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VIOLENCE AND SILENCE IN THE FEMININE NARRATIVE ON THE LAST CIVIC-MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN ARGENTINA[1]

Neither Tricks of the Weak Nor Resilience

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> What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said.
>
> *(Bertrand Russell, Introduction to Tractatus logico-philosophicus)*

Argentine literature has recurrently thematized the episodes of collective violence which have taken place at different periods of time, especially those concerning the last civic-military dictatorship (1976–1983). The same holds true for the theoretical and review studies that analyze it. Therefore, I will not be able to start off with a state of affairs on the topic, considering the length of this chapter. Nevertheless I will be able to explicitly state the methodological approach I propose in order to deal with it.

The narratives that invite me are written by women whose protagonists are also females: preferably mothers and daughters. It is from their relationship that the story is approached, in most cases. Silence is a relevant and significant feature among these protagonists; a silence that intervenes both in the plot as well as in the aesthetic–ideological line chosen by their authors. Thus, it is presented in its multiple possible meanings, though always emphasizing one in particular.

As is well known, the topic of silence has been dealt with from diverse perspectives and disciplines: not only by the Letters but also by other Arts (and much more especially Music, among them), Psychology, Law, among so many. The bibliography is extensive though, just to name a few experts from different fields, I mention the work of Jacques Rancière (philosopher), Julio Trebolle Barrera (expert on Biblical Sciences), Ivonne Bordelois (philologist), Philippe Breton (anthropologist), John Cage (musician), Juan Rof Carballo (physician and essayist), among so many others.

In order to comprehend the power of silence, it suffices to think of the different ways it has been treated in works of art, reviews and theoretical analyses. As from that Primal Silence, multiple forms have been conceived of it: the silence of censorship and repression, of oblivion, of compulsory dismemory, of burial and disappearance, of forced identity over lack of a name; the silence of death, of boredom and anguish, of impotence, of defeat. Silence as a right or the highly visited "silence is health" and "the rest is silence". The silence of the executors, of the accomplice but also of the calm

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conscience, of the lambs. Likewise, the silence of resistance, of the listener; the carefree silence among acquaintances, the silence of dreams is to be mentioned. And, obviously, the silence that accompanies writing, reading and the birth of all that is new …

It may well be that one of the most elaborated topics on the literature of the dictatorship is forced silencing as a repression method applied by the military. However, I prefer to stop at another variation that has been less trodden by reviewers.

The starting point of my hypothesis is that, in the Argentine literature framed in these fictions, there emerges an aesthetic–ideological line that questions hegemonic story. The latter are so often associated with patriarchy, arising both from the military and from the insurgents' discourse that such line remains anchored in a conflicting and borderline area, which collects topic bases from those discourse types in order to reflect on them from a critical standpoint. I refer to a series of novels by Argentine writers of the last decades, whose books have been appearing from the 1980s: *Conversación al sur* (1981), by Marta Traba; *El resto no es silencio* (1989), by Carmen Ortiz; *El Dock* (1993), by Matilde Sánchez; *A veinte años, Luz* (1998) and *Doble fondo (*2017), by Elsa Osorio; *El silencio de Kind* (1999), by Marcela Solá; *Viene clareando* (2005), by Gloria Lisé; *Todos éramos hijos* (2014), by María Rosa Lojo, and *Lengua madre* (2015), by María Teresa Andruetto.

In all of them, silence, as a strategy of resistance to the totalization of meaning, is the common denominator and implies a form of visibilization of the power matrixes in their multiple spheres, though in that of gender, in particular.

In previous essays, I have dealt with Marta Traba's and María Rosa Lojo's[2] work, whose fictional machinery centered on the questioning of those types of hegemonic discourse through the deconstruction of the maternity figure. However, on this occasion, I will delve into the work of two other writers, Gloria Lisé and Marcela Solá, who discuss the rationality of power and the tamed word through music and the oneiric.

