crimes of honor, and even cases of mental illness – can now be discussed as a sociocultural issue rooted in a patriarchal structure of power affecting society as a whole. Feminicide as sociopolitical category highlights the fact that each murder case operate together in the maintenance of a patriarchal political order. Thus, the

numerous cases of feminicide by burning portrayed in Enriquez' story constitute acts of patriarchal terrorism. They create a hostile environment for women to exist as women.

The first spark of the self-monstrification creative process comes out of *la chica del subte*. She is the first monster to appear and a highly symbolic character. The narrator describes the unnamed woman in the first paragraph of the story, creating a striking image of a monstrous figure and setting an unsettling tone for the story. The face of *la chica de subte* had been disfigured by the extensive burning she suffered when her husband had tried to kill her. The narrator describes her facial skin as "una máscara marrón recorrida por telarañas" and mentions that she only had one eye left, having a hole in place of the other (Enriquez 185). The spiderwebs provide a visual metaphor that creates associations with ruins and abandonment on the one hand, and creation and narration on the other. The narrator also mentions that *la chica*'s mouth had no lips and that her nose had been poorly reconstructed, suggesting that doctors attempted to restore her face to the way it looked before. This detail suggests that the woman's burned face is unacceptable because it falls completely outside of social standards of health and beauty.

The woman's monstrous presence forces subway passengers and readers to confront the uncanny image of a living corpse. Her scarred body evokes the pain and the near-death experience she went through. Her body carries traces of both death and life. Because of her physical appearance, *la chica del subte* resembles the zombie, a popular kind of monster in horror fiction that is based on religious traditions of the African diaspora such as Haitian vodou and Louisiana voodoo. According to Darryl Jones, "in voodoo, the zombie is a body returned from the dead by a sorcerer, completely devoid of will, there to do the sorcerer's bidding" (41). Through its numerous appearances in cultural products, the zombie's characteristics and origin have been changed. However, they have remained a monstrous threat to humanity.

Most zombies in contemporary literature are not created by magic or religious rituals but by failed scientific experiments, technological accidents, or natural microbiological disasters. While many 20th century zombies move slowly and awkwardly, 21st century zombies can be extremely fast[37]. In spite of these variations, readers and audiences usually identify a monster as a zombie when they are facing a living corpse that attacks humans. Most zombies are mindless beings who can't communicate using verbal language, and they move around in large groups. However, in recent versions of the zombie story, it is possible to find monsters who look like and act like average humans, except for having paler skin—a sign of their living corpse status—and for having brains as part of their diet. Some of these 21st century pop culture zombies may even fall in love and solve crimes[38].

Throughout the 20th century, most representations of zombies portray an ugly and frightening monster. Many Zombie films produced in the United States during the US occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) distorted religious beliefs of the African diaspora and reproduced racist stereotypes, contributing to the marginalization of Black people and their cultures both in the U.S. and abroad (Bender 176). According to Annalee Newitz, undead narratives of the twentieth century show abundant anxieties about colonialism and racial categories (242). Newitz adds that "regardless of their historical period, undead stories share a common investment in the idea that

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[37] One of the most prominent zombie films of the 20th century is George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Although Romero did not use the word "zombie," the audience and critics commonly use this term. For a 21st century representation of extremely fast and strong zombies, see the film *World War Z* (2013), which is based on a 2006 novel by U.S. American author Max Brooks.

[38] Some examples of these kinds of zombies can be found in the U.S. American television detective series iZombie (2015) and the romantic movie *Warm bodies* (2013).

communities murdered by colonialism can linger on, half-alive, and refuse to leave the living remainder alone" (243). Stories written from the perspective of white people in the Global North, the zombie represents the insistence of the oppressed people to survive as a threat to the white supremacist order.

As a polysemic monster, Zombies can also be a symbol of rebellion and resistance. In a study about the novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949), by cuban author's Alejo Carpentier, Jacob L. Bender explains that in Haitian Vodou "the zombie is not merely a re-animated corpse, but one capable of acts of corporeal transformation and metamorphosis" (177). By focusing on the zombie's ability to transform into animals, Bender delineates how Vodou zombie metamorphosis plays an active role in creating resistance and inciting rebellion. Bender argues that Carpentier's characters can change not only themselves but also the world around them (178). Contrasting with the representation of zombies in the Global North, Bender affirms the liberatory potential of the zombie in postcolonial contexts:

> "[F]or it is only in the industrialized neo-colonial First World that zombies are treated as a disease, as harbingers of an apocalypse, as the collapse of civilization—although it *would* be the end of *their* civilization. But in the post-colonial realm, in places like Haiti, Cuba, and Ireland, the zombie apocalypse would instead signify the *return of the human*, as the enslaved and exploited reclaim their right to be human in a fundamentally inhumane world. (Bender 201)

Bender's argument about the zombie liberatory potential leads to the question of how Enriquez' *monstruas* can offer an alternative for women, as an oppressed category in the modern-colonial-patriarchal political order.

Written from a feminist perspective, that is, a perspective where women are aware of their oppression as a group, the undead she-monster in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" highlights the possibility of women's agency, resilience, disobedience, and transformation of reality. However, differently from Bender's argument, I do not see Enriquez' she-monsters claiming a right to be human. Rather, I see Enriquez' monsters crafting a path outwards of a patriarchal construction of the human, since the concepts of normal and universal have been constructed around the male body, and the possibilities within the modern-colonial-patriarchal gender system are limited to man and woman. At the same time, the she-monsters who look like zombies but are not zombies, are not negating humanity either. They dwell on the borderlands.

In the character of *la chica del subte*, Enriquez creates a new kind of monster that keeps some ties with the already familiar zombie monster. When the disfigured woman enters the subway train, some of the passengers get off the car to avoid any contact with her. The remaining passengers stay silent after interacting with the monstrous woman, suggesting a state of shock or a state of pensiveness, or a combination of both. According to the narrator, the silence says: "qué asco, qué miedo, no voy a olvidarme más de ella, cómo se puede vivir así" (Enriquez 187). Because of her appearance reminiscent of a living corpse, the presence of *la chica del subte* raises questions about life and death, especially about the limits and the quality of life. Such questions echo those raised by zombies. According to Mabel Moraña, the zombie figure modifies "la relación con el tema de la muerte, ya que su propia presencia pone de manifiesto que hay formas de existencia que requieren una redefinición de lo que es la *vida*, con la cual se relativiza el carácter definitivo de la desaparición física" (*El monstruo* 166). Although the woman is not exactly a zombie, her disfigured body displays a similar kind of liminal existence that refuses to fit into familiar categories. Her body's physical appearance indicates that she "should" be dead, yet she is not. She is alive, and this fact astonishes passengers.

