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**Violent Times,  
Rising Resistance:  
An Interdisciplinary  
Gender Perspective**

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Edited by Dominique Grisard,  
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Gender Studies developed alongside and emerged out of feminist movements and critical theorizing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today they are both recognized as a discrete teaching and research area *and* an integral part of various disciplines. Gender Studies analyze how gender constitutes social order and power relations past and present. It is in this respect that gender is not understood as a biological or natural constant but as a historically and culturally specific, life-long process of differentiation and becoming and as a way of existence. Gender is thus always also an effect of social and individual processes.

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Gender Issues

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# 1 Introduction: Rethinking Dominant Understandings of Violence and Resistance from Intersectional and Transdisciplinary Perspectives

*Dominique Grisard, Annelise Erismann and Janine Dahinden*

Violence is a persistent element of modern history. This notwithstanding, a growing number of people experience today's world as particularly violent. Significantly, today's violent times have also politicized and mobilized new publics, generated creative forms of resistance, incited the most unlikely coalitions, and emboldened people to live life differently. From the Arab Spring, Occupy, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and decolonization movements to the increasing visibility of trans\* rights movements: The growing plurality of collective practices and calls for more viable modes of existence are intricately connected to the violence experienced.

This anthology originates in the conference that the Swiss Association for Gender Studies organized in September 2019 entitled 'Violent Times, Rising Protest: Structures, Experiences, and Feelings.' The conference brought together, conceptually and politically, intersectional analyses of different instances of gender as/and violence on the one hand and as forms of resistance and protest on the other hand. We aim at pushing this endeavor a step further by homing in on the entanglements between violence, resistance, and gender from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Purtschert and Meyer 2009; Sauer 2011). In our eyes, this is one of its main original contributions to current debates on violence in Gender Studies.

Examples of violence's omnipresent, global dimension abound: The media's incessant coverage of continuous warfare, without acknowledging the sexual violence it constitutes and legitimates, the pervasiveness of hate speech in social media, the increasingly open settler-colonial, racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic discrimination against all "others" and "strangers," and last but not least the persistent framing of intimate partner violence as a personal and private issue.

Simultaneously, all over the globe we witness a growing presence—be it in the media, through social movements, in political debates—of manifold forms of resistance and protests against personal and group experiences of violence and how they are connected to structural and symbolic dimensions of violence. Yet, the question, which we will elaborate on in the following, is



how to think the relationship between violence and resistance, going beyond the idea of causality.

We set out with the seemingly naive question of whether these different forms of violence in societies are connected and, if so, in which way. Thus, this anthology presents intersectional analyses of violence in their historic distinctiveness, emphasizing how violent experiences make people feel and act. Our objective is twofold: first, to better understand gender as/and violence and their multiple—interpersonal, structural, and symbolic—dimensions. Second, to explore modes of being, doing, and feeling otherwise, as well as visions of a livable life in solidarity. In so doing, we would like to offer new ways of thinking about the intricate relationship between violence and resistance, how they contest one another and mutually modify each other, without neglecting to pay close attention to the unequal distribution of power.

### 1.1 Interpersonal, Structural, and Symbolic Dimensions of Violence

There is a flipside to the ubiquity of violence: It tends to be perceived as “inevitable”, “normal”, or even “natural”, when in fact it reflects and is a product of asymmetrical power relations, which in turn, it helps to uphold, legitimize, and occlude. From a Gender Studies perspective, it strikes us as particularly important to name, interrogate, and thereby denaturalize structural dimensions of violence by showing how environmental risks, hunger, poverty, and war are indirect, often “tranquil” and tenacious forms of violence “built into the social structure [...] as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Galtung 1969, 174). Not only is their occurrence institutionalized and socially accepted. They also serve to indirectly keep those who “were never meant to survive” afraid, silent, and subordinated (Lorde 1978; Galtung 1969, 172). Phrases such as “that’s just the way things are”, “nature is bigger than all of us”, or “man is inherently aggressive” serve to normalize, naturalize, or individualize structural violence as the “bad” choices reflective of the “troubled” personalities of individual actors or groups.

These examples punctuate that structural violence relies on and feeds off other forms of violence in complex ways. For one, it works in conjunction with symbolic dimensions of violence to put minoritized, migrantized, racialized, and feminized groups and individuals at particular risk of interpersonal violence and self-harm. Indeed, symbolic processes of othering, categorization, and marginalization exacerbate the structural violence intrinsic to capitalism, coloniality, and the state. Symbolic violence, understood as

the production, imposition, and legitimation of meanings that conceal power relations, for example through schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970, 18), works as a “powerful ideological conductor” (Davis 2000) through which racism, (hetero and cis-)sexism, and classism are both normalized and occluded on an interpersonal, structural, and symbolic level. It thus strikes us as paramount to theorize these dimensions of violence as both produced by and reproductive of gender, sexuality, race, and class in particular socio-political contexts.

How different—structural, symbolic, and interpersonal—dimensions of violence sustain each other in and through an already violent (hetero and cis-) sexist, racist, and classist social order is clearly context-specific. However, what seems to be a common denominator is that they systematically render certain populations more vulnerable than others. Bourdieu’s law of conservation of violence attempts to grasp how violence self-reproduces, as one form of violence invites other forms thereof: “the structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs, loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence” (Bourdieu 1998, 40). While his observation rings true at first glance, the chronological sequence and hierarchical order of violence he proposes gives us pause. We hesitate to define a clear linear trajectory of how the different dimensions of violence unfold and rely on each other. An intersectional perspective of violence will not only question reducing structural violence to economic precarity (Schinkel 2010, 194). It will also necessarily interrogate any claim about a professed origin of violence.

Our reluctance in taking a linear understanding of violence at face value does not aim to discount that losing one’s job might have severe repercussions, potentially spiraling into everyday acts of violence. Indeed, minoritized, feminized, and racialized people often suffer the brunt of this interpersonal violence. However, painting too narrow of a picture of what structural violence entails, namely economic or financial exploitation, and prioritizing structural economic violence as what sets off other forms of violence, ignores the intricate, often non-linear ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, and age organize the complex relations and dimensions of violence. To state it provocatively: The structural violence of job insecurity or job loss may play a part in some cases of intimate partner violence, but it is hardly the only or the most relevant one.

Without professing to know the root causes of intimate partner violence in every instance, an intersectional perspective of violence points to the persistent symbolic violence of the private-public divide that bolsters the

cultural imaginary of the home and family as a safe, private realm, thereby concealing what happens behind closed doors. Furthermore, the private-public divide masks that migrantized persons without citizenship or community support tend to be particularly vulnerable to the potential symbolic and structural violence of the family, exacerbated by the lack of legal, moral, and emotional support and protection for those exposed to intimate partner violence more broadly. Along with Rita Segato (2016, 615), we thus intend to work against the minoritization of women: “if we can understand current forms of misogynist cruelty, we will understand what is happening not only to women and those deemed feminine, dissident, and other by the patriarchy but also to society as a whole” (Segato 2016, 620).

With the following examples from our research, we would like to illustrate the context-specific ways in which different dimensions of violence against feminized, migrantized “others” not only relate to each other but also rely on each other:

Dominique Grisard’s research is interested in trans women of color’s persistent organizing and creative interventions as a way to fight and at times escape, albeit briefly, the different dimensions of violence that structure their everyday lives. In New York City, many trans women of color live in poverty and have slim prospects of legal employment. It may be considered a small victory that in early February 2021, legislation implemented in 1976 to criminalize acts of “loitering for the purpose of prostitution” was finally repealed. In the past forty-five years, this law authorized law enforcement to disproportionately police and harass trans women of color, suspecting them of sex work. This assumption by the police is informed by the symbolic violence of the Western cultural imaginary and its long history of (s)exoticizing trans women of color, associating them with racist, sexist, and transphobic notions of depravity, perversion, and sexual availability. Symbolic and structural dimensions of violence undergirded the belief that trans women of color were legitimate prey and inevitable victims of interpersonal violence by individuals as much as by state officials. Phrases such as “they had it coming, didn’t they” or “look at their sexy getup” or “they were asking for it” symbolically normalize and justify acts of interpersonal violence while concealing the pivotal role of structural violence in systematically exposing some individuals and groups to interpersonal violence and premature death (Gilmore 2007, 247). In quest for respectability and inclusion, white middle-class feminism and lesbian and gay movements often reaffirmed these classed and racialized stereotypes instead of dismantling their violence in solidarity with (trans) women of color and all those engaging in sex work.

An example from Janine Dahinden's research brings the different dimensions of violence "home" to Switzerland while adding histories and politics of citizenship and (post)coloniality into the already complex understanding of multiple, context-specific dimensions and relationalities of violence. Dahinden studies migrant and particularly Muslim women's experiences in Switzerland and beyond, focusing on how their lives are implicated by the structural violence of the Swiss and European border and citizenship regimes. On the one hand, these regimes follow the exclusive logic of the nation-state (Dahinden 2016). On the other hand, they carry the weight of postcolonial legacies of historically established global hierarchies and ideologies of Western dominance (Bhambra 2014). Both logics work in a restrictive way by (re)producing particular ideas about modernity/tradition, legitimizing practices of essentialized cultural othering while silencing historically anchored global inequalities (Mayblin and Turner 2021; Lugones 2008).

It becomes clear that this structural violence is entangled with and reinforced by symbolic violence in various ways. For example, if we look at these last decades, ideas of gender equality and women's rights have been mobilized in nativist and nationalist politics in Europe as boundary markers against migrants and Muslim women in particular. Their discursive logic is simple but effective: Gender equality and women's rights are presented as accomplished facts in Western Europe, even as genuine European values. "Others" are portrayed as illiberal and, thus, a threat to European values because of their alleged lack of respect for women's rights and gender equality, which is seen as immutably grounded in their "culture" (Lépinard 2020). While a similar discursive logic was employed during the colonial era to justify "civilizing" supposedly oppressed women in the colonies, in the postcolonial era, such ideas target so-called migrants and Muslim women and their "integration" in European countries (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014; Dahinden and Manser-Egli 2022). This logic has given rise to a double standard in assessing gender inequalities with far-reaching consequences: When determining gender equality that involves migrant or Muslim women, a lack of equality is migrantized, racialized, and interpreted as cultural, but when the focus lies on gender inequalities in Swiss society it is reduced to an individual or a psychological problem. Gender inequalities in Switzerland are de-gendered, de-culturalized, and often even made invisible (Khazaei 2019), thereby reinforcing ideas of Western superiority. This discursive logic fuels the structural violence of border regimes and legitimizes their work.

What is more is that femonationalist (Farris 2017) ideas like those delineated above are increasingly naturalized in Western societies. Strikingly, we observe that migrant and Muslim women rarely have a voice in this de-

bate, at least in Switzerland. They are silenced, which again may be considered as a form of symbolic violence of a political nature. White middle-class feminism perpetuates this violence, often too invested in upholding the “master’s house” (Lorde 1977) instead of dismantling it in solidarity and coalition.

While feminist movements since the late 1960s substantially impacted how society and the state see, denounce, and penalize interpersonal violence, most notably intimate partner violence, it has remained difficult to name and criticize structural violence and seemingly impossible to dismantle it. The institutionalized, systematic, and ubiquitous nature of structural violence ties in with epistemic dimensions of symbolic violence to only allow certain voices to speak and be heard. As Mohanty (1991, 52) argues, it is a recurrent and sophisticated mechanism of colonization, also seen in its continuities: to create the non-Western World as a monolith and to repeal the “suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question”, diligently selecting its preferred or most palatable voices out of the Third World.

This is one reason why we find this current moment particularly noteworthy: Social movements such as Black Lives Matter or MeToo not only call out the structural dimensions of violence and their traumatizing effects, demanding fundamental and systemic change. What is astounding is that they are actually heard, if only partially and circumstantially. Nevertheless, we find ourselves in a moment of arguably heightened awareness of structural violence as an expression of deep-seated unequal power relations and a means of affirming control. The seemingly disparate and at times minor everyday “snippets” of violated integrity and dignity are increasingly named for what they are: structural violence.

Similarly, the contributions in this volume underscore the necessity of connecting the dots between experiences of interpersonal violence and the violence of structural (hetero and cis-)sexism, racism, and classism. Taken together, the chapters in this anthology underscore that violence is a central structuring principle of gender, sexuality, race, and class discourses and identifications, and conversely, that these structuring principles are constitutive of what we understand and experience as violence. In short: Violence is always already gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized—on an interpersonal, symbolic, and structural level. Although all contributions address violence as an intersectional, multidimensional phenomenon, the anthology’s most prominent focus lies on how gender norms inform structural violence. What it means to conceive of gender norms as structural violence, we learn from Meyer’s astute analysis of the history of Swiss democracy (in this volume; see also Purtschert and Meyer 2009) and its long-standing exclusion of women:

It is not enough to just “add-and-stir”<sup>1</sup> women to the analysis of already recognized concepts of violence. Instead, we need to challenge dominant understandings of violence and resistance with a particular eye on when and how violence is not recognized as such, silenced, or disavowed. Meyer concludes that women’s long-standing exclusion from the ballot and the way its history has been systematically silenced is a form of political violence.

## 1.2 Revisiting the Relationship Between Violence and Resistance

To focus on the complex inner workings of violence is to return to the tradition of feminist scholarship that rejects individualist and decontextualized interpretations of violence. It is, in short, to remind feminist readers that violence cannot be reduced to singular “snaps” by uncivil, pathological individuals:

*When a snap is registered as the origin of violence, the one who snaps is deemed violent. She snaps. You can hear the snap in the sound of her voice. Sharp brittle loud: perhaps it is like the volume has suddenly been turned up, for no reason, the quietness that surrounds her ceases when she speaks, her voice cutting the atmosphere, registering as the loss of something; a nicer atmosphere, a gentler mood. Violence is assumed to originate with her. A feminist politics might insist on renaming actions as reactions; we need to show how her snap is not the starting point. (Ahmed 2017, 189)*

When a Swedish journalist in the early 1970s asked Angela Davis about whether she condoned physical violence as an act of resistance, referring to her ties to the Black Panther Party, she famously and indignantly stressed the intimate connection between the structural, symbolic, and interpersonal dimensions of the White violence experienced by the Black people of her neighborhood in racially segregated Birmingham, Alabama, and how the long history of state condoned violence against Black lives is immediately silenced by the White male journalist’s seemingly innocent question (Davis and Holmström 1972/2011).

In this vein, Judith Butler, in *The Force of Non-Violence* (2020), asks us to abandon our individualist, neoliberal understanding of violence and non-violence as a binary, causal relation. Not only does she challenge the dominant notion of experiencing violence, including the commitment to nonviolence, as individual acts, but she also calls into question the idea that

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1 This expression has been used to indicate a common strategy of gender mainstreaming (Harding 1995) and a strand of feminism itself (Alexander 2005: 187).

violence is a mere tool to enact a prescribed end. Butler stresses that violence comes to matter in discourse. It is thus unable to constitute an object of analysis in isolation. Instead, violence responds to meaning-making. Calling out silenced histories as violence, for example, can indeed be a form of resisting dominant History and rewriting it. For if “violence is always interpreted” (Butler 2020, 14), then alternative interpretations of violence allow us to imagine new prospects and possibilities, especially if our focus lies on social interconnectedness instead of individual/ized experiences.

Butler does not disavow feminist traditions of radical nonviolent resistance, as, for instance, epitomized by the eco-feminist pacificism and the “do-no-harm” type of subversive consensual politics (Moore 2008). The idea that feminism does ‘no-harm’ eludes two facts: first, that feminism is not *per se* antagonistic to violence (feminist political activism can surely be a site of violence reproduction); second, that feminism intends to – violently – break with – violent – traditions, thus, being inherently violent to the given status quo. What is feminism other than a movement founded on the violence of “shattering myths, blurring and betraying boundaries, obliterating social/sexual contracts” (Zalewski and Runyan 2019, 106)? Also, let us not forget that the White middle-class feminist commitment to nonviolence was often experienced as coercion into a moral, sometimes material capitulation to the cis-hetero-patriarchy, particularly by those who did not fit the mold of Woman (Runyan 2020, 333).

There is a long history of imagining White middle-class cis-women as peaceful and powerless victims. Indeed, the cultural amnesia regarding physical acts of violence committed by White women is persistent. Similarly, feminized and minoritized people are seldomly acknowledged as potentially implicated in exerting structural violence. White feminist history tends to ignore the violent strands of feminism and the fact that they have always been present. When it does acknowledge them, it attributes their violence to the manipulative influences of external forces. The dominant representation of female terrorists is a case in point (Grisard 2018). However, as diversity and gender equality become more critical criteria for recruitment into state security forces, and more states embrace what has at times been called “state feminist” or even “carceral feminist” and “diversity” ideals, women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people’s (perceived) relationship to violence, the role of victim and/or perpetrator will likely change. This anthology is part of a larger body of thinking about the current necro-liberal moment and its experiences with gender and diversity mainstreaming (Davis 2000; Gilmore 2007; Valencia and Bordai 2019). Along with Dorlin, Vergès, and Segato, we center the state as a principal instigating, institutionalizing, and stabilizing force in

(re)producing inequalities, “arming” those who exert structural violence with legitimacy, legality, and interpretative power (Vergès 2020, 10; Dorlin 2017; Segato 2016).

What strikes us as noteworthy is that recent feminist theory calls into question the dominant individualized understanding of violence from an intersectional perspective. Most importantly, for our purpose, a significant number of feminists also question the idea of resistance as mere “reacting.” Their analyses resonate with many of this anthology’s reflections on the violence of silencing and the resistance of breaking silence, speaking up, giving voice, singing, and incivility. Holly Patch (in this volume) impressively describes how individual voices, when singing together, embody political resistance for trans\* people. Virginia León Torrez (in this volume) expands on this reflection of togetherness by looking at literature fostering memory against gender-based violence as a shared resource for different generations. She conceives literature as a form of resistance against forgetting. León Torrez, along with several other contributions, shows us convincingly how art contributes to an inclusive politics of justice, supporting victims’ demands for reparations from physical and symbolic violence.

A key aspect binding the chapters together is their insistence on contextualizing structural violence within specific histories and politics of place, struggles over power and meaning. They are indebted to Indigenous and Southern Theories (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012; Connell 2007; Hokowhitu et al. 2021; TallBear 2019) and their deep understanding of how history and place matter to how we conceive and experience violence. While much is gained by “renaming feminist actions” as “reactions” to structural violence, as Ahmed previously proposed, the danger lies in diminishing social actions (and the realm of agency itself) as secondary and passive.

The difficulty to find more encompassing terms than “resistance”, “reactions”, and “nonviolence”, a vocabulary that does not suggest to be little more than (passively) reacting to discrete instances of violence, is neither unique to the anthology’s chapters nor to Ahmed’s proposition. It suggests an inadequacy in the current theorizing of the complex entanglement of structural violence and individual and collectively experienced “snippets” of violence that push us to underestimate the transformative power of personal and group resistance. Owed to an understanding of violence as intersectional, multidimensional, relational, and emplaced, the contributions in this anthology refrain from espousing a linear, unidirectional temporal logic where an incident of violence comes first and re-sistance second, as a mere, direct answer to the former.



Against this backdrop, we insist on defining violence as hegemonic in the Gramscian sense: as both dominant *and* contested, a site of various degrees and intensities of negotiation, struggle, and resistance. If the volume at hand privileges “structural violence”, it constantly studies it in relation to other dimensions of violence *and* in relation to (all kinds of) resistance while paying close attention to those with the power to naming, defining, and interpreting the violence. In this sense, our theoretical perspective dovetails with the current political moment of mobilization, protest, and disenchantment.

Clearly, conceptualizations of violence differ among different feminist traditions. However, there seems to be some consensus that strategic thinking about agency and resistance will remain at the core of feminism for foreseeable generations. Our attempt to place equal weight on violence and resistance to better understand how they relate to each other might have inspired our authors to reflect on violence *and* resistance in nonlinear ways. In this anthology, they effectively provide our readers with a tactical roadmap to counter the systematic denial of violence’s structural dimension. Though we might have facilitated them to venture into a type of contradictory logic, to use Heleith Saffiotti’s (Saffiotti et al. 2011) favorite term, the honors for the thorough and tireless work of dissecting structural violence are truly theirs.

### 1.3 Subjects of Resistance in their Quest for Change of Violent Structures

Most of the contributions in this volume take experiences of interpersonal violence as their starting point to examine both symbolic and structural dimensions of violence as their primary object of analysis and critique. In each paper, the interplay of the different dimensions of violence offers insight into the conditions of possibility of resistance in the particular socio-political context. Far from adopting an individualizing logic, the authors refrain from framing resistance as violent snaps. Importantly, they acknowledge and reflect on how structural, symbolic, and interpersonal dimensions of violence inform and mutually reinforce each other and how they shape dissident subjectivities and actions. The contributions at hand reflect how structural violence is woven into the political, social, and economic fabric at a global, national, local, and personal level to better understand how it affects those subjected to it. Indeed, their focus lies on how individuals and groups come to embody structural violence and resistance, often experiencing their realities as inevitable, evoking a variety of affects—from the flat affect of dispassionate disillusionment and acceptance of some to the helpless rage and righteous anger of others. As Audre Lorde reminds us, their anger is an appropriate answer

to injustice and oppression. It is “loaded with information and energy” in the move “toward coalition and effective action” (Lorde 1981, 280–281).

The case of Lara Barcelos in Annelise Erismann’s research conveys how theorizing violence as both produced by and productive of particular subjectivities and affects allows for nuanced analyses of violence *and* resistance. Barcelos was a White middle-class medical student turned revolutionary in 1960s Brazil. Like other Third World women dissidents of the time, Barcelos was subjected to strict state regulations of both body and mind. The structural violence experienced at the hands of society and the state both shaped her will to resist and her mode of resistance: interpersonal violence. For Barcelos, to resist the structural violence deep-rooted in imperial capitalism and the military dictatorship in Brazil left her only one option: to participate in a violent insurgency. Not only did she take up guns herself as a member of the *Vanguardia Armada Revolucionaria Palmares* (VAR-Palmares), a socialist organization that prioritized the political education of the urban masses. She also directly benefitted from the kidnapping of a Swiss representative as she was one of several political prisoners released in exchange for the Swiss ambassador to Brazil, Giovanni Enrico Bucher, kidnapped by VAR-Palmares’ parent organization, the so-called *Vanguardia Popular Revolucionaria* (VPR), in 1970. The VPR was an organization that attempted to recreate the conditions of the Cuban Revolution in Brazil, focusing on developing a leftist militia in rural areas under the direction of Carlos Lamarca (Chacel 2012; Silva 2019). To acknowledge that Barcelos was a survivor of institutional sexual violence, as rape was a standard tactic used against Communist women insurgents in South America, strikes us important. It does not depoliticize her struggle. On the contrary, it politicizes sexualized violence as a systematic weapon against those deemed a threat to the international order, nation, and body politic(s).

The forms and intensities of resistance discussed by the authors in this volume vary substantially. Susanne Nef and Isabel Boni-Le-Goff describe their interlocutors’ narrow repertoire of resistance to interpersonal violence at home and at work. Extracting themselves from their violent, harmful intimate and work relationships of dependence, and admitting to themselves and others what they had lived through, was often all the resistance they could muster. Feeling shame at allowing these violent transgressions to happen was never too far off. Their resistance remained on the interpersonal level by rejecting the stigma of being victims and self-fashioning as survivors.

Virginia León Torrez, Carmen Carrasco Lujan, Nicolas Wasser, Patrizia Zanella, and Holly Patch’s contributions explore the symbolic power of artistic interventions as resistance to the multidimensional violence expe-

rienced by its subjects. Carrasco Lujan, León Torrez, and Zanella choose to reflect on the role of literature in mourning and commemorating those who were meant to be forgotten, denouncing and narrating settler colonialism, feminicide, and rape as integral elements of war, empire, and global capitalism. Wasser's chapter on *geração tombamento's* "gender terrorist" performances spotlights the visual and affective charge of their symbolic acts of resistance in light of the structural violence marring their lives. Patch's paper, finally, shows how singing in a transgender choir was experienced as a symbolic, interpersonal, and sensual mode of resistance and survival. It didn't end there: Those singing in the choir were able to carve out for themselves a place of belonging and flourishing.

The relevance of culture and art as socio-political arenas of resistance in so many contributions strike us as noteworthy. Inspired by Feminist and Queer Theories of Color, Indigenous and Southern Theories, Nicolas Wasser reflects on the politics of the Brazilian LGBT and Black *geração tombamento* in reactionary times, Holly Patch crafts an arts-based ethnography of a transgender choir, and lastly, Patrizia Zanella focuses on how radical incivility as a politico-esthetic form of resistance embedded in a long tradition of Indigenous histories of resistance against settler colonialism rejects the dominant distinction between art and politics. These three authors attribute political meaning to the use of esthetics as violence and/or resistance, underscoring the emancipatory, community building, and healing qualities of politico-esthetic forms of resistance.

#### 1.4 Resisting the Negation of Structural and Epistemic Gender Violence

Thus far, we have tried to make sense of structural violence from an intersectional and relational perspective. Here we would like to home in on what might be specific to structural gender violence. The contributions in this volume highlight its intimate relationship to epistemic violence. Indeed, one of the common mechanisms of structural gender violence that they identify is its systematic negation. For one, structural violence is repudiated by the tenacious tendency to individualize the violence experienced, as Susanne Nef's chapter (in this volume) on intimate partner violence shows. She describes the long journey of educated White middle-class women and men in admitting to themselves and others that what they experienced was, in fact, violence. Nef's findings dovetail with Isabel Boni-Le Goff's analysis (in this volume) of sexual violence in white-collar work settings as key to reproducing gender inequalities. Boni-Le Goff identified three recurring mechanisms of repudi-

ation and normalization of sexual violence serving to disavow its structural dimension: sexual violence is routinely minimized and ridiculed, turned invisible by its relegation to the private and intimate, even when it occurred at the workplace, and its targets are left to feel complicit and guilty.

Similarly, Carmen Carrasco Luján's (in this volume) analysis of how the media made sense of feminicides points to the symbolic violence of sexist jokes meant to reproduce women's subjection. In addition, Katrin Meyer's chapter (in this volume) on Switzerland's exclusion of women from suffrage convincingly argues that the repeated denial of women's rights to vote was a systematic, conscious, and willful strategy to silence women.

Indeed, several authors discuss silencing as a dominant mode of denying how gender—along and intertwined with other differentiating principles—structures violence. The state-sanctioned silencing of gendered and sexualized violence serves to reaffirm a given national ethnic-racial “politics of belonging” through the control of women's bodies (Yuval-Davis 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997). In this case, Virginia León Torrez (in this volume) analyses how rape is a systematically deployed weapon of war within the internal armed conflict in Peru. Through the “symbolic trashing of women” (Silva Santisteban 2008), undergirded by the non-acknowledgment of gender inequalities, geographic asymmetries between the rural and the urban, and institutionalized racialized structures, women become vehicles for the elimination of a declared national enemy. Here, silencing means not recognizing how raping “those women” depends on the symbolic violence of the hegemonic gender order and a racialized notion of belonging. León Torrez' analysis dovetails with Femenias and Rossi's (2009, 44), who developed the concept of “exemplary bodies”, that is violently conditioned bodies, hence, connecting the increasing number of feminicides in the Global South to glocal economic insecurities and cultural changes. They discuss how socio-economic dependence ties into the feminization of certain men and the socio-economic independence, isolation, and vanishing of certain women.

Likewise, Nicolas Wasser explains that Afro-Brazilian and *travesti* artistic expressions were first understood as resistance to Brazilian society's “symbolic trashing”. Wasser insists on recasting their resistance as a “gender terrorist” resurgence against necropolitical circumstances targeting minoritized travesti artists and activists. Wasser inquiries into how Black queerness, womanhood, and trans identities may disrupt the rigid gender binary and racial hierarchies. He theorizes these hierarchies as both structural and digital manifestations of violence against feminized and gender-nonconforming people. Indeed, the *geração tombamento's* resistance unveils what South African, Black-diasporic feminist scholar Barbara Boswell (2015) leaves implicit by

asking: “Which acts of violence ‘matter’ as contemptible? [...] Whose bodies are sacrosanct, evoking horror when bodily integrity is violated, and on which bodies is violence business-as-usual?” In short: whose lives are expendable, whose bodies erasable?

As the authors in this anthology reveal, the recurring mechanisms of negation, exclusion, and silencing are not accidental or minor but constitutive of structural gender violence. They are indebted to Spivak’s (1994) seminal work on epistemic violence, which theorizes how dominant knowledge production marginalizes, marks, mutes, or silences particular groups and their knowledge, namely due to ethno- and euro-centric power relations rooted in coloniality. The fact that many of our authors’ work on violence and resistance draws on Feminism of Color, as well as Southern and Indigenous Theories, speaks volumes. We would like to consider it a corrective to the long history of epistemic violence in Western scholarship, including the violent silences of some earlier White feminisms and feminist theories.

This anthology pays a modest yet due tribute to how Francophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone feminist theories have conceptualized violence and modes of resistance. Considering Switzerland and France’s cultural ties, our anthology would be incomplete without standard references to authors influencing the teaching, research, and activist practice of gender studies in the Romandie and increasingly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Dorlin 2017; Vergès 2020).

We situate the work in this anthology within this tradition and as (renewed) attempts at blurring violent boundaries, analytically and politically speaking: west versus east, north versus south, global versus local, private versus public, art versus politics, and finally, violence versus nonviolence, or violence versus resistance. Blurring these violent metaphorical and physical borders will help reconceptualize resistance in more creative, just and visionary ways.

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## 2 **Blood of the Dawn: Resistance Literature Against Forgetting**

*Virginia León Torrez*

In this chapter I analyze representations of the ways that women are subjected to physical and symbolic violence. My analysis will be focused on the literary representation of sexual violence against Indigenous women in the novel *Blood of the Dawn* by Claudia Salazar Jiménez<sup>1</sup>, which sheds light on the meanings of sexual violence as a war crime and crime against humanity. The novel is distinguished for its historical contribution to the study of the internal armed conflict in Peru (1980–2000) between the insurgent group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and the government of Peru. There, rape was indeed used as a “weapon of war” (Skjelsbaek 2010). Moreover, sexual violence inflicted on women had a strong racist dimension (Boesten 2014). In post-conflict Peru, cultural production that addresses the systematic sexual violence during the conflict supports movements against forgetting and in favor of inclusive politics of justice. Resistance literature, such as the cited work, can be defined as a “repository for popular memory and consciousness” (Harlow 1987, 34), which forms part of a wider project of cultural and political transformation that is required to meet the victims’ demands of reparations and criminal justice.

