

**EMBODYING MEMORIES: THE WOMEN RIGHTS MOVEMENT “#NiUnaMenos” AND THE WOMEN NARRATIVES ABOUT STATE REPRESSION IN ARGENTINA<sup>1</sup>**Verónica Ada Abrego<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Since 2015 a new human rights movement struggle against violence against women, Ni una menos. From the perspective of cultural studies, there is a strong link between these women struggling for cultural transformation and the long lasting battle against oblivion carried out by Argentinas Human Rights Movement and especially, by the Mother and Grandmother of Plaza the Mayo. Against the background of state terrorism and its literature written by women, this contribution reflects on methodology studying Argentina women’s literature on state repression and also on the role of women as agents of social transformation.

**Keywords:** Violence against women; intersectionality; literature on state terrorism.

**Resumo:** Desde 2015, um novo movimento de direitos humanos luta contra a violência contra as mulheres: Ni una menos. Do ponto de vista dos estudos culturais, existe uma forte ligação entre essas mulheres, que lutam pela transformação cultural, e a batalha duradoura contra o esquecimento realizada pelo Movimento dos Direitos Humanos argentino e, especialmente, pelas Mães e Avós da Plaza de Mayo. No contexto do terrorismo de estado e sua literatura escrita por mulheres, essa contribuição reflete a metodologia que estuda a literatura feminina da Argentina sobre a repressão estatal e também sobre o papel das mulheres como agentes de transformação social.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência contra mulheres; interseccionalidade; literatura sobre terrorismo de estado.

**Resumen:** Desde 2015, un nuevo movimiento de derechos humanos lucha contra la violencia contra las mujeres: Ni una menos. Desde la perspectiva de los estudios culturales, existe un fuerte vínculo entre estas mujeres que luchan por la transformación cultural y la duradera batalla contra el olvido llevada a cabo por el Movimiento Argentino de Derechos Humanos y, especialmente, por las Madres y las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. En el contexto del terrorismo de Estado y su literatura escrita por mujeres, esta contribución refleja la metodología para estudiar la literatura femenina de Argentina sobre la represión estatal y también sobre el papel de las mujeres como agentes de transformación social.

**Palabras clave:** Violencia contra las mujeres; interseccionalidad; literatura sobre terrorismo de estado.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The new human rights movement “#NiUnaMenos” provides at present an appropriated occasion to reflect on the role women play as agents of cultural transformation. Founded in

---

<sup>1</sup> My gratitude to Richard Pearson in Gernersheim for reading this manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics and Cultural Studies. University of Mainz/Gernersheim. E-mail: abrego@uni-mainz.de.

Buenos Aires in 2015, #NiUnaMenos - which translated means “one less is also too many”, literally not even one less - echoed immediately in Brazil and continues to spread throughout Latin America, and the World.<sup>3</sup> Seen from the study of the literature of women on Argentina’s state repression, my field of research, it makes sense to link the current struggle against violence against women with the historical situation surrounding the disappearance of people, and specially the case of women, between 1975 and 1983 in Argentina, as well as with the work done by society to keep alive the memory of those disappeared. As we all know, partnerships on equal terms in just societies, the establishment of more egalitarian relationships at all levels, especially between the sexes, while respecting the need for personal autonomy and sexual diversity are a main issue in the struggle for de-colonialization of thinking and knowledge. Thus, de-patriarchalization of societies is one of the most important and pressing issues in theoretical and political debates.

From the perspective of literature studies on the forced disappearance in the 70es/early 80es in Argentina and taking into account the work of Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, as well as #NiUnaMenos, a substantial desideratum emerges for a different approach to dealing with the women in question. One which does not perceive feminine agents as “subalterns”, i.e. as subordinated social agents with an intrinsic, essential position -, but rather as subalternized subjects who have been forced into subordinated position through daily actions based on an intersectional legitimation discourse of discrimination. As soon as we are aware of the power of discourse, this perspective obliges us to direct our attention to precisely those discourse coordinates that subalternize subjects in a precise context, in a precise materiality, in a precise territory. In this way, we are in a better position to understand how discriminating discourse functions – even when discourse acts in an implicit and subtle way – that is what the concept of intersectionality is all about. From my point of view, in the examples I quote, the individuals refuse to be seen as subalterns nor as passive victims. They demand their own position as agents of transformation. And for this reason, as well as from our view-point which recognizes their agency, we are able to construct together another epistemological approach and to contribute to promoting that which we call a de-colonial discourse of transformation.

---

<sup>3</sup> The organizers of this year’s event noted, a new feminist movement may be in the making: “... # 7N in Spain, # 24A in Mexico, # 1J in Brazil, # 3J2016 in Argentina, August 13 Ni Una Menos Peru, on October 3 in Poland, on October 19 the first women's strike in Argentina, # 26N *Non Una di Meno* in Italy, the Women's March in the United States on January 21 and # 8M with the International Women's Strike, which brought together more than 50 countries worldwide...” (¡NI UNA MENOS!: 2017). Women's March leaders to Washington pointed to Ni una menos as an inspiration <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/06/women-strike-trump-resistance-power>.

## 2. A CULTURAL CHANGE MOVEMENT IN THE MAKING

In 2015, the human rights movement #NiUnaMenos, led by journalists, social scientists, activists and, among others, by the very popular cartoonist, Maitena, who is one of their prominent leaders, started a widely-supported campaign against femicides with an impressive first mass mobilization of their supporters on June 3rd. Their stated objectives are to heighten social awareness in order to put an end to violence against women, transvestites and transsexuals, based on the conviction that the social problem of machista violence cannot be resolved only by imposing increasingly severe penal sentences but rather through social prevention programs and cultural change. A cultural change, it should be pointed out, that must become aware of the widely accepted Macho discourse that legitimizes inequality in everyday's life and – at the end – also violence. A cultural transformation that has started to be spread throughout Latin America and wants to make the 3rd of June a day of rebellion against femicide.

