

## **Narratives of Violence**

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# **Introduction**

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*Narratives of Violence* is a contribution to the ethical turn in literary studies. In the current context of systemic political violence unleashed in the wake of 9/11 and in the midst of the global advance of capitalism and neoliberalism, literature has become a particularly fitting device for raising awareness about injustice, abuse of power and human rights violations. We believe that literary work can be useful in addressing social challenges such as the abolition of patriarchal and colonial imaginaries, the prevention of gender-based violence, and the construction of a peaceful coexistence with immigrants and displaced persons.

We believe that a good way to achieve this goal is by paying academic attention to the voices of people and groups traditionally excluded from knowledge and cultural representations - voices that crystallize into literary or artistic creations, sometimes thanks to the help of a mediator. Ethical commitment forces us to listen to the denunciation of the oppressions they have suffered or continue to suffer; also to consider their resistance or rebellion, especially when it takes the form of an alternative political proposal, be it personal or collective. Thus, subverting the hierarchies and dynamics of the canon, we invite readers to discover a selection of narratives of violence

of female authorship that have been published in non-hegemonic literary or cultural spaces and that, because of the political potential they include – beyond their literary qualities –, it is worth fostering. The mediating function of the academic works we have gathered, therefore, seeks to amplify the subversive potential and the circulation of texts that tell stories of oppression.

The attention we have paid to a very small, yet diverse, set of creations that testify to experiences deeply marked by violence has been reflected in eight critical essays.<sup>1</sup> These essays provide contextual elements and theoretical tools for a better understanding of the positions of subjects who want to subvert the unjust power relations that grip them. The main goal, it should be emphasized, is to encourage readers to develop their own ethical response to the various dilemmas posed by these creations.

The works we analyze have been said, sung or written originally in different languages. They also belong in a wide range of genres: oral poetry, song, biographical or autobiographical narration, *testimonio*, novel, essay, comic and visual art. Anchored in different geopolitical realities, the works are set in historical contexts ranging from the 1920s to the present day. In order to reinforce the diachronic dimension of the selection, we present the essays according to the chronological order of creation of the works – which does not always coincide with their publication.

The stories we invite you to read display precarious experiences lived on the margins, sometimes in situations of confinement, caused by conflicts of all kinds: military, social, political, economic or religious, of a patriarchal nature, often intimately intertwined with *machismo* – which has its worst expression in femicide. The stories we have selected are generally controversial: their sharp edges, we must warn, will possibly bother readers. These works are situated at the opposite end of creations of wide global circulation, conceived as a commercial commodity, that often reinsert victims at their bowed down condition and prevent the articulation of alternative imaginaries.

By tackling works rooted in local experiences as the essays we proceed to present do, *Narratives of Violence* does not want to be limited to a gesture of listening to voices that are generally ignored because they are outside the hegemonic and mainstream patterns and channels of circulation. It also wants to strengthen the political agency of the literary text by contributing to the configuration of global imaginaries based on respect, recognition and empathy, especially towards the most vulnerable people.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to guarantee the academic quality of the chapters, the texts have gone through a double-blind peer review process.

Lhousain Simour opens the volume with a proposal that connects with postcolonial and subaltern studies: “Colonial Encounters in Gendered Settings: Reflections on Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq, a Moroccan Amazigh Courtesan and Singing Poet”. Simour deals with the legendary oral poet Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq, from Morocco, an illiterate Amazigh absent in the hegemonic historiographical accounts, eminently urban and elitist, and in the narratives that glorify the nation. As he warns at the outset, her songs, which have come down to us through René Euloge’s French version, *Les Chants de la Tassaout* (1986), do not escape the problem of the construction of images of the Eastern woman by Western male subjects. Simour’s analysis of the embodiment of the female body and subjectivity, themes, and rhetorical strategies of Mrīrīda n’ait ‘Atiq songs helps to vindicate her as an emblem of women’s resistance to patriarchal and colonial oppression.

Alfons Gregori’s essay, “Janina Hescheles, o la resistència del subjecte trasbalsat. Identitat, heroisme i dignitat” (Janina Hescheles, or the Resistance of the Upset Subject: Identity, Heroism and Dignity), is located at the crossroads between studies on concentration and autobiographical literature. Gregori addresses the testimonial text *Oczyma dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (1946) (*My Lvov. Holocaust Memoir of a Twelve-Year-Old Girl*), in which the Polish Janina Hescheles reflects on her experience as a persecuted and confined Jewish girl in a concentration camp during World War II. In his essay, Gregori relates Hescheles’ text to Anne Frank’s canonical *Diary*, briefly recalling the anti-Semitic barbarism deployed in Poland in the 1940s in order to contextualize the work for today’s readers, and studies the concepts of identity and dignity. Gregori describes Hescheles, a still little-known author, as an activist and social heroine.

Montserrat Lunati Maruny studies a testimonial work in “Personal Remembrance as Historical Memory: Eva Koch’s Interactive Visual Work on Her Mother’s Experience of the Spanish Civil War”. Lunati analyzes the video installation *Villar* (2001), by Eva Koch, in which the Danish artist reconstructs the experience of her mother, Cristobalina Martínez López, when she was adopted by a leftist, committed to pacifism Norwegian couple at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Koch articulates a visual interactive body of work shaped by the memories of several family members who narrate how they lived through the war and what the absence of Cristobalina meant to them: therefore, Lunati considers Koch a “postmemory subject”. She addresses Koch’s work by mobilizing theoretical concepts of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), collective memory (Maurice Halbwachs), history (Walter Benjamin), and performance of memory (Jay Winter). She highlights the connections between personal experiences and collective history, and points out the need to recover them, as Koch does, in a choral and interrelated way to build the memory of the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of the defeated Republican side.

