

Body Talk: Performing Violence against Women in Contemporary Guatemala

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Abstract

Drawing upon Diana Taylor's concept of the repertoire, I propose that the performers' and photographers' use of the female body functions as a meta-language to denounce several types of violence against women. Guatemala offers a unique opportunity for the study of embedded issues of identity, indigeneity, and gender, which are at the core of the same structural ailments that lead to its 36-year armed conflict that influences today. This analysis contributes to the understanding of embodiments of violence and considers the ethical implications of reproducing violence against women. Even though there has been extensive ethnographic work on violence and its manifestations, very few scholars have worked with the new generation of female Guatemalan artists that explore violence through a practice of denunciation. I analyze performance work by Regina José Galindo, Rosa Chávez, and Sandra Monterroso, photography by Verónica Riedel and Rodrigo Abd, street protest by the Spanish Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista (GAF), and an ethnographic exhibit by the Mesoamerican Regional Research Centre (CIRMA). The thread that unites my analyses is the embodiment of violence as seen through the lenses of what I call body talk. Body talk is the staged use of the performer's body to convey meaning; it is a distinctive practice of non-verbal, non-discursive bodily communication that can be strategically used to promote acts of resistance. I conclude that ethnic and gender violence representations in contemporary Guatemala transcend language limitations and I explore the possibilities for the female body to create alternative spaces. In addition, I explore the impact and the challenges that embodiments of violence pose for distinct spectatorships, especially considering visceral synesthaetic responses. As far as future inquiries, body talk can easily be applied to better understand issues such as body manipulation, alteration and beauty contests related to the politics of indigeneity in Guatemala, and also mass-production, *maquiladoras*, and neoliberal female exploration in Central America.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Dulce Tavares Coelho da Costa Redondo. She was a woman of much strength and a true admirer of beauty, art, and science. Most of all she cherished her family and believed in education. She was also the first person ever to believe in my intellectual abilities. I miss her.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I explore violence against women and its artistic representations in contemporary Guatemala. Guatemala offers a specific opportunity for the study of issues of indigeneity, gender, and social status, which are at the core of the structural problems that led to its thirty-six-year armed conflict and sustain the current conjuncture of violence against women. Drawing on a series of interdisciplinary approaches to issues of embodiment and violence, I analyze how violence is enacted in artistic platforms such as performance, photography, street protest, or ethnographic exhibitions that emphasize the female body.

Guatemala's modern history is bloody. Torture, death, and disappearances were a constant throughout the civil war period, from 1960 to 1996. From 1978 to 1982, and confirmed by the United Nations in March 1999, there were at least 130,000 political murders, 45,000 "disappeared," 50,000 widows, 250,000 orphans, 500,000 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, 1,000,000 internally displaced people and 440 villages destroyed (COHA). Unfortunately, the violence that characterized the civil war has not ended, but is now disproportionately redirected towards women. The figures speak for themselves: from 2000 to 2004, violence against women, usually against impoverished *mestizas* in urban areas, increased by 112.25 percent (COHA). During this same period of time, 1,501 women were violently murdered (COHA). All throughout the 2000s, the numbers have skyrocketed, and finally in 2008, strongly encouraged by UNIFEM, the *Congreso de la República de Guatemala* passed the DL 22-2008, entitled "*Ley contra el Femicidio y Otras Formas de Violencia contra la Mujer.*" Later, in 2009, another law also passed, DL 9-2009, "*Ley contra la Violencia Sexual, Explotación y Trata de Personas.*" Even though Guatemala now possesses legislation against such practices directed at women, law enforcement is ineffective and a viral culture of impunity dominates.

Proving the point that in Guatemala, violence against women has not emerged from a vacuum, Matilde González Izás reports that during the war, indigenous women in Guatemala were often raped by the soldiers, and also by their own community members, neighbors, and relatives at gunpoint or under death threats. For the army and its allies, “the mass rape represented the spectacle of shame through which the entire community became accomplices of war crimes... no one remained untouched, no one would have the moral solvency to judge, much less denounce what had happened” (González Izás 407). In tandem, Emilie Smith-Ayala notes that “women were hit hard[er] [than men] by the counterinsurgency campaign and then by the continuing military build-up in the countryside. Countless women were raped, tortured, and murdered (CEH 23). Countless more were widowed (CEH 23). Officially, the number of widows registered in Guatemala is close to 45,000, but other estimates reach as high as 100,000” (Smith-Ayala 43). Currently, and in a similar fashion, an ongoing structural impunity allows crimes against women to be perceived as admissible or even State-sanctioned. It is against this gendered oppression that many voices have made themselves heard in Central America, particularly in Guatemala, and specific works that I analyze in this dissertation participate in the effort to call attention to this issue.

This study seeks to highlight the importance of a new generation of Guatemalan artists and critically discuss their contributions to the understanding of the social phenomenon of violence against women. To date, the work of these artists has not received much scholarly attention. Even though there have been important ethnographic studies on violence in Guatemala, including its impact on women, little has been done when it comes to the study of the artistic and theatrical representations of this issue by Guatemalan artists.

Post-war Guatemala has seen an explosive creative period, particularly in the field of performance. This performance and other artistic works are often critical of existing societal practices surrounding violence against women. Performers such as Regina José Galindo, Sandra Monterroso, María Adela Díaz, Jessica Lagunas, and many others have repeatedly presented works that critique violence against women and challenge the people and institutions that sustain and disseminate it. In this dissertation I consider performance and photographic works by Regina José Galindo, Sandra Monterroso, the Spanish *Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista* (GAF), Verónica Riedel, and Rodrigo Adb. Although I focus my work on female artists, there are also several male artists who have become influential in the performance field such as Aníbal López (aka A-1 53167) and Jorge de León. All these artists have in common that they produce art that clearly operates as a counter-discourse against the excesses of neoliberalism in Guatemala such as violence. Violence against women, however, is a theme that is taken up, not surprisingly, by female artists, especially Galindo and Monterroso.

To better understand how violence against women in post-war Guatemala is represented through performance, I also examine other forms of artistic expression. Photography, for instance, has a long tradition in Guatemala, and several photographers have undertaken as their mission denouncing current and past atrocities. For example, Daniel Hernández Salazar's photographs in the exhibition *So That All Should Know/Para que todos sepan* (1998-9) denounce genocide. Andreas Aragón, another internationally known Guatemalan photographer, has steadily been working toward denouncing specific social circumstances, for instance in *Anti-postales de Guatemala* (2001) and *Prostitutes of La Línea* (2001). In this dissertation, I analyze the work of photographers Verónica Riedel and Rodrigo Abd because their photographs provide a distinctive glimpse into Guatemalan reality, particularly violence against women.

By focusing on enactments of violence against women, artists such as Galindo and Monterroso contribute to disrupting the naturalization of gender behaviors that are understood as dangerous and pervasive. Artists denounce, expose, and make visible violence against women using what I call body talk. Body talk is the staged use of the performer's body to convey meaning. Bodily enunciations are generally non-verbal, non-discursive forms of communication in which the performer's body is the privileged site that makes "alive" that which is being embodied, which in the case of this dissertation is the insidious power of violence against women in contemporary Guatemala. The performer's body as a site of enunciation becomes a communicative act that speaks synesthetically to spectators conveying meaning through the sole usage of its own intentional materiality and physicality. As constituted by bodily acts, body talk focuses on the exploration of the body as the means of communication anchored on the notion of the performative body itself.

I contend that body talk, a nonverbal, non-discursive form of bodily communication, expresses acts of resistance and questions the status quo through performance, photography, and street protest works. Even though body talk is markedly non-logocentric, it functions as a privileged form of communication through the senses and allows for a dialogic experience between performers and their public. In this sense, body talk does not preclude verbal speech acts, rather it expands the performative repertoire to include all types of experiences considered to be more visceral and easily apprehended by the spectators. At the sensory level, body talk operates by increasing the impact of certain denunciatory practices and realities fully embodied by the performers, thus provoking an inescapable type of experience for the spectators, while enriching the performers' own in return.

For each of the works I have chosen to represent Guatemalan art, I analyze how body talk reveals the intersection of gender-specific embodiments of violence and the impact it creates on the spectators. My analyses cover the strategic embodiment of femicide and the affirmation of a hybrid ethnic iconography in performance; the impossibility of historical reparation and relief from traumatic post-genocide experiences; and the consideration of problematic multicultural identity politics in performance, photography, and very briefly in an ethnographic exhibition. The common thread is the representation of violence against women and how spectators receive and respond to such works.

More specifically, I am interested in the nature of violence itself and how it is created, constructed, and reproduced in the corpus of works analyzed. How does violence against women in contemporary Guatemala inform the works of artists and what are these works' ethical implications? What is at stake with the embodiment of an experience of violence upon the female's body on stage? Is the performers' goal the gratuitous engagement of the spectators and their gratuitous pleasure in viewing suffering female bodies? Or rather is it the performers' goal to empower the viewers through direct confrontation with certain insidious practices existing in Guatemalan society? Does the work of these female performers empower the spectators and promote strategic essentializing, to borrow Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's expression, around the category "woman"? Is collective healing of a traumatic event possible through the arena provided by body art works? Does the performative nature of violence interfere with such a healing or *curación* process?

I am interested, furthermore, in exploring the social implications of violence, particularly violence against women as expressed in the performance art, photography, and street protest analyzed here. What is embodiment and what is meant by performing violence? Does performing

violence imply the same violent nature as violence itself? Considering ethical limitations on performing violence, are there safe and secure ways to perform violence? Does staged violence serve a social purpose? What purposes does staged violence serve? These questions and others are addressed in this dissertation.

My particular interest in explicit body performance and visibility strategies lead me to question the very act of resisting violence by embodying violence against women through a female performer's body on stage. Violence's pervasive power causes an ethical dilemma for the performer or artist and the audience. In essence, the challenge lies in how to represent violence without recreating its dynamics and making a spectacle out of it, thereby perpetuating it. Mary Russo asked the question "in what sense can women really produce or make spectacles out of themselves?" (17). Pertinent to my exploration of representations of violence against women in Guatemala through performance and other artistic manifestations is an understanding that these female performers/artists have strategic control over the way in which they use the female body and resort to certain violent practices in their works or events.

Contemporary female artists in Guatemala are transcending the nation's borders while considering possibilities for resistance and agency for women of all races, ethnicities, classes, sexual orientations, and political factions. They question the rigidity of gender roles and claim their bodies as a vehicle that performatively enunciates its own language of provocation. Their work is markedly political and feminist in the sense that it engages and aims at involving spectators in multi-sensorial live experiences that function toward the improvement of women's condition in Guatemala, through raised awareness and a call to engaged citizenship. The performance works analyzed in this dissertation openly denounce violence against women by

showing the atrocities committed against them. These works enable spectators to experience the pain and fear embodied by women in Guatemala daily.

From the many available works that criticize gender roles and particularly focus on violence among women, I have chosen specific works by Regina José Galindo and Sandra Monterroso, in performance; Verónica Riedel and Rodrigo Abd in photography; and the Spanish *Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista* (GAF) in street protest. Each artist touches on a contentious issue within the context of violence against women, from femicide to the Guatemalan press's exploration of gender violence, from ethnic paradigms to hybrid iconographies, from rape, torture, and annihilation to survival and cultural bearing, and from trauma survival to standing up against oblivion and genocide denial.

Body Talk and Theoretical Reflections

This dissertation contributes to the overall theoretical discussion concerning embodiment, violence, and the ethical implications of embodying violence in an array of artistic forms. It focuses on the interplay between specific strategies and techniques that enhance the embeddedness of gender, ethnicity, class, and political views that form a power web that conditions female subjects in contexts of violence. Women in Guatemala are constrained by a male-dominant society that restricts socially constructed habits of female body comportment, including limiting the agency and power of certain female body modalities. Following Iris Marion Young's theory of the female body experience, and drawing on phenomenology's interpretations of embodiment, I contend that embodiment is a mode of being-in-the-world, and women's embodiment, in particular, is constructed by the specificity of each individual's modality of sexual and gender difference. Embodiment can also involve subconscious routinization of behaviors, rituals, and practices socially considered female. Young considers

important questions regarding female embodiment that are also crucial to my analyses in this dissertation in regards to the experiences of women in Guatemala:

[...] how do girls and women constitute their experienced world through their movement and orientation in places? What are some of the feelings of ambivalence, pleasure, power, shame, objectification, and solidarity that girls and women have about bodies, their shape, flows, and capacities? How do the things and people [girls and women] touch and are touched by become a material support for an extension of [them] selves? To the extent that women occupy relatively disadvantaged positions in gendered power and role structures, how, if at all, is [their] subordination embodied? (9)

Following these theoretical questions, my dissertation deals with central aspects of women's experience in Guatemala, even if it does not represent a definitive account of the experience of each female body. Through my analysis of each of the chosen artists, I expand on the artistic exploration of specific female body experiences and the socially circumscribed loci in which they operate. By socially circumscribed loci I am referring to all those social and emotional structures and apparatuses that physically and spatially condition women's being-in-the-world and their material manifestations as subjects.

My analyses employ theoretical tools such as Rebeca Schneider's concept of explicit body in performance, Diana Taylor's notion of performance as repertoire and a means to preserve cultural memory, and Andrea Azoulay's theory of embodiment in photography. Schneider addresses the way certain performance pieces aim to explicate bodies in social relationships in artistic processes by which the body of the performer unfolds, "peel[ing] back layers of signification that surround [her body] like ghosts at a grave" (2). Thus, "peeling at

signification, bringing ghosts [out] to visibility, [performers] are interested [in] expos[ing] not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves” (2).

Also focusing on meaning-building and social performances, Diana Taylor introduces the notion of performance as an “act of transfer” by transmitting cultural knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated practices (6). Taylor distinguishes between different types of reiterated practice: by “repertoire” she means knowledge that is transmitted by performance practices that is ephemeral and privileges bodies, while the “archive” privileges writing and is designed to endure. Regarding embodiment in photography, Azoulay argues that “photographs are constructed like statements (*énoncés*)” and that “the photographic image gains its meaning through mutual (mis)recognition [when exposed to citizens]” (25). A photograph not only has a declarative nature, but it “is an *énoncé* within the pragmatics of obligation” and exceeds the status of testimony or evidence by calling the viewer into action (25). Azoulay explains that particularly in cases of photographs of violence, the civil contract of photography requires the spectators’ acknowledgement of “a civic duty toward the photographed person who hasn’t stopped being “there” (16). Overall, these three theoretical concepts allow for a better understanding of the dialectic relationship between the real and the representational. In this manner, I expand on the concept of body talk, which can serve as a productive lens through which to understand the affective appeal that certain artistic and political works have for spectators, particularly considering civic responsibility and public action.

I contend that body talk requires an intrinsic tie to an affective spectatorship in order to be effective. I am considering the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences, a return to subjectivity and emotions in response to the weakened exploration of the material body by post structuralism and deconstruction. Affective spectatorship is an approach described by Silvia R.

Tandeciarz as “the process of making and consuming images [, which] serves not only to reference affective experience, but also to activate or stage it” (135). Thus, by affective spectatorship, I mean an organic response to the staging of specific cultural realities through the nonverbal, non-discursive logos of emotions, feelings, and sensations. Whereas embodiment implies staging, affective spectatorship implies co-participation, and often a call to action in the form of a challenge—I dare you! According to Tandeciarz, only with this call to action or spectatorship will art be meaningful and will the contractual nature of art come into play as an act of communication.

My theoretical framework is based on the concept of body talk as a critical tool to understand bodily behavior and the layering of effects that contribute to the performance of violence in a nonverbal, non-discursive way. Given verbal speech’s limitations to articulate certain human emotions, feelings, and sensations, relying on the body’s ability to communicate at an elemental sensory level is essential when treating extreme circumstances such as rape, torture, and murder. According to Elaine Scarry, even though language can be a vehicle for pain, nevertheless, pain “actively destroys language, and in fact brings about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). Regardless of the merits of body talk to convey extreme emotions, feelings, and sensations to spectators, such experience is not limited to negative engagements. Rather, body talk can include positive and affirmative practices too. This is the case of artistic practices where the body conveys meanings of empowerment, pride, and intense joy that are more effectively transmitted to spectators through body expression than through language or articulated forms of speech. Although most often body talk works in tandem with verbal communication in order to maximize the staged effects of a given piece or phenomenon, it some times excludes verbal

communication in staged events and artworks. The ultimate goal of body talk is to engage spectators completely, by appealing more to their own lived experiences and body reactions than to written history or direct speech. In this sense, body talk is a comprehensive, holistic way to understand the phenomenological dialect of the staged body and the effects the body produces on spectators.

In focusing on body talk, I am particularly interested in the spectators' elemental sensory or visceral engagement. Sally Banes and André Lepecki have investigated performance practices in which emphasis is given to sensorial-perceptual realms as alternative modes for life to be lived (1). They explain how certain unsuspected connections become visible through body practices: "In an intertwining process where the somatic, the political and the imaginary, the profoundly performative interfaces occurring between history, corporeality, power, and language, and the sensorial become apparent" (1). Performers play with the perennial metamorphoses that occur during the ephemeral events where the body is constructed, manipulated, rendered language on stage. In addition, performers engage in this playing with the performative power of the senses, which informs human action and interaction, and ultimately accompanies changes in culture and society. Naturally, as argued by Banes and Lepecki, spectators respond to performers' provocations affectively: "audiences intuit this metamorphic sophistication of the sensorium that the trained performer endures, enacts, and projects. They recognize it, sense it, fall into it, are summoned by it, and then either reject it or applaud it" (2). Consequently, body talk operates in two ways between performers and spectators, and reciprocally, between spectators and performers. A third way would be between performers themselves. While performers endure staged emotions, feelings, and sensations, spectators find themselves responding somatically to

these provocations through their own emotions, feelings, and sensations, and either reject or applaud the overall event.

Body talk functions as interlocution or as a speech act, but it does so relying totally on sensorial experience instead of articulating meaning through language and other conventions. Performance and photography, then, cease to be mere aesthetic objects and become part of an experimental interchange that functions performatively to solicit affective responses to multiple human experiences, particularly those pertaining to pain and suffering. In cases of extreme violence, body talk becomes a powerful narrative that shocks and attracts spectators, and in certain contexts it can also shame the spectators into taking action. There is an intrinsic call to action in body talk as in Taylor's "acts of transfer," which transmit "social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through performance" (2). In certain circumstances there is a common core of shared cultural signs and beliefs among spectators; however, such presumptions should not be over-generalized. As a scholar I insist on thinking about spectatorship by assuming the heterogeneity and the individuality of possible responses. In essence, affective spectatorship implies a civic impulse and the need to participate in public discourse.

As Guatemala gradually enters a global age and is connected to the rest of the world via the Internet, spectators of national and local events, including art and politics, also become known globally through digital means. Considering different levels of spectatorship and engagement and taking into account the current global dissemination and reception of artistic works, a note should be made about digital spectatorship. Even though spectators can and do respond to artistic content available to them through the World Wide Web and by other technical means, I argue that this type of spectatorship engenders responses that are necessarily distinct from live events. The use of body fluids in certain performances as a means to provoke a visceral

response in the spectators, for example, will have a different impact when viewed digitally than it does when viewed in person. Similarly, there is an important distinction between witnessing and participating as these distinct forms of spectators' engagement operate differently in digital versus in-person situations. In live events, witnessing often makes participants out of spectators; for instance, in a street protest situation where the audience can join the protesters physically. Nevertheless, in digital form, witnessing is a more solitary act that might lead to nothing or to a different sort of participation, also remote and diffused via social media, for example.

Violence's Distinct Manifestations and Expressions

The production, construction, and dissemination of violence, particularly violence against women, are at the core of my analysis. Violence can be broadly understood as any coercive and destructive act that provokes pain and causes harm to the physical, psychological, and overall well-being of individuals. Violence against women implies the particular consideration of targeted behaviors and practices that directly impact and jeopardize women's participation in social life and individual subjectivity. As women continue to be the preferential victims of random annihilation practices such as femicide, a vital group of Guatemalan society is hindered from fully participating in the democratic process that has been emerging since the signing of the Peace Treaties in 1996. Women in Guatemala are targets for gendered violence due to the culture of violence that still exists in the country and the contemporary climate of institutional impunity experienced on a daily basis.

In the corpus of works that I analyze in this dissertation, violence is used in a productive manner in order to achieve a specific goal: to critically engage the spectators. Thus here violence is performative. I understand performative violence as a meta-phenomenon that both recreates violence and opens up a space for reflecting on its impact and productivity. Performative

violence tends to perpetuate the spectators' exposure to its core elements of fear and discomfort every time this violence is reenacted or embodied, even if it is done in a controlled manner through careful preparation. Through the significant visual impact of performative violence, the performers employ a body talk strategy that either aims at expressing artistically the unmentionable and what is often silenced or taking justice into the performers' own hands.

Manipulation of violence by performers and artists implies sado-masochist overtones that coincide with the performative nature of violence. Most often, spectators interact with the body as spectacle and its manipulated representation, which can serve multiple purposes and goals. My working concept of violence draws on a range of sources to emphasize the types of violence most relevant to the private and public spheres of women in Guatemala. At the core of Guatemalan violence against women is physical violence, which includes several forms of abuse, ranging from beatings, rape, torture, and homicide. Even though femicide (death) is an extreme form of violence against women, it is nonetheless prevalent and is addressed in several of the works that I analyze in this dissertation. I prefer to use the term femicide, which is more political and insists on the perpetrators' accountability, and not just the compounding of circumstances that lead to the victims' suffering. For Victoria Sanford, "femicide," is a more political term than "femicide" that better encompasses the role of institutions and structures of power in the killing of women in the Guatemalan context (62). In addition, Pascha Bueno-Hansen argues that "femicide" is an "empowered term" and that a strategic focus on the universality of violence against women has made possible the de-normalization of that violence (292). At the heart of a theory of femicide is the heated debate that has arisen among specialists with regard to "the divergence between the drive to generalize for social impact and the push to specify for juridical utility" (Bueno-Hansen 307).

In spite of the obvious importance of physical violence, violence against women in Guatemala is more insidious and prevalent in the form of symbolic violence, or the deep internalization of negative stereotypes and social expectations by women. Unlike physical or direct violence, symbolic violence ostensibly works gently until it fulfills its goal of mining and controlling the subject from inside, as a self-regulatory or self-censorship mechanism or negative embodiment. This specific form of violence corrupts the daily lives of Guatemalan women, and particularly the lives of indigenous women and their descendants. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has defined symbolic violence as “a form of power that is directly exerted on the bodies and, just like magic, without any physical coercion” (38). It is thus a symbolic force, a violence, which according to Marta Plaza Velasco “acts in an insidious, invisible, and gentle manner in the deepest of the body” (135). Symbolic violence is a key concept to understand the diversity assumed by distinct forms of violence against women in contemporary Guatemala. And this happens precisely due to symbolic violence’s productivity as a form of invisible domination that operates through a set of daily practices that change the bodies of the individuals, informing their actions and the social spaces in which they can move and engage in meaningful social interaction. Symbolic violence as a working concept is particularly relevant because it makes visible the connection between social forms of control over the woman’s body and the process of naturalization of such violence inflicted on her body. Remarkably, bodily performance destroys symbolic violence by raising consciousness.

Ultimately, subjectivication, or symbolic violence, operates through daily negative self-talk and is instrumental in maintaining the cultural grip that hegemonic discourses place on the bodies of women in Guatemala. As noted by Linda Green, “Women’s bodies [in Guatemala] have become repositories of the painful experiences they have been unable to articulate as a

result not only of being silenced but also because of the non-narratability of atrocious experiences” (247). As the vast majority of genocide victims and survivors during the armed conflicts, indigenous women in Guatemala are in a particularly challenging position, caught between loyalty to the Pan-Mayan cause and the need to assert their particular needs as women and cultural bearers. In fact, a succession of approaches by Guatemalan policy makers, feminists, and scholars have consistently overlooked the needs of Guatemalan women, particularly when it comes to historical reparations made to the benefit of indigenous women. For example, reparations to Guatemalan women seem impossible because of over 500 years of abuse experienced by the indigenous people of Guatemala, particularly women.

When considering Guatemala’s violence against indigenous people, it is pertinent to think in terms of the explicit violence of coloniality. I understand explicit violence as epistemic violence, which implies both the physicality of coloniality, as well as coloniality as spectacle. Epistemic violence is a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which means the infliction of harm against subjects through discourse. For Spivak, epistemic violence occurs through the marginalization of certain voices within Western discourses, which belong to the subaltern (302). By subaltern I understand any group that is politically, socially, and culturally excluded from the hegemonic power structure, even when non-actively participating in their own disempowerment. Thus, subalterns are denied a voice in established structures of political representation. Coloniality is a kind of systemic violence theorized by Walter D. Mignolo, as a historic, dynamic, and contemporary condition that permeates social life in many regions, particularly in Guatemala. Mignolo contends that “coloniality is the machine that reproduces subalternity today in the form of global coloniality in the network society” (426). Aníbal Quijano first introduced the concept of coloniality of power to refer to the persistent categorical and discriminatory

discourse and practices that in Latin America was inherited from European colonialism and that still pervades in contemporary social orders that continue to prescribe value to certain peoples while disenfranchising others (536). Furthermore, Mignolo recognizes that there are “new forms of coloniality in a global and transnational world” (439) and that “subalternity is inextricably linked to coloniality” (430).

Verónica Renata López Nájera considers that in order for a society to progress it must be open to change, and that the change process starts by engaging with “common sense’ destabilizing processes” such as art (115). Coloniality and denial of Mayan genocide are in alignment with violence against women as forms of systemic violence experienced by women in Guatemala. As recognized by López Nájera, art has the destabilizing power to intervene in peeling back at coloniality’s layers denouncing its intrinsic mechanisms and thus can be a critical component of the change process. In specific works analyzed in this dissertation, coloniality is the violent force that guides artists and spectators towards intervention in situations of violence against women.

Ultimately, considering Guatemala as a pluri-democratic nation with great ethnic diversity, it is pertinent to keep in mind issues of women’s identity. After a long history of subalternity and invisibility, in the twentieth-first century Guatemalan women appear as autonomous political subjects and are slowly occupying the public sphere. However, unresolved issues between *Ladinas* (non-indigenous) and indigenous women concerning political alliance and gender-based violence complicate the advancement of a common cause. Even though *Ladinas* and indigenous women join together in their fight to promote women’s rights, for indigenous women, violence is not a thing of the past; it is a common occurrence they must deal with on a daily basis. At stake is the need for a de-colonializing project that brings together the

fight against patriarchy and coloniality as two sides of a common oppression. Manuela Camus argues that defenders of a Maya *cosmovisión* (worldview) are indeed advocating for an anti-discourse of gender as a social construction of difference, making a clear distinction between male and female social roles, but then fail by denying them in terms of power structures and its implications (“Mujeres y mayas” 52). Here I understand an anti-discourse of gender as a Mayan response to Western social constructions foreign to the indigenous idea of gender complementarity and equity. Camus’s argument expands on the ambiguity claimed by those who defend such gender complementarity but then fail to give Mayan women the space and the power that according to that same worldview they are entitled to.

The major obstacle to any form of structural advancement in Guatemala is related to the country’s intrinsic culture of impunity and the current state of its institutions, which are very weak from a democratic point of view and also very slow and inefficient. By Guatemala’s culture of impunity, I am referring to the fact that the vast majority of perpetrators of violent crimes, particularly crimes against women, are left free of legal prosecution and an effective criminal investigation. In addition, a blame-the-victim ideology, particularly if the victim is a woman in a domestic violence situation, and a deeply ingrained culture of machismo in the justice system are paramount in keeping women subordinated to the will and preferences of their male partners (Walsh 54).

The Contexts of Violence in Guatemala

To understand how different forms of violence operate in Guatemala and how several institutions fail to address and prevent violence against women it is necessary to address the specificity of Guatemalan violence. Existing ethnographic and sociological studies of the recent history of violence in Guatemala provide a rich context within which to analyze the current

circumstances in which violence against women occurs and how it is perpetuated. The artistic and cultural works that I analyze in this dissertation often engage directly with specific data pertaining to a multitude of forms of violence against women, including frequency, intensity, and the lack of legal and social consequences for the perpetrators.

A term often used to refer to the longevity of violence in Guatemala is the “continuum of violence.” This “continuum of violence” has been described by Philippe Bourgois, Manolo Vela, Alexander Sequén-Mónchez, and Hugo Antonio Solares, among others, who conclude that the basic Guatemalan social problems that existed at the genesis of the armed conflicts linger today. Since the 1996 Peace Agreements failed to address the dispossession (lack of land and subsistence) of the majority of the population under neoliberal structural readjustment policies, violence has skyrocketed in a population that is still armed, deals with guilt and desire for retaliation, and is in search of trauma relief. Neoliberalism, despite all its devastating effects on subaltern peoples, has helped increase awareness of violence against women. Several Guatemalan institutions and even the State have provided a forum for the discussion and prevention of violence against women. This space has extended to the national art community. These initiatives, however, do not sufficiently address the problem, since it is the State itself, and concomitantly several other social institutions, that fail to acknowledge gendered violence, prevent crimes against women, or prosecute the perpetrators. The reproduction of gender stereotypes leading to the current state of violence that ails women in Guatemala is a circumstance that is especially frightening.

Discussing the culture of violence that is omnipresent in contemporary Guatemala, Camus points out that “women have also been caught in the same scenario of production and reception of violence [in comparison to men]” (“Desclasamiento y violencias” 353). Camus

expands on a “culture of service” that she finds symptomatic of women’s inner domination, noting that “women nowadays seem to reproduce even more traditional roles [...] as mothers, wives, friends, and prostitutes [than what one would expect]: they are always in service, on call” (“Desclasamiento y violencias” 353). In a similar fashion, Angélica Cházaro, Jennifer Casey, and Katherine Ruhl have argued that it is Guatemalan women’s “systematic oppression” that has culminated in the current epidemic of femicide, which arises from “a high incidence of violence in the home, a thirty-six-year legacy of war violence targeting women, and deeply rooted patriarchal traditions enshrined in the legal code” (99). Where certain notions of “decency” and “respectable” gender behavior are deeply ingrained in women’s self-perceptions and value, “blaming the victim for her own death is a persistent practice in the investigation of femicides” (Cházaro, Casey, and Ruhl 99), Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano contend that the conditions that give rise to femicide in Guatemala are “the legacy of military violence, the failure of the legal system, and a historical structure of impunity and systemic discrimination” (32). They estimate that “more than thirty-five hundred women and girls have experienced brutal forms of violence in the post-conflict period” (Fregoso and Bejarano 32). Accordingly, the *Informe estadístico de la violencia en Guatemala* of the UN’s *Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana y Prevención de la Violencia* reports 518 victims of femicide in Guatemala in 2005, representing 9.7 percent of total homicides in that year (32). Seeking an explanation for the State’s failure to address gendered violence, Fregoso and Bejarano conclude that “a reliance on the logic of protection extends patriarchal ownership and control and further disempowers women” (32).

The reliability of Guatemalan femicide and gendered violence statistics is questionable since the majority of the cases are unreported or made public only by the gruesome headlines of

shocking newspaper articles. Overall, Guatemala's sensationalistic press naturalizes violence against women because in a national culture of printed gore, publicity of violent crimes sells. Continuously, the slaughter and the spectacularization of violence against women have served as a catalyst to more violence and fear. The cases of femicide are displayed as "either sensationalized, their gory details graphically described, or they are presented in a very matter-of-fact manner, containing indications only of where the body was found, in what condition, and at what time" (Godoy-Paiz 98). According to Paula Godoy-Paiz, the blame is often shifted to the female victim, following a narrative that presumes that her personal relationships were the cause of her death (99). In addition, the identity of the victim is often described very briefly, resulting in omission of significant details about her. The focus is placed on her severed or mutilated body. As for the perpetrators, they are often unidentified and go unpunished (Godoy-Paiz 99). Even if families wish to further pursue investigations into the gruesome and untimely death of their loved ones, they are often confronted by a culture of silence because potential witnesses fear retaliation (Godoy-Paiz 100).

Sarah England concludes that before 2008, the Guatemalan press exoticized women's deaths, using gory photos to sell papers, and blaming women for their own deaths (E-mail). After 2008 and due to the impact of the work of various women's organizations, in tandem with all of the national and international pressure to eradicate femicide from Guatemala, the press stopped such practices. Referring to the current situation, England observes that the Guatemalan press today is more subtle, even if still engaged in the same type of mentality as before. England finds that what is disturbing in today's reports is what is not said: how many articles do not identify the victim, how very few identify the perpetrator and question the motive for the killing, which is always a guess on the part of the police (E-mail). Decisively, England argues that while there is

more inclusion of feminist language and points of view in media reports, these are dwarfed by the daily barrage of murder reports that, with bare minimum descriptions and very little follow up, leave the Guatemalan public to fill in the blanks with their own interpretations of what is "really" going on (*Systemic Gender Discrimination* 4).

In April 2008, the Guatemalan Congress passed the Law against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women (Decree 22-2008), and in September 2010 special courts were established to address the crimes specified in the new law (Doiron 2). Although progress has been made at the legal level, the root of the problem and its implications for Guatemalan society still need attention. Guatemalan women's bodies today are the site of social control and ideological manipulation.

Representing Violence against Women in Guatemala

This dissertation includes four chapters, each pertaining to the analysis of specific art works that explore particular aspects of violence against women and its representation. I analyze works that meaningfully examine rape, femicide, and domestic violence; internalization of negative stereotypes and pernicious social expectations that lead to women's victimization; coloniality and its lingering force pulling women into the center of Guatemala's history; and traumatic violence, postwar survival, and the continuing need to offer substantial and gendered reparation to genocide victims. Thus, this dissertation addresses issues that are unique to the Guatemalan context and takes into special consideration the impact violence against women has on its people as a whole and on the spectators of art works seeking to be crucial agents for potential change.

Chapter 1, "Out in the Open: Violence Against Women as Public Spectacle," examines how body talk informs an in-depth analysis of performance artworks by Regina José Galindo or

by cultural expressions that are inspired by her work in two distinct contexts: first, in what Schneider has called “the explicit body” in performance, and then by contrast, in what can be considered the “implicit,” hidden, or disappeared body. I analyze two of Galindo’s works, *El dolor en un pañuelo* (1999) and *279 Golpes* (2005) pertaining respectively to explicit, and then implicit performance body talk. Lastly, I analyze a street protest inspired on Galindo’s work by the Spanish GAF in Seville, Spain in 2007, *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?*, supporting the Spanish Constitutional Court’s 7 to 5 vote upholding of the constitutionality of the *Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género* (Organic Act 1/2004 of 28 December on Comprehensive Measures against Gender Violence), which caused great controversy nationwide.

Chapter 2, “Flipping the Tortillera: Sandra Monterroso’s Hybrid Iconography in *Tus tortillas mi amor*,” addresses issues of identity, cultural representation, and subjectivization through the female body. Here I analyze Sandra Monterroso’s *Tus tortillas, mi amor* (2004), or *Lix cua rahro* (Q’eq’chi Maya), a tale of passion and agency told in a native tongue, while a woman rebels against her millenary fate of tortilla maker, house wife, and gender victim. With humor, the protagonist somewhat unexpectedly unravels a first-person narrative of resistance while she rethinks her own hybrid *Ladina* identity. *Tus tortillas* breaks down the ethnic, generic, and social label *tortillera*, while constructing the *tortillera*’s own possibility for resistance. Debunking the Guatemalan *tortillera*, Monterroso conveys her message to the spectators about the ongoing and unstable process of identity-production using a combination of body talk and the spoken word. She resists the spectators’ gaze by becoming “hard to read,” somewhat resistant to appropriation when compared to the widely circulated “text” or iconography on indigeneity and femininity in Guatemala. To produce such an effect, Monterroso’s body talk brings to light her

own flow of identity-production by juxtaposing the performer's corporeality to anticipated representations of ethnicity and gender.

Chapter 3, "Re-Imagining the Archive: Verónica Riedel's *Reinas Indígenas* Doubling for Latin America's Foremothers," analyzes Verónica Riedel's photographic exhibition, *The Making of a Mestiza* (2005). Making visible unknown or anonymous historical subjects, through photographs *Mestiza* derails and de-familiarizes the dominant rhetoric of colonization in Latin America as a way of seeing that which is grounded on a hegemonic visual economy of indigenous women and their descendants as exotic Other. By visual economy I am referring to an economy where images are circulated, mediated, and communicated by imaginings and materiality of photographs or paintings. As in a multivoiced *testimonio*, *Mestiza* is composed of a triple embodiment, including the photographs, their corresponding personal stories or texts, and the artwork on the prints, or "interventions." Riedel creates distinct visual narratives in lieu of the visual colonial archive by transposing indigenous women's portraits where traditionally white and creole ladies were once represented, thus hybridizing the end product. The *Mestiza* women of her native Guatemala acquire a tridimensional quality as historical subjects taking a stand against gender, ethnic, and social discrimination. Riedel's aesthetic rendering of the *Mestizas'* pride, dignity, and self-confidence engages in photography as a performance of empowerment. I also briefly analyze Rodrigo Abd's *Portraits of the Mayan Queens* (2011), which provides an alternative mode of representation of indigenous women and their descendants. Abd promotes a counter-visuality that brings Mayanness and ethnic authenticity into a new light through his use of older technology, which presupposes contradicting the voyeuristic gaze inherited from the earlier foreign ethnographers who depicted indigenous people as Other. The contrast between Riedel and Abd's photographic projects allows for

juxtaposing two distinct manners of ethnic representation and the often underlined erasure of the subalterns' voices.

Chapter 4, "Violent Truths: Performing Memory and Embodying Violence in Guatemala," explores the link between embodied memory and political struggle through two of Galindo's performances, *Hermana* (2010) and *La verdad* (2013). In *Hermana*, a performance in which Maya poet Rosa Chávez spits, slaps, and whips Galindo directly in the face and back, I probe the possibility of an organic sisterhood between Galindo and Chávez. I contend that in *Hermana*, Galindo and Chávez transversalize the very notion of contemporary coloniality as it is lived in Guatemala. In direct reference to the Guatemalan context, in *Hermana* I explore the way in which gender issues and the need for gendered and cultural sensitive historical reparations are embodied. Ultimately, I read *Hermana* as a symbolic effort to artistically respond to a current need for reparations in Guatemalan society. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze *La verdad*, a performance that emphasizes the importance of memory work, particularly in the Guatemalan context. In this performance, Galindo's level of experimentation is great, for *La verdad* is a performance *à thèse*. Because in Guatemala there is a manifest lack of official forms of remembrance to serve as important symbols for the future, there is the need for memory work. *La verdad* is a performance that facilitates a time and space to enact and promote memory as a necessary practice for survival and justice. Galindo's voice becomes the memory conduit that brings to life the voices of female survivors and embodies their pain and suffering. In both performances, Galindo explores self-violence as a way to embody and make present the contemporaneity of Guatemala's violence and the lingering effect of its recent past. In addition, I analyze the intended effect this performance provokes on spectators, drawing from Sherene

Razack and Doris Sommer's explorations on the perils of empathy and its implication as a "colonialist" way of reading the Other.

Out in the Open: Violence Against Women as Public Spectacle

Violence against women is a type of gendered violence that is socially pervasive and often accepted as natural. According to Shannon Walsh, “the term ‘violence against women’ refers to physical violence, including assault, sexual violence, and homicide both within and outside of a domestic context” (51). Throughout Latin America, there has been an increase in violence against women, particularly since the economic crisis of the early 21st century. This increase has often been attributed to the effects of late capitalism and globalization. In Guatemala, violence against women has reached numbers that place the country among the most violent nations in the world (Camus 353). Since 2000, Guatemala has seen a large increase in cases of femicide (Cházaro, Casey, and Ruhl 99).¹ According to Angélica González of Guatemala’s Network to Oppose Violence Against Women [*Red de la No Violencia Contra la Mujer*], “sexual aggression, the mutilation of body parts like breasts, torture, and the dumping of victims in empty lots are trademarks of the killings” (9).² Not surprisingly, and in spite of the lack of reliable figures, Karen Musalo and Blaine Bookey concluded upon interviewing violence survivors that “a significant number of the femi[ni]cides are in fact the result of domestic violence” (273).³

Violence in Guatemala did not cease with the end of the armed conflicts (1960-96). Rather, in the postwar, violence “assume[d] a gendered form” (Godoy-Paiz 90). While men have also been victims in postwar times, it is mostly women who have been hit the hardest. The increasing violence against Guatemalan women, including incidents of rape, torture, mutilation, and homicide, lead to the passing in 2008 of anti-femicide national laws. Pressure at both the national and the international levels culminated in several judicial reforms aiming at stopping the

violence against women and persecuting the perpetrators. Unfortunately, there is still reported widespread impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes (Godoy-Paiz 91).

The Guatemalan national press represents violence against women as gruesome and spectacular. Cases of femicide are displayed as “either sensationalized, their gory details graphically described, or they are presented in a very matter-of-fact manner, containing indications only of where the body was found, in what condition, and at what time” (Godoy-Paiz 98). In a similar manner to what happened during the period of internal armed conflict, by sensationalizing violence against women, the contemporary national press promotes fear among the population (Torres 155). In news stories on violence against women, the blame is often shifted to the female victim, following a narrative that presumes that her personal relationships were the cause of her death (Godoy-Paiz 99). In addition, the identity of the victim is often described very briefly, resulting in omission of significant details about her. The focus is placed on her severed or mutilated body (Godoy-Paiz 99). As for the perpetrators, they are often unidentified and go unpunished (Godoy-Paiz 99). Even if families wish to further pursue investigations into the gruesome and untimely death of their loved ones, they are often confronted by a culture of silence because potential witnesses fear retaliation (Godoy-Paiz 100). Overall, Guatemala’s sensationalist press naturalizes violence against women because in a national culture of printed gore, publicity of violent crimes sells. This, in turn, serves as a catalyst to more violence and fear.

Although violence against women takes many forms that manifest themselves in different ways in different cultures, globally there is an urgent need to prevent such violence and to find adequate strategies and effective measures to address women victimized by it. Many entities, both at the governmental and non-governmental levels, are working together against the global

problem of violence against women. In Guatemala, several forms of activism have been crucial. In particular, Guatemalan activists are engaged in promoting art that displays better gender values and furthers social progress. The interconnectedness of our global society allows for the emergence of new forms of protest or engaged citizenship via a multitude of media. For instance, theater and performance have been addressing violence against women for many years now. In Guatemala, Regina José Galindo is one of the performers who have tackled this topic. In this chapter, I analyze three performances that were either created by Galindo or inspired by Galindo's performance work. These performances have a common theme of denouncing violence against women. The three include works of performance art and a street protest that I consider performance activism.

Regina José Galindo's work as a performer started in 1999 with *El dolor en un pañuelo* (*Shroud of Pain*), a performance presented at a collective exhibit in Guatemala entitled *Sin pelos en la lengua* (*Without Mincing Words*). Since this presentation, Galindo has repeatedly denounced atrocities and shocked audiences worldwide with her live events or online. From being tortured on stage, to undergoing several surgical procedures, including a hymenoplasty, Galindo is fearless and has tackled many violent and difficult issues through the years; her performance work has come to be known worldwide. Galindo is the most famous of the Guatemalan performers of the generation that emerged after the signing of the Peace Agreements in 1996 and with the explosion of urban art festivals in the capital city. These art festivals include *Casa Bizarra* (1996), *Festival del Centro Histórico* (1997), and *Octubre Azul* (2000).⁴ She has received numerous public acclamations and international prizes. In 2003, her protest against the presidential candidacy of Guatemala's former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt titled *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who can erase the traces?*) brought her international fame.⁵ Actually,

it was the impact of this very same performance that provided global recognition of her work, particularly in Spain.

The first of the three performances that I analyze in this chapter is *El dolor en un pañuelo* (1999), a performance that denounces rape and other sorts of abuses suffered by women in Guatemala, but focuses mainly on how Guatemalan society and the press naturalize and accept this violence against women as tolerable. *279 Golpes (279 Blows)* (2005), the second of Galindo's performances that I explore here, denounces women's deaths in Guatemala from the beginning of 2005 to June 9 of the same year. Galindo performed it at the 51st Venetian Art Biennale in Italy, in 2005. Finally, I analyze a street protest by the GAF (Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista) from Seville, Spain, which took place on March 8 2007, on International Women's Day. This protest was inspired by Galindo's earlier performance piece *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas? (Who can erase the traces?)* (2003). It was intended as a response to the Spanish Constitutional Court's upholding of the constitutionality of the *Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género* (Organic Act 1/2004 of 28 December on Comprehensive Measures against Gender Violence) with a 7 to 5 vote, which caused great controversy nationwide.

Following a chronologic order, I have chosen to analyze these three performances by addressing their treatment of distinct facets of violence against women and of audience engagement. Together these pieces present a complex and multifaceted view of violence against women, of the problems inherent in representing that violence, and of the ethical questions those representations raise. As each performance explores a particular aspect of the ethics of representing violence, violence is embodied more or less explicitly, depending on the circumstances. In *El dolor* and *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* violence is explicit, whereas in

Golpes, it is more implicit. However, the spectators' response varies tremendously and for instance, implicit violence does not necessarily create a minor impact on the audience.