On the basis of an analytical literary approach that integrates perspectives pertaining to Anthropology and Cultural Studies, the use of concepts, such as Rita Segato’s *pedagogía de la crueldad* (pedagogy of cruelty) as a form of power that relies and depends “on the constantly renewed destruction of women’s bodies, upon the spectacle of their subjugation, on the showcasing of their subordination” (2016, 620), and Rocío Silva Santisteban’s (2008) *basurización simbólica* (symbolic trashing) as a way to categorize people through imaginaries of contamination, will contribute to a better understanding of the links between race, class, and gender in the perpetration of sexual violence during wartime. This chapter introduces the role of literary representation of rape and sexual violence in war in explaining their under-

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1 Claudia Salazar Jiménez, born in Lima, Peru, is one of the most recognized contemporary Peruvian writers. Her debut novel *Blood of the Dawn* was awarded the Casa de las Americas Prize in 2014 and the TUMI-USA Award in 2015. She is also a literary critic, professor, and cultural manager currently based in New York City.

lying factors, such as a continuum of a gender order, racism, and institutionalized structural and symbolic violence, which were all at work in the Peruvian context. For this purpose, I will first examine and contextualize sexual violence in the Peruvian conflict. Then, I will reflect on the role of literary representation in understanding such phenomenon, before turning to the analysis of *Blood of the Dawn* and the contribution it has made to a better understanding of the nuances around the category of rape while giving voice to women as victims and survivors.

## 2.1 Rethinking the Broadened Concept of “Sexual Violence”

A case of extreme cruelty and systematic sexual violence inflicted upon women’s bodies can be identified in Peru’s internal conflict. The profound political upheaval and violence were triggered when Shining Path, a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party (*El Diario*, as cited by Degregori 2011, 183), proclaimed an insurrectionary war in May 1980. In Shining Path’s vision, not just the government but the entire social structure and economic foundation were to be remade under its leadership (Stern 1998). Over the course of the twenty years between 1980 and 2000, sexual violence practices, which mainly consisted of rape and sexual abuse, were mostly perpetrated against young Indigenous women from rural areas, or, in Segato’s view, “bodies that do not represent the antagonist in the war scene, subjects that do not correspond to the soldier of the inimical armed corporation” (2016, 622). As Indigenous women in Peru are seen as responsible for reproducing and maintaining the boundaries of the group, these acts of sexual violence were intended to dishonor the victims as well as the Indigenous community. That is to say, women’s bodies were used as “vehicles” for the symbolic depiction of political purpose: destroying the community suspected of helping the enemy side through the rape of its women. While all participant agents in the war, including members of the Shining Path and of the peasant self-defense groups (*Comités des Autodefensa*) used rape, it was mostly soldiers who committed such acts of sexual violence.

These findings were provided by the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC (*Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*, CVR), which was created by a Supreme Decree in 2001 to investigate and report on human rights abuses committed during the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the inclusion of

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2 Just after the President of Perú, Alberto Fujimori, fled into exile in Japan in 2000, the interim president, Valentín Paniagua, called for the establishment of a truth commission, which was the culmination of the hard work by more than fifty Peruvian non-governmental organizations since 1985. The TRC’s official mandate was to analyze why the violence occurred, assess

a special chapter on sexual violence against women in the commission's *Final Report* (2003) had the aim to visibilize it as human rights abuse, and acknowledge it as gender violence since it widely affected women, something that was based on the testimonies of victim-survivors and on its specific consequences, such as pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>

The definition of rape as a form of sexual violence, used by the TRC, was based on the texts of the International Human Rights Law, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the International Criminal Law, which understands it as penetration of the body under force (TRC 2003, 264).<sup>4</sup> Thereby, the TRC defines it as “the invasion, however slight, of any part of the body using force or the threat of force, with a sexual organ or any other object” (2003, 264). However, the legal definition neglects the viewpoint of the victim or the perpetrator, or even their relationship, something that could have allowed the experts to expose the tensions in what rape meant according to these social actors as well as to observe the institutional reasonings when this type of violence is perpetrated against women's bodies. That is to say, a broader definition of sexual violence would have allowed experts to grasp the extent of the relation between sexual violence against women in war and the ensuing impunity once peace is restored.<sup>5</sup>

Within the scholarly literature that includes a gender perspective in the analysis of sexual violence in Peru's wartime, the work of Jelke Boesten (2014) stands out. Boesten's research on transformative gender justice in post-conflict societies and in particular her study *Sexual Violence During War and Peace* consider sexual violence “as those experiences that are perceived as such by its victims” (147–148), or in other words, when women reported sexual violence to the TRC or other agencies. In addition, her research also

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responsibility, propose reparations, and recommend preventative reforms. From June 2001 to August 2003, the TRC collected nearly seventeen thousand testimonies about the violence committed during the twenty-year armed conflict. These findings were collected in the TRC's *Final Report* in 2003.

3 The TRC set up public hearings, where victim-survivors testified to repertoires of violence, torture, and intimidation that included rape. By considering these testimonies, the TRC observed that sexual violence occurred in a context of broader violations of human rights, which included disappearance, killing, torture, and imprisonment of women. As a result, the TRC registered 538 reports on rape (Boesten 2012, 23–24).

4 Other forms of sexual violence cited by the TRC were forced prostitution, forced marriage, sexual slavery, forced abortion, and forced pregnancy. CVR *Informe Final*, vol. VI, ch. 1.5, p. 264.

5 It is important to underline that at the moment of writing this chapter the only case under investigation and prosecution is *Manta y Vilca's*, a collective case of nine Indigenous women who were raped by thirteen members of the armed forces between 1984 and 1991, brought to justice in 2015 and still ongoing.

examines the understandings of sexual violence uttered by perpetrators. By doing so, it broadens this concept to include all acts that can be labeled as unwanted sexual acts and exposure with the aim to uncover nuances between these different meanings according to all of the involved actors.

Drawing on her empirical research, Boesten also asserts that rape was used as a weapon of war. Informed by Inger Skjelsbaek's definition, her study demonstrates that rape, and sexual violence in general, was used as "part of a systematic political campaign that has strategic military purposes" (2010, 27). As the author explains, "this means that rape was sanctioned from above, although not written in orders, and that rape was used alongside other forms of violence and intimidation" (Boesten 2014, 23). An example thereof is the use of public mass rapes during incursions into villages and massacres. According to the testimonies provided to the TRC, in such contexts, women and girls were frequently raped before being shot and buried. So, rape was part of a broader set of terror tactics against the Indigenous population, alongside other forms of violence and torture, such as mutilation of sexual organs and forced nudity. As mentioned before, rape was used strategically, as a weapon of war to destroy communities morally and physically, while it also reinforced existing gender ideologies that legitimate inequalities based on gender, race, and class.

## 2.2 Gender, Race and Class during the "Years of Violence"

The Marxist-Leninist-Maoist guerrilla group Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) found support initially among rural peasants and provincial youth, especially the first generation of university-educated young men and women of rural origin (Degregori 1990). The attacks of the Shining Path were followed by a military counterinsurgency driven by racism towards the Andean population, which has been historically marginalized. Indeed, the Peruvian armed forces came to suspect all Indigenous rural peasants of being potential terrorists. Consequently, these peasants may be understood as both agents and victims of violence. According to the TRC, 69,280 persons died or disappeared during the internal war, and 80 percent of them were young men of indigenous descent. I follow Boesten (2014) in the assumption that the Peruvian conflict had no ethnically motivated objectives. As Boesten argues, Sendero focused on class and not ethnicity, when drawing conclusions about the wrongs of the Peruvian society. Nevertheless, as the author claims, the profile of the majority of deaths and disappearances during the conflict shows that class was intertwined with perceptions of race (Boesten 2014). This was also reflected in the use of rape in war, majorly perpetrated by the army and

the police over Indigenous women as a strategy to intimidate and dominate not only those suspected of being terrorists (from the viewpoint of the Peruvian armed forces)<sup>6</sup> but also, the Andean population as a whole.

It is important to say that in its Final Report the TRC introduced wartime rape of women, especially young Indigenous women as systematic, underscoring how much race, class, and gender were closely interwoven in consolidating hierarchies in Peru. The TRC included in its statistics 538 cases of rape, which is estimated as a mere 7 percent of actual cases of rape. Since most of the testimonies they received included references to sexual violence (2003, 274),<sup>7</sup> political scientist Michele Leiby (2009) suggested an amplification of the TRC's definition of rape as penetration of the body under force which has ever since influenced the reported number of cases. Additionally, based on the testimonies of female survivors of political violence, the TRC also suggested that it is likely that a majority of the 7,426 registered female victims of disappearance, detention, torture, and killings were also subjected to sexual violence.

Additionally, as the victims' narratives show, physical violence is also grounded in prejudice and normative frameworks of what women are perceived or supposed to be. In the case of Peru, the reproduction of the associated everyday racism and sexism are present in the everyday symbolic violence. The latter can be understood as a process of "naturalizing unequal power structures to the point of rendering them inevitable" (Hume 2009, 32). Such symbolic power reinforces pre-existing imaginaries of population groups in the Peruvian society. Hereby, it is particularly important to pay attention to discursive interactions, for example, the use of the derogatory term *chola*<sup>8</sup> or Indian by the perpetrators to refer to Indigenous women, where the everyday gendered hegemonic order emerges to reinforce racialized hierarchies. The appellation *chola*, which is widely used in the Peruvian society as an ethnic

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6 Terrorist and terrorist organization were the common terms that the members of the armed forces used to designate their enemy (that is, members and supporters of *Sendero Luminoso*), in reference to what they targeted as a terrorist organization. An example of that is the statement of a Peruvian former general, Germán Parra, who declared to the press: "the terrorists wanted to destroy the society, the state, and committed acts of terrorism. The military did commit some excesses, but what they were doing was defending the state" (The New York Times 2003).

7 As the TRC declares in its *Final Report*, vol. VI, only the cases of rape were reflected in their statistics, which negatively affects the overall impact that sexual violence actually had. Between the causes that compelled many women to not report their cases of sexual violence, the commission mentions the shame and the guilt of the victims. CVR *Informe Final*, vol. VI, ch. 1.5, p. 274.

8 In relation to this term, it is necessary to say that the English version of the novel written in Spanish translates it into *Indian* (Salazar Jiménez 2016, 80).

label to refer to women of indigenous descent, was frequently mentioned in the victims' accounts of assaults, where soldiers used it as a racialized insult. The word was commonly used during rape beyond its function as an identity marker that establishes power relations between the perpetrator and the victim. Since it was frequently repeated as "stinking *chola*," "lousy *chola*," it was deliberately used to humiliate women. In this regard, the use of sexual violence by all armed groups was intertwined with existing institutionalized and normative violence against women underpinned by other hierarchies of difference, apart from gender, like race and class.

### 2.3 Cultural Practices of Resistance to Contest Violence

Since the 1990s a vast set of literary productions that recount the political violence in Peru emerged together with other forms of expression, such as memorials, drawings, theatre, films, and painted wooden retablos (three-dimensional boxes) (Milton 2014). Ever since the publication of the TRC Report in 2003, the literature has worked intensely to represent the specific impact of violence on women during the internal armed conflict (Ferreira 2015).<sup>9</sup> The fact that most of these works are written by women is relevant to understanding the role of literature in the shaping and expression of suffering and terror over women's bodies. In this respect, literature can be considered as a powerful means of remembrance and healing in post-conflict Peru, since it can generate new opportunities for empathetic understanding and solidarity with the victims.

Thus, by analyzing a literary text, I seek to show how literature may be understood as a form of resistance to gender-based violence and to forgetting, in particular in the aftermath of armed conflicts in the Global South. Compared to poetry or photography, Barbara Harlow emphasizes that:

*resistance narratives go further still in analyzing the relations of power which sustain the system of domination and exploitation. Where symbols and images often fail to elucidate the implicit power structures of a given historical conjuncture, the discourse of narrative is capable of exposing these structures, even, eventually, of realigning them, of redressing the imbalance.* (1987, 85)

Different to the extensive poetry of witnesses that globally emerged in the twentieth century, produced by writers who bore testimony to the

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9 For more profound research of a wide range of literary texts on this regard, see the extensive cartography of literary productions that addresses the political violence against women in wartime in Peru analyzed by Rocío Ferreira (2015).

horrors in contexts of exception (Forché 1993), writers in post-conflict Peru assume an individual commitment to speak for others and to others in an active quest for justice though in the pursuit of a general aim, these narratives of resistance don't "lose sight of concrete aims, grievances and demands" (Casas and Bollig 2011, 3). In a context where impunity for sexual violence perpetrated in wartime is widely associated with tolerance for such symbolic violence in homes and streets in peacetime (Boesten and Fisher 2012), which is intimately connected to a current "insensitivity to the neighbor's suffering" (Segato 2016, 623), these literary texts contribute to collective bonds of affiliation between women. By depicting the complexities of horror and overcoming the silence to which the victims were subjected to, they lead the readers to a collective reflection and action. At the same time, by including the perspective of the perpetrators, they challenge historical presuppositions and mechanisms of subjection, and exhort the listeners to resist forgetting. In her reading of Hannah Arendt, Carolyn Forché underscores the vital importance of resistance writings: "The resistance to terror is what makes the world habitable: the protest against violence will not be forgotten and this insistent memory renders life possible in communal situations" (1993, 46). The "holes of oblivion" that Arendt points out when reflecting on totalitarian regimes are those that the contemporary writings in Peru call to defeat.

#### 2.4 From the Individual Commitment to Collective Reflection

In her novel *Blood of the Dawn*, written in 2013, the Peruvian writer Claudia Salazar Jiménez recounts the stories of three women victims of sexual violence during the armed conflict. Among other literary texts that made visible the violence inflicted on women during the years of political violence in Peru, Salazar's novel can be distinguished by the fact that the actions are narrated from the victims and survivors' perspectives. For this reason, it stands out from previous literary productions where the acts of violence were mostly narrated by an omniscient narrator or another character. The story takes place during the Lucanamarca Massacre in 1983, when 69 peasants were murdered by a Shining Path's incursion in different villages of the district. The region was later attacked by the military forces, which accused the surviving population, mostly rural of indigenous descent, of collaborating with the insurgency. The mental images disclosing the massacre of villagers, including infants and children, and the destruction of a small hamlet by insurgents and soldiers refer to the historical event that left the community devastated (TRC 2003, 76):



*how many were there it hardly matters twenty came thirty say those who got away counting is useless crack machete blade a divided chest crack no more milk another one falls machete knife dagger stone sling crack my daughter crack my brother crack my husband crack mother [...].* (Salazar Jiménez 2016, 10)

This event was representative of the recurring incursions into rural areas in the most impoverished and marginalized regions in the South-Central Andes during the conflict, in which Peruvians were slaughtered en masse, either by members of Sendero or the armed forces. In the novel, the experience of three women, who are subjected to gang rape and imprisonment is exposed not through a linear narrative, but elliptically, through personal confessions and flashbacks: Melanie, a photojournalist from Lima that leaves the city to immerse herself in the highlands and cover the conflict for a newspaper; Marcela, a former social worker who abandons her family to join the Shining Path forces; and Modesta, an Indigenous peasant whose child is murdered by the Peruvian military forces after the incursion in her village. Significantly, the choice of three names that start with the letter “m” for the female characters may refer to the word *mujeres* (women) in Spanish, perhaps alluding to the importance of highlighting the gendered aspect of the violence that they suffered during the conflict. The presentation of the characters’ voices in a fragmented way evokes at the same time the disruption of any unity, integrity, or continuity of conscious meaning. The story is presented by an omniscient narrator in third person and through the three character-narrators. But the story of Modesta is told in second person, shifting from the pronoun “you” to the name of the peasant. The direct address not only restitutes the victim the individuality that the perpetrators stripped her of, it also invites the reader to accompany the character into their repertoire of violence.

In the spiral of violence that the novel recreates, the key episode is the public mass rape of these three women, in which the victims’ voices overlap with those of the perpetrators, that is, the members of the army and the Shining Path. The systematic character of the occurrence of public mass rape in the Peruvian war is depicted in the novel through the rhetorical device of repetition. The passage describing the rape is reproduced almost without alterations except for the way in which the victims are referred to: Melanie as an “anticommunist journalist”, a “bourgeois”; Marcela as a “fucking terrorist”, a “fucking subversive”, and Modesta as a “fucking mountain whore”, a “lousy Indian”. The repetition not only recalls the “excess” of violence that the Peruvian army justified as necessary to preserve national security. It also underlines the process of dehumanization of women in captivity. The three rape scenes begin with the sentence: “She was a lump on the floor.” These ref-

erences and comparison to trash reveal how the perpetrators perceived women's bodies. This interpretation can be connected to the approach of Zygmunt Bauman regarding the production of "human waste" in the contemporary world. In *Wasted Lives* (Bauman 2003), the author reflects on the rising quantities of human beings abandoned and left to die. His thoughts about the underlying strategy of modernity that divides "what counts" and "what does not count" enable connections to the systematic violence exerted on women's bodies in the Peruvian conflict, where women's bodies were reduced to a mass of inhuman objects and even thrown away into the abyss.

What follows is a passage that describes Modesta's rape, the Indigenous woman who is abused by a group of soldiers. The sentences in italics are the voices of the soldiers:

*She was a lump on the floor. It didn't matter what her name was, they were only interested in the two holes she had. Sheer emptiness to be filled up. They knew all there was to know about this lump. But really, she meant nothing to them. Her four limbs were enough: with them she could be held down, immobilized, restrained. They wore black leather boots and khaki clothes, balaclavas covering their faces. It was all the same, she was just a lump.*

*Blows to the face, abdomen; legs stretched out to infinity. Fucking mountain whore. They line up to enjoy their part in the spectacle. No orifice is spared in this bloody dance. Lousy Indian. Only pain in this lump, like a tightened knot that could never come undone... Your turn, soldier, finish the job, finish it off... Give it to her hard, these Indians can take anything... Now you'll see how delicious it is when a sergeant gives it to you from behind, you'll never feed those terrorists again. (Salazar Jiménez 2016, 74–75)*

Once the woman's body is consumed as a commodity that can be used, transformed into a "body-thing" (Giorgi 2014, 201) ("just a lump"), it is ready to be expelled, and even eliminated. To this point, it is possible to establish a link between this systematic act of violence and the representation of the soldiers trashing women with the notion of "trashing" proposed by Daniel Castillo Durante (1999) for the current Latin American context, that is, a mechanism of exclusion of what can "violate" a system. As the quote shows, Modesta is accused of helping the Shining Path. Consequently, by "trashing" her, the army exterminates what it considers to be a threat. However, the production of otherness as a surplus of the social system also implies symbolic and semantic figurative representations. In this regard, Silva Santisteban's work (2008) on the notion of "symbolic trashing" is helpful as it

can be linked to the process of subjection and disposal of the peasant's body. Based on a discourse analysis of Peruvian military testimonies, the author defines "symbolic trashing" as a process that constructs a functional otherness through disgust. In this way, such operation has the only purpose of categorizing certain people as garbage and transforming them into a surplus of the system. As the quote states, the expression "lousy Indian" unveils the idea of disgust that is associated with Indigenous women. The use of the infestation analogy, like the louse, is in a metonymic relationship with other characteristics ascribed to her, like poverty and "Indian", which clearly suggests the perceptions of class and race that the Peruvian society has about the Andean population.

The mass rape in the Peruvian conflict can be explained through the notion of "pedagogy of cruelty", which Segato (2017) uses to analyze the gang rapes in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and in the para-state wars<sup>10</sup>, like the one in Guatemala. Among these conflicts and in wartime, rape has historically been rooted in the same problem: men dominating women and exercising their power by perpetrating sexual violence against them. The anthropologist uses this concept "to name all acts and practices that teach, accustom, and program subjects to turn forms of life into things" (2017, 30). Thus, the idea that rape serves a strategic purpose, that it is used as a weapon of war to destroy communities both morally and physically, to spread fear and terror, should not be underestimated. However, rape was not only used strategically. In fact, rape in the Peruvian war was linked to the existing gender inequalities. As the novel suggests, these mass rapes were not just sexual acts to relieve the soldiers' sexual desires. They also were acted out as a spectacle, and certainly promoted male bonding. Thus, sexual violence can be perceived as producing and reproducing certain hierarchies that are grounded in the existing notions of class, gender, and race (Boesten 2014).

The end of the rape passage leads us to reflect on the different forms of violence against women in the time of war:

*You're still you. Your nails, your hair, your teeth chatter. Your legs tremble, you want to run but can't leave. The food. Quick, the food, they say. Dive into that pot and disappear. Boil yourself up with those chickens. Let yourself turn white white white. It's already white. Deathly white.* (Salazar Jiménez 2016, 77–78)

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10 I use the term "para-state wars" as defined by Segato to refer to "parastate forms of control of life falling over growing masses of people" as a current new form of war in Latin America, what the author calls a "second reality" (Segato 2016, 622). Even though the conflict in Peru differs in many aspects to the two mentioned conflicts, I consider that the sexual abuses committed by all agents involved share the mechanism of turning life into things.

According to the testimonies of rape victims, this act is often recalled as a sort of domestic and sexual “duty” demanded from them while in custody: “they forced me to have sex with him, I had to cook and serve him; they imprisoned me in the kitchen and in that room” (Boesten and Fisher 2012, 2). In the passage, the direct address not only highlights the metonymic relation between women’s bodies and animals to be consumed. By using a “you” that resonates with the reader, it also prompts the audience to reflect on how some forms of violence were perceived as relatively legitimate and connected with existing inequalities.

In general, the novel illustrates the oppression that men exerted on women. However, it also sheds light on women’s capacity for resistance. The following passage is narrated by Modesta, who eventually manages to escape from captivity:

*A good number of us women have decided to work together, to try to get back something, even just a tiny bit, of the lives we led before. We weave ...*

*It’s been almost two years since I got away ... Each time I remember, it hurts. Each time I forget, life seems peaceful. Sometimes we stop our work and another woman comes to join us ... The threads cross over each other and the fabric grows. The weavers saying things. Just between us—we’re all women.<sup>11</sup> That’s the only reason I talk. Another thread. Our voices weaving. (Salazar Jiménez 2016, 96–97)*

As the quote shows, women show their determinacy to resist forgetting through their weaving, a widespread line of work for many Indigenous women. The metaphor of the “fabric” (telar) that grows is not accidental in the passage, since the word “text” in Latin (texere) means “to weave”, “to connect”. It clearly refers to the ability of literary texts to denounce the war atrocities.<sup>12</sup> The political violence did not silence them; rather it seems to have energized them to resist. In fact, the networks of women who denounced the disappearance of their family members provided information and support, and organized public marches against violence during the conflict. However, it is remarkable that women publicly protested against the violence perpetrated against their families and communities, but not against the violence

11 The emphasis in italic is added by the author of the novel in the original.

12 The practice of weaving in violent political contexts has its precedent in the Chilean weavers known as the *arpilleras*. These groups of women, like in the novel, also formed communities of victims-survivors of political violence. During the 1970s, under the regime of Augusto Pinochet, they expressed in scraps of fabrics the “disappearance” of their family members perpetrated by the militaries.

exerted on their own bodies. The quote also unveils that this group of women can only address their trauma among themselves, making a clear reference to their will to counter some discourses that still today try to throw their bodies into the “holes of oblivion”. Hereby, this may be the greatest contribution of resistance literature, namely its ability to enable communities to deal collectively with traumatic experiences for which the victims can hardly find words.

## 2.5 Conclusion

On the basis of the above, the representation of sexual violence in *Blood of the Dawn* shows how the violence perpetrated by members of the armed forces against women during the Peruvian armed conflict was used strategically and systematically. The iteration of the rape scene for each of the three women who belong to different social classes indicates the important dimension and impact of this common practice during war. As the analyzed passage of the rape of Modesta shows, rape was used to physically and morally destroy the Indigenous community suspected of collaborating with Shining Path. Since women, in a strong sexist society like the Peruvian, are perceived as responsible for the reproduction of the group boundaries, they were the target for this type of violence. Moreover, the insults to the Indigenous woman, Modesta, made by the soldiers during the act of rape suggest that rape often reproduced and reinforced long-standing racism and sexism. With this, the physical violence exerted over Indigenous women was intersected with symbolic violence.

Additionally, the literary representation of this form of violence can be seen as a courageous response to the impunity with regard to sexual violence in Peru. Salazar Jiménez’ short novel represents a cultural practice of resistance, a demand for justice and memory. The will to recreate sorority, suggested in Salazar’s text through the community of victims-survivors that deal together with their traumas, clearly aligns with the writings of resisting community seeking to challenge naturalized divisions in society.

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### 3 Which Women's Murders Are "Grievable"? On the Media's Frames and Femicides in Roberto Bolaño's 2666

*Carmen Carrasco Luján*

On over three hundred pages of 2666, Roberto Bolaño describes, with a coldness that recalls forensic language, the discovery of one hundred and ten bodies of raped, mutilated women. These women had been murdered and then abandoned for more than a decade in Santa Teresa, a fictional city based on Ciudad Juárez in northern Mexico. Similar to the real city that the novel evokes, Santa Teresa is a place of passage for migrants on their journey to the United States as well as a destination for workers from the south who come to seek work in the *maquiladora*<sup>1</sup> industry. The victims of sexual crimes, torture, and murder are mostly migrant women who work in the *maquiladoras*, local businesses, or as sex workers. The violence suffered by the women of Santa Teresa is multiple: systemic, symbolic, and subjective. In this chapter I focus on the characterization of these three types of violence according to the definitions given by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008), because it allows us to grasp how the different forms of violence that end the women's lives are intertwined. Subjective violence is visible, it has an agent or "subject". Most of the time the women of Santa Teresa suffer physical violence at the hands of their partners and ex-partners, which in the cases reported in the novel, is what ends their lives. Symbolic violence is "embodied in language and its forms" (Žižek 2008, 1) and has to do with the reproduction of power relations not only through discourse, but also through "its imposition of a certain universe of meaning" (2008, 1). This is precisely what happens in 2666: not only is there a reproduction of the subordinate position of women through jokes (see below), but there is also a framework of meaning that prevents us from apprehending the value of the lives of murdered women, a framework that the novel tries to unveil. Finally, systemic violence is more

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1 A *maquiladora* or *maquila* is a company that assemble, manufacture, or process raw materials and export the finished product, in factories that are duty free and tariff-free. These factories are based throughout Latin America, especially in Northern Mexico, since the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, when multinational corporations from the US were allowed to produce products cheaply employing Mexican workers.



invisible. It tends to reduce human beings to extremely precarious situations without being able to see the face of the perpetrator. According to Etienne Balibar, systemic violence may be understood as a cruelty without a face, creating *l'homme jetable* (a disposable human being), considered as “naturally” produced, it is in fact the kind of violence that blurs the limits between the human and the natural (1997, 415). In *2666*, before visible violence ends these women’s lives, they were already living in extreme precariousness: the process by which these women will end up becoming waste, dumped in garbage cans after having their bodies sexually used, begins long before subjective violence.

By utilizing the style of a forensic study, the novel leaves little space for the murdered women’s agency. In contrast to their narrative silence, however, Bolaño also introduces us to women who organize themselves to resist the patriarchal and neoliberal powers reducing them to the role of society’s waste. In this chapter, I understand *resistance* from a feminist point of view as organized opposition to established powers that seek to maintain the status quo of the subordinate position of women in society, especially when this position is more vulnerable due to an intertwined condition of race and class. In the novel, women gather in nascent feminist collectives and raise their voices against the systemic nature of feminicides in order to reach the authorities with a particular political program. In this sense, they seek out the mass media, with the aim of having their protest heard by the authorities and the population and thus resisting all kind of violence. However, the media will at first ignore not only the protests against feminicides, but also the feminicides themselves.

In our days, the role played by the mass media in mobilizing affects that allow (or shut down) the realization of the protest is undeniable. New media and social networks such as Facebook contribute greatly to the dissemination of topics that will go viral, taking global dimensions, as we have seen in 2020 with the #BlackLivesMatter protests.<sup>2</sup> However, the non-interactive media such as radio, newspaper, and television can in their own way interpret situations and guide the public to certain reactions. That is what Klandermans calls “framing collective action” because it concerns “the processes of consensus mobilization” (2014, 41) of protest according to the information given by the media. As they interpret and define the situation, the media play an active role in social protest.

The media, understood as everything that extends human beings’ ability to access, store, and disseminate certain information, are omnipresent in *2666*. In this chapter, I argue that its representation of the media’s role

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2 About the role of social media in denouncing the state’s apathy for violence in Mexico, see McPherson and Moreno Figueroa (2015).

in relation to feminicides and the protests that denounce these is strategic insofar as it allows the reader to reflect on the way in which the media—among them the written word, that is, the novel—filter reality and become frames that shape our recognition of which lives matter. It is here that we are tasked with interpreting the politics of literature, in the way that Nelly Richard thought of “the politics of art” as “the internal articulation of the work that critically reflects on its environment from their own organizations of meanings”<sup>3</sup> (Richard n. d.). In this sense, understanding the politics of *2666* involves understanding the way in which a topic as complex as that of feminicides in northern Mexico is articulated, with respect to how that topic is understood by its environment, and the way in which the novel disarticulates the discourses—in this case, discourses of violence against women—that underlie the characters’ reactions to crimes. This chapter presents 1) a brief discussion of my interest in a political reading of the novel, 2) how subjective and symbolic violence are articulated, 3) how systemic violence has an impact on the assimilation of women to human waste, and 4) how the novel explains the way in which media frame our affects towards feminicides.

### 3.1 Politicization of Violence in *2666*

There is no strict correspondence regarding the problem of femicide between the fictional city of Santa Teresa, the scene of the crimes in *2666*, and the real city of Juárez regarding the problem of femicide. Still, we cannot avoid the question of the quasi-mimetic representation elaborated by the author, considering that Roberto Bolaño had extensive communication with one of the main investigators of the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, the journalist Sergio González Rodríguez. In fact, he also appears as a character in the novel. A brief reflection on how Ciudad Juárez’s feminicides have been studied in academia and journalism until the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century allows us to better understand the challenge that *2666* offers. During the last years of the nineties and early 2000s, numerous investigations were published that contributed to clarifying (or sometimes mystifying) this complex phenomenon. From semiotics (cf. Segato 2013), sociology and anthropology (cf. Washington Valdez 2005), and journalism (cf. González Rodríguez 2002), these investigations addressed various aspects of the problem, such as the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the consequent precariousness of *maquiladora* workers along the border as well as possible links between organized crime, drug trafficking, and corrupt authorities. Among these investigations, the work of the mentioned Sergio

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3 All the translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise indicated.