In Argentina, the social movement did not come out of nowhere, on the contrary: violent acts against feminine and transvestites have become an issue of increasing public interest for decades. So, for instance, guided by the catchphrase “Vivas nos queremos” – which roughly translated means “we love to be alive” – #NiUnaMenos called on October the 19th for a general strike for two hours across the whole of Argentina. As a sign of solidarity, the same action of protest took place in Uruguay, México and Chile. These protests were triggered by the extremely violent death of a girl of 16, Lucía Pérez, who was “drugged, raped and impaled to death” the weekend before in the city of Mar del Plata. Three young men who are suspected of having committed this horrendous crime are currently in police custody. In 2016, every 26 hours a woman died in Argentina as a victim of sexual violence perpetrated by a man, often by their own partners (PÁGINA 12, 2016). Statistics say that in 2008 one woman was killed every 40 hours, in 2014, every 30 hours, in 2015 a woman was murdered every 26 hours (#NiUnaMenos, 3.06.2015). This current shocking trend must be stopped. The human rights situation regarding feminine and effeminate subjects, that is for women, transsexuals and transvestites, is getting worse in Argentina. This struggle for autonomy, respect, freedoms and rights is therefore indispensable.

The trend has got worse, but the news is not new. The death of María Soledad Morales in 1990, a girl raped and beaten to death by the Kids of the Powerful in the Northern Province of Catamarca is one of the well-known cases. Twelve years later, in 2002, people were shocked by the case of Marita Verón, a young woman who lived in rural environment in the

Province of Tucumán and went walking one morning along the highway on her way to the doctor, as she was abducted and forced into a car. Her mother initiated immediately a campaign searching for her, since the local police administration seemed to be indifferent and even suspected to be involved in the murder. Her mother found out that Marita Verón was later seen not only in brothels in other Provinces of Argentina but also in Spain. Human trafficking should be mentioned as a serious problem for Europe and Spain, where programs have been started since only in 2015 45,000 women and girls were suspected to be victims of trafficking and be objects of a business that moved about five million euros every day. According to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE), prostitution has become an activity that generates 0.35 percent of GDP, which means about 3.7 billion euros/year (EL PAÍS, 2015).

Since the 90's, public attention in Argentina has focused on news about women used as drug couriers, increasing number of cases of sexual exploitation at home via the internet, very young women who have been kidnapped and/or have disappeared in the network of trafficking only to be condemned to prostitution. For instance, during the investigations in the case of Marita Verón, 21 women - kidnapped in the same way as her - could be rescued by the police – but Marita has still not been found. In view of the current economic crisis, women are seriously vulnerable and suffer because they are often deprived of their rights. But it is not only a question of violence, we also talk about a process of feminization of poverty due to the crisis; a process which is occurring in Argentina at the same time as we are witnessing unequal representation of women in political parties and trade unions, and, of course, in Argentina's Parliament.

### **3. LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE CURRENT AGE OF GLOBALIZATION**

In order to summarize some facts about the new forms of brutal treatment of feminine and transvestite subjects in Latin America, but not only there, I would like to quote Rita Segato, the well-known Brazilian anthropologist born in Argentina. In Guatemala, El Salvador and México, but also in the Congo after Ruanda, the scenes are terrifying. In the Congo, physicians speak of “vaginal destruction” to refer to extreme forms of sexual attacks causing the death of women. During the “pacification phase” in El Salvador, between 2000 and 2006, male homicides increased by about 40%, female murders by about 111%, this means factor 3. In Guatemala, the democratic process between 1995 and 2004 was accompanied by an increment of male homicides of 68%, but for women this figure was more

than double, reaching 144%. In April 2010, the Society of Threatened People estimated that the number of Maya women murdered since 2000 was 4.867 persons, which reflex the reality of indigeneous femicide (HANTZSCHE, 2010). In Honduras, between 2003 and 2007, murder victims among men increased about the 40%, but among women 166%, that means a four-fold increase (CARCEDO, 2010, p. 40-42). Faced by current global migration trends, an increasing number of vulnerable people like women, but also minors, indigenous people and extra-continental migrants transit every day Central America without any civil right and are exposed to illicit trafficking, labor exploitation, sexual violence, extortion, kidnapping and widespread crime, not only on the border between the United States and Mexico, in cities like Ciudad Juárez, but also between Costa Rica and Panamá, in the region of Paso Canoas. Although 17 Latin-American countries have passed laws that have defined and punish femicide as being a specific crime, violence against women is currently taking place on an unprecedented scale.

#### **4. FEMININE SUBJECTS IN LATIN AMERICA – YESTERDAY AND TODAY**

According to Rita Segato, formerly, the warlike attitude toward women's bodies in patriarchy and in its collective representations used to have the character of the Conquest of a territory and its annexation including possession through individual and collective rape or through slavery for sexual services. These acts of war were directed against the honor of the male enemy. But now a woman body has become an object of destruction and exploitation. The only thing left behind are often mutilated human remains. The purpose of destroying - and not simply annexing a woman's body - is for Segato a novelty in the new war-like scenario of globalization (CARBAJAL, 2010). Viewed from this perspective the repressive actions of Argentina's government between 1975 and 1983 marked a kind of transitional phase in the landscape of 'proxy warfare' in the South during the Cold War. In a situation that was strongly influenced by the hegemonic discourses of the Cold War, the demands of the revolutionary movements arising from the deeply unequal societies of Latin America were reduced to the struggle between the hegemonic powers, i.e. the dichotomy East versus West and communism versus capitalism. Abducted and held in a complex environment of interests, following many months of torture, most of the "disappeared" (the *desaparecidas* and *desaparecidos* of Argentina) were treated as if they were mere human waste. By the means of repressive discourse, the revolutionary youth of Argentina was defined as the enemies of "occidental and Christian values", as the "Others" of a nation which was allegedly in danger of being contaminated by foreign influences such as, for example, socialism or communism.