The performers' goal is obviously to obtain a deeper engagement of the audience, seeking to bring awareness, but also promoting a critical stance and civic engagement. Each chosen performance has its own specific strategy to engage with violence, shedding more or less blood, but all coincide in provoking the spectators to undertake action. In order for each performance to be effective, it must tantalize the spectators at the level of emotions, feelings, and sensations, promoting affective spectatorship. Affective spectatorship employs an array of techniques that draws on the spectators' empathy to the cause of women and explores such feelings to promote awareness and critical engagement of spectators. Affective spectatorship is an approach described by Silvia R. Tandeciarz as "the process of making and consuming images [, which] serves not only to reference affective experience, but also to activate or stage it" (135). Engaging with events beyond the rational sphere allows spectators to experience firsthand certain realities factually distant from their own. Even though spectators are not necessarily exposed to gender violence as female victims in Guatemala, through the experience provoked by the staged embodiment of violence, they come to feel how it relates to their own humanity.

Crucial to understanding these performances is the notion of performative violence, a meta-phenomenon that intends to perpetuate the spectators' exposure to core elements of fear and discomfort every time violence is reenacted on stage. Even if violence is done in a controlled manner through careful setting and preparation, violence on stage is being manipulated as spectacle. The performative nature of violence is such that to talk about violence is already violent per se; however, to represent violence is unequivocally engaging with its power of impact. Amalia Gladhart's notion of a "denunciatory theater" suggests that the spectators know

that, in fact, theatrical representations of violence are “unreal” (163). Gladhart stipulates that denunciatory theater must then “recreate the spectacle of [violence], this time as spectacle, rather than as [violence], but it must do so without recreating the numbing or terrifying effects of the spectacle the producers of actual [violence] seek from their audience” (163).⁶ In such a manner, the representation of violence and the pain and suffering that it causes are not experienced as one’s own, which in turn allows the spectators the critical distance necessary to become aware of it and consequently to take a political stance. Therefore, in performance, it is not only the event or set of actions that is manipulated and constructed, but the audience must also be taken into account as an integral part of said event.

Expanding on the notion of performative violence, I am particularly interested in the specific strategies and actions that each one of these performances uses in order to promote and bring visibility to the issue of violence against women. Women’s bodies are often seen as cultural spectacle or as commodities, and performers such as Galindo or collectives such as the Spanish GAF tend to expand on the material body as a site of political struggle. In the three performances that I analyze in this chapter, the female bodies speak a language of provocation talking back to the social structures of advanced capitalism that have turned women’s bodies into a commodity and have allowed for violence against women to happen. My analysis draws on Rebecca Schneider’s theory of the explicit female body. For Schneider, the explicit body in performance equals the body of the artist as the stage where social layers of signification are peeled back, unfolding the “social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality” (2-3). Questioning the status quo, explicit body performance offers perspectivism and exposes representational structures of desire in commodity capitalism (3).

Besides the explicit body as described by Schneider, spectators recognize a second one; the implicit body of the oppressed with which they engage in a dialectical relationship. Debra Walker King has introduced the term “body fictions” by which she means the externally defined identities and representations of bodies that women confront daily and that often speak louder than what they know to be their lived experiences (vii). King expands on the insidious role this double standard plays in women’s lives through the idea of conceptual violence: “the violence acted out against the mind and spirit of the individual whose body is gazed upon with such body fictions in mind” (ix). Echoing these theorizations, the performers in the three works analyzed in this chapter use their bodies as a metaphor for the experience of the oppression of women in their native countries. In these bio-political confrontations, in spite of the liminality and the ephemerality of performance art, the body is constructed and manipulated in the sense that it interpellates the audience.

Through the staged use of their bodies and actions or what I call body talk, the performers in these three works convey a message of condemnation of violence against women while engaging the spectators in their cause. Body talk is the staged use of the body to convey meaning. It is a nonverbal, non-discursive form of communication in which the performer’s body brings to life the insidious power of violence against women. Body talk can operate at different levels: in *Golpes*, Galindo unfolds an “implicit body,” producing a “ghostly” effect on spectators by strategically dislocating their sensory experience. In *El dolor en un pañuelo*, Galindo’s explicit body materializes the violence to which women in Guatemala are exposed. Several agencies and organizations such as Amnesty International report that such violence can be extreme. For instance, in the case of femicide, what is most striking is “the way in which murders of women are carried out—with *sana* [hate], as evidenced in the targeted mutilation of

parts of a woman's body that symbolize her femininity, such as her reproductive organs, breasts, and face" (Cited in Godoy-Paiz 91, emphasis in original). In the GAF's *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* (2007), the denunciation of violence is taken to another level by the public performance of protest that, borrowing Rachel Kutz-Flamenbaum terminology, I call performance activism. She has defined performance activism as "a particular kind of performance striving simultaneously to attract and hold attention, and challenging the understandings and expectations of fellow protesters and the general public while, paradoxically, staying within the boundaries of these commonly held understandings and expectations" (91). I contend that the GAF's main objective of making the audience look, inquire, and join their cause, is fully achieved. The GAF uses a similar strategy of dissemination as Galindo, that is to say, a combination of live protest with virtual diffusion. In addition, the GAF's great public visibility was enhanced by key coverage in the press, namely in Spain's biggest newspapers such as *El País* (GAF E-mail).

Galindo's Explicit Body in *El dolor en un pañuelo* (1999)

El dolor en un pañuelo (1999) is Galindo's first performance in which she openly addresses the issue of violence against women in her country by literally projecting a series of sensationalist newspaper articles onto her own naked body. In her own words, "Amarrada a una cama vertical, se proyectan sobre mi cuerpo noticias de violaciones y abusos cometidos en contra de la mujer en Guatemala" ("Tied to a vertical [stage] bed, news of rape and abuses committed against women in Guatemala are projected on my body") (*El dolor*). *El dolor* is a performance that further explores the rhetoric of what Rebecca Schneider calls the explicit body in performance. Galindo uses her body as a staged site of remembrance, in direct contrast to the institutionalized ready-made narratives of violence against women. In doing so, she seems to

illustrate Schneider's observation that explicit body performance "replays the historical drama of gender, race, class [or all at once,] across the body of the artist as stage" (3).

The Guatemalan press in particular since the earlier twentieth-century to the post-war period, has been systematically exploring women through different historical periods.⁷ Susan Sontag has argued that the nonstop imagery of late global capitalism brings about an overload of information and she has examined the way spectators react to such burden. Focusing on photography, Sontag shows that our contemporary camera-mediated knowledge of traumatic and catastrophic events worldwide is anchored in the emergence of photojournalists as professional witnesses.⁸ Globalized suffering "may spur people to feel they ought to 'care' more" while recognizing their powerlessness to stop it, at least by any local political intervention" (77). As archives of horror, the images of mutilated and assassinated women in the Guatemalan media seem to have created a cycle of what Sontag calls the "perpetual recirculation of horror" through continual media display (87). Sarah England concludes that on and before 2008, the Guatemala press was exoticizing women's deaths, using gory photos to sell papers, and blaming them for their own deaths (E-mail).⁹ However, after 2008, and due to the impact of the work of various women's organizations, in tandem with all of the national and international pressure to eradicate femicide from Guatemala, the press stopped such practices.

Referring to the current situation, England observes that the Guatemalan press today is more subtle, even if still engaged in the same type of mentality as before. England finds that what is disturbing in today's reports is what is not said—how many articles do not identify the victim, how very few identify the perpetrator and question the motive for the killing, which is always a guess on the part of the police (E-mail). Decisively, England argues that while there is more inclusion of feminist language and points of view in media reports, these are dwarfed by

the daily barrage of murder reports that, with bare minimum descriptions and very little follow up, leave the Guatemalan public to fill in the blanks with their own interpretations of what is "really" going on (*Systemic Gender Discrimination* 4).¹⁰

In *El dolor*, Galindo embodies the nation by making visible the national culture of spectacle and impunity that feeds itself on women's bodies, their pain, and their suffering. Galindo uses several strategies such as resorting to a rhetoric of visibility, the symbolic appropriation of objects and images that convey a message of being trapped, of no escape associated with Guatemala's late twentieth-century cultural and social history, and promoting a shock effect in the spectators expanding on Brechtian dramaturgy. Brechtian dramaturgy emphasizes the creation of a critical distance between the spectators and the characters allowing for social and political reflection. Instead of spectators trying to identify with the characters, this critical distance or *Verfremdungseffekt* in German, is achieved by having the characters expose the facts, in lieu of dramatizing them (Pavis 117).¹¹ Essentially, Brecht created several scenic solutions with the goal of interrupting the hypnotic effect that fictionalized plays had on spectators during the early 20th century: news boys would sell the latest headlines live in the theatre, in an effort to characterize the contemporary social climate, and he would also use slides with historical pictures, or even songs and posters with slogans that were critical of a particular represented event.

Galindo employs similar techniques to create a strong reaction in the spectators. For instance, Galindo's body is displayed naked standing up against a stage bed with her hands tied up on the bedframe.¹² By displaying her naked body standing against a stage bed with her hands tied, Galindo makes visible a litany of horror and repeats it *ad nauseum* in the form of the images

projected on her naked body. These images are of men, cameras, scandal, and contain key words that add to the sensationalist press effect that Galindo denounces.

Galindo's use of symbolism in this performance continues with her blindfolded eyes and the explicit mention in the performance title of the bed sheet, the shroud, as the object on which the evidence of violence against women lies. The stage bed must be understood both as a place for intimacy, as well as part of the public national geography in a society that constructs women as commodities and objects of men's desire. While drawing on the symbolic value and powerful imagery of a culture that renders women defenseless, Galindo pushes for women's visibility and empowerment by denouncing what is wrong with life in Guatemala. Ultimately, Galindo contests sensationalist accounts of violence against women in Guatemala, literally giving body to what the State and the press, among other social agents, treat as spectacular and statistical events. Discrediting what the press sensationalizes as spectacle, Galindo's body stands for the women that have lost everything, their lives, bodies, right to speak or contest such aberrant representations of violence against women. Ultimately, Galindo literally gives body to what other social agents such as the State and the press seek to suppress or demonize. Women hurt by femicide and gender violence are not statistics, but rather real people with full rights to subjecthood and an identity. Most of all, gender victims have the right to matter and that is precisely what Galindo's work validates.

Galindo's exposed naked body in *El dolor*, even though not obviously displaying signs of foul play, nevertheless stands out in the open for the national body, as Guatemala's own social body unveiled and displayed for criticism. In *El dolor* Galindo uses a rhetoric of visibility in which resorting to the projection of news articles on Guatemalan violence against women literally displays the horror and shows how the press repeats it *ad nauseum*. She is a bodily live

advertisement in which images of men, the cameras, the scandal, certain words like “ultrajes” [insults], “violaciones” [violations], “violaciones sexuales” [rape], “asesinan” [murder], and “cuerpo” [body] take central stage. Following the steps of several women’s organizations in Guatemala, and even though Galindo criticizes the press for perpetuating and sensationalizing violence against women, she recognizes the media’s potential for creating public awareness when judiciously employed. The overall objective is to encourage victims and perpetrators to denaturalize the violence, and to encourage the State to take action. For instance, Godoy-Paiz reports how several women’s organizations argue that “violence against women needs to be made visible, but not simply in displaying dead bodies and giving gory details which only serv[e] to terrify the population and send the message that women should stay in the “safe” space of the home” (*Systemic Gender Discrimination* 44). Rather, there is the need to “inform the public about the larger issues, and empower [citizens] to take action[,] whether as individual[s] reporting a crime, or the State in changing laws” (*Systemic Gender Discrimination* 44-5). Performance art such as Galindo’s *El dolor* can also play a role in bringing awareness to the issue of violence against women, while criticizing the lack of effective solutions to address and eradicate said violence.

The language in the projected media articles revolves around the instrumentalization or *cosificación* of women as bodies and objects of both violent crimes and public scrutiny. A good way to analyze this performance is to tackle several of the press’s titles. For example, “Treinta violaciones in sólo dos meses” (“Thirty rapes in only two months”) is one of the titles projected on Galindo’s exposed body core that directly plays into the national obsession with quantifying crimes, particularly crimes against women. Even though such practices as quantifying crimes can be read as part of a denunciatory process, the fact that these practices are embedded in the

national culture of impunity and spectacle renders them ineffective. This title--“Treinta violaciones in sólo dos meses” (“Thirty rapes in only two months”)--in particular is accompanied by an image portraying a public scene where mostly men, a camera, and a public barrier are depicted, with the barrier highlighted in yellow light at the level of Galindo’s pubis. The effect is shocking because it illustrates how, in this same culture of masculine domination and naturalized violence, the deep wounds on Guatemala’s social fabric such as femicide emerge. Another title, “Asesinan a mujer/ Dejan cuerpo en Planes de Minerva” (“Woman murdered / Body left at Minerva’s Heights”) frames the crime of femicide by referring to a victim who is nothing more than a mere body, with no name, no face, no subjectivity, pointing out only that her body was left lying in a particular part of the city. A different title, “Violaciones sexuales deben ser tipificadas” (“Sexual Rape should be typified”) expresses a critique of some weak attempts at regulation and of stopping the impunity; in Guatemala, only in 2008 anti-femicide laws were passed, responding to the need to further prevent this phenomenon from becoming a national calamity. Perhaps what Galindo was pointing out by choosing this specific title was the then already felt need in 1999 to further study, prevent, and legislate anticipating the need to prevent violent crimes against women.

Galindo’s usage of newspaper articles projected on stage is a common Brechtian dramaturgy resource, even though the fact that those articles are projected on her naked body is less common. She leaves room in her performance for spectators to understand how close and intimate the issue of violence against women has become in Guatemala. Galindo employs this technique to show the audience how pervasive this violence against women is, promoting identification and an affective spectatorship. Instead of merely disrupting the national discourse on the inevitability of violence and the impossibility of prosecuting the perpetrators, affective

spectatorship suggests that personally every spectator can relate to the experience of violence through emotions, sensations and feelings strategically provoked by staged events. By forcing spectators, particularly Guatemalans, to experience the intimacy of their homes assailed by continuous violence, mimicked on stage, Galindo is pushing them to recognize how scary it is to cohabit with violence against women. Because violence is everywhere, insidious and pervasive, this performance suggests there is no escape from it, not even at the inner space of home since the national body is porous and can easily assimilate what seems to be just on the outside.

In *El dolor*, the primary focus is on the body. On stage, Galindo focuses on the bed and insists on dismantling the complicated national relationship with women and the effects of sexualizing their representation. Embodying the Guatemalan nation, Galindo's body stands for the closeness and the pervasiveness that violence against women has on all Guatemalan women, and shows how defenseless they all are when facing a national culture that actually naturalizes this violence and confirms women's primary role as gender victims. Consequently, Galindo's body is both object and subject. As object, it is part of the setting, a means to clearly display the message that violence against women has reached record-breaking numbers and should be stopped at any cost. As a stage prop, her body is framed by the bed sheet that symbolizes Galindo's pain as a woman in Guatemala, for all women can potentially become victims of rape, torture, mutilation, and homicide. Consequently, her body is the shroud that encapsulates Guatemala's national suffering, for a nation where half its population is in danger is nothing but a body in pain. Nevertheless, as a subject, her body signifies how one woman makes visible the threat and the pain that are unavoidable for all women in Guatemala, thus becoming a powerful political statement in opposition to violence against women.

Galindo's goal is to bring public reality—violence against women—to the stage by affirming the historical dimension of this issue through narrative elements such as slide projection, tied hands, and blindfolded eyes. Galindo's hands tied to the bedframe might suggest her entrapment and powerlessness, particularly when combined with her blindfolded eyes and the exposure of her body. However, Galindo's self-affliction conveys a powerful image denouncing the nation's own subjection to violence through its inability to address the disastrous impact it has on half of its inhabitants, the women. In spite of the national mentality that makes commodities out of women, as violence against women becomes as common as furniture, Galindo makes visible what lies between the gender lines and the double standards. Galindo's blindfolded eyes, for instance, clearly evoke the standard figure of blind justice, a symbol for impartial rule of law. In spite of this common assumption, it is Galindo's eyes that are blindfolded, so by extension it is Guatemala herself as a nation that is refusing to see what is clearly evident: that violence against women, like all violence, derives from the same culture of impunity that sees women as victims and deserving of such brutal and extreme forms of social control.

In Galindo's *El dolor* the intended effect of awakening the spectators' consciousness is achieved by other means than promoting an emotional distance from the facts enacted and embodied on stage, such as in Brechtian dramaturgy. Nonetheless, Galindo's staging of the spectacle of violence against women employs several techniques that might also be understood as "didactic" since her goal is to obtain a reaction from the spectators. Brechtian theater was pedagogic in the sense that it offered the spectators the opportunity to creatively engage with the narrated events in a critical manner. Like in Brechtian dramaturgy, Galindo focuses on a public topic and even though there is no narrator to guide the spectators through their own history, her

focus on one fragmentary scene of the more complex situation of women in Guatemala can be understood as a component of a coherent whole lived daily in Guatemala. Galindo's expansion on Brechtian dramaturgy in *El dolor* has a dual effect: on one hand Galindo promotes sympathy for the victims by embodying Guatemalan women's defenselessness; and on the other hand, she categorically refutes pity and holds the spectators accountable for their scopophilic practices and for their role in naturalizing violence against women and accepting impunity as the accepted practice, in spite of the law of the land. Ultimately, and much like in Brechtian dramaturgy, Galindo's *El dolor* leaves an open ending, making it possible for spectators to take a stand and fill purposely in the blanks.

Galindo's Body Talk: Performing Femicide in Guatemala

Galindo's *279 Golpes (279 Blows)* is an example of performance art that facilitates communal gathering around lived experiences and empowers a possible desubjectivization through the performer's female body.¹³ By "desubjectivization" I mean a process by which the individual becomes aware of the internalization of negative stereotypes. This often leads to the rejection of assigned social scripts based on very sophisticated power struggles and dominance. Galindo's body talk is a message of resistance to the annihilation of Guatemalan women through femicide. She gives the victims a voice and forces the audience to listen.

Galindo's *Golpes* is a sound performance in which the performer is "enclosed in a cubicle giving herself a blow for each murdered woman in Guatemala from the 1st of January to the 9th of June of that year" (Galindo 2009). Although the spectators cannot see the performer, through sound amplification the audience can listen to everything that takes place in her self-imposed confinement. Initially, spectators enter a room in semidarkness, and the only information that is shared with them through the printed program is that the performance work that they are about to

engage with has to do with the women murdered in Guatemala; they also learn that the performer has chosen to be incarcerated in a cubicle so that no one can see her while she gives herself a lash with a whip for each woman murdered so that her cries and moans will be amplified. The performance unfolds with a spotlight focusing on Galindo's cubicle, while her self-sacrifice, embodied through sound, progresses in a crescendo. I suggest that *Golpes* can be read both as an effort to prevent violence against women through consciousness raising and as a possibility for communal healing. Galindo's strategic manipulation of the scenario provokes the spectators to go beyond empathizing with the victims. After viewing the performance, spectators are encouraged to rewrite history from a new, informed position. The effect of "being there" and "being part of" the performance is a call for action to the spectators as social agents.

In *Golpes*, Galindo provides a shared collective space for producing an anti-scenario. According to Diana Taylor, scenarios are "meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential out-comes" (28). Gina Sandi-Diaz suggests that "anti-scenarios" challenge and subvert everything that scenarios stand for. Whereas "scenarios are meant to reproduce the status quo [. . .] anti-scenarios are meant to deconstruct the social order" (30). In the context of violence as spectacle, Galindo's *Golpes* functions paradoxically as both a scenario and an anti-scenario. It is a scenario of violence against women in contemporary Guatemala in that it acts out women's acquiescence to the social discourses that cause them pain and suffering. On the other hand, it is an anti-scenario because it opposes women's self-punishment and self-blame and thus seeks to deconstruct their complicity with the dominant *machista* social order.

On the political level, Galindo's piece must be approached as a violent work of art that is aimed at raising awareness of violence against women. Galindo's manipulation of the spectators'

expectations is a political choice to not allow feasting on the victims' suffering. It is an ethical decision to stop the appropriation of the bodies and identities of the victims of femicide by the media and by society at large. For the spectators it is of course doubtful whether anyone is inside the cubicle on stage since they never see Galindo going into or out of it. And even if she really is in there, the spectators can doubt that she is, in fact, inflicting pain on herself, for they never see her body.

Galindo's *Golpes* embodies violence against women without repeating its expected frame of representation. Instead, Galindo provides spectators a blank canvas that screams and moans to her own personal rhythm. Her attempt to shock the spectators out of their stupor is an implicit invitation to react genuinely. By consciously reacting to the naturalization of violence against women, spectators are offered an alternative to the media's consumerist manipulation of victims and exploitation of sentiment. Essentially, Galindo encourages the spectators to act in order to prevent this perpetuation of violence from continuing. Galindo chooses to use her body as a staged site of remembrance as well as a place of consciousness raising. Her work says to spectators, "Wake up!"

The body talk in Galindo's *Golpes* is an expressive semiotics of the body that promotes the strategic dislocation of the spectators' sensory experience. *Golpes* articulates pain and suffering and raises awareness of the unmentioned and unobjectifiable aspects of women's experience of violence, promoting an open dialogue with the audience. Galindo uses her body as a metaphor for women's experience of oppression, but since the spectators do not see her perform, the effect is a profound shaking of the foundations of their understanding of gendered domination. Rebecca Schneider argues that the body-made-explicit has become "the mise-en-scène for a variety of feminist artists" and describes the artistic processes by which the bodies of

the performers unfold, “peel[ing] back layers of signification that surround their bodies like ghosts at a grave” (2).¹⁴ Accordingly, Galindo’s *Golpes* unfolds an “implicit body,” producing a “ghostly” effect on spectators by strategically dislocating their sensory experience from the visual to the aural.

Does live sound have the same impact as the live image? Is listening the same as seeing? Can sound by itself bring with it the lived experience of the human body that makes meaning possible? Martin Welton’s detailed account of his experience of “theatre in the dark” explores the unsettling effect of being immersed in total darkness: “The sound seems ‘solid’ somehow [. . .] As hearing replaces sight as the primary sense, there’s a struggle to endow what [one hears] with the same concreteness as the seen” (147).¹⁵ In comparison, Galindo’s cries as she inflicts pain on herself can be equally “thick” and “solid,” although it is not darkness that creates the effect in this case. Welton observes in his experience of Shakespearean theater in the dark that there were other performed sounds in the room, which “[reminded him] of the very realness of flesh and heighten[ed] the horrors of battle,” and are relevant for contesting the common idea that knowledge is dominated by vision (148).¹⁶ It is important to keep in mind the differences among the senses in the way they work.¹⁷ Taylor suggests that witnessing a live event can transfer more knowledge in that it requires the “presence” of the spectator, the engagement of all of our senses (20). With her performance, Galindo entices the spectators to witness and participate in an uncanny and ambivalent artwork.

In *Golpes*, several strategies combine to produce the performance and to inform the spectators’ production of meaning: the use of a whip, the spotlight focused on her cubicle, the sound and vocal effects, the room’s semi-darkness, the studied décor or setting, and her absent/“present” body. How effective is Galindo’s staged pointing-the-finger at violence against

women if her aching body is not seen? According to Severino João Albuquerque, physical nonverbal violence can be communicated through a combination of staged effects. Drawing on Sherman Stanage's work, Albuquerque argues that nonverbal violence must be "situated," assigned to a site of utterance with which specific phenomena are associated (72–73). Staged nonverbal violence effects range from the visual to the gestural, the kinesic, and the proxemic. Although nonverbal violence is typically enacted on the performer's body, it may also employ props, décor, lighting, music, and sound effects.

In *Golpes*, the whip remains invisible throughout the performance, and, as Albuquerque reminds us in other contexts, "the less identifiable with injury the artifact, [. . .] the stronger its impact" (99).¹⁸ Precisely because spectators never see it and are instead informed of its existence by a note in the event program and later by the sound effects identifiable with its use, the whip is highly suggestive and aggressive, contributing to the atmosphere of pain and suffering that is crucial to the work.

Lighting also contributes to the atmosphere of torture in *Golpes*. The spotlight aimed at the blank cubicle wall can be read, in Albuquerque's terms, as circumscribing an area in which "intimidations, interrogations, solitary confinement, and torture sessions take place" (106). In *Golpes*, there is both solitary confinement and self-torture. Because the room is dark except for the spotlight and the light bulb backstage, the spectators are led to focus on the victim. Galindo's body is shielded from sight, but spotlighting the exact location of her self-imposed infliction of pain may intensify the effect on spectators. Thus Galindo calls attention to the victims of femicide instead of merely displaying their raped, mutilated, and murdered bodies. It is the victims and their particular suffering that receive the emphasis, not the spectators' pleasure in feasting their eyes on their abused remains. This strategy of avoiding direct violence and refusing

to engage in certain sensationalist practices can, nonetheless contradict the overall effectiveness of *El dolor*. Notwithstanding, the feeling of discomfort and uneasiness provoked by this performance causes spectators to see beyond the gruesome representations in the media that have turned the public into desensitized consumers. Instead of buying into the story of women's victimization, spectators are asked to make sense of it all by taking a critical stance.

Galindo constructs a performance that feels uncomfortable and challenges spectators' expectations through the sound effects produced onstage, a crescendo of suffering sounds that range from rhythmic moaning to clear and abrupt manifestations of pain. These effects, perceived as if offstage, play with spectators' sympathy for the victim. Albuquerque indicates that in contemporary Latin American theater "the vast majority of the sound effects used to indicate violence are produced offstage" (111). The sound effects in Galindo's *Golpes* are ambiguous. They take place onstage, in the cubicle, but since the spectators cannot see their source (and what they hear could even be a recorded tape) they can also be regarded as happening offstage. As a staged sound effect manipulated as the embodiment of the reality of the victims of femicide, this human voice in great distress can be considered either part of an archive, or part of a repertoire.¹⁹ As archival material, the staged sound functions as a testimonial element, a personal nonverbal narrative of pain and abuse that immediately provokes a response in the spectators. Similar to a visual projection, the sound effects illustrate and represent the victims' pain causing a significant level of shock, and it may contribute to a permanent record of an acknowledged reality. As part of a repertoire, *Golpes'* ephemeral character as a live performance event makes it an act of transfer between the performer and the audience. Metonymically, Galindo's voice stands for the body of evidence of femicide in Guatemala and acts out its disarticulation in a way that will leave no spectator indifferent.

Another important nonverbal element that conveys violence in *Golpes* is the setting. The cubicle not only signifies Galindo's lack of freedom, but also serves as a physical impediment to the spectators' full sensory experience by not allowing them to see what is taking place inside it. Albuquerque calls attention to the fact that "the impact on the audience may be far more potent when no torture is actually carried out onstage and the strong impression of violence is elicited by the view of the portentous setting as a whole" (116).²⁰ Not seeing Galindo's tortured body, but listening to her cries of pain, makes the ordeal of women's victimization in femicide more prominent and unavoidable. The cubicle chosen for her confinement can evoke the image of a torture chamber, while providing a blank wall on which the spectators are urged to assist the artist in rewriting Guatemala's recent history, rescuing from oblivion the very women that the media displays as abject and unimportant. A blank wall is a clear invitation to creative participation by the spectators.

At the same time, the cubicle serves as a barrier between what the spectators are allowed to see and what they are not. Ironically, Galindo's cubicle resembles a box, inviting its interpretation as a cry against compartmentalized lives in an urban setting characterized by boxy structures, ready-made products packaged in neat containers, and isolation from neighbors and fellow human beings. For many, the final resting place for eternity is also in a box buried several meters underground: a coffin. Galindo's moans and cries thus might evoke the voices of the women victims who have been buried in common graves, indistinct, abject, and robbed of their identity.²¹

Performance Activism: The Global Effect of *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?*

In 2003, Galindo made ground-breaking history in Guatemala with her performance *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* This performance, in which Galindo walks from Guatemala's

National Congress building to the National Palace of Justice, dipping her bare feet at intervals in a white receptacle full of human blood, is a vigorous protest against the presidential candidacy of Guatemala's former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt. Galindo's protest quickly became known worldwide. In 2007, the Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista (GAF) from Seville, Spain, inspired by Galindo's work and motivations, planned and staged a public protest on the occasion of the yearly public demonstration celebrating International Women's Day on March 8. This protest was in support of the Spanish Constitutional Court's upholding of the constitutionality of the Law Against Gender Violence with a 7 to 5 vote, a decision which caused great controversy nationwide.

Profound legal and political changes took place in Spain after the re-election of Prime Minister José Rodríguez Zapatero in 2008. As Margarita León contends: "the merit of these legal and political changes cannot be underestimated in the country where not long ago women's rights were subordinate in law to those of men" (59).²² León's research on the efficacy and *de facto* impact of such legislative efforts in real life conditions for men and women in Spain leads her to conclude that even though institutional progress is fundamental in advancing the equality agenda, substantive equality is still elusive. Throughout Spanish history, discrimination against women has taken many shapes; in the present, crimes such as rape and femicide are considered catastrophic. The implementation of the above mentioned legislative measures has proved to be much harder than drafting them, since certain social agents, such as the conservatives and the Catholic Church, questioned the constitutionality, and thus the legitimacy of various aspects of the *Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género* (Organic Act 1/2004 of 28 December on Comprehensive Measures against Gender Violence). For example, the Spanish Right had a hard time making room in the national

judicial system for the Courts for Violence Against Women (*Juzgados de Violencia Sobre la Mujer*), specialized criminal courtrooms established by the Organic Law 1/2004 as a necessary measure to protect women from violence. Even though the creation of these courts was founded and strongly supported by several national women's organizations, numerous professionals within the judicial system thought that it violated the principle of equality as established in the Spanish Constitution.²³ After several magistrates and conservative institutions had challenged the constitutionality of the Organic Law for the Prevention of Violence Against Women, the Constitutional Court ruled for its legality, upholding the legislator's initial intention of implementing more progressive policies in Spain.

It was in this context that, after formally securing Galindo's permission to emulate her performance, the GAF invited another women's organization from Granada to join its members in a public protest in opposition to violence against women. This protest was called *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* (GAF E-mail). Adapting Galindo's performance to the Spanish context, the GAF created an elaborated formal action that had the ability to mobilize participation. Street spectators were welcome to join the activity spontaneously and without long-term commitment. Thus, the GAF's strategy of performance activism brings violence's denunciation to another level, taking it to the streets, and to the internet, through virtual dissemination. In addition, the GAF's great public visibility was enhanced by key coverage in the press, namely in Spain's biggest newspapers such as *El País* (GAF E-mail).

During the staging of *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?*, the GAF used a variety of strategies, including the employment of costumes and prompts, which served as an identifying marker for the group and their cause. As they walked down Seville's main arteries, all the women and their supporters were dressed in black, symbolizing mourning for women victims.

The GAF's members resorted to the embodiment of pain, suffering and violence through the use of blood as they carried with them basins of water dyed with red pigment. At regular intervals, the women would stop, dip their feet in the red liquid, and continue walking leaving behind parallel rows of red footprints or *huellas* as clear physical manifestations of the violence, the event, and the protest.

About the employment of red dye as blood, Silvia Molina Castaño, the GAF's spokesperson, further elucidates that she and her partners “usa[ron] una tintura roja sobre agua, investiga[ron] varias hasta que di[eron] con una que era en densidad lo más similar a la sangre real. Cogi[eron] de [sus] casas barreños, y [se] descalza[ron] los pies al principio de la manifestación. [Iban] todas vestidas de negro” (E-mail). (“used a water soluble red dye, tried several until we found one that was closest to real blood in density. Got basins from their houses, and went barefoot at the beginning of the demonstration. They were all dressed in black”). Molina Castaño clarifies that “...éramos solo mujeres. Entre 10-12 más o menos entre grupo de Sevilla y grupo de Granada. No todas estábamos haciendo la performance a la vez, algunas nos acompañaban y apoyaban y otras se turnaban para participar” (E-mail). (“...we were just women. Between 10 to 12, more or less, comprising the members from both groups, Seville and Granada. Not all of us were doing the performance at the same time, some were just walking by us and supporting us, and others took turns participating”).

Even though the staging of the protest action was minimal, the GAF's treatment of violence was explicit and very successful in engaging the spectators, some of whom joined in. The blood red liquid in the basins constitutes a direct reference not only to the blood shed by women victims of violence, but also Spain's continuing history with this issue. The footprints or *huellas* left behind in the wake of the street protest are an undeniable sign of the violence's

contemporary persistence, and the GAF's need to go beyond raising spectators' awareness is understandable. On the importance of leaving a trace behind them, Molina Castaño explains that for her and her companions, "las huellas representan todas las formas de violencia contra las mujeres" (GAF E-mail). ("the footprints represent all forms of violence against women"). I would add that blood as a particular sign of violence, and the embodiment of violence that blood invokes, contribute to render this performance highly effective when compared to other similar events. Bodily fluids, even as stage prompts, have an undeniable impact because they engage spectators through sensory response.²⁴ Individual spectators' reactions might differ, but no one escapes reacting to the employment of blood, particularly in public events. The fact that this action takes place in a public space, and during a demonstration, emphasizes the ritualistic action undertaken by the GAF.

Taking protest to the streets makes it public and enhances the possibility for collective action. Arvind Singhal and Karen Greiner write that

performance can be broadly construed as a public spectacle which, depending on what is being performed, draws in a citizen audience, allowing them possibilities to engage with its multiple elements in a manner of their own choosing. Performances may be designed to create spaces for reflection, consideration of new possibilities, or sometimes even evoke a 'preferred' reading. (2)

The GAF's protest action not only calls attention to the specific issue of violence against women, denouncing a variety of injustices, but most importantly offers the possibility of community building and adhesion to a common cause. Ultimately, the effect of the GAF's action, like all performance activism, is the promotion of active and engaged citizenship. The GAF's members clarify that for them

Nuestro luto y las huellas son una muestra de nuestro dolor y nuestra indignación. Nos vestimos de negro porque la violencia de género nos implica, como parte de una sociedad sexista, nos sentimos también impotentes y corresponsables en la medida en que reproducimos y normalizamos relaciones de maltrato. No se trata tanto de un sentimiento de culpa como de un llamamiento y una reflexión a la complicidad y la tolerancia que renueva el sexismo, lo actualiza y continúa reproduciendo relaciones de poder, jerárquicas y violentas. Este acto es para nosotras y es público, para la gente que nos manifestamos ese día y para la que encontramos a nuestro paso (GAF E-mail).

(our mourning and footprints are a sign of our pain and our indignation. We dress in black because gender violence implicates us; as part of a sexist society, we also feel powerless and co-responsible in the sense that we reproduce and normalize abusive relationships. It is not so much a feeling of guilt as a call and a reflection to the complicity and the tolerance that renews sexism, actualizes it, and continues to reproduce power relations that are hierarchical and violent. This act [performance] is for ourselves and is public, for the people that like us joined the demonstration that day and for the ones we meet on our way).

Through the event's coverage in the print and electronic media, the GAF's performance reached politicians, non-protesting sympathizers, individuals who were neutral, and obviously opponents to protesters' actions and political views. This double level of interaction is a key factor in performance activism, where the lines between performers and observers are increasingly blurred, leading to increased participation and potential expansion of the GAF and its ideals. Molina Castaño recalls that "desde el primer momento todos los medios de comunicación, fotógrafos/as, etc., empezaron a retratarnos. Luego las imágenes salieron en

muchos periódicos, tv, tanto autonómicos como nacionales” (E-mail). (“from the first moment, all the media, photographers, etc., started to take pictures of us. Then the images came out in many newspapers and TV, both regional and national”). For instance, *El País* published a whole article on May 15, 2008, connecting the recent controversy regarding violence against women and the Spanish Constitutional Court’s upholding of the constitutionality of the Law Against Gender Violence to the GAF’s Seville performance, under the title “El Constitucional avala un castigo más duro para el maltratador varón – La Ley de Violencia de Género, aprobada por siete a cinco, fractura el tribunal” (Lázaro). (“The [Spanish] Constitutional [Court] guarantees a harder sanction for male batterers – The Gender Violence Law, approved by seven to five votes, breaks the court”). Having repeated the same performance also in Seville on November 25, 2007, International Day for Celebrating the Eradication of Violence Against Women, the GAF posted more photographs and a note on its website, further increasing their protest’s visibility via the world wide web (“Performance”).

The key objective of performance activism is to make the audience look, inquire, and join the cause. The GAF’s success can thus be measured by the high degree of visibility, media attention, and the popularity that demonstrations like *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* received. Consequently, the group could have seen a rapid growth of its membership as well as supporters’ base. The GAF has been able to attract public attention, but paradoxically, and echoing Kutz-Flamenbaum’s definition of performance activism, the group has decided to maintain its membership both in the Seville and the Granada chapters at the 2007 levels in order to “[stay] within the boundaries of these [of fellow protesters and the general public’s] commonly held understandings and expectations” (91). Given the successful scenario of the GAF’s performance activism, however, it is possible that in the future street protest will further

complement the cyberfeminist actions and the empowerment of women that is already happening virtually in the Spanish-speaking world.

The Ethical Implications of Bringing Violence Against Women On Stage

In this chapter, I have analyzed three performances by, or inspired by the work, of Regina José Galindo. Following a chronological order, I have analyzed how the performances *El dolor en un pañuelo* (1999), *279 Golpes* (2005), and *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* (2007) address specific issues regarding violence against women and reenact distinct levels of violence, from implicit to explicit. I have argued that each performance has a different treatment of violence and employs distinct strategies; however, together these performances present a complex and multifaceted view of violence against women, of the problems inherent in representing that violence, and of the ethical questions those representations raise. In addition, these performances' ultimate goal is audience engagement and activism.

Galindo's clever manipulation of the representation of violence in *Golpes* is an example of the way body talk is performative and can deconstruct the voyeuristic media-mediated gaze on violence that is so frequent in Guatemala. My particular interest in explicit body performance and visibility strategies in performance lead me to question the implications of embodying violence against women through a female performer's body on stage. Is the performer's goal the gratuitous engagement of spectators in obtaining gratuitous pleasure in viewing her victimized and suffering body? Or rather is Galindo's goal to empower viewers through direct confrontation with certain insidious practices existing in Guatemalan society? Mary Russo asked the question "in what sense can women really produce or make spectacles out of themselves?" (17). Pertinent to my investigation into violence against women in Guatemala through performance art is an

understanding that Galindo and other performers have strategic control over the way in which they use the female body and resort to certain violent practices in their performance events.

In *El dolor*, for instance, Galindo uses media articles projected on her naked exposed body to shine a light on gender violence. In *Golpes*, due to the impossibility of language to fully articulate the pain and the suffering of women victims of femicide, she uses a different strategy embodying violence and suffering that are unmentionable and often silenced. In *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?*, the GAF's decision to mimic a previous performance by Galindo using blood-like dye is part of their strategic employment of prompts to protest against gender violence in Spain and the institutions and people that refuse to acknowledge that said violence is pervasive nationally.

Recreating violence through the woman's staged body has the effect of shocking the spectators and promoting a personal experience. Galindo's goal and the goal of the performers she inspired is to go beyond mere awareness and to provoke participation and civic engagement. Even though performing violence can cause an ethical dilemma to the performer and the audience, the strategies each artist employs to distance their staged work from real life situations—for example, the GAF's employment of blood-like red liquid instead of real blood—differ immensely. It is difficult to represent violence without recreating its dynamics and making a productive spectacle out of it. In order to avoid creating sympathy for the perpetrators' point of view, performance events must necessarily engage in the deconstruction and the dismantling of such hegemonic narratives and allow for the visibility of what is normally hidden by fear and suspicion (Taylor "Disappearing Bodies" 150). A more productive line of inquiry is considering the role of spectatorship in staged violence.

How and when do spectators become witnesses? And how does witnessing become a critical stance, if it does? Witnessing is a complex process of negotiation rich with interpretive nuances, which facilitate the establishment of an ethical position as citizens decide to support or subvert societies' officially accepted narratives. The explicit body performances that I have analyzed invite the public to protect women from gender specific violence, by denouncing it. Freddie Rokem calls attention to the need for citizens to revise their positions as active and engaged witnesses, both as performance spectators and as participants or observers of the world in which they live. Rokem believes that the ethical consequences of media-mediated knowledge are pertinent to a reconsideration of witnessing. Since the knowledge individuals have about how the world is, is mediated by professional witnesses such as journalists and photojournalists, there is a need to examine the way witnessing protocols have come into being and how they inform our role as spectators of performance events. Rokem argues that "the function of the witness in performance is to undo this ignorance through the investigative protocols of witnessing" (169). By this he means that, as in Bertolt Brecht's account of a traffic accident in terms of the epic theater model, "bystander-spectators who have not seen the accident itself, thus become secondary witnesses to [that] event, [in turn] watching and listening to the eyewitnesses" (169). Thus, in performance, spectators bear witness to the unraveling of the performer's tale, which in turn is a rendering of an event witnessed by others and rendered "objective" by the media.

For instance, in *El dolor*, the experience proposed to the spectators not only turns them into witnesses, but most significantly renders visible the pernicious intimacy that violence against women has to gender norms and societal expectations in Guatemala. Violence against women, in this particular case, is not just something that happens next door and that Guatemalans watch in silent fear; rather it is present on every corner and street, at home and in

national public spaces. In *Golpes*, through Galindo's embodiment, spectators are invited to participate collectively in the sensory lived experience of pain and trauma reenacted. In *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?*, the GAF's embodiment of violence and the trail this protest leaves behind excludes mere witnessing without participating. No viewer can be indifferent to the clear invocation of Spanish history and its violence against women, particularly in the present.

Parallel to the escalation of violence in these three performances, there is an equal effort towards materializing the embodiment that violence sustains. In *El dolor*, the materialization process occurs between the realms of the figurative and the judiciary as the bed shroud on which Galindo lies embodies the burden of proof of violence against women. Juxtaposing the past and the present, the shroud is more than a religious symbol for women's suffering; it is a physical trace of what is left to do in Guatemala in terms of serious police inquiries and unbiased prosecutions. Ironically, its blank nature as a page in history that remains to be written can be read as a sign of hope. In *Golpes*, little is left behind but the haunting impression of witnessing first-hand the suffering of Guatemala's femicide victims that Galindo chooses to represent. Furthermore, in *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?*, materialization reaches the highest point as the physical traces of violence, the *huellas*, are left behind on Seville's main streets. Collective signs such as these *huellas*, markedly exposed on the public arena, have the strongest appeal when it comes to attracting spectators and making engaged participants out of each one of them. Overall, and even though these performance art initiatives might not be considered sufficient to effectively address a solution, they nevertheless support the fact that both Galindo and the GAF's work is highly successful in confronting engrained beliefs and practices in their contemporary nations and promoting global resistance to current neoliberal processes of women's subjectification through violence.

Notes

¹ Fregoso and Bejarano contend that the conditions that gave rise to femicide in Guatemala are “the legacy of military violence, the failure of the legal system, and a historical structure of impunity and systemic discrimination” (32). They estimate that “more than thirty-five hundred women and girls have experienced brutal forms of violence in the post-conflict period” (32).

² I prefer to use the term “femicide,” which for several scholars implies the perpetrators’ accountability, and not just the compounding of circumstances that lead to the victims’ suffering. For instance, for Sanford “femicide,” being a more political term than “ficide,” encompasses better the role of institutions and structures of power in the killing of women in the Guatemalan context (62). In addition, Bueno-Hansen argues that “femicide” is an “empowered term” and that a strategic focus on the universality of violence against women has made possible the de-normalization of that violence (292). At the heart of a theory of femicide is the heated debate that has arisen among specialists with regard to “the divergence between the drive to generalize for social impact and the push to specify for juridical utility” (Bueno-Hansen 307).

³ For more on the origins and causes of femicide in Guatemala, see Carey, and Torres.

⁴ For more on the evolution of performance art in Guatemala, see Pérez-Ratton. On the emergence of a new way of doing art in post-war Guatemala, mainly performance and installation, see Toledo and Acevedo. On the work of specific Guatemalan female performers, including Galindo, see Toledo.

⁵ According to Castillo, “A pesar de su carácter local, la pieza tuvo un impacto mediático inesperado” (“In spite of its local nature, this piece had an unexpected media impact”) (n/p). For a more detailed description of this particular Galindo performance, *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (2003) see Castillo’s full article in SalonKritik.net.

⁶ Similarly, Artaud argues that the playwright faces an ethical quandary when representing torture on stage. If the representation is deemed too realistic, it may be read as exploitative; if it is not realistic enough, then the effect will be feeble, evasive, or sentimental (85).

⁷ See Godoy-Paiz for more on the history of the Guatemalan press’s exploration of women.

⁸ Sontag contends that “the memory of war, [...] like all memory, is mostly local” and that “the horrid photographs that document violence and traumas past have meaning for the construction of local and regional identities. Photography generates documents that anchor knowledge production and creates works of visual art that convey individual aesthetic expression: “Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!” (35).

⁹ In her latest research, England analyzes how women’s organizations and NGOs played a fundamental role after 2008 in changing how the Guatemalan press depicted female victims of violent crimes. Even though there are still few serious studies on the role of the press in the national culture, England has analyzed three Guatemalan newspapers, *Nuestro Diario*, *La Prensa Libre*, and *La Hora* from 2009-2014. Her primary focus is on murder reports, reports of men put on trial for femicide and/or violence against women, rape reports and *reportajes* [coverage] on the problem of violence against women in general.