González Rodríguez, *Huesos en el desierto* [Bones in the desert] (2002), is important to understanding *2666*, since it can be considered the subtext of the novel. However, the hypotheses about the causes of feminicides differ markedly between the aforementioned journalistic work and the fictional work we study. Sergio González considers three hypotheses: that of two serial killers; that of ritual murders during “sexual and fraternity orgies” (2002, 251) of powerful characters in the city; and that of crimes orchestrated by businessmen and politicians in order to create an atmosphere of insecurity through which to reaffirm their domination. Previous works have argued that the main limitation of these interpretations is that they prevent considering deep political responsibility (Zavala 2016). As we will see, in *2666*, on the contrary, the hypothesis of the serial murderer is discarded and crimes are re-politicized both in their state and social dimensions. For that purpose, the murders are placed in a context of deep complicity between the state and organized crime, neoliberalization of the economy as well as subjective, symbolic, and systemic violence against women.

### 3.2 Subjective and Symbolic Violence

In *2666*, symbolic violence against women encompasses the entire spectrum of represented social relationships. From law enforcement to civil society, the ubiquity of this violence would demonstrate the feminist thesis that sexual crimes are “expressions of a deep symbolic structure that organizes our actions and fantasies and confers intelligibility on them” (Segato 2013, 19). At the beginning of ‘The Part about the Crimes’<sup>4</sup>, when the first bodies appear, law enforcement agencies do not devote the efforts they should to investigating the murders, until they gain visibility in the media. Only from then on will the police dedicate more resources to the investigation, although mainly in order to clean up their own image and that of the city. This disinterest is due, according to the novel, in part to the misogyny within the police force. In this regard, we find a series of jokes by police officers: “Why don’t men lend their cars to women? Well, because there is no road from the bedroom to the kitchen” (Bolaño 2004, 690); and that conclude on the part of an inspector: “women are like the laws, they were made to be broken [raped]” (2004, 691). From this symbolic violence through jokes that amuse the entire police force, they move on to subjective violence, which consists in not dedicating the necessary efforts to solving crimes because they assume that the

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4 The novel is divided into five parts: ‘The Part about the Critics’, ‘The Part about Amalfitano’, ‘The Part about Fate’, ‘The Part about the Crimes’, and ‘The Part about Archimboldi’.

victims were sex workers (and this conclusion is taken from the examination of women's clothing, although this may simply be "a pair of good-quality leather high heels" (2004, 790–791).

As the novel suggests, this symbolic violence is closely related to a physical and sexual violence against women by the police. Indeed, it is described how some of them erroneously accuse a group of sexual workers of one of the murders, and to "punish" them they organize an orgy and rape them in the police precinct (2004, 502). Although other types of police excesses are reported by suspected perpetrators of the crimes, such as psychological and physical torture in the case of men; the rape of women by the police indicates a disregard for sexual rights by the same authority in charge of solving this type of crime. The misogyny of law enforcement is only a reflection of the symbolic violence that permeates all strata of society and in turn leads to subjective and sexual violence. Of the crimes solved (which constitute 10% of the total documented victims), most were committed by the partners, ex-partners, or suitors of the victims. They take possession of female bodies to write and send a message of male dominance. If we consider that crimes against women are "intimately related in direct proportion to the degree of tolerance that each society manifests around them and their level of violence" (Monárrez Fragoso 2000), *2666* shows how symbolic violence is intimately related to the feminicides.

### 3.3 Systemic Violence: Human Waste of Maquiladoras

Bolaño's style in 'The Part about the Crime' is impersonal, similar to a forensic medical report in its description of the corpses. This style aims to recreate the situation in which women live: since the true protagonists are murdered women, their female and subaltern subjectivity "has been wiped off the map, reduced to silence and destroyed" (Asensi 2010, 358). While this style in the novel can be related to the analyses of feminicides in the real city of Ciudad Juárez—they highlight that women were found in desert areas, garbage dumps, riverbanks, and sewers, other relevant information such as identity and social background of the victims is sidestepped in such a way that they are somewhat reified (Monárrez Fragoso 2010)—in *2666*, the narrator is interested in revealing details about the identity of the murdered women. Indeed, despite the impersonal style, the narrator details the social background of the victims: most of them were workers of the *maquiladoras* in Santa Teresa. Among the victims who are not recognized, some are said to have been migrants who came from the South (southern Mexico or Central America) to work in the United States or in Santa Teresa, or sex workers.

Through the victims, the narrator also reveals information about members of their families, most of them also *maquiladora* workers, many of whom deal with extreme poverty, working overlapping shifts that can reach twenty hours a day.

What seems clear is that the crimes' victims in the novel are determined by the precariousness in which they live. One of the characters, Professor Pérez, reassures Amalfitano who fears that his daughter could be a victim of the crimes, by stating that the victims "were usually kidnapped in other parts of the city" (255). Indeed, the victims portrayed in the novel are without fail part of the lower classes, and they live and work in precarious conditions. Indeed, in the *maquiladoras*, they work under conditions of exploitation: "Only one of the *maquiladoras* had a cafeteria for the workers. At the others, the workers ate next to their machines or in small groups in a corner. There, they talked and laughed until the siren sounded that signaled the end of the lunch. Most of them were women." (449) Likewise, there are reports of women being fired from their jobs for trying to organize labor unions (634, 721). The disdain of the *maquiladora* hierarchy for the fate of the workers is shown in the case of two kidnapped girls: when a neighbor wants to alert their mother who works in one of the factories, she does not succeed because "personal calls were forbidden and they hung up on her" (659). She then tries to call the father who works in the same *maquiladora* because the mother, for being a woman at her position, "was undoubtedly considered to be of a lower rank, that is to say *dispensable* at any moment or for any reason or hint of a reason" (659, emphasis added). Women are considered, in the context of their work in the *maquiladora* industry, as "disposable". As machines, they are used for the benefit of the industry and are easily discarded and replaced. Paradoxically, the labor of these women is what sustains the *maquiladoras*: they are a central element of the industry.

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler reflects on the cultural modes involved in the regulation of affects "through a selective and differential framing of violence" (2009, 1). The populations of victims of wars are not considered "grievable" because they have not previously been fully considered "alive". In this sense, there is a politically determined "precarity" that shapes a certain ontological status of populations considered substitutable. While *precarity* is politically induced, *precariousness* is defined in existential terms: it "underscores our radical substitutability and anonymity in relation both to certain socially facilitated modes of dying and death and to other socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing" (2009, 14). We can see that in 2666 the deaths of women are socially facilitated as their bodies, being alive, previously have suffered from a sexually determined precariousness.

The *maquiladora* workers are replaceable since they are considered cogs in a wheel. As anonymous pieces, these women living precariously are murdered and their bodies are deposited in garbage dumps near the *maquiladoras*: “In the dump where the dead woman was found, the remains of the slum dwellers piled up along with the waste of the *maquiladoras*” (449). Thus, these women’s lives are part of a production cycle that leads to the consumption of their body and their subsequent disposal.

### 3.4 Media Frames

The concept of media frames can help us to understand the effects the media produce regarding the issue of feminicides. Media frames are “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, 6). In this sense, these frames modulate “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin 1980, 7), with which the media organize discourses—whether verbal or visual. These frameworks allow events to be shaped in such a way that they are perceived as important or not, depending on the time or the importance they are given and how they are presented. In ‘The Part about the Crimes’, the media play a role in shaping or preventing the protest about the feminicides. The crimes initially do not have a place in the media. In order to show this lack of interest, the narrator stages a criminal who repeatedly urinates in churches, and who gets “more importance in the local press than the women murdered in the preceding months” (459). Even the national press takes an interest in the case of the so-called “Penitent”, sending journalists to Santa Teresa to cover his case<sup>5</sup>. In the aforementioned book, Butler points out that “[o]nly under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear” (2010, 14), and that the media have a decisive role in creating affections that lead us to assimilate those lives as “grievable” or not. In effect, they act as filters that allow public opinion to start taking an interest in the murders of women.

The frames of the newspaper articles about feminicides contribute to diverting the attention of the specificity of the women’s deaths towards the issue of drug trafficking or a possible serial killer. For example, the press accuses Klaus Hass—who is the scapegoat for the murders—of being part of a drug trafficking network, even inventing statements that he never made (673). Some newspapers publish that the crimes are linked to snuff movies:

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5 And he not only gets more attention by the media, but the police spend twenty-four hours a day guarding the city’s churches.

without having evidence, they consider Santa Teresa the capital of this genre. Furthermore, while the press conferences organized by the accused of the murders, Klaus Haas, were attended by numerous media, at the press conference of the Women of Sonora group for Democracy and Peace [MSDP], “only two newspapers from Santa Teresa attended” (625). Here, we clearly see a media frame that consists, on the one hand, in granting truth to the sensationalist hypothesis of the serial murderer and, on the other, in obstructing the information of women who have a political agenda and precise complaints regarding the handling of feminicides by the authorities. It is not, however, until the MSDP appears on television accompanied by the clairvoyant Florita Almada that they have a space to make their claims known to the public.

In this way, we are shown how “media play an important role in the diffusion of protest” (Klandermans 2014, 41), because soon afterwards, the women of the MSDP manage to call a march through the streets of Santa Teresa (Bolaño 2004, 758). Thus, we are shown that in ‘The Part about the Crimes’ the media play the role of creators of affect and diffusers of intelligibility schemas of the main events (for the characters in the novel). Here, I understand intelligibility schemas, again following Butler, as “the general historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable” (Butler 2009, 6), these schemas condition and produce norms of recognizability that will lead in turn to the full recognition of a life as worthy of importance<sup>6</sup>. In this sense, through disseminating selected information about the murders, the media allow or prevent the creation of intelligibility schemas. They are depicted as gatekeepers in the recognition of said lives in the long term. Hence, according to this part of the novel, the death of women does not become publicly important until a seer appears on television denouncing in a mystical trance the authorities’ lack of interest in these murders.

The newspaper journalists in *2666*, for their part, are attributed the role of investigating what is happening in Santa Teresa and offering interpretations to the readers of the novel. Sergio González, a journalist from Mexico City, travels to Santa Teresa to cover the issue of the “Penitent”, and it is there, fortuitously, where he learns about the issue of feminicides. While discussing the crimes with a sex worker in Mexico City, González tells her that her lack

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6 In her previous work, *Precarious Life*, Butler stated that “schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death” (2004, 146), especially in war contexts. These regulatory schemes are sadly distorted by the media monopolized by big corporations. For Butler, pictures of war that show the extreme precariousness of people can be a decisive instrument in mobilizing the collective rejection of war. The author considers one of the current functions of the humanities to be precisely to open ourselves to regimes of sensitivity that allow us to apprehend the human lives in its precariousness.

of interest shows an absence of “professional solidarity” (583), to which the sex worker replies that according to his own narration, the women were *maquiladora* workers, not sex workers. González then “as if struck by lightning, glimpsed an aspect of the situation that until then he had overlooked” (583). In other words, the aspect González sees is that women were murdered for being *maquiladora* workers and not for being sex workers, or precisely for *not* being sex workers, for not adapting to one of the permitted models of women for male satisfaction; and, on the contrary, willing to be part of the industrial economy.

Something similar occurs in another part of the novel, ‘The Part about Fate’: the eponymous character, an African-American journalist, comes to the border to cover boxing fights and decides to independently investigate the crimes. This character indirectly gives us some interpretations of the murders when he involuntarily listens to a character’s reflection on the differentiated value (for public opinion) of life and death of people according to their origin:

*In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example, at least twenty percent of the merchandise on every slave ship died, that is the persons of color who were being transported for sale, to Virginia, say. And that didn’t get anyone upset or make headlines in the Virginia papers . . . , But if a plantation owner went crazy and killed his neighbor and then went galloping back home, dismounted, and promptly killed his wife, two deaths in total, Virginia society spent the next six months in fear, and the legend of the murderer on horseback might persist for generations. (338)*

When he asks himself about this disproportion, the mentioned character concludes that “the persons of color killed on the ship did not belong to society, while . . . the murderer on horseback from Virginia did . . . , that is, what happened [to him] could be written, it was *legible*” (339) (emphasis added). That is to say that, as Butler points out: “there are ‘lives’ that are not quite—or, indeed, are never—recognized as lives” (Butler 2009, 4) and that this recognition passes through “the filter of words” (Bolaño 2004, 337)—through the schemas that allow crimes to be understood, to be *legible*.

### 3.5 Conclusion

“[N]obody pays attention to these murders, but the secret of the world is hidden in them” (439), one of the (female) characters affirms. As if it were a puzzle, the secret of the world is that nobody pays attention to these murders—or not the due importance—, that there are lives that matter



and that are mourned, and others that do not, because there are no criteria or frames that allow us to apprehend them and recognize them as important. The three kinds of violence—subjective, symbolic and systemic—are intertwined and mutually nourished. The symbolic violence is nevertheless described as a gateway to other kind of violence, since is an endemic problem in Santa Teresa. As I argued in the beginning of this chapter, resistance is a reaction against established powers that contribute to maintain a subordinate position of women. This position is of course, linked to factors such as ethnicity and class. But there are not only the concrete facts that maintain these women in such a position, and resistance begins directed at symbolic violence when the feminists complain about the attention given in the television to a clairvoyant's statements on the feminicides, while structural issues such as the possible collusion between police officers and the criminals are not discussed. In this way, the feminists want to highlight the problem of the creation of frames and bias of information that prevent us from understanding the feminicides as a whole. We have seen how the novel reflects on the way in which the reaction to feminicides is mediated by the ability to recognize those lives as important, and that this recognition in turn needs the intelligibility of those lives as fully “alive”. The media, through their frames, favor or obstruct this recognition. The ethical challenge of the novel then consists in thinking of the media—and the literature among them—as a practice that redistributes the sensible (I think of Rancière's *Distribution of the Sensible*), that is, that reconfigures our field of perception by exposing phenomena that are hardly assimilated by general attention. The novel allows us to grasp the importance of “the filter of words” (Bolaño 2004, 337) in the recognition of the lives of women in all their precariousness and in preventing us from perceiving these lives as worthy of value.

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## 4 **Sexual Violence as an Invisible Process in White-Collar Work**

*Isabel Boni-Le Goff*

A growing body of literature examines how the pervasive effects of sexual harassment and sexual violence affect women at work. Scholars particularly insist on the sexual violence as a key contributor of professional discriminations and gender inequalities. This chapter aims at shedding light on a paradox: sexualization and sexual harassment frequently prevail in qualified male bastions (Sommerlad 2016), but while professional women should rely on a significant social and cultural capital (Adkins and Skeggs 2006) to fight against these discriminatory situations, most cases of sexual violence seem to be surrounded by silence and ignorance in these professional environments.

This chapter is based on the comprehensive sociological definition of gendered violence developed by feminist scholarship: this definition encompasses “using force and threat in various forms and intensity in order to make women behave or not behave in a certain way” (Hanmer 1977, 72), insisting on social control as the central purpose of violence against women. Such a theoretical framework posits that a continuum of violent practices takes place at the individual and collective level in public and private arenas and plays a key role in (re)producing gender relations of power. By linking together women’s various routine experiences of violence, including sexual violence, it offers a comprehensive and systemic approach (Lieber 2008; Debauche 2016). In this comprehensive approach, I define sexual forms of violence as “the unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power” following Kensbock, Bailey, Jennings, and Patiar (2015, 37). Such a comprehensive approach takes into account the particular role sexual violence plays in producing women’s objective and subjective experience of violence and oppression through different routine practices—evaluation, exploitation, exclusion (Gardner 1995). However, these routine practices of sexual violence appear underestimated: firstly, some of them are minimized and seen as “simple remarks and jokes”; secondly, they are made socially invisible as they are thought as a private and intimate matter into which no stranger should intrude.

As far as sexual violence in the productive labor relations is concerned, scholars have mainly favored the study of low qualified service jobs and clerical work where women appear particularly vulnerable because of precarious job positions, (see for instance Adkins 1995; Rogers and Henson 1995; Kensbock et al. 2015), while white-collar occupations have been less put under scrutiny.

Indeed, a large body of research has already shown how qualified occupations are gendered and that they involve practices of hegemonic masculinity, especially in the professional field of management and business activities (Kanter 2008; Wajcman 1998; Connell 2005; Messerschmidt 2014). In particular, professional men display routine practices of homosociality involving emotional detachment, competition, and sexual objectification of women combined with hetero-normative attitudes (Bird 1996). Nonetheless, sexual violence in white-collar occupations has been less documented for at least two reasons. Firstly, professional women and women executive managers may have problems to identify themselves as victims and to engage in any kind of protest: a meritocratic discourse prevails in their professional fields, with a strong collective belief in the gender-neutral recognition of merit and competency (Acker 1990; Boni-Le Goff and Le Feuvre 2017). Secondly, professions and qualified occupations appear deeply embedded in patriarchal practices which are in return likely to be kept unnoticed (Witz 1992). In the legal professions for example, studies have shown the high level of routine sexual violence in a context of “hypersexualized corporate culture” (Sommerlad 2016, 73), going with a general indifference and the “politics of ignorance” (Gross and McGoey 2015) of professional institutions.

This chapter expands over various social processes in management consulting, a white-collar environment in which the question of sexual violence gradually emerged during Ph.D. research on gender regimes. This professional environment is indeed a very competitive one with a professional ethos particularly praising nomadic experts deprived of any emotional ties. In such an environment sexual violence and the hypersexualized corporate culture may reach a higher level than in other professional areas of management. However, management consulting has similarities with management in general, even if certain processes are amplified in it. Kanter’s pioneer contribution on management in a big corporation earlier showed how emotions and sexualization could also be implicitly deeply embedded in routine management (Kanter 1977). The empirical research is based on a mixed-method approach study mainly conducted between 2007 and 2013, with a web survey answered by 1,630 French consultants belonging to twenty-three different consulting firms (both local and global firms, from less than ten

employees to more than 10,000 employees). The chapter will mainly tap into the qualitative data: a long-lasting ethnography in two consulting firms and several participant and non-participant shorter observations in a total of 6 other consulting firms, seventy-two biographical interviews with sixty-eight management consultants or former consultants (thirty-nine women, twenty-nine men). Six longitudinal follow-up interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2018.

Firstly, the chapter aims at understanding in what kind of situations sexual violence might appear, while shedding light on how sexual violence produces power relations through exploitation, control, and exclusion. Secondly, it expands on different processes involved at the micro, meso, and macro social level in making sexual violence invisible and examines the dynamics of women's individual and collective strategies of resistance.

## 4.1 The Routine Experience of Sexual Violence

During the different ethnographic sessions and interviews, sexual violence in management consulting gradually appeared as a discrete but rather frequent phenomenon with a pattern of individual and collective sexual violence towards women. I'll first show how the silence faced during fieldwork revealed a social taboo before exploring the main professional situations and contexts that foster sexual violence.

### 4.1.1 Silence and Discomfort During Fieldwork

The different experiences of sexualization and forms of sexual violence emerged with great difficulties during fieldwork. They would be expressed in very indirect and implicit ways in a "by the way" manner and they often triggered a sense of unease and discomfort hovering during interviews. I became gradually aware of these non-verbal expressions while being unsure of their meanings. I also became gradually aware that during my own professional experience as a management consultant I would ordinarily not make a fuss about sexist and sexual jokes and other sexual "incidents". This helped me comprehend how women interviewees often tended to downplay different experiences of sexual violence.

Junior women professionals were particularly prone not to discuss feelings and experiences, while senior consultants' narratives would more often tell about sexual violence than junior ones. Indeed, the interviews took place before the #MeToo Movement (Cousin et al. 2019) and it appeared that most of women consultants did not feel entitled to name their experience

as sexual harassment or sexual violence. There were frequent expressions of unease during interviews while telling about sexual violence such as lowering one's voice, unfinished sentences, expressing worries about confidentiality, or telling stories in the third person ("did not happen to me but to a friend of mine"). Moreover, women interviewees often downplayed the sexist atmosphere in which their professional socialization took place. While they acknowledged that jokes and other discursive practices could be an obvious attempt to tarnish women's professional reputations (especially when they had positions of power, were partners, or about to become partners), interviewees often denied any serious consequences related to these practices. These elusive talks indirectly acknowledged that sexual violence was a social taboo while prevailing as a routine practice of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Bird 1996).

#### 4.1.2 Expressing Power Relations by Practicing Sexual Violence in Daily Encounters

Some professional situations appeared to be a favorable ground for sexual violence. As Kanter (1977) and Wajcman (1998) have shown for other areas of managerial work, practicing management consulting means meeting and interacting a lot: with colleagues as well as with clients. The job routinely involves understanding and adjusting to various kinds of organizational contexts through intense communication and relational work; it may even require settling for a while in your client organization offices. The relational aspect of the job seems to multiply situations of potential sexualization and episodes of sexual violence. However, our empirical material stresses that most of the unwanted sexual interactions reported during interviews happened in the context of relations of power between the perpetrator and his victim(s). Sexual violence between men and women co-workers without hierarchical asymmetry was less frequently reported.

Two major professional situations seemed to expose women consultants to more frequent sexual violence: interactions involving junior women consultants with male colleagues in senior positions (senior managers or partners) and interactions with clients. Women's narratives included different practices ranging from "minor" misbehaviors, disrespectful comments to physical threats and physical violence. On a total of thirty-nine women interviewed, seventeen reported repeated sexualized, sexual, or sexist comments and jokes that created a hostile environment (Saguy 2003); seven women spoke about repeated unwanted sexual invitations from senior managers or from clients; four about collective harassment; one about a collective rape attempt on one

of her female colleagues from a group of clients. Besides, our empirical data confirmed the hetero-normativity prevailing in management and the business environment (Connell 2005), with limited cases of sexual harassment between men: only two male interviewees mentioned having experienced and/or witnessed sexual violence between men (in each interview, a senior partner being mentioned as a “junior male consultants’ serial harasser”).

### 4.1.3 A Matter of Context

Indeed, interviewees offered a mitigated picture when they told about their experiences of sexual violence because it was a matter of context: while reported incidents were more frequent in certain types of interactions involving power relations, they also took place more often in certain occasions and places than in others. They prevailed more in the context of men’s large numeric dominance, especially during consulting projects for industrial and economic “male bastions”—such as the banking industry or the construction industry. Social events and drinking occasions with colleagues or clients were also frequently mentioned as moments when women consultants were more frequently exposed to different forms of violence. These informal social occasions are rather frequent and of professional significance in the consulting industry. Two types of social events are organized on a regular basis: social events with teammates and colleagues of the firm and events with clients and business prospects. Internal events with colleagues officially aim at bringing “fun” and helping the sharing of business information. Consultants also attend external events with clients or potential clients in order to develop business relations and secure new projects.

These events often go with a loosening of professional etiquette and potentially high level of drinking. They can be compared to the “backstage activities” studied by Pruvost (2008) in her ethnographic work in French police precincts and during which she witnessed many cases of sexual violence towards women police officers. Many reported incidents by women consultants were related to this particular backstage atmosphere, which seemed to make men consultants or clients easily indulge in sexualized interactions and inappropriate behaviors with women consultants.

Dorothee’s<sup>1</sup> narrative illustrates the form of sexual harassment to which a woman professional can be exposed during a commercial social event with corporate clients.

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1           25 years old, Master’s Degree in Philosophy, Paris Business School, junior consultant, ConsultOrg, single, no children.



*I found myself at a dinner party, well, it wasn't a dinner party ... it was a cocktail party. Organized by one of our prospects ... so I was dressed ... I had a little cocktail dress on ... I was the youngest one of course, and for the whole evening ... It was one of our prospects, he was someone who had really listened to the speech, so I was happy, he spent most of the evening with me, he was running a big company in the industry. He was just hitting on me all night, but, no, it was very hard to live with. So, at first, I was of course very happy, ... (but) it was just very embarrassing, because all night he tried to ... It was very embarrassing because, as I didn't know anybody in the evening ... and there was this gentleman who was there all the time, he tried to take me home at the end, it was embarrassing because I was representing the company.*

Dorothee's narrative illustrates how sexualized harassment is a way for men managers to express relations of power. Their practices involve three different aspects with objective and subjective consequences on women: exploitation, control, and exclusion (Gardner 1995). The exploitation is on two levels: first Dorothee appears to be exploited by her managers who use her esthetic and erotic capital (Sommerlad 2016) to win the favor of prospects. Then because the client's sexual harassment is a way to attempt to obtain a sexual profit in exchange of a professional benefit for Dorothee or Dorothee's consulting company. Control, as the situation of harassment prevents Dorothee from discussing with other clients. Exclusion, because of the dilemma Dorothee faced after this professional event. Should she call the client again while exposing herself to additional quid-pro-quo harassment or would she give up and face negative professional consequences? At the end, she opted for the latter.

Dorothee appeared particularly uncomfortable while telling me about this experience which she labeled as "a very unpleasant incident". As this violence took place in an ambiguous situation—she attended this social event for professional purposes, but the general atmosphere was casual, she wondered whether she had committed a professional "faux-pas" or not, because of her own behavior and dress code. Her reaction and sense of guilt was symptomatic of how women professionals can routinely be exposed to the "whore stigma" (Pheterson 1986). Her narrative illustrated the way ambiguous social contexts and backstage activities could particularly be conducive to violence and abuse.

## 4.2 The Social Construction of Ignorance and Resistance

How could frequent sexist and violent practices in a qualified occupation be made invisible, while professional women seemed to hold very privileged positions with important economic, social, and cultural capitals? From Dorothee's and other interviewees' narratives the social construction of ignorance around sexual violence in the workplace becomes salient. The previous section has shown how sexual violence takes place on specific occasions and in specific locations. This affects the way sexual violence may be witnessed or not. In this second section, we analyze various social processes that intersect at the micro, meso, and macro social level to keep sexual violence invisible. Then we explore women consultants' strategies of resistance against sexual violence.

### 4.2.1 How Is Sexual Violence Made Invisible?

At a micro social level, the invisibility of sexual violence is tightly linked to consulting professional practices and to the importance of consultants' professional façades and legitimacy. In many narratives, women's denials or euphemisms about sexism and sexual violence appeared to be related to a certain conception of professionalism. They expressed the need to "remain professional" sticking to the professional ethos of emotional detachment. For instance, Dorothee kept calling the business prospect who harassed her "this gentleman" in a half-ironical way, meagerly expressing anger or any violent emotional response while telling me her story. Implicitly or explicitly, women consultants did not want to be seen as victims, usually joking and laughing even if they told about very disturbing events. For example, at the beginning of her career, Claudie<sup>2</sup> was kept locked up in a locker room in which walls had been covered by pornographic images by a group of male employees of a client's factory; but while telling about this unsettling event, she was adamant that this should not be taken too seriously and that she had been right to treat this "incident" as a funny trick.

Women interviewees do not only maintain their sense of professionalism by denying to be victims of violence. They also adopt active strategies to circumvent or try to control the level of violence, often by escaping the situation rather than denouncing it. Dorothee did not confront her potential client and harasser, while Laura<sup>3</sup> kept at a distance while witnessing a man-

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2            39 years old, Engineering School, Master of industrial organization, partner, ConsultStrat, married, no children.

3            25 years old, Business School, Junior Consultant, ConsultStrat, in a relationship, no children.

ager harassing and physically aggressing a women colleague during a social event.

Moreover, the denial of sexual violence may also be fostered by paradoxical injunctions with which women consultants are very often confronted concerning their professional practices. On the one hand, professional rhetoric insists on the necessary gender-neutral posture, embodiment, and attitudes in interactions with clients (Boni-Le Goff 2012). On the other hand, in the dress code and esthetic standards conveyed by consulting firms, women are often explicitly expected to “do gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987), to perform specific esthetic labor (Mears 2014), and to pay particular attention to their appearance (Bitbol-Saba and Dambrin 2019; Boni-Le Goff 2019).

Navigating between these contradictory expectations, women consultants may therefore lend themselves to gendered esthetic practices, forms of sexualization of their appearance, and forms of seduction. They are then caught up in ambivalent feelings: they may experience the feeling of being at odds with a double standard—as they are treated as “ordinary professionals” and at the same time as gendered bodies—and they may also feel guilty when confronted to forms of sexual violence with the perception that they might have “provoked” sexualized interactions.

These micro social processes are embedded at a meso-social level in organizational structures and practices, as organizations and economic institutions actively “do gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987; Acker 1990; Acker 2006; Connell 2006) with written rules and images materializing specific body and emotional norms. Consulting firms are especially very careful with the institutional façades they convey through their websites, with many pictures of offices, individual and group portraits of consultants during work or social events. These images produce specific professional body norms and convey some ideal-typical models of the expert’s body which are not gender neutral (Boni-Le Goff 2019).

The way women try to deal in a “professional way” with various experiences of violence by downplaying or denying them also relates to macro social processes and gender norms that implicitly make women accountable for their own safety in different public places (Pheterson 1986; Lieber 2008). For instance, when women consultants attend any social event in their professional environments, they are expected to anticipate that sexualized interactions and different forms of harassment may occur, especially when this event involves alcohol and the loosening of professional etiquette.

Women’s comments on men’s inappropriate behaviors during these events often indirectly blame the victims. Indulging in drinking with colleagues is understood as an unprofessional attitude for women. Various pro-

cesses at the micro, meso, and macro sociological level are hence involved in the way sexual violence is made invisible in the consulting workplace. Professional norms appear to play an important role by imposing a strong emotional detachment and preventing women from expressing themselves as vulnerable or harmed persons and as political subjects.

#### 4.2.2 Breaking the Silence?

Women professionals do not always keep silent, but also find means to resist and protest against different kinds of asymmetrical professional situations, gendered inequalities, and forms of violence. Their strategies of resistance mainly take collective forms through the constitution of groups and networks of informal sociability, on the scale of a company or on a broader level. These groups mobilize around a common agenda to address inequalities in careers and the mechanisms that (re)produce the glass ceiling (Blanchard et al. 2013). Despite the soft repertoire of contestation inspired by neoliberal feminism (Budgeon 2011; Rottenberg 2018), these networks of women managers produce forms of political awareness. They can lead to collective strategies for influencing policies on equality/diversity and the advancement of women as well as for reporting the most proven cases of sexual violence.

Still a minority, women who got involved in collective initiatives formed a significant part of the corpus: a quarter of the women interviewed participated more or less regularly in one or more networks, registered at the level of a company or more globally. The older women also seemed to be the most heavily involved in these groups, since 7 out of 10 women were over 35 years old. As Alexandra's example shows (see Box 'Alexandra: Concrete Actions and Small Victories'), commitments in these networks build over the course of one's career and decisive experiences can be viewed as forms of 'militant careers' (Blanchard et al. 2013) even if they remain modest.