Before dealing with the novels, I will make a brief overview and proceed with the discussion of two concepts that have been thoroughly studied by literary reviewers (one more than the other), concepts whereby the texts I study could be read. Nevertheless, they might somehow lead to confusion as to the standpoint from which these writers pose their deepest questioning. I refer to the notions of "the tricks of the weak", proposed by Josefina Ludmer in an homonymous essay, published in *La sartén por el mango* (*Calling the shots*) in 1985, and that of "resilience", long standing since its introduction by the engineering studies in the 19th century and that has been reappropriated by so many other disciplines until reaching philology.

Regarding the Tricks of the Weak Females

It is said that when a woman holds a position in the face of male power she adopts some strategy that may allow her not only mere survival but also a sort of discursive emergency. This move, made by many women, and which Josefina Ludmer had thought applied to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, has resulted in an effective resource as against a *status quo* that:

> knows that, in the historical distribution of affection, roles and faculties (transformed into mythology, fixed in the language), pain and passion as against reason, concrete as against abstract, indoors as against outdoors, reproduction as against production were dealt out to women. To read these attributes in women's language and literature is merely to read what originally was and still is circumscribed to a social domain.
>
> *(Ludmer 1985, 89)*

Since then, such strategy bears its own trademark. It is called "the tricks of the weak" and, in the literary analyses, it has been put into practice, I would rather say almost "left, right and center", over the decades.

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Nevertheless, the insight revealed in Ludmer's essay invites us to continue reflecting on this question, acknowledging her fancies while, at the same time, heeding her reformulations or mutations.

Ludmer dissects, as is well known, Sor Juana's "tricks" while making visible her subtle strategy to face the perverse hierarchization and domination system, explaining it consists of four steps: inversion, separation, reorganization and change, which I propose to put into context as a first preamble to my approach to the novels by Lisé and Solá.

Argentine reviewers state that a way to

> break the circle which confirms the difference in what is socially differentiated is to propose an *inversion*: to read, in the femenine discourse, the abstract thought, science and politics, just as they filter into 'the crevices of what is known'.
>
> *(Ludmer 1985, 89)*

In concomitance with it, she examines two other tricks: "in the first place, *separation* of the field of knowledge from the field of saying; in the second place, *reorganization* of the field of knowledge aimed at not saying (hushing)" (90, my italics). Finally, the fourth step consists in "changing, from the assigned and accepted role, not only the meaning of that role but also the meaning itself of what is instituted in it (98).

Likewise, a key issue for my aside is what Ludmer concludes, while still focusing on the *fields and roles* taken on by men and women, superior and inferior. She understands that in these antinomic relationships:

> there combines the acceptance of their role (for women to shut up) and their trick: not to say but to know or say you do not know and know, or say the opposite of what you know. This trick of the weak, which separates the field of saying (the other's law) from the field of knowledge (my law) combines the tactics of resistance, submission and acceptance of the role assigned by the other, with antagonism and confrontation, withdrawal of collaboration.
>
> *(Ludmer 1985, 94)*

After having read these novels I will talk about in this chapter and several others I have mentioned at the beginning, in which, on many occasions these tricks could be seen, I wonder whether the question is to invert the roles of knowledge because – strictly in these cases I study – I cannot see that, from the reading of the novels, it can be deduced it is a problem of space (where do I read this or that?) but rather a problem of modes of perceiving, conceiving and saying which are different between the masculine and the feminine. Nor do I believe there is actually a no saying but rather a saying in another way that is not legible by the masculine discursive device. Therefore, it filters through the crevices of the system of paradigms of hegemonic knowledge. Consequently, we may think not of abandonment but rather of a sort of mutation of the "tricks of the weak" strategy by the writers herein considered.

Thus, I understand that, somehow, these authors' novels constitute a breakaway from the idea of having to adopt a feminine position whose sole mode of existence is through those tricks of the weak. Furthermore, though their words hold an intimate relationship with silence, still they do not hush. Nor did Sor Juana do so completely, of course, and Ludmer could see it in her work.