¹⁰ Even though the reporters are not saying directly that they blame the victim, there are very subtle ways in which such an assumption is suggested; for instance, by the few details that are given. The emphasis is placed on the crime and the circumstances in which it occurred as if the victim predisposed her own dismissal by going against certain social mandates (not walking out alone at night, wearing revealing or fitted clothes, etc). In addition, since there is very little follow up to these crimes, then the audience has to fill in the gaps or use the "public imaginary" to guess who these women were in life, what their relation to the killer was, what was the motive for the killing, etc. (England E-mail).

¹¹ Some of the techniques that Brecht advocated for in his Epic Theater as a mean to create a V effect or critical distance for the spectator include resorting to an on-stage narrator, who becomes omnipresent, but never or rarely takes places in the action; a simplified non-realist setting, using advertisements or other visual forms that frequently interrupt or summarize the action; the use of music that clashes with what is happening on stage, typically by conveying an emotion contrary to the one promoted on stage; employment of defamiliarization techniques as a means to break the fourth wall, often by having the actors directly interpellating the audience out of character and playing multiple roles; frequent usage of the *gestus* or the physical attitude and gestures that the character represents independently of the text or plot with the goal of creating surprise and estrangement in the spectators. See Jameson for more on Brechtian dramaturgy's strategies and philosophy.

¹² It is no coincidence that eight years later, in 2007 Galindo, eight months pregnant, would perform *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* (*While they are free*), tied to a campaign bed with human umbilical cords, in a similar position, denouncing the mass rapes suffered by Guatemalan women during the war. While tying women up for rape, torture, and mutilation was part of the

soldiers' counterinsurgency strategy, many women perished, lost children, and became heavily traumatized by such practices. Considering Galindo's later work, the same gesture of being tied up as a woman is a sign of being rendered defenseless and powerless, which was already present in Galindo's 1999 performance *El dolor*.

¹³ The concept of "lived experience" comes from de Lauretis, who sees it as the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed (159).

¹⁴ Thus, "bringing ghosts to visibility, [such performers] are interested to expose not an ordinary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves" (Schneider 2).

¹⁵ In addition, Welton explains that "darkness also meant that the familiar visual cues, which would have allowed an audience to remind themselves that they were attending theatre, were withdrawn" (146).

¹⁶ In a culture dominated by visual images, performance like "theater in the dark" can disrupt the primacy of vision as the primordial sense of experience and knowledge. For instance, Welton's description of the "chilling" effect of feeling someone brushing against his shoulder corroborates his observation that his senses were "thrown off-balance" (146).

¹⁷ For example, Welton claims that, in contrast to vision, "touch and hearing do not offer continuity" (152). In effect, in touching or hearing "things and events have little duration ontologically; they come into being as sounds or feelings and disappear just as quickly" (152). Therefore, "there is little stability of scene; instead, the world is grasped only in a state of constant engagement" (152).

¹⁸ Furthermore, Albuquerque distinguishes between what Kowzan calls "signs at the first degree" and "signs at the second degree." The former is an object encountered in real life, such

as a gun or a knife, and the latter is one that “can obtain a semiological value at a higher level,” such as something readily identifiable by the spectator with a weapon without being one (99). Albuquerque contends that the latter’s sophistication has more impact on the staging of violence.

¹⁹ Taylor introduces the notion of performance as an “act of transfer” by transmitting cultural knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated practices (6). By “repertoire” Taylor means knowledge that is transmitted by performance practices, which is ephemeral and privileges bodies, in contrast to “archive,” which privileges writing and is designed to endure.

²⁰ In this particular instance, Albuquerque draws on Scarry’s idea of the depiction of torture sessions. In plays that depict torture sessions, as in Scarry’s torture model, a set that faithfully represents a torture chamber is indicative of extreme violence (Albuquerque 116). Scarry conceives the torture room as more than a space; as a weapon or agent of pain (40).

²¹ Death is a constant theme in Galindo’s work, as is the manipulation of staged effects in order to bring a sense of humanity and of denunciation to the ordeal of victims of violent crimes, particularly women (Galindo Interview 2010). Galindo has addressed this theme in a 2007 performance action entitled *XX* in which she helps set up 52 tombstones representing the remains of unclaimed women, victims of violent crimes. The action takes place in La Verbena cemetery in Guatemala City. In addition, in *Tanatoterapia* (2006) Galindo was anesthetized and put on display at a Guatemala City mortuary, where a hired professional applied makeup to her face as if she were a corpse.

²² León is referring primarily to the five new laws that have brought Spain into the 21st century: the Law Against Domestic Violence of 2004 (*Ley Orgánica 1/2004 de 28 de diciembre, de medidas de protección integral contra la violencia de género*); the Law on Same-Sex

Marriage of 2005 (*Ley 13/2005 de 1 de julio, por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio*); the Law on Long-Term Care of 2006 (*Act 39/2006, of 14th December, on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons*); the Equality Law of 2007 (*Ley Orgánica 3/2007 de 22 de marzo para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres*); and the new abortion law of 2010 (*Ley Orgánica 2/2010 de 3 de marzo, de salud sexual y reproductiva y de la interrupción voluntaria del embarazo*).

²³ These are the findings of a non-binding legal report by the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ), available online.

²⁴ See André Lepecki and Sally Banes' exploration into "the performance of the senses."

Flipping the *Tortillera*:

Sandra Monterroso's Hybrid Iconography in *Tus tortillas mi amor*

According to the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred Book of the Maya, the forefather gods, Tepew and Q'ukumatz turned to Grandmother Xmucane for her assistance in creating a better race of people once mud and wood figures failed their standards. Grandmother Xmucane mixed clear water with kernels scraped from corn grown inside the sacred mountain Split Place and from the coarse dough molded four men and four women made of flesh, perfect in their own image (Morton 6-7). The Maya called the corn dough *yokem* and traditionally women spent four or five hours a day on their knees grinding corn on the *metate* using a cylindered hand tool called *mano* (Morton 8). Even though carbon dating from *comal* (a smooth, flat griddle typically used in Mexico and Central America to cook tortillas, toast spices, sear meat, and generally prepare food) postherds do not provide definite dates and uses, anthropologists estimate that *nixtamal* tortillas (nixtamalization is a chemical process conducive to the accelerated digestion of corn protein, often expanding it into its double size, traditionally achieved by adding processed lime to corn dough and letting it ferment together) have become a mainstay in Mesoamerican culture since at least 300 BC and long before the Hispanic era (Morton 14). However, archaeological evidence demonstrates that around 1000-800 BC lowland Maya already prepared nixtamal corn dough (Morton 16).

In Guatemala, young indigenous women typically learn to *tortillar* at roughly three years of age, developing into accomplished *tortilleras* only after many years of practice. Maya women and their descendants have been identified as *tortilleras* for many centuries now and the expectations of how women should use their own bodies inform everyday actions of, and perceptions of, indigenous Guatemalan women and their descendants and every gesture counts

towards each woman's respectability capital. Considering *tortilleras*, society has specific expectations as far as what women can and cannot do. Such social scripts anchored on ideals of modesty and submissiveness reveal the oppression experienced by Guatemalan women and highlight the fetishization of the *tortilleras* as national icons. As a cultural icon the *tortillera* reveals the complex interplay of power and representation within national identity, where complicated gender and ethnic assignments collide. Nowadays this designation can signify indigenous women and their descendants pride as accomplished food preparers as well as cultural bearers. In fact, often Maya women and their descendants manifest their strength and pass on core communal values through activities such as tortilla-making. This is visible in the many possible variations that can be introduced to ancestral practices, for instance, by incorporating modern tools, experimenting with new ready available ingredients, or simply by changing the litany of enchantments and invocations traditionally thought to bring on a better outcome.

“A Mayan woman is not a woman unless she makes tortillas,” said a leader of the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (the Academy of Guatemalan-Mayan Languages), according to field study by Diane Nelson (333). In Mexico, tortilla makers often use a press to flatten the dough. In Guatemala, the small, fat traditional tortillas are patted out by hand, which takes hours. Thus, “the only authentic tortilla is made of corn ground by hand and rolled out in hours of painstaking labor” (Nelson 333). This laborious work done by women comes across as the authentic way to preserve culture and tradition. Indeed, the “[y]oung girls copy their mothers as they use their hands to shape the corn dough into tortillas, producing the unmistakable rat-tat-tat that one hears coming from Maya kitchens at mealtime,” says Linda Green (18). As cultural reproducers, indigenous women are in constant contact with Mayan rituals and beliefs. For

tortilleras, the ubiquity of corn in Maya culture symbolizes how the Maya people are closely related to the land and what it provides. Corn also is a symbol for the relationships between tortilla makers. If one has corn tortillas to eat, then she or he will survive. If there are no corn tortillas at the kitchen table, then one is destitute. Corn epitomizes Maya identity. It “weaves a thread that connects Maya people with their ancestors and sacred spirits and their future through their children” (Green 18). For many Maya, corn is power and agency, and for the *tortillera*, corn can become a way to practice resistance and redefine ethnic and gender future.

Indigenous Guatemalan women and their descendants still continue to perform these daily rituals to feed their families. These enduring practices have turned women into iconic figures, sustaining culture through ritual such as the making of tortillas. Such practices serve one’s own family, and, in turn, feed the powerful, national “culture of service,” as theorized by Manuela Camus. Camus proposes that Guatemalan women’s culture of service is a symptom of their being dominated by men: “... women nowadays seem to reproduce even more traditional roles than what one would expect as mothers, wives, friends, and prostitutes: they are always on service, on call” (“Desclasamiento y violencias” 353). This culture of service fuels violence against women and girls, and is one reason women are not advancing in Guatemala.

Feeding said culture of service as theorized by Camus is a deeply ingrained culture of machismo, which in the justice system is paramount to keeping women subordinated to the will and preferences of their male partners. Such attitudes interfere with the application of the law and are fundamentally detrimental to female victims, leaving them in a very vulnerable position, particularly considering how the State offers them little or no protection. When women cannot resort to law enforcement and have no social support to treat their claims and complaints as legitimate, then they are, in fact, exposed to true violence and the whims of whoever crosses

their paths and insists on treating them poorly. Overall, their identity and role as citizens of a pluri-democratic society is questionable and there is still much to be accomplished.

Traditionally, indigenous women were confined to domestic work, subdued in their communities by male family members, and considered incapable of any form of agency or productive action outside the home. Formally, the women's situation in Guatemala improved dramatically after 1985 and with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. During the peace negotiations, all parties, including women's organizations and organizations of displaced women such as *Mama Maquín*, *Madre Tierra*, and *Ixmucané*, recognized the specific discrimination suffered by women and committed themselves to overcome this by actions such as guaranteeing women's right to organize themselves and participate in society under conditions of equality with men. This was a pivotal time when Guatemalan women began emerging as political activists.¹ This is true for *Ladinas* (mixed-race women) and indigenous women who promote women's rights.² Consequently, the current situation for women in Guatemala has improved somewhat, even though there is still a lingering *machista* culture of violence. Presently, women are still been objectified and relegated to the domestic sphere. The real devaluation of women's daily actions and their lack of participation in the political sphere run parallel, and there is an ongoing struggle towards more recognition and gender equality, in spite of the formal achievements of the current era.

Likewise, the *tortillera's* identity as a national symbol is problematic because of its dual role; on one hand it is a powerful cultural icon and it stands for indigenous women's power as the reproducers and keepers of Maya traditions, while on the other hand it locks them in an idealized form of Mayaness and femininity that disregards real women's needs and challenges. To demonstrate how the *tortillera's* identity as a national symbol is controversial, in this chapter,

I explore how body talk and the bodily fluids rhetoric put forward by Sandra Monterroso in the 2004 performance *Tus tortillas, mi amor* (*Your tortillas, my love*) deconstructs the ethnic, generic, and social labels that defines the *tortillera*. My contribution to the study of iconic Guatemalan representations of female subjects reveals the profound need to rethink female agency and empowerment, particularly pertaining to indigenous women and their descendants.

In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso successfully promotes hybridity and resistance while building the *tortillera's* anti-story or resistance to this label. According to Madam Sarup, creating one's identity runs parallel with narrating one's life story (15). Most often people cannot control the construction of their lives and subsequently the construction of their life stories. More importantly, people cannot control how their life stories will be interpreted or acted upon. Some life stories become what Sarup calls anti-stories, because they are not linear or logical, but they are stories of resistance. Monterroso's performance is an example of this because even though her exploration of tortilla-making follows in traditional rituals and practices, she nevertheless introduces elements of resistance and defiance to social assigned scripts through powerful body fluids rhetoric.

In order to better understand this performance, a detailed description is necessary. *Tus tortillas mi amor* (2004), or *Lix cua rahro* in Q'eq'chi Maya, is a twenty-four-hour performance condensed into a twelve and a half-minute video. The video includes Spanish and English subtitles and references in Q'eq'chi Maya, the primary spoken language in the video.³ The video depicts Monterroso, a woman of mixed race, at a kitchen table chewing corn. Monterroso performs a ritual speaking in Q'eq'chi Maya and spitting the corn into a bowl to make tortilla dough. The performance was filmed from overhead, and the scene resembles the Maya kitchen in

the ethnographic museum in Guatemala City. The background is purposefully dark, but the kitchen table is lighted, showing Monterroso making tortillas.

The performance's careful staging and props create intimacy and invite spectators to engage with the private space of the Maya home, a fundamental component of Maya identity, particularly for women and their descendants. As the performance progresses, the lighting and camera increasingly focus on Monterroso—her body, the tortilla dough, and her tortilla making. Her body and the corn pulp (wet with saliva) mingle, via the careful manipulation of the camera. Twenty-five seconds into the video, Monterroso starts chanting in her grandmother's native tongue. For each utterance, subtitles appear on the screen, first in Spanish, then a few seconds later in English. At four to five minutes into the video, we see a close-up of the *olla* (pot) with a repugnant, fermenting pulp that seems to be moving on its own. Then, at five minutes, twenty seconds, she slowly spits a long stream of saliva into the pot, adds water, and forms a mashed corn pulp.

Five to eight minutes in, sweat and tears are mixed into the dough that Monterroso is steadily kneading. At about minute nine, she proclaims in Q'eq'chi Maya that “she [the woman] fornicates” (*Lix cua rahro*). At that point she slowly assembles a line of small balls of dough, like chicken eggs, on the table. At ten minutes, thirty-three seconds, with the subtitle “soul and body,” Monterroso stamps heart shapes into her flattened tortillas, and she pours her blood into each one of the hearts.

Lastly, at twelve minutes, she toasts the tortillas in a comal, and then serves them warm in a basket toward the camera. In the last few minutes, a voice-over repeats the title of the poem, and the performance, *Lix cua rahro* (*Your tortillas, my love*). These words are seen on the screen in Spanish, then in English. This translation into the languages of the colonizers is ironic because

it adds to the mockery effect advanced by Monterroso in order to dispel the *tortillera*'s identity as stable and any exoticist claim to ethnic authenticity as impossible. Instead of being an imposition by force as in colonial times, language functions as a useful tool vital for the colonizers' understanding of the action taking place. In essence, it points to that unwillingness to surrender cultural secrets and tropes that is, for instance, explored by Doris Sommer in her examination of Rigoberta Menchú's hard-to-read text/self.⁴ Nonetheless, Monterroso's efforts seem to be drawn toward revealing the secrets and tropes of *tortilleras*, or at least at exposing one possible venue to construct the subjectivity of the *tortillera* as she embodies it herself. And she does so while playing with the spectators' will to see more and to know more, thus to appropriate the Other that is the *tortillera*.

The analysis of this video's performance scenario is crucial to understand how *Tus tortillas* de-stabilizes the iconic Guatemalan *tortillera* as reified in the national ethnographic museum. From within the same domestic sphere where indigenous women and their descendants are kept away from true political and community participation, Monterroso disengages with the national narrative of violence and oppression against women. Against impunity and circumscribed identity, she steps up with a hybrid interpretation of the *tortillera* and in the process re-signifies what it means to be *Ladina*.

Creating one's story of resistance is a privilege for Guatemalan women since often their political engagements are contained and limited to ethnic and community struggles under the influence of male leaders. Francisca Álvarez explains how for some Maya women the difference between daily practice and discourse is due to the fact that they are trying to be coherent with "the cause;" if they question "la cultura" in Maya discourse, or better said, what Maya men say, aren't they in essence questioning their whole fight against ethnic oppression? Hopefully,

creating one's story of resistance will become a right and responsibility of all women and girls in Guatemala. And hopefully Guatemalan men also will create their own stories, and join women in meaningful self-reflection by writing or telling one's life experiences.

To better understand how Monterroso creates an artistically and politically significant hybrid *tortillera* to rebuke Guatemalan symbolic pressure put on indigenous women and their descendants as culture reproducers, I will first focus on the manner in which she constructs her *tortillera*, then move forward to analyze her performance's strategies, mainly her body talk and bodily fluids rhetoric, the enunciation of the Q'eq'chi' Maya spoken words as "poetic disobedience" to socially assigned scripts, auto-ethnographic inquiry as hybrid self-affirmation, and will then finish by exploring the impact her work has on spectators and how it may promote change.

Ritual Appropriation and Identity Construction

To debunk the stereotype of the female Guatemalan *tortillera*, Monterroso shows how Guatemalan women may feel insecure to create their own sense of identity. Monterroso conveys this insecurity using body talk⁵ in addition to spoken words in her performance. Since women's movements and actions are inscribed in a power network where male desires and expectations rule, it's understandable that one will think carefully before engaging in direct rebellion because the consequences can be harmful. In her performance, Monterroso uses her body as a prop, and speaks out loud, to convey the insidious power of violence and discrimination against women. She repeatedly focuses on the hard and laborious tortilla-making process, while exploring ways to undermine domestic confinement and gender oppression. Engaging with a millenary tradition of resistance to power by indigenous women, where there is power there is also opposition to it in a Foucauldian sense, Monterroso disrupts the *tortillera* script by creating her own anti-story.

When she appropriates the Maya incantation to put a spell on her lover, she also doctors his food and in essence talks back to his domination and the gender and ethnic oppression that society inflicts on her. Following artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Gina Pane, Marina Abramovic, and Annie Sprinkle, Monterroso's body talk is nonverbal and her performance is not logocentric—it does not overly rely on the meanings and use of the spoken word. For instance, instead of directly insulting or interpellating her lover, Monterroso resorts to a spellbinding incantation/poem, *Lix cua rahro*, in which she concentrates more on her own feelings and experiences as a gendered and ethnic subject.

Consequently, Monterroso's video skillfully encourages the spectators to see beyond spoken words and mere traditional tortilla-making. Instead, she proposes a visceral engagement through her body fluids rhetoric in an effort to demystify the tamed indigenous woman stereotype embodied in the conventional *tortillera*. While spectators respond to bodily fluids and deal with their uncanny discomfort, Monterroso unravels her tale and her tortilla-making, culminating with a powerful display of rebuttal for anticipated gender and ethnic social scripts. Monterroso's body talk educates the audience about the struggle for power in relationships and how one woman using her own body constructively from a very strict and contained environment can, nonetheless, promote her own hybrid model that flows out with her body fluids and incantation. In this process, seeking to redefine Mayaness and femininity, Monterroso leads the way encouraging further subversion of traditional roles.

Her prolonged repetition of the gestures of *tortillar* conveys the ritual appropriation of Maya practices. She performs these gestures reverently, as if possessed, as if she has fallen into the same trance she mentions in the description of her own performance. Her actions, and words, lead the audience to become aware of real-life conditions for Guatemalan women, as the

symbolic violence is juxtaposed with the uncanny physicality of the tortilla dough and tortilla-making process. As she labors, painstakingly, to make the tortillas on stage, Monterroso re-signifies women's daily practices, behaviors, gestures, and rituals.

Her body talk encompasses role playing, mimicry, historic reenactment, poetic disobedience to socially-assigned life scripts, and auto-ethnographic exploration. In this chapter, repossessing one's identity, culture, and body fluids is the primordial focus of my analysis as Monterroso sides with a long genealogy of women that throughout time have resisted and fought against oppression in her native Guatemala. In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso's body becomes a series of scenarios with various possible endings. Her performance disrupts the spectators' expectations and taps into the rich vitality of the "repertoire," according to Diana Taylor, becoming a new, vital way of looking at Guatemalan women.

Monterroso resists the spectators' gaze or their scopophilia—getting pleasure from looking at her body. She resists by being hard to read, compared to common texts and icons that depict indigenous women in Guatemala. Her *tortillera* is ambiguous because it detaches itself from iconic representations; however it still needs this traditional image as a basic reference to oppose for its oppressive and stereotypical nature. Art critic Jorge Villacorta comments on how Monterroso's *tortillera* is hard to read by suggesting that:

In it [*Tus tortillas mi amor*], the protagonist seems to address the spectator, often looking directly into the camera, but the [communication] link is broken due to a cultural gap, as she speaks in a kind of Maya dialect [Q'eq'chi]. With it, she proposes a friction situation between the spectator's occidental reading perspective and the ancestral knowledge of Guatemalans. One could sort of say that the artist plays with certain mechanisms that have provided the basis for the ethnographic register, but take to the extreme such 'exoticist' valoration (Villacorta 126).⁶

Villacorta reinforces Monterroso's objection to exoticist appropriation of indigenous women's rituals and cultural practices, and indicates how the performer's commitment to break with stereotypes might render the spectators uncomfortable and uneasy.

Monterroso's body talk reveals her own sense of identity. She does this by juxtaposing her body against the common beliefs about her ethnicity and gender. By changing the age-old script of the *tortillera*, Monterroso's performance goes against a romanticized version of the Maya that is in the past. References to Maya Golden Age often come with a great deal of idealization about the surviving practices and rituals of Maya descendants, notably concerning gender and community organization. Even though Maya gender complementarity and equity are indeed primordial elements of the Maya *cosmovisión* or worldview, contemporary reality is hardly the same as what is repeatedly glorified as Maya past. However, the *tortillera* version directly representing these idealizations of Maya glory days and glorifying a tamed indigenous woman frozen in time as the cultural reproducer of millenary traditions, lingers in the ethnographic museum. Likewise, Maya culture as a commodity suffers from the same reification of Maya ideals and practices that are in deep disconnect with the real lives and challenges of contemporary Maya people and their descendants.

In *Tus tortillas*, gestures long thought to be politically innocent—such as tortilla-making—built up a powerful body talk that symbolically questions and deconstructs the Guatemalan narrative about women and the social roles that they are expected to fulfill. Imbuing women with negative stereotypes about who they are and what damage they can potentially inflict on their households, families, and ultimately the nation constitutes an elaborate form of symbolic violence.⁷ By demonstrating the hard labor and how the ritual of *tortillar* can contribute to dispel the violence and oppression that pin down Guatemalan women through the

body as cultural reproducers, Monterroso introduces resistance in unexpected ways, exemplifying how symbolic violence can be stopped from corrupting the daily lives of Guatemalan women and girls, particularly indigenous women and their descendants.

Body Talk and Performance Strategies

Monterroso's performance challenges the cultural idea of so-called tamed indigenous women or discrete, domesticized versions of unchallenged gender and ethnic conformity to the rule of the father, the husband, the community, and ultimately, the nation. In *Tus tortillas* Monterroso uses artistic and stage techniques that give her audience access to Maya intimacy and domesticity. These intimate looks into the Maya home are usually inaccessible to outsiders. Through her body talk, she distances herself from a gender-based and ethnic discourse that oppresses women and girls in Guatemala by openly revealing the intimacy and the domesticity that inform her own identity. Instead of being inaccessible and closed in her cultural confinement as a *tortillera*, like many other women in similar circumstances, she engages us in a repertoire of experiences we spectators share with her. Her performance replaces the official line of what female identity is supposed to be. She pulls this off by literally giving substance to the inevitable. The Maya woman, or a so-called docile, feminine woman, turns into a spectacle of ethnic identity as embodied by Monterroso:

The action takes place in a private space, a room where a woman prepares tortillas for her lover. It rethinks the body as part of nature, since it has its own wisdom. The scenes display an obsessive state, as if through the [bodily] fluids a metaphor unravels, a possibility for a spell. The words in Q'eq'chi Maya are poetry that intend to provide the

sense of imperfection and unbalance on which gender relations are

imposed. It connotes the controversy of a *ladina* woman who wants to be

accepted by the same Maya culture that also wants to seduce her (*Lix cua rahro*).

The actions of the *tortillera* in this performance replicate a simple daily activity in a traditional kitchen. Monterroso's focus on the body resonates with my interpretation of her body talk and bodily fluids rhetoric as an artistic venue to manifest a complex interplay of power between social expectations placed on *tortilleras* and her own process of becoming a different, hybrid kind of *tortillera*, thus on her own anti-story. In essence, it seeks to denounce that most violence perpetrated at women is domestic and insidious.

This performance breaks down the homogenous identity of indigenous women and their daughters for it clearly exemplifies many instances in which variation to established rituals and practices can be introduced, including revealing how women's subjectivity is constructed. Embracing traditional tortilla-making wholeheartedly however, does not mean that Monterroso will not be able to detract from age-old formulas and gestures. Instead, she chooses to follow her own steps into creating her lover's tortillas and doctoring them with her body fluids and her spellbinding incantations. Even if historically Monterroso is not the first nor the last woman to doctor her lover's food and to rebel against her oppression, her *tortillera* is indeed an "other." Apparently, she shows us the mainstream *tortillera*, but really Monterroso is reconstructing her own identity. From the salivated pulp to manufacturing and kneading palatable tortilla dough, this video apparently concentrates on recreating the traditional Guatemalan tortilla making process and representing the iconic *tortillera*. However, critically engaging with Monterroso's body fluids rhetoric provokes a visceral reaction in the spectators that leads to more in depth insights, such as her own process of becoming a *tortillera* by relearning her *abuelita*'s language and re-performing what she had learned as a child in her own family's kitchen. Introducing and

embracing variations to the socially expected *tortillera* script empowers Monterroso to engage in auto-ethnographic exploration and in turn construct her own hybrid model. A closer look lets us know that she is not the typical *tortillera* and that her new hybrid identity symbolizes an identity path that is possible for all women and girls in Guatemala through agency and self-empowerment. In essence, if more women remain true to their origins while developing a voice and subjectivity that refuses traditional oppression based on gender and ethnicity, then true gender complementarity and ethnic revalidation are attainable.

In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso delivers her message to disrupt the ethnic- and gender-socially assigned scripts in a subtle way by constructing her own *tortillera* from the ground. She notably refuses to be a typical *tortillera* according to Guatemalan society's rigid concepts of authenticity and what is proper for women, in part due to the fact that she is *mestiza*. These scripts—if left untouched—would continue to support violence and oppression against women in her native Guatemala. Diane Taylor argues that without the threat of consequences the violence and discrimination will go on (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 28). Body talk performances like Monterroso's stand as scenarios that predate the scripts of violence, and allow for many alternative endings. In the end, Monterroso affirms herself, against accepted ideals of Mayaness and femininity as she stands tall and proud to the camera delivering her finished tortillas as a new hybrid *tortillera*.

Monterroso's signature performance strategy is her unforgettable use of bodily fluids. The fluids graphically convey her message that the *tortillera*, both as an icon and a real person, is quite significant. The *tortillera* feeds her family and nourishes people outside the home, while meaningfully engaging spectators. In *Tus tortillas*, the bodily fluids expose the agony of routine, the pain caused by societal expectations, and the crying need to upend identity standards that

suffocate the *mujer* (woman) Maya. Considering Guatemala's ethnic fabric, Diane Nelson defines the *mujer Maya* "as a construct, a boundary marker, a prosthetic" (314). Citing Allucquère Rosanne Stone, Nelson says "the prosthetic makes up for something missing, it covers over an opening, it overcomes a lack of presence" (314). Thus, "like a peg leg," the *mujer Maya* "supports the nation's limping political economy" (314). And this serves as evidence that Guatemala is up to the challenge of modernity, becoming a contemporary society in the world, while maintaining the traditions that identify and legitimize it as an indigenous nation. At the core of Nelson's analysis is her collection of anecdotes about the *muchachas* (girls) and *tortilleras* who inhabit the imaginations of Guatemalans and the country's cultural tropes or metaphors (327).

Furthermore, while *tortilleras* function as organic builders of the traditional social fabric, Monterroso's own *tortillera* fully disengages with current models of identity politics and instead becomes her own self-nourishing subject matter from where several possible scenarios start unraveling. Her manipulation of bodily fluids in *Tus tortillas* illustrates my theory about the impact of body talk. At the beginning of her performance, the camera close-up on the saliva and maize (corn) pulp being chewed by Monterroso provokes a visceral reaction from spectators. While repulsed by the tortilla dough-making process, audience members are led to consider that Monterroso's character is exotic and that she is an Other. Monterroso's sweat, tears, and blood are also mixed into the tortilla dough and the finished tortillas. This process creates the sense of a bodily transubstantiation—from *tortillera* to a woman who is suffering as she makes tortillas time and again, and that rebels against the oppression she feels, to a new type of hybrid subject. Her *tortillera* fully engages with her ancestry while refusing to give in to society's pressure; however, even though she rebels against her lover and her socially accepted confinement, her

actions are paused and thoughtout, and her overall presence seems serene and focused on her ritual.

Monterroso's behavior on stage is contained, though not demure. Her behavior is symbolic of the subjectivity and agency of Guatemalan women, in spite of the insidious, indirect violence suffered daily. Monterroso's body, center stage, positions her as a woman confronting the cause of her suffering, empowering, and then relabeling herself. Even though she does not directly interpellate her lover or the audience, she engages in an identity construction process that runs parallel to her tortilla making. Her actions and gestures unravel in crescendo, culminating in the incorporation of her own body fluids to her lover's tortillas, doctoring his food. Simultaneously, she recites her poem/incantation, *Lix cua rahro*, which also increases in tension and culminates in denouncing the violence and oppression to experiences under his control. She effectively breaks tradition, thus rebelling both physically and verbally.

Monterroso's body talk reshapes daily practices and sparks our memory in the process. By her focus on the corporeality or the physical chore of tortilla making, her body becomes a site of remembrance and self-affirmation. Her body is the archetypal dough from which good *tortilleras* are made, by apparently docile and gentle-mannered women and girls of native descent. She is both the tortilla dough and the tortilla maker in the epitomized kitchen. Yet her body, seemingly magical, and her spoken words, overturn society's basic views of what it is to be Maya and a woman. Notably, she is not wearing a *traje*—indigenous clothing—and she does not pretend to be someone other than who she is. She is dressed in white, simple, functional clothes. Her midriff is nonchalantly exposed, unlike traditional indigenous women who are concerned with decency, perhaps suggesting that ladinization is liberation from Maya docility.

She distances herself from mere memory, instead enacting the bodily experience of tortilla making and, in the process, reshaping the inner voice of a *tortillera*. Her performance unfurls the rebellion against the usual fate of *tortilleras*. Monterroso shows us, physically, how to resist and subvert the control society is imposing upon us. As she doctors her lover's food, and displays unequivocally the lengthy and fierce physicality of tortilla making, her body looks like a *mujer Maya*. Her body also is a stage upon which ideas and meaningful gestures come alive, namely her rebellion against her lover and her need to affirm herself beyond the confines of the domestic sphere. The implication is that Guatemalan women need to be more assertive in the domestic sphere and likewise beyond it. Monterroso's bodily fluids' flagrantly defy traditional understanding of Maya women in the home. Her *tortillera* embodies a visual scream that shocks the audience with how badly the *mujer Maya* is hurt by the mistreatment supported in Guatemalan culture. Without being explicitly sexual, using her body fluids on stage as a symbol of injustice conjures up the idea of women being sexual objects and raped. By magnifying the hard labor of the *tortillera*, Monterroso reveals her own struggle to resist sexism. She pushes back against the feelings of being alienated and not valued because she's a woman.

In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso challenges the dominant points of view about both indigenous women and the feminine nature of women in general. She does so by making her audience see the body of the Other, the person inside the indigenous woman, the woman who bleeds as she makes tortillas again and again. The staging of a common ethnic scene like making tortillas—a scene one might see in a museum—is not intended for spectators' eyes to feast upon; such a scene can be like holding a mirror to the audience members' faces, showing them their ambivalence toward the ruling point of view on indigenous women and femininity. Getting their

audience into this ambiguous space is a coup for cultural translators such as Monterroso, depending, of course, on who the audience members are.

Body Fluids and the Spectators' Visceral Response

Canonized and adventurous artists have been experimenting with bodily fluids in Western art, particularly performance art, since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸ In feminist theory, the female body and its fluids are often perceived as more than a penetrable surface, precisely because of the very fluidity and life-giving qualities of women's bodies. If, indeed, the female body is constructed through and by its fluidity, then it leaves room for change and allows for the potential of merging with other bodies (Lindenmeyer 48). Since no stable image of the female body is possible, there is no authentic discourse, particularly considering the postmodern, fragmented self that is a labyrinth in which to search for one's identity. Because the body changes and signifies different things as one grows older, creating theories about the female body means considering its "multiplicity of parts and changeable surfaces, held together not by discursive regulations, but by forces of connection" (Lindenmeyer 60). Thus, anything that disrupts society's image of self-contained bodies, which ostensibly are politically defined and stable, opens the door to other connections—with other body parts, other practices, or other bodies' altogether. In *Tus tortillas*, the strategy of bodily fluids exposes the need to change identity practices that suffocate the *mujer Maya*. The bodily fluids in *Tus tortillas* perform a tangible, physical deterrence against an omnipresent masculine presence that permeates women's lives in Guatemala. As a physical warning, bodily fluids tell the world that one has had enough. The flow of these fluids cannot be contained and risks contaminating the heart of Guatemalan society. For millennia, bodily fluids have been used in witchcraft or sorcery the worldover,

including in Mesoamerica. If all women resist and put up a fight can patriarchal rule keep pinning women down by their bodies?

Exploring how the use of body fluids disseminate and, by extension, rebel against society's norms, provoking subjects into resistance or liminal positions, can elucidate individual agency and empowerment in body talk. Stephen Di Benedetto says "bodies and fluids, especially body fluids, carry their own story of meaning" (11). As spectators, we have been culturally predisposed, by centuries of dissociation from nature, to avoid bodily waste products (11). Placed in public, such fluids convey a particular meaning or anti-story, provoking strong reactions. Thus, "not only do bodies on stage speak and express, but also the bodies of the spectators have some sort of contingent response," as textures, colors, and smells trigger natural and cultural responses to what is being exposed (12). The spectators' visceral response might not be rational, but rather felt as discomfort or odd, with a heightened awareness of a context of the situation. Spectators question their perceptions when confronted with performances such as *Tus tortillas*. Employing body talk, Monterroso discourages a certain unattainable ideal from coming alive while she implicitly chastises spectators for often disregarding the physical reality of women's lives with all its corporeality and bodily fluids. Her body becomes metaphorically the very tortilla dough plied by the *tortillera* as its own plasticity provokes revulsion from the spectators.

Monterroso's body fluids, including the use of her saliva, sweat, tears, and blood, feels threatening to the spectators. What is most frightening for spectators is what Karina Eileraas calls the uncontainability of bodily fluids because of its capacity to question physical boundaries. By revealing their fluids, women "reclaim the 'unsightly' corporeality of femininity and deploy the disgust and fear fluids evoke" (132). As uncontainable, bodily fluids "are reminders of the

body's permeability, and of the constructed self's reliance upon the delineated border between it and the outside world" (132). The bodily fluids in *Tus tortillas* are warning signs of violence, be it a direct sign of violence such as blood or an indirect suggestion of oppression such as the sweat, saliva, and tears that go into the tortilla dough composition attesting to the hardship and corporeality of the lives of *tortilleras*.

In *Tus tortillas*, the saliva Monterroso incorporates into her tortilla dough comes from a traditional mode of preparation. Saliva's symbolism, as a fluid that ferments, moistens, and dissolves, is common in pre-Hispanic Latin American cultures, particularly when associated with corn, and its transformation into food and drink.⁹ Even though in Central America, ancestral tortilla dough rarely requires saliva to help with the fermenting and bonding that allows the dough to turn from an inconsistent *pulpa* (pulp) into a manageable substance, in the Andes it is the intrinsic component of some alcoholic beverages. All over the Americas, corn pulp is traditionally mixed with animal blood, ashes, and lime to prepare different types of dough for typical dishes, in a process called nixtamalization. Distinct methods of fermenting that include saliva allow for subtle variations in the flavor of the final products. Monterroso's performance detaches itself step-by-step from this ancestral process as mere mimicry, as she hums and chants. This gesture is less traditional and more symbolic of her subversive contamination of the tortilla, revealing her power.

The many hours that Monterroso spends chewing and munching on corn grains to form workable dough, condensed into a mere twelve and a half minutes of video, illustrates women's hard work for each meal, and embodies the profound connection that Maya people have with maize and its mythology. The *mujer* Maya's saliva—and, by extension, Monterroso's—ferments revolt, instead of serving as the sacred ingredient of gender complementarity within the Maya

people's *cosmovisión* or worldview. Thus, the mastification and spitting can symbolize her torn bitterness and need to be loved and acknowledged.

Monterroso also folds her sweat into the tortilla dough. In *Tus tortillas*, her sweat, unlike her saliva or blood, is an almost invisible element of her tortilla dough. But spectators realize that her syncopated dough kneading is sweaty labor. It is the salt in her sweat, as well as in her tears, that flavors her lover's tortillas, and her sweat and tears symbolize her lingering presence in his life. It's left up to the audience to decide what her presence in his life means, and what the consequences of her rebellion are. Her tears, sweat, saliva, and blood form a united bodily force against the oppression of women. The audience is mesmerized by the pull of her bodily fluids.

Spectator response to *Tus tortillas* grows with the unraveling of Monterroso's seemingly gentle, yet spiraling rebellion. The spectators tap into a primordial perception of the tortilla making. A visceral response leads spectators to rethink social behaviors and mass-produced narratives. As spectators we all experience bodily sensations (Di Benedetto 14). In what Claudia Mandel calls an "*estética de la recepción*" (an aesthetics of reception), the presence of audience members, as they physically and emotionally respond to the performance, results in a paradigm shift—now they are inside the art. Monterroso's body fluids orchestrate a "powerful visual rhetoric" (Di Benedetto 15) to which the spectators respond "synaesthetically" or with more than one of their senses (Di Benedetto 8). *Tus tortillas* conveys a body rhetoric which stands for the empowered *tortillera* and her resistance to ethnic, class, and gender-biased submission. In conjunction, Monterroso's body fluids reveal her feelings and express her refusal to buy into the submission inflicted on Guatemalan women.

Monterroso's blood on top of the tortilla's heart, shaped into this essential food from corn, tells a tale of refusing to allow domestic violence that permeates the Guatemalan culture.

As the last element played in her body fluids strategy, blood taps into the blood shed in contemporary Guatemala, where blood is everywhere. Blood may signify a wound and a ritual offering, as Monterroso ironically offers herself and her body to her lover—*mi amor*—through the simple act of coating her tortillas with it. She substitutes her own witty variation, by re-signifying her body as a weapon instead of a wound. Ironically, Monterroso finishes her long-lasting, tortilla-making enterprise with a visual scream, conveyed by the contortions of her body. Monterroso candidly disrupts the powerful tale of a woman's subjugation in the kitchen, preparing food for her lover. Her own blood and other bodily fluids are the substance that doctors her lover's food.¹⁰

Monterroso's anti-story counters the hegemonic fiction of submissive, indigenous women in Guatemala. Her blood is the text that visually screams "Enough!" on the surface of the tortillas, as well as the surface of the nation's body. Her body is not vulnerable to victimization; rather it is a stage for resistance. Contained, not demurred, behavior is expressed with the same fluidity of her body's secretions in the tortillas, which symbolize violence in the Guatemalan home. Her actions showcase the agony of routines, the nonsense of repetitive, empty traditions that fail women's expectations of liberation and being valued in a so-called pluri-democratic society.

Monterroso's tortillas become pieces of her that prolong the curse on her lover, and these pieces are intrinsically connected to her incantations. Even though bodily fluids in *Tus tortillas* are not overtly sexual, and Monterroso's performance detaches itself from the iconic *tortillera*, the fluids symbolize the presence of female power that rejects the objectification of the female body by men who do not yet appreciate the full value of women in society.

Monterroso is not “food” to satisfy her lover; rather she takes charge of her role in their relationship. By manipulating the way she is cannibalized by Maya gender complementarity, her bodily-fluids strategy wages war against the Guatemalan “housewivization” of women, and against the myth of the docile *mujer* Maya. Housewivization is a term frequently employed by Diane Nelson, and originally theorized by Maria Mies, that ties women to the domestic sphere in a manner that subalternizes them and thus impedes their full participation in a democratic society. In Guatemala’s dealings with international capital, neoliberal readjustment policies since the '90s have depended to a great degree on the *mujer* Maya housewivization, or the prosthetic housewife (Nelson 325). Monterroso, in carnivalesque fashion, discredits the docile, wifely script.

While debunking the iconic *tortillera*, Monterroso grows into an empowered figure that rethinks her hybrid identity in the problematic context of Guatemala. Just as her maize pulp changes from solid to liquid to solid again, transforming into workable and edible dough, so does her role as a new *tortillera* move through multiple stages. She transforms herself into workable and palatable dough at the same time resisting being controlled through the body. She addresses her lover in her grandmother’s Q’eq’chi Maya tongue, offering enhanced meaning to the language in a performance that achieves self-empowerment.

Ultimately, Monterroso’s bodily fluids rhetoric in *Tus tortillas* supports her rebellion against gender and ethnic oppression and become the material basis from which she expands her own self-affirming *tortillera*. By re-signifying the *tortillera*, she critically engages the spectators into rethinking gender and ethnic identity as a controversial and ongoing organic process, full of contradictions and affirmations, pulls and tugs.

In *Tus tortillas*, Mayanness and femininity are reshaped into something more attainable for Guatemalan women. Monterroso bridges the separation between *Indias* (Indian) and *Ladinas*, by bringing to light her own ambiguity as an ethnic hybrid. Monterroso expands the State's colonial discourse by positioning herself as a hybrid; she can thus destabilize its claim for ethnic authority, as well as the authenticity claims that emerge from within certain Maya associations (for instance, the *Rabin Ajaw* contest). She mimics agency in a structure of inequality and convincingly shows that the Other, in her role as a *tortillera* is, ultimately, one's self.

Performances such as *Tus tortillas* tap into art's social and political functions and invite spectators to do the same. Possibly even if spectators resist engaging in the performance, they will still be witnesses of the art's message. Taylor says that by witnessing a live event, one can gain more knowledge than merely searching through archives, because it requires presence from the spectator (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 20). The experience of being there makes participants out of witnesses, and witnesses out of participants (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 20). However, Taylor explains that such transmission of knowledge is only possible in a live event because all of our senses are opened and exposed.

I adopt the term witnessing as theoretically significant because the performance fosters spectators' presence and attention. At a performance, witnessing requires interpreting the Other. Amelia Jones finds this process "the most powerful effect of recent body-oriented practices," for it drives the spectators to the point where they're "made responsible for the effects of [their] own perceptions and interpretive judgments" (*Body Art/ Performing the Subject* 17). Jones discusses how video and other forms of recorded live performances disrupt the very concept of performance as essentially a live event and a presence, recontextualizing "the ontological coherence of the body-as-presence" (*Body Art/ Performing the Subject* 35). Peggy Phelan insists

on the very genesis of performance as an unrepeatable or a non-reproductive, totally experiential, present type of event (146-8). Obviously, Monterroso put a lot of care in the reproducibility of *Tus tortillas* and in its availability as an artistic product and a cultural reference, as she collapsed her own twenty-four-hour live performance into a more accessible twelve-and a half minutes video. Jones calls the body in such diffused performances (as opposed to live ones), a “technophenomenological body,” allowing a preliminary reworking of phenomenology through technologically based rearticulations of [a] gender-particularized subject” (*Body Art/ Performing the Subject* 17). Thus, documents of the body-in-performance can just as easily express an open-ended meaning and interpretation as live performance ones (*Body Art/ Performing the Subject* 34). Hopefully, Monterroso’s *tortillera* appears as fleshed out in her video as she would in a live event where spectators would have the benefit of bodily proximity to her staged actions

The utility of documentation of live events by resorting to video or photography, or even the utility of spreading their message virtually through the Word Wide Web is, of course, of obvious benefit to both the performers and the critics. However, the sense of “presentedness” in virtual reality and the multiplication of dimensions of the “real” possible with the advent of new technologies is a constant in our daily life that should not be disregarded when considering performance. There is also the question of the impossibility in time and space to coincide with the emergence of new forms of art in the duration of the human life span. The fact that I have not been a witness to Yoko Ono’s first performances, or those of Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovic, Carole Schneemann, or Annie Sprinkle, due to the obvious time-space contingencies, does not necessarily imply that I cannot experience their work and analyze it in a different, now mediated, context. Hence, critics should “rely instead on the efficacy of the performance or the reproduction of that performance as an emotional and interpretive link between the past and our

imperfect present” (Blackson). The careful manipulation of space, time, ritual, and embodiment in performances such as *Tus tortillas*, as well as its widespread availability through the internet, its documentation and existence as a commoditized performance, add to its efficacy, as much as its dissemination. *Tus tortillas* makes “live” the embodiment of Mayaness and femininity as a spectacle and delivers its message against oppression and violence against women in Guatemala in a widely diffused manner through its video format.