#### **Alexandra<sup>4</sup>: Concrete Actions and Small Victories**

I met Alexandra twice: the first time while she was a manager in a large strategy consulting firm and pregnant with her third child; the second time after she left the consulting firm to become an executive in a large banking group. During these two meetings she talks about her investment in different women's networks (simple auditor at events or member

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4 First interview, 35 years old, Business School, Manager, ConsultStrat, married, two children, pregnant with her third child. Second interview, 36, Head of Strategy, banking industry, three children.

involved in initiatives to promote women's careers). Her internal women's network has initiated a "lobbying work" to make the processes of access to partnership more transparent. It has committed to actively supporting two women to be co-opted into the partnership together. She believes "in concrete actions" and notes the strong resistance of senior male managers towards women's access to positions of power. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, she expresses herself more freely on the working atmosphere of her former company: she relates the sexual harassment practices of a senior partner against female colleagues and assistants, and their recent denunciation in the context of the indictment of French politician Dominique Strauss Kahn for rape. The recent ouster of the partner who committed violence is, in her opinion, a "small victory" in which her network played an active role.

But these militant careers are in some respects very problematic, both because of the social position occupied by these professionals and because of the forms of antifeminism, discreet or assumed, that constitute a backdrop to the working environment in consulting.

The interviews evoked the historically and socially constructed obstacles that can prevent women in higher professions from expressing a feminist point of view. This anti-feminism particularly targets the collective initiatives of women consultants, taking the form of denigration and mockery ("your Tupperware meetings!"). It can also take a more aggressive turn. This is what two young consultants—Caroline<sup>5</sup> and Hasnae<sup>6</sup>—experienced when they showed their support for the women's network in their company. Caroline expressed her bewilderment in front of what she thought was "irrational" but clearly appeared as men partners and senior managers' open resistance:

But these are irrational reactions! It's irrational! Partners stop us in the corridors: "But what is this, the war between the sexes?!"

These "backlash" reactions (Faludi 1991) show that the denunciation of inequalities and gendered power relations is clearly perceived as a threat to the status quo by some of the male colleagues.

In several interviews, the interviewees reported or took antifeminist statements on their own behalf. Sylvie<sup>7</sup> thus expressed great suspicion about the possible "excesses" of collective initiatives, not without contradiction since she will nevertheless report having taken part in events such as the Woman's

5 28 years old, Business School, Senior Consultant, ConsultStrat, single, no children.

6 29 years old, Business School, Senior Consultant, ConsultStrat, single, no children.

7 43 years old, Ph. D. in biology, engineer, former partner ConsultInfo, executive director in a large industrial company, married, 4 children.

Forum. Her words signaled a fear of the very virulent reactions of male colleagues: “we saw, right away, when we talked about this, the reactions of men: but what are they going to do, the suffragettes, they’re going to get together!”.

Thus, the process of denouncing sexual violence is by no means automatic or easy. They come up against manifestations of antifeminism and women’s fear of professional retaliation.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Systemic sexual violence in white-collar work is involved in the production of gender inequalities and of robust glass ceilings. In the case of management consulting, women consultants appear to routinely face different forms of sexual violence of various intensities. These experiences are more frequent when women are a very small minority, pointing that sexual violence can be used by men in order to collectively produce social bonds while excluding minorities. However, several intersecting processes tend to make this violence invisible, with professional and organizational norms promoting emotional detachment and compelling women to keep silent. Women’s ability to resist the oppressive mechanisms of sexual violence in qualified occupations like management consulting depends on the way they manage to develop collective mobilizations.

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## 5 The Normative Framework of Intimate Partner Violence: Mechanisms of Differentiation from Others

*Susanne Nef*

Intimate partner violence has long been considered a private problem. However, the women's movement and feminist research have contributed to politicizing this so-called private domain, drawing attention to violence perpetrated behind closed doors and its gendered nature (Pease 2019). Indeed, as Crenshaw and Bonis (2005) conclude, one achievement of the women's movement is the recognition that intimate partner violence is part of a broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a group and that needs to be addressed politically, legally, and socially. This acknowledgement led to wider recognition of this formerly private and covert violence as a violation of human rights and prompted international resolutions and conventions holding individual nation states accountable for protecting and supporting survivors<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, despite these advances at a legislative level, intimate partner violence continues to be depoliticized or culturized: it is typically ascribed to specific groups, namely migrants and the working class (Karlsson et al. 2020; Pease 2019), despite studies demonstrating that intimate partner violence is prevalent across all social strata (BMFSFJ 2014). This gap sheds light on social problematization and has led to controversies related to patterns of interpretation and categories that have been symbolically transmitted—the typical social problematizations. The traditional patterns of interpretation of intimate partner violence point to a *migrant background* categorized by a *lack of education*. In Western Europe, survivors who are classified as middle class—the dominant social group—tend to be excluded from public discourse about violence (Karlsson et al. 2020; Schröttle 2011) and consequent political and legal interventions (Pease 2019). Indeed, Gloor and Meier (2014) note, in the Swiss context specifically, that women from the middle and upper classes (and men in general) are the most difficult to reach target group. Accordingly, they do not benefit from available support (i.e., they rarely appear in women's shelters) nor from inclusion in scientific studies.

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1 In the following, the term *survivor* is used. This term focuses on ideas of coping and resistance. However, if I address the dominant conception of *victimhood*, I use the term *victim*.

In this paper, I illustrate how the absence of the middle class in public discourse and interpretation of patterns of intimate partner violence relate to these typical social problematizations and how it may determine how survivors (women and men<sup>2</sup>) perceive violence. Central to this is how traditional patterns of interpretation and problem categories contribute to the normalization and individualization of intimate partner violence and thus influence the perception, interpretation, and coping strategies of survivors who are identified as members of the middle class. Thus, this research makes an important contribution, as these survivors' perceptions of violence are widely unknown.

This work is grounded on the viewpoints of feminist violence research. The research aims to expand the concepts and analyses of violence by including structural and cultural components in addition to the symbolically transmitted and subjectively defined concepts of violence (Brückner 2002). This can be achieved by applying a qualitative approach to the life views, the interpretation of violence, and the subjective level of experience (Böttger and Strobl 2002).

## 5.1 Methods and Terminology

In this chapter, I draw on the results of my study of intimate partner violence based on 18 interviews conducted throughout Switzerland from 2015 to 2019. They were analyzed using qualitative reconstructive methods, in line with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). The thirteen women and five men interviewed had all experienced intimate partner violence in heterosexual relationships. Their ages ranged from 20 to 72 years, and they were in relationships that were ongoing or had ended prior to the interviews. All had been socialized as either male or female. They were born in Switzerland or the European Union and identified as Swiss/European nationals. Most had secondary education and the rest had studied at higher vocational or university level. It became clear that the interviewees all self-identified as members of the middle class. For example, Ms. Mueller<sup>3</sup> positioned herself as being from “the higher or richer class” (paragraph 20).

The following terms are relevant to this analysis: violence, interpretation, frame of orientation, dominant conceptions, and coping strategies.

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2 All interviewees were socialized as male or female and identify with their assigned gender. In the following, I therefore refer to a heterosexual two-gender model and use the terms *woman* and *man* accordingly.

3 All names were replaced by pseudonyms.

Violence, in this study, is understood as a phenomenon that does not exist in a fixed manner but is classified in social processes of negotiation and interpretation and embedded in power relations (Staudigl 2012). The social-theoretical analysis is based on the empirically founded model of violence modalities that I developed (see Nef 2020). According to this model, violence not only refers to (physical) experiences but above all, to social and intersubjective processes of interpretation. Consequently, violence must be understood as a social construct that a society constantly renegotiates (Staudigl 2012). Central to this is that in these negotiations dominant conceptions represent value judgments and norms. In relation to the present study, these can be, for example, dominant conceptions about what a couple relationship must be like.

In the social sciences, interpretations are not individual opinions or hypotheses—they are supra-individual, as they reduce the complexity of everyday experience and organize the world into common schemes of possible ways to solve problems. Because specific interpretations may diverge due to the biographical course or individual narrative perspectives, they depict the social reality of the respective subjects when confronted with a problem of action. Hence, social reality only manifests through the interpretation itself (Herma 2009, 99). These interpretations are, in turn, embedded in frames of orientation (Kavemann et al. 2016). These frames consist of values and norms that have become hegemonically established. In this chapter, these frames are referred to as *dominant conceptions*. Therefore, not only violence itself is embedded in relations of power and domination. Moreover, it is assumed, that the respective experience of violence and its interpretations are not only subjective but interactively negotiated and socially situated (Kavemann et al. 2016; Staudigl 2012). Survivors use individual coping strategies to deal with violence. Defining *coping* is complex, as different forms of dealing with a situation can be employed simultaneously. Moreover, it is important to note that coping strategies are not to be understood as strategies that pursue some larger plan or clear goals. They are merely ways of surviving and, as a concept, simply refer to ways of dealing with an actual situation, incident, or experience (Bauman et al. 2008).

## 5.2 Survivors' Perspectives and Applied Coping Strategies

In this section, I first outline the dominant conceptions about intimate relationships, violence, and victimhood from the survivors' perspectives. I then describe how these dominant conceptions relate to coping strategies and how this connection results in well-rehearsed routines and a dynamic

that gradually gels into patterns that contribute to normalizing and individualizing intimate partner violence. As an illustrative example, I show this dynamic along with the pathologization as a central means of coping that emerged throughout the interviews. These explanations illustrate that survivors and their means of coping are shaped by two intricately interwoven dominant conceptions of intimate relationships: a) dominant conceptions about intimate relationships, violence, and victimhood, and b) dominant conceptions of intimate relationship expectations shaped by the power dynamic of perpetrator and survivor.

### 5.2.1 Dominant Conceptions of Intimate Relationships, Violence, and Victimhood

Dominant conceptions of intimate relationships, violence, and victimhood were instrumental in shaping the interviewees' process of meaning-making and developing their ways of coping and survival. For instance, throughout the interviews, the most dominant idea about intimate relationships is that they are an essential aspect of life. This is reflected in comments that stressed that one *has to have* and *has to maintain* a relationship. From the perspective of female survivors, relationships are associated with social status—they bestow higher status upon a woman than being single does, and the desire to retain this status leads female survivors to stay in violent relationships:

*I think we [women] are partly victims ... in the sense of letting too much happen to us ... I noticed that the protection or other prestige I had, just because I had a partner, was immense [long pause].*  
(Ms. Mueller,<sup>4</sup> paragraph 46)

Moreover, the different ways in which the relationships began and proceeded, as described in the interviews, suggest several dominant conceptions of relationships:

*And that was a moment when I thought, "Come on, take the plunge! Now it's your turn to dive into a relationship." And that's how it actually started with him. And it all happened extremely quickly. So, he also pulled the strings, and, at that moment, I was very happy that someone was there for me. Someone to make decisions. Someone to take over everything. Yes, someone who was not afraid of tasks. Someone who carried you in his hands, who did*

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4 Ms. Mueller, Swiss, 42, mother of two children, degree in management, 8-month relationship.

*everything for you. Offered himself for everything, yes. And then I was happy, so to speak. I could let things slide and not always have to take everything into my hands and somehow do it myself and take responsibility, so ...* (Ms. Bertrand,<sup>5</sup> paragraphs 14–15)

Dominant conceptions of relationships are also linked to the roles one has in a relationship and to the duties associated with them:

*That's just the way it is, and if you have a family and are in a relationship, ... then this becomes almost like a job, or a ... so, any self-determination is gone, and instead there are just duties. This is how you do it, this is how you do it, and this is what you do, and this is a family.* (Ms. Gerber,<sup>6</sup> paragraph 66)

Such conceptions of a relationship serve as a frame of orientation (“how a relationship has to be”): “... a relationship simply [has] to work” (Ms. Gerber, paragraph 36). The result is that interviewees demand a great deal of themselves as they see themselves as responsible for making their relationships work.

This burden of responsibility is clearly illustrated in the case of Mr. Bischoff. He remained in a violent relationship, as he felt responsible for his wife due to his understanding of gender roles and relationship dynamics. For him, this included maintaining the relationship at all costs and taking care of his partner, whom he said was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and alcohol dependency. When she became violent, he reacted by withdrawing. For example, he moved small objects from the apartment to the basement, gradually withdrawing from the common bedroom, and slept in his car to be rested for work the next day. She, in turn, reacted aggressively, and the violence increased, with her smashing objects that belonged to him. Finally, one day when he was leaving to walk the dog after an argument, she stabbed him in the back, leaving him hospitalized:

*That was the cut-off-day for me, because she attacked me with a knife and because it was simply finished for me ... That was simply the point where I could not do it anymore ...* (Mr. Bischoff,<sup>7</sup> paragraph 18)

The decisive factor in his decision to leave was the clear departure from his dominant conceptions of a relationship. For him, it was impossible

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5 Ms. Bertrand, Swiss, 43, mother of one child, IT specialist, 18-year relationship.

6 Ms. Gerber, Swiss, 48, mother of one child, yoga instructor and sales manager, 10-year relationship.

7 Mr. Bischoff, Swiss, 56, foreman, 31-year relationship.

to reconcile the notion that someone who loved their partner would stab them with a knife. Nonetheless, he reported still being burdened by his decision to end the relationship and questioned whether his actions could be interpreted as a failure to take responsibility for his wife and their relationship. This *burden* was shared by other interviewees. They shared their feeling of not having invested enough and of having failed to maintain the relationship. Central to this is the observation made by interviewees that their partners described them as incapable of relating when they ended the relationship. The interviewees incorporated this kind of pathologization into their self-description. Another form of pathologization was also evident across cases: the pathologization of the violent partner. Cross-cases, a gendered pattern became apparent: male survivors explained that their partners had borderline personalities, while female survivors described their partners as narcissists.

With regard to dominant conceptions of violence, the most prevalent was that intimate partner violence was a concept to which the interviewees were not able to relate their own experiences. For them, *real* violence was physical violence, especially of the type associated with visible injuries and requiring hospitalization. In their perception, what they experienced was *not real violence*. Thus, it was downplayed or excused. For example, some interviewees minimized their own physical abuse by noting that their injuries did not require hospitalization or, if hospitalization was necessary, by ascribing the injury to an accident, such as an “unfortunate fall” (Ms. Novak, paragraph 202). It became clear that the abuse they experienced was not immediately interpreted as violent but characterized as merely one of life’s adversities, accidents, or unfortunate circumstances for which nobody was to blame. Hence, violence was described as unintentional. By objectifying violence as one of life’s adversities and bestowing legitimacy upon it, interviewees interpreted their experiences either as *not quite violence* or, in comparison with *others*, *not even violence at all*.

This comparison with *others* is closely linked to dominant conceptions of victimhood. Indeed, there is a complex connection between the essentialist notion of *real* violence and its disavowal and the projection onto others (*real victims*) (Nef 2020, 327; Reuter 2002, 13; Scherr 1999, 51; Velho and Thomas-Olalde 2011).

Ms. Mueller’s case exemplifies how these interwoven interpretations become powerful; she had been separated from her partner for about five months. Before ending her eight-month relationship, she had been a single mother for eleven years. Ending the relationship meant leaving her home with her children “in a hurry”. They were still living in a women’s shelter at the time of the interview. She found the decision to leave difficult. To her, the

family home was a status symbol as was the community in which they lived. She described herself as a very strong woman, a self-image that precluded seeing herself as a victim. She associated victimhood with weakness, a migrant identity, and being less educated.

It is obvious to Ms. Mueller who the *real victims* are. They are women who are complicit, who *allow it to happen*. They are women with a “low IQ” and “no education”. Above all, as she goes on to clarify, real victims are “others”. She does not see herself as “belonging to that group” (paragraph 72), nor to any other group of victims who fit into traditional patterns of interpretation, namely those with a “migrant background”. In her words, “women ... from other cultures” (Ms. Mueller, paragraph 84).

The offshoot is that these interviewees found it nearly impossible to see themselves in the role of a victim:

*Domestic violence ... for me, it's something ... that women allow to happen to them: [it happens] to women who have a low IQ, who have no education, [and] who are, yes, weak.* (Ms. Mueller, paragraph 72)

In all cases, dominant conceptions of intimate partner violence were linked with dominant conceptions of victimhood. These include the notion that the status of victimhood entails involving social/state institutions, for example, reporting the violence or pressing charges. In other words, it is only through this report, for example, and thus the social/legal recognition that someone becomes a victim in the interpretation. Therefore, victimhood is not associated with the experience of violence *per se*. Moreover, it differed greatly depending on the gender of the survivors. The men felt they needed to fight for recognition because, due to their gender, social recognition and victim status were generally denied. The women, meanwhile, expressed the need to distance themselves from the image of the “typical victim” to maintain their self-image. Ms. Gerber, for example, emphasized that she would not press charges because she did not want to be “portrayed in that way” or let others “make her a victim” (paragraph 28).

The cross-case pattern is that the interviewees employed gendered categories, such as strong/weak, woman/man, and the like, thereby rearticulating the social patterns of interpretation associated with these terms. Importantly, however, they do not see these categories as applying to them. Female interviewees, in particular, distanced themselves from supposedly female attributes, emphasizing instead their own strength, emancipation, and independence, whereas male interviewees described themselves as being “open to injury” (Popitz 1992), something socially recognized as a female trait.



What also became apparent was how survivors interpreted violent experiences as non-violent, thereby normalizing their experiences. Dominant conceptions of intimate relationships became the backdrop against which the interviewees (re)interpreted their experiences as non-violence. That is, even when the dynamics of violence changed, the experience continued to be normalized by differentiating it from dominant conceptions, as the following quote illustrates:

*For me, it [violence] somehow became a part of the relationship then: ... our relationship was just like that. (Ms. Novak,<sup>8</sup> paragraph 82)*

Ms. Novak had been with her partner for about six years. They were married but had been separated for two years at the time of the interview. Her case is typical of perceiving violence as non-violence. Instead, the violence is framed as merely a “*relationship problem*”:

*Well, I never considered it as violence, as domestic violence. I kind of considered it a relationship problem ... Even if somebody was talking about [intimate partner violence], I never felt [like my situation was being] addressed. (Ms. Novak, paragraph 184)*

It is noteworthy that Ms. Novak gives meaning to her experiences and reaffirms that violence and relationships are mutually exclusive. Describing her partner’s violent actions as making her feel insecure or uncomfortable, she recounts having admonished herself not to “make a scene” (paragraph 202). For her, this meant not *exaggerating* what she experienced. Part of this process included her partner bringing her the bathroom scales weekly or sometimes daily to weigh herself, and her weight and figure were then assessed. These interventions escalated markedly and assaults also took place—he pushed her, for example. The fact that she then made “no scene”, in her words, led her to write off such incidents as “accidents”, even when she was hurt. When she was pushed or her partner threw objects at her, she interpreted his actions as just a “reflex”. Indeed, she downplayed violent situations, using idioms such as her partner being “on edge” or that “his temper got the better of him”. Her semantics offer an insight into her meaning-making processes. This is further reflected in her euphemistically qualifying situations in which she was financially and socially controlled by her partner as “someone looking after me”. This illustrates that the violence experienced was not merely physical but extended to financial, social, and mind control (e.g., making her control her weight). For Mrs. Novak, however, it was central that as soon as they were

“outside” in public, her partner had been the “nicest man”. In her words, they had a “nice relationship outside” (paragraph 120), as illustrated by this quote: “As soon as we were outside, he told me that I was pretty, that I looked good, and then he always hugged me and kissed me” (paragraph 120).

As Ms. Novak’s example shows, violence experienced in relationships is imbued with the interpretation of non-violence and is (re)interpreted as merely a relationship problem. Moreover, this frame of orientation is continuously readjusted by, for example, relativizing dominant conceptions after each instance of violence. A typical adjustment tactic reported by the interviewees was to try to please the partner. In Ms. Novak’s case, this was done by constantly trying to lose weight. Other tactics adopted by the interviewees involved intensifying their relationship work by, for example, trying to be even more attentive and supportive of their partners’ wants and needs.

Furthermore, the example of Ms. Novak demonstrates how interpretations of violence are informed by the underlying dominant conceptions about relationships. However, there is also a correlation between these concepts and the strategies survivors used to deal with the situation: When everyday life is reorganized and the relationship becomes problematic or even impossible, survivors develop coping strategies. This can be seen in Ms. Novak’s case. Due to sexual pressure from her partner, she struggled increasingly with everyday life, partly due to a lack of sleep. Giving in to his advances, however, enabled her to at least function on a daily basis. The downside was that this coping simultaneously created a new relationship dynamic in which her own needs were put aside. She thus oriented her actions toward his expectations of what a “healthy relationship” entails. Her coping ended up normalizing his violation of her physical integrity and sexual self-determination.

### **5.2.2 Dominant Conceptions of Intimate Relationship Expectations Shaped by the Power Dynamic of Perpetrator and Survivor**

I previously illustrated that, on the one hand, survivors normalize their experiences and thereby retain the feeling of being able to act. On the other hand, this normalization successively turns violence into an ordinary experience. In brief, dominant conceptions of intimate relationships are intricately connected to expectations within relationships. These are shaped by the power dynamic of perpetrator and survivor and result in normalizing and individualizing patterns of intimate partner violence. This process and the extent to which relationship ideals are used to normalize violence are illustrated in the example of Ms. Spindler.

Ms. Spindler<sup>9</sup> experienced psychological and physical violence from her partner of 19 years. At the time of the interview, they had been separated for a year and a half. Her case exemplifies how violence becomes a regular part of life and how normality is established by drawing on dominant conceptions about intimate relationships. Ms. Spindler met her partner as a teenager, and they married after nine years, but the relationship dynamics changed with the birth of their first child. For the couple, a “traditional assignment of roles”, as Ms. Spindler called it, was very important, which is why she quit her job to devote herself to caring for their children and the household.

After work, her partner would check whether and how she had done the household chores. His daily accusations of improperly performing housework chores intensified, and she reacted with compensatory clean-ups shortly before he was to return home:

*Yes. That became more frequent ... Before he'd come home, I'd quickly clean up everything and put everything away, because ... otherwise he'd start complaining again. Yes, and then at some point he threw a chair at me, but I think he missed on purpose.*  
(Ms. Spindler, paragraph 32)

This interview passage illustrates the dynamic of anticipating or trying to anticipate what may potentially trigger violent outbursts. This anticipation shaped the ordinariness and omnipresence of violence, even when the violent partner was not present. As a result of this mind control, Ms. Spindler began to structure her day around her partner's (surprise) inspections:

*I increasingly noticed I was panic-stricken in case something wasn't right again, but at the same time, I knew that it could never be right anyway. Sometimes I thought—when he was on a business trip or something—that when he comes home, I'll do this and that and that and that, and I'll make over there nice and there nice and there nice, but I actually knew full well that it would never be right.* (Ms. Spindler, paragraph 34)

This dynamic gradually settled into patterns, and the couple eventually followed their well-rehearsed routines: Ms. Spindler did the housework according to her partner's wishes and cared for the children, while he controlled her in the evenings by conducting comprehensive inspections. His disparaging tone and shouting became their only communication. The dynamic became even more intense when he began throwing things at her. In our interviews, Ms. Spindler continued to relativize this development by

emphasizing that the objects either missed or were not heavy or large enough to cause her serious harm. Even when beatings were added, she immediately put the new dynamic into perspective: “[B]ut not in such a way that I would have had to go to hospital or anything like that. Nothing like that” (Ms. Spindler, paragraph 34).

Their couple’s dynamic was further charged by her partner, who justified his actions based on her supposed “lack of love”: If she truly loved him, he reproached her, she would know that her behavior bothered him and would know what he expected from her. She anticipated and preempted his criticism and thus, violence began to occupy her mind every minute of the day:

*That’s actually something I’ve always thought about, too. I’ve always thought, yes, I have to, I have to do the housework even better. And I have to, if he doesn’t want to talk, then I have to leave him alone. Even if he still doesn’t want to talk, I just have to go away, I have to leave him alone; I have to accept that.* (Ms. Spindler, paragraph 45)

After moving to a larger house, Ms. Spindler decided to try even harder to be “nicer” and “more understanding”. She adopted his viewpoint and tried not to provoke him with her behavior: “Yes, and I, well, I’m just not a good housewife; he’s quite right, and maybe I can do better (?) Yes” (Ms. Spindler, paragraph 45).

Ms. Novak and Ms. Spindler have in common the way they normalized their respective dominant conceptions and organized their daily lives accordingly. In each case, their ways of coping strengthened the asymmetric power dynamics. Consequently, the dynamics of violence changed considerably and became part of the routine of the relationship. Thus, it became “normal” in Ms. Spindler’s relationship that her partner used the *if-you-loved-me* argument every time she failed to meet his standards. With this argument, he put psychological pressure on her. She, in turn, adapted accordingly. This shows the power dynamic at play, wherein his erratic expectations were elevated to the guiding norm in their relationship. Efforts to achieve the partner’s ideals and organize the relationship in accordance with those ideals dominate the quotidian life of the relationship.

### 5.3 Discussion

This paper examines how survivors interpret and cope with their experiences of intimate partner violence. Their interpretations are strongly

influenced by dominant conceptions of intimate relationships, violence, and victimhood. These dominant conceptions led interviewees to interpret love and violence as mutually exclusive. Moreover, the prevalence of societal conceptions about the importance of being in and maintaining a relationship prompted interviewees to employ a variety of means to cope with violence in their attempts to retain the relationship.

I identified three ways in which middle-class survivors cope with situations of intimate partner violence. First, survivors do not conceive of their own situation as intimate partner violence. In their understanding, intimate partner violence is something that affects poor, weak, or migrant women but not them. Thus, a distinction is made between the constructed “others” (Velho and Thomas-Olalde 2011) who are affected and the self who is not. The resulting paradoxical consequences are that middle class survivors often normalized and trivialized their experiences of violence. For them, victimhood applies exclusively to these constructed *others*. This was illustrated by the finding that when the interviewees were confronted by third parties or violence prevention campaigns, they separated themselves from the *other victims*. The findings also reveal a complex relationship between the interpretation of *real violence* (i.e., physical violence, especially if it results in visible injuries and hospitalization) and its denial and projection onto others (i.e., *real victims*). Hence, the need to affirm that one is *not a real victim* or to project the concept of true victimhood onto others is a way of coping with the lived experience of violence in a society that stigmatizes survivors of violence as weak and passive (Glammeier 2011). The *real victims* are coded as the *socially accepted victims*. This finding is supported by Kersten’s study in which the author reconstructed connections between victim status and categories of difference (with the main focus on gender) (Kersten 2015). Hence, the interweaving of survivors’ interpretations of violence, traditional patterns of interpretation, and problem categories can lead to the above-mentioned paradoxical consequence that women and men from the dominant social group do not consider themselves *real victims*. On the one hand, this categorization reinforces the constructions of self and other that may lead to further divisions and hierarchies, which could be construed as another form of violence (Galtung 1990, 295). On the other hand, survivors have to explain to themselves what they have experienced in order to remain capable of acting. In this process of meaning-making, a central means of coping emerged throughout the interviews—pathologization. When interviewees cannot interpret what they are experiencing, they pathologize it. By doing so, something inexplicable can be made accessible or even comprehensible. According to Reemtsma (2008), this type of pathologization—as a general interpretation of violence

and not specifically related to intimate partner violence—is the last coping strategy left that can explain the inexplicable.

Second, survivors integrate personal experiences of violence into their lives by modifying their own behavior. In particular, they ascribe a socially and personally accepted meaning to the violence they experience. This meaning is always subject to a cultural repertoire in which love relationships and intimate partner violence are per se mutually exclusive. From the survivors' perspective, coping strategies, such as Ms. Novak's acquiescing to her partner's sexual demands, might be the only possible path for survival at the time. Nevertheless, this strategy tends to maintain the status quo, allowing violence to dominate a relationship and to (re)produce power asymmetries. Furthermore, a strategy such as acquiescing may be understood as a form of normalization because it does not deny female sexual availability but rather regulates it. In this way, Ms. Novak's approach merely serves to support gender norms such as the desire of reassurance from the partner about compliments on attractiveness or the perceived female sexual availability (Villa 2011, 99).

Third, survivors mobilize dominant gendered conceptions about the nature of relationships and sexuality. This helps survivors distinguish what is intimate partner violence and what is not. For example, in a romantic relationship, it is *natural* to be sexually available as a woman, and therefore violations of sexual integrity are not considered transgressions in this context. Although these strategies serve to cope with and survive violent situations, they ultimately exacerbate the asymmetric power dynamics in relationships and consolidate violence. As a concrete example, a gendered dimension was also evident in the desire of Ms. Bertrand and Ms. Novak. They constructed their experience as being looked after and cared for. This desire to have a partner who looks after you is one of the dominant gendered conceptions of intimate relationships (Gunnarsson 2016).

Central to these interpretations, dominant conceptions, and coping strategies are the mechanisms of differentiation across cases. This also becomes clear in the pathologization presented above; this type of pathologization interprets the act of violence as an individual transgression and thus individualizes and depoliticizes it. In short, the structural dimension of violence is dethematized. It is also clear from other studies that these mechanisms of differentiation are not restricted to self-perception. As Khazaei (2019) shows, individuals who identify as Swiss or European nationals received different treatment when they reported intimate partner violence. The structural anchoring of these mechanisms is evident, as underscored by Philips (2009) who concludes that these mechanisms of differentiation from *others* supports the tectonics of the patriarchal structure of the dominant society. Thus, the

dominant understanding of intimate partner violence obscures the violent character of gender relations within the middle class of society (Song 2009).

Again, this can be exemplified by pathologization; the survivors explained their experiences and the violence in psychological terms. Male survivors characterized their violent partners as borderline personalities, while female survivors described their partners as narcissists. In so doing, they individualized their experiences by reducing the violence they experienced to an individual act of violence. Moreover, violence was typically de-gendered—in the sense of not being structurally embedded in a violent gender order—and therefore depoliticized.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Middle-class women and men are considered invisible in the discourse of intimate partner violence. With the insights into how dominant social groups interpret and cope with violence, I illustrated (1) how traditional patterns of interpretation and problem categories contribute to the normalization and individualization of intimate partner violence, and (2) how violence is subject to intersubjective processes of negotiation and interpretation. These interpretations revealed complex processes of social differentiation and hierarchization. Furthermore, I discussed how these processes lead to paradoxical consequences. The consequences of such a distinction are divisions and hierarchies. From a survivor's perspective, victimhood is a concept that applies exclusively to *other* cultures and social classes. The self appears neutral and universal and tends to be understood as non-violent (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). I conclude that it is this mechanism of differentiation that may explain why social groups such as the middle class are considered a difficult to reach target group by social workers and researchers.

My findings support an urgent recommendation that intimate partner violence be addressed as a social and structural problem across social distinctions. Prevailing concepts of intimate partner violence and the mechanisms that lead to differentiating dominant class survivors from *others* must be critically discussed. Feminist research and, by extension, social, political, and legal discourse of violence must focus on survivors' perspectives. Scholars must likewise draw attention to the structural character of these interpretations. This will enable a comprehensive description and thus understanding of violence as a social construct throughout a society structured by complex social processes of differentiation and hierarchization. Further analysis and empirical research are needed to specifically address the interplay of privilege and discrimination in the context of intimate partner violence.