Equally important is the fact that the disfigured woman, much like a zombie, unexpectedly takes over the spaces where "regular life" is taking place. Typically, zombie hordes travel through all social spaces, bringing devastation and creating more zombies along the way. According to Moraña the zombies' actions are "una forma perversa de invadir los espacios del yo, la conciencia burguesa, los imaginarios de la vida, el poder y el consumo, como un recordatorio ineludible de que la vida, y no su fragmentada materialidad son un espectáculo pasajero e inútil, vaciado de sentido" (Moraña *Pensar* 321). While the zombie horde's destructive invasion of public and private spaces may destabilize bourgeois life and rationality, Enriquez' first she-monster travels alone and intentionally turns her presence into a spectacle. Her performance challenges the patriarchal mentality that separates private and public spheres as she brings the issue of domestic violence into a public space. Being conscious and having the ability and the courage to speak up turns her into a dangerous she-monster.

The subway car becomes a stage from where the woman narrates her story. She decides to publicly perform her story of survival for an audience in exchange for money. Her method involves greeting passengers with a kiss before telling her story (Enriquez 185). Through an action as simple as a kiss, she breaks social rules and expectations. Although greeting friends and acquaintances with kisses on the cheeks is common practice among Argentinians, kissing complete strangers on a subway is out of the ordinary, especially for a person with a monstrous appearance. Her kiss is an assertive way to turn distracted passengers into a captive audience. Because the woman's body is visibly scarred and her face is disfigured, the act of giving out kisses escalates from unconventional to frightening. Besides her resemblance to a living corpse, part of the horror her action creates comes from having a feminine body that does not fully fit into the social expectations around a woman's body and behavior.

Her monstrous appearance and provocative demeanor generate a powerful reflection of conventional beauty and normative femininity. *La chica del subte* knows her appearance is ugly (according to conventional standards) and yet she forces people to look at it and to feel it with their skin when she dares to initiate close contact. She defies the patriarchal expectation for women's bodies as decorative objects when she exhibits her ugly female body in public. The narrator says that "la chica del subte, además, se vestía con jeans ajustados, blusas transparentes, incluso sandalias con tacos cuando hacía calor. Llevaba pulseras y cadenitas colgando del cuello. Que su cuerpo fuera sensual resultaba inexplicablemente ofensivo" (Enriquez 186). A disfigured female body wearing revealing clothing and traditionally feminine adornments that evoke sensuality defamiliarizes the reader from the performance of normative femininity. When the monstrous woman exposes social conceptions about women's bodies and behavior, it creates an uncanny effect, a confusing mixture between femininity, beauty, death, and decay.

According to feminist scholar Barbara Sutton, "physical beauty, judged by very narrow standards, is a key requirement of appropriate feminine appearance and plays a prominent role in Argentine culture" (65). Moreover, Argentina's culturally sanctioned model of femininity is centered on European standards that glorify "white and middle-upper class ways of being a woman" (Sutton 65). The construction of such beauty standards is tied to centuries of European colonialism and post-independence nation-building processes. However, more recent violent events such as the military dictatorship of the 20th century have greatly contributed to the narrow definition of femininity beauty. In dialogue with the work of Diana Taylor, Sutton states that one of the consequences of the dictatorship was the imposition of a strict gender code where women would be considered good when they were docile and submissive, and bad if they were subversive (67). The distinction between good and bad "was partly manifested through a proper

feminine look" which, in that context, included wearing makeup and dresses or skirts instead of jeans (Sutton 67). During the dictatorship period, there were institutionalized processes to "recuperate" subversive women through forced transformation of their bodily appearance (Sutton 68). Women's physical appearance, therefore, has become a way to demonstrate moral worthiness through compliance with patriarchal authoritarian rule.

While clothing is an important aspect of performing conventional femininity, it is important to highlight the racist foundation of the gender code in Argentina and throughout the Americas. As Sutton affirms, women's bodies were "one of the territories in which Argentine elites' desires to 'civilize' the nation would be carried out since the inception of the nation" (64). In that context, to civilize meant to impose European culture over the Indigenous culture, but it also implied the supremacy of European (white) bodies over Black and Indigenous bodies. In Argentina, the "civilizing" process included the genocide of Black and Indigenous populations, and the virtual erasure of those who remained alive from the national imaginary. They became invisible even if many still existed and resisted[39]. Therefore, having black or brown skin has become a barrier to performing the highest level of femininity in Argentine society. The consequences are broad and they include difficulties finding a job to support themselves financially. Job ads in Argentina often seek candidates with "*buena presencia*" ("good presence" related to appearance and demeanor), which according to Sutton, "is code for white, middle-class, heteronormative femininity" (73). Thus, women who do not fit into these categories have fewer job opportunities as they are less desirable and even disposable in such society.

The monstrous woman in Enriquez' story embodies the intersecting issues of beauty, race, gender, class, and labor. The narrator calls attention to the fact that the fire disfigured her face, but it did not reach her hands, which are described as following: "eran morenas y siempre estaban un poco sucias de manipular el dinero que mendigaba" (Enriquez 185). The word *morena* stands out as the only indication of racial difference among all the other women in the short story. In general, *moreno/a* is an ambiguous adjective that may or may not designate a specific race in Latin America because it can mean dark skin or dark hair regardless of skin color. What is considered *moreno/a* may vary from context to context. Very often it is used as an euphemism for Black (*negra*), in contexts where being Black is undesirable. Because Latin American conceptualizations of race are related to a history racial-mixing and a gradient range of hierarchical categories instead of a rigid racial binary, the culturally ambiguous adjective *moreno/a* encompasses a very large group of people that only excludes those who are light skinned with blonde hair. In this story, the reference to the woman's skin color creates several meanings about social marginalization in the specific context of Argentinian society.