Tus tortillas as “Poetic Disobedience” to Socially Assigned Scripts

Yet another strategy employed by Monterroso is the recitation of Q’eqchi’ words, which functions as “poetic disobedience” to the socially-assigned gender and ethnic script of the *tortillera*. Against self-censorship and self-deprecation, *Lix cua rahro*, the poem-incantation, offers passion and agency, constituting an act of “poetic disobedience,” a term coined and often used by performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In his poem-proclamation, *A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience*, Gómez-Peña goes beyond Henry David Thoreau’s concept of civil disobedience, and expands it to mean the act of “talking back” to power structures and all sorts of mechanisms of oppression by “We, the Other people.” By purposefully positioning himself as Other, and consequently belonging to a long line of historic subjects that have suffered the same sort of exploitation through the centuries, Gómez-Peña re-signifies what it means “to talk back” and “to make art” in a new postcolonial context (*A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience*). He is, in fact, that anonymous historic subject that Marc Bloch and the scholars from the French school of the *Annales* envisioned as “l’homme total” (Chevalier 267)¹¹, the human being itself, or the masses that have given body and existence to all contemporary humanity. Envisioning art as a battlefield and vouching “to continue ‘talking back’ and ‘making art,’” Gómez-Peña and his brotherhood/sisterhood of historic subjects embrace the cause of speaking for all of those in the

Americas that have been left behind by oppression and colonization (*A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience*). Likewise, Monterroso provides an “anti-story” in lieu of a colonizing master narrative, and repositions ethnic-hybrid women like herself in positions of power, be at home, in the community, or nationally, while rewriting social scripts. She effectively contests symbolic violence by rehearsing some steps of “poetic disobedience” with her spoken words, and she re-labels herself by consistently reassigning self-value to her actions through her display of agency and determination.

Monterroso’s poem/incantation, *Lix cua rahro*, destabilizes current safeguards on authenticity and ethnic politics that often lead to the fetishization of gender discourses. As an author of an “anti-story,” and recalling Sarup’s definition of anti-stories as stories of resistance, Monterroso chooses and is in control of possible outcomes for her *tortillera*’s representation. She achieves such a result by critically questioning the traditional tale of indigenous women’s historical subjugation and oppression, particularly from the inside, as they are also themselves the agents of their own domination. Thus her “anti-story” allows her sufficient agency to protagonize her own identity as a *Ladina* woman engaged in the task of reconnecting with her Maya Q’eqchi’ grandmother’s heritage, namely by learning how to speak her language. In this manner, Monterroso literally speaks in tongues and ‘talks back’ to the social assigned scripts that have oppressed so many indigenous women and their descendants in her native Guatemala. Even though her path is somewhat self-experimental and personal, her voice echoes with the voices of many others, while she opens up the *tortillera*’s script for new possibilities.

In *Lix cua rahro*, the poem, a copy of which is attached to the end of this chapter, the poetic voice is often self-named as “somos mujeres/ we are women.” Together, these many women that compose the *mujer* Maya and her descendants, through Monterroso’s voice and

embodiment, are escaping from him, he who is “darkness” in the poem, Xk’ajyinal in Q’eqchi’ Maya, a “matador de mariposas blancas/ a white butterfly killer” (*Lix cua rahro*). In a strong patriarchal society that is still influenced by classic Maya concepts of gender complementary, the *mujer* Maya is left fighting against real oppression, even if her male counterparts seem to think that it should be the natural order of things.

In Monterroso’s own words, *Tus tortillas* functions with the specific goal of denouncing the duality between what is commonly seen as the Maya *cosmovisión* or worldview, and what is, in fact, everyday practice of female oppression and gender violence: “The words in Q’eqchi’ Maya are poetry that intends to provide the sense of imperfection and unbalance on which gender relations are imposed” (*Lix cua rahro*). Monterroso’s inquiry into the discrepancy between the *mujer* Maya’s daily experience of violence and oppression and the good intentions of Maya *cosmovisión* defenders are echoed in the current debate about Maya gender discourse.

Camus asks blatantly: “What will signify to be a Maya woman and what will be its limitations? How will she be identified if one assumes the cultural diversity and the rupture of the indigenous/Ladino binomial in Guatemalan ethnic ideology?” (“Mujeres y mayas” 54). Camus calls attention to the fact that defenders of Maya *cosmovisión* are indeed advocating for an anti-discourse of gender as a social construction of difference, making a clear distinction between male and female social roles, but then fail by denying them in terms of power structures and its implications (“Mujeres y mayas” 52). Francisca Álvarez explains how for some Maya women the difference between daily practice and discourse is due to the fact that they are trying to be coherent with “the cause;” if they question “la cultura” in Maya discourse, or more precisely, what Maya men say, aren’t they in essence questioning their whole fight against ethnic oppression (122)? Even if this dilemma may be understandable in the case of the *mujer* Maya,

Camus concludes that a unique effort to elaborate a gender discourse that is able to incorporate the cultural difference of such a *cosmovisión* and its practical manifestations for the indigenous population is at stake, for there are indeed very few female Maya activists that don't recognize the current subordination status of the *mujer Maya* ("Mujeres y mayas" 46). Following in this line of thought, Nelson revealed how, in her anthropological interviews, "both male and female organizers [of different Maya associations] claimed that gender relations are equal among the Maya" (334), and how the discourse of gender complementary, the home as free from colonial disfiguration, and the spiritual power of the *mujer Maya* can all be "empowering discourses for Mayan women" (335). Nelson explains how such rhetoric can indeed be a sign of agency on the part of Maya women's organizations, and also of their fight against hegemonic foreign feminism (334-5). Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo explains in great detail how feminism as theorized and practiced in Western style and in academia falls short of indigenous women's expectations and does not necessarily promote the same agenda for advancement of indigenous women's conditions since they often see themselves first as indigenous subjects, and only then as gendered individuals.¹² To contradict that tendency, often, as pointed out by Camus, indigenous women and their descendants are "turning back to acknowledge [that] the[ir] grandmothers' legacy can be a path to self-worth" ("Mujeres y mayas" 52-3). Likewise, in *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso turns back to her own *abuelita*'s heritage and engages in the physical embodiment of tradition, while delineating her personal path for self-growth by (re)creating her own version of the millenary *tortillera*.

From the start of the poem *Lix cua rahro*, Monterroso functions as a linguist and cultural mediator. She is fluent in both Spanish and English, and functional with the relearned Q'eqchi' Maya of her childhood. As a translingual expert, she is capable of switching back and forth at

ease, and of offering capable translations of Q'eqchi' Maya into Spanish and English. The obvious goal with the inclusion of the subtitles in *Tus tortillas*' video is to reach a wide audience. Simultaneously, she is a transcultural expert because she interprets and embodies for national and foreign audiences the iconic *tortillera*; however, her translation or rendition of the Q'eqchi' Maya words she herself intones in the performance into the European languages in the subtitles, from the orality of Maya hermeneutics to the written colonizers' record, is basically problematic. Kay. B. Warren identifies Maya hermeneutics as essentially focusing “on highly condensed symbolism, multiple levels of meaning, and veiled language” (25).

As signaled by Mary Louise Pratt, being a translingual and transcultural mediator has its advantages and disadvantages. One has the tendency to see translation as a peace tool, a way to help communication between two entities without a common code possible, “as doing justice” (*Harm's Way* 1527). Nevertheless, there is always the risk that the translator/mediator becomes a traitor in the sense that “not only [they] have the ability to betray each side to the other, but also because they have the ability to betray both by envisioning, and embodying, something different, a third term” (*Harm's Way* 1527). In the poem, her final words, “tus tortillas, mi amor” (*Lix cua rahro*) leave no doubt about her “*desdoblamiento*,” a term which Pratt identifies as “a multiplying or unfolding of the self” (*Harm's Way* 1527). In essence, Monterroso is offering not a literal translation of her linguistic and cultural performance in Q'eqchi' Maya into Spanish and English, she is reinventing and recreating the *tortillera* through her own self-assigned and self-exploratory path. As a trickster, she resists interpretation and promotes an ambiguity hard to grasp when it comes to meaning production for she showcases the fissures in the problematic identity-making process of contemporary indigenous women and their descendants. Even though her subjective position as a Spanish native-speaker, who is fluent in English, and is relearning

her *abuelita*'s Q'eqchi' Maya fosters problems of authenticity, she offers different possibilities for interpretation, in a site where all translations collide into multiplied identities, as the possible echo of a collective voice is metonymically annunciated with "somos mujeres/we are women" (*Lix cua rahro*).

In the beginning of the poem, there is awareness and conscious-raising as the day comes up, "El día se aclara/The day is clearing" (*Lix cua rahro*). In the Guatemalan context, this simple line can mean a variety of openings from the end of the war and the violence, to the beginning of the transition into peace, passing through a personal journey of self-awareness and collective healing. However, such auspicious scenario is quickly disrupted by the presence of a threatening element of supernatural essence: "Mala suerte embrujada/ Bad luck bewitched" (*Lix cua rahro*). Suddenly, the spectators start asking questions about what is going on, perhaps considering how disturbing Guatemala's peace process is. Are the failing of the premises of the Peace Accords of 1996 seemingly dictating that Guatemalan people suffer a repeated curse of violence and misery? Answers come in the following line with a brief statement, "Cada pueblo con su respectivo idioma/ Each people with its own language" (*Lix cua rahro*). In Spanish, "pueblo" means "people," but also a "small village," thus there is some ambiguity in the translation or passage from Spanish to English. Is Monterroso referring to the different people of Guatemala, the different ethnicities, including the intricate differences between distinct Maya groups, or is she giving deeper meaning to the local level, the little village as a small world closed in its own *cosmovisión*? I sustain that she refers to the former, which is symbolic due to her own ancestry as a mixed race subject.

Afterwards, the recitation moves steadily to the performance per se, instead of just evoking a scenario or imagery. At this point, Monterroso is totally focused on the maize pulp, on

the act of kneading the tortilla dough, and starts connecting it to her lover, the act of loving itself, and the tradition of *tortillar*: “Amar hasta rayar el alba/ To love until the dawn is grate/ Amasar/ To knead/ Alma y cuerpo/ Soul and body” (*Lix cua rahro*). To love is to knead, a repeated act and a routine, even though sacred, one into which one puts one’s whole body and soul, as she stands not just for herself, but also for her ancestors, the multitude of women that have loved and kneaded tortillas for their lovers before her, since time immemorial. Here, a Freudian slip perhaps, but Monterroso inserts a textual element of “betrayal to the original,” to use Pratt’s expression, by adding one more word in English to the Spanish translation: “Nuestros antecesores/ Our absent ancestors” (*Lix cua rahro*). Does this simple word, “absent,” reveal her playful nature as a trickster, or is it perhaps something more serious, a profound reflection about the long gone Maya golden age? No matter how one interprets it, this single slip, purposeful or not, leaves room for questioning if there are any more additions, or perhaps subtractions, when the text goes back and forth from Q’eqchi’ Maya into Spanish and then into English.

Consequently, at the verbal level, this performance entails a great deal of ambiguity and is hard to grasp by a given number of spectators, since one presumes that not all native speakers of Q’eqchi’ Maya can also understand Spanish and English, or that people that are fluent in these two latter languages, aren’t necessarily conversant in Q’eqchi’ Maya, which is precisely why Monterroso’s role as translingual and transcultural mediator is in such high demand and can be so expertly manipulated in her performance *Tus tortillas*. One can identify a certain diglossia in her incantation, even though she probably tried hard not to let that happen, as certain linguistic slips keep occurring throughout the poem’s recitation in her performance. The employment of the collective pronoun “we,” for instance, is it symptomatic of her voicing a feeling of belonging, or on the contrary is it a refusal to accept the seemingly impassable binomial *Indio/Ladino* in a

clear affirmation of a common ancestry? Are there any “authentic” Maya or any *Ladinos* in contemporary Guatemala?

While at around minute 5, proclaiming in a monotone tone, “Amar hasta rayar el alba/ We love until the dawn is grate” (*Lix cua rahro*), she pats the dough hard, some three times, and this particular sound is amplified in the video version to convey that the show is about to begin, she suddenly pronounces words that disrupt any warm feeling the spectators could have gotten from hearing about her lovemaking: “Frialdad/ Coldness” (*Lix cua rahro*). The scenery is disrupted by this simple and carefully pronounced word, as she calmly shakes the positive imagery of lovemaking and transforms it almost alchemically into a physical invocation of an unpleasant sensation - cold. And then, uninterrupted, the negative side of the poem emerges, as the spectators are informed that “Se le están rodando las lágrimas/ Tears are rolling down” (*Lix cua rahro*). The subject of this passive action is never revealed or elucidated, and there is no punctuation that could aid in solving this puzzle. The emphasis is given to the tears that are slowly coming down, not to the subject who produces them, and maybe it is at this time that tears are incorporated into the maize dough. However, while spectators are told about such tears, they can't really see them. It's like all agency has been obliterated, which allows for another connection to the negative self-talk and self-effacement that is so pernicious in the Guatemalan case. Known to all is the fact that when it comes to symbolic violence and how it commands so many women's lives, from within, Monterroso's tears here echo a naturalized and implicitly consented state of oppression.

Further complications follow as the poem unravels and the performance comes to the climatic offering of handmade tortillas to the camera, a sign of both her delivery to her lover, as well as to the audience. Even though the poem is spoken and almost simultaneously written in

the subtitles in free form, with no rhyme or rhythm to consider, there is a sort of enjambment occurring with the rolling of the previous verses to the following ones, almost as if the lack of punctuation purposefully leads to a flowy kind of poetry. From the tears rolling down, the text uninterruptedly moves to “Matador de mariposas blancas,” followed not by its immediate translation into English, but rather interspersed by another verse in Spanish, “Somos mujeres,” and then culminating in the English translation of both verses in the following entries, “He is a white butterfly killer/ We are women” (*Lix cua rahro*). Is Monterroso’s character crying because he, this ominous male figure, is a white butterfly killer, and “we,” a collective voice, defenseless women, subjugated by his power? What do the white butterflies represent if not the souls or the spirit messengers of the many women who, generation after generation, have sacrificed themselves for their lovers and have lost themselves in the burdening routines of daily life? How and why does he kill them, this male figure later identified with darkness, to which, in Maya fashion, a female complementary corresponds?

As a response, further elucidation comes about his nature, but after there is no doubt about the functionality of gendered roles occupied in Maya complementarity, where women function literally as vaginas, bearers and transmitters of tradition and of Mayaness: “We are women/ Vagina/ He’s darkness/ Xk’ajyinal/ Su oscuridad” (*Lix cua rahro*). There’s a unique subject in response to a collective embodiment of gender positions, as “we” women stand for the “vaginas” that literally and metaphorically create and recreate mayaness and are the guardians of its authenticity. Concurrently, this male figure ominously represents darkness and a whole system of socially assigned transcripts put into place to nail women down to domesticity as a subalternized subject. It follows that there is no doubt about the role this male figure has in the *mujer* Maya’s life, crediting the enunciation of a rule that follows, “Tomar mujer es tabú/ To take

a woman is taboo” (*Lix cua rahro*), as if women, like land, were nothing but devoid entities waiting to be taken and possessed in conquest and colonization. At this point, the whole paradigm of Maya gender complementarity is shattered and irretraceable, for there are no stable images or notions anymore: “Imagen incierta/ Uncertain image” (*Lix cua rahro*). Once the *tortillera* realizes that her dreamed complementarity is no longer possible, that she is indeed being put into a context of oppression by a millenary male discourse of de facto inferiority, she feels lonely first, and then a turmoil of anger, resentment, and vengeance unravels: “Soledad/ Loneliness” (*Lix cua rahro*). Possibly Monterroso is referring here to the lack of romance and women’s will in Maya traditional sexual relationships, where they typically do not select their mates, rather they have them selected for them, typically by their fathers or older brothers.

As the apparent calmness of the beginning gives place to a contained, but not demurred speech, the language becomes increasingly violent and crude. Words like “killer” and “vagina” culminate in the verb “to fornicate,” and there’s no doubt now that Monterroso’s incantation/poem is becoming a curse as she blatantly confronts how the *mujer* Maya is put down by her male counterparts. Against the grain of Maya gender complementarity discourse, through her body and her sex, understood in a collapsed form of rebellion against the rule of the father and the Spanish inherited sense of honor: “Yumbetac/ La mujer fornica/ She fornicates” (*Lix cua rahro*). Again, the trilingual translation or trans-literation’s value can and should be questioned, for there is not just a crescendo in tone, and in the embodiment process that runs throughout the whole performance, but also an augmentation in the trickster and mischievousness.

From this point on, the text grows into a spiral of interjectional sentences that oppose or contradict each other, expressing two concurrent sides of the same story; that is the process of

unraveling and debunking from a female subject position the myth of Maya gender complementarity: “Enamorar/ To fall in love/ Xk’ajyinal/ Su oscuridad/ He’s Darkness/ Ixka/ Somos mujeres/ We are women/ Amn iz’ejcual/ Alma y cuerpo/ Soul and body” (*Lix cua rahro*). At a rapid pace, a common story of boy-meets-girl and then they fall in love and so on, quickly gets interjected by his presence, his darkness of a presence, to which the choir of collective voices “we” women responds by ratifying again their full commitment, body and soul, just like their ancestors, perpetuating the same line from where all *tortilleras* descend in Guatemala.

This recurrent repetition of the body and soul, or rather, the soul and body, the emphasis being on the soul, the spirit, the light and the knowledge that represents the indigenous women and their role as bearers and transmitters of tradition and Mayaness, can also be read as an act of transubstantiation. Their soul and their body, like Monterroso’s blood, discussed earlier, in addition to the tortillas that incorporate her saliva, her sweat, and her tears, embody the body and the soul of the Maya essence, as does the white butterfly, of what it means to be a *tortillera*. What is “authentic” in this context is again questioned once we open a wide window into the ethnographic mainstream representation that permeates all spheres of the Guatemalan social fabric. Transubstantiated into the ironic tortillas made with such sacrifice and embedded in such a controversial performance, Maya essence is disputed as an “authentic” cultural construction.

Likewise, the soul and body of the *mujer* Maya is presumably offered, even though in reality is being refused for being victimized, by coping with such a blatant record of institutionalized oppression. The message is clear: “you might think you have me, and you might indeed have the best of me, my body, my fluids, my soul, but for real all you have is just my curse, a transubstantiated form of evil that I am unleashing to refute the script that you yourself

created for me in this world, for I can imagine and I am fully capable of living by my own script.”

Ultimately, this ominous male figure becomes a “Culb/ Corazón de palo tirado en la montaña/ Heart of stick thrown in the mountain,” a lifeless doll figure thrown on the mountain for he is nothing, and stands for nothing without the *mujer* Maya’s blood, her commitment to the cause and the maintenance of tradition: “Xquiq’uel/ Mi sangre/ My blood/ Xk’ajyinal/ Su oscuridad/ He’s Darkness” (*Lix cua rahro*). As such, the *tortillera* stands for a metonym of the *mujer* Maya, a cultural prosthetics on whom the whole nation and particularly Maya ideology stand, and without whom the men could not function or make sense. In this manner, the *mujer* Maya is physically and metaphorically supporting the burden of Mayaness and ultimately, of the pluri-democratic nation where every subject collides in a multicultural rainbow: “Aj pujuyer/ Guardacamino/ She guards the way” (*Lix cua rahro*).

At the same time that she reinforces her role as the blood that sustains the *tortillera* and the national iconography, that’s the precise moment in the performance when she starts frying up the tortillas in a pan, around 12:10 minutes. She consequently serves them, while a single word in Spanish, without any English translation to follow, shows as a subtitle, “Soledad,” and as the camera closes up, and the performance slowly fades to its end at 12:30 minutes, a voice off calmly states, “Lix cua rahro/ Tus tortillas mi amor/ Your tortillas my love” (*Lix cua rahro*). Ironically, Monterroso has then succeeded in “talking back” to the socially assigned script of the *tortillera* and in “making art.”

Her “poetic disobedience” in essence reclaims a different epistemology, a truly Mayan one, where gender complementarity is a reality, a white butterfly not killed and sacrificed by the ominous male, the primordial being of darkness. It is as if she is going back in time, to a

mythical suspended reality where the Maya *cosmovisión* can be fully articulated and experienced without the subsequent layer upon layer of Westernized coloniality to contend with; as if the pre-Hispanic indigenous past were a golden age where conflict and power asymmetries were non-existent. On the other hand, depending on Monterroso's perspective and knowledge of Maya daily life, her performance can be read in the opposite way, meaning that tradition is oppressive, and it is now time for Maya women and their descendants to rebel against nostalgic re-visitations of mythical pasts that only serve the purpose of maintaining a strongly de facto patriarchal hierarchy. Ultimately, serving up tortillas contaminated by body fluids and ill intent does not harken to a golden age of Maya civilization.

Monterroso becomes possessed by the white butterfly light and luminous version of possibility, "speaking in tongues," often slipping through the paths of high-speed diglossia between three languages. Concurrently, she conjures a curse as powerful as her need to neutralize the active forces of machismo that have worked through the bodies of "we" women in Guatemala continuously until they become tailored into the socially expected script of the *tortillera*. Interesting enough, her "speaking in tongues" conjures up a whole new system of language hierarchy, as it is obvious that the primacy is given to the Q'eq'chi' Maya language.

Poetry in *Tus tortillas* is embodied for the very form of the poem *Lix cua rahro* creates meaning promoting an intended correspondence between lived experience and speech. This phenomenon occurs in the same manner that Carolyn Ellis conceives as "lyric poems often focus on representing episodes or epiphanies" (201). In this sense, poetic language re-creates and evokes lived experience. For Ellis, poetry "recreates embodied speech in its meter, cadence, speed, alliteration, connotation, and rhyme" and often "the short lines, breaks, spaces, and pauses create a text that sounds more like actual conversation" (201). Thus, both form and content in

poetry seek to evoke an emotional and intellectual response in the reader or the spectator in live recitation. The specific poetics of *Lix cua rahro* give voice to the *mujer* Maya and functions as nativist poetry as well as an alternative discourse challenging canonical interpretations of native texts. As a performer, Monterroso invites her spectators to be seduced by her poetics, while she undergoes the transformation of embodying the “native” possessed and in charge of the power of the Q’eq’chi’ Maya distinct hermeneutics. By introducing the spectators to her own experience, by having them experience her experience, she makes visible the power interplay that constructs the iconic *tortillera* and opens the possibility for cultural transformation by interrupting their preconceived flux of expectations.

Even though much of her speech is demurred or is indeed body talk, instead of articulated and formal, Monterroso’s spoken words function as what Severino João Albuquerque classifies both as “reportive,” as well as “distortive.” Drawing on Albuquerque’s study of staged violence in Latin American contemporary theatre, a “reportive” is a verbal violent utterance in which usually a character or protagonist reports violent situations on stage (42). Most frequently, as noted by Albuquerque, “one character gives another a straightforward account of what has been experienced” (42). In this way, the protagonist becomes “a reporter of violence experienced not only individually, but also collectively, [as a sort of] historian of his [own] people’s predicament” (Albuquerque 42). Albuquerque also suggests that reportives are often more effective in shocking spectators than actual scenes of physical violence “both in print and onstage” (42). In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso’s spoken text is a sort of “reportive” that effectively insinuates to the spectator the violence suffered by women in their own homes. The whole performance functions as a *tableau* that “reports” and showcases the reality of painstaking daily

hard work in an oppressive context, a visualization in clear contrast with the ethnographic version typically displayed in a museum.

In addition, some spoken words are also a “distortive,” following Albuquerque’s theorization, as “the object of distortives is language itself” (59). Albuquerque explains that “distortives represent an indirect form of personal aggression, since the addressee cannot help but feel disturbed or threatened by the disruption of worldview that is brought about by any attempt on the part of the addresser to distort or deny aspects of [her] own language” (Albuquerque 59). In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso denies, in Albuquerque’s sense, “the literal aspect, metaphoric quality, or symbolic function of language” (59) by re-articulating in spoken words the traumatic inner speech experienced by Guatemalan indigenous women. Her “speaking in tongues” is part of her own performance of Mayaness and contributes to denounce the fact that not just men, or the ominous male “he” in the poem, but also women themselves, the collective vagina-voice that kneads tortillas and is the blood sustaining matter of a living Maya line, are to blame for perpetuating the victimization process as “guardacaminos” (*Lix cua rahro*) or the bearers of symbolically oppressive traditions.

In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso showcases several possibilities of resistance to this ethnic and gender paradigm imposed on Guatemala’s indigenous women by self-expressing her hybridity and role-playing with her latent Maya roots. What stands to reason is that some variation can be introduced into the simple act of reproducing, or repeatedly enacting an ancient practice such as *tortillar*. Monterroso’s simple actions as an ethnic hybrid engaging in a gender-specific millenary practice, lead to a demystification of essentialist views on Mayaness. By promoting in its place a body discourse of resistance and re-signification, Monterroso decenters official and traditional tales of mayaness and femininity and succeeds in displacing the question

of identity in Guatemala from the unproductive level of “authenticity” to the empowering realm of new hybrid possibilities.¹³

Monterroso’s body talk is, borrowing Emma Pérez’s expression, a “useful apparatus for critique” for her embodiment of decolonial imagery re-enacts those in-between spaces that deconstruct the Guatemalan ethnic and gender binaries of a colonialist dominance (147). Pérez constructs her innovative concept of “decolonial imaginary” drawing from many postcolonialists’ work on the “third space” as intervention and political stand. As a contemporary theorist seeking to reframe Chicana history, she is engaged in the illustration of third space voices, politics, and feminisms. She conceptualizes a “decolonial imaginari” where Homi Bhabha pondered on the interstitial “time lag” between the colonial and the postcolonial - “the decolonial imaginary is that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (Pérez 6). Vibrant and in motion, those who inhabit this in-between space from where otherness is decolonized, become interpreters or cultural translators at the service of their own political agendas, rather than the intermediaries between the colonizers and the millions that they govern, against the colonial apparatus of control and dominance. In spite of the fact that Monterroso’s actions can be seen by Maya women as cultural appropriation, her body talk in tandem with her spoken words decolonizes the ethnic imagery in contemporary Guatemala.

Implicit in the poem *Lix cua rahro* is the question of a shift in attention to focus on the language of hate, such as insults or threats, and its performative capacity. Verbal violence’s performativity pertains to the ability that language has to produce such an effect as that of placing a subject in a subordinated position (Plaza Velasco 137). Therefore, language *is* violence, since it produces its own kind of violence too. In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso’s recitation is violent

in the same manner that internalized self-deprecatory speech conditioning women's movements and existence is oppressive and aims at regulating them into a docile and modest archetypical *tortillera*. Gender hate speech repeated over and over again, degrades and debilitates the *mujer* Maya from the inside, creating a non-stop echo in her head.

Auto-ethnographic Performance and Self-Empowerment in *Tus tortillas*

The third performance strategy employed by Monterroso in *Tus tortillas* is auto-ethnographic exploration.¹⁴ Drawing from Gust A. Yep, who contends that there is an “I” constantly changing faces in the cultural borderlands (71), I argue that Monterroso plays around with “passing” as an indigenous woman while being a *Ladina*, a strategy that allows her to change the national social scripts on Mayaness and femininity.¹⁵ According to Dwight Conquergood's notion of ethnography as embodied research and inquiry (180), I conclude that Monterroso can be perceived as a subject who questions Guatemalan identity, paying special attention to the ingrained symbolic violence that is at the core of national narratives of gender and ethnicity. Starting from inside the very same space of domesticity and gendered confinement, the kitchen, Monterroso repositions herself as a hybrid. This process, in turn, allows for reassigning self-value and subjectivity at the communal and national levels. Monterroso's performance is a work of patience that culminates in showcasing the value of daily practices and suggests that women's re-enactment of certain practices can bring about resistance and the power to decide who, what, and how cultural markers are embodied and perpetuated. Essentially, Monterroso brings elements of transgression into the millenary tradition of tortilla-making that ultimately transform it. Her embodiment in this performance translates into a border-crossing between the *tortillera*'s assigned social role and her own rebellion against it. Concurrently, Monterroso expresses her ambivalence between her indigenous background and

her current *Ladina* status. In this manner, Monterroso's performance brings visibility to issues of contemporary identity and cultural imagery, while questioning the commodification of the Other.

Even though Monterroso's is a solo performance and a *sotto voce* "text," her intent to speak for a multitude as depicted in the poem *Lix cua rahro* as "We, women" corresponds to new hybrid plurivocal explorations. Exploring subjectivity and lived experience, auto-ethnographic performance can function as a plurivocal "text" that promotes a space for expression and evocation of a plurality or collectivity of voices in many instances perverting the boundaries between insider/ outsider, subject/ object, and self / other. Monterroso's engagement in a complex strategizing with Maya hermeneutics and making her voice heard while embodying the *mujer* Maya conduces to a particular ventriloquism that seeks to expand on the possibilities for transcultural understandings of the Guatemalan *tortillera*.¹⁶ For Pratt, autoethnography is a concept linked to the complicated relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, and to resistance practices and hegemonic discourses offered by the native account. Thus, it has more to do with one's own culture than with literary autobiography, "autoethnographic texts [...] involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror [that] are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with the indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding" (*Autoethnography* 28). Monterroso's own voice, ultimately, is more than ventriloquist, particularly considering how she self-explores her own subject position and privilege.

Thinking of Monterroso's *Tus tortillas* as self-exploration implies considering what is at stake with auto-ethnography. Even though this performance does not fully correspond to the genres explored by several critics, it satisfies most of the requirements to be considered at least auto-ethnographic inquiry for it fulfills specific criteria, particularly if we shift the focus from

writing to performance and think in terms of an audience instead of a reader.¹⁷ In essence, what matters in *Tus tortillas* is its verisimilitude, which for Ellis and Bochner is the fact that it invokes in the readers/spectators a sense that the process embodied is lifelike, believable, and possible (751). Because Monterroso shows and embodies, rather than tells the lived experience of the *tortillera*, her self-exploratory art is key as a counter discourse to socially assigned scripts and hegemonic power struggles that have been oppressing the *mujer* Maya. As her embodiment results in expanding ethnic positions to find her own, Monterroso's practice is often subversive and ironic. Contrary to traditional social behaviors, Monterroso, a *Ladina*, fully embraces and embodies an indigenous woman in her *tortillera* exploration.

Auto-ethnography as carnivalesque practice is a powerful way of destabilizing authority that often leads to rethinking identity.¹⁸ Monterroso's great care and attention in recording *Tus tortillas*, a feat precisely for which she won a prize, adds to the new current of hybrid forms and registers that explore the manifestations of the self and the social construction of identity¹⁹.

Auto-ethnography²⁰ is better understood as cultural practice, and also as ethical practice, as story that re-enacts an experience by which people find meaning and through that meaning are able to cope with the trauma of said experience.²¹ Similar insights have been developed by Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, Carolyn Ellis, and Garance Maréchal, among others. At the performance level, auto-ethnographies "contribute to remaking self and identity as a *site* for the negotiation of social, cultural, and political dialogue, often in a carnivalesque form" (Maréchal 44).

In this manner, each of Monterroso's gestures and her embodiment contribute to an accumulation of experiences that, as geological strata, ultimately constitute her identity, both as performer and individual. Her "passing" can be understood as what V. Chen and D. Tanno identify as a "double vision" since "a person's dual identity or multiple identity is no longer

perceived as an ‘either/or’ choice, but ‘both/and’ (quoted in Chuang 55). Thus, problems often arise as there is a tendency to misunderstand an identity situation such as the one embodied by Monterroso. Monterroso’s identity is a combination of both/and simultaneous existence, rather than neither/nor. Often she will be perceived as someone trying to “pass” the imaginary line between privilege and oppression.

Ultimately, it is the performative aspect of “passing” that is crucial to understand how Monterroso disrupts the national narrative of upward mobility through whitening, by embodying the practices and behaviors of a *tortillera*. In fact, Monterroso *becomes* a *tortillera*. Considering “passing” an act one performs by acting or mimicking a certain set of behaviors and practices, it follows that it is by performing that which is other to her, that an individual becomes someone else, an ambivalent “I;” and therefore increases her social and cultural status. Whitening or creolizing her gestures would equate to denying her indigenous ancestry, while just sticking to a traditional Maya reenactment would be the same as disregarding her *Ladina* and privileged position in Guatemalan society. Instead, her “passing” is ambivalent and could easily be interpreted as shooting either upwardly or downwardly, since what really matters is her “in-betweenness,” to borrow Doris Sommer’s expression.²² Consequently, Monterroso’s ability lies in the fact that as a hybrid subject, she disrupts any preconceived and expected representations, for she is a subject-in-construction and in permanent contradiction and affirmation. Maybe in that sense, her poem mentions an “uncertain image” (*Lix cua rahro*).

Monterroso openly manifests her intent to seduce and to fit into a new paradigm of indigeneity. Her own words presenting *Tus tortillas*: “It [her spoken words and her performance] connotes the controversy of a *Ladina* woman that wants to be accepted by the same Maya culture and tries to seduce her” (*Lix cua rahro*). Thus Monterroso is borrowing Sommer’s expression,

“recognizing [herself] as the Other’s other, as the potential object of another (asymmetrical) desire” (30). In this sense, her “passing” becomes an open dialogue with her own heritage through her relearning of her *abuelita*’s language and through the embodiment of the long practiced daily ritual of *tortillar*. In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso proves that there can be and there are, in fact, variations to the dichotomical line that assigns Guatemalan citizens to the subject positions of *Indios* or *Ladinos*.

While hybridizing the *tortillera*, or flipping it, Monterroso is a mediator between said speakers and listeners in the speech act of representation. She does not pretend to be speaking for anyone else but herself; however, while exploring her own path she also bridges the gap between those that cannot speak and those that refuse to listen, for she embodies a visual scream that resounds in high pitch across the whole social spectrum. Her locus of enunciation is problematic, however, as she provides alternative paths of resistance to the *mujer Maya* by literally embodying her representation, walking in her shoes, and by doubling it, she displays the hidden violence implicit in the “housewivication” of Guatemalan women, and complicates for the spectators their understanding of categories such as femininity, Mayaness, and humility. There is no stable image of the *tortillera*, and Monterroso, by showcasing other possibilities, contributes to de-stabilize “naturalized” notions of femininity and Mayaness that have been consistently oppressing women in Guatemala. Her “anti-story” or counter-narrative is in fact a critique of such naturalization of symbolic violence against women, and of the exclusion of the *mujer Maya* from the daily democratic practices of the nation.

Nevertheless, does Monterroso have the right to speak for the *mujer Maya*? Nelson argues that “the transparency of access to subjectivity, the very category of “woman”, and the move to “speak for” the other made by anthropologists, whites, feminists, first worlders, and

solidarity activists, and so on (all locations I must speak from) have been stumped (bewildered, and made political) for some time now” (318). Ellis reminds us that performance theorists such as Conquergood and Pelias claim that “performers should not try to speak ‘for a community,’ but instead should be engaged in shared conversations in which they speak ‘to and with the community” (208). Thus, “performance is not so much representational as it is dialogic and conversational” (Ellis 208) and personifying a cultural icon like the *tortillera* complicates representational issues, even if it also opens up a dialogue with the spectators about femininity and indigeneity in contemporary Guatemala.

I contend that this performance becomes a transgressive act by emphasizing that the iconic *tortillera* is an unstable “text.” Consequently, there is a need for an emergent, situated, and reflexive construction that renames and reclaims a particular and personal experience, in this case that of Monterroso. In that sense, as a personal embodiment that disrupts and disturbs master narratives, *Tus tortillas* is political, rather than cathartic, for it empowers the *mujer* Maya and her descendants as autonomous social subjects capable of writing their own history and of re-creating their own cultural icons and practices. At the same time, it urges the spectators, echoing Ellis’s words, “to be critical, appreciative, and bear witness to personal suffering and lived experience” (209).

In this manner, spectators have the burden of competence in interpreting and producing meaning out of Monterroso’s performance; however, as a critic, can I speak of a privileged locus of interpretation? A locus of interpretation for *Tus tortillas* would have to be situated, and circumscribed to the lived experiences of the spectators themselves, taking into consideration what Sommer’s identifies as the “site of trouble [that] is the underdeveloped place where reader [spectator] response meets political imperatives [and] the inordinate difficulty that educated

readers [spectators] have in recognizing themselves as textual targets” (13). Although Monterroso does make a considerable effort to make her performance available to Western spectators, it remains problematic how an indigenous audience would react and respond to her performance, most likely in a distinct manner. Her emphasis on reviving her indigenous fluency and her exploration of her own ethnic background nevertheless, make her complicit with the indigenous subaltern’s employment of a specific strategy of resistance. Often it is not that the subaltern cannot speak, but that the colonizers cannot listen or chose to suppress, ignore, or simply fail to understand native “texts” and their meanings. In Sommer’s opinion, “To ask if the subaltern can speak, as Gayatri Spivak had asked, misses a related point. The pertinent question is whether the other party can listen” (20).

In response, Monterroso’s performance as is, becomes a complex interweavement of *cosmovisiones*, colliding different possibilities of meaning from two very distinct epistemologies. “Fluidity, ambiguity, and hybridity are ‘threatening’ [to the audience] because they represent the possibility of an in-between, of contamination and obfuscation of not only personal, but also epistemological boundaries” (Eileraas 137). That the meaning of Monterroso’s performance for a Maya audience might be distinct from an Occidentalized one, only solidifies the argument that her careful recitation of the Maya Q’eq’chi’ poem *Lix cua rahro* and the latter orchestrated embeddedness with her body fluids’ manipulation work in tandem to infuse her performance with coded meaning and symbolic understanding that is unavailable at a first impression. Relying on the power of Maya hermeneutics, her performance stands as a subtle, but not less poignant critique of the imported system of knowledge and meaning production of the invaders, most notably through the ethnographic model of Western Academia and its reified notion of indigeneity. Thus, her *tortillera* conspicuously undermines the representations of the *mujer* Maya

enclosed in the ethnographic museum, from which it stemmed, and instead reveals the fallacies of mayaness as spectacle, a commodity available to vast audiences.

How does Monterroso's locus of enunciation affect her performance? Noticing the position from which one speaks is fundamental for the success of *Tus tortillas* because without fully acknowledging her own hybridity and ambivalence as a cultural subject, Monterroso would not be able to display the fissures and interstices in the iconic *tortillera* as the metonymic amalgam that condenses the specificity of Guatemalan identity politics. Monterroso needs to carefully strip and bare the nakedness of her own problematic identity in order to showcase her fragmentary and in-construction subject position as a Maya descendant and the endless meanings for the "*tortillera*."²³ Therefore, Monterroso is moving in, and moving out, of the iconic *tortillera* in *Tus tortillas*, and she does so in order to produce a specific effect, unsettle the audience, and to open new possibilities for the *mujer* Maya and her descendants. Provoking in the public the need to rethink contemporary notions of femininity and indigeneity in Guatemala, what matters is the usefulness of her performance, besides the aesthetic aspect or its artistic *mise-en-scène*. She wants to contaminate or infect others, to curse them, with what she sees as the need to create her own *tortillera*, thus with their own likewise problematic and inquiring cultural icons.

Monterroso is also addressing the academia with *Tus tortillas*, mainly those American anthropologists doing ethnography in her country, and she reacts against their authority and skewed view of indigenous people or their "scientific" Occidentalism. Certain anthropologists such as Kay B. Warren have long addressed such ethical and methodological issues, especially concerning, as she had already stated in 1997, "the fact that the US political and military involvement in Guatemala was part of the problem" (40), even if anthropologists like herself did

not support them. Furthermore, indigenous scholars that often function as organic intellectuals in Gramsci's sense, also rebel against such depictions and outsiders' contribution to reify Maya identity. For instance, Victor Montejo writes that "Indigenous people have always complained that anthropologists do not listen to them, that instead they have represented native people with the anthropologist's preferred images: "primitives," "minorities," "backward," or just "informants" (16). And Montejo also makes the point that it's the colonizer that doesn't listen: "We Mayans find it difficult to deal with the academic world because if we tell the "experts" what is Mayan, they are reluctant to listen; instead they find it more scientific (comfortable) to tell us what it is to be Mayan, or to define Mayan culture" (17). Warren explains that Pan-Maya critics of anthropology have denounced "the use of ethnographic interviews and autobiographical accounts which underscore individualism and divisions within the Mayan community" (41). Spivak's strategic essentialism is more than ever necessary for Maya survival as understood from the complex strategizing of ethnic organizations. While Mayanists seek to represent themselves in a politically advantageous manner, Monterroso as ethnographers strips them bare, exposing the contradictions inherent to Maya discourse.

Beyond such complex divisions, *Tus tortillas*' ambivalence allows it to fluctuate between being read as a typical "intercultural text," to borrow Pratts's expression, and as a *testimonio*. However, Monterroso is not a subaltern, rather a privileged *Ladina*. As an intercultural text, *Tus tortillas* would be always in-between the Maya and the Western worldviews, unstable. While *testimonio*, it would give authority to subaltern voices. This performance is not a *testimonio* or testimonial representation, rather an exploration into the repertoire, because it is more focused on the embodiment of certain cultural and identity practices than on the writing self of subalternity and the intricacies of a "rhetoric of particularism" to use Sommer's term. In *Tus tortillas*, the

idea of transcultural production, appropriation, and circulation of “texts” and cultural practices is scrutinized, but only to the extent that it relates to Monterroso’s personal path to reinventing the *tortillera*. Monterroso’s performance is a form of auto-ethnographic inquiry²⁴, even though not necessarily coinciding with what is contemporarily understood as auto-ethnographic performance or an auto-ethnographic “text.”

In conclusion, Monterroso’s focus is on evocative self-exploration since “Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response” (Ellis and Bochner 744). Evocative performance is at the intersection of auto-ethnography and performance studies, wherein certain postulates hold true: both the performer and the audience are key elements of research; the performer’s embodied experiences create an effect and have an impact on the audience; the goal is to provoke emotion and a reaction in the spectators, and to do so in a controlled environment, in order for further analysis to take place. Hence, what’s performed on stage or staged can be a multitude of representations, including daily behavior and practices as life history and the difference being that the performer is also constructing a portrait of the self.

Contesting Mayanness in Contemporary Guatemala

Why embody a *tortillera* when, despite her heritage, Monterroso does not identify herself as indigenous? Why fight the *mujer Maya*’s quest for social justice and recognition when one is a *Ladina*, a person with an education, and an urbanite? Why relearn her *abuelita*’s (grandmother’s) Q’eq’chi Maya language long after her death and the disruption of her family’s connection to the land? *Tortillar* or tortilla-making is a daily ritual aimed at regulating the body of indigenous women in Guatemala by socializing them into an anticipated form of femininity and indigeneity.

In *Tus tortillas*, Mayanness and femininity are reshaped into something more attainable for Guatemalan women. Monterroso bridges the separation between *Indias* (Indian) and *Ladinas*,

by bringing to light her own ambiguity as an ethnic hybrid. Monterroso expands the State's colonial discourse by positioning herself as a hybrid; she can thus destabilize its claim for absolute ethnic authority. She mimics oppression toward the Other and convincingly shows that the Other, in her role as a *tortillera* is, ultimately, one's self in the sense that we all have agency.

Resorting to Doris Sommer, Monterroso's performance functions as a text in that "it is calculated to produce the desire that will then be frustrated" (15). On the one hand, spectators are seduced into gazing at the intimacy of Monterroso's open kitchen and open one-woman-show on Mayaness and femininity. On the other hand, her *tortillera* resists appropriation and is hard to read as a cultural iconic figure. Hence, *Tus tortillas* both engages and deflects spectators because "if reliable knowledge cannot be gotten, control is impossible" (Sommer 17). Ethnic exoticism inherent in figures such as the *tortillera* cannot be sustained without the people and the practices that feed it. Monterroso's *tortillera* is truly postmodern in its contradictory way.

In *Tus tortillas*, Monterroso does not pretend to represent that which she is not, an indigenous Maya woman from Guatemala. Rather, she explores her path of indigenous descent. Monterroso might look indigenous but she resists being commodified into an ethnographic museum rarity. Her actions toward her lover might seem inoffensive and dull, just a woman preparing her lover's food, when in reality she is doctoring his food and, in the process, casting a spell to produce awareness. By rebelling against the fantasy of the tame, demurred indigenous woman, Monterroso refuses the social pressure put on Guatemalan women by a patriarchal culture that repeatedly pushes for essentialist views on identity. Nevertheless, she caricaturizes Guatemalan males, the State, anthropologists, and museums by reducing them to unidimensionality, thus essentializing them too. In spite of that, Monterroso's *tortillera* is not

keen on reproducing unproductive ideals of ethnic authenticity that further confine indigenous women in the domestic sphere away from fully democratic participation.

Monterroso's simple acts, as an ethnic hybrid making tortillas, demystify traditional viewpoints of Maya women. Instead, she urges women to resist the old expectations of how they should live their lives by challenging the so-called authentic Maya woman. Her lesson is that women may empower and value themselves both in the home and outside the family as citizens of their country and the world they share. Monterroso's showcase performance reveals the inconsistencies in ethnicity and identity-production and displays the paradoxes of performing Mayaness as a survival strategy as well as a commodity with a market value. As the production of ethnic paradigms ready to be consumed and commodified is vital in the global context to understand current negotiations of identity and ethnic survival, the issue of authenticity emerges repeatedly. Monterroso's *Tus tortillas* gives an optimistic response to the authenticity dilemma as she is not afraid of hybrid and merged solutions such as her *tortillera*. Nevertheless, this Guatemalan problem remains: are Guatemalans able and willing to embrace true gender equity at home letting go of a centuries-old culture of male domination and impunity to domestic violence? Monterroso's *tortillera* would encourage women to pursue their own agendas and continue questioning the status quo.