Women suspected of participating in the revolutionary movement suffered double persecution, since their political opposition intersected with gender rebellion and was too challenging for one of the most deeply-rooted social conventions: social gender roles. During the brutal crackdown started in 1975 there were no legal prosecutions of cases of political violence, but only for forced disappearances. Some hundred people survived the purge while the fate of thousands of others could only be reconstructed bit by bit based on work that has been going on for decades and continues to date. The reason why some of the disappeared survived continues to be an enigma for many. It could be that the few survivors of torture were set free as a kind of message directed to the enemy and society, in order to terrify and intimidate individuals with the intention of preventing protests and ensuring civil discipline. Especially some women of the enemy, as in the case of Pilar Calveiro, seem to have been set free as a decoy or as a sign of defeat. Pilar Calveiro herself, today a social scientist at the Mexican University of Puebla and the wife of a former high-ranking leader of Montoneros, is one of the female Argentine authors who has written an important and damning testimony on state repression. Her book “*Poder y desaparición: los campos de concentración en Argentina*” (Power and Disappearance: concentration camps in Argentina) is not only an unmatched scientific reflection on power and biopolitics, but also a book of witness and sorrow for those who were kidnapped, tortured and condemned to death without trial by the forces of the state. She reflects on the fact of discarded bodies as follows:

Through torture of the prisoner, unlimited in intensity and duration, information is extracted from her/him. She/he is deprived of all kinds of sensory perception. She/he is drained of humanity, and she/he is discarded like a useless object. Every trace of the person disappears, and, finally, their remains too (CALVEIRO, 2011, p. 118, translated by Richard Pearson).

Contrary to the notion, however, that torture would stifle any form of resistance, camp survivors such as Pilar Calveiro defend themselves and show that the person who has been terrorized and animalized has tried to preserve her/his dignity through compassion. Outside the camp, amid the silence of Argentine public opinion, the same struggle for human dignity was fought by the female members of the older generation of relatives. Since those days resistance against state repression in Argentina bears the face of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. During the years of dictatorship they fought against the policy of concealment among the country's military using their own weapons of discourse demanding their right to information as caring mothers. Using this stratagem as a basis of legitimation they challenged not only the powerful in government but also those who reduced the idea of women's right to self-down to what they deemed acceptable virtuous qualities.

During the long struggle, the "Madres de plaza de Mayo" developed something they call "socialization of motherhood". The private struggle for a once lost child became a common battle for all Desaparecidos. They created a link between the individual loss of the beloved disappeared and the social enigma of forced disappearances. In my opinion, the movement #NiUnaMenos is today carrying out a similar operation, i.e. out of an individual loss they create a single struggle. And thus, individual fate is socialized, and human rights are represented as an issue that concerns all.

My proposal today is that we understand the current movement #NiUnaMenos as an heir to the long struggle of the human rights movement in Argentina. After organizing resistance during the dictatorship and after 30 years of political opposition during the period of democracy, since 2004 the human rights movement of Argentina has achieved - thanks to the increasing support of large sections of society - recognition of the genocide committed in Argentina and that crimes against humanity were severely punished by the national courts. Only since 2005 has violence against women, exercised in the context of state repression, been classified as a category for itself in the fight against crimes against humanity in Argentina. Physical limitations and disabilities, unwanted motherhood, including infertility due to trauma as a result of mass rape, have remained to date scarcely documented physical consequences of violence against women. However, the social discrimination of the survivors is an important aspect of postgenocidal Argentina. Remarkably, the mothers and grandmothers of the murdered Desaparecidos, the praiseworthy Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, received approval and recognition for their commitment and have now become symbols of resistance to the long-standing state policy of ignoring the past. The importance of the efforts to restore family relations in postgenocidal Argentina, in particular regarding the search for the "stolen" children and the disclosure of their origins, cannot be stressed enough. However, this policy of recognition has a downside as the survivors themselves are often forced into the background. Because of the taboo that surrounds rape – but nonetheless universally known, not least mass rape practices – the sheer fact the victims survived their ordeal makes them suspects of treason. Those few camp returnees stood for a long time in the shadows and were often loathed by former friends and foes for having survived. Against this background it is remarkable that those who are physically and mentally wounded have made a significant contribution to resolving cases of injustice in recent years. However, their social contribution does not end with the struggle in the courts. Their presence in the public eye visualizes the negative past, which some would rather suppress and forget because it

repeatedly raises the question whether and how the individual has contributed to the repression and the concealment of crimes.

Today, Argentina's human rights movement has been significantly weakened by the existence of tensions between protagonist groups, by sectarianism and the current government, which has withdrawn its support for some the institutionalized activities of the movement. (FEIERSTEIN, 2016). However, from my point of view, the work of Argentina's human rights movement in order to promote social awareness of the situation of those, who society tries to marginalize and forget, takes on new meaning in the movement which aims to vindicate the rights of female subjects.

## **5. FEMICIDE AS SEEN FROM ARGENTINA'S MOVEMENT #NiUnaMenos**

The human and women rights movement *#NiUnaMenos* applies a concept of femicide, which at first glance may seem to be too universal and indistinct. They understand femicide as an action carried out by a person in order to punish and psychologically destroy a woman considered to be someone's property and they see this as an act of mass murder of humanity in the body of a woman.

The concept of femicide is directly linked to the concept of genocide. It was only after the genocide of Ruanda that rape was recognized in the context of genocide thus constituting a crime against humanity as indicated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This means that the right of a woman to take legal action in a court never expires, even many years after the crime has been committed.

Argentina ratified the Rome Statute but despite this even after the Criminal Code was reformed in 1999 – which endorsed a woman's individual right to sexual integrity – investigating magistrates in Argentina continued to have problems prosecuting crimes of sexual violence outside the framework of torture and cases of intended rape were considered 'a private matter'.