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## 6 Tracing the Violence of Hegemonic Silence: The (Non-)Representation of Women's Suffrage in Theories on Swiss Democracy since 1971

*Katrin Meyer*

In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the fragility of democratic rights is experienced, criticized, and discussed in many ways worldwide. Indeed, there is a long tradition in theories of democracy to highlight the fact that states of emergency and exception are the ultimate threat to the democratic participations of broad sections of the population. But not only states of exceptions can be at odds with democratic rights. Also legal democratic structures can be considered undemocratic as it shows in the case of Switzerland where Swiss women were excluded from suffrage rights on a national level until 1971. This exclusion not only did last for decades, but also was formalized and reproduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by various legal procedures, authorized by the parliament, the executive power, the jurisdiction, and last but not least, the Swiss male voters who denied their female co-citizens their equal political rights by several popular votes on the cantonal and national level.

Given this long tradition of a normalized exclusion of Swiss women from formal political rights, it seems to be especially important to understand more about the political, i.e. *democratic* conditions that made this exclusion possible. This is an important issue for today's normative democratic theories that are committed to justice and advocate against *any* forms of political inequality and exclusion. Theories of Swiss democracy should therefore carefully analyze and reflect on the political conditions of exclusion *and* inclusion of women's suffrage in Switzerland before and after 1971. How did the political integration of Swiss women change the institutions of Swiss democracy? How did it affect basic normative principles of Swiss democracy such as people's sovereignty, direct democracy, constitutional rights, and international law? And finally, what can we learn from this history in order to develop a critical awareness of current political exclusions and ways to overcome them?

These questions were the starting point of my research on how Swiss women's suffrage is represented, analyzed, and examined in mainstream, i.e. representative and influential theories on Swiss democracy today. As a Swiss citizen and raised by a mother who did not have the right to vote until she was 42 years old, my theoretical interests are also personal. How can I feel

at home in democratic institutions if they are not learning from historical exclusions and engaging in critical reflections on how to overcome current and possible future marginalization of social groups? My expectation was to find some answers to my questions and hopes in Swiss academic mainstream literature. I focussed my readings on selected handbooks, student manuals, surveys, and introductions, published between 1974 to 2020, that are representative of research and teaching on the Swiss political system in Swiss-based political science and legal studies (such as Aubert 1974; Aubert 1987; Tschanen 1995; Kölz 1992; Kölz 2004; Linder 2005; Klöti et al. 2006; Linder et al. 2010; Kley 2013; Kley 2015; Ehrenzeller et al. 2014; Vatter 2014; Suter and Kreis 2016; Diggelmann et al. 2020).

What I found in many of these texts was something unexpected, namely—silence.<sup>1</sup> It seems that political and legal studies on Swiss democracy—beyond the small field of women’s history and feminist political theory—are not deeply committed to the issue of Swiss women’s suffrage. They implicitly frame the problem of the exclusion of Swiss women as either a problem of and for women, but not for Swiss democracy in general, or as a problem, that has contingent historical roots and which is not systematically connected to the fabric of Swiss politics today.

The aim of this paper is to challenge both of these views and to offer a critical perspective that makes this silence speak. I will argue that the silence can be captured as hegemonic and that it implies hidden effects of violence on a discursive, epistemic, and political level. Hegemonic silence is violent insofar as it is violating the personal dignity of women, making them discursively *inexistent*, treating their experiences and perspectives as epistemically *irrelevant* for gaining knowledge on Swiss democracy, and finally by *negating* their constitutive power for politicising conflicts. The intersection of discursive, epistemic, and political violence also sheds light on the mechanisms of further exclusion of silenced social groups in Switzerland such as racialized groups, refugees, undocumented migrants, poor people, trans\* persons, and many others who do not represent the normalized and “generalized” subject of Swiss citizen and thus are treated as invisible and irrelevant.

As a first step, I will develop my perspective on the silence in mainstream theories on Swiss democracy today by contrasting it with the constellation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that can be framed as hegemonic silence on women’s *political exclusion*. In a second step, I will identify the forms of hegemonic silence on Swiss women’s *political inclusion* in contemporary

1 I am grateful to many discussions with my colleagues Andrea Maihofer, Noemi Crain Merz, and Fabienne Amlinger on the cultural, political, and social implications of silencing Swiss women’s suffrage in Switzerland that reach far beyond the political discourse on democracy.

mainstream political theories. Its *systematic implications* and *violent dimensions* are discussed in the third and fourth parts. I will argue that breaking up with hegemonic silence on women's suffrage is indispensable for any critical reflection of democracy that strives for inclusive and just institutions and thus, is relevant beyond the case of Switzerland and Swiss women.

## 6.1 Hegemonic Silence on Women's Suffrage in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Bringing silence into voice implies some methodological assumptions. One is the hermeneutic insight, that silence is only silence—that is an *expression of meaning*—in the context of a discourse. In order to identify a silence as such, it has to be acknowledged that what is not said, could be said, because it is intelligible—or at least could be made intelligible by a critical perspective. Thus, naming a missing speech as silence is linked to critical hermeneutic analyses that are reading and comparing various texts and discourses, practices and politics, to explore what could be said at a time by whom, and is not, and what this silence could mean in a given context.

It is my claim that silence on women's rights in western politics is always a *hegemonic* silence, giving expression to a widely shared consensus in society regarding gendered power relations and gender norms that are intersecting with race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability. If political hegemony refers and relies, after Antonio Gramsci, on a cultural or “civic” consensus that is based on shared values and world views (Nonhoff 2019, 544f.) and, which, following Judith Butler (Butler 1997), has to be maintained by everyday discourse and practice, then hegemonic silence is stabilizing and reproducing this consensus exactly by the form of *not* speaking about it. Instead of launching discussions and exposing justifications that could bring the contingent, already always precarious status of social consensus to the fore and raise doubts and critical questions, silence becomes a form of reaffirming the normal and consensual state of the art. Hegemonic silence is thus depending on practices of *silencing* critique and resistance which remain invisible and unnoticed.

In the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's suffrage in Switzerland is treated in the Swiss constitution and in theories on law, democracy, and the state mostly with silence. As an example of many, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Swiss philosopher and politician Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler passionately advocates for what he calls the “sovereignty of the people”, without ever referring in a single one of his texts to women's political rights (Meyer forthcoming). His silence echoes the position of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who does not mention

women's rights in *Contrat Social*, his foundational text for modern democracy. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about what this silence means. Indeed, there are too many philosophical texts, from Aristotle to Hegel and Kant that make the discourse behind the silence explicit. They deliver justifications why (free) women should be subordinated or completely excluded from the realm of politics, be it due to their specific female virtues, their social or economic position, their lack of reason, their (biological) nature, or their reproductive tasks (Appelt 1999). These gendered reasons are intertwined and overlapping—sometimes also in conflicting ways—with justifications along with class, religion, ethnicity, and ability that excluded further social groups from the political and social rights of (Swiss) citizenship and that are in part working until today (Redolfi et al. 2009; Dos Santos Pinto 2019; Michel 2015; Kristol and Dahinden 2020).

Even if we interpret explicit misogynistic explanations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a sign that women's political exclusion was not as evident as it looks like from today's point of view, i.e. that it had to be justified especially after the decline of the *ancien régime* and the establishment of the norm of democratic egalitarian structures and the growing feminist struggles for women's rights in Europe and USA (Mesmer 1988; Wecker 1998; Maihofer 2001; Gerhardt 2019; Voegeli 2019), there can be no doubt that the formal political exclusion of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a tacit consented hegemonic practice. The political institutions worldwide, in nation-states as well as in colonized countries, quasi "naturally" deprived women from their political rights. Exceptions to this general rule happened only on a local or regional level (Braun Binder 2012, 149; Hangartner 1994, 133).

In the Swiss constitution of 1848 resp. 1874, women's exclusion from politics was considered so evident and was broadly acknowledged that it had not to be mentioned as such. Article 4 stated that "all Swiss are equal before the law": "Alle Schweizer sind vor dem Geseze [sic!] gleich." (Kley 2013, 500). This only could be understood as "all Swiss *men* are equal before the law". Such was the judgement of the federal court in 1887 against the appeal of the jurist Emilie Kempin-Spyri who claimed equal rights for women by referring to article 4 (Mesmer 2009, 88 f.). The implicit masculinity was also true for article 74 of the Swiss constitution from 1874 that stated that each Swiss ("jeder Schweizer") has the right to vote under certain conditions (Kley 2013, 506). Based on article 74, Swiss women were excluded from general suffrage without any need for the male gender to be explicitly articulated as a basic condition for political rights.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Swiss women's organization strongly advocated for women's suffrage; in 1929, with support of unions and the left

parties, they deposited a petition for suffrage rights at the government with 248,000 signatures. But the Federal Council actively blocked the political claim for more than twenty years and as one newspaper remarked “buried it silently” (Linder et al. 2010, 268; in detail Voegeli 1997, 71–105), obviously backed up by wide parts of the society who supported conservative gender roles. Consequently, when in 1959 there was, finally, a first popular vote on Swiss women’s suffrage on a national level, those who opposed the vote did not have to speak out loudly against it (Linder et al. 2010). They could trust the gendered political order in its hegemonic power that invariably supported continuity. And they were right. Women’s suffrage was denied by two-thirds of the Swiss male voters in 1959.

Despite a select few Swiss legal scholars who were explicitly in favour of women’s suffrage—such as Carl Hilty in the 19<sup>th</sup> or Werner Kägi in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—an ongoing silence on women’s suffrage in mainstream academic theories on Swiss democracy can be observed even in the 1950s and 1960s. When in 1963, the famous Swiss professor of constitutional law Hans Huber talked to a German academic audience about the strengths and weaknesses of Swiss democracy, he did not say a single word about Swiss women’s missing suffrage rights (Huber 1971). Whatever his personal reasons may have been, whether Huber found the exclusion reasonable, “natural,” or maybe just irrelevant, his silence speaks volumes about the normalization of Swiss women’s political exclusion still at that time.

This picture changed completely on February 7, 1971, when Swiss women’s right to vote was granted in a popular vote by two thirds of Swiss male voters. The reasons for the—compared to other countries—late establishment of women’s suffrage in Switzerland are widely analyzed in feminist political theories, gender, and women’s history studies. Most of those studies refer to a combination of conservative gendered cultural and political norms, direct democratic institutions, and nationalist masculinist politics in the context of World War Two that were all together hampering gender equality and women’s political rights; (Blattmann and Meier 1998; Hardmeier 1998; Hardmeier 2004; Ludi 2005; Mesmer 2007; Stämpfli 2000; Studer 2003; Studer 2014a; Studer 2014b; Voegeli 1997; Wecker 1998). Some reasons for the change in the hegemonic constellation since the 1960s were related to what now is counted as the politically “normal” gender order in Switzerland that came along with increasing political rights granted to women in many cantons since 1959. Another reason was the emergence of a new hegemonic identity of a Swiss citizen that was—at least in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland—among others built in the opposition to “foreigners” and “guest workers” (“Gastarbeiter”) and formed strong separation lines between “the

Swiss people” and “the other” that motivated Swiss men to recognize Swiss women as fellow citizens (Mesmer 2007, 315).

How then, we might ask, is this new constellation regarding Swiss women’s suffrage reflected in the literature on Swiss democracy today?

## 6.2 Hegemonic Silence on Swiss Women’s Suffrage in Democratic Theories Since 1971

Surprisingly enough, the introduction of women’s suffrage in Switzerland is treated in many of the analyzed mainstream political theories *after* 1971 in a very similar way as *before*, that is: mostly with silence. *Silence* does not mean that the words “women’s suffrage” are not evoked at all in a historical survey of Swiss democracy. Instead, I define as “silence” any form of representation that is capturing women’s suffrage in Switzerland in such a minimal way that its relevance for Swiss democracy today is left blank. By silencing the topic of women’s rights, we are told a story about Swiss democracy in which women’s exclusion *and* inclusion have no weight.

In the literature I analyzed, Swiss women’s suffrage is treated with silence in different degrees. Some texts ignore the topic completely (Aubert 1987). Others mention it briefly as one element in the history of equality (Ballmer-Cao 2006). Only a few texts dedicate its own chapter or a subchapter to the issue (Kölz 2004, 783–796; Schmid 2020, 300–313; Linder 2005, 61 f.).

Even if presented as an integral element of Swiss democracy, most texts present the issue of women’s suffrage only shortly and superficially. Seldomly, they provide information about political alliances and struggles that treat the issue of women’s suffrage as a genuinely political one, omitting the depiction of the women’s movements as socially and politically important actors. This picture often becomes a contrasting example of the representation of the workers’ movement as an influential and central political force in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Suter and Kreis 2016). Another wide literature gap is the influence of Swiss women’s suffrage on the political agenda, the organizations of parties, and the political personal in parliament. If mentioned at all, the political effects of the suffrage right since 1971 are mainly discussed from the perspective of individuals in regard to quantitative data (as an exception Senti 1994; Kley 2013, 408–410)—and therefore unfortunately as a change for the worse. Women’s suffrage is the reason for the lower voter turnout after 1971 (Aubert 1974, 99; Vatter 2014, 134) as well as for the lowering of political party membership since that year (Ladner 2006, 333).

Framed in this way, the effects of women's suffrage on constitutional rights and gender equality in civil law after 1971 are not reflected. In fact, granting equal political rights for men and women in 1971 made it possible to establish equality between men and women as a constitutional right in article 4 in the Swiss constitution in 1981. And based on article 4, the Swiss federal government could force the canton Appenzell-Innerrhoden in 1990 to grant Swiss women's suffrage on a cantonal level. Thus, the principle of gender equality trumped the sovereignty of the canton in an inner-cantonal issue, which was a radical break with a basic principle of the Swiss federal system.

Furthermore, general reflections on democratic concepts and principles from the perspective of women's rights are rare in mainstream political theories. Even if the democratic exclusion of women is acknowledged as conceptually and normatively problematic, the issue is not explained or analyzed any further (Schwingruber 1978, 75; Brühlmeier and Vatter 2020, 381 f.). A paradigmatic example is the 550-pages-long in-depth study on a normative understanding of direct democracy in Switzerland that is reflecting on women's suffrage only in a small, one-page-long paragraph under the title "Nachlese zum Frauenstimmrecht" ("gleanings to women's suffrage") (Tschannen 1995, 47–48). The rhetoric of appendix in this title underlies that the history of women's suffrage is only marginal for developing a concept of Swiss democracy.

And least, and consequently to the above described forms of silencing women's rights, (feminist) studies on women's suffrage are mostly ignored in the analyzed mainstream literature.

Despite these lacks and voids on an analytic level—and seemingly in contrast to it at first glance—, all mainstream theories on Swiss democracy that I consulted fully support Swiss women's political inclusion and interpret their former exclusion as a democratic deficit and moral wrong. Vatter explicitly advocates this position by criticising the defeat of Swiss democracy regarding the political integration of Swiss women and foreigners (2014, 30 (FN 2), 372, 548, 552). Other authors call Switzerland before 1971 a "half democracy" (Linder 2005, 55; Linder et al. 2010, 683). Even Aubert—though not without ambiguity—describes the political exclusion of Swiss women as a "petit 'scandale'" (1974, 67).

This position is not self-evident, considering the fact that many conservative groups in Switzerland were reluctant to introduce women's suffrage until at least the 1990s. In contemporary academic writings, however, the formal political inclusion of Swiss women seems so obvious that the issue is not even worth wasting too many words on it. Such rhetoric of silence is anticipated by Swiss legal scholar and politician Max Imboden. In his famous



pamphlet *Helvetisches Malaise* from 1964, he ends his chapter on missing popular rights ('Fehlende und fragwürdige Volksrechte', 289–293) calling on Swiss men to finally eliminate their Helvetic male privilege that no one believes is justified anymore “as silently and as quickly as possible”. (Imboden 1971, 293 – my translation) Indeed, shortly after these words were written, Swiss women’s suffrage was established “silently and quickly”. The silence has dominated mainstream academic and political discourses ever since.

It is obvious that the hegemonic implications of this silence are radically different from those in the 19<sup>th</sup> and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, both of which reproduce a consensus on women’s political *exclusion*. Today, the silence captures the evidence of their *inclusion*. Nevertheless, this silence implies seminal problematic dimensions as I will elaborate in the next chapter.

### 6.3 Who Constitutes the Demos?

In order to decipher the silence in many Swiss mainstream theories on Swiss women’s suffrage in more detail, it is helpful to focus on its systematic aspects. Can the meaning of hegemonic silence be interpreted not only as an expression of what is evident and normal, but also what is unimportant and irrelevant?

Indeed, there is good reason to pursue this interpretation of irrelevance further. Much of the literature that I analyzed takes for granted that the inclusion of Swiss women’s suffrage did not substantively change the basic constitutional and procedural institution of Swiss democracy. In a paradigmatic expression, the *Handbook of Swiss Politics* (Klöti et al. 2006) states that the 20<sup>th</sup> century only brought “small modifications” (“geringfügige Modifikationen”) in regard of the institutional development of popular rights in Switzerland (Linder 2006, 105; similar Linder et al. 2010, 676; Vatter 2014, 347). In this light, the establishment of Swiss women’s suffrage rights in 1971 does not represent a qualitative or fundamental change of Swiss democratic institutions, though its denial may be qualified as non-democratic. Because the exclusion of Swiss women has been overcome with time, similarly to other groups that were excluded based on religion, property, and abilities, the political inclusion of excluded groups can be considered as proof of the continuity of Swiss institutions since 1848 that enabled the process of linear democratization.

Of course, this perspective is plausible in many ways. Swiss democratic institutions after 1971 are mostly the same as before 1971, and they are comparable to other democratic states that have granted women’s suffrage earlier. Thus, the historical process of *quantitatively* expanding democratic

rights seems to take place without a *qualitative* change of Swiss democratic institutions and is therefore *institutionally irrelevant*.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental part missing in this picture as developed by most contemporary liberal democratic theories. When I presented an earlier version of this paper at a conference of SWIP in Bern, my audience's anger and emotional reaction on the citation from the *Handbook of Swiss Politics* heightened my awareness of this lack and further helped me to integrate it into my analysis.

The fact that Swiss women's political inclusion was called institutionally *marginal* seemed to violate a basic intuition about what counts as relevant democratic institutions and procedures, namely the institution of "the people"—the *demos*—as constitutive and legitimizing power of state politics, and the procedure of the so-called "general suffrage". Especially in Switzerland, the concept of *people's sovereignty* seems genuinely important for the development of direct democratic procedures (Aubert 1974, 91; Kölz 1992, 303–320; Boillet 2020, 1657; Schmid 2020, 292–297). In order to be counted as democratic, "the people" must be representative in number and recognize the formal political equality of its members beyond all feudal hierarchies (Aubert 1974, 92 f.; Tschannen 1995, 497). Both criteria define what in Switzerland since 1848 is qualified as "general suffrage" and what turns a subject into a citizen (Kägi 1956, 43). Therefore, all questions that are related to limitations, conditions, and transformations of this basic legitimizing institution deserve intensive theoretical reflection.

The fact that until 1971, (Swiss) women were counted neither for the institution of general suffrage nor for constituting a representative *demos*, their exclusion *and* inclusion makes evident a constitutive problem of (Swiss) democratic procedures. It shows that the recognition of basic democratic rights, such as equal representation and political liberty, that are considered as the normative foundation of liberal democracy, nevertheless depends on contingent conditions that define who counts as democratic subject and who does not. In Switzerland, this systematic problem could not be solved by the positive outcome of the 1971 popular vote because its problem was the procedure of voting itself. The fact that the democratic rights of Swiss women were depending on Swiss men's decision alone, highlights the problem that the sovereign power of "the people" *can* clash with the recognition of universal—or constitutional—rights. This constitutional conflict becomes manifest in the seminal expertise of Werner Kägi who states that the political exclusion of Swiss women is violating the principles of the Swiss constitution and the necessity of their inclusion can be systematically deduced from the constitution. He even goes so far as to denounce contemporary Switzerland as

“privilege state” (“Privilegienstaat”) (1956: 47) that at his time paradoxically could not be qualified as democratic anymore (48). Nevertheless, he declares that the question on women’s suffrage has to be decided by the male voters because the question is too important for Swiss democracy, and voting would be the only legally correct procedure in this situation (Kägi 1956, 53 f.). Thus, the constellation of 1971 can serve as a concrete and paradigmatic example of a problem that is discussed in political philosophy as “double paradox of democracy”: the first paradox refers on the potential conflict between recognizing universal rights and people’s sovereignty as the legislative power. The second refers to the impossibility of the *demos* to decide democratically who belongs to the *demos* (Benhabib 2008, 41; Mouffe 2008, 20 ff.).

Obviously, this paradox is relevant still today, its relevance becomes evident whenever the claim for granting democratic rights to social groups that are formally excluded such as foreigners living in Switzerland, is taken up. Thus, the democratic paradox calls into question the concept of “people’s sovereignty” in many ways (Meyer 2016a). Because in the context of the nation-state, the concept of “the people” already always implies a socially contingent group, their claim on legitimate and unbounded sovereign power can and must be scrutinized in order to understand and improve the legitimation of democratic politics.

In the literature that I analyzed, the fundamental questions regarding the conflicts and paradoxes of Swiss (direct) democracy that are connected with the 1971 vote, are not reflected at all, and if mentioned shortly, not discussed as a systematic and conceptual democratic problem, but instead often framed as a simple problem of dealing with the “irrationality of the (male) people” (Hangartner 1994, 134) and which might be responsible for effects of retardation regarding the protection of basic rights (Vatter 2014, 372). By focusing on the outcome of votes, these interpretations do not capture the basic democratic conflict of the vote itself. And conversely, where current theories on Swiss democracy observe a growing awareness of a potential clash between basic democratic rights and democratic institutions, they are not discussed and reflected in relation to Swiss women’s suffrage but defined as a recent problem arising since the 1990s only and mostly related to initiatives of right-wing Swiss People’s Party (SVP) that is violating the constitutional rights of religious minorities and foreigners (f.e. Christmann 2012, 105; similar Ehrenzeller and Nobs 2014, 2431 f.).

Why is that? The only answer that can be given is that most mainstream theories of Swiss democracy *after 1971* still do not count women and women’s rights as constitutive for Swiss democracy. This becomes evident in Aubert’s question concerning the representative size of the “people” (corps

electoral): “School question: from when can we speak of democracy? Approximate answer: before women’s suffrage, when the fraction is one quarter; with women’s suffrage, when it is one half.” (Aubert 1974, 92f. – my translation) The citation makes manifest that in the “calculation exercise” of the school of liberal democratic theories, women or other marginalized groups are not counted *for* constituting the *demos*, but only counted when they are already *in*. This limited and static conception of democracy captures, in the words of Jacques Rancière, “the rights of those who have rights, which amounts to a tautology”. (Rancière 2004, 302) Obviously, Swiss women’s inclusion in the “corps electoral” after 1971 did not change this circular and tautological concept of democratic rights. Those who are not counted as part of the *demos* until today will also remain invisible and irrelevant in the future.

#### 6.4 The Violence of Hegemonic Silence

Violence can be defined as a social practice that is a punctual or structural negation of the status of persons as human beings by treating them as “things” (Weil 1965)—be it by violating their physical or psychic integrity, destroying their agency, or not recognizing their individual and irreducible significance for the commonly shared world (Arendt 2017; Meyer 2016b). In this light, treating an individual or social group in words or deeds as not “counting” can be called violent.

As demonstrated above, most Swiss theories of democracy are not counting (with) women, and in this respect express violence on different levels. First, violence occurs on a *discursive* level, when women in general are silenced and not mentioned in theoretical texts because they are women, and which therefore renders them discursively inexistent. When individual women are overlooked and their agency as activists, voters, and politicians is denied, they disappear from the collective memory, which makes them forgotten as part of the world. It is only thanks to feminist studies that this violent gender-biased amnesia is broken up (Dos Santos Pinto 2013; Amlinger 2017).

Secondly, violence occurs on an *epistemic* level, if the experience of political exclusion and inclusion of Swiss women is marginalized in its relevance for reflecting basic political concepts and institutions of Swiss democracy. By not integrating the perspective of women, their experiences and point of view are theoretically ignored and conceptually downplayed for our understanding of Swiss democracy in past, present and future.

And finally, violence occurs on a *political* level, when in theories of democracy political struggles based on gender differences and inequalities are effaced and denied as constitutive democratic conflicts. By negating gender

as a genuine political category and “women” as a political subject, political conflicts are framed in such a narrow way that the radical democratic contestation of the conditions of democracy itself is foreclosed. Thus, depoliticising and disempowering political struggles of marginalized groups that want to overcome their political exclusion go hand in hand.

All three levels of violence—discursive, epistemic, and political—are intertwined with each other. Indeed, it is exactly the effect of individual feminist movements and individual women who took their knowledge and experiences as a starting point for building coalitions, politicising their gender and turning “woman” into a powerful political subject which was challenging the exclusionary understanding of democracy. By ignoring this process, political theories are reproducing an understanding of democracy as a seemingly gender, race, and class neutral institution, and with that sustain current hegemonic orders of androcentric, white, western, and bourgeois power relations.

Without taking seriously the gendered dimension of politics, contemporary theories of democracy overlook the systematic democratic paradoxes that women’s suffrage in Switzerland brought to the fore and that are directly linked to the paradoxes of gender-neutral concepts of citizenship and political equality in general (Riley 1988; Scott 1996).

Democratic theories that do not capture and address these systematic challenges, are reproducing a violent approach towards all those who were and still are excluded from being part of the Swiss political people by mere habit or contingent reasons. In fact, it signals individuals and groups that their integration or exclusion in a political community does not make any substantial difference for the latter. Currently, the violence of such a politics is mainly discussed in political theories in contexts of exclusionary politics towards foreigners in general and refugees and undocumented migrants in particular, as is the case in most the western countries.

To integrate (Swiss) women “silently” in a theory of democratic institutions that are traditionally defined as male, is typical for what has been described in political theory as the liberal approach of “add women and stir”. This saying describes democracy as a pot always already defined by a certain social group—here: Swiss male adults—and will not change its structures nor forms by adding further ingredients. The ingredients may be women, young people, disabled people, or foreigners living in a nation-state—they all are thrown in a pot of soup that might become more diverse or colorful but substantially remains the same over time. The emotional reaction of my audience at the aforementioned conference pointed to this central conflict—or double perspective—in standard liberal democratic theories. On the one hand, the sovereign power of the people and the concept of general suffrage

is taken as historically and systematically *constitutive* for Swiss democracy. On the other hand, it is considered institutionally irrelevant who counts as part of the people and who does not, as long as the excluded or included are not representative of those who represent the general or universal political subject—i.e. the western white, non-colonized male individual.

Thus, the ongoing silence on the 1971 vote makes evident that the political inclusion of Swiss women did not change the gender-blindness of the basic concepts of mainstream political theories. The category of women—and gender in general—is not integrated conceptually in analysing and reflecting political institutions, because gender is not recognized as a political category. Thus, despite their normative contrast, silencing the *exclusion* of women and silencing the *inclusion* of women share common ground by depoliticising gender and ignoring central transformations and challenges in the history of Swiss democracy.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter was written in 2020. 2021 will mark the 50th anniversary of Swiss women's suffrage in Switzerland. We can expect many texts and articles about this event—also in the context of political theory and law. As I argued above, it will not suffice to just scandalize Swiss women's historically—compared to other countries—late political inclusion. It will be tantamount to systematically reflect on the relevance of women's rights, gender differences, and intersectional exclusions in general. The lessons that can be learned from such reflections are manifold. An important one is that all theories and practices that “silently” include excluded persons and groups, are taking the risk of leaving the excluding structures and mechanism unrecognized and unchanged. In order to overcome existing inequalities and to “count” *all* excluded persons and groups as equal members of “the people”, mainstream political theories of democracy have to reflect on the question of who counts and constitutes the *demos* in past and current democracies and who does not and why.

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## 7 **Between Violence and Resistance: The Brazilian LGBT Musical Movement**

*Nicolas Wasser*

In recent years, Brazil has seen a strengthening of critical discourse led by women, Black people, lesbians, *travestis* and trans people<sup>1</sup>, gays and non-binary genders. These groups have been speaking out in culture, science, grassroots collectives, and the media; and their voices seem to have touched the very realms of power. Thus, their manifold interventions against sexism, homo-/transphobia, and racism are also being violently defamed. Conservative and right-wing movements, both secular and religious, are combating what to them is an expression of excessively supported minority issues and “gender ideology”<sup>2</sup>, thereby fostering hate speech and violence on different levels. The present chapter looks at this critical moment by focusing on the recent Brazilian LGBT<sup>3</sup> musical movement<sup>4</sup>. I will describe and analyze the different musician’s mode of challenging multiple forms of oppression, expressed by the use of language, body, and feeling. Above all, my sociological and gender perspective prompts me to address the question about why and

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1 In the Brazilian context, trans refers to a more recent political subject that integrates different gender categories, such as transgender, transexual, and *travesti* (for a discussion, see Coacci 2018). The latter, *travesti*, not only occupies a historically strong cultural imaginary in the region that is linked to transgender sex workers and social marginality, but also continues to be a common gender identity for trans and non-binary people.

2 The discourse of “gender ideology” initially goes back to the Vatican’s counteroffensive against the concept of gender, articulated in the 1990ies, to reaffirm Catholic doctrine and the naturalization of the “biological” sexual order (Junqueira 2017). In the Latin American region, “gender ideology” discourse has spread widely in recent years. In different countries, it has turned into violently orchestrated “anti-gender crusades” with considerable effects on the political landscape, especially the rise of conservative and right-wing movements (see Prado and Correa 2018).

3 I use LGBT as the umbrella term for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and trans/*travesti*, on the one hand, because it describes the historical constitution of a political and rights subject in Brazil over the last two decades and which has consolidated in everyday language (see Aguião 2018). On the other hand, the acronym LGBT has also come to appear as a label for a segment of current artistic expression in music, cinema, and literature, among others.

4 This topic is part of my postdoctoral research project ‘From the circles of the LGBT+ musical scene: occupation, moral panic and new sexual subjectivities’ (19/05219-7), funded by the *São Paulo Research Foundation* (FAPESP).

how these artists have become a target of right-wing attacks. My interest lies in the political motives and methods of these attacks.