Notes

¹ Probably the best known is Rigoberta Menchú Tum, recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize and whose testimonio *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in partnership with Elizabeth Burgos is an all time bestseller; however, many more indigenous women are steadily starting to participate in the public sphere at the communal, regional, and national levels. As an example, women's rights activist Mildre Yaxon, of Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads) is among the youngest fighting to end femicide in Guatemala.

² *Ladino/a* in the Guatemalan context is a term that refers to the mestizo or mixed-race population of the country, and is officially recognized as a distinct ethnic group by the Ministry of Education, which bases its working definition of the term on a 2007 monograph by Ronald Soto-Quirós and David Díaz Arias. This term is not to be confused with Sephardic Jews' designations.

³ The video won first prize in the Third Central American Video Art Contest in San José, Costa Rica, in 2004. It also garnered a special prize for its "precise recording as a performance," according to Doriam Díaz.

⁴ In *Proceed with Caution when engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*, Sommer analyzes how some literary texts attributed to minorities redirect the readers' desire for more intimacy and familiarity with the Other to more cautions, respectful engagements. She calls the strategies of cultural discontinuity that frustrate the Western readers' move to appropriate the Other's culture, a rhetoric of particularism. In the case of Rigoberta Menchú's world famous *testimonio*, Sommer identifies a strategic protestation of secrecy that both further entices, and deflates the readers' desire to appropriate her culture tropes.

⁵ I understand body talk in the context of a body art, in which staging of the female body artistically conveys meaning.

⁶ This and all subsequent translations from Spanish to English are mine.

⁷ Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has theorized symbolic violence as “a form of power that is directly exerted on the bodies and, just like magic, without any physical coercion” (Bourdieu 38). It is thus a symbolic force, a violence, which according to Marta Plaza Velasco “acts in an insidious, invisible, and gentle manner in the deepest of the body” (135). Unlike physical or direct violence, symbolic violence works gently until it fulfills its goal of mining and controlling the subject from inside, as a self-regulatory or self-censorship mechanism.

⁸ Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Hermann Nitsch, Franko B., Vito Acconci, Daniela Kostova, Olivia Robinson, Marina Abramovic, May Ling Su, Ingrid Berthon-Moine, Casey Jenkins, and Marni Kotak, to name just a few.

⁹ In the Andean world, *chicha* is traditionally prepared by using human saliva as a catalyzer for fermentation, and there is even a specific verb in Spanish—*muquiar* or *muquear*—to designate the act of masticating the maize for the *chicha* production.

¹⁰ Ruth Behar is an anthropologist and Nicole Von Germeten an historian who have studied cases of Latin American women doctoring their lovers’ food during colonial times as a form of coping with and resisting gender violence by putting a spell on their lovers. Likewise historian Martha Few has analyzed in great depth Guatemalan cases in which colonial women doctored their lovers’ food as an everyday form of gender empowerment and agency.

¹¹ For further exploration of the *École des Annales*’ theorizations, see Jacques Blot. In his own words, “[Les Annales] prétendent dépasser à la fois l’histoire bourgeoise traditionnelle et le

marxisme, au nom d'un retour au 'concret,' d'une histoire 'totale' capable de retrouver l'homme, 'l'homme total'" (Blot 46).

¹² Camus acknowledges a steady production of texts and discourse, presently, pertaining to discussing and questioning the articulation of a Maya gender speech that is loyal to tradition, and yet is already situated in modernity - "Desde las mujeres mayas ha empezado una producción de textos que abordan el género tratando de enfrentar los modelos de la equidad y de la dualidad/complementariedad. Son voces que empiezan a conocerse y se puede esperar que esta corriente aumente, ya que cada vez son más las mujeres mayas con acceso a la educación y con motivación para la investigación, la denuncia y la propuesta" ("Mujeres y mayas" 53). Maya scholars such as Irma Otzoy, Emma Chirix, and Amanda Pop are those that Camus refers to, among many others ("Mujeres y mayas" 53).

¹³ Drawing on Sarup's theorization, I understand "decentering" as a mental process in which "individual consciousness can no longer be seen as the origin of meaning, knowledge, and action," therefore pertaining to the realm of the unconscious and subjective, thus collective and ongoing (46).

¹⁴ Auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that combines different aspects of social studies; auto = self, ethno = culture, graphy = research process. It is a controversial topic in ethnography and its meaning and consideration has been shifting more recently as personal narratives become more instrumental in understanding subaltern and silenced voices: "The meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult" (Ellingson and Ellis 449).

¹⁵ "Passing" is a cultural and social process typically undergone by people who wish to fit in or assimilate to a new culture, which is common with immigrants in a foreign country, and can

be enacted with different purposes in mind. Chuang mentions, for example, “to become a member of another cultural group, to be accepted, to gain personal benefits, [or] to avoid persecution” (55). Therefore, the act of “passing” can be aimed upward or downward, and it can be passive or active, depending on the circumstances of each individual. In the Latin American context, it is common to talk of *superarse* or to move upwardly, either crossing ethnic, social or cultural boundaries which often implies “shedding the Indian” or leaving behind what is perceived as a shameful origin.

¹⁶ Chang argues that “autoethnography benefits greatly from the thought that self is an extension of a community, rather than it is an independent, self-sufficient being, because the possibility of cultural self-analysis rests on an understanding that self is part of a cultural community” (26).

¹⁷ Auto-ethnographic accounts are often criticized as not being real science for lack of objectivity and auto-ethnographic genres are criticized “for being biased, navel-gazing, self-absorbed, or emotionally incontinent, and for hijacking traditional ethnographic purposes and scholarly contributions (Maréchal 45). However, major defenders of this form of qualitative research such as Ellis emphasize the “narrative truth” of auto-ethnographic accounts, for it is not so important that art represent life accurately, rather the focus should be on the usefulness of the story or narrative (126). Likewise, in the case of performance, the focus should be the embodiment’s effect on the spectators. In the same fashion, Arthur P. Bochner contends that the real issue with auto-ethnography is “what narratives do, what consequences they have, and to what uses they can be put” (133), and consequently, what performances do, what consequences of effects they promote, and how useful they can be, for instance, to question rigid identity solutions, to contest authority, or to increase awareness, is crucial.

¹⁸ Since “everyday practices are increasingly pervaded by impulses for self-documentation and the reproduction of images of the self [,] the radical dissolution of the ethnographic ‘I’ and the eye blurs distinctions between ethnographic representations of others (ethnography) and those others’ self-representations (autoethnography)” (Maréchal 44).

¹⁹ In fact, there are new hybrid genres and methods that blend ethnography and autoethnography such as “witness narratives in cases of social violence and repression; private folk ethnography in households and specific collective settings; and testimonies of daily life in captivity, total institutions, armed conflicts, or self-reflection on symbolic violence” (Maréchal 45).

²⁰ For a detailed account of this term and its history, see Deborah E. Reed-Danahay.

²¹ For the benefits of auto=ethnography, see Heewon Chang.

²² Doris Sommer calls attention to what she identifies as “the lesson of passing,” through a careful examination of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *Lesson of Little Tree*: “The lesson of passing, Gates concludes, is that ‘No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world’ (17). Sommer adds that this availability is what makes minority critics angry “because ethnic cultural content is eaten up by white consumers who are careless of the people they cannibalize” (Sommer 17).

²³ Patrick Slattery, cited by Ellis, makes a case for arts-based autoethnography in the sense that “arts-based inquiry experiments with alternative ways to transform what is in our consciousness into a public form that others can take in and understand” (215). Thus, “arts-based researchers include the artist’s subjectivity and present their work as embodied inquiry – sensuous, emotional, complex, intimate [and] they expect their projects to evoke response,

inspire imagination, give pause for new possibilities and meanings, and open new questions and avenues of inquiry” (Ellis 215).

²⁴ For performance ethnography, see Michal M. McCall.

Re-Imagining the Archive:

Verónica Riedel's *Reinas Indígenas* Doubling for Latin America's Foremothers

Verónica Riedel's photographic exhibition, *The Making of a Mestiza* (2005), defamiliarizes the dominant visual rhetoric of colonization in Latin America, which looks at indigenous women and their descendants as exotic Other.¹ In contemporary Latin America, women of mixed blood and of an underprivileged background are constantly victims of gender based violence. In *Mestiza*, Riedel offers artistic reparation for this damage done to Guatemala's mestizas. Politically, Riedel gives body and voice to persistently subalternized historical subjects, responding to what conquest and several centuries of colonization in Latin America have done to denigrate, or in some cases even obliterate, the historical presence of mixed blood women, the foremothers of a new race. Simultaneously, Riedel engages in an aesthetic experience that juxtaposes colonial Baroque elements with native conceptions of beauty, nature, and nakedness. In order to draw attention to the interstices in the social fabric that is Guatemala and in an effort to explain how things came to be the way they are, Riedel shows that indigenous aesthetics can be used as a sign of resistance to the colonial social framework.

Riedel creates distinct visual narratives in lieu of the iconography of the visual colonial archive such as the *casta* paintings by transposing indigenous women's portraits where traditionally white and creole ladies used to be represented. In this manner, Riedel contests dominant hierarchies of knowledge established by a contemporary residual way of seeing, inherited from the colonial archive, that subalternizes the historical Other. Even though Riedel's archive in *Mestiza* is apocryphal, I contend that it promotes a positive artistic intervention as it extends the colonial archive past its limitations. By presenting these women as full historical subjects and allowing them to tell their untold visual stories, Riedel retells history from a

previously absent angle. The foremothers are depicted as real women who often had to engage in original negotiations in order to survive the trauma of conquest and colonization. Some of them succeeded in surmounting the imposed social structure; others did not fare so well. The dominant note is the agency, determination, and dignity of the women depicted in their efforts to oppose conquest and colonization. The implication is that in Guatemala mestiza women have been present and active from the beginning. Although reinterpreting history is a potentially dangerous and destabilizing endeavor, Riedel's artistic practice promotes an ethnocentric view of indigeneity, by conflating European aesthetics, visual rhetoric, and hegemony with indigenous *cosmovisión* [worldview].²

Instead of mere pieces of recollection stored away in a pictorial document or text, Riedel's mestizas take center stage. Riedel proposes reading the mestizas as "queens' capable of representing with honor and dignity the motherhood of Latin-American societies" (Corp). Riedel explains her motivations:

Yo quisiera tomar con fuerza otro punto de vista de la conquista. Es lo que propongo. Replicar que no todas las mujeres fueron victimizadas, que muchas resistieron, que otras se vendieron y que varias pasaron a adquirir estatus. Bueno, todas éstas son las Reinas de América (Riedel quoted in Gala).

(I wanted to strongly engage with another point of view about the conquest. That is what I propose. To contest that not all the women were victimized, that many resisted, that others sold out, and that many acquired social status. Well, all of these women are the Queens of America).

For her revision of the colonial iconography Riedel uses female models from her country's indigenous communities (Gala). In particular, she uses as a frame of reference the colonial portraits of dignitaries or women of high ranking in the colonial caste system (Gala). In

her portraits of the mestizas we see, for instance, the frills or white lacy collars of colonial aristocrats. Riedel weaves a complex and hybrid model when she juxtaposes these particular colonial referents with the rich indigenous adornments. The material aspect of the hybrid model of reference conflates several colonial historic documents such as maps, illustrations, and facsimile books with imagery from the indigenous codices, Mesoamerican glyphs, and indigenous ornaments. Embedded in the photographs, the indigenous elements juxtaposed on the Elizabethan style portraits invoke simultaneously the Baroque of the Colonial Americas and pre-Columbian art.

In Riedel's *Mestiza*, three processes run parallel in order to pay tribute to the survival of Mayan women and Ladinias: the historical process of *mestizaje* (miscegenation), Riedel's authorial process of creation, and the process of Guatemala's transition into democracy. Accordingly, *The making of a Mestiza* is a title that encompasses all of the above while promoting an affective spectatorship. What Riedel proposes is re-reading history based on a strategic appropriation and hybridization of distinct iconographic archives, the pre-Hispanic and the Colonial, with the dominant note being to emphasize Guatemalan, and by extension, Latin America's syncretism and cultural hybridization.

An alternative mode of representation of indigenous women and their descendants is used by Associated Press photographer Rodrigo Abd. Abd uses a nineteenth-century style wooden box camera that he bought in Afghanistan to photograph participants in the National Indigenous Queen of Guatemala contest who compete for the *Rabin Ajaw* title. Abd offers a different look at the Mayan Queens display of Mayanness and ethnic authenticity as he uses older technology to imply that perhaps the same voyeuristic gaze promoted by the earlier foreign ethnographers who depicted indigenous people consistently as the Other has not totally disappeared.

Photography and Embodiment in *Mestiza*

The Making of a Mestiza is a collection of embroidered monoprints that as a multivoiced *testimonio* offers an alternative to the colonial visual archive. It is a collection composed by a triple embodiment, comprising the photographs, their corresponding personal stories or texts, and the artwork on the prints, or “interventions” to use Riedel’s own terminology. Leonor Gala describes Riedel’s prints in *Mestiza* in the following manner: “una serie de retratos nativos intervenidos con bordados y collages, envueltos en ropajes coloniales y ornamentos, que relatan las historias de aquellas que -hace cinco siglos- se encontraron con los primeros españoles” (“A series of portraits of native people intervened with embroidery and collages, wrapped in colonial clothing and ornaments, that retell the stories of those women that – five centuries ago – met with the first Spanish”) (“Las mujeres indígenas”). Mathieu Corp more explicitly refers to the way Riedel’s collection of prints was created:

sobre las fotografías digitales a partir de las cuales los retratos han sido realizados e imprimidos sobre lino, la artista incrustó distintos materiales que han sido tejidos o pegados: a veces plástico, pero sobre todo tela, madera, arcilla, cuero, hilos de oro o de plata, yute, plumas, joyas, jade y obsidiana en particular, que coleccionó en diferentes países de América latina, así como lo hizo con las historias a las que remiten los nombres que la artista puso a cada retratada (Corp).

(on top of the digital photographs from which the portraits have been created and printed in linen, the artist embedded distinct materials that have been woven in or glued to it: sometimes plastic, but above all canvas, wood, clay, leather, gold and silver thread, jute, feathers, jewelry, jade, and obsidian in particular, which she collected in different Latin

American countries, the same way she did with the stories that refer to the names that the artist gave each of the women portrayed).

Riedel carefully prepared the creative process that would result in *Mestiza*. Her search for once muted voices, invisible bodies, and untold stories led her to revise the archive that flatly denies their existence. More precisely, she reinvented this archive by inseminating it with the repertoire, mining it from within.³ In her own words, she engages in “una arqueología invisible, o no escrita” (“an invisible, unwritten archeology”) (Digital Press File). Riedel acknowledges her special interest in the colonial period: “investigué la obra por un año y medio. Leí todos los artículos y libros relacionados con mujeres de la época y con la conquista de América, ya que me interesa situarme bien. De esta forma me empapo del tema y abarco todo lo que se haya hecho antes para hacer algo totalmente distinto y con otra visión” (“I did research for *Mestiza* for a year and a half. I read all the articles and books related to colonial women and the conquest of America, since I am keen on getting myself well situated. This way, I soak up the topic and cover all that has been done before so that I can make something totally distinct and with another vision”) (Riedel quoted in Gala).

Riedel’s artwork carefully manipulates the *Mestiza*’s body, both as the starting point or locus of production of meaning and as its dissemination.⁴ The bodies represented in Riedel’s *Mestiza* bear the mark of colonial history through memory, inscription, and register in the form of oppression, torture, and manipulation; however, there is no fetichizing of violence in Riedel’s *Mestiza* for there is no blood, suffering bodies, or other elements that explicitly recreate violence. On the contrary, the violence in *Mestiza* is subtle and implicitly connected to the condition of coloniality. Riedel invites the spectators to see distinct and identifiable patterns of domination in the colonial and neocolonial Latin American contexts, beyond the arbitrariness of the

historiographical process and the dichotomy *vencedores/vencidos*. Corp expands on Riedel's treatment of violence in *Mestiza* by suggesting that her collection

no hace abstracción de la violencia de la Conquista, [ya que] encontr[am]os por ejemplo a modo de segundo plano de los retratos, documentos utilizados durante el periodo colonial para llevar a cabo la evangelización de los indígenas o la primera página de la famosa obra del dominico Bartolomé de la Casas quien fue uno de los primeros europeos a condenar el trato infligido a los Indios (Corp).

(does not abstract the violence of Conquest [for] we find, for example, as background to the portraits, documents used during the colonial period to carry out the evangelization of the indigenous, or the first page of the Dominican Bartolomé de la Casas's famous book, he who was one of the first Europeans to condemn the abuse of indigenous people").

Thus, Riedel has made the editorial decision not to display open violence such as acts of torture, rape, or killing that are symptomatic of conquest and colonization. Instead she prefers to contextualize each image and personal story in an effort to open the spectators' imagination to other possibilities beyond the mainstream visual archive.

Riedel explains her reasoning in the following manner:

para las mujeres indígenas, la conquista en Latinoamérica y el Caribe fue una experiencia trágica, traumática, y totalmente surreal. Después del primer año, el esquema familiar y social de los grupos originarios había cambiado especialmente para ellas, que fueron obligadas a incorporarse en la vida cotidiana de sus invasores. Sin embargo, como una muestra de rebeldía, en la mayoría de estos pueblos sobrevivió gran parte de sus creencias a través de procesos sincréticos que aún perduran en nuestros días (Riedel quoted in Gala).

(for indigenous women, the Conquest of Latin America and the Caribe was a tragic, traumatic, and totally surreal experience. After the first year, the family and social organization of the native groups had changed, especially for women who were obliged to assimilate into their invaders daily life. However, as a sign of rebellion, in the majority of these villages, a vast portion of their beliefs survived through synthetic processes that still remain nowadays).

In *Mestiza*'s monoprints, this apparently easy cohabitation is achieved through juxtapositioning European and native decorative elements and beliefs. And even though coloniality's violence is often implicit, neither the images nor the small narratives that accompany them expressly refer to rape (*Doña Carmen*), prostitution (*Cacao* and *Ixchel*), or abjection and being treated as a commodity (*Doña Carmen* and *Cacao*). Even though understanding the process that led to the creation of *Mestiza* is important, analyzing the visual effects of the photographs is fundamental to understand how Riedel promotes a counter-visuality to the colonial archive.

Photography as a process involves investing objects and subjects in materiality, and empowering them with cultural, ethnic, and gender significance that ultimately often results in attributing value to them. Even though colonial and post-colonial hegemony tried to erase the footprints of the mestiza foremothers, artistic representations such as *Mestiza* celebrate and make them visible. Riedel's photographs imbue Guatemala's mestizas and, by extension, Latin America's foremothers, with a corporeality that historically they have been denied. According to Roland Barthes, embodiment in photography means that "I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (Barthes 76, emphasis in original).⁵ Thus, the Guatemalan mestizas in front of Riedel's camera stand in for those that once existed ("the thing has been there") and as a photographic referent they express the author's intention to materialize them as Latin America's

foremothers. Playing with the body's ceremoniousness and with photographic portraiture as an art of the person, Riedel offers the images in *Mestiza* as referents for a new appreciation of history. Her photographs not only become effective vehicles for the recollection of invisible lives and repertoires, they also enable spectators to learn about this re-discovered referent: the Guatemalan mestizas. *Mestiza* obliges the spectators to relearn history, acknowledging the mestizas' role and presence from colonial times to the present day. Implicitly, spectators recognize the common links between the colonial and contemporary hegemonic systems and the fact that memory is constructed and, thus, can be revised and reviewed. The Guatemalan foremothers stepping out of historical oblivion in *Mestiza* prove that the past can be retrieved through the lens of artistic revalidation, even though there is no returning to colonial times.

Riedel's fifteen mestiza representations stand in for all of the Guatemalan mestizas, and, by extension, refer to the whole of Latin America's mestizas. In her own words,

los rostros de nativas guatemaltecas cuentan como propias las historias de aquellas que se encontraron con los primeros españoles; de ancianas, niñas y jóvenes que fueron arrancadas de sus pueblos para ser entregadas a la fuerza del mestizaje. Convertidas en sirvientas, respetables señoras o concubinas, todas investidas de ropas ajenas, construyen un relato sociocultural que -pese a la violencia intrínseca- no habla de discriminación, sino que "deja de lado el tono victimizante y tradicional" para situar a la mujer indígena "en un sitio de honor, como madre de todos los latinoamericanos (Riedel quoted in Gala). (the faces of Guatemalan natives count as their selves the stories of those who encountered the first Spanish; they count for all the elderly women, little girls, and girls taken away from their villages to be delivered by force to mestizaje. Turned into servants, respectable ladies and concubines, all invested in someone else's clothing, they build a

sociocultural account that – in spite of the intrinsic violence [in the conquest and colonization] – does not speak of discrimination, rather it “leaves behind the traditional victimizing tone” to situate the indigenous woman “in a place of honor, as the mother of all Latin Americans).

Therefore, even though Riedel seeks to represent these foremothers as their own referent, by recurring to their indigenous descendants’ faces and materiality, in fact she is alternatively reframing them as visible, newly empowered subjects who acquire social status only in reference to the colonial past and their absence in the archive (*Cotz’ij*). Thus, the references do not coincide, in the same manner that the images do not represent the long gone historical subjects, even though the concept, the performance of *mestizaje*, is no doubt achieved. Riedel seeks to fuse the proper name of each mestiza represented in her collection with a specific reference (*Nicté* and La Malinche), one of the foremothers to be signified and appreciated as the bearers of a “new race.”

Objects such as photographs can function as a material sign of history since they bear the marks of history taking place on them, and thus can operate as a material object that can be manipulated, preserved, or intervened upon, especially considering these are contrived creations. Tear and wear, erosion and the sedimentation of time itself will become part of the object per se, and will impact its own genealogy, thus creating also the possibility of retelling or reconstructing history through it. Such retelling of the past as embodied in the object, in this case, Riedel’s photographs, leads to its pure materiality while confirming the impossibility of objectifying human agency. For Frederic Jameson, what we as spectators “consume” “is no longer a purely visual or material entity, but rather the *idea* of such an entity” (My emphasis “New Literary History” 384). Riedel is considering the referent “absent from the colonial archive” as a void that

can necessarily be filled by artistic reinterpretation. She implicates the spectators in her performance by employing what Ariella Azoulay calls “a deliberate instance of framing” (“Archive”). By “a deliberate instance of framing” Azoulay refers to an intended allusion to specific documents in art history (“Archive”). Thus, Riedel deliberately implicates the spectators by intently resorting to known art history tropes ; for example, on the western side, Elizabethan white lacy frills and collars, *Barroco de Indias* portraits of dignitaries, as well as glyphs, drawings, and decorative elements from pre-Columbian indigenous art. Also, both in *Doña Carmen* and *Doña Leonor*, Riedel has indigenous Guatemalan women dressed as Elizabethan ladies, while *Cotzij* wears the attire of an indigenous princess, and *Nicté* a traditional *huipil* [sleeveless indigenous blouse or dress].

Riedel is promoting a hybrid type of visual art that forces testimonial accounts to enter into an effective dialogue with interpretive ethnography. As a compiler, Riedel’s voice is almost erased beyond those of the subjects she chooses to display and to celebrate as historical entities by their own right, and with their own importance. However, she is still the editor and the *maître d’œuvre* who guides the spectators to her display of alternative or subversive recordings in the Latin American archive. Corp explains that what first interpellates the spectators is “la actitud y la mirada digna de esas mujeres” (“the attitude and the dignified gaze of those women”). Riedel resorts to naming all of her mestizas because by identifying them as individuals and historical subjects she succeeds in drawing them out of anonymity. This strategy is also important for giving emphasis to personal narrative over other types of archival evidence, particularly considering that these are those subalterns that have been systematically unaccounted for due to their gender, ethnicity, and social status.

Riedel intervenes in her printed photographs with valuable natural elements like shells, feathers, and stones that were dear to indigenous aesthetics before the arrival of the Europeans. In *Mestiza*, Riedel stimulates a collage effect in the fusion of native and European aesthetics, ideas, and symbols, creating a transcultural visual space, or an atopic “space outside of space” (Codell 10). Riedel’s aesthetic rendering of the *Mestizas*’ pride, dignity, and self-confidence decolonizes the tridimensional quality of indigenous women’s subalternity based on gender, ethnicity, and class, while promoting “una estética de la dignidad y del apoderamiento” (“an aesthetics of dignity and empowerment”) (Ormond 8).

While *Mestiza*’s main strategy is a triple embodiment condensed in the photographs themselves, the texts, and the artwork on the prints, the direct consequence is that *mestizaje* is at the core of Riedel’s representations. In Guatemala, the Liberal Era’s (1871 to 1898 or 1944) efforts to fully integrate indigenous populations into the nation State failed completely (Soto Quirós & Díaz Arias 129). Largely seen as the working hands that sustained colonial exploitation, indigenous people were often thought of as unworthy of modern political rights and representation, and were thus treated in a very patriarchal manner for years to come (Soto Quirós & Díaz Arias 129). In spite of the bleak canvas of Guatemalan *mestizaje* which serves as background for *Mestiza*, Riedel asserts, referring to the conquest and colonization period, that “las mujeres nativas dieron vida a la economía por medio de sus servicios domésticos y concubinato con los conquistadores. Ellas, con sus cuerpos y fuerza espiritual, dieron vida a una nueva raza, convirtiéndose en las madres de los latinoamericanos, los mestizos del nuevo continente” (“indigenous women gave life to the [new] economy by means of their domestic service and their concubinage with the conquistadores. They, with their bodies and spiritual

strength, gave life to a new race, by becoming the mothers of all Latin Americans, the mestizos of the new continent”) (Riedel quoted in Gala).

As heroines, survivors, victims, but also players, the women in *Mestiza* display an active participation in the events that shaped their plausible lives as imagined historical subjects. The women’s personal histories showcase ambiguity towards conquest and colonization, as each woman had to negotiate her future and livelihood resorting to different survival strategies. Each photograph is accompanied by a first-person story of survival, compliancy, or rebellion. The degree of disagreement and the ambiguity over what conquest and colonization have meant for each one of these women renders the overall narrative effect in *Mestiza* verisimilar.

Visual Pedagogy and Riedel’s Transcultural Subjects

In *Mestiza*, Riedel engages with a tradition a resistance that dates back centuries. Rather than being mere contented characters, her mestizas pose as problematic historical figures that had to contend with several challenges in an era of rapid, and often brutal, change—the first years of conquest and colonization. Often disregarded as historical subjects, the foremothers’ role as bearers of a new race is consequently re-envisioned by Riedel through photography and the accompanying short narratives that accompany each monoprint. Accordingly, photography in *Mestiza* is a performance of empowerment that leads to the creation of a counter-visuality. By counter-visuality, I mean the act of proposing an alternative way of seeing or of representing historical subjects, situations, and places contrary to common expectations. I understand common expectations in terms of visibility as a consequent development of specific ways of seeing and representing created by the successive exposure to institutionalized images, texts, and documents as in the archive. Counter-visuality functions in opposition to what is expectedly seen

or represented, for instance, bringing visibility to particular historical subjects, situations, and places.

As a creative archive, Riedel's *Mestiza* performs an educational role, affecting public history with an emphasis on public pedagogy. Even though artists acknowledge the contemporary tendency to create cultural icons and construct media-influenced imagery for political purposes, art can be understood as precisely an attempt to relocate unquestioned assumptions and preconceptions. Left uncontested, the colonial archive would fail to bring forth certain historical subjects, situations, and places to the present time and something would be lost in the process. Riedel's work in *Mestiza* provides a visual pedagogy to the spectators in order to replace the colonial archive's gaps and missed opportunities. By visual pedagogy, I am referring to the manner in which the spectators themselves are led to create their own counter-visuality. In this sense, *Mestiza* as visual pedagogy forces the spectators to see beyond what is represented and shown, including the images, the short narratives that accompany each monprint, and Riedel's interventions.

By adding a personal embodied dimension to the hegemonic framing of collective memory, *Mestiza* contrasts starkly with colonial iconography and the contemporary insistence on victimization. Both the images and the narratives that constitute this exhibition convey what Jill Bennett calls "a process of "seeing feeling," where feeling is both imagined and regenerated through an encounter with the Guatemalan mestizas, made possible by the artwork (36). Riedel's work manifests a strategic choice to engage with Guatemalan mestizas' stories and feelings rather than privileging the invaders and their cruel acts. The focus is on affective spectatorship, and symptomatically she draws on the spectators' empathy to the foremothers' cause. This is an approach described by Silvia R. Tandeciarz as "the process of making and consuming images [,

which] serves not only to reference affective experience, but also to activate or stage it” (135). Riedel’s *Mestiza* invites the spectators to see distinct and identifiable patterns of domination in the colonial and neocolonial Latin American contexts. As a polyphonic and interactive body of work, the exhibition pushes the spectators to think and draw conclusions for themselves.

A closer analysis of Riedel’s *Mestiza* photographs illuminates the artist’s manipulation of conventions to offer a product that puts emphasis on strategic visibility. By strategic visibility, I mean the critical manner by which Riedel promotes an alternative anthropology for the foremothers by making them recognizable historical subjects with positive agency. Unlike the traditional *pinturas de castas*, the monoprints in *Mestiza* purposefully play with and display syncretism. In fact, according to Gala, “en “Mestiza” todo es sincretismo (“in *Mestiza* everything is about syncretism”) (Gala). These prints are identified not by number, but by the name and the short narrative attributed to the subject portrayed. In the exhibition’s catalog, each monoprint is shown on a full page, immediately followed by another one containing the portrayed subject’s name and her narrative. The prints representing *Cotz’ij*, *Doña Carmen*, *Cacao*, *Doña Leonor*, *Ixchel*, and *Nicté* are particularly interesting because they best illustrate Riedel’s initial intention: to provide visibility to the Latin American foremothers absent from the archive. Nevertheless, in these particular prints, the collage effect and the manipulation of aesthetic and political elements that lead to Riedel’s elaborate performance of dignified hybridity is more striking.

These particular prints also produce singular feelings. In terms of affective spectatorship concerning Guatemala’s colonial legacy, it is not so much the details contained in Riedel’s brief narratives that matter, but the feelings they connote. Though most of the stories indicate survival trajectories, in tandem with the embodiment in the images, what stands out in the prints that I

have selected is the expression of specific feelings such as joy, pain, longing, sadness, and satisfaction, among other feelings. By giving these particular feelings a name and a face, Riedel attempts to map the emotional toll of conquest and colonization and the lingering effects it still can provoke today. Her focus on *traje* [wardrobe], accessories, and ethnic markers and how they change through time can best be seen in these six monoprints, and they engage with the visual Colonial archive as empire's propaganda and other contemporary racist practices.⁶ Riedel's archive constructs mestizas for a widespread audience; however, her mestizas are transcultural subjects that hybridize the process of understanding *mestizaje* itself.⁷ Ultimately, Riedel socializes affect through narrative and visual representation in an effort to invite spectators to collectively revise known Guatemalan history.

Cotzij (illustration 1) is the first monoprint of Riedel's collection in *Mestiza*, and functions as an opening statement for the whole series. It depicts an indigenous woman of mixed skin-tone with almond-shaped eyes wearing a turban or headpiece and facing the camera head on. Her expression seems serene and her lips are closed indicating a thoughtful silence. Her bust is clothed in fine and richly decorated fabric, with a vast assortment of embroidered symbols. She is wearing cross-shaped earrings that hang vertically from her lobes and frame her round face on both sides. She is not wearing any visible make-up, and is coiffed very simply with her hair pulled up into the headpiece. The headpiece occupies about one third of the whole image and is made of richly embroidered brocade. At the center of the headpiece lies a shell that resembles that of the Spanish followers of Saint James (Santiago), but this one has two stones or small teeth applied to it in the manner of eyes. The combination of the Spanish Santiago's cross and the indigenous anthropomorphic form with two eyes makes for an eerie and strange symbol, which is encased by an embroidered leafy palm that joins it from both the bottom and the top of

the headpiece. Immediately underneath the headpiece's central shell, lies a small stone native head figure with a big mouth line and closed eyes. This native figure is also wearing a headpiece, thus creating a multiplication effect in the image. The neckline is short and even though Cotziz's throat is partially exposed, her wardrobe nevertheless displays decorum and formality. Her top is richly adorned and there is not a single inch without decoration. Evenly distanced from one another, the neckline includes three lace rosaceas, each with a central pearl and ten leaves. On her right shoulder, the corresponding left side for the spectators, Cotziz's tunic displays several silvered elements including a fish, a bird, a heart, a half-moon, and a figure eight lying horizontally with two concentric eyes, one on each circle. In addition, her tunic includes other decorative elements such as a hand, a cameo brooch, and what looks like a headless human figure. At the center of her tunic lies an ascending silver lizard that seems to undulate climbing towards her head, making way through a patch of closely knit oval pearls. Bigger than the remaining elements, at her heart level, to the spectators' right, is a jewel heart made of dark stone and encircled by smaller ones, possibly diamonds, with a hairy silver crown on its top. On her left shoulder, to the spectators' right side, lies a silver dove figure above a golden leafed miniature fan like the ones society ladies used in the Enlightenment, but that could also represent Spanish *abanicos* [fans]. In the remaining portions of her top, there is a multitude of embroidered buttons, seeds, and paillettes. The overall impression is of nobility and of ceremonial portraiture. I contend that Riedel chose this particular print as the opener for her exhibition precisely because of its display of solemnity and dignity. Thus, she starts her collection of prints in *Mestiza* with what can be identified as the personification of mestizas' pride.

Cotzij's accompanying narrative talks about a Maya Kakchikel princess who was forced to marry the Spanish Captain Julián (no last name given). *Cotzij* claims to be the daughter of the deceased resistance hero Cahi Imox, a man who bravely opposed famed conquistador Pedro de Alvarado in his conquest of the city of Iximché, at the heart of the Kakchiquel world. In Guatemala, the story of this beloved indigenous figure is taught in school and everybody knows how Alvarado repeatedly refused to make any kind of agreement with the Kakchiquel ruler, in spite of the latter's efforts to promote peace. According to the legend, after six years of failed negotiation attempts and with Alvarado only focused on the search for gold and wealth, Cahi Imox was imprisoned by the Spanish troops. He would remain in confinement for ten years, after which he was executed by order of the local *cabildo* [Spanish crown official council]. The most interesting part of the story, is the rhetoric advanced by the Spanish to justify Cahi Imox's death: the *cabildo* interpreted the Kakchiquel resistance embodied in Cahi Imox as a time bomb that could potentially detonate an even wider native rebellion, so the only solution was to put an immediate end to all those aspirations by killing the head of the insurgency movement.

In *Mestiza*, *Cotzij* as the daughter of such an indigenous hero functions as the blood line that will carry his life of resistance even further. To that avail, Riedel provides her narrative in the first-person and has *Cotzij* saying that she will always carry the same royal blood in her veins, no matter what the Spanish or any one might do to her (*The Making*). *Cotzij*'s exact words are, "no matter who wants to change me into some one I am not" (*The Making*). In addition, *Cotzij* states very matter of factly that she was forced to marry Captain Julián because that was the only way for him to acquire "the land of [her] ancestors" (*The Making*). The emphasis this historical re-imagined character places on blood is striking when considering Spain's obsession with purity of blood and nobility throughout the colonial period. This sentence in particular

allows for the extrapolation that maybe indigenous and Spanish people were more alike than what any of them would care to admit.

Cotzij's story ends with the assertion that due to the extraordinary circumstances in which she lived, forced into marriage with a Spanish conquistador, her children will inevitably become mestizos. This very word, *mestizos*, is placed in italics in the text, indicating the weight the word bore in colonial times. Today, it is still a controversial term, particularly in multi-ethnic nations such as Guatemala; however, Cotzij's insistence on how her descendants, regardless of being mestizos, will always be of noble heritage, functions as an overt counterclaim to the conquistadors' colonial *castas* system. In spite of the fact that colonizers created a social system that manifestly privileged their own descendants as more socially desirable, indigenous peoples maintained their own notion of nobility through the preservation of their native heritage and values. This is also a powerful political move for Riedel as her mestizas side with contemporary claims for privileging indigenous memory and *cosmovisión*, conspicuously disregarding the colonizers' claim to cultural superiority and obliteration of native past.

Doña Carmen (illustration 2) illustrates Riedel's attempt to render the mestiza foremothers as historical subjects through the contemporary embodiment of several indigenous women from Guatemala. Even though *Doña Carmen* is markedly attired as a colonial woman of a higher social ranking, and the European influence is predominant, her manifest discontent and defiance are in clear opposition to the pious inscription underneath her image. Such disparity exemplifies the real life dilemmas and contradictions of verisimilar historical subjects. In addition, it unveils the identity performance and the hidden existence of many colonized people who intimately fought to keep their traditions and true self, in spite of the false fronts they had to uphold.

Doña Carmen's is a highly elaborated image that displays the bust of an indigenous woman attired in Elizabethan style with a grand lacy cowl and an impressive golden tiara from whose ends intricate golden leafy extensions descend all the way down to her shoulders. On the right side of the picture, the spectators can see a half folded red velvety curtain that creates a dramatic and solemn atmosphere. From Doña Carmen's haughty neckpiece hang several pearls and bigger precious stones that form a series of eight hanging appendages consisting of distinct indigenous stone head figures, some of them clearly of Maya influence. Her remaining attire is constituted by a pompous colonial-style dress with puffy sleeves and a very detailed lace bodice, the latter containing one row of embroidered pearls on each side. Doña Carmen is not visibly wearing make-up and her facial expression denotes sadness and a certain degree of defiance with her puckered lips. Her face occupies about one third of the picture, and her image is not only framed by the red curtain on the top right, but also by a traditional tableau wavy vignette destined to hold an inscription. In this case, the inscription reads: "le doy tantas gracias a Dios por haberme permitido con este nuevo reino, llegar a ser una gran señora" (*The Making*). ("I give God many high praises for allowing me to become a great lady in this new kingdom"). Her attitude and her facial expression overall are in clear opposition to the message inscribed under her image, possibly echoing the same sort of contradictions found in the mini-narrative that accompanies her picture. In addition, her facial expression could also connote arrogance and pride.

In the accompanying text, the dominant tone is Doña Carmen's feeling of strangeness and uneasiness towards her new life and her new family. Doña Carmen starts by saying the name of the man who is now presumably her husband (Don Jorge), but she refers to him as "the man I now sleep with" (*The Making*). She blatantly refuses to place any affective charge on her new

lover and even when conveying the information that she is now expecting his child, she does so in a cold and distant manner by calling him “his child” (*The Making*). This last statement, in turn, creates a feeling of consternation and intrigue in the spectators because it goes against the social expectation that pregnant women start loving their unborn children and cherishing them all throughout their pregnancy, even before their actual birth occurs. Doña Carmen concludes by asserting this same feeling of nonconformity in stating that both “his child” and Don Jorge will remain strangers to her, even though she phrases it carefully to give the impression that the impossibility of their understanding each other resides on Don Jorge’s side: “I’ll bear his child who will be a stranger to me, as I am to his father” (*The Making*). Implicitly, the spectators are forced to ask: is this the child of rape? The historical record shows that indeed the massive rape of indigenous women was but one of the many scare tactics employed by the colonizers in order to exert their control over the native populations and also to keep their troops appeased, in keeping with contemporary warfare practices.

By showing Doña Carmen’s discontent and defiance, and implicitly the abuse and grievance she endures, Riedel contrasts her forced acceptance of colonial rule with the belief upheld by the society of her time that she was being given a unique opportunity for social climbing. Considering the harsh realities of social mobility in colonial Spain, this belief seems credible. Even though the social reality in the colonies was thoroughly different from that of imperial Spain, often individuals in the colonies did have more opportunities for social ascension. It was such a common fact that even Doña Carmen in the text states that having Don Jorge’s child in her belly was good for her (*The Making*). What she means is precisely that in terms of social politics, she now has better standing, and this is where Riedel plays with the unseen and often ignored reality of the foremothers as historical subjects, for many individuals

such as Doña Carmen often had to employ great gimmicks to display agreement with a system of rule that intimately they despised. According to Sara Suleri, rape as metaphor is commonly identified as a trope for colonialism. Thus, colonized territory is seen as a female geography that because it is perceived as pre-cultural and unclaimed becomes legitimate as a consequence of conquest and colonization (16-17). Seeing coloniality as stereotyped and accepted sexual aggression leads to a certain degree of patriarchal complacency akin to the empire's hegemonic supremacy. Furthermore, the bleak reality of women who get pregnant and give birth to children who are a product of rape is symptomatically ignored, in the colonial past as well as in our own time.

Cacao (illustration 3) is one of the monoprints that best exemplifies Riedel's playing with the ethnogenesis of colonial America and what it signified for its native populations, especially women. In this particular case, Riedel renders visible the process of abjection and depletion undergone by native populations in the Americas, which resulted in genocide and ecocide. As part of the Conquest's plunder, women were often treated as a commodity and a tool of trade, and thus they repeatedly changed hands and ownership from one master to another. Sometimes women's male relatives were the ones who decided to use them as a commodity, be it for peaceful and profitable endeavors, or as a means to affect their enemies by raping and disposing of their women. It is easy to grasp the notion that when the conquistadors came, native women like their male counterparts were thought of as commodities, and in a sense the Spanish rulers' machismo perpetuated some of the pre-Columbian societies' practices. In *Mestiza*, *Cacao* functions as the exemplary tale of what happened to those women, often of great beauty or with enviable skills, who were given a less favorable life under colonial Spanish rule. As servants,

interpreters, or concubines, their sole existence was indeed based on pleasing the conquistadors and their retinue.

Cacao consists of the image of an indigenous woman placed on the canvas's left-hand side at roughly a 45 to 60 degree angle. Her face is slightly tilted to the right of the spectators, so to *Cacao*'s left, and she has her hair caught up and is wearing a sort of tiara made from shells, beads, nuts, or other natural dark elements and which descends on her left side ear, ending in an exquisite brown feather. *Cacao*'s torso is naked from the waist up, and on her chest are projected or engraved images of a multitude of long-haired people, possibly women, or just indigenous people. The figures seem to also be naked and are grouped tightly together as if packed for some collective function. On her left upper arm, to the right of the spectators, some of the projected figures stand out from the mass formed by the collective and seem to be in great distress. There is one figure that has both hands on her head, possibly pulling her hair. On *Cacao*'s breasts there is also a duplicate figure that faces her left, to the right of the spectators, and in both cases appears to be looking down at other less visible and still perceived human figures. On her left breast, close to the aureole, there is a picture of a woman with one hand on her face close to her hairline in a gesture similar to the one that one makes when hit in the face. Such gender violence can be interpreted as an obscure reference to rape violence and the type of sentiments that it invokes in women. To the right of *Cacao* in the image is a semi-oval shaped furnishing that could either be the back of a chair or the arch of a floor-leveled aperture that recalls a window. This fixture is made of washed-out white bars in a series of four divided by a central line. Each bar has an intricate sculpted shape that makes it look more like ornamental columns than any incarceration device. The painting on this semi-oval fixture is peeling off in several places and provides a textural contrast to *Cacao*'s own skin.

Whereas on Cacao's skin the kind of images projected refers to the vast Mesoamerican iconographic past, which presently can only be acknowledged through key archeologic sites and a few codices, the image's background is filled with iconographic figures and depictions of European origin. On the upper left corner there are four rows of people kneeling in prayer, some of them easily identifiable as members of the clergy; the bottom row is made of kneeling angels and is immediately followed, continuing downwards in the same direction, by two horn-blowing cherubs. This iconography is quickly identifiable with the various religious paintings of the medieval and the colonial periods pertaining to religious practices and hierarchies integral to Roman Catholicism. On the upper right corner, there is an image of a semi-naked figure seated on an orbit wearing a mantle right above a cross where a native corn doll has been appended as a crucified figure. At the feet of the cross lies a priest who is looking up at the image of the crucified corn doll. To the right of the central orbit figure stands a priest surrounded by several other dignitaries who are either standing or also kneeling in prayer, in what seems to be a projected continuation of the rows of believers on the other side. At Cacao's shoulder level, on the spectators' left side, stands an allegorical depiction possibly of medieval origin in which the devil's figure stands side-by-side with a skeleton that also stands with a man-length scythe. Both allegorical figures face a group of naked penitents who have their backs turned to them. The penitents' row in the back is standing, while those in the front row kneel. At the opposite side, by Cacao's left shoulder and to the spectators' right, is a projection of a three-layered painting with a horse-riding warrior (possibly a hagiographic scene) who defeats someone standing at his feet, followed to the right by an archangel bearing a cross. Immediately underneath, there is a row of figures semi-erected from the ground that seems to be sustained by three skeletons. Underneath

this level, there is a final one with just scattered human bones and skulls, framed on the lower side by part of the semi-oval arch of the off-white furnishing described above.