To better understand what *#NiUnaMenos* means when they talk about femicide, we have to remember that in the modern age sexuality is associated with something which is 'private' and is accompanied by an increase in domestic violence. For this reason Latin American feminists insist that there is a fundamental need to separate sexuality from morality in order to recognize that violence against women occurs when men use their genitals as if these were 'weapons' to destroy women. When sexuality is considered to be a private matter, the political and war-like character of the actions is negated.



If patriarchy were not the network of meanings and senses in which we are prisoners, sexuality would not have any of the meanings that it has for us today. For example, it would not mean demoralization of the other. The position that women have to defend publically is that sexuality exercised in that way does hurt physically. But the moral injury results from the patriarchal order that makes up the very air we breathe and places in the realms of privacy that aggression that hurts but which is, in reality, simply an attack as if carried out using a knife or a gun. The whole dimension of pain, which is the most important aspect of all, is lost. In this way, pain is privatized and aggression is situated within the framework of morality. Consequently, no one talks about it (quote in CARABAJAL, 2010, translated by Richard Pearson).

Useful theory today cannot continue to ignore the dimension of pain and sorrow, indeed quite the contrary: for me, theory today must be based on these dimensions in order to contribute to social transformation.

## **6. VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINE WOMEN'S LITERATURE ON STATE REPRESSION, SOME METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIONS**

Encouraged by the idea of a viable revolution, young women in Argentina during the 60s and 70s broke with stereotypical attitudes and expectations, both politically and in matters concerning gender: for this they were persecuted, tortured, their children abducted, and often murdered and their bodies discarded. The images of those politicized women - and the effect of violence in the course of the years – can be traced in the discourses of political and historical memory and especially in the literary narratives of remembrance. Literature as a field of individual manifestation and social negotiation plays a fundamental role in the current dispute about the past. While it often depicts negative memories of persecution using very lyrical but often remarkably factual language, women's literature on the subject of forced disappearance articulates itself as a discourse against oblivion and resists simplifying formulas of postgenocidal discourse.

In Argentina, there is a vast body of literature today dedicated to preserving the memory of those who were detained and abducted by that tyrannical regime which between 1976 and 1983 violently repressed all forms of criticism and protest. Let me point out, that the determining moment of the emergence of this literature goes hand in hand with the fact of oblivion, better said, with the state politics of oblivion and the need of articulating suffering under state violence. Since the path to justice for the crimes committed against humanity was extremely steep and the speech that legitimized repression required 20 years to change, literature has a crucial role to this process of transformation. This means that for Argentina

the very first link between violence and literature concerning state-terrorism has always been the struggle against silence.

Since the beginning of the 80's to date, wherever you look in Argentina you will discover "creators of culture" doing everything in their power to keep alive the memory of injustice and ensure that the perpetrators are themselves brought to trial. Culture made an essential contribution to the proliferation of perspectives concerning the forced disappearances of people, and to efforts to confront the enduring "policies of forgetting and neglect".

Let me now set the focus on some methodological reflections, which deal with the narratives of violence during Argentina's state repression as I refer to in my book "Memory and Intersectionality: Women as Victims of Argentina's State Repression" (1975-1983) (german original: Erinnerung und Intersektionalität: Frauen als Opfer der Staatsrepression, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016).

#### *A. Memories against oblivion*

The study of literature focusing on the forced disappearances involves the challenge to cope with absence and with a negative social remembrance. Following post-dictatorship, remembering the violations of human rights stands for a reconstruction process based on vestiges of former physical presence of those who "disappeared"; a process, which has an enduring impact on the present. Absence caused by forced disappearances means a crisis of "sense". Uruguayan sociologist Gabriel Gatti speaks about a catastrophe of identity, the forced disappearance destroyed the common idea in modern western societies, that identity is bound to an architecture of name, a family genealogy, and a citizenship. Due to forced disappearance, the name was separated from the body, the personal life story snatched from the family genealogy, the individual thrown out from the state collective (GATTI, 2012).

The social construction of negative memories, as in the case of Argentina, means facing negative events that people actually prefer not to remember. Let me quote Germany's well known historian Reinhart Koselleck on this fact:

To speak of a negative memory is ambiguous, for either the negative in the memory means that the content that is stored in it is unwelcome and despicable, or the negative means that memory blocks remembering, that it refuses to acknowledge the negative at all: it suppresses it and surrenders it to the past and to oblivion. Both, the horror-filled content, and the refusal to transfer it from a social to a personal memory, are of course, closely connected. One refers to the other and leads us directly into the historical problems of how crimes are to be remembered at all (KOSELLECK, REINHART, 2002, p. 21, german original).

For Argentina, we must agree with Koselleck on the initial tendency of society refusing to remember events of social violence. Argentine citizens today accept a violent past, but this is a result of a long process of awareness to which, from my point of view, creators of culture have essentially contributed, as well as, along with human rights organizations, scientific disciplines such as Psychology, which promote social acceptance and listening to the victims.

People elude negative memory since the memory of state violence reminds us about the position we adopted while violent events occurred. Genocide researcher Christian Gerlach speaks about “extremely violent societies” to describe those societies where groups have been victim of mass violence (cp. Gerlach: 2010). While it can be said that post-traumatic societies may have reasons for a consensus on looking forward and reconciliation, it is also necessary to add that eluding confrontation with pain and wanting to flee instead of accepting what it was and what there still is corresponds sadly to human standards. And we shouldn't forget that negative memories are the subject of controversial interpretation; their reading and their place in national history involve a power struggle for the right to speak out.

### *B. Social discourses and memory*

A second point concerns the changing conditions of remembrance which affect work on cultural and personal memory, and of course on literature. We must remember that in Argentina we are dealing with a struggle for memory and against oblivion during a period of 40 years. In this period, there were discursive transformations at the level of discourses in Argentina confronting with crimes against humanity as a society, and concerning victims and perpetrators.