To approach these questions, I propose to distinguish between two different notions of violence involved: historically rooted structural violence and hate-driven attacks articulated via digital technologies. The first, which permeates the LGBT musicians' critical discourse, is linked to an understanding of violence as a structural phenomenon that permeates Brazilian society. It involves institutional, epistemological, and everyday forms of oppression, such as anti-Black racism (Almeida 2018) and cisgenderism with a long history of dehumanizing *travesti* and trans lives (Jesus 2013). The second notion of violence, in contrast, arises in a more specific way. It points to the ways in which right-wing and other conservative forces have ultimately invested in digital technologies and how they use them to both raising and directing hate towards certain social groups. The massive use of social media to spread the discourse of "gender ideology" and the concomitant moral damnation of LGBTs has proved to continually sharpen the country's political and social polarization (Machado and Miskolci 2019). Although this digitally driven and hate-centered form of violence is also entangled with structural violence, it differs in that it frames its targeted subjects as the representatives of an ideological conspiracy, putting together "communists", TV channels, teachers, artists, and whomever opposes the gender binary, heteronormativity, or the oppression of women (see also Wasser and França 2020).

Resistance, for the LGBT artists I am dealing with in this research, is a form of mobilizing against the outcomes of structural violence commonly experienced in their own life trajectories. I suggest that this mode of resistance is expressed in a language of intersectionality<sup>5</sup>, which refers to opposing multiple forms of oppression and which takes Black queerness and *travesti* positionalities as its points of departure. Without wanting to ignore the fact that these artists also use technology and social media to spread their messages and counteract attacks directed against them, I emphasize resistance to broader and long-lasting forms of oppression in order not to reduce the LGBT music movement to a reaction to current right-wing conservatism on the Internet. Against this backdrop, I will show that both sides are embedded in a larger violent cultural struggle about the dis/continuity of a rigid gender binary and racial hierarchies in Brazil, as well as about the freedom of desire and sexuality.

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5 Before referring, in a more strict sense, to this critical-academic perspective developed by authors of Black and Chicana feminism in the USA, I am especially interested in the ways in which intersectionality is being articulated, empirically, by different groups and activists in the Brazilian cultural sphere. For similar analysis of how intersectionality is mobilized in activist contexts, see Zanoli (2020) or Roth (2020).

## 7.1 Popular Music, Feminisms, and Black Feelings of Empowerment

Popular culture and especially music has a considerable influence on how gender identities are contemporarily felt, lived, and negotiated (Hawkins 2017). Moreover, pop music seems to be ever more influencing the—conflicting—meanings of feminism, queerness, and beauty ideals, as has been argued with the example of Lady Gaga (Halberstam 2012). In Brazil and the Latin American region, a growing number of gender-focused studies are emphasizing a generational lens in order to grasp the current interplay of queer and feminist activisms with popular culture and the arts. As Alvarez (2014) argues, Latin American feminist movements have entered in a current phase distinguished by “side streaming”. Based on a certain distrust towards more traditional institutionalized forms of social movements, these feminisms are plural, their ideas are flowing more horizontally, and their agencies are linking less formal groupings, individuals and feminist discourses with academia, the cultural industries, media and the internet. Together, they form “discursive fields of action” which serve not only to build and exercise citizenship, but also to imagine rights, to forge identities, and to dispute power (Alvarez 2014, 19). In the Brazilian context, especially Black feminisms stand out to this respect.<sup>6</sup> Black women have advanced a cultural change on the level of Black identity construction, linking the subjective and collective processes of “becoming Black” to feelings of courage, self-esteem, and empowerment.<sup>7</sup>

Popular music is a vibrating node of these political feelings. In hip hop, rap, and funk carioca genres, self-defined Black feminist singers like Karol Conka have coined the name of *geração tombamento*—a recent generational movement that gained visibility through its Afro futuristic<sup>8</sup> esthetics expressed for instance through braided and colored hair extensions. As analyzed by Santos and Brasil (2017), this movement is mobilizing young Blacks and activists, most notably women from the urban peripheries, exalt-

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6 Silva (2019), for instance, reveals a meaningful expansion of Black feminisms that radiate from the political engagement of Black women in the spheres of fashion and esthetics—the *Afroempreendedorismo*—aimed at the Black community of São Paulo. According to the author, the collective production of new looks at the Black body and beauty permeates media, markets, and recent forms of feminist engagement in a way that also creates a new type of mediator of both knowledge and politics.

7 According to recent numbers, the self-identification of Black people in Brazil has increased by 12 million within the past six years (Velasco and Rocha 2019).

8 Studies on fashion and contemporary cultural movements (Santos and Santos 2018) highlight *geração tombamento's* transnational entanglement with Afrofuturism, an esthetic and philosophy exploring the experience of African diaspora through technoculture and that emerged in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

ing self-esteem and consciousness of their history, values and rights. “Tombamento”<sup>9</sup>, they observe, refers to an idea of drawing attention in daring ways, with the intention of shocking or leaving someone speechless by using confrontational discourse, attitude, and body (Santos and Brasil 2017, 9). This body, I should also add, is confrontational not only because it rebels against racist and sexist representations of Black women. Moreover, *geração tombamento*’s militant languages give voice to anti-racist and queer feminist body politics that reframe dominant perspectives on blackness, femininity, masculinity, and queerness. According to Reason (2019)<sup>10</sup>, the Black esthetics of *geração tombamento* reinvent blackness not only by reclaiming Black history and culture, but also by “valorizing Black queerness, Black womanhood, and other deviations from normative conceptions of what it means to be Black” (Reason 2019, 71).<sup>11</sup>

LGBT singers and bands, such as among many others Liniker, As Bahamas e a Cozinha Mineira, Luana Hanson, Rico Dalasam, Tássia Reis to Linda da Quebrada,<sup>12</sup> are part of *geração tombamento*’s discursive field of action. As will be outlined further, I hold that these artists—most of them Black and from the peripheries—form a LGBT music movement which emerged from the latter’s artistic impulses and expanded through its languages and feelings of empowerment. The artists of this movement articulate trans, *travesti*, *bixa*<sup>13</sup> and non-binary subjectivities from social and racial positions that have historically long been hindered (and, in the case of *travesti* and trans, literally deprived) from access to the Brazilian popular music businesses. Thus, when then 20-year old Liniker launched her first single ‘Zero’ on YouTube in 2015, the mainstream media reacted astonished about her success. Newspaper *O Globo* complimented her “sweet and instigating voice”, but also highlighted in a sensationally mannered way that a young male Black artist was on stage with a “skirt, earrings, lipstick, necklace, headscarf [*turbante*] and mustache” (G1 São Carlos e Araraquara, 2015)<sup>14</sup>. This listing of supposedly

9 The Portuguese verb *tomb* also means to overthrow or knock down something.

10 Reason looks ethnographically both at queer Afro-Brazilian students as well as at Afro entrepreneurship and taste makers with the example of the party labels *Batekoo*, *Afrobapho*, and *Tombo* in Salvador da Bahia. For a further discussion see Ribeiro (2018).

11 The capital B for Black used by the author re-translates race and Black movements to mostly US-based debates, where the capital B is a strategy to more respectfully refer to people and cultures of African origin.

12 For a first overview, see Moreira (2018).

13 *Bixa* or *bicha* commonly refers to “effeminate” gay, an insult which being reframed as empowering self-definition in this context.

14 In the same newspaper article, Liniker replied that he did not fit into certainties of being either man or woman and that his body was political. “What I do know is that I’m a fag, black, poor and I’m there, fighting for this people” (“De batom“ 2015).

improper style components indicates how Liniker's body and performance not only eluded available categories and norms of race. Equally, a sort of gender trouble, to use Butler's (1990) well-known formulation, occurred by Liniker's unframing of the social position attributed to travestis. Indeed, the media coverage implicitly questioned the possibility of a feminine or queer esthetics on the body of a Black male artist. It thereby reflected the general lack of intelligibility of a trans non-binary subjectivity that—especially in the role of a successful pop singer—was not associated with prostitution, homelessness, and marginality.

## 7.2 “Bixa Preta” and travesti Disidentifications

Analyzing the imaginary horizons of *travesti* subjectivities from an intersectional perspective is central to the Brazilian LGBT music movement<sup>15</sup> as the example of singer and multimedia artist Linn da Quebrada<sup>16</sup> underscores. One of the movement's most radical voices, Linn never tires to address her social background in her work. Growing up in the outskirts of São Paulo, she takes her body as the point of departure for addressing both the harms and powers of marginality. While she emphatically underlines her positionalities as “*bixa*, trans, Black and peripheral” (Quebrada 2020), the singer-performer self-identifies as a “gender terrorist”. The idea for her queer art—Linn is a reader of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Paul B. Preciado—came out of her somatic experience with violence against her, as she explained in an interview given to the arts magazine *Cult* (Tróí 2017). This violence, as she continues to describe, had always existed in all districts of São Paulo. Indeed, it expressed a general hostility towards the bodies of Blacks, trans, and *travestis*. Therefore, she felt the necessity to “respond with terror, with aggressiveness, using my body as a weapon, as a protest, as manifest, as gunpowder in the face of this system that is violent on a daily basis” (Tróí 2017).

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15 As I hold (see also Wasser 2020), this aspect is crucial to distinguish the “novelty” of this movement when compared to former generations of homosexual or LGBT musicians in the Brazilian popular music scenes. Artists such as Ney Matogrosso, Gal Costa and later on Renato Russo or Cássia Eller all contributed enormously to forge the LGBT culture which permeates Brazilian popular music. At the same time, their different language is evident. The concept of “empowerment” of the contemporary generation presents itself in a discursive field inseparable from social criticisms formulated by Black feminisms and trans movements which did not occupy such a discursive and artistic scope at the time.

16 *Quebrada*, in Brazilian Portuguese, is another word for *favela*. The artist's wordplay together with “Linn da,” read as “linda,” may be translated as “Favela's beauty”, or, in a wider sense, “Linn, the beauty of the favela”.



Linn’s “gender terror” is most salient in her videoclips and live shows. In the stage-performance of her Funk<sup>17</sup> song ‘Bixa Preta’ [Black fag]<sup>18</sup>, she provokes both images of lethal violence and feelings of empowerment. On the one hand, her gestures, body, lyrics, and voice are running to the refrain “Bicha preTRÁ, TRÁ, TRÁ, TRÁ”, the TRÁ echoing the sounds of gunfire. This gunfire, mimicked by Linn and stage partner Jup do Bairro rising finger guns, is what violently frames the (im)possibility—also evident in the former example of Liniker—to inhabit a queer Black body. Depending on the audiences, this momentum may evoke images of police violence against Black bodies, transmurder of *travestis*, as well as the lethal effects of machismo<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, ‘Bixa Preta’ is also a piece of resistance and a Black queer manifesto. The song assembles the feeling of empowerment through the esthetics of aforementioned *geração tombamento*, that is, through a confrontative, provocatively daring gender performance, paying tribute to the extroverted elegance of favela *travestis*. The lyrics present Linn’s black skin as a “cloak of courage”, from which she would command the white straight mind to “gay up” and to give vanity to queerness. What is more, the song also affirms that times have changed and that no one thinks to laugh at Linn, a crazy, faggish, Black *travesti*, when walking down the streets in high heels. Derisive laughter was now the domain of the *travestis*, while “alfa males” were called to prepare, sit down, and watch their own destruction (Quebrada 2017).

Linn may be outside of the Brazilian racial and sexual mainstream. But at the same time, she uses mainstream codes—the marginality of *travestis*, Blacks and Funk Carioca—in a way that is reminiscent of what Muñoz

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17 Funk refers to Funk Carioca, the Brazilian hip hop style that originated in Rio’s urban favelas in the 1990s. Although it has become widely popular since, Funk is still “strongly associated with young residents of the city’s favelas and peripheries” (Mizrahi 2018), mainly through its proper esthetics, including not only rhythm and lyrics, but also body styles and fashion.

18 A part of a live performance of the song can be seen in the documentary *Bixa Travesty* (Priscilla and Goifman 2019).

19 Linn da Quebrada’s audience at live shows encompassed, at least initially, mostly students and people with a certain access to higher education and/or to political debates about gender, queerness, and marginality. This is also due to the fact that her shows preferably used to take place at cultural centres (SESC and CCSP in São Paulo capital, for instance) and smaller festivals. However, her TV program *TransMissão* (Canal Brasil) as well as her growing presence in the media since 2019 as a whole made her reach also broader audiences. As I could record during my ongoing fieldwork, especially at a discussion *After the Body* (19.11.2019) between Jup do Bairro (Linn’s stage partner), Karol de Souza, and Rico Dalasam, the relation of Black and LGBT activism with the media and music industry is a controversial subject for the movement. Some artists complain that they feel uncomfortable with having to represent the marginal, sometimes fetishized or heroized figure of the Black, queer, and peripheral subject.

(1999) described as a representation of “a disempowered politics or positionality” (Muñoz 1999, 31). Analyzing the politics of queer Black and Latino artists in the US as acts of disidentification, the author could show how these artists were not only challenging the racial and sexual framings of dominant culture, but also how they were to some point redefining race and queerness. When Linn da Quebrada shifts her positionality as Black *travesti* from victimhood and violence to courage and vanity, she is working through fixed genders, racial and social positions, sexual identities, and music genres that are considered to be outrageous or to contradict one another. In this sense, she may articulate feelings and positionalities that unclose dominant meanings attached to being a *travesti*, to blackness and marginality.

### 7.3 Confronting Hate Speech

It is certainly tempting to tokenize the subjects of the LGBT musical movement uniquely as the materialization of empowering gender politics and the coming of a queer feminist future. What cannot be ignored, however, is that their nonconformist performances and positionalities have faced a wave of rejection as well as hateful attempts to stop or censor them. Anti-gender movements also dispute—and recently with considerable success—the defining power and cultural norms of gender and sexuality. The current gender conflicts in the region confirm, quite clearly, that the discourse of “gender ideology” has been used to unite a morally motivated front of different extremist political actors, religious and secular, of the conservative camp (Facchini and Sívori 2017; Miskolci and Pereira 2018; Wasser and França 2020).

It is worth remembering that the “gender ideology” discourse has been instrumental in defending the traditional Brazilian family and children (Balieiro 2018). Although the “gender ideology” discourse has expanded in Christian institutions since the 1990s (Junqueira 2017), it was only in 2017 that extremist groups in Brazil began to systematically take it up as a strategy to legitimize intimidation and attacks against artists and intellectuals. Similar to other regions, these attacks are largely orchestrated through social media. Following the logic of our “attention economy” (Albrecht et al. 2019), they manage to shift the boundaries of what is socially acceptable. In doing so, ideas, expressions, and violent acts that were once considered extremist enter the repertoire of the normal. Such was the case with performer Wagner Schwartz, who was publicly accused of pedophilia. In September 2017, the Brazilian artist presented his performance *La Bête* at the *Museum of Modern Art* in São Paulo. The performance, which invited the public to participate in the artwork, was quickly polemicized because the artist appeared naked.

After the circulation of a fragmented video showing a child touching the artist's body, right-wing groups like the *Movimento Brasil Livre* and religious leaders incited a moral campaign against Schwartz that turned him into a hateful monster. On social media death threats were issued as well as false announcements that Schwartz had committed suicide (Brum 2018).

In accordance with Balieiro's analysis (2018), it can be said that these polemics are part of a discursive strategy that places children at the center of a moral panic. As already present since 2011 with the demands for the abolition of didactic material for the prevention of homophobia at public schools, children are portrayed as being exposed to the ideological arbitrariness of teachers, intellectuals, and artists who would promote pedophilia and gayness. In my view, popular music has given an ambivalent boost to these morally-led cultural struggles over the sexuality of children. The fact that drag queens and *travestis* now occupy a place in popular music means that traditional gender arrangements falter, or at least, that they are being fundamentally questioned. While this cultural movement—as described above—gives broad impulses to Brazilian LGBT agencies, it also triggers rejection among people who share a traditional, exclusively heterosexual and cis understanding of sex/gender, which they pretend to pass on to their children. For instance, I recall a conversation between a white academic and her colleagues in São Paulo, which I happened to attend in 2017. The woman, a trained social scientist with an ostensibly alternative appearance, expressed deep concern that her 5-year-old son was constantly singing the songs of Pabllo Vittar, an artist she framed in terms of propagating indecent sexualization.

Pabllo Vittar—one of Brazil's popular pop stars and the world's most streamed drag queen—became not only an issue of broader social controversies, but also a target of the anti-gender movements. Since her breakthrough in 2017, her media exposure as the actual icon of the Brazilian LGBT communities—Vittar is by far the most commercialized and internationally successful artist of the Brazilian LGBT music movement<sup>20</sup>—has provoked a series of opposing reactions. According to a reception analysis of the videoclip 'Corpo Sensual' (Paulino and Nunes 2017), most spectators support Vittar's significance for debates about gender, sexuality, and LGBT issues, while still a considerable number of consumers express their rejection on YouTube

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20 Amongst the LGBT musicians, extensive commercialization is a highly controversial topic. Several artists see the commercial tag "LGBT" as limiting to their artistic expression and they criticize Pabllo Vittar for offering drag representations that may reinforce cisgenderism, heterosexuality, and whiteness.

comments like “I hate gays” or “a good faggot is a dead faggot, bolso myth 2018”<sup>21</sup>.

Comments containing hate speech reached a provisional climax in October 2017 when the drag queen received the Music of the Year award from the popular TV show *Domingão do Faustão*. After her presentation of the song ‘K.O.’, a wave of reactions spread on internet platforms and social media ridiculing her vocal performance and questioning whether she was a real singer. In the data interpreted by Pereira (2018), reactions included denouncing her person as personifying the decay of Brazilian culture and destroying Christian values and the traditional family.<sup>22</sup> The ideological charge of such responses on social media intensified during the presidential election in 2018, mostly through a series of memes and wrong information that became publicly known by the slogan “this time Pabllo Vittar has gone too far” (*nessa vez Pablo Vittar foi longe demais*). The campaign against Vittar ranged from bizarre photo montages, depicting for example that the federal government had plans to print Vittar’s face on banknotes or to equip traffic lights with Vittar-fashioned eyelashes—to spreading disinformation about Vittar starting an improper TV show for children (see a collection in Evangelista 2018). Common to this defamation is the way it linked Pabllo Vittar as a person to “gender ideology”, portraying the latter as the product of the leftist ideology of the *Worker’s Party* and *TV Globo* that would contribute to a supposed destruction of culture, traditional values, the nuclear family, and the gender binary.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Although the anti-gender discourse is not new, its widespread diffusion through social media (accompanied by increasingly violent content and imagery) has ultimately furthered the country’s moral and political polarization. As a historically specific articulation of violence, the discursive strategy of putting children at the center of moral anxieties about sexuality and gender works, for instance, to legitimate the actual attacks and attempts to censor LGBT culture<sup>23</sup>, and it has both renewed and instigated prejudice of the LGBT population. This notwithstanding, the movement including the LGBT musicians, but also activists, cultural and social institutions as a

21 Bolso stands for Jair Bolsonaro, the then State Deputy at the beginning of his presidential campaign.

22 Although Vittar publicly identifies as a cis gay person acting as a drag queen, in hate speech she is often referred to as travesti or trans person representing gender “aberrations”.

23 In 2019, the main target of president Bolsonaro were TV series as well as movies with LGBT content, for which public fundings were canceled.

whole are firmly rejecting intimidation. They often refer to their experiences of violence, which they have experienced by being targets of structural sexism and racism, and they hold that their resistance to this violence is also more far-reaching than that against the excesses of the current anti-gender movement. On social media, Vittar's fans reframed the saying "this time Pablo Vittar has gone too far" in affirmative ways and they solemnly emphasized that LGBT culture has long since spread and that it would continue to do so. Vittar herself endorses this situational resistance against hate speech and intimidation. In 2018, when she publicly defended her permanence in Brazil after Bolsonaro's election, she proclaimed that "neither will blacks return to the slave quarters, nor women to the kitchen, nor gays to the closet" (Gshow, 2018). Again, one encounters this intersectional language of the LGBT musical movement's critical discourse—an entanglement of Black, feminist and LGBT experiences that not only challenges gender norms, but also dominant racial ideologies.

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## 8 The Sensuous Politics of Singing in a Trans\* Chorus

*Holly Patch*

### Singing as Resistance

*Ain't gonna let nobody...*  
*Turn me 'round*  
*Turn me 'round*  
*Turn me 'round*  
*Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'*  
*Marchin' for ev'ryone trans*

*Ain't gonna let...*

*2. no doctor...*

*no family...*

*3. legislation...*

*no frustration...*

(US Trad.)

In March 2020, the *Trans Chorus of Los Angeles* (TCLA)<sup>1</sup> rehearses their adaptation of a traditional African American spiritual turned civil rights song 'Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around'.<sup>2</sup> The all trans\*-identified chorus declares resistance to oppressive medical and legal institutions and actors, disapproving families, or potentially disempowering affective states. They are marching (stomping and clapping, in performance) and singing "for ev'ryone trans". The TCLA explicitly demonstrates their politics using

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1 "The Trans Chorus of Los Angeles is the first all Trans-Identified Chorus in America, consisting of Transgender, Non-Binary, Intersex, Gender-Non-Conforming and Gender-Fluid individuals. TCLA Celebrates diversity and acceptance in our appearance and vocal presentation so that others can see and feel the joy we share. Through our music we bring to the world awareness, understanding, power and victory for the Trans Community" (The Trans Chorus of Los Angeles 2020a).

2 A partial recording of a TCLA performance of this song features in the May 2020 video 'They Will See You: LGBTQ+ Visibility in Advertising' (Great Big Story 2020). The spiritual was first printed with music in 1927 with the title 'Don't You Let Nobody Turn You Around' (White 1927).

the “multilayered effect” of adapting a civil rights protest song to address injustices against trans\* US-Americans (Balén 2017, 22).

Since its conception in 2015, in addition to creating a space for its members to “discover and love their voices”, the TCLA has linked what it does to issues of social justice, its original mission statement including a line about striving to “change the social ecology”, by using their voices. At the first ever *Transgender Singing Voice Conference*<sup>3</sup>, the original director of the TCLA recited, “we are a gentle angry people, and we are singing for our lives”, quoting the protest song penned by folk and protest songwriter and singer Holly Near in response to the assassination of one of the first openly gay elected officials in the U.S., Supervisor Harvey Milk, and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone in 1978.<sup>4</sup> Their singing has always been set against the backdrop of voices that have been permanently silenced.

Self-described as the first in America, the TCLA is one of few trans\*-identified *Gay and Lesbian Association* (GALA) of Choruses (GALA Choruses 2020). They perform at pride and LGBTQ-focused political events<sup>5</sup> and now rehearse at the Los Angeles LGBT Center in Hollywood. They are situated within a history of gay and lesbian and transgender liberation struggle, in their individual formations and in their collective contentious political formation under the LGBTQ umbrella. The “T” in mainstream, Western neoliberal LGBTQ politics often only discursively exists in the necropolitical figure of the murdered Black trans\* woman or trans\* woman of color (Haritaworn et al. 2014; Krell 2019; Nay 2019; Spade 2011).<sup>6</sup> David Valentine’s (2007) ethnographic work details how violence—especially towards trans\* people—has discursively been used for LGBTQ claims-making, to both productive and problematic ends. Violence can be a starting point for narration, but violence should not be understood a priori to be salient for all trans\* existence.

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3 Organized by Danielle Cozart Steele at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, January 2017.

4 The first public performance of the *San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus* was at the candle-light procession on the steps of City Hall following the assassination (see Balén 2017, 42).

5 For instance, the TCLA performed the ‘Star-Spangled Banner’ at the first ever democratic presidential townhall focused on LGBTQ issues hosted by CNN and HRC in Los Angeles on October 10, 2019 (The Trans Chorus of Los Angeles 2020b).

6 At the townhall mentioned above, Black trans\* activist Blossom C. Brown staged an intervention, taking the microphone to criticize event organizers and make a claim for Black trans\* women. The host attempted to silence her by taking back the microphone and asking her not to come on stage, maintaining the hosts were there “to validate people like [her].” Brown persisted, and the host offered her the microphone, into which she said that up until then, “not one Black trans woman has taken the mic tonight. Not one Black trans man has taken the mic tonight” (CNN 2019).

With its focus on celebration and joy, the TCLA practices a counterstorying characteristic of queer choral musicking (Balén 2017).<sup>7</sup> The new directors of the TCLA find it especially important to offer a different narrative than one of victimization. They strive to “normalize” trans\* existence in its heterogeneity, which means including stories of success and joy. Another US trans\* chorus singer talked about the chorus being the only time she had gathered with other trans\* people for something other than a political event or to mourn their dead.<sup>8</sup> She could just simply be in joy, singing with others (Patch 2017; Patch and König 2018). The presence of the vital choral body joyfully singing produces a living, thriving trans\* subjectivity and manifests an affective atmosphere contrasting to somber events like the *Transgender Day of Remembrance* (Haritaworn et al. 2014; Nay 2019). Whereas trans\* people are too often spoken for, the choristers collectively take up space in the auditory realm, amplifying each other’s voices.<sup>9</sup> In their singing, they manifest their “sensorial existence among others” (Bonenfant 2010, 74).

Collective, bodily, affective joy in singing matters and is transformative. While the TCLA’s use of song is one way they represent their shared beliefs (see Rosenthal and Flacks 2011), I do not focus on the level of transmission, reception, or performance in this paper. Instead, I center the sensuous experience of singing and the everyday narratives that emerge in a reflection of this sensuousness. I draw from in-depth interviews with TCLA singers and participant observations of their rehearsals.<sup>10</sup> I employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al. 2009) to get closer to the lived experience of the phenomenon of trans\* vocality (Patch and König 2018) and to guide participants in their own hermeneutic work of making sense of these experiences. Sociologist Alexis Shotwell describes sensuousness as naming “a socially situated experience of one’s embodiment” (Shotwell 2011, 127). In other words, the singers socially situated their embodied singing experience.

In my ethnographic work and in contributing to this volume, I take seriously Valentine’s point that “in making claims about how gender-variant and transgender-identified people experience violence, ‘violence’ is neither an easy nor a self-evident category, and the ability of an anthropologist or any social actor to counter such violence is deeply complicated by the interpreta-

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7 Balén uses Hilde Lindemann’s term “counterstorying” to name one of the practices of queering the formal choral form enacted by LGBTQ choruses (Balén 2017, 16).

8 She presented at the aforementioned ‘Transgender Singing Voice Conference.’

9 Perhaps at the risk of their voices being relegated to the esthetic background, having only a symbolic function in the neoliberal frame.

10 Interviews and observations with the TCLA were carried out in 2017 and 2018. When referring to primary interview data in this text, the anonymized name of the participant will be indicated. References to fieldnotes will likewise be identified as such.

tion of what counts *as* violence” (Valentine 2007, 223). Violence is not the starting point of my inquiry, and it is also not the destination. The singers’ sensuous knowledge nevertheless exposes the very real tensions in their lives as trans\* people that in turn mark the experience of singing in the chorus as exceptional and transformative. I seek to articulate how singing with fellow trans\* people as a trans\* chorus can be read as sensuous trans\*-liberatory politics. The “mutual transformation of the self and social worlds” lived by the TCLA singers should be considered everyday political work (Shotwell 2011, 126).

## 8.1 A Sensuous Problem

While the joyfulness of singing may seem so self-evident and simple as to require no further investigation, the meaning and significance of that joy explains much about the social contingency of embodied lived experience for the trans\* singers.<sup>11</sup> To make sense of their joy in singing (specifically with the trans\* chorus), the choristers take into account the horizon of that experience. The somatic ease felt singing with the TCLA contrasts starkly with their socially situated embodiment moving through their worlds as trans\* people on the street, at the workplace, and at home. One singer, Finn, calls this the “energy price of society”, whereby gender non-conformity is met with an “external force of tension”. They arrive to the chorus feeling their tense muscles, gritted teeth, and headache:

*Finn: ... and when I first started coming, it just dropped out, you know, and I'm like/ I went home that day and I'm like, "Why do I feel so light?" Like I physically felt light, because I wasn't holding myself down and pulling myself in, um, worried about these things, and even as I go on now and I don't have to worry about these kind of day-to-day interactions. I still feel a little bit lighter and a little less tense, uh, physically as well as mentally, emotionally, all that stuff.*

The chorus as a trans\*-constituted space allows “external” tensions subtly embodied in “day-to-day interactions” to “drop out”. As we will see in the next sections, it is both the space and the singing that facilitate a dropping out of and working through physical, mental, and emotional tensions. Grace, who also sings with another trans\*-friendly college choir, finds the TCLA to

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11 Thank you to Crispin Thurlow for drawing my attention to the “more-than-representational” approach of Hayden Lorimer to consider phenomena that “may seem remarkable only by their apparent *insignificance*” at the sensuous, everyday level (Lorimer 2005, 84).

be “a particularly wonderful space to sing”, where it is “magical to be around trans people every week”.

*Grace: Um, in some ways it's like, um, beating yourself in the head with a hammer, right, it just sort of feels so good when you stop. That I move through the world in a constant state of alertness and stereotyped threat and with my guard up at all times, and I don't have to do that in this space.*

The example is striking, and the extent to which the category “violence” is applicable to this contribution is in the way that moving through the world as a trans\* person is *like* being beaten in the head with a hammer. Everyday insidious injustices are sensed and felt, just as violence is injurious. These everyday realities include threats of physical and sexual violence, street harassment, stigmatization, institutionalized transphobia and discrimination, and disenfranchisement by the state.<sup>12</sup> I consider these empirical realities of trans\* existence to be representative of a “sensuous problem: living well involves a socially contingent comfort in one’s body” (Shotwell 2011, 135). In the following, I seek to illuminate how singing with the TCLA is counteractive to this sensuous problem for its members. It first provides a “freedom-from” and also makes possible a “freedom-to” that Shotwell names as characteristic of flourishing (Shotwell 2011, 154). For Finn and Grace, and all of the choristers, the TCLA is a place where they can relax and “just BE in a sense” (Finn). To Lili, feeling and expressing through singing: “It’s like you exist.” Finn describes how through the “physical act” of singing, “just by exerting that breath, you kind of expel out a lot of that tension.” The intersubjective atmosphere manifested in their singing conditions how they “can feel that the others relax” (Finn). Their collective singing establishes place, community, normalization, touch and healing, and strength as constitutive features of the lives of the trans\* chorus members.

## 8.2 From Marked Singularity to Normalizing Plurality

For many of the members, the TCLA marks their first return to singing since before transitioning. The trans\*-identified constitution of the chorus means they can know they are interacting with people who have implicit and explicit knowledge of what the trans\* experience can be or is like, who value using correct pronouns, who reciprocate an acceptance, appreciation, and un-

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12 I am presenting instances of such as they were reported to me in interviews about their singing experiences. My study is not about trans\* existence as such, nor is it about violence.

derstanding for the others' felt gender, gender identity, and gender expression. It is a place where they know they are “not gonna get judged” (Sebastian) or be “rejected, um, or misplaced because of our trans identity” (Maya), where gender policing should not happen.<sup>13</sup> Many TCLA members noted how their first rehearsal was the first time they had ever been around so many trans\* people and what this made them feel.