Argentina's nation-building process involved the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the virtual erasure of the Black population from the national imaginary. The hegemonic concept of Argentine national identity is one of a white nation conformed by European immigrants (Sutton 26). As a result, darker skinned people are frequently perceived as outsiders and non-citizens[40]. At the same time, darker skinned people are associated with poverty and working class status in the hegemonic national imaginary (Sutton 26). In this context, *la chica del subte* becomes the embodiment of social marginalization, and her gender identity is only one of the factors.

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[39] Historian Erika Denise Edwards provides an in-depth discussion of Black disappearance and Black invisibility in Argentina in her book *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic.*

[40] In *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina,* feminist scholar Barbara Sutton includes a few cases of Black and Indigenous Argentine women who were harassed by the police under suspicions of not being Argentine and having false documents (27).

Moreover, the fact that her hands were always a little bit dirty (*siempre estaban un poco sucias*) due to handling cash adds another layer of meaning. According to Sutton, "for women with brown skin, regardless of their actual class standing, looking clean may help avert stereotypical suspicions of criminality and of membership in the lower class" (82). Since the consequences of being stereotyped as criminal can lead to further social exclusion and violence, dark-skinned women may give more attention to having a clean and groomed appearance as a strategy for surviving and participating in society. In such a context, the behavior of *la chica del subte* stands out as a woman who does not subscribe to social expectations around gender and race, as she is not trying to fit in nor to please anyone.

It is important to highlight that her defiant behavior does not appear to be so much of a choice, but a strategy for surviving. When she asks for money on the subway after telling her story, she explains: "no estaba juntando dinero para cirugías plásticas, no tenían sentido, nunca volvería a su cara normal, lo sabía" (Enriquez 186). She clarifies for passengers that she begs for money on the subway because she needs to buy food and to pay the rent, since "nadie le daba trabajo con la cara así, ni siquiera en puestos donde no hiciera falta verla" (Enriquez 186). Her justification reveals multiple layers of the problem of violence against women, including its connection to money and work. Her scarred face further marginalized her, leaving her unable to find a job. As a survivor of feminicidal violence, she needs to find ways to stay alive. Her struggle for surviving surpasses the moment when she suffered physical interpersonal violence.

The experience of *la chica del subte* shows how the time period associated with violence is actually long. It highlights the fact that, for many survivors, there may not be a support system to help her carry on with her life. Instead, interpersonal physical violence has an afterlife that inflicts economic and social violence upon the survivor. Consequently, her experience also stretches the victim-perpetrator paradigm where her ex-husband would be the sole abuser. In this case, the whole society becomes complicit in ostracizing the survivor. In the figure of the monstrous undead woman, it is possible to see how violence against women is one aspect of a structurally violence society. Finding individual perpetrators accountable for the violence they inflict is as important as transforming the political structure that benefits from feminicidal violence. "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" does not provide an imagining of how the transformed structure would look like, as much as it imagines women fabricating a way out.

The Female Corpse

The figure of the living corpse or the undead monster allows for an exploration of some of the ways the she-monsters in "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" challenge the limiting norms for women's appearance and behavior within the patriarchal order. In addition, the transformation of women's embodiment into corpse-like she-monsters calls for an exploration of the representation of the female corpse in the history of arts and literature. The exhibition of the corpse and its aestheticization is an aspect of crime, gothic, and horror fiction aesthetics that Enriquez plays with in this story. The battered body of *la chica del subte* is evidence of the violence she suffered and a reminder of her status as a survivor. When she uses her monstrous body in her storytelling act, she not only shows her scars, but she produces a spectacle around her body. It's the corpse-like female body that becomes a model for the she-monsters "las Mujeres Ardientes" create.

According to Moraña, the fascination with the corpse and its processes of decomposition are at the base of a gothic aesthetic of "otrificación y cosificación del cuerpo" (*Pensar* 318). This

is particularly visible in detective novels where the plot is centered on the investigation of a murder crime. In this case, the corpse is one of the most important sources of evidence because it can reveal important information about when and how the crime occurred. A forensic study of the corpse may also point to suspect perpetrators, especially since the 1990s, when technology for DNA analysis became widely available. Because of the corpse's function as evidence, its exhibition is often performed through a scientific lens. Thus, in crime fiction, the dead body becomes an object containing important data to be decoded by detectives and forensic experts.

In gothic fiction, the dead body is often portrayed in graphic detail in order to elicit uncomfortable emotions and sensations. The effects of the display of the corpse in gothic aesthetics have been studied by several scholars, including Moraña, who relates them to Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (*Pensar* 318). When confronting a corpse, readers or viewers face something that is strange and familiar at the same time. The uncertainty becomes a source of horror. Moraña also connects this experience around indeterminacy and difference with Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, where the blurring of the distinction between subject and object creates strong reactions such as horror and disgust. Moreover, according to Moraña, the dead body disrupts the order of life and productivity "no solo porque el cuerpo muerto implica la disolución de la materialidad, sino también porque la violencia que conduce a esta disolución (la pérdida total del límite sin el cual la subjetividad no puede sustentarse) desarticula el sistema de derecho y hace de esa destrucción un espectáculo, creando una estética sobre las ruinas y sobre los deshechos del ser social" (*Pensar* 320). When the corpse reveals death, it does not bring answers, but it raises several questions about the body as matter, consciousness and the mind, spirituality, and social structures, among others.

Although depictions of death and dead bodies have always been present in literature, its representations have acquired different forms and meanings through time. According to Yael Shapira, who is a scholar of British literature, the corpse as a fictional trope "is created through a series of experiments in novel-writing that run through the whole of the long eighteenth century" (1). Shapira differentiates earlier depictions of the dead body, such as the Christian *memento mori* and martyrology, from eighteenth century fiction, including the Gothic novel, because in that period the instructional and religious purposes diminishes while the concern with selling entertaining books rises (Shapira 3). Authors of Gothic narrative fiction had to negotiate the limits of the spectacularization of the corpse and their status as novelists with readers, alongside the rise of mass-marketed literature and the growing concern about the moral and social effects of "fictional pleasures" depicting transgressive sexualities (Shapira 7). Thus, Shapira argues that the corpse is "the erotic body's unacknowledged twin in its capacity to epitomize what critics find disturbing about the novel's popularity" (8). The changing ways in which authors engaged with the corpse through the eighteenth century were connected to broader social change.