Victims of state repression not only suffered physical violence, but also discursive violence. Their extermination stood at the end of a long discursive chain that segregated them from the majority and legitimizing discursively even illegal measures under the phrase "algo habrán hecho" (they must have done something). It was only by 2004, 20 years after the end of dictatorship, that public opinion on forced disappearances made a 180 degree-turn-around and provided the possibility that the demands made by human rights organizations raised more than 25 years before could now be converted into state policies. The former “saviors of the fatherland were then called “genocidas”. For text-work on memory this question is crucial, since literature of the abduction rebels against discursive stereotypes that legitimized persecution. Literature applies the technique of writing back, the concept formulated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in 1989, inspired in Salman

Rushdies words "the empire writes back with a vengeance", emphasizing that in the literature of decolonization an alternative perspective emerges directed against works of the hegemonic centers and their distorted images of the subjugated. The "writing back" is directed not only against the practice of forced disappearances and the discourses on discipline of the Argentine State, but also against the policy of impunity, the silence of repression and memory, against the suppression of the psychological pain of the survivors and relatives of the disappeared from public space during democracy.

Also global discourses and global contexts have changed. The Cold War, the Fall of the Berlin Wall and, for Latin America, the Washington Consensus, they all are events that have affected the place of Latin America and Argentina in the geopolitical sphere, since the internal policies of any country considered to be peripheral have always been closely related to international constellations of power.

### *C. Intertextuality on memory discourses*

Thirdly, remembrance does not exist in an uninhabited space. In fact, discourses about memory in Argentina are closely interrelated with other remembrance discourses in other societies and in other times. There is a high degree of inter-textuality in discourses on law, humanities and the media, especially those concerning the Shoah.

This is a relevant issue not only because of the historical parallels between systematic forced disappearances in Argentina and Night and Fog-Actions in Nazi-Germany. It is generally accepted, that the Holocaust represents a benchmark for the Humanities, but also anti-Semitism must be borne in mind since the number of Jewish victims of repression was significantly high in terms of Argentina's average population. There is an extremely sad super-position of memories among the survivors of the Holocaust in Argentina, whose families had to endure for a second time social violence. Beyond that, the fact of exile - and of migration movements - brought a different global component in the formation of this literature. People were forcedly displaced to different geographical locations as the work of memory reflects creating a narrative at a trans-cultural level. Taking into account the diversity of family origins of the population of Argentina as well as the transnational spaces on which writing occurs, these texts are written in a kind of hybrid space of remembering.

### *D. Female authorship and memory*

And, fourthly and finally, when focusing on literature written by women authors we must also be aware of perception and reception of female authorship in society, and of circulation and distribution of literature written by women in Argentina.

No one can say with certainty whether the female authorship was the reason why many books about the State repression in Argentina written by women have met so little positive resonance. However, you will find that literature about dictatorship written by women was more reluctantly received than that of male authors. Seen against the background of the social hearing this seems not to be a single phenomenon. According to the American scholar Joeden Forgy testimonies and reflections of male survivors form today, primarily, the canon of literary and historical science about the Shoah - with the prominent exception of the diary of Anne Frank and the now recognized work of Hannah Arendt. The crucial point in literary work on forced disappearance is here the *reécriture* feminine. The re-writing from a feminine point of view means undoubtedly subversions of existing models of culture and thought. At the core of this counter-narrative you will find embodied memories, remembering personal and social experiences of (systematic) torture, (mass) rape and impeded motherhood, seen against the background of a general dumb threat of violence in repressive discourses and the mostly socially tolerated practices of gender discrimination. Systematic violence against women during state repression was only spoken out in the courts in 2010 (BACCI, 2012; BALARDINI, 2011).

## **7. VIOLENCE IN LITERATURE ON STATE REPRESSION**

In the context of destruction, extermination and mass repression, the researcher necessarily adopts an analytical position, which, from my point of view, does not exclude or negate empathy, on the contrary! Starting point for research work on violence is an ethical commitment, which necessarily has to be adopted, and for me is based on the active listening to the voices of the victims of repression.

It was due to both, the lack of listening to female victims of repression and missing acknowledgement of intellectual activity of women, that I decided to choose 4 very different texts written by women for my analysis on intersectionality and memory.

Literature concerned with the memories of that era of repression highlights the extreme experience of state arbitrariness and despotism and prevents the memory of the victims from falling into oblivion. The space that these narrations talk about is not prison but torture camps, secret spaces which inflicted unimaginable pain occurring parallel to the normal, every-day life of the majority of Argentines. A space where people were forced to

betray their own convictions and friends through systematic torture; places from which only a few returned. As such, these narrations focus on simple human life and aberrant humiliations, but also on solidarity at the edge of humanity, and on resistance to preserve one's own sense of dignity. In order to analyse the case of Argentina, many studies introduce the figure known as *Homo sacer*, as presented by Giorgio Agamben, an individual that exists outside the confines of the law and can be meaninglessly killed but not sacrificed (because sacrifice is meaningful). In his investigation, Agamben argues that by the imposition of the state of emergency, a rightless space emerges in which this form of rightless life grows outside the political field. I'd like to remember that Judith Butler objected to the notion of separating life from the political. She argues that this exclusion logic is the most important issue of the "abandoned life" from the field of the political, although this life is "both degenerate and deprived of life" in precisely the moment that it is deprived of citizenship." According to Butler, Agamben's so defined "state of emergency" is a "state of expropriation." The logic of looking at this state as an undifferentiated instance of "simply and naked life" limits our conceptual framework and our vocabulary too far to comprehend the complex action of power; Thus, at the same time, it makes resistance invisible.