*Jennifer: ... Most people don't even hang around with one other trans person [laughs]. And I'm hanging in a room with thirty of them! And feeling completely NOT in the slightest bit out of the ordinary in this! I'm like, totally [lets hands fall on table audibly] totally normal here.*

The sheer number of people showing up each week is significant—it has a normalizing effect. Jennifer is “instantly made at ease”, noting that most do not get to feel this “on a daily basis”. Grace says rehearsal is “a brief moment where I get to be normal, and I don't get that in life”. Rehearsals mark an exceptional time in their week. While most of the rest of the time they move through their lives as *the* trans\* person in their respective, very diverse worlds outside of the chorus<sup>14</sup>, at rehearsals with the TCLA, they get to just be a chorus member. They can be “just like everybody else” (Lili). With the normalcy and corporeal and psychic ease they experience with the chorus, they are freer to try themselves out, exist their bodies comfortably in singing, and make their vocal sounds livable.<sup>15</sup> The singers can more freely

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13 Some singers tell me how initially when they first joined the chorus, they experienced their trans\*ness being put into question by other members. The violence of the gaze and double-edged sword of “passing” persist in the trans\* space. While these tensions could be resolved, I also witnessed a moment of struggle in the chorus that led to a member being formally asked to leave the chorus. The repeated disruptive behavior of this member could no longer be tolerated or worked through collectively. There was a general consensus of relief following their dismissal, because rehearsal time could be more dedicated to the singing and interpersonal tensions were relieved. One singer told me he felt his gender had been “policed” by the former member. Another singer critiqued the reasoning given for letting the singer go, allegedly based on musical grounds, and wondered what kinds of power could be wielded in the name of musicality moving forward that would start to qualify who does and does not deserve to be part of the chorus, which has become so meaningful in her life.

In their ethnographic work doing participatory observation of musical performances by trans\* musicians, Krell argues that “popular music performances emerge as one of the only public venues in which trans people can be in community with one another with less likelihood of policing” (Krell 2014, 49).

14 Some even live their marked singularity in a broader scope, for example being profiled in the local media as *the* trans\* middle school teacher.

15 One major focus of my dissertation is on (re)claiming voices and bodies and the gendering of vocal sound. This is crucial for bodies and voices in flux and sounds and gender

feel how their bodies feel, feel their feelings, process emotions, develop their skills, and increase feelings of self-worth and confidence.

### 8.3 From Safe Space to Rooted Place

Now let me show how the chorus moves from being another “safe space” for them as trans\* people to being a *place* of rootedness. It starts with the most evident purpose of the chorus—being there to sing. They have a “specific purpose” or “reason” for gathering “that’s to CREATE something other than just to/ for us/ just to get around and, and bitch about everything” (Jennifer). Unlike other familiar trans\*-designated places, the focus with the chorus is on something other than the trans\* experience and airing grievances. They have a reason to meet, to create and be “productive.” There is an appreciation for not even having to really like each other or agree with one another in order to sing with each other in trans\* community. The sensuousness of the singing arguably constitutes the community formation, as the sonorous constitutes the place. Unlike the bar, where Jade has also found trans\* community, the chorus is something she can share with her young daughter. The singers practice counterstorying through place-making and have a new avenue for being trans\* role models of success.<sup>16</sup>

They meet to sing, and they stay in the chorus to care for each other:

*Claire: ... it's more than just singing. I mean, that's what brings us together, um, and is one of our commonalities and I think is the, the focus of what we all love/ in the chorus. So, that's the root, but I think we all stay because we care about each other. And, you know, and th/ those roots are just getting stronger. And, and our tree is getting bigger as it grows. And that's exciting! And our sound is getting richer!*

They have built community around the root of singing. The chorus is the nourishing place they look forward to going to each Sunday—“it feels like coming home” (Sebastian)—to break bread and collectively sound

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identity that break with the cisgender-bodied norms that structure our commonplace listening (the colonizing ear).

16 Choristers point out their fulfillment in singing for parents of trans\* and non-binary children at PFLAG events. One singer told me about inviting her boss and coworkers to a TCLA performance as a way to come out to them, having them see her community “shine”. Some of the older chorus members actively seek to be models of success for the younger choristers, too.



with people who have come to be “family,” as many members put it.<sup>17</sup> As the chorus professionalizes<sup>18</sup>, gains new members, and develops its sound, the audition process becomes more selective. The new directors find it emotionally difficult to turn away people but state matter-of-factly, there are “not many seats at our table” (Fieldnotes). Facing re-evaluations, in a near whisper, Lili tells me, “I guess it makes me anxious cause I would hate to have one of the last things I enjoy taken from me”. The shadow side to building community around a specialized skill is the practice of exclusion that comes along with it.<sup>19</sup> Being part of the chorus, Eli feels “vocally valued”. Even outside of the chorus, this knowledge of their roots and sense of support through their trans\* choral family makes them less alone and more secure in their respective daily lives as trans\* people.

#### 8.4 From Stigmatization to Healing Touch

Another aspect of their collective singing that matters for countering the sensuous problem is touch. Here, I would like to focus on the TCLA’s performance practice of one of their standard repertoire songs, ‘You Have More Friends Than You Know’.<sup>20</sup> It is sung whenever guests or new members join the chorus.<sup>21</sup>

When they perform this song, the members gradually move closer together. By the end of the first chorus of the song, they have their arms draped around one another. That they physically come together was nev-

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17 The chorus rehearses every Sunday for three hours, including a break mid-rehearsal for a potluck dinner. They note not only the positive aspects of “family,” but also the struggles.

18 At the end of an open rehearsal where prospective new auditioning members were in attendance, the directors stood in front of the group to give notes and announcements, describing how being “a chorus and a public representation of trans people” makes them more than “just a group of trans people singing together,” alluding to without specifying how the TCLA is more than a community choir (Fieldnotes).

19 The members themselves also justify how having to turn away some people is necessary for a professional group. With more resources, different chorus models could be implemented so that more trans\* people could find community through singing, which clearly proves to be meaningful and transformative for its members. The current Artistic and Executive Directors work unpaid hours to keep the chorus going. For more on the resources it takes to run and sustain a queer chorus, see Balén (2017) and Attrinello (2006). My dissertation considers in greater depth the structural factors of inclusion and exclusion, societally and chorus-internally.

20 Written by Mervyn Warren and Jeff Marx; commissioned by Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa for the *“It Gets Better” Show*, 2013.

21 This song was performed by the chorus to both welcome me (with others) on the first day of both of my visits, in 2017 and in 2018, and to bid farewell to me on my last day with the chorus. I also witnessed it performed at open rehearsals and audition days in 2018.

er choreographed or given as a direction, but it inevitably always comes in their performance. It is a practice that always arrives. In their semi-circular formation, by extension, they enclose and hold their guests. When the song ends, they hug each other, often teary-eyed. Grace calls this performance practice:

*Grace: ... a profound, physical manifestation of saying, "You have a community around you. You have people around you. You have family here". Um ... to people who have experienced either the fear of losing all human contact or have experienced uh ... um ... and who have experienced, um ... very often violence, very often loss of family, very often loss of career, very often loss of home, loss of job, um, loss of a life partner ... loss of their children, um ... and have been told time and time and time again that "You are not worthy of being loved. You are not lovable. You are an abomination". [voices breaks on the word "abomination"] Um, and to counteract that message in the community is a very powerful thing.*

The collective embrace is the physical manifestation of this counteractive message. Grace is particularly articulate about the notion of touch and its importance to this group of people of trans\* experience. At the same time, noting a disproportionately higher rate of sexual violence incurred by trans\* people, embodied histories they bring with them to the choral space, Grace offers a nuanced critique of the chorus's hug-friendly environment. She believes the chorus should sit down and have a discussion about how touch could be unwanted, nonconsensual, or triggering for some.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, she stresses the power of the chorus as a place to receive touch, necessary for human life, potentially not received outside of this environment. For her, the aspect of touch is part of what makes the TCLA a "space of healing"—a means for combating the "internalizing of the dehumanization of trans people that is pretty constant" (Grace). The former Artistic Director found hugging a helpful practice for countering in-fighting and (vocal) competitiveness between chorus members and a tool of "radical acceptance of one another" and each other's voices (Fieldnotes).

Materialist perspectives allow us to understand the singing itself as intimate touch, with vocal sound by definition implying material relation-

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22 This reflection during the interview was posed against the backdrop of the televised and widely viewed and discussed Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing of testimony by Prof. Christine Blasey Ford of the sexual assault by now confirmed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, which was going on at the time of my stay with the TCLA.

ality between vocal and listening bodies.<sup>23</sup> As a chorus, they are intimately, corporeally in relation to one another. Finn “like[s] the experience of being able to be part of a community in this more intimate way”. The production of safe spaces and practices of counterstorying typical to queer choral musicking can have healing effects (Balén 2017; DeNora 2000; DeNora 2013).

## 8.5 From Existential Stress to Catharsis and Strength

For my final example, I turn to Jade, who felt like she was physically losing her voice when we interviewed. Her voice was bearing traces of everyday, existential stresses at work and on the “home front” related to her gender identity (Jade). The following day, she was to head back to her job as a utility repair maintenance worker after a short leave of absence. She describes herself as having “halfway” come out at work. She has seen misogyny at play and is scared of the trans\* misogyny she might yet encounter in the “good old boys club type of atmosphere” (Jade). She does not have role models, does not know of anyone in her trade who has transitioned before. Self-described as being “early in [her] transition” when she joined the chorus, singing and performing with the TCLA has been an important positive support:

*Jade: ... even though I was scared, it gave me the strength. That's what I'm trying to say. It just helps, you know, it gives me strength to keep going and keep pushing and moving on with what I have to do, um, and then with the administration and the president, you know, when they elected Trump, that really um ... kind of ... made me hesitate again for a minute, you know, but I had already gotten my, um, IDs changed over and presented that at work, you know, in a small, like one-step-at-a-time, um, kind of thing, but um, / So first it was kind of scary, and it was disappointing that/ to me that/ I felt like we were going backwards by electing him.*

She is unsure about the kinds of legal protections she will have at the workplace, and she is right to be concerned.<sup>24</sup> Among other attempts to actively disenfranchise transgender people in the US<sup>25</sup>, in August 2019, the

23 For just a few that also focus on matters of gender, see: Bonenfant 2010; Cavarero 2005; Cusick 1999; DeNora 2013; Eidsheim 2015; Fischer 2010; Patch and König 2018; Schlichter 2011.

24 Even other members of the chorus working in white collar jobs tell me about waiting to come out at work until they no longer have family members dependent on their income and employment, recognizing that being out and trans\* could cost them their job.

25 Like, for example, a reinstatement of the ban of transgender people from serving in the US military, and most recently, trying to remove healthcare coverage of transgender people in the midst of a global COVID-19 pandemic June 2020.

Trump administration was urging the Supreme Court to approve anti-transgender discrimination at the workplace, and in a landmark ruling in June 2020, the Court ruled that federal sex discrimination protections of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 extend to gay and transgender workers.<sup>26</sup> Amidst such uncertainty<sup>27</sup>, the chorus is a place of reprieve for Jade, something she “needs.”

*Jade: ... [Choir] helps me, and it gets me through my week, um, you know, for the whole/ for the time I'm here, it's like all of that stuff is ... behind me for the moment, you know, and I know it's there, but I'm, I'm um able to just be myself.*

Jade can recharge. Singing with the chorus is part of her self-care regimen, which she has to justify to her spouse, who struggles with Jade's transition and from whom she is painfully separating. It takes effort on Jade's part to provide herself this care, which I regard as political. This is in line with Black feminist and queer and trans\* of color contributions on self-care as activist practice, of self-preservation as political (Lorde 2007), and how “it is important for us to name the conditions under which we can have optimal well-being. It's important to name what aids us in our decolonization process” (hooks 2014; hooks 2006). At rehearsal, Jade receives validation and feels embodied comfort living her gendered existence truthfully, something she is currently unable to have at home or at work. It gives her the strength to keep going, supporting the claim that artistic cultural practices are a means for survival (Horlacher 2016; Rosenthal and Flacks 2011). For Jade and for other choristers, the soma-affective ease and catharsis experienced at choir has lingering material effects that can last for days, and it thereby becomes constitutive of their other social contexts.

## 8.6 Conclusion

Singing in the chorus provides more than a temporary reprieve from living with the threat of violence and harassment and the existential stresses of institutionalized transphobia and discrimination. In addition to being fun and cathartic, singing together is somatically effective in normalizing their gendered ways of being and in countering social messages of untouchabili-

26 *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. On his first day in office, January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to reinstate protections of transgender US-Americans. On this same day, the TCLA was featured in the Inauguration Day virtual *Parade Across America*.

27 A singer who had come to audition said, “Trump is scary”—that they “have to stay away from the news cycle because it's genuinely making people feel suicidal” (Fieldnotes).

ty via the inherent intimacy of vocalizing and through tactile performance practices.

Trans\* community has taken root in singing. Through their weekly rehearsals, Sunday dinners together, and reciprocal commitment, the chorus establishes itself as a mainstay, a home in the chorus members' lives, where life is livable, joyful, and creative. Working within community on the project of singing allows them to experience and document the joy that is also part of the struggle (hooks 2006, 249). Amongst each other in song, they process and work through the "external" tensions of a transphobic society hostile to gender non-conformity they have carried and internalized. Its effects carry forward; this sensuous knowledge itself becomes constitutive of future engagements with their everyday worlds, actively transforming how they experience life beyond the walls of their rehearsal space and boundaries of rehearsal time.<sup>28</sup> They feel lighter and less alone: "It's tacit that we have each other's backs" (Irene). This implicit knowledge is a resource when, for example, encountering street harassment. Their sonorous engagement proves a means for decolonizing minds and bodies that exist in a transphobic society and for resisting the violence of the hegemonic gaze that particularly non-passing trans\* people are exposed to in the world.<sup>29</sup>

They are empowered by developing their skill in singing, receiving standing ovations, and performing in esteemed venues.<sup>30</sup> These experiences are like "diamonds in their heart" (Claire) that can shine through in other moments. Singing with the TCLA "feels right," (Maya) is "wonderful," (Nolan) and "magical" (Grace). Combined with its life-affirming quality—"This is probably the best me that has ever existed in a lot of ways!" (Finn)—I read their experiences as enchantment, which Jane Bennet describes as "a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence; it is to be under the momentary impression that the natural and cultural worlds offer gifts and, in so doing, remind us that it is good to be alive" (Bennet 2001, 156). Community singing is a "simple" offering to each other as trans\* people: "Sometimes simple things/ people forget that those simple things are what matter to us

28 Krell draws a similar conclusion when it comes to trans\* performer and audience relationship in musical performance: "Through transvocal exchanges, performance is shifting the material conditions that structure trans lives today" (Krell 2014, 49).

29 The singers allude to prior experiences of verbal and sexual street harassment in their narrations of renewed empowerment. They are able to move about comfortably in the world in the face of such risk, having the knowledge of the place and experiences of the TCLA where they have love and well-being.

Beyond this study of trans\* vocality, I urge for more attention to the sonorous and tactile in a world in which the visual is favored, dominates, and is endowed with the power to represent truth.

30 Like the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles.

when things stop mattering” (Lili). They have internalized and embodied positive counter-messages about their skill and value. Other people’s opinions and transphobic slander lose footing in the internal dialogue.

Following their adoption of queer choral musicking’s motto about “changing hearts and minds” with their singing (Balén 2017, 16), they do it first by transforming themselves, desubjugating their experiential knowledge of their vocal bodies, healing themselves from the daily insidious violences brought into their lived bodies and minds. They sing and joyfully reclaim their voices, bodies, and narratives, regardless or maybe even in spite of the evaluation of their listeners.<sup>31</sup> The outward orientation of the chorus gives another level of esthetic, sonic, and corporeal politicism to consider, although this has not been the focus of this particular contribution. Nevertheless, the sensuous politics of the TCLA of and for themselves is constitutive of their performance for audiences, regardless of whether the audience is sympathetic.<sup>32</sup> The registers of potential violence discursively addressed in the song that opens this chapter (institutional, interpersonal, affective) are thus also actively countered in their everyday practice of singing. While they become increasingly explicitly political in their artistic and performance choices, the TCLA singers are already enacting sensuous politics in their weekly collective singing practice.

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31 See Eidsheim (2019) on the micropolitics of listening and disidentification. See also Vallee (2017).

32 For Meizel, “vocalities function as sociopolitical spaces at the borders of the human body” (Meizel 2020, 15). And drawing on Grant Olwage, Bonenfant thinks through decolonial aspects of voicing: “The caress of the vocalic bodies of those we oppress might activate feelings of warmth, sexual response, and even love. It is difficult to dominate and destroy the world of those one cares about” (Bonenfant 2010, 79). Audre Lordé’s naming of the power of the erotic has been taken up by several authors seeking to articulate the power of vocalizing and the relationship between vocalizing and listening bodies, arguing for it as a way to bridge across difference (like Balén 2017, 161).

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## 9 “i would haunt you”: Contemporary Cree Literary Resistance to Settler-Colonial Violence through Radical Incivility

*Patrizia Zanella*

*Feminist consciousness can be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power concealed under the languages of civility, happiness, and love. (Ahmed 2017, 62)*

In ‘Love Story Medicine’ and ‘Toxic Masculinities’, the opening chapters of their memoir *nîtisânak*, Jas M. Morgan (Cree-Métis-Saulteaux) thrice asserts the following: “In the prairies, The Truth is a yt man. The Truth is whatever the yt man says, and whatever truth is said by the yt man is the ruling law of the *holy wild wild (prairie) west*” (Morgan 2018b, 12, 38, 40).<sup>1</sup> The statement’s internal and external repetitions and its lack of logical connectors perform the vacuous, violent ways in which white men have established their Truth as uncontested. Part of the memoir’s project is to speak Morgan’s complex, personal truth to this hegemonic Truth. Morgan adopts an unabashedly confrontational voice that is hyper aware that their narration will be construed as unreliable in the context of “KKKCanada” (Morgan 2018b, 15, 22, 99, 145). Morgan’s use of the term “KKKCanada” foregrounds the white supremacist foundation of the settler state. The uncivil renaming of Canada calls attention to the violence enacted against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the name of civility and its connotations: civil order and civilization (OED Online 2010). While the charge of incivility is routinely levelled at Black and Indigenous people as a silencing mechanism and a call back to order, Morgan refuses this call and in turn denounces white supremacy’s civilizing hierarchies.

The short lyric ‘if it were me’ by Nehiyaw (Cree) and Trinidadian author Tasha Spillett likewise presents a defiant speaker that, out of care for

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1 I would like to thank the editors, especially Annelise Erismann and Dominique Girsard, for their constructive feedback and acknowledge Laura De Vos and Sarah Brazil who provided valuable comments on various drafts of this paper. My gratitude to Erzsi Elizabeth Kukorelly and Doreen Mende for inviting me to my first Swiss Association for Gender Studies conference on a kick-ass transdisciplinary, artistic, and feminist panel.

themselves and their relatives, confronts the imminent danger of being disappeared with a threat of their own: “i would haunt you” (Spillett 2018, l. 11). Spillett’s speaker and Morgan communicate in a mode of radical incivility: they call out settler-colonial violence (including (trans)misogyny, cis-heteropatriarchy, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, capitalism, and white supremacy) in interpersonal and institutional spaces (in particular state institutions, such as academia, media, police, child welfare, medical care, the carceral justice system, as well as Indian Act band councils).<sup>2</sup> They do so in order to build on and create alternative networks of kinship, governance, and care.<sup>3</sup>

This kinship-building praxis is also central to the work Morgan and Spillett do outside of publishing, as both are engaged in education, activism, and community work. Additionally, Spillett is a poet, the author of the graphic novel *Surviving the City*, and an educator currently pursuing a Ph. D. in Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Morgan is also a curator, editor, acclaimed writer, and an assistant professor of English at X University.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on the work of Indigenous literary critics, Indigenous theorists, and queer of color feminists, I will show that Spillett and Morgan participate in a literary tradition of radical incivility as an act of care, specifically as an expression of the Cree concept of wâhkôhtowin or extended kinship.<sup>5</sup> Both texts make a political and aesthetic intervention that directly addresses a diverse readership—Indigenous (Black and non-Black) and non-Indigenous, queer and straight—through a call to witness and a demand for justice. Before returning to Morgan’s memoir and Spillett’s poem in greater detail, I will briefly introduce the shapes settler-colonial violence takes and present the genealogies through which I understand radical incivility.

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2 The Indian Act contributed to patriarchal structures within First Nations. In 1876, the Canadian parliament established patrilinearity as determining factor for Indian status in an amendment to the 1868 Indian Act. In the 1980s, Indigenous women’s efforts to change the enshrined sexism was met with resistance from male-dominated band councils and Indigenous organization. For more on this complex history, see Barker (2006).

3 My use of the term governance is indebted to nehiyaw policy analyst Emily Riddle (Alexander First Nation in Treaty 6) who defines governance as “how we relate to each other as collectivities:” “the ways in which we care for or don’t care for each other is governance” (Riddle 2018, par. 4, 7).

4 In 2021, Morgan, along with other staff and students, began substituting their institution’s name with an X to draw attention to the violent legacy of Egerton Ryerson, one of the architects of residential schools. This renaming is an act of resistance that uncovers the violence settler colonial institutions seek to hide. For more context, see Spice (2021) and Xavier-Carter and Sachdeva (2021).

5 I deliberately refrain from italicizing Indigenous words because I do not want to mark them as foreign words according to style guide rules.

## 9.1 Settler-Colonial Violence and Radical Incivility

Indigenous women, gender-queer, and sexually diverse people have spoken out against settler-colonial, gender-based violence for centuries. As Muscogee law professor Sarah Deer argues, “rape is a fundamental result of colonialism” (Deer 2015, x). Settler colonialism is inherently violent as it operates within a logic of elimination, specifically, “the elimination of the native *as native*” (Kauanui 2016, par. 3), which targets Indigenous legal, cultural, linguistic, scientific, religious, and socio-political ways of knowing and being along with non-Western expressions of gender and sexuality.<sup>6</sup> The latter have become known as Two-Spirit, a term that was dreamt into being by Cree-Saulteaux elder Myra Laramee in 1990 (Pyle 2020, 3’50”–6’46”) and which was quickly adopted as a relational umbrella term. In the words of Two-Spirit Métis and Bawiting Nishnaabe writer Kai Minosh Pyle, the term refers “to Indigenous people who fall outside the accepted boundaries of modern white or ‘Western’ gender and sexuality, both past and present” (Pyle 2018, 576). Broadly speaking, the term “Two-Spirit” refers to Indigenous LGBTQ2S+ people, their place within Indigenous communities, and how they continue or reinvent tribally-specific roles.<sup>7</sup> The centuries-long crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people is inextricably tied to settler-colonial manifestations of violence: the dispossession of Indigenous land, the deliberate weakening of Indigenous political and legal structures, the efforts to sever Indigenous kinship ties, and the imposition of Euro-Western gender binaries and cis-heteropatriarchy (Deer 2015; Miranda 2010; Simpson 2017; TallBear 2018).

Indigenous literatures, or what Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald calls “Indigenous storywork” (Archibald 2008), disrupt the settler-colonial process of erasure and replacement.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the settler-colonial logic of

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6 Given the multi-faceted violence of settler-colonialism, it is perhaps not surprising that “an Indigenous feminist approach is not limited to constructions of gender but more specifically addresses the colonial ideologies that inform constructions of gender, race, class, nationality, geopolitical space, physical ability, etc.” (Sneider 2016, 99). It should be noted that Indigenous feminisms only exist in the plural, taking into account the plurality of Indigenous nations. In the context of North America, there are over 560 federally recognized tribes (in addition to unrecognized nations) in what is currently known as the United States, over 600 First Nations in addition to Inuit and Métis in what is currently known as Canada, and 68 pueblos indígenas in Mexico that make up over one fifth of the Mexican population, with many Indigenous nations crossing the violently imposed and violently maintained boundaries of settler-colonial nation states.

7 For more on the specifically Cree context, see the work of Two-Spirit Opaskwayak Cree scholar Alex Wilson (2018).

8 As settler scholar Patrick Wolfe succinctly put it, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe 2006, 388). More importantly, settler colonialism

elimination, Indigenous storytelling offers what Koyangk'auwi Maidu poet Janice Gould identifies as “historical consciousness” in Native women’s poetry: “The evidence of American Indian poetry suggests that ‘to witness’ means, among other things, to store an event in tribal memory, a memory that is at once personal and collective” (Gould 1995, 798, 800). Although this paper examines a poem and a memoir and tries not to conflate genre differences, I am interested in them both as literary works that offer “a perspective born out of stakes,” to use Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott’s words (Elliott 2019b). Elliott suggests that Indigenous writers, specifically women, youth, Two-Spirit, and racialized Indigenous writers, write from the knowledge and experience that their bodies, lands, and communities are actively targeted by settler-colonial structures that aim to erase and replace them.

My interest in radical incivility as an aesthetic, political, and intellectual practice that enables structural critique of settler-colonial violence is indebted to Indigenous literary studies, which analyze the intersections of the literary, legal, political, and historical. In his essay ‘The Callout: Writing American Indian Politics’, Cherokee scholar Sean Teuton engages with the intellectual and political legacy of Indigenous literatures and the writings by American Indian prisoners at the Auburn Correctional Facility to develop “a theory of Native praxis” through the twin concepts of “the call of history and the call to action” (Teuton 2008, 106, 121). Teuton grounds his interpretation of Indigenous literatures in the lessons he learned from Indigenous prisoners during his weekly visits over five years. He develops the notion of the “callout” as a “demand for justice” (Teuton 2008, 107) and a “call to action” (Teuton 2008, 106), which are grounded in and mindful of lived experiences.<sup>9</sup> Teuton’s definition of the call-out complements my understanding of radical incivility as it draws attention to the affective and intellectual labor that Morgan’s and Spillett’s texts undertake.

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operates according to a logic of erasure and replacement in which Indigeneity is continually under erasure because it can never be fully erased, a paradoxical mechanism that Kanaka Maoli scholar Kēhaulani Kauanui calls “enduring Indigeneity” (Kauanui 2016, par. 1).

9 It is prudent to note that Morgan recently penned a piece in which they condemn the violent nature of “call-outs” directed at one individual and so-called “cancel culture” because “it’s women, queer, and trans folks, and predominantly trans women, who are subjected to constant lateral violence and cruelty online and within creative industries” (Morgan 2020, par. 11). Similarly, their memoir states: “I don’t want to enact carceral cultures, make myself a cop, judge, and executioner” (Morgan 2018b, 110). I understand calling out to be less about putting someone in their place (punching down) and more about refusing the place one has been assigned (punching up). Evidently, this is complex, context-specific, and requires a critical assessment of power dynamics. Due to the evolving nature of the term call-out and its shifting connotations, I rely more strongly on the term radical incivility.

Queer of color feminisms provide another important theoretical foundation to examine intellectual and literary traditions of radical incivility. Most importantly, I rely on Tavia Nyong'o and Kyla Wazana Tompkins's generative definition of radical incivility. Rather than violence, with which incivility is often conflated in civility discourse, incivility enables a strategic, structural analysis benefitting a collectivity: "Far from giving in to individuation, radical incivility turns us from individual pain to structural analysis; it is a with-ness that turns us toward each other" (Nyong'o and Tompkins 2018, par. 2). Radical incivility is inherently political and invested in collective interests in counter-distinction to the depoliticizing mechanics of civility discourse. I consider civility as "kindness [that] can be extremely unkind if it's only towards your own kind" (Ahmed 2019), such as trans-exclusionary feminists whose concerns for safety are limited to cisgender women. By contrast, radical incivility challenges structural inequities beyond individual interests.<sup>10</sup> Usefully, Nyong'o and Tompkins also complicate the binary between calling in and calling out by inviting readers to "hear the call-out as a request to be invited inside" (Nyong'o and Tompkins 2018, par. 7). I consider the groundbreaking 1981 women of color anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* and Audre Lorde's 1984 essay collection *Sister Outsider* to be part of such a tradition of radical incivility, of calling out as an invitation. In particular, my thinking is shaped by Lorde's insistence on difference as a creative force and the anthology's project of "collectivity making," which "understood coalitions of difference as at once relational and contestatory" (Melamed 2011, 29).<sup>11</sup> The contributors' frank assertions of irreducible differences to build collectivity provide literary articulations of radical incivility practiced

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10 In this sense, radical incivility is connected to Kai Cheng Thom's nuanced definition of justice: "justice is the naming of harm and the transformation of the people *as well as the conditions* that perpetuated harm" (Thom 2019, 89, emphasis in the original). Thom's work is vital to this discussion because she writes insightfully about the impossibility for transformation and healing through shaming and how call-outs often harm the most vulnerable. Morgan similarly draws attention to "the uneven repercussions of the call outs and being called out" (Morgan 2020, par. 8). It is generative to read Morgan's work alongside the work of Thom, who advocates against disposability inherent in capitalist celebrity culture and for a compassion-based model of "look[ing] at each other through the lens of love and justice at the same time" (Thom 2019, 53).

11 It is perhaps worth noting that the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (Chicana), who co-edited the anthology together with Cherríe Moraga (Chicana), has been criticized for its uncritical engagement with José Vasconcelos. Wendy Trevino summarizes the Mexican thinker's anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism as follows (Trevino 2018, 63, 86, 87): "He imagines a mixed race, a new shade/ of white, that will trump them all. He sounds like/ A Nazi who believes 'the Indians / A good bridge' between the Black race & white" (Trevino 2018, 87, ll. 11–14). What interests me in *This Bridge* is precisely the opposite of this impulse of homogenization, namely the open acknowledgement of and critical confrontation with irreducible dif-

in 1970s social movements, in particular women of color feminism, which built on Black and Indigenous traditions.