This so meaningful difference between keeping silence and hushing has already been supported by many thinkers, such as philosopher Ramón Xirau: "To remain silent does not necessarily or fundamentally mean to hush. It is silence, neither mutism nor muteness" (Xirau 1993, 144–145), although Sartre – untimely, of course – could reply: "to hush is to resist to speak and, thus, to speak all the same" (Sartre 1950, 132), with which the Catalan would obviously agree, since "essential silence is that which is in the word itself as in its home, as in its dwelling. It is the silence that expresses: the silence which, said, half said, viewed, half viewed, constitutes our essential talk" (Xirau 1993, 146). Needless to say, Xirau

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and Sartre are not referring to the same type of silence, though, interestingly enough, both adhere to the standpoint of these feminine writings: their silence is essentially questioning and significant. It dwells in its poetical word and resists. What does not seem to fit in is the silence characteristic of the traditional ways of the tricks of the weak: "Silence constructs its domain of resistance against the power of others" (Ludmer 1985, 92), as this is no hushing at one's own will but rather for fear of retaliation, as is very well explained by Ludmer though, from there, however, the idea of resistance could be retrieved.

Another core idea for analysis deals with the limits between the public and the private, which I do not argue against, but which I consider insufficient for these narratives. Ludmer affirms:

> if the personal, private and daily are included as a starting point and perspective of the other types of discourse and practices, they disappear as personal, private and daily: that is one of the possible results of the tricks of the weak.
>
> *(Ludmer 1985, 100)*

And she proposes, as an example, the fact that Sor Juana should have "'discovered natural secrets' while she was cooking" (95), which reminds me of a similar anecdote retold by Rita Segado, who claimed she reflected in the kitchen, with the apron on. I feel inclined to think that the problem lies, precisely, in conducting the approach from the division of genders: the private domain corresponds to women and the public, to men, according to hegemonic discourse. However, if we keep on supporting this category of analysis, we will keep on giving room to the confrontation against patriarchy. Along these lines, I would like to remember what María Lugones sustains as one of the key issues for women submission. She conceives of it from the case of the existing tribes before the colonizing movements, which believed:

> that the primary force in the Universe was femenine and that such understanding authorizes all tribal activities. The Former Spider Woman, the Maize Woman, the Serpent Woman, the Thinking Woman are some of the names of powerful female creators. For gynocratic tribes, Woman is at the center and nothing is sacred without her blessing or her thought. […] To replace this gynocratic spiritual plurality with a supreme masculine being, such as Christianity has done, was crucial for the submission of the tribes.
>
> *(Lugones 2014, 29–30)*

Perhaps we could rethink the tricks of the weak or their ensuing re-elaborations, avoiding considering them a resilient attitude. I would prefer that the precolombine tribal conceptions prospered, such as those which María Lugones recalls in line with African thinker Oyéronké Oyewúmi, who clearly disbelieves in the "patriarchy" category, by not contrasting it with matriarchy but by changing completely the perspective, emphasizing that "gender was not an organizing principle in yoruba society before the western colonization. No gender system had become insitutionalized" (Lugones 2014, 27).

I could, therefore, sustain that these women from the novels I will deal with do not conform, as the placards of the 8M rallies proclaim, to being muses but rather place themselves as artists and, with the word and the silence of their art, dynamite, from within, the hegemonic discourse, since they act from a role enabled by this same discourse; namely: the discourse of the irrationality of poetry and the oneiric. It is from there that they pierce the imperturbability of the rational–logical discourse. Nevertheless, following these affirmations, which are true, to a large extent, I would still be sustaining the polarization of the genders, which would lead me to the same aporia stated at the beginning: women's impossibility to be otherwise than through the tricks of the weak.