The cultural shift around the corpse that took place during the eighteenth century encompassed many areas of society besides arts and literature. For instance, anatomists working with corpses were not only producing scientific knowledge, but in many cases they were also participating in the spectacularization of the dead body through public dissections and its transformation into a commodity (Shapira 15). Moreover, public executions and the public display of the dead bodies of criminals were a common practice until the nineteenth-century, when a series of reforms removed those practices from public spaces (Shapira 15).

An important aspect of the aestheticization of the corpse since the 18th century and throughout the 19th century is its insistence on dead female bodies. Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most representative authors of Gothic literature in the English language, famously wrote in 1846

that "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world–and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover." (122). Although Poe was not necessarily referring to death by murder, his statement reflects the general interest in representing women's death and female corpses that can be found in multiple literary texts and visual arts from the 19th century. Literary scholar Elisabeth Bronfen states that "the pictorial representation of dead women became so prevalent in eighteenth and nineteenth century European culture that by the middle of the latter century this topos was already dangerously hovering on the periphery of cliché" (3). The impact of these repeated images of dead women has led Brazilian philosopher Márcia Tiburi to affirm that "a principal imagem de uma mulher, bem como a essencial imagem 'da mulher' na história patriarcal moderna, é a imagem de uma mulher morta" (304). Thus, aesthetic representation of dead women continues to live in patriarchal cultures of Europe and the Americas (via colonialism and its reiterations).

To explain the emphasis on death as an ubiquitous artistic topic of the 19th century, Bronfen states that "the aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of the reality of death precisely because here death occurs *at* someone else's body and *as* an image" (*x*). There is a kind of relief in acknowledging the existence of death that is not our own. The dead body, then, functions as Other to those who are alive, that is, the survivors. On the other hand, the insistence on female corpses may be explained by the fact that "the feminine body is culturally constructed as the superlative site of alterity" (Bronfen *xi*). Bronfen does not critique the historical construction of the feminine as Other from an openly feminist perspective. Instead, she employs Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to explain the connections between death, femininity, and beauty as a fact of Western culture. According to Bronfen, both "beauty" and "woman" operate as masks for death, thus the "pleasure at the beauty of Woman resides in the uncanny *simultaneity* of recognizing and misrecognizing it as a veil for death" (63). Although the corpse, as inanimate materiality and as a sign, is not gendered, Bronfen observes the fact that it is represented through a gendered body in western culture, as a desirable *feminine* corpse" (64). Even in the absence of an explicitly feminist stance, Bronfen's analysis reveals that the dead female body is constructed as Other within a culture built around the (white) male human[41].

One of Bronfen's points that helps elucidate my analysis of Enriquez' short story is the idea of the survivor as masculine. Bronfen takes the painting "The Anatomist" (1869), by Austrian painter Gabriel von Max, as a case study and affirms that the male anatomist "constitutes himself as surviving, analysing and writing subject only in relation to the other dead objects" (Bronfen 8). Although there are several elements in the painting that reinforce his subject position, the main component is the opposition between his animate body and the inanimate corpse he is about to cut open. Bronfen points out that "his upright posture signals a form of control and domination culturally ascribed not only to the survivor but also to the

[41] The conclusions that I am drawing from engaging with Bronfen's text are based on the understanding that Western symbolisms around male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine, active/passive, are not preexisting facts that are then expressed in cultural products such as paintings. Instead, these symbolisms are culturally produced and reproduced, so they can also be challenged and transformed. I align with Paul Preciado when he affirms that "el régimen de la diferencia sexual que ustedes consideran universal y constituyente, sobre el que reposa y se articula toda la teoría psicoanalítica, no es una realidad empírica, ni un orden simbólico que subyace a la estructura del inconsciente; es [...] una epistemología históricamente situada que se forja junto con la taxonomía racial en el momento de expansión mercantil y colonial de Europa y que cristaliza durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Esa epistemología, lejos de ser la representación de una realidad, es una máquina performativa que produce y legitima un orden político y económico específico: el patriarcado heterocolonial" (59).

masculine position of the lover" (8). The position of the male anatomist (scientist) as subject, survivor, and lover reinforces cultural codes about the masculine as active and the feminine as passive.

Brofen returns to the idea of survival as masculine in her analysis of Poe's famous quote, mentioned earlier. Bronfen affirms that the designations of the corpse as feminine and the survivor as masculine depend on the cultural values attributed to feminine and masculine and not on biological reality (65). Thus, "an anatomically 'male' corpse may be gendered 'feminine'" in the same way that "an anatomically 'female' spectator or narrator may, because she has accepted a fixed position in masculine culture and supports its norms and semantic encodings, embody a 'masculine' spectator or focalisor position" (65). Thus, Bronfen's analysis suggests that the position of subject and survivor as symbolically masculine is so powerful that the corpse will be symbolically feminine regardless of its anatomy. Although Bronfen does not clearly articulate the idea that the repetition of the hierarchical gender binary and of the values attributed to each gender in the arts relates to the oppression of women and to the privilege of cis-gendered white men both inside and outside of the artistic realm, I find her analysis useful to think of the challenges that survivors of gender-based violence face to escape the permanent position of victim. In the legal field, it is important to clearly define victim and perpetrator positions, and avoid victim-blaming, as it often happens when the person who was victimized is a woman. At the same time, the permanent positioning of women as victims ends up removing their agency.

The female corpse as a literary trope is present in Enriquez' story only at the surface appearance of *la chica del subte*'s body because she subverts the patriarchal cultural codes established through the repeated representation of the female dead corpse. As mentioned above, the monstrous appearance of *la chica del subte* evokes the corpse but it also challenges it because she is in fact fully alive. Her corpse-like body is spectacularized, but she is not passively laying down as an inanimate object. Instead, she stands, she moves around and takes the subway. She kisses and talks to passengers, and she gazes at them with the only eye she has left on her scarred face. Her body is evidence of a crime, but she is not reduced to an object ready to be passively read. She embodies a female survivor literally and symbolically.