A. *on Pilar Calveiro's "Poder y desaparición"*

The first text I would like to refer to is Pilar Calveiro's *Poder y desaparición*, one of the central scientific and philosophical reflections about the Argentine concentration, torture and extermination camps. I like to compare this small book to Primo Levi's text from 1946 *If This Is a Man*. *Poder y desaparición* – Power and abduction – does not belong to the Latin American genre of *Testimonios* in a classical way, since her text is scientific, an sociological essay, with literary value. Calveiro maintains academic discourse but she interlinks her personal embodied experiences having spent one and half years in captivity within the torture and concentration camps of armed and security forces in the District of Buenos Aires. After her abduction on 07.05.1977, she stood under the supervision of the Air force and the Navy, and was also kept captive in the notorious camp called ESMA. In her book, the author takes the testimonies of survivors of both sexes, held in camps of the various forces of repression – navy, army, air force, police –, as the basis for her analysis and she intertwines these with her own experiences as a prisoner ("Pilar Calveiro: 362"). This polyphonic text suggests a form of collective writing, since personal experiences and reflections are presented in conjunction with the experiences and reflections of other former interned. This technique enables her to perform a balancing act between solidarity and some degree of distance at the same time.

Close to experience, but detached enough to be able to enunciate, Pilar Calveiro reflects on power, taking as starting point the works of Hannah Arendt *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* and Tzvetan Todorov *Facing the extreme: moral life in the concentration camps*. The crucial motivation for writing, the “writing back-moment” of this text consists in raising to speak and saying what happened in that reality parallel to the lives of most Argentines and disobeying the order of silence on the survivors.

If someone who fled from a concentration camp is already suspicious, the survivor is a thousand times more. Her/his resistance, dexterity with which he/she tricked or deceived his/her tormentors, the acts of solidarity, all this does not count. Society wants to understand why he/she has survived, and he/she can not explain it, so that he/she is almost automatically condemned to exclusion, and her/his life becomes a visible proof of her/his guilt, whatever it may be (CALVEIRO [1998] 2008, p. 160).

With the illustration of how unthinkable the tight-rope act of survival was in the camp, Pilar Calveiro makes clear how unfounded the placative stamp of treason is, with which survivors have been stigmatized. From a temporal distance it becomes clear how useful this suspicion was to the community. This generalization has the effect of a protective shield, which distracts attention away from the question of how the individual behavior during the dictatorship has contributed to its establishment and legitimization. The subjectivity of the narrative resides in the matter-of-fact prose of scientific papers, but at the same time her very personal voice and her distinctive style becomes increasingly perceptible. She calls on the implicit reader to deal with the concrete experience of the camp and with the torment suffered by the *Desaparecidos*. “It is important to know what is done to a person, in order to understand how she/he is terrorized and processed. The terror belongs to a different register than fear” (CALVEIRO, [1998] 2008, p. 65).

Acceptance for socially caused and suffered pain is a matter of empathy, which is often repelled by psychological defense, a defense that raises immediately in front of pain. This resistance is like an impenetrable cover coat on the emotional level, especially with regard to torture. That is why a sober confrontation, beyond voyeurism or trivialization, seems to be a first step on the way to sincerely listen to the torture victims. Pilar Calveiro makes a contribution in this sense, when she invites the implicit reader explicitly to deal with pain. She succeeds in creating a scenario with striking factual and almost dissecting words that the reader can enter in order to practice compassion and empathy. Following sentences are the closest narration of violence in her book:

When you sit and read, terror is only a concept vaguely associated with a kind of great fear, perhaps with a cinematographic work, but it is enough to choose one of these techniques, one that you personally consider to be the

most tolerable, and to imagine how it feels on your own body, when you feel it, boundless and unlimited, always and endlessly, to have an approximate idea of how terror is generated. Endless means in the truest sense without end, to death or to an arbitrary end, to which one has no influence (CALVEIRO, [1998] 2008, p. 65).

This offer should not be confused with the attempt to make pain under torture comprehensible in any form. Rather more, she creates a space of intimacy to verify the limits of communication, the interiority of a not shared experience. I would like to quote Jean Améry's essay of the year 1966, "Die Tortur", where he affirms description of pain was aporia:

It would be out of sense wishing to describe here the pain inflicted on me. Was it "like a glowing iron in my shoulders," and was this "like a dull wooden pile pushed into the back of my head?" - a comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be brought in the hopeless carousel of the parable. The pain was that what it was (AMÉRY, [1966] 2008, p. 63, german original).

The humiliating practices women and men had to endure, however, are written down in this text with clear words, and both men and women are quoted equally often. Nevertheless, this book has its main focus on the deconstruction of binary thinking as a fundamental factor in the structure and function of the camp, and in the segregation of survivors. Calveiro's narration, however, has a prominent omission in regard to memory: there are no clear moments of *réécriture féminine*. From today's point of view, seems obvious that in the torture camps the repressive staff was essentially male, as well as the systematic use of gender-specific torture practices. Facing thousands of dead young people, lost friends and comrades, and in view of the immense significance of the loss, there was probably no space in 1998 for complaining about a specific pain of women.

The readership will not find out if Pilar Calveiro, the wife of a high-ranking officer of the Guerilla Montoneros living in exile, and the mother of two daughters, experienced herself any of the crimes systematically committed on women. By 1998 it may have been too painful, too personal or even too problematic to write from the clear personal perspective of a woman.

#### *B. on Maria Teresa Andruetto's "La mujer en cuestión"*

In the novel about Eva Mondino, roll-assignments to this formerly persecuted woman focus on the personal participation of the civilian population in the crimes of repression. Societal voices are made here into central actors and they provide insights into the intersubjective level in which the discourses accompanying the dictatorship and afterwards are transported. Particularly with regard to the discrimination of the survivors, this text also writes back against long lasting discursive stereotypes after dictatorship. Survival itself



necessarily makes survivors suspect, for the shadow of treason hangs over them. As Andruetto explained in an interview, she herself attaches substantial importance to her own experience in that time and particularly, to the experience of Inner exile.

Inner exile or *rioplatense*: "insilio" is at the same time a predicament and a strategy of survival which, according to Andruetto, should not be generalized to a social condition of anyone in Argentina. Much more, the situation of *insilio* affected only regime opponents, that is, persons who were aware that they were threatened by their oppositional attitude to the regime, and who were about to lose everything, emotionally and financially. For reasons of fear, selfishness, expediency, or consensus, the majority of the population contributed to the existence of the dictatorship and did it subtly or openly. To the theme complex of inner exile, Andruetto counts, beside reclusion and solitude, also the fear of denunciation. Inner exile means a kind of self-chosen captivity that also describes the situation of survivors even in democracy. Inner exile and ostracism are the conditions in which Eva Mondino, Andruetto's main figure, lives in.