As a result, there should be a different strategy that would break the calm and univocality of the tamed word. I would like to think that these novels act in a way similar to that explained by writer Paula Gun Allen regarding the Indian tribe of the Yumas, which Lugones presents us:

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> Gender was not understood, first of all, in biological terms. Most individuals fitted into the tribal gender roles "on the basis of propensity, tendency and temperament". The Yumas held a tradition for designating the gender based on dreams: a female who dreamed with weapons turned into a male for all practical purposes.
>
> *(Lugones 2014, 31)*

In other words, the claim is that abstract thought, science and politics should not be regarded as a question of patriarchy or matriarchy but rather of different, though equally significant, modes of word and silence, which we, readers, may naturalize as interchangeable among the different discursive players, thus disassociating them from a specific gender.

Resilience or Resistance?

For some time, there have come to light literary approaches that study the fictions on collective types of violence (wars, holocausts, dictatorships, among others) under the aegis of resilience. I would like to resort briefly to the past to explain my skepticism about this alternative.

Although it was a working concept in engineering studies, other disciplines explored it and discussed it. From the 1970s it achieved some relevance in psychopathology and the social sciences. One of the pioneering writings that has studied resilience[3] is that of Emy Werner and Ruth Smith (1982) who, after researched the cases of around 700 children in Hawaii from prebirth to adulthood, come to the conclusion that one out of every three children had been born into disadvantageous family, social and economic conditions; that two out of every three of these vulnerable infants had undergone misconduct in adulthood; and that one out of every three had become successful in life.

In 1997, the Pan American Health Organization (Kotliarenco et al. 1997) published a state of the art on the term resilience and highlights several approaches on the topic, the previously mentioned, of course, among others. Along the same lines, Masten and Garmezy's (1990) and Luthar and Zingler's (1991) can be mentioned. This collection of writings focuses on the question of successful stories of individuals who have been exposed to biological risk factors or to stressing situations. An observed result is low susceptibility to future stressors. In line with this, Lösel, Blieneser and Köferl's studies in Brambing et al. (1989) emphasize the effective confrontation with stressing circumstances with cumulative effect.

I understand that a relevant change of direction in the conception of resilience is contributed by Edith Grotberg (1995). Starting with what she considers is a universal capacity of the human being to face adversity, this researcher states that resilience is part of a development process and must be promoted since childhood. As a result, resilience should entail not only resistance against destruction but also the capacity to construct a positive vital behaviorism, socially acceptable, according to Vanistendael (1995). This process, Rutter and Rutter (1992) could contribute, which tends to enable a healthy life within an insane environment, should take place throughout time, promoting combinations between the individuals' attributes and their family, social and cultural context. Therefore, it is an interactive process between individual and environment, subject to a combination of factors, such as temperament or a type of cognitive skill (Osborn 1993), which allows a human being to face life adversities (Milgram and Palti 1993, 207–221).

There has been profuse discussion around the beforementioned faculties or attributes, behavior or cognitive skills (self-confidence, personal perception, flexibility, organization, problem solving, interpersonal relationships, social connection, proactivity). Several concepts have stood out that interact with that of resilience, such as invulnerability, competence, robustness, protecting, distal and proximal factors, mediating mechanisms, among others. Evidence of this is to be found in the studies by Rutter (1985 a y b), Roth et al. (1989), Contrada (1989), Rolf et al. (1992), Meisels et al. (1993), among many others who I cannot comment on here so as not to go beyond the length limitations of this chapter. Likewise, a recurrent issue is that, though the situations studied herein should manifest themselves in individual, family or group behavior, it is evident that they constitute themselves socially, from the relational aspect of the human ecosystems (Madariaga 2014).