The fact that she recognizes herself as a victim of attempted feminicide does not keep her permanently in a victim role. During her storytelling act, she "nombraba al hombre que la había quemado: Juan Martín Pozzi, su marido" and she affirms that "ni bien pudo hablar, en el hospital, contó la verdad. Ahora él estaba preso" (Enriquez 186). Instead of being silenced, she uses her voice to speak up and she becomes the narrator of her own story. She is a witness who chooses to publicly denounce the perpetrators of feminicidal violence. Although she may look like a zombie who brings terror to all spaces where she goes, she is not mindless. The monster in Enriquez' story subverts the norms for women within the binary gender hierarchy under her own terms. She keeps some of the practices of femininity such as her clothes, but she goes around forcing people to face a monstrous body that is offensively sensual, in the narrator's words (Enriquez 186). She is a corpse-like monster who is not dead and not "woman." The she-monster is a hybrid that dwells in ambiguity and indefinition.

Unruly Hag Witches

In "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego," the ceremonial bonfires women use to create their new monstrous selves are charged with historical meanings of the 16th and 17th century witch hunts in Europe, which also impacted the Americas. Enriquez's story brings up the figure

of the witch as a symbol of women's resistance to patriarchal violence. Although *las mujeres ardientes* do not identify as witches, the connection between contemporary violence against women and the historical witch hunts is made explicit in a conversation where María Helena, who is in jail because of her leadership role in the women's movement, tells Silvina and Silvina's mother that she has been educating other women in jail about the witch hunts: "¡que nos quemaron durante cuatro siglos! No lo pueden creer, no sabían nada de los juicios a las brujas, ¿se dan cuenta? La educación en este país se fue a la mierda" (Enriquez 196). Their conversation continues with the three of them wondering if the voluntary burnings will keep happening until the number of burned women reaches the same number as the Inquisition victims. When they trace the history of violence against women back to the witch hunts, they highlight the importance of knowing the history of violence against women to put present-day feminicidal violence in a context of structural political violence.

According to Silvia Federici, the witch hunt was fundamental in the transition to capitalism because it facilitated the defeat of the European peasantry and the transformation of their bodies into work machines. Furthermore, it destroyed women's power and subjugated them to the reproduction of the workforce (Federici *Caliban* 63). Federici states that a new model of femininity emerged after two centuries of state terrorism. She affirms that "while at the time of the witch-hunt, women had been portrayed as savage beings, mentally weak, unsatiably lusty, rebellious, insubordinate, incapable of self-control, by the 18th century the canon had been reversed. Women were now depicted as passive, asexual beings, more obedient, more moral than men, capable of exerting a positive moral influence on them" (Federici *Caliban* 103). After such a long-lasting terror campaign that spread from Europe to the Americas, the witch came to represent a negative aspect of femininity, a monstrous woman. Obedient women were praised while witches were rejected. These models of femininity have been imposed in Latin America through European colonialism and reproduced by local elites after independence.

Since the terror campaign that monsterized disobedient women into evil witches, being called a witch was considered offensive. Over centuries, the figure of the witch has been invoked by anti-feminists seeking to demonize and ostracize women who dared to question social hierarchies and inequalities, and women who demanded civil rights. In the mid-twentieth century, several feminist groups have embraced the figure of the witch strategically in order to resist patriarchal oppression. In the United States, for example, the anti-capitalist feminist group W.I.T.C.H., an acronym standing for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, performed public demonstrations dressed as stereotypical witches (black gowns and pointy hats). Using guerrilla theater methods to protest against Wall Street, they hexed the U.S. financial center. According to film scholar Amelia Crowther, "During the short period of radical feminism's activity during the late-1960s and into the early 1970s, the image of the witch became ideologically multiplicitous, contested and almost uncontainable, her meaning evading the boundaries of categorisation, suggesting that she might never be able to be fully recuperated by the patriarchal discourses in which she was initially constructed" (4). For many U.S. feminists today, the meaning of the witch was reclaimed and ressignified as powerful and desirable.

In contemporary Latin America, including Argentina, the witch is frequently conjured as a symbol of resistance during feminist protests. According to Karina Felitti, the feminist slogan "somos las nietas de las brujas que no pudieron quemar," which often appears in posters and t-shirts, is part of a process of identification with the witch as an icon of rebellion against the patriarchy and as "'sanadoras' de un linaje" (543). For contemporary feminists, the matrilineal affiliation with historic witches connects the violence of the past with the struggles of the

present, recognizing a continuous resistance to patriarchal violence. Because the witch is historically associated with healers, midwives, and nurses, the witch carries a symbolism of power to create and transform. In particular, the witch carries a symbolism of control over one's reproductive lives. In a context where Christian churches—mainly catholic, but also protestant and evangelical—have so much power of influence in state legislation, the figure of the witch also appears as defiance to religious beliefs that control and discipline women.

Although many feminists have embraced the witch as a rebellious figure, the witch as a monstrous feminine figure can easily be transformed into an ambiguous figure that conforms and challenges the patriarchal order. Popular television witch characters such as Samantha Stephens from *Bewitched* (1964-1972) have been studied by feminists as both subverting the patriarchal order and conforming to gender roles as a housewife[42]. Since the 1990s, new witch characters have become popular in U.S. television series such as *Charmed* (1998) and *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* (1996), focusing on the lives of young women and teenagers. Both of these 1990s series have been remade in 2018. The remake of *Charmed* portrayed a major change in the cast of protagonists, from three white women in the 1990s to Black and brown Puerto Rican women in the recent version. Some of the witch characters have some depth, showing "good" and "bad" personality traits—meaning they conform to some of the norms for women but they disobey sometimes. But overall, these pop culture witches embody "good" witches who are not considered monsters. Moreover, they are all conventionally feminine in their physical appearance, including the women characters who reject cis-heterosexual normativity such as Mel Vera and Josefina from the 2018 remake of *Charmed*.