Federico Pous sets out to reflect on a space of tensions that is especially controversial: the position of feminism vis-à-vis prostitution in “Memoria Transversal. Aportes a las genealogías del movimiento feminista en Argentina en *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*” (Transversal Memory: Contributions to the Genealogies of the Feminist Movement in Argentina in *No Woman is Born to Be a Whore*). Pous discusses the work of the Argentine María Galindo and the Bolivian Sonia Sánchez, *Ninguna mujer nace para puta*, a collection of voices by various self-organized prostitutes and ex-prostitutes who explain the multiple violence they suffer. He argues that Galindo and Sánchez’s text has radicalized Argentine feminism by defending the abolitionist stance amid the intense debate over prostitution in Argentina. Pous highlights that, for the current feminist wave in the South American country, the points of reference are the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), who flagged the motto *Ni una menos* (*Not one less*) as a response to the social scourge of femicides. In his opinion, the main virtue of this work, which aspires to undermine the patriarchal domination that legitimizes and gives continuity to the prostitution industry, is its weaving of a transversal memory of the narratives created by prostitutes while articulating a complex and disruptive political proposal that draws attention to the most vulnerable, precarious and marginalized women, those who have always had their bodies exploited but never have had access to the word.

Josep-Anton Fernàndez analyzes the work of Najat El Hachmi, a Catalan novelist who has denounced the various kinds of systemic violence inflicted on women, particularly migrant women, both in her country of origin, Morocco, and in Catalonia. In the chapter “Dislocated Temporalities: Immigration, Sexuality, and Violence in Najat El Hachmi’s *L’últim patriarca*”, Fernàndez focuses on the novel that was awarded the prestigious Premi Ramon Llull in 2008. Fernàndez explores, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, how El Hachmi’s novel portrays the effects of the clash of temporalities brought about by immigration. These effects are present in the psychic conflicts experienced by the unnamed protagonist, but also in her brutal disruption of gender subordination. El Hachmi, argues this scholar, locates in the reproduction of patriarchal domination a kind of sexual violence that is both foundational and structural, and that is dealt with by the protagonist by means of a sexual transgression – carried out in the realm of anal sexuality – whose effects are no less violent and shattering. This transgression, Fernàndez claims, “manifests as a symptom, expresses, and brings into play the conditions of possibility of the construction of contemporary Catalan identity, as well as its risks and dangers”.

Teresa Iribarren, for her part, proposes incorporating Arundhati Roy’s controversial work *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) into ac-

ademic curricula in Western universities. In this hybrid text, which combines journalistic chronicle, essay and *testimonio*, the respected novelist explains her long journey through the forests of India with the young Naxalite guerrillas. Roy defends the militia's armed struggle to protect their natural environment from the extractive projects of the government and various corporations, while showing the richness of their tribal culture at risk of being annihilated. Although this work has been widely criticized in India, and even banned in some universities, in "L'escriptora i els guerrillers: *Caminant amb els camarades*, d'Arundhati Roy" (The Writer and the Guerrillas: *Walking with the Comrades*, by Arundhati Roy) Iribarren would like to see it promoted among young people, especially in the global North. She believes that reading it can contribute to the formation of a critical, more conscious citizenry to build new political imaginaries and more equitable and respectful forms of life and habitats.

María Porrás studies a memorial comic in the chapter "Representations of Violence and Exile in Leila Abdelrazaq' *Baddawi*". Porrás inscribes *Baddawi* (2015), a work in which Palestinian author Leila Abdelrazaq recreates her father's childhood and adolescence in a refugee camp in Lebanon, in the paradigm of those comics that deal with postmemory and testimonial writing, which began in 1986 with the publication of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Through the analysis of the text and graphics, Porrás argues that Abdelrazaq manages to translate a personal experience of violence and exile representative of the Palestinian diaspora into a graphic novel capable of connecting with a wide and very diverse audience.

Finally, Jordi Serrano-Muñoz discusses three current Japanese novels in "Bodies and Economic Violence in Contemporary Japanese Fiction: Absence, Change, and Empowerment in Yū Miri, Murata Sayaka, and Kawakami Mieko". This study compares *JR Ueno-eki kōen-guchi* (*Tokyo Ueno Station*) (2014), by Yū Miri, *Konbini ningen* (*Convenience Store Woman*) (2016), by Murata Sayaka, and *Natsu monogatari* (*Breasts and Eggs*) (2019), by Kawakami Mieko. His interpretation revolves around a highly original core idea: the global decline of Japanese wristwatches. Serrano-Muñoz explores the different ways in which the authors denounce the violence of an unjust economic system from multiple points of view. The works studied, which incorporate the intersectional view, show the extent to which economic violence and social oppression have a profound impact on the precariousness of people's lives, a problem that is often hidden behind macroeconomic figures. Through the mobilization of the concepts of invisibility, imitation and metamorphosis, and empowerment as a form of resistance, Serrano-Muñoz focuses on the treatment of the bodies of the protagonists. Thus, he argues that the body is a space of tension where Japan's neoliberal policies are questioned and proposes, through markedly feminized dissent and subversion, the changing of hegemonic norms.

*Narratives of Violence* has been published in open access to facilitate its use, both for teaching and research purposes, by those seeking literary works politically committed to the prevention and deactivation of violence. We hope that the essays that make up the volume will inspire students and teachers to read, analyze, and discuss the works in question.