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Another approach to this question, which is gaining more relevance, is that of ecological resilience, understood as the ecosystem's capacity to resist and recover itself from the harm caused by stochastic events (such as fires, floods and the like) or by human activity (deforestation, use of pesticides, introduction of new species, and others), which triggers biodiversity reduction, pollution, anthropogenic climatic change, among other disasters. Therefore, the ecosystem undergoes changes in order to preserve essentially the same role, structure, identity and feedback. The first to introduce the concept of resilience of the ecological systems was Canadian ecologist Crawford S. Holling (1973, 1–23). In line with this, Brian H. Walker and D. Salt (2006) develop their studies of ecological sustainability and resilience in socioecological systems. The paradigmatic concepts posed by these scientists, as critical aspects of resilience, are: latitude, resistance, precariousness and panarchy. Associated with the concept of resilience, that of adaptative capacity is fundamental. One of the objectives that is becoming more and more recurrent is, no doubt, sustainable development. In order to achieve such goal, these researchers and others claim that more comprehension of and emphasis on the resilience of ecosystems is deemed necessary.

In the last decade, there has clearly been a significant derivation of the concept of resilience to other fields, such as that of economy and that of political sciences, as well as the interdependence of the ecological and social systems (Berkes and Folke, among others). To the extent that cities become more and more densely populated, combinations of these approaches have been appearing. The concept of sustainable development receives more political emphasis in the economic development, which arouses great concern among many thinkers (Clive Hamilton et al.). In this context, a proposal starts consolidating itself as a vertebrating alternative: that of resilience of urban ecosystems.

In other words, the notion of resilience has been thought of and discussed both in forums and publications of researchers coming from diverse disciplinary approaches, as well as in the institutional guidelines for risk management. However, the actions to make it work and to strengthen it are not perceived as successful by many authors who question their pertinence, such as L. Comfort, A. Boin and C. Demchak. Likewise, there is much discrepancy about the epistemological considerations of the concept, its ideological dimension and its possible instrumentalization by thinkers such as Kuhlicke, Walker and Cooper, among others.

In this sense, the concept of resilience has also been debated in terms of the Foucaldian perspective that defines the contemporary field of biopolitics (Foucault 2009). Thus, it is understood as risk management linked to the success of subjectivation processes that confirm forms of biopower within the immunity paradigm. The *homo resiliens* would correspond to a neoliberal sovereign that deploys its metaphysical identity, regarded as capacity of growing agency, devoid of all critical content concerning the outdoors, considered only a stimulus. These neoliberal subjectivities, as existence modes, beyond the political or economic system, constitute themselves solely as modes of assimilation apt to preserve survival without any consideration as to the condition of material exteriority of what is solely considered "environment". Thus, the question would be not to avoid disaster but rather to adapt oneself to living under the new circumstances. Therefore, all critical capacity dissolves because what becomes preeminent is the strategic deployment that defines insecurity as opportunity and disconnects the risk of objective danger. The difference between resilience and other forms of danger management would be linked, in neoliberal governmentality, to the resulting transfer of the State's responsibility to individuals and the placement of empowerment as a practice aimed at yielding extreme gains.

This path leads me to disbelieve in the concept of resilience as capacity of adaptation as against catastrophic stimuli and to confront it with that of resistance, as the latter implies the capacity of response of a social, community, organizational collective, which can, in the first place, make a diagnosis of such catastrophes, without leaving in parentheses its political condition. Thus, the disadvantageous or danger situations, such as domination and violence against women, would no longer be contingent but would thus be resignified, described as systemic effects of logics that do not depend on the individual transactions, with political genesis to be debated.

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Thus, art as a form of resistance (Deleuze 2009) would entail work on the language, the memory and the elaboration of the diverse languages of the arts in so far as it is understood as transformation of the real conditions breeding disadvantage. I think that the narratives I research follow this line.

Neither Tricks of the Weak Nor Resilience: Resistance

Two of the novels that I understand propose more effectively a sort of questioning of the hegemonic logical–rational discourse on the last Argentine civic-military dictatorship are *Viene clareando, by* Gloria Lisé,[4] and *El silencio de Kind*, by Marcela Solá.[5]

The strategies that vertebrate their proposals can be condensed into two lines: the critical exposure of the confronting discourse of the military and that of the insurgents and the construction of a complex metaphor that assumes the force of resistance, flowing through three hubs that radiate sense: the body, Nature and music, intertwined by silence.