The juxtaposition of European religious and medieval iconography with the native imagery and the crucified corn doll creates a powerful visual comment on the imposition of the cultural and religious beliefs of the conquistadors on those of the colonized peoples. While on one hand, conquest and colonization were the product of military force, on the other, they also derived from the attempts at proselytizing the natives' souls. Perhaps in this particular case, Riedel is making an implicit reference to the Black Legend and the subsequent Valladolid debate (1550) in which Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda opposed their theological views on whether the American natives had a soul or not. In spite of the Spanish crown's New Laws of 1542, which proclaimed the defense of the indigenous people of the Americas against their ruthless exploitation by the colonial *encomenderos* [large enterprise landowners], Spanish rulers and their descendants in the colonies continued to abuse them. *Cacao* is a means to promote discussion on that often suppressed aspect of conquest and colonization: the abjection and annihilation of the native peoples and cultures of the Americas.

Very little is said in the short narrative that accompanies this image, but enough to show how even amidst the most disheartening circumstances native people, including Riedel's foremothers, still had a voice. *Cacao* asserts that she has become a trading commodity, and adds "like cacao beans" (*The Making*) to convey a known monetary unit of the Maya. She continues that as an object capable of being rendered in currency, she is not allowed to think (*The Making*). If what distinguishes humans from animals is reasoning, then in effect, *Cacao* is voicing her animalization and the suppression of her existence as a subject. The implication is that the slavery of indigenous people in the Americas existed historically, and even though Riedel is not

necessarily disregarding the plights of millions of Africans brought by force to the Americas, her focus is on the effective mistreatment suffered by the indigenous people at the hands of their colonizers. *Cacao* culminates her denunciation of the colonial rulers' abuse and exploitation with a strong remark: "I just obey, perform, and procreate" (*The Making*). Obviously what *Cacao* voices in a supposedly matter of fact way is the result of said exploitation, with the added aggravating consideration that as a woman she is also meant to give birth to children, against her will, like an animal, thus the use of the verb "to procreate." However, the very fact that she is voicing her ordeal, thus showing agency and coherent speech, grants her the quality of personhood. Such a quality stands in stark contrast to her characterization as an object or a commodity.

What Riedel shows with *Cacao* is that it is possible to consider the subaltern's voice even if coming from a position of privilege by imagining that interior monologue that inhabits all human beings. Nonetheless, and considering post-colonial theory, the subaltern cannot speak and clearly Riedel's performative ventriloquism is insufficient to materialize fleeting or problematic subject positions. Although changing the material conditions of subalternity is impossible through art, at least promoting probable scenarios where the subaltern manifests her condition is attainable and that is what *Cacao* entails. Echoing real life resistance practices common to all colonized people, *Cacao* is an incursion against the insidious power of symbolic violence that pins individuals down by their inability to conform to the privileged norm. By imaginatively accessing the interior monologue of an objectified foremother and giving her, as an historical subject, the possibility to be fully conscious and rebel against her own exploitation under a disheartening rule, Riedel draws on the long chain of resistant practices of mestiza women in the Americas. Refusing to mold into the shape of a thing and to lose one's self-appreciation and

capacity to think and feel is the method employed by Cacao and many other women in similar circumstances. Ultimately, the system might have owned their bodies, but never their minds and spirits.

Doña Leonor (illustration 4) represents an indigenous woman's almost mystical experience of social ascension leaving behind a life of poverty and promiscuity. She is an example of an individual who finds joy in her personal contact with the conquistadors and colonization, *Doña Leonor* runs contrary to the expectation of suffering and pain commonly associated with colonialism. In the context of colonial society in Spanish-speaking America it was fairly common for certain individuals to improve their social status either through marriage to a suitable partner, or by business partnerships that often extended to complex affairs between families. Given the mobility of individuals, as well as a certain freedom in terms of social mores in the colonies, there was indeed more social permeability in the Americas, especially in comparison to the rigidity of Spain's customs and the lingering national obsession with *pureza de sangre* [blood purity].

Doña Leonor represents a woman of indigenous features fully clothed in Elizabethan style with an immense stiff lacy collar and who is at the center of the image, occupying roughly a third of its full extension. She is dressed in very ornate brocade with several golden applications such as buttons and embroidered half-ovals. At the center of her neck descending to her stomach, there are two rows of embroidered chained flowers possibly made of mother-of-pearl. The same chained precious flowers are also applied to the outer layer of her impressive stiff cowl, which is bigger than her head. The cowl itself is composed of frilly lacy motifs arranged in layers from the center out, and embroidered with precious stones, pearls, and buttons. *Doña Leonor's* hair is pulled back and framed by a headpiece composed of felt and encrusted with around two dozen

silver pearls and sixteen shells. At the center of her hairpiece lies the skeleton of a horse conch shell. She is not wearing make-up, but she does have golden pearly earrings on her ears. The image's background consists of an ochre-colored painting such as the ones seen in Mayan archeological sites. On the left side, right above Doña Leonor's considerable lacy collar, the image emerges of a half-hidden Maya warrior holding a tool similar to an ax. On the upper right side, there is a dark Maya symbol standing out from the remaining hieroglyphs. The Mayan background is partially erased as if eaten away by time. At the edge of Doña Leonor's capacious cowl, there is the top part of a Mayan round stone heavily textured, recalling a calendar wheel, which is positioned in such a manner as to effortlessly frame both Doña Leonor's face and her attire. The overall impression is that the European aesthetic elements predominate in this composition, even though sometimes native elements are given emphasis too, particularly when strategically combined or accentuating a European one. As an example, one can consider the Mayan calendar wheel that frames Doña Leonor.

As far as Doña Leonor's expression, she clearly exudes rapture and exaltation with her eyes looking upward to an invisible higher plane. Such expression is remarkable when compared with some of the expressions in the remaining monoprints of the *Mestiza's* collection. In addition to the text that accompanies this specific image, it promotes an intense feeling of joy and bewilderment by the main character, Doña Leonor, which in turn can provoke a certain surprise in the spectators. Initially intrigued by her facial expression, her mouth half open in awe, the spectators will soon find out that the reason for her joy is the fact that she has left behind a life of misery. She starts by declaring that she has had no regrets about renouncing a life of eating dry tortillas, rodents, and lizards (*The Making*). In the same manner, Doña Leonor affirms that she is happy to have left "the smoky hut where [she] slept with [her] brothers, sisters, and

cousins” (*The Making*). Accordingly, she has no use for the memory of “the long days of picking up corn [...] or living in constant fear of an attack from [their] enemies” (*The Making*). Having experienced a life of hardship and nonstop dread for the future, Doña Leonor’s story exemplifies the millions of individuals who lived under Maya rule and were at the base of the social pyramid. She clearly voices the abjection in her own life and communicates that she was just one more number in Maya society’s statistics. The fact that exploitation occurred before the arrival of the conquistadors is often ignored because the emphasis is put on the abuses committed by the invaders pursuing the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Pointing the finger at the similarities between exploitative systems, Riedel’s choice to include the social ascent of a particular indigenous woman as a consequence of colonization goes against the grain of held beliefs concerning the Black Legend [*la Leyenda Negra*] of Spanish colonization.

Subsequently, Doña Leonor is truly enthralled by her newfound social position and wealth. She is now very keen on being a *señora* [lady], and her pleasure with her new title is emphasized by the italics in the text (*The Making*). She further elucidates that she is now married to a Captain in the Spanish Army and that she could never have imagined “the extravagance of the luxury which is now part of [her] life” (*The Making*). To people used to living in very modest circumstances such as rural farmers and debtors to the great Mayan warlords, it must have been extremely impressive to deal with the wealth and luxury of certain Spanish colonizers and their families, particularly in a position where one could actually enjoy such luxuries, and not just be surrounded by them without savoring any of it (like a servant). This would be the equivalent in contemporary times of winning the lottery and surrounding oneself with great luxury and comfort. Whereas Doña Carmen feels estranged by her recent experience of rape and social

climbing, Doña Leonor welcomes the change as the means to free herself from abject poverty and social exclusion. Hence, the two women's experiences differ significantly.

Ixchel (illustration 5) also deals with issues of desire, appropriation, and commodification of the Other. It portrays an indigenous woman of rare beauty with her breasts exposed and displaying a defiant attitude. She is dressed in a front center-opened top with shoulder pads that is framed by an ear-high stiff collar. Both her breasts are fully exposed and textured by the projected Western writing displayed all over the frame, with the exception of her face. On her *épaulettes* there are insignias resembling military attire; however, these insignias clearly display syncretic symbols, mixing Spanish saint effigies with Maya stone faces and Catholic crosses with small wood or bone rectangular decorative motifs. On Ixchel's neck there is a round lace collar as well as a beaded necklace with two central stones, one dark and one metal color, depicting native symbols. On her head she is wearing a turban resembling a sixteenth century piece of head attire. At the center of her headpiece there is golden cross that ends in a row of pearls framing her face. The headpiece is highly decorated with gold beads and small snail shells. Ixchel's hair is pulled up and she is not wearing any earrings. She is however, wearing makeup, including eye shadow and eyeliner, and a golden tone lipstick. The handwriting that serves as the picture's background seems to be cursive Spanish and some words can be understood such as "folio" and "rpto." Her overall facial expression denotes defiance and her pouting lips and frontal look clearly convey Ixchel's contempt and provocation.

In *Ixchel*, Riedel explores the indigenous woman as object of desire for the conquistadors. Colonial desire was primordially ambiguous since it implied both the satisfaction of physical needs, but also collided with the moral upbringing of the conquistadors. For the conquistadors, the natives' nudity became the voyeuristic spectacle of nakedness, then itself a

taboo in Europe, which in turn provoked successive waves of scandal in the unaccustomed European public.⁸ After several months at sea, the conquistadors' desire for Latin American women increased, masked under their guise and will to conquer and proselytize. For the conquistadors, Latin America's native women were considered part of the conquest bounty and chasing them, fair game. As the first mestizo people of the Americas were being born and maturing into adulthood, the propensity to approach indigenous and mixed-blood women as objects of desire and to use them as a means to placate one's sexual impulses became institutionalized.⁹ Yet at the same time that women such as *Ixchel* exposed their nudity and performed acts of seduction, the colonizers became incapable of recognizing in the new other the inherent fusion with the self. The *castas* system was informed by the same Iberian Jewish-Christian morality and the colonizers were keen on promoting the same kind of gender and sexual politics as practiced at home. Conflicting with their desire, there was the repulsion felt by what they perceived as less civilized practices such as rape. To appease their spirits and to allow them to rape the indigenous women nonchalantly, the conquistadors followed the same mentality of the holy crusades and treated the women they raped as war bounty.

In *Ixchel*, however, the focus is not so much on the conquistadors and their actions, but on how indigenous people dealt with them and their desire. By positioning themselves as objects of desire, and consequently playing with the conquistadors' uncanny feelings towards their indigenous worldview and way of living, native people were sometimes able to better resist colonization and abuse. Thus, in the accompanying text, *Ixchel* acknowledges that "their desire [i.e., that of the foreigners] is intensified by the exquisiteness of our ethnicity" (*The Making*). Well aware of how the refinement and beauty of her people exacerbated the colonizers' lust, *Ixchel* voices a sentiment of pride. The colonizers were often given the illusion that they

dominated the sexual interaction. Rodney Harrison identifies indigenous arts of seduction as “technologies of enchantment” and theorizes how such technologies allowed unlocking the way by which native peoples engaged and participated in the process of captivation that is colonial desire (63). Ixchel calls the conquistadors “the foreigners” and does not hesitate to imply that while they “think we [the indigenous people] should be ashamed of our ways and reject our customs,” such indigenous practices and beliefs do remain [*The Making*]. The conjunction “even though” that she uses to unite the two clauses in her declarative sentence indicates that in defiance to the established new order of things, Ixchel is mindful of the desire politics that inform gender relations in colonial society. Thus, Riedel’s point is that the mestizas also played the colonial system and tried to gain as much power and influence as they could, regardless of the survival means they had to employ. Fully cognizant of the system’s idiosyncrasies, here implicitly considered through the conquistadors’ sexual imagery and fantasies about the Other, the mestizas’ statement of pride in their origins and identity deeply contrasts with the perceived moral dilemma of their invaders. Not only are these women represented as morally superior, they are refusing to think of themselves as conquered land, without any form of resistance. Even when all else fails, a simple open manifestation of pride and moral superiority has the power to show how conquering women’s bodies does not equal conquering their minds.

Nicté (illustration 6) illustrates the life of an indigenous woman who had a life trajectory similar to the infamous Mexican known as La Malinche. In *Nicté*, Riedel explores the instrumentality of native women interpreters to the conquistadors and strategically suspends judgment on their involvement and loyalty politics with the invaders. Her focus is on bringing visibility to the plight of the Americas’ first truly transcultural subjects and the need to revisit the mythicized versions that often circulated about them in popular culture. Riedel opts for

emphasizing the foremothers' real contributions to the fusion of cultures in the Americas, highlighting their own accounts of survival.

Nicté is the portrait of an indigenous woman dressed with a traditional *huipil* [sleeveless indigenous blouse or dress] heavily decorated with jade, stone, bone, or clay beads and symbols. *Nicté*'s attire clearly defines her as someone of importance or of a higher social status. Her headpiece is also intricate and frames her serene face. This headpiece is made of stone depicting native deities and symbols or glyphs, but at the center, right above her forehead, it includes a jade color crucifix with a dying Christ. She is not wearing any make up and her hair is gathered up and collected into her headpiece. Her expression is serene as she faces the camera head on. Her head occupies roughly one third of the composition and is centered in the frame against a background composed by an ancient map colored in red earthy tones where printed Western writing is juxtaposed.

Nicté can be compared side by side with other historical subjects such as the Mexican Malinche and Pocahontas when considering her relevance to advances of colonizers in native lands. According to Sandra Cypess, interviewed by Jasmine Garsd, characterizing women such as La Malinche as traitors and Pocahontas as a heroine gives the women a free will they didn't really have (Cypess quoted in Garsd). As Cypess points out, becoming a savior or a villain, taking on a lover or rejecting him, are choices that neither woman really had (quoted in Garsd). Even though women such as La Malinche are often seen as traitors to one's own people or some who preferred a foreign culture over her own, Jasmine Garsd contends that "the facts about Malinche are obscured by myth, and by the interests of the men who wrote her into history" (Garsd). Consequently, when Riedel suspends judgment in *Nicté* about the implications of being a woman interpreter surviving a life trapped between two cultures, she is indeed rescuing La

Malinche's reputation and by extension that of all the other women who in similar historical circumstances have been mythicized to serve certain identity and gender politics. For instance, as Garsd points out, these women often lived lives that hardly have anything to do with popular tales about them: "in *The True Story of Pocahontas, The Other Side of History*, Dr. Linwood Little Bear Custalow writes the oral history of the Mattaponi tribe, which states that Pocahontas was raped during captivity" (Garsd).

Accordingly, and even though interpreting services such as those provided by La Malinche to the Spanish conquistadors were instrumental in their success, she is still regarded as both a victim and a traitor to her people. Historically, Hernán Cortés very briefly mentioned La Malinche twice in his correspondence with the Spanish crown as the tongue that served as his interpreter, and he referred to her as "una India desta tierra" ("an Indian [woman] from this land") (Cortés 73). Octavio Paz, furthermore, wrote that he thought that La Malinche gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador and that she became an iconic figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated, or seduced by the Spaniards (86). Either instrumentalized or treated as seduced and expectant lovers, the female interpreters of the Americas remain crucial historical subjects in dire need of revision and visibility as the first real transcultural subjects on this continent. The abyss between historical reality and the myths erected by the men who wrote about them or contributed to their contemporary status as popular icons, has long contributed to obscuring these real women's lives and contributions. In *Ixchel*, Riedel seeks to reopen the debate about these and other foremothers' real contributions to the culture fusion in the Americas.

Of particular interest is the fact that in indigenous cultures, contrary to the Catholic inspired mentality of the conquistadors, only the powerful spoke and those were mainly sacred

men and powerful rulers. That a woman of lower condition broke the rules and became a tongue must have been seen as subversive at several levels. In *Nicté*, the accompanying text reveals that this historical character had a life trajectory very similar to that of La Malinche. Nicté states that her fate changed when she became a gift for a conqueror, thus leaving behind a life where she was a slave in an enemy tribe (*The Making*). Therefore, hers is also a history of upward mobility and resistance. Seeking to survive her ordeal, Nicté explains how learning the conquistadors' language was a way for her to cope because it "occupied [her] mind and numbed [her] soul" (*The Making*). The feeling of devastation she experienced was surmounted by the need to do something and to keep oneself occupied; thus in Nicté's tale she clearly confesses how learning the usurper's language served as a coping mechanism as well as a way to make herself more valuable in their eyes.

Using a trade language comparable to that used by Cacao, Nicté flatly proclaims that she "[has] become a valuable asset," distinguishing herself through her interpreting both "for my former owners and the Spanish" (*The Making*). Moving between two worlds, interpreting back and forth between powerful warlords, and finding her own place within complex identity politics and political maneuvering, women interpreters such as Nicté might have had an adventurous life, but not one that was exempt of peril. However, in Riedel's portrait of such a transcultural worker, not much is said about what comes after in her life, so the spectators can freely speculate about the fate of women that like Nicté endured conquest and colonization with the same serene expression granted to a powerful tongue.

All the women portrayed in Riedel's monoprints from *Mestiza* that I have discussed here share similar tales of survival, acceptance, rebellion, resignation, or subversion towards the conquest and colonization of the Americas. The key focus in Riedel's artistic depictions is on the

feelings that the historical foremothers, liberally represented in *Mestiza* by some of their contemporary descendants, must have experienced as responses to such traumatic events. In *Cotzij*, Riedel asserts the foremothers and the mestizas' pride, while by contrast in *Doña Carmen* she explores how this character's inner discontent and defiance reveals the abuses and complacency of a rogue colonial society self-proclaimed as civilized and Catholic. In *Cacao*, Riedel renders visible the process of abjection and depletion suffered by many indigenous people in the Americas, particularly women. Riedel draws on the long chain of resistant practices of mestiza women in the Americas who refused to mold into the shape of an object and to lose their self-appreciation and capacity to think and feel. *Doña Leonor* is the only one of Riedel's portraits that runs directly contrary to expectations. In *Doña Leonor*, an indigenous woman becomes a Spanish lady and is truly enthralled by her newfound social position and wealth, her face clearly depicting joy and rapture. In *Ixchel*, Riedel explores the conquistadors' feelings of desire towards indigenous women; however, the focus is not so much on the conquistadors and their actions, but on how indigenous women dealt with them and their desire. And lastly, in *Nicté*, Riedel explores the instrumentality of native women interpreters to the conquistadors and opts for emphasizing the foremothers' real contributions to the cultural fusion in the Americas, highlighting their own accounts of survival.

Viewed comparatively, all of these women have their own stories and experiences. Sometimes, their experiences coincide, regardless of the fact that how they see and feel about the events is markedly personal and unique. Both *Doña Carmen* and *Doña Leonor* share experiences of social mobility; however, these are very distinct. While for *Doña Carmen* her recent social climbing is insufficient to appease the pain and numbness she feels after being raped, for *Doña Leonor* the fact that she now lives in luxury and secured seems extraordinary compared to her

former life of extreme poverty. Cotji, Cacao, Ixchel, and Nicté all assert their pride in their roots and promote distinct ways of resistance to coloniality. Lastly, both Doña Carmen and Cacao expand on their experiences with abjection and being treated as commodities.

A significant feature of the collection is Riedel's choices of the women's names and the personification and accompanying narrative in each monoprint. Their names vary from native to Spanish and seem to coexist as multiple layers of the same entity. In their efforts to evangelize natives, it is common knowledge that the conquistadors and their priests gave natives what they considered to be more appropriate Christian names. The best known example is La Malinche, whom Bernal Díaz del Castillo referred to in his chronicle as Doña Marina (58). The title "Doña," the equivalent of the male "Don," referred to a married woman and denoted social status and nobility in colonial and Spanish societies and the people who were referred to in this manner were highly regarded. Doña Carmen and Doña Leonor thus are clear examples of two women whose social status changed due to their marriage to a Spanish Don. An important consequence of their change in name is also the loss of their native and family names once they became assimilated in the colonial manner. In contrast, Cotzij, Ixchel (which means "moon"), and Nicté (which means "flower") have kept their native names and, in each woman's case, there is a specific reason for this, typically unveiled with each accompanying narrative. Cotzij is the descendant of noble indigenous people and shares with them the same fierce resistance, Ixchel is a woman who also frontally resists the foreigners, and Nicté, unlike La Malinche, is not intent on betraying her roots. For her part, Cacao (from the Maya word "kakaw"), named for an important Mesoamerican commodity and trade unit—cacao was the first major colonial cash crop in Central America until the early 1600s-- uses her given name as a means to criticize the abjection process she undergoes under Spanish colonial rule.

By and large, Riedel's foremothers are portrayed as the first truly transcultural subjects of the Americas and as the bearers of a new race of hybrid subjects. Riedel's focus is on counter-narratives that reconstruct a partial, collective history of affect modeled on the findings of her ethnographic research. Her emphasis on syncretism and the strategic collage effect achieved by juxtaposing two very distinct aesthetic iconographies, European [Elizabethan] and indigenous [mostly Maya], does more than just pinpoint the moment of cultural fusion, as the artist highlights the material possibility of reconstructing the past, thus of rewriting history. Riedel's work speaks against subalternity by giving visibility and a voice to a gendered Other against the reductionist practices of collectors and archivists.¹⁰ Moreover, the juxtaposition of European and indigenous decorative elements from different cultural backgrounds and time periods starkly contributes to the collage effect that Riedel uses as the aesthetic rendering of dignified *mestizaje*. It is all a matter of playing with the archive and creatively re-imagining its historical subjects.

The Effects of Doubling Latin America's Foremothers

Irrespective of the strategies and mechanisms that Riedel employs in *Mestiza*, there are also striking silences and absences in this body of work; the fact that Riedel claims that she is representing the long gone foremothers through their indigenous descendants' faces and materiality as their own historical referent is questionable. The real women who are represented only acquire cultural meaning as standing in for the foremothers in reference to the colonial past. The absence of references in the colonial archive to the foremothers as vital historical subjects by their own accord is the referent against which Riedel's mestizas acquire materiality. Riedel's goal of performing *mestizaje* as a newly empowering experience is presented as an ideal. The aesthetic manipulation of cultural symbols does not equal a true account of the foremothers' lives under conquest and colonialization, even though a true and impartial account is obviously not

possible. Truth be told, the images in *Mestiza* do not represent long gone historical subjects, and the cultural and artistic references do not necessarily coincide in her photography. Many native symbols were not contemporary with the European style of clothing, nor the notion of gender norms that informed Spanish colonial society necessarily coincided with the indigenous ones. In her effort to embody the foremothers, Riedel collapses notions of time and of temporal reality into aesthetic renditions, and then fuses together those elements that we contemporarily consider more popular from each culture. The ultimate example of such disruption is of course using contemporary indigenous women to stand in for Latin America's long gone foremothers.

Furthermore, the manipulation of indigeneity and *mestizaje* in *Mestiza* is problematic. Riedel's artistic ventriloquism stems from her apparent wish to be part of the same chain of events that link the foremothers to today's female condition in Latin America. Even though Riedel offers a positive artistic intervention in *Mestiza* that extends the colonial archive past its limitations--the foremothers are depicted as real women who often had to engage in original negotiations to survive the trauma of conquest and colonization-- their voice in the archive remains unheard. Consequently, Riedel retells history from an absent angle and has the merit of unveiling the foremothers as historical subjects. However, Riedel does not allow the real indigenous women representing her characters to tell their own stories and to do so in their own terms, as often is the case in artistic millieux where models are hardly ever given equal voice as the modelers.

In *Mestiza*, Riedel approaches the Other by playing with the colonial archive's absence and the subsequent historical fetichizing of the colonized subject. Philippe Calia writes that the representation of the Other, especially visually, "is indeed a very sensitive matter" (56). Following the same line of thought, and considering the problem of speaking for others, Linda

Martín Alcoff contends that “speaking ‘for’ and ‘about’ the other are equally problematic” (“The Problem of Speaking With Others” 6). The implicit question is if Riedel’s representations of Guatemalan mestizas can stand for historical documents regarding the Other’s past and ethno-genesis as mixed-blood, hybrid subjects.¹¹ I contend that Riedel’s mestizas as representations of historical subjects are attempts at directing our cultural consumerism into a more balanced and ethical realm, one past essentialist views in a neocolonial context.

Riedel refutes the criticism that her approach in *Mestiza* is ethnocentric, insisting that estas mujeres tal y como les ves la cara, fueron fotografiadas en el año 2005, y lo único que les cambié fue su vestimenta. A unas ni siquiera les quité el maquillaje. Estas son las mujeres contemporáneas de nuestros países. Todas trabajan y usan vestuario como el tuyo y el mío. Pero sus miradas, gestos, pensamientos, son muy parecidos a los de antes (Riedel quoted in Gala).

(these women exactly as you see their faces, were photographed in the year 2005, and the only thing that I have changed was their clothing. For some I have not even changed their makeup. These are the contemporary women in our countries. They all work and dress in similar clothes to yours and mine. But their gaze, gestures, and thoughts are very similar to those of former times).

Without necessarily alienating the women and children displayed in her collection of prints, Riedel still orientalizes them by fusing together image, concept, and reference.¹²

Riedel acknowledges the issues with representability and insists on her *Mestiza* as a necessary disruption to the colonial archive and the accepted narrative on *mestizaje*. As a polyphonic text, *Mestiza* is directly connected to testimonio and promotes a positive anthropology based on dignity and empowerment, which Riedel labels the rethinking of a “new

race” (Riedel). *Mestiza* focuses on creating a gendered, ethnic significant, and non-classist new archive that stands against the treatment of indigenous and mestiza women as a type. By capturing living indigenous and mestiza women from Guatemala representing or standing in for their foremothers, *Mestiza* taps into the rich repertoire of performing identity and then collects these artistically manipulated renditions. Even though there is no denying that Riedel essentializes mestizas, her political and artistic goal of dignifying them in photography seems to justify her conscious strategy.

In her digital press file, Riedel introduces *Mestiza* as an unconventional photomontage in which Latin America’s foremothers are immortalized (Digital Press File). In her exact words, “las immortalicé con el propósito de reinventarme a mí misma, de convertirme yo también en una mestiza, y comparar sus experiencias con las mías y las de muchas mujeres en el mundo. De esta manera, el registro simbólico de su esencia femenina se hace real y verdadera en el siglo 21” (Digital Press File). (“I have immortalized them with the goal of reinventing myself, of also becoming a mestiza, and of comparing their experiences to my own and those of many women in the world. This way, the symbolic register of their feminine essence becomes real and true in the 21st century”). Nonetheless, Riedel herself is not a mestiza and benefits from significant privilege. In addition, her claim to register a feminine essence for the future is detrimental to understanding the specificity of women’s circumstances, namely of the foremothers and the indigenous women who agreed to embody them.

As an artist with ethnographic concerns, Riedel fails to understand the specific role of art as a practice distinguished from reality when she claims that her work in *Mestiza* allows for the archaeological register of never before revealed women’s true life stories: “Como artista guatemalteca, tengo el privilegio de dejar el registro de su verdadera huella, evocando en estas

imágenes, el registro arqueológico de sus historias nunca antes contadas” (Digital Press File). (“As a Guatemalan artist I have the privilege of leaving behind the true register of their presence by invoking in these images the archaeologic register of their never before told stories”). In spite of the visibility that her work renders to the foremothers, her art is apocryphal and should be viewed as an attempt at reconciling the official historical record with inaudible individual memories that are essentially contrary to the mainstream colonial archive. Riedel’s ultimate goal is to simply add subjectivity to the category *mestizas* and thereby erase their invisibility and objectification.

Additionally, in *Mestiza*, Riedel visually promotes an optimistic notion of *mestizaje* that does not necessarily reflect reality. Both in colonial times and in the present, the politics of *mestizaje* and its complex relationship with art is muddled and complicated. In showing these subalterns as rightful historical subjects, Riedel subalternizes their voices and presence by modelling them to fit her artistic and political agenda. In essence, Riedel suffers from artistic hubris when considering the subaltern; she engages in uncritical ventriloquism to the detriment of the subaltern’s subjecthood and will to be acknowledged historically. I call Riedel’s ventriloquism uncritical because she bypasses the necessary work of what Spivak would call “unlearning one’s privilege as one’s loss” (“Strategy, Identity, Writing” 42). In *Mestiza*, she never demonstrates that she is working critically through her own beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions in the hope of understanding where they come from and how they have become naturalized. Riedel’s inability to understand subalternity as a two-way path connecting to Spivak’s notion of ethical singularity and the need to listen to the Other in order for real dialogue to take place—Spivak advocates for the ethical stance of making discursive room for the Other

to exist (Landry and MacLean 269-70)--, shows just how disappointing her art can be, in spite of its admitted aesthetic achievements and effective social commentary.

Rodrigo Abd's *Portraits of the Mayan Queens* (2011) provides an alternative mode of representation of indigenous women and their descendants. Abd's portraits were shot using a nineteenth-century style wooden box camera that he bought in Afghanistan. As a photojournalist for the Associated Press, Abd often has the opportunity to cover current events in Latin America such as the National Indigenous Queen of Guatemala contest when indigenous participants from all Guatemala compete for the *Rabin Ajaw* title.¹³ According to Abd, "shooting these pictures for a wire service implies a massive audience around the world" because the Associated Press, like many other news agencies, supplies syndicated news and images by wire to newspapers, radio, and television stations on a regular basis (E-mail). With the 2011 edition of the *Rabin Ajaw* taking place in Cobán, the representatives of each region present themselves voluntarily in the national contest for a chance to represent all of native Guatemala as a country (Abd E-mail).

Several Maya Queens have used the *Rabin Ajaw* as a platform to protest against several matters such as genocide, murder, and community claims.¹⁴ The participants in this competition range between 14 to 26 years old and they must demonstrate proficiency in their native language, and in Maya traditions and worldview. In addition, they must also display awareness about mining and other threats to Maya livelihood and resources, a nuanced view of gender roles, and leadership in their community (Abd). Abd states that what differentiates the *Rabin Ajaw* from other contests where physical beauty is the most important attribute of the contestants, such as in the Miss Universe contest, is that in the former women must dress in the most appropriate manner to represent the indigenous women of their community and their traditional customs (E-mail). Most importantly, the Mayan Queens must be leaders of their own people, meaning they

must understand the dreams, challenges, and difficulties of all indigenous women in a markedly conservative and *machista* country such as Guatemala (E-mail). Furthermore, and unlike what is common in traditional beauty contests, the panel of judges in the *Rabin Ajaw* not only values the participants' leadership skills, but also their commitment to the rescue and maintenance of Maya values.¹⁵

The nineteenth-century style Afghani wooden box camera that Abd uses means that the women have to sit still for several minutes gazing into the camera, “enabling a depth of engagement rarely achieved with today’s hectic technology” (Abd). Abd explains that this particular camera has allowed him to apprehend the essence of the Maya Queens, their long stares, and their determination in front of the camera (Abd E-mail). Abd further clarifies that what he achieved, the Maya Queens’ prideful portraits, is basically a technological feat; however, it is the women’s resolution that the camera captured more emphatically due to the older technology he employed (E-mail). As subtitles to each print, Abd displays each woman’s full name, age, and the community that she is representing immediately after the title “Maya Queen.” Their beauty is exquisite and their frontal gaze engages the spectators on their own terms, disrupting former colonial visualities that objectified them. By using older technology, Abd’s art decolonizes the gaze, which allows the Maya Queens to present themselves as they deem fit, without any manipulation or staging by the photographer. Abd further elucidates that even though he has not formally asked them how they felt about the portraits, he could tell that they were proud and very eager to tell their stories because from their point of view, this was an opportunity to have their often silenced and untold stories known to the world (E-mail).

As far the visibility and the dissemination of his *Portraits of the Mayan Queens*, Abd expands on the benefits of the Associated Press’s wire service explaining that this work in

particular was well received in dozens of daily newspapers printed worldwide, from China to Europe and Latin America. In addition, Abd had this specific series of portraits in several individual and collective exhibits in Guatemala and Argentina. Abd points out that these portraits were very well received by the public, and several authors discussed them in blogs, photo galleries, and magazines. Several art curators showed interest in Abd's work due to his success with these specific portraits. For Abd, the ultimate pleasure he derives from the Maya Queens's portraits is the manner in which these photographs coexist perfectly with others taken using the latest technology (E-mail).

In Abd's *Portraits of the Mayan Queens*, representation is envisioned, following Ella Shohat's theorization, as a sort of speech act with a speaker and a listener.¹⁶ There is often a manifest disconnect between the Other speaker and the listener Self because indigenous representation is framed within the context of dominant identity politics. The expectation for how indigenous people are represented and how such representation is received mirrors current social impositions on the ethnic imaginary. Therefore, there is room for doubling and/or subversion within hegemonic representations of indigeneity, as well of any other social constructions. Abd subverts the gaze through his uncanny manipulation of productive-collaborative techniques: when given an opportunity, the Maya Queens posed out of their own volition for his camera. The result is undeniable pride in origin and leadership, unequivocally translated in the women's long strong stares and frontal renditions to the camera. The black and white high contrast of this older technology strongly reinforces the dominant presence of the Maya Queens and provides an alternative framing of indigeneity to that of the colonial archive. Since Abd, unlike Riedel, intentionally considers the indigenous queens as artistic participants, he allows these women to present themselves as historical subjects. Contrary to Riedel's claim

that her foremothers are the Queens of Latin America (Riedel in Gala), Abd lets the Maya Queens represent themselves through his lenses as the vital links that unite the past to the present. Thus, Abd promotes a counter-visibility that brings mayanness and ethnic authenticity into a new light. His use of older technology presupposes contradicting the voyeuristic gaze inherited from the earlier foreign ethnographers who depicted indigenous people as Other. In this sense, Abd's Maya Queens look and act more convincingly as descendants of the foremothers Riedel claims as their common matrix.

In conclusion, Riedel's archive constructs mestizas for a widespread audience as she seeks to engage spectators in a positive anthropology based on pride and dignity common to all Guatemalans; however, the experience is not within everyone's reach and not all Guatemalan's views of the past will coincide. From within a culture of violence and victimization, Riedel has the merit of focusing on alternative narratives of resistance and survival. Nonetheless, Riedel's art is an imperfect form of rendering visible the real lives of Latin America's foremothers, women who most likely never felt like queens, at least the vast majority. The very notion of being a queen and the sense of nobility inherent to such ideology is not necessarily akin to Maya worldview and values. While in *Mestiza* the historical construction of *mestizaje* operates concomitantly with Riedel's flawed authorial process, and the growth of indigenous and *Ladina* women's empowerment in Guatemala's transition into democracy, the key note is affective spectatorship. What spectators make of the foremothers existence as full historical subjects, as well as the way they acknowledge their descendants in the present are the enduring effects of such identity performances as those that Riedel's and Abd's art promotes.

Notes

¹ Though Riedel's exhibit has been displayed in different venues at different times, the most complete textual record referring to this particular work was published as the exhibition's catalog in 2005 in Guatemala. Curiously, the exhibition's title changed somewhat depending on where and when it was displayed; for example, in 2005 in Miami, Florida it was shortened to *Mestiza*, but changed into *Reinas de América* in Argentina in 2006, and then into *Mestizas* also in the same year in Santiago de Chile. My analysis of this photographic exhibit refers primarily to the original catalog.

² Mary Louise Pratt develops the concept of "anti-conquest," which she defines as "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (*Imperial Eyes* 7). In her analysis of Alexander von Humboldt's creation of new systems of knowledge with which to measure, analyze and conceptualize the Other and American nature, Pratt concludes that knowledge about the Americas underwent a significant transformation following the writings of Humboldt in the early 19th century. Through his work, America was re-defined as young, new and ready for development, as a way to legitimize Europe's neo-colonial project. I contend that Riedel expresses a similar anti-conquest sentiment in *Mestiza*.

³ Diana Taylor introduces the notion of performance as an "act of transfer" by transmitting cultural knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated practices (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 6). By "repertoire" Taylor means knowledge that is transmitted by performance practices, which is ephemeral and privileges bodies, in contrast to "archive," which privileges writing and is designed to endure.

⁴ The body can be read as a unit that produces meaning, but also as a unit that disseminates it at the same time, as a self-representational entity.

⁵ Roland Barthes calls a “photographic referent not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a thing refers, but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph” (76).

⁶ As Manuela Camus has detailed, even though ethnic markers continue to be primordial targets for indigenous women’s discrimination, a sign of the ubiquitous presence of gender violence in the country, in Guatemala mentalities are slowly starting to change as particularly younger indigenous women use such ethnic markers in a new manner for self-expression, sometimes provocatively, others in an original way (“Mujeres y mayas” 35).

⁷ MacDougall views transcultural processes as “injecting ambiguity into images and into a discipline’s underlying presumptions, since images range widely in their many possible meanings across different contexts” (MacDougall cited in Codell 7).

⁸ Conquest chronicles of Spanish and Portuguese origin often described indigenous people in a denigrating manner, attributing to them the most horrific and gruesome acts such as human sacrifice, cannibalism, and sodomy (Sigal 1).

⁹ Due to their contact with Iberian, and later African peoples, the indigenous populations’ morality and sexual behaviors also changed, including shifts in their own perceived objects of desire and fantasies. For more on changes in sexuality and behavior, particularly during and after the Conquest, see Asunción Lavrin.

¹⁰ As Frederic Jameson argues, even though globalization is symptomatically a decentered system, it has a dominant cultural center that coincides with US economic and political hegemony (“New Literary History” 378). The pull to materiality is everywhere is the

globalized present world, thus it's common for cultural artifacts and representations to undergo a process of fetichizing, culminating in their enshrining in cultural institutions to which social and civilizational meaning as Other is ascribed, in museums.

¹¹ As Ella Shohat argues, for minority groups and ethnic others, “the burden of representation” often is positioned against metonymic stigmatized depictions of themselves in dominant social discourse and, therefore, “the struggle to ‘speak for oneself’ cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard” (173).

¹² This is what Ariella Azoulay identifies as “the protocol of iconization [or as] the illusion that anyone has the power of total mastery over that which would be inscribed in a photograph” (“Archive”).

¹³ For more on Mayan Queens and the politics and differentiation between the *Rabin Ajaw* and *Ladina* beauty pageants, see Betsy Konefal and Jon Schackt.

¹⁴ A well-known and documented episode in Guatemalan history is the “revuelta de las Rabinas.” (See Camus “Mujeres y mayas”) More recently, the Guatemalan press has reported that several other Rabinas or Maya Queens have publicly condemned government policies and made appeals regarding finding the whereabouts of disappeared community leaders.

¹⁵ As Brent Metz argues, it is important to recall that indigenous traditions are understood contemporarily as “everything that ‘modern,’ individualistic, capitalist consumers presumably do not have: self-subsistent and sustainable economies rooted in holistic spiritual traditions, distinct languages and dress, autochthonous political and legal systems, and communitarian ethics” (Metz 291). These are obviously unrealistic expectations that largely demonstrate the romanticized vision of indigenous peoples and cultures that international bodies still portray and

that date back to Rousseau's ideology of the *bon sauvage* and to the colonial fascination with the Other.

¹⁶ As Shohat expresses, when the subaltern makes an attempt at self-representation outside "the lines laid down by the official institutional structures of representation, [he/she] [often] is not heard" (176).

Appendix

Illustration 1. (*Cotzij*)



Illustration 2. (*Doña Carmen*)



Illustration 3. (*Cacao*)



Illustration 4. (*Doña Leonor*)

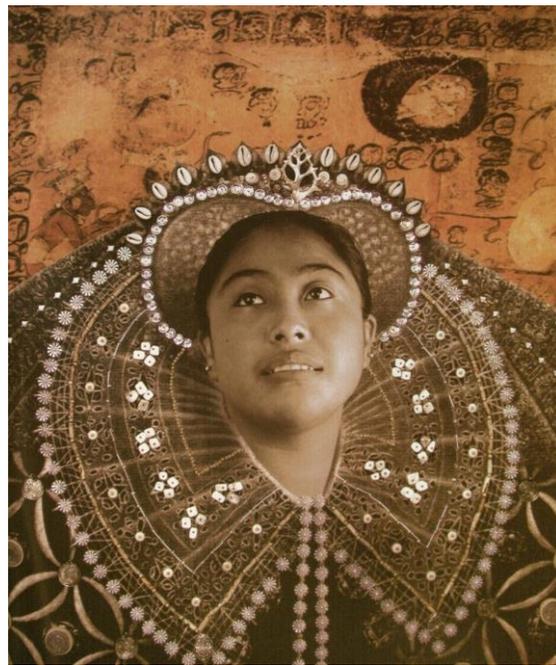
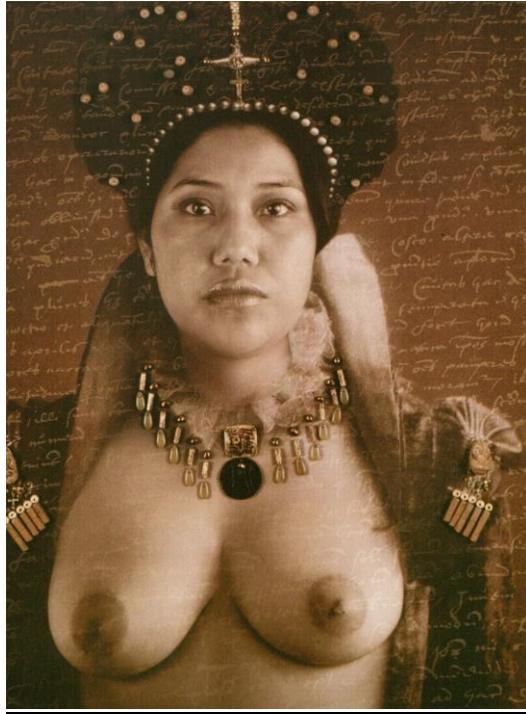


Illustration 5. (*Ixchel*)Illustration 6. (*Nicté*)

Violent Truths: Performing Memory and Embodying Violence in Guatemala

In this chapter, I explore the link between embodied memory and political struggle in Guatemala. Art in itself provides space for reconsidering destabilizing realities that have been naturalized, normalized, and stabilized; art is often a means to question colonialist and violent naturalizations, and to promote local knowledge systems and the truth. I analyze two performances by Regina José Galindo, *Hermana* (2010) and *La verdad* (2013), which emphasize the importance of memory work, particularly in the Guatemalan context. In both performances the performers' level of experimentation is great: *La verdad* is a performance *à thèse*, and *Hermana* functions as an exercise in transversalizing the violence of coloniality and promoting a unique organic sisterhood between Galindo and Rosa Chávez, her co-performer. Coloniality, as we know from Walter Mignolo, is a historic, dynamic, and contemporary condition that permeates social life in many regions. I am extending Mignolo's definition of coloniality to especially consider the case of Guatemala. Mignolo contends that "coloniality is the machine that reproduces subalternity today in the form of global coloniality in the network society" (426). Aníbal Quijano first introduced the concept of coloniality of power to refer to the persistent categorical and discriminatory discourse and practices that in Latin America was inherited from European colonialism and that still pervades in contemporary social orders that continue to prescribe value to certain peoples while disenfranchising others (536). Furthermore, Mignolo recognizes that there are "new forms of coloniality in a global and transnational world" (439) and that "subalternity is inextricably linked to coloniality" (430).

The video performance *Hermana* (2010) challenges structures of coloniality by reversing traditional roles between *Ladinas* and indigenous women in Guatemala. In Guatemalan society there are unresolved issues between *Ladinas* and indigenous women concerning political alliance

and gender based violence. The action in this video performance depicts Maya poet Rosa Chávez first slapping Regina José Galindo on the face, then spitting at her, and last whipping Galindo's back. I contend that in this video performance, Galindo and Chávez transversalize or transpose the very notion of contemporary coloniality¹ as it is lived in Guatemala through the prevalence of the ethnic binary *India/Ladina*.

La verdad is a performance delivered by Regina José Galindo in front of a live audience at the *Centro Cultural de España* in Guatemala City on Thursday, November 21, 2013. In this performance, Galindo read testimonies of women survivors of the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996) for an hour and ten minutes. Her selection was apparently random and she never referred to either the victims' names or the source from where she extracted these testimonies. While she kept reading for the duration of the performance, a dentist interrupted her periodically and injected anesthesia in her gums. She was anaesthetized 7 times starting at 5 minutes into the performance, then subsequently every 10 minutes, and lastly in shorter intervals of only 5 minutes from 55 minutes to the hour, which is the last time she received an injection.

The Guatemalan past is always present in both pieces, as a constant background framing the performances and social rituals, practices, and contemporary political situations. Both performances denounce Guatemalan systemic violence, be it in coloniality, Maya genocide denial, or violence against women as in other of Galindo's works. Drawing from the same historical and cultural background, both performances engage and seek to implicate spectators, while promoting awareness and responsibility for Guatemala's violent past. Consequently, the strategic use of violence in these two performances as a shock factor to engage spectators is instrumental in creating involved spectatorship. In addition, in both performances, Galindo

explores self-violence as a way to embody and make present the contemporaneity of Guatemala's violence and the lingering effect of its recent past.