My use of radical incivility is also indebted to the work of Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg thinker Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Alderville First Nation). In her work on radical resurgence, Simpson insists on Indigenous, place-based alternatives to settler colonial, white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal, and capitalist modes of being:

*Radical requires us to critically and thoroughly look at the roots of the settler colonial present—capitalism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness. Radical requires us to name dis-possession as the meta-dominating force in our relationship to the Canadian state, and settler colonialism as the system that maintains this expansive definition [...]. Radical resurgence means an extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganization of things [...] a rebellion and a revolution from within. It has always been about bringing forth a new reality.* (Simpson 2017, 48–49)

Radical incivility is inherently resurgent because it entails not just speaking out against violence and injustice but refusing the confines of hegemonic systems of oppression by insisting on other forms of kinship, governance, and care. In the context of Indigenous literatures, this means that “the writing is *not* a reaction to colonialism, it is an active and a new way to tell the stories we have always told,” as Mohawk lesbian writer Beth Brant asserts (Brant 1994, 40). I define radical incivility as an act of care, as speaking up and speaking out against violence and the hegemonic system(s) that they maintain and are maintained by in order to nurture other ways of being. More specifically, Morgan’s and Spillett’s work can be read through the Cree concept of wâhkôhtowin, meaning relations in the extended sense of the term, which runs counter to settler-colonial attempts to destroy Indigenous relations to human and other than-human kin, the language, the land, and the waters.

## 9.2 Radical Incivility as wâhkôhtowin in Jas M. Morgan’s *nîtisânak*

In their memoir *nîtisânak*, meaning siblings or relatives, Morgan examines their relationships with “adopted kin” (Morgan 2018b, 4), “blood kin” (Morgan 2018b, 12), and “chosen kin” (Morgan 2018b, 10) within the larger context of settler-colonial cis-heteropatriarchy. Written after the death

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ference. The contributor whose collective work has most impacted my thinking in this regard is lesbian Menominee poet Chrystos.

of their adoptive mother, Morgan's memoir grapples with the messy entanglements of kinship in the prairies.<sup>12</sup> The memoir is dedicated to their mother as well as to okâwiya, their Cree mother, from whom they were removed in what has become known as the Millennial Scoop (Tremonti 2018).<sup>13</sup> Morgan critiques the structural conditions of interpersonal violence out of love for wîtisâna, their siblings and relatives; for their mothers and grandmothers; for their "plains NDN kin" (Morgan 2018b, 1); for the "*bb girls with that halfbreed, city NDN hustle*" (Morgan 2018b, 141), and for their "descendants, for all [their] 2s kin to come" (Morgan 2018b, 157).<sup>14</sup> In the following, I will argue that the memoir's structure, its genealogies, the specificity with which Morgan addresses various readers, and Morgan's use of nêhiyawêwin or Plains Cree contribute to the combination of critique and care that constitutes radical incivility.

Composed of twenty-three chapters containing short, punchy essays interspersed with poetry, a letter, twelve *PRAYERS*, and eight *VISIONS*, *nîtisânak* embodies an aesthetic of Indigenous prairie punk that is articulated through a unique mix of colloquialisms, cyber-slang, and academic language. As Alicia Elliott argues, "*nîtisânak* is an incredibly punk text—from its many musical references, to its descriptions of the Queen City Punk scene, to its continual refusal of authority, to its very structure" (Elliott 2019a, par. 16). The memoir's non-linear, episodic structure counters the teleological narratives of the white man's Truth.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the

12 Part of Morgan's memoir was published in *ndncountry*, which also features Spillet's poem. Both of their works are grounded in a specific location, namely the prairies. For more on Indigenous kinship practices and settler-colonial violence in the prairies, see Logan McCallum and Perry (2018) and Starblanket and Hunt (2020).

13 The Millennial Scoop refers to the ongoing disproportionate rate at which Indigenous children are removed from their families and put into foster care, especially in the prairies (Palmater 2017, par. 2, 3). As advocates and youth who have been through the system argue, the Millennial Scoop is an extension of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop in its assimilationist and culturally genocidal purpose (Tremonti 2018). In fact, "there are three times more Indigenous children in care today than there were during the height of residential schools," an overrepresentation that is directly linked to the disproportionate numbers of "missing, murdered, and exploited Indigenous women and girls" (Palmater 2017, par. 1, 4).

14 Diasporic Diné writer Lou Cornum has stated that "[n]dn is a subtraction made substantive, marking how terms made to describe Indigenous peoples are always lacking—indeed how we are made to lack and always feel lacking. But in the word's notes of subversion and irreverence, as well as its widespread use in forming digital collectives and connections, ndn also signals the ways in which ndns build worlds even as ours are invaded and denigrated" (Cornum 2017). Cornum's analysis speaks to how Indigenous people constantly reinvent language, subvert dehumanizing categories, and Indigenous digital space.

15 Morgan's memoir is doubtlessly influenced by Indigenous art and by what they define as Indigenous Relational Aesthetics. In their contribution to the recent anthology of Indigenous feminisms, *In Good Relation*, Morgan remarks: "The Indigenous relational artist or cu-



multiple, non-chronological examples of settler-colonial violence challenge the settler-colonial narrative of progress and reconciliation, which obscures ongoing violence by promising settler colonialism's future demise. By contrast, Morgan examines the entangled nature of toxic masculinities, rape culture, (trans)misogyny, cis- and heteronormativity, genocide, racism, capitalism, segregation, incarceration, medicalization, forced sterilization, body shaming, and colonialism.

The memoir, in which the personal is political, thus provides a particularly apt form for institutional critique. As Morgan observes, “[a]s a ward of the state, my whole life has been constructed for me by institutions” (Morgan 2018b, 173). Morgan’s writing is *radical* because it examines the *root* of settler-colonial violence and analyzes the interrelations between interpersonal and structural violence.<sup>16</sup> In this vein, Morgan analyzes the uneven relationship they have with their adoptive father within the larger context of colonialism and toxic masculinities in the prairies:

*the necessity of my wrong-ness is about more than my dad’s individual authority—it’s about moral order on the prairies, too. There are racial scripts encoded in the ways we interact. My dad needed me to believe in The Truth, or else his own moral reasoning around race, his reasoning for my adoption, that I would be better off with a yt family, would be untrue.* (Morgan 2018b, 26–27)

In contrast to their father’s unwavering belief in “his ultimate Truth” (Morgan 2018b, 25), Morgan self-critically reflects on which stories are theirs to tell, interrogates the accuracy of their memories, and asks readers to be similarly self-critical of their interpretations. This practice reflects Cree-Métis-Sauteaux storytelling traditions that acknowledge the personal, context-specific nature of truth. Morgan’s memoir therefore follows in the footsteps of Indigenous autobiographies, which Cree-Métis literary critic Deanna Reder regards as “a continuation of varying Indigenous intellectual

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rator questions the confines of settler materialities—such as space-time, language, and written law—opting instead to examine Indigenous nonlinear narrative form, which exists in multiple physical and spatial realms, from our dream visions to our waking lives” (Morgan 2020b, 202).  
16 The memoir undertakes a structural critique of interpersonal violence that is also present in Morgan’s previous publications (Morgan 2015; Morgan 2016; Morgan 2017; Morgan 2018a; Morgan 2018d; Morgan 2020a; Morgan 2020b). For instance, Morgan traces toxicity, competition, and bullying back to capitalist modes of extractive industries, including academia, as “scarcity-driven economies [that] breed cruelty” (Morgan 2018d, par. 12). For a more complete list of Morgan’s writing, consult their blog <https://aabitagiizhig.com/>.

traditions” (Reder 2016, 171),<sup>17</sup> that is to say nation-specific ways of storytelling and place-based ways of knowing.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to Cree-Métis-Sauteaux literary traditions, *nîtisânak* continues and co-creates intellectual traditions of queer Indigenous ethics that can be considered radically uncivil. At the end of the first chapter, Morgan writes: “No, my trauma is not a commodity, but my story doesn’t always have to be uplifting, resurgent, or revolutionary to be my truth, either” (Morgan 2018b, 18). Morgan’s refusal to be defined exclusively in terms of either victimhood or empowerment resonates with concerns about the discourse of the sacred in Indigenous nationalisms and in advocacy for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people.<sup>19</sup> Morgan thwarts any romanticizing gestures by claiming the label of “*bad girl*,” by signing off as “*Ungrateful, Traitorous, Troublesome Bitch*,” and by telling Two-Spirit youth that their existence is enough (Morgan 2018b, 26, 42, 160). In chapter 18, ‘PRAYER 9: For My NDN Bb Girls’, Morgan invokes the sacred while pre-empting essentializing expectations:

*This one’s for you, all the NDN bb girls, women or otherwise. Your body, your hustle, is sacred even if it’s grounded to the land through the connection of kicks to concrete. You’re an inner city baby who might not always be okay, on the truth, and resurgent; who goes crazy, who goes off, and who needs to self-medicate sometimes; who might not be one of the “good NDNs.” But you’re still here, bish.* (Morgan 2018b, 142; italicized in the original)

What I call radical incivility in Morgan’s writing is therefore akin to the “refusal of the respectability politics that contain queer and trans bodies

17 *nîtisânak* notably resonates with Métis author Maria Campbell’s autobiography *Halfbreed* (1973), “in which Campbell draws on Cree ideas of *wâhkôhtowin*, of kinship, and the tradition of protest to theorize opposition and allegiance” (Reder 2016, 171).

18 Morgan always locates their analysis of these interconnected forms of violence in specific places, from rural Saskatchewan to prairie cities, most prominently Regina and Edmonton, but also Saskatoon, Swift Current, Estevan, Moose Jaw; an oil camp outside of Fort McMurray; the Eastern seaboard in “Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Abenaki territories” (Morgan 2018b, 21), Trois-Rivières, and Tió’tia:ke/ Montréal. They also briefly reference visits to the Tennessee mountains as well as Brighton, London, the Scottish Highlands, and Cornwall. This grounding practice lends specificity to Morgan’s critical analysis and is consistent with Indigenous epistemologies’ attention to place and context.

19 Cree-Saulteaux-Dunneza legal scholar Val Napoleon points out that calling Indigenous women sacred creates further stereotypes and unrealistic expectations, which can be used to justify violence against Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people: “I think our so-called failures to live up to those abstract stereotypes are just another excuse for the violence against us ... shouldn’t we not be killed whether we’re sacred or not?” (Napoleon 2018, 11’–11’06”, 20’19”–20’23”).

in Indigenous spaces” that Morgan celebrates in the contemporary “wave of queer and trans Indigenous literature and art” (Belcourt and Morgan 2018, par. 13).

While I aim to examine how *nítisânak* performs radical incivility through an analysis of the interconnected nature of interpersonal and institutional violence, I need to also acknowledge that it is quite problematic for me to read the memoir at least partially through the lens of violence. This is especially true because I am a white reader, whose interpretation of violence Morgan anticipates with apprehension:

*After all these years, I still don't know how to talk about homophobia and transphobia on the rez. I'm not supposed to say the truth and give in to settler desire to consume my trauma and feed yt saviour ego, so at some dinner party settlers can use my book to talk about how they read a gay NDN's memoir and it said that it's so violent on the rez for gay NDNs—but, like, it's so violent on the rez for gay NDNs! (Morgan 2018b, 50)*

Morgan pre-emptively denounces misinterpretations that decontextualize their account of interpersonal experiences of violence from their rigorous analysis of structural violence, most notably the intergenerational effects of ongoing settler-colonial violence. There is a repeated refusal to become the object for settler consumption or to take on the role of Native informant in the pre-scripted narrative of the “vanishing Indian.”<sup>20</sup> Morgan admonishes non-Indigenous readers that “we [Indigenous people] are not your trauma porn” (Morgan 2018b, 90). In order to mitigate the danger of eliciting selective outrage that remains uncritical of power structures, Morgan also inserts abbreviated reminders of structural conditions: “See also: capitalism, colonialism” (Morgan 2018b, 50), “(see also: colonialism)” (Morgan 2018b, 70), and “institutional (see also: yt) privilege” (Morgan 2018b, 130). Morgan’s awareness that their story can be misappropriated leads to a context-specific critique that is couched in a careful consideration of existing power structures, about which Morgan reminds specific readers through indirect and direct address.

Morgan’s address to the reader demands a heterogenous audience to interrogate their complicity in various forms of violence, such as colonialism, racism, and intimate violence in queer spaces or homo- and transphobia

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20 This well-known phrase refers to the predominant conviction among settlers in the second half of the nineteenth century that Indigenous peoples “would not be around to see much of the twentieth” (Francis 1992/2011). This led to an ongoing discourse of inevitable decline and disappearance.

in Native spaces.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Morgan draws attention to kinship bonds with adopted kin, blood kin, and chosen kin in these spaces and maps constellations of care. While critiquing the whiteness of queerness, Morgan states: “Yt gays were some of my first queer kin. Don’t get it twisted, my dearest queers, queer is my home, too” (Morgan 2018b, 73). Here, Morgan’s direct address simultaneously acknowledges kinship and its limitations in order to claim space without diminishing difference.

Like the frequent address to specific readers, Morgan’s use of *nêhiyawêwin* or Plains Cree combines care and critique and constitutes a form of self-location. The first family that Morgan claims is their “plains NDN kin” (Morgan 2018b, 1). This relational identity is confirmed by Morgan’s first use of *nêhiyawêwin* in the following subheading: “The story of Mom and Dad, as told by niya (me), quilted together from stories told to me by adopted kin” (Morgan 2018b, 4). The first-person pronoun emphasizes Morgan’s Cree-Métis-Sauteaux positionality and their irreducible difference within their adopted family. At the same time, “as told by niya (me)” draws attention to Morgan’s authorial power to present their perspective as the storyteller even while the metaphor of quilting acknowledges previous storytellers.<sup>22</sup> *nêhiyawêwin* also enables Morgan to be more specific when using the first-person plural, as Plains Cree distinguishes between the we inclusive (including the addressee) and the we exclusive (excluding you). Morgan concludes the chapter ‘*wihtikow*’,<sup>23</sup> in which they “tell the truth of one of the most prolific sources of violence within our [Indigenous people’s] lives: the cops, the pigs, the *wihtikowak*” (Morgan 2018b, 92), with a short paragraph of untranslated Cree. The use of the first-person plural exclusive, “*nika-mâci-waniskânân*” (Morgan 2018b, 92; my emphasis), reinforces the opposition between the we and the excluded addressee, in this case the police. Beyond the incendiary content that issues a threat to the police, the very refusal to provide a translation is an act of resistance to the settler-colonial logic of elimination.

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21 In this way, Morgan broadens the critique that (non-citizen) Cherokee Two-Spirit and queer writer Qwo-Li Driskill undertook of academia in “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Alliances Between Native and Queer Studies” (Morgan 2010).

22 The metaphor of quilting could also be applied to Morgan’s citational practices; the memoir’s endnotes feature a mix of academic and pop-cultural references without imposing an epistemic hierarchy. Note that Elissa Washuta (Cowlitz) and Theresa Warburton analyze the form and purpose of Native non-fiction through the analogy of weaving practices (Washuta and Warburton 2019).

23 Designating a cannibal monster of insatiable hunger that appears in both *atâyohkewina* (legendary story cycle) and *kayâs acimowina* (historical incidents) (Carlson 2009, 359), Morgan’s use of the term *wihtikow* highlights the ongoing danger Indigenous people in the prairies face of being disappeared by police.

Morgan's use of *nēhiyawewin*, in addition to some Anishinaabemowin and Kanien'kéha, illustrates the twin project of radical incivility to speak truth to power and to create constellations of care. Most of the Plains Cree terms in the memoir are relational terms. The memoir's title, *nítisânak*, is a gender-neutral expression for both "my siblings" and "my relations," generally" (Morgan 2018c, par. 1). Morgan uses Cree as an inherently queer and/or trans language (without gendered pronouns) to create an expansive sense of kinship that resonates with Métis elder and writer Maria Campbell's teaching about *wâhkôhtowin*: "Today [*wâhkôhtowin*] is translated to mean kinship, relationship, and family as in human family. But at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation" (Campbell 2007, 5). In the section entitled 'Terra Nullius', Morgan uses Plains Cree kinship terms to refer not only to blood and chosen kin, but to their "relation, *kihcikamiy*, the ocean" and "*nîkihcihik* (my big parent, here a gender-neutral way to refer to nature)" (Morgan 2018b, 21). In counter-distinction to Euro-Western conceptions of empty space that were used to justify settler colonialism, these *nēhiyaw* terms insist on the water and the land as kin. Morgan also claims the prairie wind as a queer ancestor and relative, a liberating force, and a guide (Morgan 2018b, 45–47, 62, 84, 120, 157). In the chapter 'For My Descendants', which is addressed specifically to Two-Spirit youth, Morgan uses "*nibi*," the Anishinaabe term for water, to theorize *nibi* as a model for gender fluidity and the expansive kinship role of Two-Spirit people (Morgan 2018b, 160).<sup>24</sup> In these ways, Morgan uses Indigenous languages to articulate forms of kinship, governance, and care that include the whole of creation.

Returning to Deanna Reder's theorization of autobiography as a continuation of intellectual traditions, Morgan writes and co-creates in a tradition of radical incivility and queer Indigenous ethics that are grounded in teachings from the language, the land, the waters, the prairie wind, Indigenous art, and "women's knowledge and kin-making practice" (Morgan 2018b, 170). Morgan's self-critical examination, the non-linear structure, the unabashedly straightforward tone, the frequent address to various audiences, and the use of Indigenous languages contribute to a radically uncivil mode that questions power dynamics in order to be in better relation.

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24 Morgan's blog name, *aabitaagiizhig*, also speaks to the queer and expansive relational worldviews of *nēhiyawewin* and Anishinaabemowin. Morgan adopts the Anishinaabemowin term "*aabitaagiizhig* (half-sky) or Two-Spirit" to "signify a gender fluidity that exists outside the bounds of the colonial gender binary; a self-determined, resurgent gender, based in my own ways of knowing and being" (Morgan 2016, par. 1, 2).

### 9.3 The Conditional Construction of “No Justice, No Peace” in Tasha Spillett’s ‘if it were me’

Tasha Spillett’s ‘if it were me’ is a short poem of seven stanzas and twenty-one lines, in which the speaker imagines becoming a casualty of violence and threatens to haunt anyone complicit in settler-colonial violence and injustice. “if it were me” functions not only as a *j’accuse* in which the speaker calls out a variety of addressees that are implicated in institutionalized spaces, but also as a warning. Its tone is both accusatory and cautionary and its purpose disruptive. The poem is a promissory note to “Relatives” (Spillett 2018, l. 3) and an overt threat to those complicit in and compliant with institutionalized violence. The dramatic monologue is structured around the repetition of the conditional clause “if it were ever me” in stanzas 1, 3, and 6 (Spillett 2018, ll. 1,7,18). The speaker envisages the possibility of being subjected to violence that will garner attention on social media without, however, resulting in holding the perpetrator(s) of violence accountable. In addition to the implications of violence behind the suppositional “if it were ever me/ with no justice” (Spillett 2018, ll. 8,19), the first self-definition of the speaker denounces the confining violence of becoming a symbolic victim: “if it were ever me// the culmination of my story/ a hashtag cage/ trapping my name” (Spillett 2018, ll. 1–4). While the speaker of the poem anticipates the likelihood of their possible violent death, their stance is simultaneously one of refusal.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, the speaker refuses any mediatised afterlife in which the violence inflicted on them becomes their defining feature. They denounce the performative outrage which perpetrates further violence by circumscribing the speaker’s story.

Unlike the erasure the speaker fears from public performance and within the settler-colonial state, the dramatic monologue provides a space in which the speaker is not reduced to the status of voiceless victim<sup>26</sup> and asserts their relational worldview. Refusing the “hashtag cage,” the speaker

25 For more on the function of refusal, see Audra Simpson’s work in *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014). It is worth noting that Morgan challenges the notion of refusal, meaning to refuse reliance on settler-state recognition, where Indigenous nationhood and self-governance does not extend to care for more vulnerable members (Morgan 2018b, 15).

26 The term “victim” is somewhat contentious as it has been used to further undermine agency and bolster settler-colonial narratives of superiority by enabling saviour mechanisms (Palmer 2015, 131). Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million has pointed out how “[t]hose academic languages (*abuse, victim*) that created a space for the residential school survivors to speak are part of the intricate sexual and gendered construction of nation so basic to the violence done to Indigenous peoples, to life as relationship and being” (Million 2014, 40). While the term victim creates a space to name violence, that space is still inscribed within Euro-Western understandings of gender and sexuality.

foregrounds a relational self-definition: “i would demand more for my Relatives/ than your cyber love & keyboard prayers” (Spillett 2018, ll. 3, 5–6). The speaker’s first and only explicit demand concerns the well-being of their kin. The importance of the demand stands out visually as the two lines in which it is formulated are the longest in the poem. Additionally, the term “Relatives” is the only word in the poem that is capitalized, which is especially striking given that even the customarily capitalized first person singular is written in small-case letters. Rather than the atomizing hashtag that reduces the speaker to the act of violence that ended their life, the speaker’s enduring concern rests with their kin. The typographical emphasis on “Relatives” resonates with the Cree concept of “wâhkôhtowin,” that is to say with the idea of kinship in an expanded sense. In “if it were me,” Relatives arguably refers not only to the speaker’s immediate and chosen family, but to people whom the speaker may not know but who are at risk of dying a similarly violent death within the settler-colonial order. The speaker’s care for those left behind extends beyond recognizing the grief of loved ones to recognizing that violence targets not just individuals but entire communities.

The speaker’s conditional mood, which anticipates the possibility of violence, expresses an awareness that individual acts of violence occur within a larger cis-heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, settler-colonial system in which Indigenous, Black, racialized, queer, gendered, and/or disabled lives are, to varying degrees, marked as expendable. There is an amplification in the poem as the speaker’s demand for their Relatives transforms into outright threats towards those complicit in structural violence in the fourth and in the last stanza: “i would allow no rest/ you would not know peace” (Spillett 2018, ll. 9–10, 20–21). In between the repetition of this threat, the fifth and longest stanza specifies to whom the speaker’s warning extends:

*i would haunt you  
 in your parliament buildings  
 in your chief & council meetings  
 in your lecture halls  
 in your news rooms  
 in your police stations  
 in your court rooms* (Spillett 2018, ll. 11–17)

The anaphora “in your” specifies various institutional spaces in which the individual “you” is implicated. Although “you” seems to designate a heterogeneous plurality, the fact that “you” can also refer to the second-person singular arguably facilitates a nuanced understanding of settler-colonialism as articulated by historians Mary Jane Logan McCallum (Munsee Delaware)

and Adele Perry: “settler colonialism, and the structures of indifference that it produces and is maintained by, are always both [individual and structural]” (Logan McCallum and Perry 2018, 15). The speaker’s direct mode of address constitutes a call-out that can be defined as a call *against* indifference by producing stakes for the implied reader, whom the speaker threatens with being haunted. The speaker’s direct mode of address shifts the gaze away from the victim and onto those who occupy positions in settler-colonial national politics, Indigenous national politics, academia, media, police, and the justice system. The earlier reference to “your cyber love & keyboard prayers” highlights the absence of meaningful action towards justice in these institutional spaces.<sup>27</sup> The anaphora’s five-fold repetition of “in your” contributes to the poem’s underlying opposition between the “i” and “my Relatives” and the “you” and “your” institutional spaces of power, highlighting the fact that these sites of power were not built to serve the speaker and their communities.

By calling out the various addressees that are implicated in institutional power structures, the speaker puts the responsibility back onto those benefitting from and/or co-involved in settler-colonial violence. By calling attention to the problem of the institutionalized nature of settler-colonial violence, the speaker disrupts the settler-colonial discourse that constructs Indigeneity in terms of deficiency, trauma, and a problem to be solved.<sup>28</sup> The conditional mood, the direct mode of address, and the speaker’s explicit naming of power structures all contribute to radical incivility that refuses the status of victim and of problem and enables a structural analysis of violence.

Almost two-thirds of the poem focuses on what the speaker promises and threatens to do in response to a possible violent death. The speaker’s acts of “demand[ing],” “allow[ing],” and “haunt[ing]” contrast with the you’s performative and immaterial “cyber love & keyboard prayers” (Spillett 2018, ll. 5, 9, 11, 20). The poem dramatizes the ironic contrast in which a ghost’s hauntings will be more tangible than the symbolic mourning of violent deaths without institutional change. Actions and verbs are the speaker’s domain and, as a result, all of the spaces in which the speaker could not expect justice face the threat of being haunted by the speaker. The sense of enclosure and imprisonment that the speaker fears in the mediatized afterlife in the

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27 It is important to note that the indictment of online activism does not target people with disabilities who participate in online activism, but the hypocrisy of symbolic activism by institutionally affiliated actors who offer condolences without structural changes.

28 As Maya Ode’amik Chacaby (Anishinaabe) succinctly phrased it, “what has been discovered and represented in the news, in research reports, and even at the rallies and gatherings is only what is permissible: that there are Indians and that they have problems” (Chacaby 2018, 127). For more on the discourse of damage and deficiency, see Tuck (2009) and Mailhot (2017).



second stanza shifts as the institutional spaces evoked in the fifth stanza are in turn enclosed between the following refrain stanzas: “if it were ever me/ with no justice// i would allow no rest/ you would not know peace” (Spillett 2018, ll. 7–10, 18–21). Unconventionally, the term “rest” does not refer to the deceased but to the direct addressees whom the speaker haunts (Spillett 2018, ll. 9, 20). The “you” is held accountable by the “i,” who takes charge as a self-proclaimed disturber of peace and disrupter of the status quo in an act of care for their Relatives.<sup>29</sup>

The repetitive structure of ‘if it were me’ exposes the structural nature of settler colonialism. The repetition of “if it were me” and the repeated threats issued by the speaker mirrors the relentless nature of settler colonial erasure and violence, which the speaker counters with equally relentless refusal and radical incivility. The absence of punctuation contributes to the sense of ongoing violence that does not have an end date. However, neither does the speaker’s threat to be a haunting presence in the absence of justice, as the poem ends on the speaker’s unpunctuated threat: “i would allow no rest/ you would not know peace” (Spillett 2018, ll. 20–21).<sup>30</sup> The repetitive structure, the direct mode of address, and the straightforward diction contribute to the clarity of the speaker’s message, which inserts itself into larger movements of resistance against white supremacist violence. In fact, two of the poem’s four sentences are constituted of the refrain stanzas that evoke the slogan “No Justice, No Peace.” The slogan has become a popular chant to protest lethal violence against Black and Indigenous people in both Canada and the United States. While there has been some debate in recent years as to whether the construction is conjunctive (x and y) or conditional (if x, then y), “if it were me” leaves no ambiguity that the absence of peace is not a lamentation but

29 The radically uncivil threat of a ghostly intervention as an act of care can also be seen in the graphic novel *Surviving the City* written by Spillett and illustrated by Natasha Donovan (member of the Métis nation of British Columbia). It tells the story of two best friends growing up in Winnipeg amid omnipresent danger of going missing or becoming murdered and the threat of being removed from home by social workers. The novel is peopled by blue-sky-colored ghosts of stolen sisters who protect the girls on their daily travels around the city.

30 As Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and C. Ree contend, haunting is “the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation... Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop” (Tuck and Ree 2013, 642). Tuck and Ree also provide a useful definition of settler colonialism that is attentive to the interconnected history of enslavement: “Settler colonial relations are comprised by a triad, including a) the Indigenous inhabitant, present only because of her erasure; b) the chattel slave, whose body is property and murderable; and c) the inventive settler, whose memory becomes history, and whose ideology becomes reason. Settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation” (Tuck and Ree 2013, 642). In ‘if it were me’, the future ghost refuses to be managed and appeased.

a promise of sustained resistance. This also seems to be how the slogan was originally deployed in the 1980s and the 1990s (Zimmer 2013). According to American linguist Ben Zimmer, the origin of the slogan “No Justice, No Peace” dates back to the manifestations following the death of Trinidadian immigrant Michael Griffith, who was chased onto a highway by a mob of white youth in Howard Beach, New York, in 1986 (Zimmer 2013). While there is an increasing mindfulness not to co-opt slogans such as Black Lives Matter for the purpose of protesting anti-Indigenous racism, the fact that “if it were me” was penned by a Cree and Trinidadian poet speaks to the history of solidarity and resistance against white supremacy and state violence as well as the importance of foregrounding the voices of Black Indigenous people. In this way, the radically uncivil refrain gestures towards a longer history of Black-Indigenous kinship that has been under erasure in settler-colonial narratives.<sup>31</sup>

#### 9.4 Staying with Radical Incivility

Both Jas M. Morgan’s *nítisânak* and Tasha Spillett’s ‘if it were me’ participate in a tradition of radical incivility that provides structural, kinship-making critique of interrelated forms of interpersonal and institutional violence that endanger the lives of Indigenous people, especially women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, in the settler-colonial nation-state of Canada. Reading their works has led me to question my own role in academia, on social media, and in everyday interactions.<sup>32</sup> In both texts, I experienced moments when I felt called out. It is worth bearing in mind that radical incivility is frequently met with white fragility and tone-policing. Arguably one of the risks of writing in a tradition of radical incivility is the danger of being dismissed as “angry,” a label which Menominee lesbian poet Chrystos rejects because it fails to recognize their work “as a weapon for my survival & that of my allies” (Chrystos 1995, 128). However, Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde draws a useful distinction between hatred and anger in which anger could be identified as a weapon for collective survival: “Hatred is the fury

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31 In the context of the prairies, Calgary author, playwright, and director Cheryl Foggo states that “there was almost no Black pioneer who didn’t create connection and kinship with Indigenous people” at the beginning of the twentieth century (Foggo 2017).

32 Some of the ongoing questions these works have provoked or reinforced are as follows: How can I avoid participating in performative outrage that turns people into symbols for a cause? How do I minimize my research’s participation in the extractive logic of academia? Who is my research for? How can I make sure that I speak with rather than about or for Indigenous writers, activists, and academics? How do I challenge cis-homonormativity and whiteness in queer spaces? How do I position myself without centering myself?

of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change” (Lorde 1984/2007, 129). As a reader, student, and teacher of literature, one of the most transformational lessons I have learned from Indigenous, Black, and queer of color writing is to stay with discomfort and acknowledge anger as both a challenge and an invitation. I am grateful for the call-outs that invite me to do better, including Morgan’s memoir and Spillett’s poem. While refusing elimination, appropriation, and the erasure of differences, Morgan’s and Spillett’s literary texts invite readers to witness the “with-ness” of radical incivility, which is both relational and transformational.

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Violence is a persistent element of modern history and it always has been gendered. Today's violent times have politicized and mobilized new publics, generated creative forms of resistance, incited the most unlikely coalitions, and emboldened to live life differently.

The systemic use of rape as a strategy in warfare, nationalism, and settler colonialism, the persistency of intimate partner violence, and the increasingly open racist, sexist, transphobic, and homophobic discrimination are just a few examples of violence's omnipresent gender dimension. The contributions of this volume analyse violence and multiple forms of resistance from an interdisciplinary gender perspective. They show that violence is not just a central and powerful structuring principle of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and class, but that it is also part of the fabric of nation-states and structures all social relations. In addition, the contributions depict manifold strategies and tactics of confronting gendered violence.

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