The narration of Lisé's novel is located, from the very beginning and not innocently, in a context of ambiguities. On the one hand, evidence of this is the title. At first, it would suggest certain hope for better times. However, this idea will soon be overshadowed by several epigraphs containing verses of Atahualpa Yupanqui's[6] zamba, which makes it clear it is "a farewell song, a song of sorrow, of oblivion, of homeland which is being lost, of exile …" (Lisé 2015, 158). On the other hand, the relationship between history and fiction is another piece of evidence. The novel's plot unfolds between the years 1976, from the assassination of the Secretary General of FOTIA (Federación Obrera Tucumana de la Industria Azucarera (Tucumán's workers' association of the sugar industry)) and 1978, when Berta, the protagonist, leaves for exile, after having been "kept under cover", in hiding, first in the capital city of La Rioja and then, in Olpa, a town of the inner regions of this province. Curiously enough, after dedicating notes addressed to her friends and relatives, the author writes: "To the memory of Isauro Arancibia and his brother Arturo, Atilio Santillán and Trinidad Iramain, who I could never have the chance to meet as they were killed without grounded accusation nor right to defense". The story that follows is no more (no less) than fiction but, at the end of the novel, the author adds a brief historical account of the events that took place during the last civic-military dictatorship, the Malvinas war and the recovery of democracy. That is to say, that, as a framework to this "fiction", the clear historical contextualization suggests, almost as a wink to the reader, that it does not matter if the names, dates and places can be officially documented or have been changed (Atilio Sandoval, instead of Santillán, for example): what she narrates did happen, as her characters, especially Berta, insistently declare throughout the novel:

> – I'm going to retell you a novel, Aunt, which is mine and also of many people from this country…
>
> Berta, true blood of the Rieras', was leaving and they did not question anything as they were aware that what Berta revealed was true….
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 172)*

Certain irony does not escape the reader, I guess. Indeed, she retells a novel because the historical reality is so inconceivable that it resembles fiction … or, contrary to Adorno's opinion, only fiction can, then, be accountable for its narration.

In turn, the story narrated by the protagonist of *El silencio de Kind*, who is going to sell her parents' home and, from there, recalls the past, begins in the early 1950s, during Perón's administration. She belonged to a wealthy family, with decisively Nazi and antiperonist inclinations, except for her parents, who adopted a somewhat critical standpoint. She frequently went on vacation with her family to a hotel in Mar del Llano, where weird characters gathered, most of whom were European aristocrats ("tilingos"[7] according to her father) of dubious origin who had fled from World War 2. In the long summer afternoons, Mercedes, nicknamed Kind, had started a rather controversial

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relationship, somehow initiatic, with a German general, who would later relate with the dictatorship's military forces, which had been accountable for her sister's disappearance. Passion for music had brought them together and it would also be the vehicle for the narrator's most radical questioning.

Both novels repeat several topic bases of hegemonic discourse, falling into a long tradition of fictions that associate the word, above all the shout, in masculine style, and silence, in feminine style, to question, in turn, this *status quo,* as I have already anticipated at the beginning of this section, resorting to metaphorical language associated with Nature, the body and music and where silence plays a decisive role.

It could be said that the starting point of this questioning is linked to the epistemological approach adopted by these writers. Kind suggests it quite categorically while, at the same time, poetically: "words make their journey from night to light […]. I take the opposite direction, towards dreams" (Solá 1999, 54): the reverse path of the platonic philosopher of the allegory of the cave, who María Zambrano would surely celebrate: "I have preferred the darkness which, at some past time, I discovered as lifesaving shadows rather than wander aimlessly, lonely, lost, amidst the inferno of light …" (Zambrano 1996, 11). The protagonist distorts the darkness=ignorance / light=wisdom dichotomy of hegemonic rationality from the perspective of the shelter offered by the shadows and the oneiric, clearly gearing her discourse towards a resistance position. Lisé reinforces the metaphor: "In her world, at daylight, everything was gray, but nightfall highlighted all colors" (Lisé 2015, 80).