Monstrous witches with ugly appearance seem to remain constrained to villain roles. But in cases when the villain is reclaimed, as in the film *Maleficent* (2014), her demonic appearance is strangely beautiful. Amidst the beautifully feminine witches in contemporary pop culture, "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" portrays she-monsters who are voluntarily transforming themselves into ugly and scary figures. Enriquez uses the word *bruja* in the conversation where María Helena links the present-day bonfires to the witch hunts of the past. But at this point, I find it relevant to introduce the word "hag" to discuss the association between Enriquez' she-monsters and the figure of the witch as a monster. Both witch and hag refer to historically demonized models of womanhood, but hag is a derogatory term more often used against older women and it emphasizes ugly physical appearance[43]. The hag, perhaps even more than the witch, embodies a model of womanhood that threatens the patriarchal order. If some of the disrupted potential of the witch has been tamed, the ugly hag remains at the margins as a monster.

Enriquez' she-monsters evoke the hag when they choose to become undesirable in a heterosexual patriarchal economy. They find the aesthetic and behavioral model for their new selves in *la chica del subte*, who makes herself visible in public and terrorizes passengers. *La chica del subte* is not only a model, but she also becomes a sort of spokesperson of the women's movement, making speeches full of irony in television shows: "Por lo menos ya no hay trata de mujeres, porque nadie quiere a un monstruo quemado y tampoco quieren a estas locas argentinas que un día se van y se prenden fuego – y capaz que le pegan fuego al cliente también" (Enriquez

[42] In *Bewitched Again: Supernaturally Powerful Women on Television, 1996-2011*, Julie D. O'Reilly conducts a study of U.S. television witch characters where she observes these ambiguities.

[43] In Spanish the word *bruja* translates both hag and witch. However, to approximate the meaning of hag, usually the word *bruja* is accompanied by other adjectives such as *fea* or *vieja* in order to approximate its meaning to the English word hag.

195). Embodying a modified hag witch, the she-monsters no longer conform to the norms for bodily appearance. Moreover, they recover a sense of agency when they are able to produce fear. Instead of being afraid, they become frightening. Being considered ugly and mad becomes a source of power for the she-monsters because it shows that they will not conform to social rules.

The hag is usually represented as an older, childfree, unmarried woman who is considered ugly. Oftentimes the hag's ugliness is an exaggeration of the natural aging of the female body, such as having wrinkled skin and gray hair. According to Crowther, the hag is a "monstrous incarnation of the aging female body" (Crowther). While the monsterization of disobedient women into evil witches affected potentially all women, older women suffered additional rejection in the modern-colonial-patriarchal order because their participation in both productive and reproductive labor is limited. I am referring to productive labor in Marxist terms as work that generates value for capitalists in return for wages and reproductive labor as work that sustains life and supports the workforce in general. It includes childbearing, cleaning, cooking, and caring for people, among other tasks. According to Federici, "in the new monetary regime, only production-for-market was defined as value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered as valueless from an economic viewpoint and even ceased to be considered as work (*Caliban* 74). Federici adds that reproductive work was "mystified as a natural vocation" of women, who were excluded from many waged occupations (*Caliban* 75). As human bodies were reduced to work machines—paid and unpaid—the aging bodies of older women pose a problem for capitalists as they lose both productive and reproductive value.

Feminist writer Audre Lorde includes age, along with race, class and sexuality, among the factors contributing to systematized oppression "in a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need" (114). In such a society, older women are dehumanized for being women and for being older. They are surplus, excess. Moreover, the rejection of older members of society, particularly women, prevents them from sharing knowledge and wisdom. In some cases, their devaluing contributes to a dismissal of their teachings as useless information, falsities, and even madness. According to Lorde, "the 'generation gap' is an important social tool for any repressive society. If the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess, they will never be able to join hands and examine the living memories of the community, nor ask the all important question, 'Why?' This gives rise to a historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread" (117). Thus, the continuous devaluing of older women and their monsterization serves to maintain the modern-colonial-patriarchal order as it breaks intergenerational ties.

Audre's point is reinforced by Federici, who explains that witch hunts were a first step towards "the transformation of female sexual activity into work, a service to men, and procreation," demonizing all forms of non-procreative sexuality (*Caliban* 192). In turn, the demonization of non-procreative sexuality denied old women a right to their sexuality because they were no longer fertile. According to Federici, "Many women accused and tried for witchcraft were old and poor. [...] But old women were also those in the community most likely to resist the destruction of communal relations caused by the spread of capitalist relations. They were the ones who embodied the community's knowledge and memory. The witch-hunt turned the image of the old woman upside down: traditionally considered a wise woman, she became a symbol of sterility and hostility to life" (*Caliban* 193). The monsterization of old women,

therefore, combined their inability to produce children with their ability to transmit knowledge and instigate disobedience onto the younger generations.

In Enriquez' story, the hag is also evoked through the behavior of older women such as Silvina's mother and María Helena. After Silvina and her mother encounter *la chica del subte* for the first time, a young man who also watched the storytelling act starts accusing the monstrous woman of being "manipuladora" and "asquerosa" (Enriquez 187). Silvina's mother, described as being older than 60 and having "pelo corto y gris" crosses the subway car towards the young man and punches him in the face, then runs away to avoid getting into further trouble (Enriquez 187). The beginning and the end of the scene in the subway contrast the kiss of *la chica del subte* and the punch of the older woman. Both actions break social protocol and produce shock and confusion. The kiss, however, is a premeditated act that is part of a performance, while the punch is an improvised reaction of indignation to the man's disdain towards *la chica del subte*. The punch is a sign of disapproval towards the young man from the part of the older woman, but it also gives her joy and relief, expressed through a "carcajada" (Enriquez 187). Moreover, the punch functions as an expression of solidarity for *la chica del subte*, creating a kind of alliance between the women.

Silvina's mother is an important character because after the punching event on the subway, she takes on a leadership role in the women's movement known as *las Mujeres Ardientes*. Silvina and her mother were together on the subway and narration focuses on Silvina's perspective to describe the event. As I mentioned earlier, the use of free indirect speech creates ambiguity between an outside narrator's perspective and an insider's perspective. The focus on Silvina's perspective highlights the intergenerational bonds between women under a positive light. Silvina observes her mother's happiness and points out that she hadn't seen her like that in years (Enriquez 187). Then, she watches her mother and other women over 60 years old camping out in protest in front of a hospital after another woman had been burned by her intimate partner. Silvina expresses surprise about the older women's willingness to be outside on the sidewalk all night making and holding up posters (Enriquez 190). By focusing on Silvina's perspective, the story portrays not only women collaborating with other women, but also older women teaching younger women by example.