Andruetto's composes her text in the genre of report, a remarkable and symptomatic decision with a clear intention. It suggests emotional reserve and impartiality, which opposes to sentimentality and glorification of heroic times (something which is attributed to the generation of the revolutionary Seventy's). So it distances to the social place of the stories of the survivors and their labeling of being raw or even sensationalist. Not least influential people in academic circles (such as Beatriz Sarlo in *Tiempo pasado*) charged *Testimonios* and, in general, the publications of life stories about the period of repression, to serve remembering, but not historical reflection. Therefore, the decision for a report with its apparent soberness is a successful strategic move to override the human defense against suffering and open up all sympathetic channels to address the main figure. In addition, the novel corresponds formally to the series of detective narrations and novels, which are characteristic for the struggle against the crimes of the dictatorship, especially treating the question of the whereabouts of *Desaparecidos* and their children. An even at an idiomatic level, the report uses impersonal words and terms, typical of the genre, which have the weight of "general truth" and allow to recognize what are the "most normal" thoughts of people about someone like Eva.

The rapporteur is to provide a representation as objective as possible of the material and spiritual life of Eve, a version "as authentic as possible [...] and the truth as close as possible [...]. This is the main problem: to find out who this woman is and who she was in the different stages of her life" (p. 27). But the main figure itself, unrestrictedly at the center of

the narrative, is a mystery that should be aroused but not understood. Written with the typical distance which characterizes the genre, different persons report about Eva, but they all provide little more than an outline of the main figure. Eva's story stays for the generation of the Seventies. Born in 1952 as the daughter of a German Jewess from Mainz and an Italian Catholic, she is a pregnant psychopedagogue who, looking for her missing partner Aldo Banegas, will be dragged to Córdoba's concentration camp "Campo de La Ribera" in 1976. Eva survives a one-year-long imprisonment in camps where she gives birth to Aldo's son. After her release, Eva grows lonely until she became acquainted with Guillermo Rodríguez in 1979 and married shortly thereafter. It goes on for some time until she realizes that Rodríguez, a seducer and later a successful careerist, knows all about her stay in the torture camp and is very likely a "quebrado", a broken prisoner that helped repression. It was only with the advent of democracy that Eva dared to divorce in 1984, and since then has never been able to make a firm commitment again, she has a retired life on the countryside and she contests with great difficulty her livelihood surrounded by a handful of beloved people.

In the report on Eva, violence lies precisely in the enduring discursive violence of her environment even after imprisonment during the dictatorship. Already at the beginning, the character Pacha, who clearly confesses to be Eva's friend, warns the rapporteur on how futile the search for objectivity is: "People tell you all sorts of things, do not you know? According to what they told during the dictatorship, it does not matter if they now claim that she sleeps with Juan or Pablo" (p. 26).

The narrative invariably calls a multi-layered, intersectional reference network in which the political commitment of a rebellious woman of Jewish origin was punished with rape (she saw that he was "a young, slender man, a normal type"), torture (the burns inflicted on her arms and breasts, 81) and imprisonment, but also with the life-long pain of the stolen motherhood:

Of all the evils that happen to Eva in life, and this does not seem to be a little, what is most painful, as many witnesses testify, is to have a child, and neither to know where it is, nor whether it is still alive at all (p. 81).

The narrative strategy of report, formally characterized by a permanent interruption of the discursive flow by quoting figurative talks and contrasting different observer perspectives, changes in the places where Eva speaks herself (p. 81-85 and p. 105-106). Eva Mondino's words lead to an emotional turn in the narrative when she talks about her abduction, the betrayal, and the stay in the camp and also when she describes the birth of her child and "breaks" with every soberness. She opens the rapporteur torture by dry waterboarding, and her deepest embarrassment about testimony under torture. This passages are set in dramatic

fashion and, through the direct speech and the breaking of emotionality, the impression of immediacy and presence arouses in the flow of the narrative, which has hitherto been essentially reshaped.

Of course I got it, and it's Aldo's son, of course he is that" ... and that she lived in that place "without a calendar, without a watch, without light or sun" she knew that "it was a boy because I had it on my body for a moment until the umbilical cord was cut through, and then they took him away from me... And I heard him scream, I'm sure, but they told me he was dead, and from then on I know nothing more (p. 82).

[...] I do not know, no one has given it to me, neither alive nor dead, they have taken it away from me and carried it away, and I have never seen him or heard anything from him until now, to what you tell me... (p. 83).

Eve's words are a body narrative, a synaesthetic evocation in which Eve's skin and the child's fuse, the hearing and the scream become one and trace and hinge point for the starting point of a memory of those orphaned, dispossessed, disarmed bodies. To be able to assess a biography in order to be able to assess a life is a rather suspicious undertaking, for the painful experiences of the survivors can only remain an outline for the horizon of any reader.

Fernando Reati (2006) summed up the opposite relationship that characterizes this narrative: "As few we learn about Eva is inversely proportional to the many things that are revealed to us about the Argentine society in which the tragedy took place". Unsurpassed sharp, Andruetto outlines in street gossip on Eva Mondino the power of discourse.

## 8. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Following the logic of the Cold War, thousands became victims of social violence in many Latin American societies. The search for truth and justice for these thousands is today still on the agenda of many countries of Latin-America. In the fight against the concealment of injustice, women in Argentina have assumed a special position and have been key actors in the human rights movement for more than 35 years.

Today we see a new dimension of the human rights movement in the emerging transcontinental movement #NiUnaMenos. We all know very well, that the battle for nonviolence against the "other", a female or feminized body, is also one battle women give from the most diverse fields of activity. Literature – and literature studies – are not standing here, nor could they stand, on the other side of the road.