However, the treatment of violence in *Hermana* is distinct from that in *La verdad*: in the former, violence is live and enacted; in the latter it is invoked and narrated. Thus, haunting in *Hermana* happens more at the physical level, while in *La verdad* it is voiced and staged as in a memorial ceremony. Other important differences between these two performances refer to performers' participation, strategies, and the treatment of empathy. *Hermana* is the result of a joint effort between Galindo and Maya poet Rosa Chávez, while *La verdad* is a one woman show enacted by Galindo. As far as performance strategies, *Hermana* uses mostly critical mimicry, strategic role-playing, and transversality, and promotes an organic sisterhood, while *La verdad* resorts to critical ventriloquism and the administration of anesthesia on Galindo. Lastly, in *Hermana* empathy is strategically avoided, while it is productively sought in *La verdad*.

Transversalizing Coloniality and Organic Sisterhood in *Hermana* (2010)

A colonialist relationship takes a minimum of two subjects to be embodied, and hence Galindo and Chávez could stand in for all colonizers and all colonized, if not for the fact that theirs is a particularist practice that resists being apprehended. By a particularist practice I am drawing from Doris Sommer's notion of a particularist text as one that is hard to read because against "the vicious hermeneutic circle of familiarity and predictability [it] makes unanticipated lessons hard to read" (182). Thus, *Hermana* escapes interpretative control by intrinsically deflecting empathy and learning as forms of appropriating and cannibalizing the Other. In this chapter, I argue that *Hermana* promotes a personal practice of justice through critical mimicry and role reversal because it engages in current national debates about reparation and retribution, and women's role in the transition to peace and fully political participation in democracy.

Galindo and Chávez's means of providing a voice to the subaltern implies strategically embodying coloniality using real bodies in the present time, which provides a great visual impact through body talk. The performers achieve this effect by transversalizing coloniality through their particular performance practice. In *Hermana* "transversalizing coloniality" means inquiring about how the colonizer can acknowledge the extent of the damage sustained by the colonized without developing empathy for the Other. By "transversalize" I am referring to the manner in which Gerald Raunig calls attention to Félix Guattari's exploration of the term "transversality." Transversality is an encounter between two opposing and sometimes irreconcilable differences.²

Hermana is a video of a live performance taped separately from a live audience. The shown space resembles a lab, and the action happens against a white backdrop. The video was filmed using diffused light, which gives the sense of its action being suspended in time and place. This carefully manipulated setting brings spectators directly to the actions that are being repeatedly enacted. In a series of *tableaux*, the performers take center stage, side by side, never changing sides, so that Galindo is always to the left of the screen and Chávez on its right. The sounds of the performed actions are amplified, particularly the corporeal noises emitted by Galindo when slapped in the face, or when Chávez spits at her, and finally, the sounds are intensified as the whip vibrates on Galindo's back. This sound orchestration is meant to provoke discomfort in the spectators and, in tandem with the lighting, contributes to accentuate the physicality of coloniality by invoking an atmosphere of punishment and pain. The physicality of coloniality refers to the literal aspects of exploitation under colonial, postcolonial, or neocolonial rule, including slavery, forced labor, rape and physical punishment, land expropriation, systematic structural discrimination, desacralization, power of life and death, and ultimately,

abjection and dejection. Whenever the subaltern body is apprehended and subjected to others' will in a power relation, it manifests physicality comparable to the physicality of coloniality.

Neither Galindo nor Chávez seek to provoke in the spectators any feeling of moral superiority that would jeopardize the critical awareness and move to change that they seek to promote. Empathy in *Hermana* functions as a preemptive condition for artistic success. If the performance succeeds at critically engaging spectators and promoting change through retributive justice in symbolic form, then empathy's power will have been deployed. If, on the other hand, *Hermana* provokes empathy and spectators choose to commiserate over Galindo as a victim, probably while also criticizing Chávez as a perpetrator, then the necessary distance that fuels critical awareness, and ultimately provokes change, will not take place and the performance will have failed. Empathy's treatment in *Hermana* implies "not stealing the pain of others," to use Sherene H. Razack's expression.³ With her powerful criticism, Razack challenges everyone to move from outrage to responsibility. Spectators of *Hermana* are not to become distant observers of the embodiment of coloniality that Galindo and Chávez so carefully orchestrated; rather the intended effect is a shock followed by a move for action, with each spectator taking in their own quota of responsibility. For the spectators, seeing justice enacted in this manner, where an indigenous woman reattributes the wrongs of history to a *Ladina* woman resorting to violence, might seem fair and long overdue, implying a sense of moral fulfillment.

Maintaining their own identities throughout the performance allows Galindo and Chávez to critically rethink their own gender and ethnic constructions, while avoiding stepping into each other's boundaries. Speaking with or beside one another, Galindo and Chávez share the stage and give each other ample opportunity to be heard, even if theirs is not a verbal discourse.⁴ Their "mimetic fusion" equals standing in for others and raises pertinent ethical questions about

entitlement and the Other's autonomy (Pelias 146). Ultimately, empathy in *Hermana* is counterproductive, and Galindo and Chávez try to prevent it from happening to the spectators because it would sustain the ethnic privilege that they want to debunk.

Hermana is manifestly dynamic, yet it is also intimate, archival performance footage, juxtaposing representations that deconstruct the very notion of coloniality due to its subversive role reversal and critical mimicry. Technically, the same quick and shocking images are projected over three screens, in unison, producing a repetitious display that implies and, in turn, exposes the never-ending oppressive circularity of coloniality itself. The camera angles are somewhat abrupt, alternatively focusing on Galindo's face or back when she is being spat on or whipped. Curiously, the spectators never really see Chávez's face, even though she is the perpetrator of the retribution process executed on Galindo, which is somewhat disconcerting. The focus on Galindo's face lingers for a moment on her apparently fixed expression, as she looks straight out into the distance. She makes herself unavailable for identification, and avoids any connection to the spectators. In *Hermana*, the spectators' disorientation is an intended objective; asked to look at three screens simultaneously, while quick and violent images play over and over again (in loop mode), the spectators are then forced to grapple with Galindo and Chávez's unexpected role reversal (as the indigenous woman is attacking the *Ladina*), and the sound amplification (spit, spat, and whipping) orchestrated by Galindo. The way that Galindo and Chávez embody the coloniality of power, its physicality and its spectacular possibilities, provokes a visceral discomfort reaction in the spectators, who are continuously and repetitively assailed.

The sequence of events in this performance appears to intend to control the delivery of the message to the spectators, namely by manipulating the closed circle repetition of events. The

three distinct vignettes or tableaux have approximately the same time length; however, there is a significant progression in the actions performed as they become increasingly more violent and humiliating, from a simple slap in the face to the indignity of being spat upon, culminating with the degradation of being whipped in the back.

Galindo describes *Hermana* in the following manner;

Hermana es una pieza que habla de la realidad y le da una vuelta. Normalmente las mujeres indígenas son víctimas de todo tipo de actos de racismo, son excluidas, explotadas, olvidadas. *Hermana* muestra la acción cotidiana pero a la inversa. Dos mujeres que comparten los mismos rasgos físicos, se diferencian entre sí, únicamente por el adjetivo que las contextualiza como mujer ladina o mujer indígena maya. *Hermana* se hizo en un espacio privado, sin público. Una acción hecha para ser filmada y luego presentado el documento. Se hizo con la colaboración de la artista y poeta maya quiché Rosa Chávez, en Guatemala, en 2010. Me parece que las dos hicimos el proyecto con mucho interés porque además, en la vida, somos como hermanas. Ella indígena maya orgullosa de sus raíces y su sangre, yo ladina, avergonzada de mi herencia, sin raíces sólidas. Originalmente la pieza está hecha y filmada en tres cuadros separados para ser presentada en tres pantallas paralelas, en loop. De modo que el cuerpo de la mujer ladina se verá atacado constantemente por el cuerpo de la mujer indígena ("Sobre *Hermana*").

Hermana is a performance that talks about reality and gives it a twist. Usually, indigenous women are victims of all type of racist acts, they're excluded, exploited, forgotten. *Hermana* shows daily activity, but reversed. Two women that share the same physical features, distinguish each other, only by the adjective that contextualizes them as either a *Ladina* woman or an indigenous Maya woman. *Hermana* took place in a private

space, without an audience. [It's] a performance meant to be filmed and then presented as a document. It was made with the participation of the artist and Maya Quiché poet Rosa Chávez, in Guatemala, in 2010. I think we were both very interested in this project because in real life we are like two sisters; she is an indigenous Maya woman proud of her roots and ancestry, and I am a *Ladina* woman, embarrassed by my heritage, without any solid roots. Originally, the performance is made and filmed in three separate tableaux to be presented in three parallel screens, in loop. This way the *Ladina* woman's body will be seen as being constantly attacked by the body of the indigenous woman.

Galindo and Chávez's actions re-open the existing debate on how a succession of policies, feminist quests, and scholarly approaches have consistently overlooked the needs of Guatemalan indigenous women, particularly when it comes to historical reparations. In *Hermana*, bodies serve as venues for sharing a common lived experience of redressing historical pain and suffering. In Guatemala there are still major issues with identifying damages, measuring harm, and conceptualizing appropriate forms of redress, creating and applying gender-sensitive reparation policies, and reaching out and offering support to female indigenous victims. Who else but the indigenous women victims can accurately testify to what they have endured? Their voice is notably absent from the transitional justice processes and even though local and global actions have been enacted such as the *Tribunal de la Consciencia para las Mujeres Sobrevivientes de Violencia Sexual durante los Conflictos Armados* [Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Armed Conflict] in 2010, their silence on these topics is deafening.⁵ Underlying the impossibility of reparations in Guatemala is the fact that, in essence, there are 500 years of abuse against indigenous people that need to be addressed.

Performances such as *Hermana* symbolically address this need for redressing abuse against women, particularly considering that in Guatemala such practices are insufficient and inadequate. Following the publication of two reports, the REMHI [*Informe del Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica of the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala* (first published in 1998)] and the CEH [*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (first published in 1999)], the Guatemalan transitional justice process was permeated with monumental flaws. Experts such as the team Alyson Crosby and Brinton Lykes, Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, and Lieselotte Viaene identify several major flaws in the reparation process in Guatemala. First and foremost, justice was sought mostly for forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, thus violence against women has been an unaddressed issue to the present day (Paz y Paz Bailey 103). Furthermore, the lack of a voice given to Mayan women victims (Crosby and Lykes 461) is another field of contention, as is a monolithic representation of women as racialized gender-specific victims (Crosby and Lykes 463). Moreover the lack of consideration for women's unique circumstances in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, social class, etc. promoted an effective re-victimization of many indigenous women (Crosby and Lykes 456). In addition, there has been a delayed application of reparation measures,⁶ which effectively contradicts the spirit of restorative justice. Added to the fact that the government is unable to grant land titles to survivors as agreed, which is their major claim,⁷ this lack of action proves mostly dissatisfactory, and these and other flaws are only the tip of an immense iceberg when it comes to Guatemala's lingering issues with reparations.

Hermana constructs a decolonial practice as a performance that confronts the lack of a gendered politics and the inefficiency of reparation processes in postwar Guatemala. While strategically deconstructing intentional political discourses that suppress or try to manipulate the

past and the process of memory-making, *Hermana* allows for a better understanding of the current status quo, while subverting the core ethnic discrimination that shapes Guatemalan identity. *Hermana* further contributes to problematizing the national culture of impunity and silence by expanding on ways to make visible women's bodies in coloniality, which are often unavailable beyond iconic and accepted imagery.⁸ Since coloniality is an historic and dynamic construction, it is subject to change, criticism, and emancipatory practices.

Galindo and Chávez's depiction of coloniality is personal and unique in the sense that their artistic enactment challenges notions of power, knowledge, and violence that have systematically sustained the intrinsic nature of coloniality. Significantly, Chávez is wearing *traje*, which functions as an easy identifier of her ethnicity, while Galindo is simply wearing everyday urban clothes consisting of pants and a darker t-shirt, or has her back naked in the vignette where she is being whipped. At first glance, this performance challenges the spectators' expectations based on the historical record since Galindo and Chávez's embodiment suggests other possibilities of reading coloniality by changing angle, focus, intensity, and valence. Galindo and Chávez demonstrate how coloniality is sustained as a means of maintaining a unique power-knowledge system, one that credits Western standards for civilizing the indigenous natives of America, or in the case of this video performance, a power-knowledge system that separates *Indias* and *Ladinas* instead of uniting them in a common cause against gender violence and patriarchal oppression. Thus, changing the angle of approach and focus means that coloniality must be made visible as an epistemological construction that still generates oppression and inequality. Traditional representations often reproduce coloniality's status quo; for instance, depicting *tortilleras* in the national ethnographic museum as subservient and domestic icons of indigenous women's backwardness. *Hermana*, on the contrary, aims at deconstructing the same

intrinsic power network that allows for such oppression and inequality to subsist. For instance, since indigenous women are often domestic servants to *Ladinas*, an indigenous woman beating and humiliating a *Ladina* is symptomatic of challenging roles in that home front, by punishing the master with her own tools. By changing the intensity and valence, *Hermana* immediately engages with the issue of how strongly Chávez punishes and how calmly Galindo bears that punishment when enacting coloniality. This representation offers a stark contrast to iconic representations such as the Spanish conquest of Guatemala as depicted in the 16th Century *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* or the more recent Daniel Hernández Salazar's photographs in the exhibition *So That All Should Know/Para que todos sepan* (1998-9) denouncing genocide. This performance allows for a better understanding of how coloniality modulates each individual's subjectivity according to a predetermined configuration set by power structures. Thus *Hermana* succeeds at revealing that subject positions are not written in stone, thus role reversal can break the understanding of said subject positions as predetermined and unchallenged, which in turn halt subordination. In essence, *Hermana's* great de-colonizing potential resides in its ability to make visible coloniality's oppression by mobilizing, subverting, confusing, and multiplying the constitutive categories that keep coloniality in place; it ultimately shows such categories as the illusions that shape ethnic identity in contemporary Guatemala.

Hermana dialogues with the historical representations that inhabit the colonial and postcolonial imaginary, while engaging in a more emancipatory artistic practice. As shown by the *tortilleras* example, coloniality as spectacle is still pervasive nowadays under multiple forms and visual records whenever colonial-type displays of power are produced, circulated, and manipulated to provide a certain oppressive effect. Historian Martha Few documents the lives and resistance practices of Black, Spanish, and Maya women sorcerers, spell-casters, magical

healers, and midwives in Guatemala at the end of the colonial period, providing clear examples of the constitutive categories that fed coloniality. Contemporarily scholars such as Jillian L. Kite and Jon Schackt among others are investigating neocolonial practices in *Ladino* and indigenous beauty pageants in Guatemala, discussing how ethnic assignations, Western beauty standards, and authenticity rhetoric are often imbued with several of coloniality's constitutive categories that are supposedly fixed and stable. Sarah England studies feminicide representations of women in the Guatemala press as an example of how coloniality as spectacle refers to a visualization of power that is meant to be displayed, revealed, and commoditized, even if at the expense of women, their bodies, and their dignity. In *Hermana*, Galindo and Chávez go to great lengths to offer a version of coloniality that is subversive and illustrates possibilities to escape its oppressive effect. They do not only want to change the representation, they want to change the reality: *Hermana* has that great visual impact that is necessary to achieve a change in historical redress as existing currently.

Performance strategies in *Hermana* include explicit violence, mimicry and repetition, and role reversal. Explicit violence is an intensive process of violence visibility that aims at provoking a shock effect in the spectators and combines the physicality of coloniality with coloniality as spectacle.

Violence in *Hermana* is epistemic violence because Galindo and Chávez's embodiment of violence reads as the epitomic colonial violence of *vencedores* against *vencidos*. For the purposes of this chapter, I understand explicit violence as epistemic violence, which implies both the physicality of coloniality, as well as coloniality as spectacle. Epistemic violence is a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which means the infliction of harm against subjects through discourse.⁹ *Hermana* takes a step further by presenting indigenous appropriation of the

masters' tools when engaging Chávez, the Maya woman, as the perpetrator of coloniality's violence on Galindo, the *Ladina*. In Guatemala, indigenous knowledge systems have been historically challenged by the Western systems of power knowledge left by the conquistadores. Consequently, questioning what would constitute effective reparation for epistemic violence by indigenous people is pertinent.

In *Hermana*, violence is used in a productive manner in order to achieve a specific goal: to critically engage the spectators, thus it is performative. I understand performative violence as a meta-phenomenon that both recreates violence and opens up a space for reflecting on its impact and productivity. Performative violence tends to perpetuate the spectators' exposure to its core elements of fear and discomfort every time this violence is reenacted or embodied, even if it is done in a controlled manner through careful preparation. Through the great visual impact of performative violence, the performers recur to a body talk strategy that either aims at expressing artistically the unmentionable and the often silenced, or taking justice into the performers' own hands. An ethical question arises: in their efforts to go against the grain of naturalized violence through critical distance, are Galindo and Chávez generating and naturalizing violence as an artistic practice? Conspicuously, empowering the subaltern in similar fashion as the master, through violence against subalternized *Ladinos*, would be replaying coloniality's violence, only this time changing the main actors' roles. Nonetheless, the violence Galindo and Chávez embody is not masochistic or gratuitous, because the performers "resort to extreme behavior because exclusion and violence, despotism and torture, femicide and inequality *exist* not just in Guatemala, but throughout the world" (Castro Flórez 120; emphasis in original). In *Hermana*, the type of actions chosen to be enacted are not random and carry specific significance: being slapped in the face is understood as a direct confrontation and a possible call to engage in further

violence ; being spit upon recalls indignity and being made less socially accepted; and ultimately, being whipped evokes historical memories related to slavery and the degradation brought to the Americas by the conquistadores with forced labor practices (*encomienda*, *repartimiento*, etc.) and subhuman living conditions.

Even though Galindo and Chávez's focus on embodying violence is a strategic mechanism in this performance necessary to contest coloniality's hegemony, it is the implicit emphasis on non-corporal punishment that leads to understanding the intricacies of coloniality. In *Hermana*, the obvious inference is that coloniality is not the same for Galindo and Chávez. And by extension, the implication is that the level of oppression for each woman is not the same. When discussing the ambivalence of colonial mimicry, non-corporal punishment brings the traumatic event or condition into the open. In Guatemala, there is a lack of agreement about what the past can signify. In a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society such as Guatemala, who can say who suffers most and who inflicts more pain?

Instead of merely opening up or inquiring about the physicality of coloniality as part of the archive, Galindo and Chávez embody coloniality's cruelty and display its nature in a queer and atopic manner, rather than as a stable one, belonging to the past.¹⁰ Participating in the construction of a shared social memory, transversal projects such as *Hermana* engage with what Rebecca Schneider theorizes as typically explicit bodily performance, which "replays the historical drama of gender, race, and class [or all at once] across the body of the artist as stage" (*The Explicit Body* 3). In this vein,¹¹ Galindo and Chávez's body rhetoric in *Hermana* peels back the layers of coloniality's signification, exposing its violence and physicality and promoting a retribution process instead. In this manner, theirs is one of those performances that challenge and resist nomenclature, while affirming a personal way of making art and politics. Beyond the

explicit body in the sense of Schneider's theorization, the spectators of *Hermana* may recognize a second body, the implicit body of the oppressed, with which they might engage in a dialectical relationship. By bearing witness to the performance event that takes place, the spectators possibly recognize themselves implicated in the same oppressed communal situation with the performers. However, the spectators' degree of involvement may vary significantly according to their "horizon of expectations," to use Jauss's expression (23). Men and women, *Indios* and *Ladinos* will probably react distinctively to this performance.

Galindo and Chávez propose overcoming the difficult political and social clashes in Guatemalan society by engaging in meaningful redress practices that can lead to true dialogue and reconciliation. The simultaneous embodiment of pain and violence in *Hermana* functions as a double strategy to render visible the cruel physicality of coloniality, in spite of Elaine Scarry's contention that pain is inexpressible and intransmissible (25).¹² Making coloniality's pain and violence visible will at best offer a possibility for communal engagement in a redress process that can bring together victims and victimizers. At least, awareness is expected from the spectators when exposed to this level of clear corporeal and political compromise; however, the performers' joint rhetoric of visibility might lead to deeper commitment and even, possibly, redress. Fundamentally, Galindo and Chávez do not appear to solve the reparation problem in Guatemala; rather, they seek to expose the dominant discourse and its shortcomings, thus breaking with hegemony.

Hermana uses critical mimicry as the primary performance strategy to expose and question Guatemalan women's ethnic roles.¹³ Often mimicry is mockery of the intricacies of power networks and their futile attempts at controlling natives through disciplining the body while trying to follow a derivative discourse that copies Western ideas of justice, democracy, and

equality and forcibly tries to shape them into the very own intricacies of local cultures. I argue that this performance is tricksterish since critical mimicry in *Hermana* supports the understanding that the Guatemalan society as echoed by its justice system is not as universal and inclusive as it claims.¹⁴ Galindo and Chávez's mimicry subverts the inefficacy of Guatemalan justice by reversing roles, having the indigenous woman being the perpetrator of violence on the *Ladina*, thus constituting reverse mimicry.

In addition to using critical mimicry as the primary performance strategy to expose and question problematic ethnic roles by assigning them to two women of different ethnic backgrounds, this performance relies heavily on repetition and on the specific unhistorical moment in which it crystalizes coloniality. In essence, *Hermana*'s queer repetition, or "againness" to borrow Schneider's term,¹⁵ contributes to the spectators' better understanding of Galindo and Chavez's enactment of coloniality as a literal and figurative repetitive and constant assault. Manifestly, there is no before and no after to the narrative that Galindo and Chávez are embodying, thus leaving the spectators purposefully clueless about the connections with other narratives and current events. Since there is no after to the performance, there are no apparent consequences and there is no one to stop the violence that is taking place on stage as a response to 500 years of ingrained coloniality. Ironically, this lack of consequences can be read as a manifestation of the enduring culture of impunity in the country. Likewise, the lack of a before to the performance can be read as a manifestation of the disregard for the historical past of the country, a past notoriously filled with ethnic conflicts. Either way, there is contention permeating the lack of a reparations narrative in which *Hermana* situates itself by enacting coloniality reversely as a retributive practice.

Both for Galindo and Chávez, the role reversal strategy translates into a momentary stepping into hybridity through the double doors of ambivalence. Even though Galindo and Chávez aspire at being identified respectively as a *Ladina* and an indigenous woman by the spectators, being clearly identified as *Ladina* and Mayan is an intrinsic component of their role reversal strategy; nonetheless, their critical engagement does not allow for reading them as representing all *Ladinas* and all Maya women. Rather, their particular subject identities are outlined as conducive to the artistic encounter they foster as capable of exposing Guatemala's ethnic wounds. In this complex balance between embodying agency and portraying a situation of oppression, both women become cultural hybrids as they each express their identity in opposition to the other and considering the spectators' expectations on *Ladinidad* and indigeneity. In Guatemala, notions of good and bad indigeneity, as well as good and bad *Ladinidad*, further complicate the relationship between *Ladinos* and indigenous people. In neoliberal times, and echoing a World Bank dictum, *Ladinos* in Guatemala distinguish between "good ethnicity, which builds social capital, and "dysfunctional" ethnicity, which increases conflict" (Hale 519). According to Charles Hale, many dominant culture *Ladinos* are anxious about "extreme" Maya demands that they associate with violence and conflict" (518). The figure of the insurrectionary Indian, as opposed to that of the "indio permitido" ["authorized Indian"] is better understood in relation to *Ladinos'* racial ambivalence vis-à-vis Maya Indians for, in the context of Guatemala's contemporary multicultural policies, *Ladinos'* daily discourses reveal ambivalence between recognition of indigenous rights and fear of an indigenous political takeover.

Galindo and Chávez's role reversal does not translate into an ethnic crossing since neither of the performers embodies any other than their own proclaimed identities. Creating a fissure in hegemony, Galindo and Chávez bring another layer of complexity to *Hermana* by ghosting the

fact that victims were often also perpetrators, in the recent Guatemalan civil war case. Since both theatre and performance preserve their own historical memory, drawing on Marvin Carlson's concept of shadowing as the reiterated presence of the body as recognizable from past events,¹⁶ it is possible to see how Galindo and Chávez appeal to their audience from the common ground of shared traumatic memory and Guatemalan ethnic identity politics. In *Hermana*, somatic memory comes into play when Galindo and Chávez embody coloniality's violence and oppression, toying with spectators' expectations of coloniality's fear and pain. Galindo's and Chávez's body talk replaces the need for words, orchestrating an embodiment practice that manifests viscerally what coloniality is currently and what it does to people in Guatemala, particularly women.

Their performance invokes the ghost of the past and present physicality of coloniality in all its brute naked inhumanity, while at the same time fostering an exercise in imaginative resistance to the same prolonged racism and patriarchy that still informs ethnic relations in Guatemala. Thus, Chávez's position as dominating by force in this performance might be read as a more accurate representation of the gruesome reality of the civil war when all parties implicated often had to resort to cruel measures in order to survive. Guatemalan bodies as historical bodies carry in themselves the somatic experience of coloniality from which it is hard to escape; particularly, indigenous bodies are profoundly marked by the cultural boundaries and memories of coloniality. Thus, Galindo and Chávez's role reversal further complicates matters due to its implicit evocation of traumatic memory in Guatemalan culture.

A closer look at Galindo's performance as a victim raises a question: is Galindo the sacrificial victim representing the nation and its bleeding fissures? Even though she poses as the victim and embodies the pain and the suffering of coloniality, Galindo bears that weight with remarkable composure and dignity. In *Hermana*, Galindo distances herself from any attempts at

passing to indicate the impossibility of becoming the Other for she is not trying to pose as an indigenous woman victimized by an oppressor in a colonialist relationship. Galindo is never a distressed and down-trodden victim, in spite of the process of naturalization of subalternity through violence, which is shaped by the level of adhesion to an instituted form of coercion that the dominated accepts from the dominant as the natural exercise of its power over her. Instead, she exhibits tremendous dignity and discretion throughout this short performance. I agree with Castro Flores's interpretation of Galindo's artistic use of her own body as a way to provoke political change in spectators, one of the fundamental strategies of body talk. Castro Flórez sees Galindo's body of work as an "appalling incarnation of pain," as "Galindo takes the place of the victims, [routinely] inflicting upon her petite body the same violence that she denounces" (114-15). Borrowing from Antonin Artaud's notion of "cruelty," Castro Flórez expands on art's contemporary function of confronting spectators with what is definitely happening to them (114).¹⁷ He contends that "[Galindo's] self-punishing actions go beyond sociological or contextual comment;" as she "transforms her body into a medium that suffers, she embodies reality with great honesty and truth" (115). In *Hermana*, this seems to be distinctly the case since Galindo is the victim of Chávez's actions, even though she chooses to be so in a very dignified manner. Consequently, her intentions are not purely masochistic, as her suffering is not gratuitous: Galindo's self-inflicted predicament takes place in order to provoke awareness in the public.

In *Hermana*, Galindo is visibly penitent for being *Ladina*, uprooted, and in deep mourning for the loss of her connection to an ancestral identity, as indicated in her email notes. Galindo's role reversal as the *Ladina* who is being punished by the Maya woman is in direct opposition to Chávez's, who has in effect the power and the authority investment to discipline

Galindo as an age-long historical offender as a *Ladina*, or a sold-out former indigenous woman; however, Chávez's authority does not emanate from this subversive role reversal, since emulating the oppressor does not necessarily confer on the subaltern her master's power; rather her authority comes from the moral necessity to provide relief and redress to the millions of indigenous women in Guatemala who have suffered the pernicious effects of coloniality, and do so to the present day. In terms of indigeneity, Chávez never fully succeeds at being read as an epitomic oppressor, in the sense of representing all Mayan women as perpetrators against *Ladinas*. Complicating the axis where indigeneity and *Ladinidad* are two faces of the same reality, apparently Chávez can be seen as suffering from "double vision" and "double conscience" in Bhabha's terms, as she emulates the discipline technologies of the colonizers, while Galindo becomes the quintessential victim or colonized. Chávez is rather a trickster temporarily subverting what is perceived to be the Guatemalan order of things. The implication is that perhaps for justice to be made in Guatemala there is a heartfelt need for this kind of power role reversal that, at least momentarily, will allow indigenous people to experience having a voice and the power to change things.

When Chávez is wholly engaged in the practice of the same violence that renders her a perpetrator, she is embodying the worst of coloniality. Markedly, Chávez's behavior can be classified as very *Ladino* since it mimics learned age-old disciplining from the conquistadores to contemporary *hacienda* and *maquiladora* operators in Guatemala. The common denominator is violence, a kind of violence practiced as part of an oppressive and regulatory apparatus that controls indigenous populations and aims at making them subservient and acquiescent to the elite's ruling. Therefore, a Mayan woman punishing a *Ladina* woman by slapping, spitting, and whipping her, ultimately using the master's tools in documented and recent history, is a

controversial way of promoting justice-making from political and ethical standpoints. In addition, in more contemporary terms, using the master's tools can be read as subversive since many indigenous women serve as maids to *Ladinas*.

Hermana plays on the fears of *Ladinos* that Indians see them as evil, and thus evokes the specter of fear of indigenous uprisings and massacre of all *Ladinos* as theorized by Charles Hale. While Chávez dominates by physical force, assuming a role rarely seen in Guatemalan society where indigenous people behaving like *Ladinos* offending Indians is not common, she never stops being herself, an indigenous Mayan woman, a poet, and an activist. Her approach to the camera is direct and unapologetic, and she is obviously fully engaged in her actions. Her performance is efficient and to the point, in spite of being brief and abrupt, and she does not display any other emotion, rather than being totally committed. Since she is not necessarily trying to mimic the oppressor, Chávez instead strategically uses the master's tools to foster her retribution action against Guatemala's *Ladinos*; she does not display feelings of being threatened in her own identity as a Maya woman. The implication is that without redressing the punishment of those who cause such great harm, there will not be a reversal of the continuum of violence in Guatemala, as theorized by several scholars. Thus, her actions are fully justified in light of the current need for reparations.

Current expectations on *Ladinidad*, following Carlos Guzmán-Böckler's writings, sustain the identity politics that promote ethnic privilege for *Ladinos* in Guatemala. Expanding on the profound contradictions in *Ladino* identity,¹⁸ Guzmán-Böckler remarks that all *Ladinos* are defined by exclusion and in negation of the Other, as one that refuses to be indigenous (*Guatemala* 185). In contrast, Galindo's *Ladinidad*, is a construction that fully acknowledges *Ladinos*' ethnic privilege and is not blind to racism and socio-economical differences between

these two ethnic groups. Obviously, Galindo's challenge is not so much denying her ancestral indigeneity, but finding the means to cope with the loss that came from being uprooted and separated from her own family's ancestors and land.

In *Hermana*, Galindo's identity is fragmented and echoes the inquiring process of someone who is diligently reconstructing her own self-perception and re-signifying her subjectivity. Hers is a conflictive *Ladinidad*¹⁹ as further elucidated by her emails; her alliance with Chávez unveils her own problematic identity construction as a *Ladina* in a country where indigeneity is still controversial: "I think we were both very interested in this project because in real life we are like two sisters; she is an indigenous Maya woman proud of her roots and ancestry, and I am a *Ladina* woman, embarrassed by my heritage, without any solid roots" ("Sobre *Hermana*"). This situation positions this performance in the realm of *Ladino* penitence for selling out to the colonizing oppressor, and of the Mayan dream of punishing the usurper. When Galindo asserts her *Ladinidad* as a person who lost her connection to her roots, she is expressing a wish to be someone else in the Guatemalan colonialist equation; so she averts the path of double vision and mimicking the elite's identity politics. Nonetheless, in the same act she also plays with the latent social expectations on *Ladinidad*, thus she fully engages with its ability to be a threat to power. Galindo becomes a threat to coloniality's power, and effectively subverts it, when she becomes the one being punished, and by and indigenous woman, no less.

Hermana also explores and problematizes feminist notions of a potential sisterhood that might transcend ethnic differences. I read Galindo's and Chávez's sisterhood as organic, by which I mean a woman-to-woman relationship that is fundamentally built on the felt need to fight a common oppressor; thus, this sisterhood's organicity is part of daily life and experiences in a manner that defies discursive logic and articulation and is instead present in daily complicity

and shared practices of resistance. I conclude that even though an organic sisterhood is possible, regrettably it can only happen briefly in the space and time created by Galindo's and Chávez's transversal artistic exercise. Galindo and Chávez coming together in an implicit sisterhood foreshadows their transversal protest as an acentric form of alignment around a common cause: the advancement of women's life conditions, particularly indigenous women. Like sisters, Galindo and Chávez are caught in the same national family dynamic, and both choose to empathize with the plight of the other, with all its ethical implications. Between Galindo and Chávez passes that type of "female energy" that Stephanie Mandell identifies as "inherent solidarity among females" generated by their experiences of living as women. Their temporary alliance in *Hermana* results in a productive articulation of elements that are rarely if ever seen together, for *Indias* and *Ladinas* in contemporary Guatemala never seem to meet and harmonize smoothly, and are instead constantly in friction and challenging each other. Symptomatically, art forms where both indigenous and *Ladina* women engage together are not that common, a telltale sign of marked social misunderstanding and animosity. Particularly considering the violent nature of this performance, which might not be easily tolerated, any acts or representations of indigenous women inflicting force on *Ladina* women are simply unheard of.

Besides promoting a critical spectatorship, irrespective of the audience, *Hermana* is a video performance available for free on the World Wide Web. This is an easily identifiable democratic, de-colonial practice, which is designed to shock the spectators with the incessant and constant re-articulation in loop mode. It is well known that Galindo is obsessive in documenting and promoting her own work, a fact to which she has alluded in several interviews. Although performance art takes the form of live action, the former has reached a large public audience through documentation of the performance. However, the need for documentation in

performance becomes obsessive and ultimately questions performance's ontology as essentially a live event. Ultimately, both critics and spectators should at once "disregard the rhetoric of authenticity and champion the autonomy of interpretation" (Blackson). Amelia Jones, who addresses this same problem, considers that as a critic, she has not always experienced the bodyworks she analyzes as live performance events, often resorting to video, photography, the performers' comments on their own works, and other indirect sources that serve as the material base for her apprehension of the texts ("The Artist is Present" 18). The utility of documentation of live events by resorting to video or photography, or even the utility of spreading their content virtually through the Word Wide Web is of obvious benefit to the performers, the spectators, and the critics. The fact that *Hermana* is delivered in a video format does not curtail its power or hinder its poignancy as a de-colonial text.

In conclusion, what Galindo and Chávez portray is not so much their solidarity as the need for a crucial interruption of the Guatemalan ethnic discriminatory practices that, in turn, will allow for reflection and justice-making to take place. Coloniality and oppression are not the same for every woman, for as pointed out by López Nájera, there cannot be true development when the same historical structural dependence conditions are still being reinforced and reproduced (102). Thus, transversalizing sisterhood means that, acknowledging the diversity of forms of being a woman, both Galindo and Chávez recognize the tensions and the juxtapositions of differences, and move forward towards de-colonizing, as well as de-patriarchalizing, each other's and their own subjectivities. *Hermana*, however, does not provide painless solutions nor does it promote hate and suspicion towards the Other in a trajectory that could culminate with Guatemalans' hate for and suspicion of themselves. Rather, this performance pragmatically engages in a personal and situated act of justice making, through its portrayal of coloniality's

violence in all its physicality and great visual impact (spectacle), and it presents an organic sisterhood that is not easily theorized or approachable. Galindo and Chávez's sisterly encounter in *Hermana* is an act of pure "imaginative resistance" (Hale 521) against the backdrop of Guatemalan enduring coloniality. There is hope that *Hermana*'s ready availability via the internet renders it a text capable of motivating further resistance and inciting further justice-making in spectators.

Performing Memory and Exploring Ventriloquism in Regina José Galindo's *La verdad*

Preserving memory requires work. In Guatemala there is a manifest lack of official forms of remembrance to serve as important symbols for the future. The museums, monuments, ceremonies, or days of remembrance required to demonstrate ownership of the past and to challenge previous denials and ignorance do not exist. Thus a common memory, secured by tangible presences in public spaces and manifest in concrete forms of commemoration, is never truly materialized. Even though in private circles memory work is constantly being made in Guatemala, so is the effort to silence and dispute the past by obscuring some memories over others and privileging the regime's tale that there was no Mayan genocide. The fiasco of the Efraín Ríos Montt condemnation verdict overturned by Guatemala's Constitutional Court in 2013 is deeply felt as a sign that not much has changed. Seventeen years after the signing of the Peace Agreements, President Otto Pérez Molina's statement denying the genocide of Maya people shocks the world.

A traumatic debt of justice is pending. Many people are still in need of redress and the politics behind memory-making shows profound disagreements and unresolved dilemmas between different spheres of the population. Victoria Sanford, reporting on the early 2013 genocide trial of ex-dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt and his military intelligence chief of

operations, General José Rodríguez Sánchez, informs the readers that the court official who read the list of the names of the 1771 Mayan Ixil victims of 15 massacres during the Ríos Montt regime (from March 1982 to August 1983) took roughly four hours to finish his task (“Rompiendo el muro”). For Sanford the simple fact that the victims’ names have entered the official court’s records is already a major achievement for Guatemala’s justice system. As a final reflection, Sanford wonders how long it would take to read the list of names of not just Ríos Montt’s 5,000 victims, but of the 200,000 victims of the internal armed conflicts.

It is against this background that Galindo facilitated in her performance *La verdad* a time and space to enact and promote memory as a necessary practice for survival and justice. Galindo’s voice became the memory conduit that brought to life the voices of female survivors and embodied their pain and suffering. Even though Galindo went to great efforts to be as fair as possible, she nonetheless ended up re-contextualizing and to some extent, repossessing the survivors’ truth. Her performance, *La verdad*, engages with the ghosts of the recent past of Guatemalan violence. In the sense that all Guatemalans are defined by trauma, none of them can deny the recent history of abuse and atrocity; beyond personal loss and pain they are all haunted collectively as a society shaped by *La violencia*.²⁰ Telling the truth as in Galindo’s *La verdad* is fundamental in heightening public awareness against unpunished crimes and criminals that persist in a supposedly democratic society.²¹ Guatemala will not be able to come to terms with its violent past without this redemptive effort of telling the truth. Telling the truth is the first step towards acknowledging atrocity, doing justice, and healing.²² And memory-making is the active political practice that allows the present to make sense in spite of the past, or because of the past.²³

La verdad is a performance that had been announced on the Centro Cultural de España's [CCE] Facebook site where the CCE's published a copy of the event's brochure, which contained the following quote by Michel Foucault on the top left corner of its front page: "La «verdad» ha de ser entendida como un sistema ordenado de procedimientos para la producción, regulación, distribución, circulación y operación de juicios. La «verdad» está vinculada en una relación circular con sistemas de poder que la producen y la mantienen". ("The 'truth' is to be understood as an ordered set of procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of trials. The 'truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and maintain it") (Foucault quoted in CCE Guatemala). This quote emphasizes the process of producing truth and the staging of truth-telling, which is so peculiar in the Guatemalan context. Guatemala is unique because it has seen two truth commissions in its recent history, one State-sponsored (via the international community), the CEH [*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (first published in 1999)] , and one ad hoc, the REMHI [*Informe del Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica of the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala* (first published in 1998)], as well as 22 peace agreements that in its text include social, institutional, and judicial forms of reparation (Varón Gómez 23). The CEH is a non-judicial entity that by its intrinsic observance of international law and practices was not allowed to individualize and distinguish any culprits responsible for the reported human rights violations that it extensively reports (Varón Gómez 23). Such practice followed the National Reconciliation Law [*Ley de Reconciliación Nacional*] that was passed in December, 1996, granting amnesty to both the military and the guerillas involved in the internal armed conflicts (Varón Gómez 24).²⁴ Specifically, in Guatemala, "amnesty is, in effect, an official negation of government/military responsibility, as well as a negation of the very

violations perpetrated” (*Buried Secrets* 254). “[A]mnesty creates an ‘official story’ that denies individual victims of violence, as well as their families and society in general, a forum for truth” (*Buried Secrets* 254). Thus, amnesty equals negating survivors their truth and justice because there is no accountability. For example, for the most part the testimonies about the violence against Maya women in Guatemala were not told in the victims’ own voices, but were related by mostly male informants both in the REMHI and the CEH reports (Crosby and Lykes 461). Crosby and Lykes conclude that in truth and justice-seeking processes, there is an immanent paradox between the “occlusion of the cultural, historical, and structural dimensions of violence [against women], and on the other hand, the hyper visibility given to the experience of sexual violence” (463). Without truth and justice there can be no validation of the humanity and dignity of survivors and victims.

Galindo’s *La verdad* staged Guatemalan women survivors’ efforts at truth-telling. Galindo responded to the culture of silence and impunity in present day Guatemala by embodying the survivors’ testimonies. Her goal was to promote empathy and awareness in the spectators and make them responsible citizens. Galindo’s point was not so much to offer widespread evidence of the violence suffered or to substantiate a legal case with victims’ testimonies. In Galindo’s own words, “No importa qué tanto intenten callarnos. La verdad está ahí. Nadie podrá silenciarla” (Regina José Galindo quoted in Escudos). (“It does not matter that they are trying to shut us up. The truth is out there. No one can silence it.”) Truth telling gives rise to further concerns. After all, it is an official attempt to acknowledge responsibility for wide-scale violence, and the economic, political and social discrimination inherent in repressive State practices is, theoretically, difficult to leave (Stanley 7). Thus, engaging with the truth means

leaving no stone unturned, including all that Guatemalans have been silencing for a while, particularly the fact that often victims and perpetrators are one and the same person.

In *La verdad*, Galindo chose to read from a very small selection of testimonies, mostly by women, emphasizing the gendered nature of rape, torture, and abuse they suffered during and after *La violencia*. Obviously, her selection did not and could not encompass the whole range of materials and testimonies available; her focus on first person narratives and the emphasis on truth-telling was a critical component of her denunciation and memory practice, as well as symptomatic of her efforts to contradict the military sympathizers' denial of the atrocities they have committed.

In her example of a rape experience, Linda Martín Alcoff argues that in order “to theorize rape adequately, we must have recourse to the description of embodied experience, and not merely the various possible and actual discursive representations of that experience” (“Phenomenology” 52). Martín Alcoff’s suggestion is that discursive accounts of the construction of sexual experience be supplemented with phenomenological accounts of the embodied effects of certain kinds of practices on subjectivity (“Phenomenology” 55). Obviously, the mere written testimonies in themselves cannot do that; but Galindo could render alive the pain and suffering lived by these women survivors through her staged invocation and her attempt to implicate the spectators in the process. In truth-telling experiences women often perform their truth in a dialogical interaction with others. In the process of doing this they construct the meaning of ‘truth’ while repositioning themselves and their lives in direct confrontation to those of the spectators, of which they demand acknowledgement and awareness. In *La verdad* Galindo bridged the difference between reality and what justice would be by amplifying and giving strength to the survivors’ testimonies.

Galindo's *La verdad* demanded from spectators engaging with Guatemalan atrocity politics; no one could watch/listen without being caught in the undeniable fact that these voices tell the truth and this truth is brutal and absurd. *La verdad* did not allow the spectators room for skepticism; these are the facts as told by the people who lived and witnessed them. At the same time, the performance demanded even more engagement by refusing to be dismissed as just one more witness statement, simple proof or evidence. Beyond the archive of testimonies, *La verdad*'s performance of truth brought forward the transmissibility of knowledge that memory work requires. Written testimonies --the archive-- tend to render obsolete a multitude of voices that retell the horrors experienced during the Guatemalan violence, as they merge these voices into an invisible layer of history. *La verdad* sought to make visible the truth, the feelings and suffering of those that were silenced or lost their voice forever. Referring to subjects who lost their voice or were silenced experiencing similar horror, and the need to retell their stories, Taylor asserts that "traumatic memory intervenes, reaches out, catches the spectators unaware, and places them directly within the framework of violent politics" (*Disappearing Acts* 180). The past comes alive when embodied and voiced by Galindo, as she chose to strategically appropriate and disseminate the survivors' voices. Even though this is not personally her truth, her story, her embodiment brought her closer to a shared experience of Guatemalan trauma, which in turn she insisted the spectators participate in too.

Galindo's performance strategies include critical ventriloquism and strategic numbing through the administration of anesthesia. By ventriloquism I mean the physical articulation of others' utterances. Against the veils of silence imposed by the regime and those-in-power, these survivors' stories have emancipatory power since they denounce the women's traumatic experiences. Galindo's performance *La verdad* provided a venue for amplifying these

testimonies even further. When Galindo voiced survivors, victims, and witnesses' stories telling the truth, she was in fact repeating and reappropriating their pain and suffering for the purposes of a higher cause: making visible their imposed silence and literally giving voice to their voices. The contradictions inherent in the project of representing the subaltern and simultaneously deconstructing the discourses that constitute the subaltern are evident. As we know from Gayatri Spivak, the recovery of the "voice" of the subaltern also entails its erasure, since the mode of representation given in *testimonio* is no longer located in the space of subalternity but functions instead more like a ventriloquist's dummy (Cited in Beverley 135). By ventriloquizing *testimonio*, that is bearing witness and testifying, Galindo used the survivors' own words. As she embodied the survivors' words, she appropriated their stories for a specific artistic and political goal.