The role of older women as teachers for young people, especially young women, has been systematically attacked over centuries, whenever their teachings challenged the norms and behaviors defined by the patriarchal political order. As Federici points out, the European witch hunts of the 16th and 17th-centuries "instituted a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged a new model of femininity to which women had to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to the subordination to the male world, accepting as natural the confinement to a sphere of activities that in capitalism has been completely devalued" (*Witches* 32). The witch hunts supported the further removal of women from positions of leadership and knowledge production within their communities. In this process, Federici affirms that older women were especially threatened because of the knowledge that they could pass on to the young, including abortive herbs, and the memory of the community (*Witches* 32). Disobedient women, including older wise women, were monsterized into evil witches, persecuted, and killed.

Although Silvina's mother does not set out to formally teach her daughter how to protest feminicidal violence, her actions serve as examples. By watching her mother and María Helena actively support the women's movement, Silvina is invited to think for herself. At one point, Silvina wonders if her mother's participation in *Las Mujeres Ardientes* is acceptable, and

considers whether she should betray them by denouncing them and "desbaratar la locura desde adentro" (Enriquez 193). However, Silvina does not betray the women. She does not decide whether she will burn herself either. The story leaves Silvina's decision as an open possibility, ending with the narrator's opinion: "ah, cuando se decidirá Silvinita, sería una quemada hermosa, una verdadera flor de fuego" (Enriquez 197). The narrator seems to root for Silvina's decision towards becoming a monster, suggesting that becoming a monster is a positive thing. The narrator also plays with the idea of beauty by using the expressions "quemada hermosa" and "flor de fuego" to talk about Silvina as a she-monster.

In Enriquez' short story, Silvina's mother is a character who embodies several aspects of the hag witch. Even though she is a mother, she does not perform traditionally feminine functions within a heterosexual family and her role in the story is not created in relation to a husband. Silvina's biological father, described as "un hombre bueno y algo torpe" died when she was a young girl, so her mother is a widower (Enriquez 193). She tells Silvina that her participation in *Las Mujeres Ardientes* has nothing to do with who Silvina's father was, which is relevant because if there was a backstory of violence or suffering, her character would risk being constructed around her relationship with her husband. Moreover, as a woman older than 60, a detail mentioned twice, Silvina's mother is no longer able to have biological children. Her gray hair no longer fits into patriarchal models of beauty for women, which is associated with youthfulness. However, she expresses creative power in leading, organizing, and caring for other women. Silvina's mother embodies the hag when she punches the young man in the subway and runs away, as well as when she joins other women in protest against feminicide by burning. Finally, she embodies the hag when she became a collaborator of *las Mujeres Ardientes* as head of the clandestine hospital of the south (Enríquez 194). She is a leader and someone who serves her community not in the production of capital, but in a feminist form of mutual aid.

While witches in general are considered monstrous for disobeying the patriarchal order, the hag witch highlights specific challenges to the modern-colonial-patriarchy: the absence of beauty as determined by the male gaze, the impossibility to provide children for the patriarchal family, and the refusal to stay hidden inside the patriarchal home. According to Crowther "the hag witch can be considered doubly transgressive for refusing to take up the mantle of invisibility required of aging women. Instead, she embraces her barren body as a source of power, spectacle and magic, becoming an image of unruly excess" (Crowther). In Enriquez' story, the she-monsters and the older women leading the movement embrace aspects of the hag, recreating a classic monster.

In this piece of horror fiction, Enriquez changes the perspective on the monsterization of women from the position of suffering victims to audacious creators of themselves. In this context, walking into the fire to live as a monster is a gruesome but powerful form of embodied resistance to feminicidal violence. *Las mujeres ardientes* reclaim sovereignty over their bodies and lives by choosing to become monsters. The story ends without showing how the world will be after the transformation. The narrator wonders: "Hacía apenas semanas, las primeras mujeres sobrevivientes habían empezado a mostrarse. A tomar colectivos. A comprar en el supermercado. A tomar taxis y subterráneos, a abrir cuentas de banco y disfrutar de un café en las veredas de los bares, con las horribles caras iluminadas por el sol de la tarde, con los dedos, a veces sin algunas falanges, sosteniendo la taza. ¿Les darían trabajo? ¿Cuándo llegaría el mundo ideal de hombres y monstruas?" (196). By asking questions instead of giving answers, the story dwells on the possibility, on the capacity to bring about something new.

Conclusion

A Feminist Aesthetics of Disobedience

Disseram-me louca porque me recusei, porque de certo modo parti e, assim, desobedeci e continuo desobedecendo.
— Micheliny Verunschk, *Caminhando com os mortos*

To write about feminicide forces me to confront my vulnerability to patriarchal violence while empathizing with other women. On many occasions, I've had to stop reading and writing to process my grief and anger. Later, I would continue working on this project with a deep belief in the importance of breaking the silence about violence against women. As I experienced life as a woman, I wondered countless times if I would make it to my house safely while walking alone through the streets of Brazil, Spain, or the United States. A few times, I asked myself if I would be safe spending time in the house of a friend or a family member or in my own house. As the narrator of *Chicas muertas* says, "sigo viva. Sólo una cuestión de suerte" (Almada 182). Looking at life from this perspective may seem overly pessimistic and even morbid. However, it is not uncommon to feel this way when one has grown up hearing that a woman is the source of all evil in the world, that a woman is the original sinner, that a woman is the cause of wars, that a woman is beaten by her husband because she likes it, that a woman is raped because she is wearing revealing clothes, that a woman is harassed because she is too beautiful, that a woman never finds love because she is too angry, that a woman is fired from her job because her competence threatens her boss… It seems to always be women's fault.

I share the feeling that Brazilian poet and slammer Tawane Silva Theodoro expresses in her poem:

> Eu não queria ser feminista.
> Eu não deveria ser feminista.
> Em pleno século XXI minha gente, feminismo não deveria nem existir...
> Calma sociedade, não comece a sorrir.
> É porque mulheres não tinham que precisar resistir tanto assim. (Theodoro)

Being a feminist is a necessity to co-create change in a world where the lives of women are expendable. When we start asking why they are killing us and when we get together with other people who also refuse to accept things the way they are, we begin to enact disobedience to the modern-colonial-patriarchal order.