Returning to the beginning, the subalternized subject today struggles to be heard – any process of de-colonialization of our societies still necessarily requires to hear and to respect the autonomy of female and travestied subjects: the nearest exercise on equality and de-colonialization, a non-violent battle, but one that is becoming less and less silent.

## 9. REFERENCES

ANDÚJAR, Andrea et al. *Historia, género y política en los '70*, Buenos Aires, 2005.

AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Homo sacer. Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben*, Frankfurt a. M. 2002.

BACCI, Claudia. “... y nadie quería saber”. *Relatos sobre violencia contra las mujeres en el terrorismo de Estado en Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 2012.

BALARDINI, Lorena. *Violencia de género y abusos sexuales en los centros clandestinos de detención. Un aporte a la comprensión de la experiencia argentina*, in: *Hacer justicia. Nuevos debates sobre el juzgamiento de crímenes de lesa humanidad en Argentina*, ed. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)/Centro Internacional para la Justicia Transicional (ICTJ), Buenos Aires, 2011, p. 167-226.

BUTLER, Judith; SPIVAK, Gayatri. *Sprache, Politik, Zugehörigkeit*, Zürich 2007.

CALVEIRO, Pilar. *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina*, 6. ed., Buenos Aires, 2008 [1998].

CALVEIRO, Pilar. *Formas y sentidos de lo represivo entre dictadura y democracia*, in: *Hacer justicia. Nuevos debates sobre el juzgamiento de crímenes de lesa humanidad en Argentina*, hg. von CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS LEGALES Y SOCIALES (CELS)/CENTRO INTERNACIONAL PARA LA JUSTICIA TRANSICIONAL (ICTJ), Buenos Aires, p. 111-142, 2010.

CARABAJAL, MARIANA, “Las mujeres nunca han sufrido tanta violencia doméstica como en la Modernidad” [Interview mit Rita Segato], en: *Página/12* de 08/02/2010, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/dialogos/21-139835-2010-02-08.html>, 03/03/2015.

Cooperativa La Vaca Mu (2017) #NiUnaMenos: Un grito del luto al verde, en: *Mu* de 4/06/2017, 30.06.2017.

ESPINOSA MIÑOSO, Yuderkys; CORREAL, Diana; MUÑOZ, Karina. *Tejiendo de otro modo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala*. Popayán: Editorial Universidad del Cauca.

FEIERSTEIN, Daniel. *Los desafíos de la lucha contra la impunidad hoy*, cp. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-312299-2016-10-21.html>, 25/04/2017.

FEMICIDE IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM, s. <http://acuns.org/femicide-a-global-problem/>, 25.04.2017.

GATTI, Gabriel. *Identidades desaparecidas. Peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada*, Buenos Aires, 2012.

GERLACH, Christian. *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

HANTSCHE, Nicole. Diskriminierung und Straflosigkeit in Guatemala – Verbrechen ohne Sühne, in: Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker. Der Blog. Für Menschenrechte. Weltweit, <https://gfbvberlin.wordpress.com/2010/10/30/diskriminierung-und-strafllosigkeit-in-guatemala-verbrecen-ohne-suhne/>, 25.04.2017.

MOHANTY, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press Books, 2003.

NI UNA MENOS, s. [http://niunamenos.com.ar/?page\\_id=167](http://niunamenos.com.ar/?page_id=167), 25/04/2017.

NI UNA MENOS, Declaración del 3 de junio de 2015, s. [http://s1000050.ferozo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/documento\\_OK-1-1.pdf](http://s1000050.ferozo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/documento_OK-1-1.pdf), 25/04/2017.

PÁGINA 12. “La cifra de los femicidios”, cp. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/subnotas/312001-79419-2016-10-18.html>, 25/04/2017.

PÁGINA 12. Ni una Menos. El documento de las organizaciones que convocaron a la marcha contra el femicidio, 3/06/2017, en <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/41947-ni-una-menos>, 30/06/2017.

POONAL – Pool de Nuevas Agencias de América Latina. Voló una mariposa – Abschied von Lohana Berkins. Berlin, 8.02.2016, <https://www.npla.de/poonal/volo-una-mariposa-abschied-von-lohana-berkins/>, 30.06.2017.

REATI, Fernando. “Historias de amores prohibidos: prisioneras y torturadores en el imaginario argentino de la posdictadura”, in: *Ínsula. Revista de Letras y Ciencias Humanas*, 711 (2006): Letras argentinas. Un nuevo comienzo. Novela y cuento, p. 27-31.

SEGATO, Rita Laura. Género y colonialidad: en busca de claves de lectura y de un vocabulario estratégico descolonial. In: Quijano, Aníbal y Julio Mejía Navarrete (eds.): *La Cuestión Descolonial*. Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma - Cátedra América Latina y la Colonialidad del Poder, 2012. [http://nigs.paginas.ufsc.br/files/2012/09/genero\\_y\\_colonialidad\\_en\\_busca\\_de\\_claves\\_de\\_lectura\\_y\\_de\\_un\\_vocabulario\\_estrategico\\_descolonial\\_\\_ritasegato.pdf](http://nigs.paginas.ufsc.br/files/2012/09/genero_y_colonialidad_en_busca_de_claves_de_lectura_y_de_un_vocabulario_estrategico_descolonial__ritasegato.pdf), 25/04/2017.

SPIVAK, Gayatri. Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors (1993-94), in: *The Spivak Reader. Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, hg. von DONNA LANDRY/GERALD MACLEAN London 1996, S. 287-309.

SPIVAK, Gayatri. Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation, aus dem Engl. von ALEXANDER JOSKOWICZ/STEFAN NOWOTNY, Wien [1988] 2007.

Recebido em 27/09/2017.

Aceito em 23/11/2017.

Publicado em 29/12/2017.

DOI: 10.11606/issn.1676-6288.prolam.2017.134208

ISSN: 1676-6288