Galindo performed survivors' truth telling as evidence against the military-led attempt to deny the Mayan genocide and the atrocities committed during and after the armed conflicts.²⁵ Her ventriloquism is critical because she was not adding anything to their own voices; she showed their pain and suffering with great empathy and respect, even though she was literally speaking for them, embodying their truth-telling stories, standing in for them. As another Guatemalan not directly involved in the armed conflicts, Galindo implicitly acknowledged her privileged position as a *Ladina* and a non-victim, but at the same time she demonstrated that the collective national trauma is also hers and that of anyone else who chooses to side with the truth. She made her political stand by refusing to buy into the scare tactics and silencing promoted by the military sympathizers. Speaking up against the Guatemalan discriminatory system that basically ignores these women's lives, how much they have suffered, and their current need to be heard and acknowledged, Galindo had no trouble with literally giving voice to a worthy cause.

On the contrary, she insisted on making a point that we are all involved and implicated in this effort of truth-telling. Most importantly, spectators should choose to tell the truth, which equals seeking justice and promoting healing. Thus, Galindo's ventriloquist practice raises questions of moral authority and propriety.

Galindo is implicitly aware of the perils of speaking for others, but nonetheless she chose to engage in a meaningful artistic practice that has the potential to correct the wrongs of not listening to the Other.²⁶ She used her privileged position as an artist and an activist to denounce these specific atrocities and to amplify these women survivors' voices.²⁷ She literally lent her own voice to them, to their cause and pain, with the belief that ultimately the truth will set us all free.

Even though *La verdad's* spectatorship implies at least two distinct levels--the spectators that experienced the live performance at the Centro Cultural de España in Guatemala City on Thursday, November 21, 2013, and the online spectators of the resulting video of this performance--bearing witness is a process that seeks to make the public participants and co-owners of traumatic memories.²⁸ Without the public exposure staged by Galindo and other social actors, trauma would just reside within the individual sphere, often associated with personal pathology and minimal interaction. With the channeling of trauma brought up by performance, spectators are given a chance to participate and performers can selectively chose the best way to convey their message, thus often staging a very small, but yet significant and meaningful part of the vast amount of cultural materials available.

The tremendous amounts of anesthesia to which Galindo repeatedly submitted herself are an effort to physically and metaphorically replicate what a survivor experiences due to his or her shock and trauma. Physically, Galindo sought to feel the same dull pain that metamorphoses into

numbness and an inability to engage with anything or anyone, and to draw any joy or fulfillment out of life. Metaphorically, this anesthesia stands for the silence imposed on survivors in the transition to democracy, in the name of peace and harmony. In addition, the repeated administration of anesthesia coincided with the tentative awakening of the spectators out of their apathy. To that effect, Escudos expands on Galindo's metaphoric numbing in *La verdad*:

Anestesia para no hablar, para callar. ¿De cuántas maneras nos anestesia el sistema a diario para que no hablemos, para que no levantemos la voz, para que no hablemos claro, para que no digamos la verdad? ¿Con qué nos anestesian para que no pensemos ni sintamos ni nos conmovamos con el dolor ajeno, para que no nos duela ni nuestro propio dolor? ¿Qué tan genuino es nuestro intento por hablar/denunciar cuando tenemos la boca llena de algodones? ¿Cuántas dosis son necesarias para adormecernos? ¿Pocas, muchas? ¿Nos anestesian hasta matarnos o somos resistentes a la anestesia y seguimos sintiendo el dolor, aunque nadie nos crea? (Escudos).

Anesthesia to prevent from speaking, to shut up. In how many different ways does the system anesthetize us daily so that we do not speak, do not raise our voice, do not speak clearly, so that we do not say the truth? With what do they anesthetize us so that we do not think, nor feel, nor get moved with other's pain, so that even our own pain does not hurt us? How genuine is our intent to speak/denounce when our mouth is full of cotton? How many dosages are needed to put us to sleep? Few, plenty? Do they anesthetize us until we are dead or are we resistant to the anesthesia and still feel the pain, even though no one believes us?

Ultimately, Galindo overwhelmed the spectators with images and information from the testimonies, without giving them the opportunity to engage or participate in what is virtually rendered alive, yet remains distant and inaccessible.

Galindo shocked the spectators out of their apathy by successfully voicing the survivors' testimonies. In spite of her pain and discomfort, her visible dehydration and numbness, Galindo continued her embodiment and voicing of the horrors of *La violencia* in the several first-person renditions of the truth she articulated. She resisted her own predicament and although at the end of the performance, she spoke slower and was visibly tired, her message was still loud and clear. Galindo never stopped her voicing of testimonies except for the scheduled anesthesia administration interruptions. Her goal is to make sure that the transmission of traumatic memory and knowledge in Guatemala is not interrupted, even when individuals are subjected to different kinds of silencing tactics, including her own self-inflicted anesthesia administration. Diana Taylor, referring to the *escraches* and performance protest in Argentina during and after the Dirty War, points out that "the embodied experience and transmission of traumatic memory make a difference in the way knowledge is transmitted and incorporated" (*Disappearing Acts* 173). It is people's shared experience practicing memory that insures that traumatic memory is passed on and makes a difference politically. Galindo performing *la verdad*, the truth, in *La verdad* confronted spectators with the need to co-own the Guatemalan violent past and sought to promote a more productive kind of empathy.

Even though Galindo did lose partial control of her utterances due to the systematic administration of anesthesia, nevertheless she never ceased to articulate intelligible speech and to allow the communication of traumatic knowledge to advance through her embodiment of victims, survivors, and witnesses' voices.²⁹ Effectively, she also lost part of the control of the

discursive event when she had to rely heavily on spectators' interpretations to make the communication of this knowledge move forward and become meaningfully identified with the truth. However, her loss of control was staged and ultimately did not curtail her efforts to promote accountability and responsibility, which is what survivors claim with truth-telling and justice-seeking. In the context of Guatemalan reparation politics and the lack of effective redress for victims, Galindo's exposure to controlled silencing and numbing makes sense considering her point that nothing can silence what happened.³⁰ As long as people carry with them this trauma and live to tell it, it will be part of Guatemala's own history and it will continue to haunt us all as far as being connected in more ways than we as spectators could anticipate in a global effort for human rights and justice.

In *El libro de los abrazos* (*The Book of Embraces*) Eduardo Galeano notes that the root of *recordar*, to remember, is from the Latin *re-cordis*, which means "to pass back through the heart" (11). In the same manner Galindo seeks to reach her audience through the heart. The testimonies she embodied still haunt Guatemala today and have a life of their own beyond court testimonies and legal procedures. Galindo invoked a violence that is purposefully graphic and brutal. More than depicting what happened in an ordered manner, the testimonial voices she embodied have in common that they co-exist in the realm of a violence that takes first stage. Basically, these tales are all about violence and survival; markedly, brutality and inescapable evil is their key note. For example, one woman tells what happened to another woman who tried to escape a massacre: "a todos los quemaron vivos; una intentó escaparse... y le sacaron el corazón" – ("they burned them all; one woman tried to escape... and they ripped her heart out") [12:33] (*La verdad*). Or in another instance, a woman tells what she saw the soldiers do to pregnant women to make them abort: "yo lo vi, le introdujeron el arma en la vagina, grandota, y

así le mataron el feto” - (“I saw it, they put the gun in her vagina, big, and that way they have killed her fetus”) [23:50] (*La verdad*).

The many testimonial voices embodied by Galindo focus primarily on violence: they deal with infanticide, burning, forced cannibalism, reiterated rape, physical and psychological torture, forced denunciations between village communities, kidnapping of children and forced disappearance of “subversives,” massacres, bombing, and executions.³¹ Some killings were selective; the army killed key community members, priests, and guerrilla sympathizers or the soldiers would rape young girls as war trophies and punishment for siding with the “subversives.” Rape was a fundamental reality for women in Guatemala during *La violencia*. In *La verdad*, we learn that women were raped in front of their children, and that their suffering is unbearable: “Ay, no, cómo duele! Ya estaba con la tristeza... y el miedo” – (“Ouch, how it hurts! I was already full of sadness... and fear”) [21:20]. Through Galindo’s ventriloquism, the women’s voices are clear when expressing their emotions and feelings: “yo estaba así, usada” – (“I was left like that, used”) [16:51]; “Y yo toda violada” – (“and I all raped”) [20:50] (*La verdad*). Unfortunately, such acts created other kind of victims, as “the rape of the mother was a psychological torture for the children, the majority of whom did not understand what was happening” (González Izás 406). While the mothers were being raped, “soldiers took advantage of the anguish of the children to torture them psychologically” by telling the children it was all their fathers’ fault for joining the guerrilla (406). The brutality of the violence is such that one woman poignantly tells how she witnessed her son’s and husband’s torture and killing why she was being raped: “qué me importa!” – (“I don’t care anymore!”) [12:42] (*La verdad*). How could she face such horror? Women were often raped by the soldiers, and also by their own community members, neighbors, and relatives at gunpoint or under death threats. For the army

and its allies, “the mass rape represented the spectacle of shame through which the entire community became accomplices of war crimes... no one remained untouched, no one would have the moral solvency to judge, much less denounce what had happened” (González Izás 407).³²

Some of the women’s stories give testimony to the futile attempts people made to engage the local authorities in restoring order; for example, one woman went to ask the authorities for her disappeared husband, and they told her that they did not want to hear her. Above all, the brutality and suffering are made palpable and cutthroat as invoked by these testimonies, leaving a sense of shock behind: for instance, a woman witnessed her baby being blown to pieces by a bomb on purpose: “eso ya no son gente, es puro infierno” – (“they’re no longer people, it’s pure hell”) [22:31] (*La verdad*). Often the unidentified voices invoke God and religious figures, and manifest signs of orality, such as ellipsis and repetitions that render the language poetic and to an interlocutor signify the act of remembering. A mother crying for her disappeared daughters says, “No agüanto de contar, son muy dolorosos, dolorosos son los recuerdos” – (“I can’t stand recalling, they’re very painful, painful are my memories”) [19:50] (*La verdad*). Or another woman’s voice, the one that starts the long series of testimonies, “Ay, Dios”; “No, no quiero, caso no quiero recordar” – (“No, I don’t want to, the case is that I don’t want to remember”) [0:25] (*La verdad*). What Sanford calls the living memory of terror is constantly at play here.³³ In Sanford’s own words, this “living memory of terror can reinvolve the physical and psychological pain of past acts of violence in unexpected moments. A tree, for example, is not just a tree. At a given moment, a tree is a reminder of the baby whose head was smashed against a tree by a soldier. The tree, and the memory of the baby it invokes, in turn, reinvolve a chain of memories of terror” (*Buried Secrets* 143). Galindo did not linger on this brutal violence as a mere aesthetic

exercise; she strived to make the enormous amount of pain and suffering produced by the violence palpable and reachable, understandable and relatable to her spectators.

In Galindo's ventriloquized testimonies, what is first noticeable is the overall presence of women's voices. From the beginning, she set the stage for the many women's stories to be unraveled. Historically, women in Guatemala were the unspoken collateral damage of armed conflicts.³⁴ In the beginning of *La verdad*, one woman explains in her own words, "con nosotras de verdad fue dura la violencia. Por eso es que no se puede olvidar todo ese tiempo. Para las mujeres fue diferente que para los hombres porque a las mujeres primero las agarran, pasan sus ganas con ellas y después les dan la muerte. Pero la mujer sufre primero" – ("for us, women truly la violencia was hard. That is why no one can forget that time. For women it was different than for men because first they [the soldiers] catch them, use them to fulfill their desires, and then kill them. But women suffer first [before being killed] [1:35-2:11] (*La verdad*).³⁵ Mostly indigenous women collectively suffered an enormous number of unwanted pregnancies that, symptomatically, the CEH report only very briefly mentions (Paz y Paz Bailey 99). These unwanted pregnancies were the probable result of massive rapes, and should also be considered secondary harms suffered by some Guatemalan women. Neither in urban nor rural areas, now or in the past, have rape victims had access to safe and legal abortions, since abortion was and is illegal according to the Guatemalan penal code. Other noteworthy secondary harms sustained by women include the prevalence of women's contraction of sexually transmitted diseases as a result of sexual violence, which is also often completely unknown, and widowhood and sexual abuse resulting in ostracism and isolation (Paz y Paz Bailey 99). Explicitly in the Guatemalan context, Galindo is bridging that gap left by the unfulfilled promises of reparation and redress that still have not materialized. As pointed out by Lisa Laplante and Kimberly Theidon, an

implicit contract exists between giving testimony to a truth commission and demands for acknowledgment and redress (quoted in Viaene 17).

Both Galindo's speech acts and her silences are part of a web of strategies in which she engaged to narrate the survivors' experiences while seeking for justice, often questioning what it means for others to respond to this multivocal truth-telling. Perhaps the most important question to ask, with Ruth Rubio-Marín, is "what happens to the voices of these women once they find their day in court or a truth commission, and what happens to the women who speak and to the truncated lives that they talk about?" (21). In Guatemala it is common for women to keep silent, and they tend not to speak in the first person, because the feeling of both personal and family or communal shame is stronger and systematically enhanced by the reigning impunity. Therefore, the acknowledgement of individual experiences can provide a sense of worth and importance to the previously silenced. As Stanley argues, for many who suffered, the need to continue searching for truth after official procedures have ended is imperative (3).

When a mother tells how she tried to impede the soldiers from kidnapping her child, Galindo's voice faltered, and with great emotion she enunciated in the woman's own words, "No les dejo mi niño, es mio y yo no lo doy" – ("No, I am not leaving them my son, he's mine and I won't give him") [9:25] (*La verdad*). In a louder tone, this very sentence spoken with visible outrage, and then followed by an expressive silence, a silence full of fear and compassion, filled the room and echoed in the spectators' ears. Understandably, how could Galindo engage with these women's testimonies without being touched by them too? How can we as spectators not engage and be deeply touched too?

Until justice has been served and the truth has retaken its rightful place in Guatemala, performances such as Galindo's *La verdad* will continue to promote spectators' awareness into

the web of connectedness that places us all in the global drama of human rights violations. Even though we as spectators are not necessarily victims, survivors, or perpetrators of the Guatemalan human drama, we are all invited to continue the practice of denouncing crimes and seeking justice. Galindo's protest in *La verdad* functions as the voicing of truth that equals just that: denouncing crimes and seeking justice. The fact that the transition to democracy brought with it the amnesty of war crimes as a supposedly necessary step towards peace building means that the perpetrators are still free and have not been punished. Often they live side-by-side with their victims, perpetuating into the present the abuses of past years, but now in a comfortable matter of fact kind of way. For the survivors, however, the pain and suffering are as real as when first inflicted; rape, torture, and brutal killings leave inerasable traces on the victims, becoming part of who they are.

In conclusion, truth-telling initiatives can provide a counter-weight in public discourse against dominant power relations and historical narratives. *La verdad* is, in essence, mediated *testimonio*. By speaking out, re-establishing a "voice," Galindo is also re-inscribing a subordinate position in society. In *La verdad*, Galindo used her voice against the powerful masquerade of those that claim that the Mayan genocide never happened, against the imposed silence as necessary for peace in the transition to democracy. By ignoring the survivors' testimonies as well as making so many disappeared during the armed conflicts, the military believed that they could erase all traces of their own crimes. Forcing the victims into silence about what happened is just one of the scare tactics employed to dismiss war crimes and human rights abuses. In contrast, speaking up, telling the truth, is a markedly political act against the system and the perpetrators of atrocities. However, even the truth needs to be staged in such a manner that is convincingly presented as evidence. Aware of the theatricality inherent in truth-

telling, Galindo played with presenting her chosen testimonies and enacting them in a manner that makes the truth impossible to silence. Hers is a performance *à thèse*, designed to prove a point, to advance a political position. Thus in *La verdad*, ventriloquism as appropriation of the Other's voice equals a staged speech act that is illusion without deception, promoting meaning through a medium. Galindo's critical ventriloquism multiplies subject/subaltern voices, effectively interrogates reality by exposing the regime's atrocities, and ultimately destroys the veil of silence imposed on *La violencia*.

Notes

¹ Verónica Renata López Nájera expands on Aníbal Quijano's theories to analyze coloniality as a contemporary social configuration that is still alive and supports itself through intersubjective relationships molded by capitalism, wherein race, ethnicity, and nation are social differentiation forms inherited from colonialism (107). López Nájera considers that in order for a society to progress it must be open to change, and that experience starts by engaging with "common sense' destabilizing processes" (115) such as art.

² Raunig thinks transversality as "intended to overcome both dead ends: both the verticality of the hierarchical pyramid and the horizontality of compulsory communication and adaptation" (205).

³ By "stealing the pain of others," Razack means the process by which witnessing genocide pain "has mostly served to dehumanize [their victims] even further, and in the process, to reinstall us [spectators] as morally superior in relation to them" (376).

⁴ Ronald J. Pelias predicates the notion of a 'dialogic performance' in which performers and their audiences join in an ongoing exchange with alternative visions, resisting conclusions, sharing the stage "with" or "besides" others, giving everyone an opportunity to be heard (149-50).

⁵ The 2010 *Tribunal de la Conciencia* was a citizen-led initiative with international impact that took place in Guatemala City inspired on a similar popular tribunal that had taken place previously in Japan in 2000. See Crosby and Lykes.

⁶⁹ Mostly due to “differences among civil society organizations and the PNR’s [*Programa Nacional de Resarcimiento*] weak legal basis,” implementation of reparation measures was delayed until 2005 (Viaene 8).

⁷ According to Viaene, “land [is] at the core of all of Guatemala’s social issues” (19), a view shared by many other scholars.

⁸ At the intersection of coloniality as spectacle and the physicality of coloniality lies the fact that certain displays of power were historically enacted to reproduce the other’s existence in opposition to the ruling classes’ dominance, to provide spectacle for the elite’s eyes (Muñoz 187). Thus, some performances implicating the body of color, the queer body, the poor body, or the woman’s body “were positioned within the dominant culture as a substitute for historical and political representation” (188).

⁹ For Spivak, epistemic violence occurs through the marginalization of certain voices within Western discourses, which belong to the subaltern (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 302).

¹⁰ “Atopia,” from the Greek meaning “strangeness,” is a place outside of place, a non-place or virtual place. Julie Codell expands this theorization by making explicit its connection to coloniality: “the atopic space of transcultural art also has temporal dimensions because encounters are marked by transience and contingency. These spatialities and temporalities, then, may offer cultural self-criticism or a momentary interrogation of the colonial self or of colonialism” (10).

¹¹ Schneider addresses the way certain performance pieces aim to explicate bodies in social relationships in artistic processes by which the body of the performer unfolds, “peel[ing] back layers of signification that surround [her body] like ghosts at a grave” (2). Thus, “peeling at signification, bringing ghosts [out] to visibility, [performers] are interested to expose not an

originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves” (*The Explicit Body* 2).

¹² Scarry argues that the experience of pain destroys language and leaves the victim in a state of existential isolation in which he/she is immersed in the realization of the fragility and mortality of the human body (25). The fact that pain cannot be expressed brings with it harmful political consequences since there is a tight connection between verbal and political representation (27).

¹³ Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject that is almost the same, but not quite (86), when psychological traumas of the colonized self [‘almost the same, but not quite’] conflict with his/her desire to imitate the oppressor [‘a reformed, recognizable self’].

¹⁴ Instead of mockery in this performance veiling a defensive fear that the oppressor’s legal system is not quite as fair as it should be, following on Bhabha’s theorization.

¹⁵ Schneider focuses on the notion of “againness,” as performance time can be understood as “full of holes or gaps and art capable of falling or crossing in and out of the spaces between live iterations” (*Performing Remains* 6). This notion of queer time or “againness” in performance fosters the advancement of historiographic inquiry and emphasizes how audiences are witnesses to the monumentalizations of the past, or fall into the trap of consenting silence and acceptance of pre-made consumption narratives about the past.

¹⁶ Marvin Carlson introduces the concept of “shadowing” in regards to the body in theatrical performance. Even though the theatre’s usage and reuse of already familiar narrative [and dramatic] material is an old tradition, he argues that “audiences enjoy being haunted; they

take pleasure in recognizing lines of business, settings, props, and actors they have seen before” (44, 111).

¹⁷ The idea that art can lead to a change in the spectators’ position by making them participants has deep roots in Antonin Artaud’s theorization of “The Theatre of Cruelty” in his 1932 seminal work *The Theatre and its Double*. In his own explanation, he envisions the way to “make space speak,” or to catapult theatrical practice into a “theatre of action” (90).

¹⁸ Furthermore, Guzmán-Böckler asserts that urban *Ladinos* in Guatemala are so alienated from their own history that for many, racism is nonexistent and for many only socio-economical differences matter (*Colonialismo y revolución* 43). Thus, *Ladinos* do not know much about the lives of more than half of their country’s population, and are foreigners in their own country, running away from themselves as they mimic foreigners’ ways of talking, dressing, or thinking (*Guatemala* 187-88). The fact that for Guzmán-Böckler, *Ladinos*’ alienation is one of the striking achievements of the Spanish colonization, since the majority of *Ladinos* are unaware of their own history and of their identity being the result of a dialectic historical process in close connection to indigenous people (*Guatemala* 186) further complicates expectations on *Ladinidad*.

¹⁹ This conflictive *Ladinidad* can be read as threatening, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin: “when colonial discourse encourages the colonial subjects to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather [it] is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening” (139).

²⁰ “The narratives of lingering fear or living memory of terror indicate that La Violencia is as embedded in Guatemala’s present as it is in its past” (*Buried Secrets* 146).

²¹ Yet public testimony is not the only effective way for truth-telling to contribute to creating this debate. The exhumation process in Guatemala, where images of mass graves provide powerful visual testimony, suggests that truth-telling may take diverse and multiple forms, and that disruption of long-standing historical beliefs may take place through visual symbols, not only voices.

²² For more on testimony as a healing practice deemed the Therapeutic Testimonial Model by mental health professionals, see Victoria Sanford. Sanford contends that this therapeutic model has much in common with the theory and practice of testimonial literature (*Buried Secrets* 241).

²³ As Sanford contends, “for survivors, the living memory of La Violencia is integral to the local production of knowledge and the purpose of that knowledge is the production of new regimes of meaning” (*Buried Secrets* 75). Symptomatically, “Maya women’s voices challenge not only the Guatemalan army and government, but also human rights workers and academics seeking to understand La Violencia” (75).

²⁴ “Yet experiences in transitions from military rule around the world indicate that amnesty brings neither reconciliation nor social peace” (*Buried Secrets* 253).

²⁵ Cecilia Menjívar observed Guatemalan women’s words and stories, body language, and expressions as they narrated their experiences with violence, immediately perceiving visible forms of suffering “couched in a language of fear, pain, and distress” (96).

²⁶ Alcoff explains how to better conceive the locus of enunciation since “one cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the propositional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it

does there. We have to pay careful attention to the discursive arrangement in order to understand the full meaning of any given discursive event” (“The Problem of Speaking With Others” 26).

²⁷ For Alcoff, certain privileged locations are “discursively dangerous; in particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (7).

²⁸ For Diana Taylor, “a video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself (the video is part of the archive; what is represented is part of the repertoire” (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 20).

²⁹ Following on Foucault’s theorizations, Alcoff states that “rituals of speaking are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event” (“The Problem of Speaking With Others” 12). “Not only what is emphasized, noticed, and how it is understood will be affected by the location of both speaker and hearer, but the truth-value or epistemic status will also be affected” (“The Problem of Speaking With Others” 12-13).

³⁰ “The discursive context is a political arena. To the extent that this context bears on meaning, and meaning is in some sense the object of truth, we cannot make an epistemic evaluation of the claim without simultaneously assessing the politics of the situation” (Alcoff “The Problem of Speaking With Others” 15).

³¹ For more on the modus operandi of army massacres in Guatemala, see Victoria Sanford.

³² Matilde González Izás reports on her research on sexual violence during the war years in El Quiché province of Guatemala stating that “the rape of women was so serious and systematic that the majority of these women will not even talk about, much less denounce, these incidents... shame and social stigma prevent them from denouncing what happen[ed]” (405).

Through rape and torture, army officials sought to assure the silence of the women in the face of what was going on, while frequently using them as “booty” as well as “bait” to trap their escaped relatives (405).

³³ For instance, in El Quiché, González Izás concluded that the majority of women kept going in silence and with great bravery; however, “when one of them breaks her silence, her words reveal the incredible struggles that each and every one must have faced as they were trapped in [sexual slavery], forced to undress in public, gang-raped, or forced to live with one of the[ir] town’s assassins” (407).

³⁴ Emilie Smith-Ayala details about women’s suffering during the armed conflicts by noting that “women were hit hard by the counterinsurgency campaign and then by the continuing military build-up in the countryside. Countless women were raped, tortured, and murdered. Countless more were widowed. Officially, the number of widows registered in Guatemala is close to 45,000, but other estimates reach as high as 100,000” (43).

³⁵ Smith-Ayala reports that “they [the soldiers] rape women in public, in front of their husbands. They swear at the women, make fun of their dignity as women” (52).

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have explored how body talk provides a valuable framework for examining how Guatemalan artists use performance and other artistic forms that are in and of themselves violent to raise awareness of and to challenge the national culture of violence against women. Starting with a focus on the performativity of violence, I explored the impact and the ethical implications of certain artistic works whose goal it is to denounce and reveal the precarious situation of women in Guatemala, particularly that of indigenous women and their descendants.

In Chapter 1, I offered an overview of several contemporary issues concerning violence against women in its manifest expression as physical aggression concerning rape, femicide, and domestic violence. In Chapter 2, I addressed issues pertaining to subjectivation and symbolic violence, particularly considering the current demands imposed on indigenous women and their descendants as cultural bearers of Maya legacy. In Chapter 3, I examined historical violence against Guatemalan women, starting with Conquest and colonization, and emphasized strategies of resistance and survival to cultural annihilation, culminating in alternative current modes of representation of indigenous women as Latin America's foremothers. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I considered Guatemala's current challenges in the postwar period, particularly considering female genocide survivors and their specific needs, their quest for social and political advancement. In concluding this chapter, I questioned the possibility of unity around common women's causes in spite of the ethnic binary that divides the nation between *Índias* and *Ladinas*.

Although I have analyzed a distinct aspect of the embodiment of violence in each chapter, sometimes using other theoretical lenses to make my point, methodologically body talk has provided the common thread. My research has led me to conclude that body talk is a

productive tool to tackle performance and other art works that explore the embodiment of violence, especially considering the inherent performativity of violence.

Starting with the embodiment of violence in Guatemalan female performance, I extended my study to other art forms (photography and street protest) and adapted my theoretical framework to encompass complementary concepts such as the performativity of violence and the need for an affective spectatorship. In the course of my analyses and research I have reached some conclusions in relation to my major research questions. First, there is a need for artists to create and promote artistic and cultural events that emphasize the embodiment of violence, especially in countries such as Guatemala where violence is a daily occurrence. Following Diana Taylor who discusses the need for artists, scholars, writers, and critics to engage with staged violence, I agree that ultimately we have no other option for not engaging would mean allowing violence to gain terrain without ever being contested. In Taylor's words, "not representing real political [or gendered] violence and atrocity only contributes to its legitimization and perpetuation" (147). In spite of the risk of capitalizing on and reproducing the same violence that they tackle on stage, female artists in Guatemala prefer to engage in strategic embodiments with the goal of denouncing said violence and of promoting critical awareness about it in the spectators. Much like in denunciatory theater as theorized by Amalia Gladhart, the denunciatory practices in which Guatemalan performance artists engage are aimed at recreating the experiences of gendered violence as spectacle, but "without recreating the numbing or terrifying effects of the spectacle the producers of actual [violence] seek from their audience" (163). Thus the representation of violence and the pain and suffering that it causes are distanced, allowing the spectators to become aware of violence's impact, and consequently, to take a political stand. Not

only are the events or set of actions manipulated and constructed to achieve specific goals, but the audience must also be formulated as an integral part of the artistic event itself.

Considering the important role of spectatorship for the effectiveness of these artistic explorations, I have reached a second finding, pertaining to the understanding of spectatorship as an affective phenomenon and the contemplation of art's social purpose. By affective spectatorship I am referring to the semiotics of visceral responses that spectators experience when exposed to the staging of major events such as violence. Exposing spectators to distressing and shocking embodiments of violence generates strong emotional responses. It is this primal response cycle from which body talk, with its emphasis on pre-verbal and pre-logical communication, benefits by making a lasting, bodily impression on spectators. This type of visceral engagement is crucial for creating the critical distance necessary for reflection, rethinking, and action characteristic of other theatrical practices such as those of Bertold Brecht, Augusto Boal, and Antonin Artaud. These theatre practitioners refused catharsis and empathy, and instead preferred practices that emphasize critical distance, reflection, or social or metaphysical engagement. Considering Guatemala's violent nature through the cases considered in this dissertation, I argue that art plays a necessary and active social role as a space to facilitate the level of critical consideration and engagement necessary to promote change and individual action.

My last finding leads to the consideration that even though the artists and the case studies that I have analyzed contribute to art's social purpose, which is particularly needed in a country such as Guatemala, almost all of them are speaking for others, or in other words subalternizing gender violence's survivors and victims. With perhaps some notable exceptions—Rodrigo Abd's Mayan Queens' portraits, Sandra Monterroso's own ethnic explorations in *Tus tortillas, mi amor*

(2004), and Galindo's strategic ventriloquism in *La verdad* (2013)—these artists engage in denunciatory practices ranging from an array of loci of enunciation distinct from those of the subalterns themselves. For Linda Martín-Alcoff, certain privileged locations are “discursively dangerous; in particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (7). Nonetheless, given the need to address Guatemala's violence and to consider creative means to respond to this social ailment critically and constructively, perhaps certain artists' appropriations and privileged loci of enunciation are simply a necessary lesser evil and something to disregard in favor of their artistic ethics and practices of denunciation.

Ultimately, this research has opened my eyes to the possibility of adapting a theoretical framework such as body talk to further lines of inquiry. Even though body talk privileges the body's semiotics and, in this dissertation's case studies, focuses on the performativity of violence, it can likewise be used to examine other important concepts that are inherently performative such as identity and indigeneity. For example, one illustration of this is the permanent exhibit *Guatemala: ¿Por qué estamos como estamos?* (2009 to the Present) by CIRMA's [the Mesoamerican Regional Research Centre].

¿Por qué estamos como estamos? [Why Are We the Way We Are?] is an interactive exhibit on inequality and racism throughout the history of Guatemala, an exhibit that is permanent and free to the public. Located in the center of Guatemala City at the *Museo del Ferrocarril*, this exhibit is dynamic and uses a wide range of photographs, texts, videos, audios, interactive games and group activities covering complex topics such as inequality and racism to ask how these phenomena have been constructed in the different historical periods of the

country. Touring the exhibit, visitors feel challenged in their identity, prejudices, stereotypes and discriminatory practices that characterize social relationships in present day Guatemala. The exhibit places emphasis on the land conflicts, forced labor, racism, and inequality as well as the causes and consequences of Guatemalan discrimination; however, while the armed conflict is presented as a tragic episode in the recent history of Guatemala, the exhibit does not offer sufficient information or details as to the magnitude of the crimes, the responsibility of the government, the causes, or aftermath of the conflict. This is may be an attempt to avoid legal issues, considering the prevailing impact of the National Reconciliation Law [*Ley de Reconciliación Nacional*] that was passed in December, 1996, granting amnesty to both the military and the guerillas involved in the internal armed conflicts (Varón Gómez 24).

I had the opportunity to visit this exhibit in January of 2010 while in Guatemala and was struck by the unconventional manner in which Guatemala's national history is displayed, through well-orchestrated sets of information, reflections, images, and activities. Visitors are invited to engage with the exhibit's materials and may arrive at their own conclusions about the relationships of inequality and racism in Guatemala. Surprisingly, the most striking feature of the exhibit is the interaction that visitors can have with each of the components presented; visitors can listen, or they can "put themselves in the place" of the Other through different techniques. The idea of the exhibit is for people to touch, play, and identify with the material presented. In order to achieve this, the resources vary depending on the area of the exhibit. According to the reporters on Impunity Watch's 2012 report, the idea is to put people in touch with the way other cultures see and feel, showing how inequality, prejudice and racism present themselves in day-to-day Guatemalan relationships (32).

Using body talk to analyze this exhibit would prove valuable insights into the manner in which embodiment, violence, identity, and spectatorship are interconnected in this case. By representing daily situations and activities as primary social practices where racism and discrimination occur, this exhibit promotes awareness and invites spectators to change society by first changing themselves. Even though violence in this exhibit is subdued, perhaps out of consideration for children and young adults among its visitors, it nevertheless is staged as a symptom of national suffering, as a wound. Many Guatemalans' faces are displayed as conveying the idea of the multitude of victims during the nation's many wars, even though there aren't specific references to Maya genocide victims. For Impunity Watch, even though "this exhibit represents something new in Guatemala, [...] it does not offer enough information about the armed conflict to allow visitors to understand that the impunity for these crimes even today is evidence of the persistence of racism and inequality [in Guatemala]" (34).

In spite of the implicit decision not to engage in current polemics that might offend certain spheres of Guatemalan society, this exhibit invites its visitors to acknowledge the known and visible faces of the nation's dealings with racism and discrimination. In a creative and provocative manner, spectators are literally invited to walk in Others' shoes by means of a staged wall that showcases life-size portraits of a multitude of Guatemalan citizens, whose faces have been hollowed out. The visitors can go beyond the hollowed faces and juxtapose their own, creating a staged situation where they embody the Other. On a positive note, visitors are then asked to appraise the Other and to express respect for specific aspects of the Other's culture and history.

Acknowledging individual episodes of Guatemalan history in which certain ethnic and social groups exploited others, this exhibit recognizes the traumatic effects of conquest and

colonization and pedagogically explains the origin and the evolution of the term *Ladino* and its impact on the current population, including people's last names and family designations. For instance, clarifying that the current ethnic binomial *Indios/Ladinos* was artificially created in 1880 by the government, visitors are asked to reflect on the current Guatemalan society's ethnic bipolarization and to discard their own prejudices. This way, the exhibit links spectatorship to an affective response and engaged citizenship and the proof of its effectiveness lies in the reaction that it provokes in its visitors. For the vast majority of visitors, the exhibit is disturbing enough to make them question their own position on inequality and racism, as indicated by the responses written on the exhibit's book of comments (Impunity Watch 33). Overall, body talk is a critical tool that could allow a better understanding of this and other aspects of this exhibit, particularly considering the embodiment of violence, identity, and the role indigeneity, racism, and prejudice play in Guatemalan identity.

Beyond the application of body talk to other creative and politic works in Guatemala, my study raises the need to tackle further lines of inquiry such as the history of theatre and performance in Guatemala, and other cultural manifestations that address issues of violence against women and the advancement of women's condition in Guatemala and Central America. To date, there have not been comprehensive studies focusing on the importance of theatre and performance in Guatemala, with the exception of John Wesley's Shillington's book *Grappling with Atrocity: Guatemalan Theater in the 1990s*. Since its earlier years as a nation, Guatemala has maintained a lively tradition of theater and the performative arts that deserves to be studied comprehensively due to the merit of the works and theatrical manifestations that it encompasses.

Despite the merit of Guatemala's earlier corpus of theatrical works, I am above all interested in performance and other art works from the post-war and the current period, including

work by women theatre collectives such as *Las Poderosas* and *Laboratorio Magdalenas Teatro de las Oprimidas*. These and several other Guatemalan theater collectives such as *Andamio Teatro Raro* make a conscientious effort to discuss society's most prevalent issues by constructing their theatrical work as a practice that empowers its members and the audience. In this spirit, the previously mentioned women's theatre collectives address issues of violence against women on stage drawing either from personal experiences (*Las Poderosas*) or other women's (*Magdalenas*). In the case of *Magdalenas*, their theatrical practice draws directly from Augusto Boal's theater philosophy, which promotes social and political change, and aims at empowering women to overcome the multiple challenges they face in a society such as Guatemala's.

I am also interested in the new wave of Central American female spoken artists such as Rebeca Lane (Guatemala), Gaby Baca (Nicaragua), Nativa (Costa Rica), Majo & Mafe (Nicaragua), Nakury (Costa Rica), and Audry Funk (Mexico) who, through markedly diverse approaches (hip-hop, rap, and spoken poetry), address women's issues that include violence, and are opening up the discussion to include other topics such as sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and political views as experienced by women. The concept of body talk will prove to be a fundamental tool in analyzing how these artists' work embodies and represents violence against women and in illuminating the effects and the impact their work has on distinct spectatorships.

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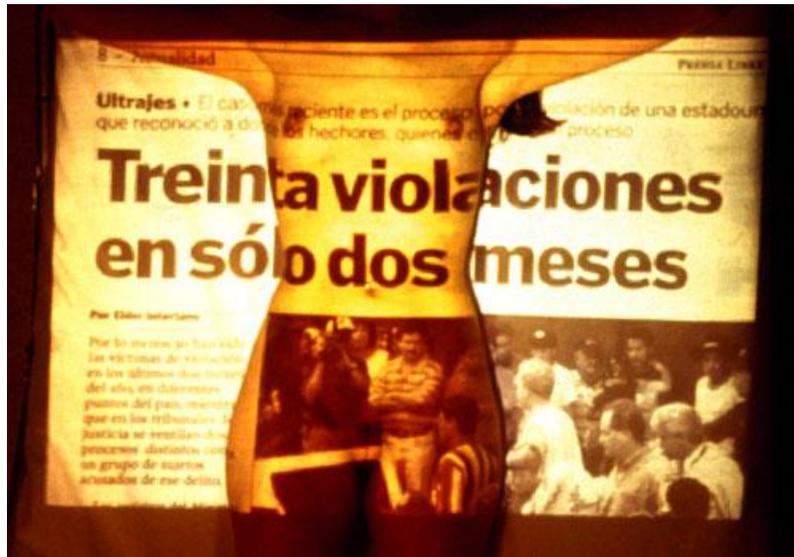
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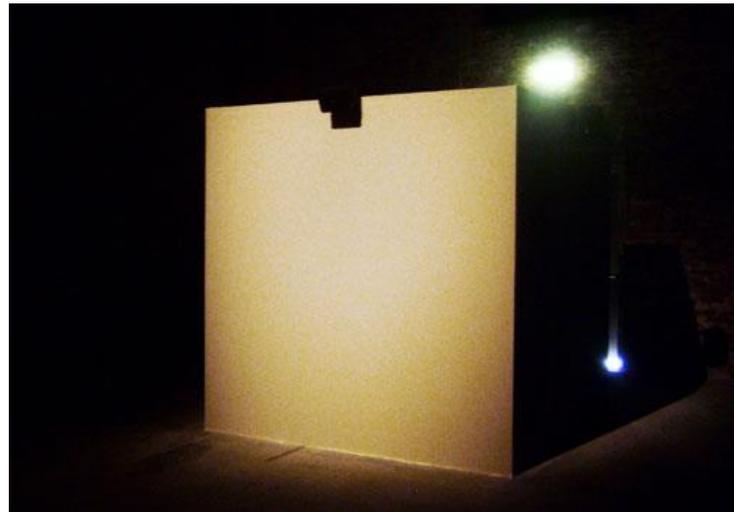
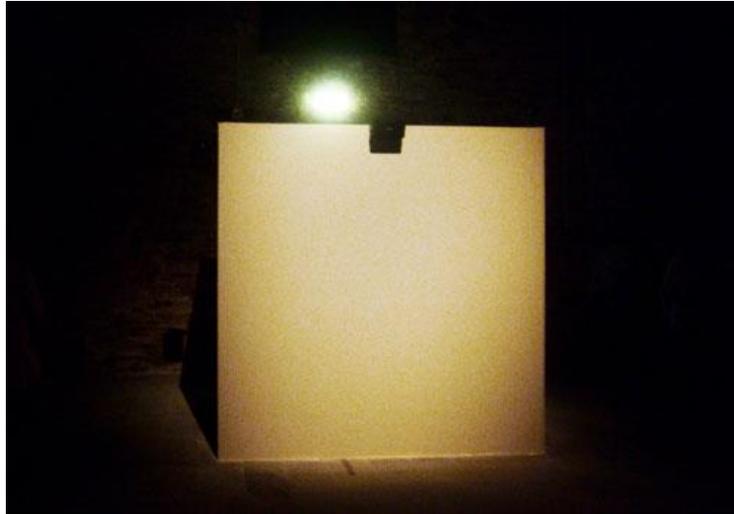
Dissertation's Images and Appendix

Chapter 1

Regina José Galindo, *El dolor en un pañuelo* (1999)



Regina José Galindo, *279 Golpes* (2005)



GAF, Grupo de Autoconciencia Feminista, *¿Quién puede olvidar las huellas?* (2007)





Chapter 2

Sandra Monterroso, *Tus tortillas, mi amor* [*Lix cua rahro*] (2004)







Lix cua rahro/Tus tortillas, mi amor

El día se aclara
 The day is clearing
 Mala suerte embrujada
 Bad luck bewitched
 Cada pueblo con su respectivo idioma
 Each people with it's own language
 Amar hasta rayar el alba
 To love until the dawn is grate
 Amasar
 To knead
 Alma y cuerpo
 Soul and body
 Nuestros antecesores
 Our absent ancestors
 Amar hasta rayar el alba
 We love until the dawn is grate
 Frialdad
 Coldness
 Se le están rodando las lágrimas
 Tears are rolling down
 Matador de mariposas blancas
 Somos mujeres
 He is a white butterfly killer
 We are women
 Vagina
 He's darkness
 Xk'ajyinal
 Su oscuridad

Tomar mujer es tabú
 To take a woman is taboo
 Imagen incierta
 Soledad
 Loneliness
 Yumbetac
 La mujer fornicar
 She fornicates
 K'un besinc
 Enamorar
 To fall in love
 Xk'ajyinal
 Su oscuridad
 He's Darkness
 Ixka
 Somos mujeres
 We are women
 Amn iz'ejcual
 Alma y cuerpo
 Soul and body
 Culb
 Corazón de palo tirado en al montaña
 Heart of stick thrown in the mountain
 Xquiq'uel
 Mi sangre
 My blood
 Xk'ajyinal
 Su oscuridad
 He's Darkness
 Aj pujuyer
 Guardacamino
 She guards way
 Soledad
 [voz off] Lix cua rahro
 Tus tortillas mi amor
 Your tortillas mi love

Versión Inglés – 2 –
 Guatemala México Mayo 2004

Chapter 3

Verónica Riedel, *The Making of a Mestiza* (2005)

Illustration 1. (Cotz'ij)



Illustration 2. (*Doña Carmen*)



Illustration 3. (*Cacao*)



Illustration 4. (*Doña Leonor*)

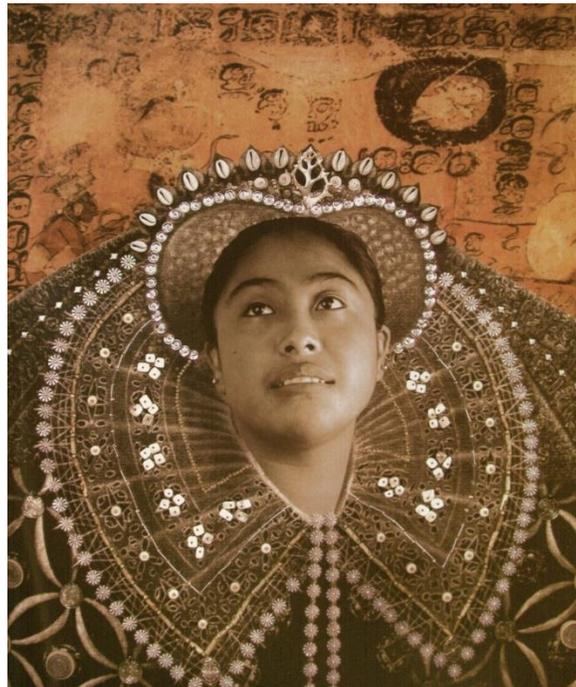


Illustration 5. (*Ixchel*)

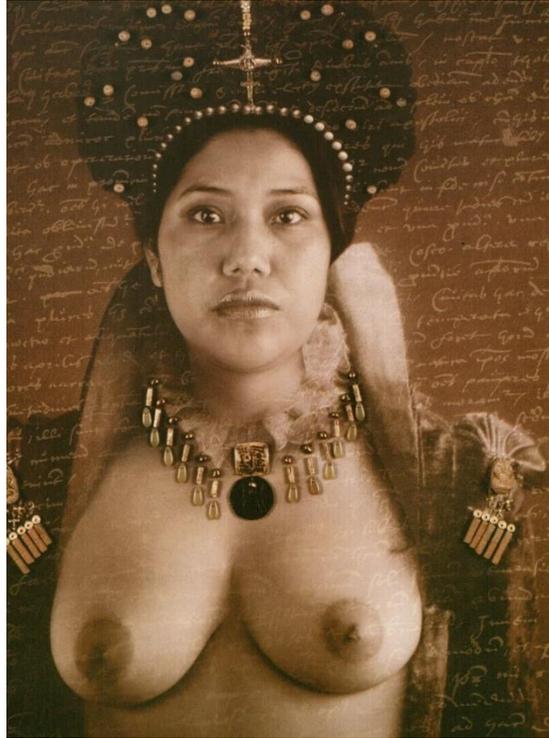


Illustration 6. (*Nicté*)



Rodrigo Abd, *Portraits of the Mayan Queens* (2011)







Chapter 4

Regina José Galindo and Rosa Chávez, *Hermana* (2010)



Regina José Galindo, *La verdad* (2013)



Conclusion

CIRMA's [the Mesoamerican Regional Research Centre],

Guatemala: ¿Por qué estamos como estamos? (2009 to the Present)