Those who benefit from our compliance label us "difficult," "rebellious," "unruly." But our disobedience has a vital intensity, as Segato has said in a 2019 speech at the Buenos Aires International Book Fair. A pluralist and feminist logic, according to Segato is "para-consistente para conservar la vida y garantizarle continuidad y mayor bienestar para más gentes, para mantener el horizonte abierto de la historia sin destino pre-fijado, para mantener el tiempo en movimiento" ("Las virtudes"). Disobeying is not always a bad thing, as many of us have been taught in school, at home, or at church. Disobeying a patriarchal necropolitical[44] system can be, from the perspective of the oppressed, a virtue. Feminist disobedience is an action pro-life, pro-women's lives, and everyone's lives.

[44] I am thinking with Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitcs, a politics of death enacted by contemporary societies in which "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (11).

When Verónica Gago theorizes the politics of the feminist strikes in Argentina, she affirms that "la clave de la huelga feminista es la *desobediencia* en un sentido Amplio, que excede el marco legal del paro 'sindical' […]. Pero lo radical es que abre también la pregunta de a quién desobedecemos (si no es sólo a la figura del patrón), contra qué y quiénes paramos (si son patrones no sólo condensados en jefaturas) y en qué sentido la interrupción de la relación de obediencia que nos impone el capital abre un espacio para pensar vidas diferentes" (37; italics in original text). Gago draws from the work of Silvia Federici to affirm that the feminist strike is about stopping the activities that contribute to the oppression of women and sexual dissidents and freeing up time and energy to imagine a different way to exist (Gago 37). Disobedience, in the many forms it may take, disrupts the normal functioning of a social order that oppresses women to the point of death.

In this dissertation, I have begun to sketch some of the aspects of a feminist aesthetics of disobedience to the modern-colonial-patriarchal order that resists feminicide. I have turned to narrative literature in search of a creative potential to disrupt dominant discourses about feminicidal violence. I have observed how contemporary women writers—namely Selva Almada, Mariana Enríquez, and Patrícia Melo—are inspired by feminist theories and practices in the treatment of this subject. They have reinvigorated horror and crime fiction, and nonfiction to emphasize women's potential to resist and generate change. I have argued that these feminist writers expand the conversation about feminicidal violence beyond simplistic victim-perpetrator paradigms that neglect systemic violence. Moreover, I have contended that these works challenge national histories of political violence when they frame feminicide as political violence. They expose the biases of local and national justice systems against women and racialized communities. Finally, they co-create a counter-discourse about feminicide in dialogue with other feminist arts, scholarship, and activism.

Segato has called on Latin Americans to build their own disobedience based on interconnectedness and community ("Las virtudes"). According to Segato, the feminist movement should not appeal to the "paternidad del Estado" as the only tool in an ultra-individualistic world. Following along these lines, I have observed how the women narrators and women characters in the selected works emphasize the bonding or the ties, *los vínculos*, among women as a strategy to survive and to resist. In my first chapter, I have discussed how the narrator of *Chicas muertas*, who is a fictionalization of the author, weaves the stories of murdered women and girls into the stories of survivors and her own experiences as a woman to create an *autohistoria-teoría* about feminicidal violence. This work crosses genre borders and challenges dominant discourses about political violence in Argentina. Moreover, *Chicas muertas* produces knowledge about feminicide and the experiences of women with tools often rejected by dominant patriarchal epistemologies such as spiritual mediumship.

In my second chapter, I have studied how the novel *Mulheres empilhadas* confronts constructed imaginaries of race and gender in Brazil by contrasting violence against white middle-class women and violence against Indigenous women. The novel also highlights how the justice system is biased against women and racialized communities, raising questions about the limits of the law in preventing feminicide and punishing perpetrators. Furthermore, *Mulheres empilhadas* helps us see how feminicidal violence supports the colonial matrix of power. The novel is narrated from the perspective of a white middle-class woman from São Paulo who travels to the Amazon region to collect information about feminicide. This plot echoes canonical works in the Brazilian literary tradition. However, as the narrator faces her ignorance, the novel

begins to dismantle the dominant imaginaries about the Amazon and Indigenous peoples, suggesting that this confrontation is a necessary step towards eliminating feminicide.

Finally, in my third chapter, I have studied how the short story "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" explores the horror aesthetics of fear and disgust while touching on taboos about self-harm. I argue that this story engages with social anxieties about women's autonomy and sovereignty over their bodies by pushing these fears to an extreme where women burn themselves in bonfires and transform themselves into she-monsters. I contend that the creation of she-monsters, in the context of feminicidal violence, is a form of embodied resistance and that the *monstruas* have the potential to bring a new way of existing.

The research I have conducted for this dissertation opened up several lines of inquiry that I would like to explore in the near future. For instance, the specificities of violence against Black women in Latin America is an important aspect of feminicide that I have yet to study in depth. As I have briefly mentioned in my second chapter, feminicidal violence against Black women is associated with the genocide of the Black population historically tied to national whitening projects. Contrary to the mythical Indigenous woman who represents the dead mother in the dominant narratives of many mixed-race nations in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, the imaginary around Black women often relates to the workers who nursed and raised the children of the nation while being kept hidden and forgotten in the kitchens of white and whitened folks.

Another area that can expand this research project is the specificities of feminicidal violence against trans women. As I briefly noted in the introduction of this dissertation, definitions of "woman" and "feminicide" are still being negotiated, and there are strands of feminism that exclude transgender women from their political struggle. However, in my future research, I plan on studying how transfeminisms further illuminate the ways the modern-colonial-patriarchy operates, and how the liberation of trans women and *travestis* is fundamental for the liberation of all women.

This dissertation is simultaneously the end product of a few years of research and the beginning of a larger project. The feminist practice of disobedience against the patriarchal order is a work in progress, and so are the strategies feminist writers and artists are developing to resist feminicidal violence. Meanings are constantly being renegotiated, and the network of practices and institutions that sustain patriarchal power is often changing the forms and tools of subjugation. Fortunately, the imaginative potential of feminist writers and artists is abundant.

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