The first stop of this trodden path is, then, the confrontation of hegemonic discourse, both military and insurgent. This critical position against the words coming from both blocs, which explained reality and narrated the story, has aroused a great deal of controversy and has entailed the adoption of the term "traitor" to refer to anyone who supported it. However, it was reclaimed by several essayists, most of whom had been exiled by the civic-military dictatorship: Nicolás Casullo, Sergio Bufano, Claudia Hilb, among others.

In one of the first chapters of Lisé's novel, entitled "listen to the radio" the discursive device of the military power is clearly exposed:

> The military music reappeared and the so-called "Joint Chiefs of Staff" communiqués, enumerated in military style, just as one more military call, were repeated, one after the other, on the radio, from number one on, read by a powerful masculine voice ….
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 33–34)*

However, this device does not only apply to the communiqués. It also reaches the press…: "Videla, who was a good military man, as the press by then, already introduced him…" (34) and education:

> No textbook devoted more than ten pages to the 45 years of history that had elapsed [it refers to the so-called "alternation", the series of civil governments interrupted by military insurrections since 1930], and that, in itself, was a way of thinking, a mindset, for which such period of history was worth ten cents or ten *guitas.*
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 35)*

Nevertheless, alongside it, after detailed recounting of all the Argentine political voices put to the debate,[8] there appear all the involved political players in:

> the nights were flooded with incomprehensible violence, unless an account were made of, at least, the last twenty years of alliances and schisms, exiles and returns, amnesties and agreements among the protagonists of Argentine political life, to whom, besides the parties and their different factions, the military power and the church were added as crucial subjects of the warp on which this rustic fabric had been dramatically knitted and which shrouded a whole generation.
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 37)*

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Absolutely in line with this perspective, Marcela Solá depicts the national political scenario with similar controversies. However, the starting point is peculiar since Mercedes-Kind, the protagonist, belongs to a family that interacts, on a daily basis, by means of silence:

> At home, silences were always a weighty weapon. They were of all kinds. Disdainful indifference, hurt sensitivity, good manners not wishing to reach confrontation by means of insult, patient as against others' stupidity, moral disapproval, I cannot say what I know, effort's uselessness, politeness when faced with the intranscendental, impotence. If one knows the language of silence, she is on safe ground.
>
> *(Solá 1999, 73)*

Clearly, silence is a political positioning in her family, inherited from a long conservative lineage close to the right and that their children's generation would question in many cases. The last phrase of the quotation is to be highlighted. It is evident that silence is imposed by the men of the family ("If *one* knows…") and is woman's refuge ("she is *on safe ground*").

To a large extent, the military discourse is embodied in the figure of refugee German general, Wilhem Jantzen:

> – In twenty-four hours, I can make an army stand to their feet –he told me, evidently self-satisfied-. You shouldn't fear, Kind. My army is here to protect you and your relatives. And, maybe, you even marry one of my youngest officers-he laughed and stroked my cheek.
>
> – And where is that army?
>
> – All over Latin America.
>
> *(Solá 1999, 125)*

The quotation repeats all possible topics: the idea that the military come to protect us (above all, this being said more surreptitiously: the wealthier families, such as Kind's), that woman's fate is marriage and that the main mission is to cleanse Latin America (of communism).

The other discourse under controversy, the Peronists', is encoded in these characters: her sister Carmen and Pepe, her couple. This environment is, for Kind, equally expelling, as her sister's militant comrades, "having tracked my lack of belief in their success, treated me coldly and made me feel a closer relative of Judas' […]: what's more, I lived in the enemy's country and was completely estranged from politics" (Solá 1999, 147). The fact that she does not belong to one bloc immediately places her in the other. There is no possible third position. Therefore, when her grandaunt's granddaughter, husband and daughter are kidnapped and Kind seeks the general's aid, the protagonist reflects: "there is no difference between a Bolshevik and a Christian. Both try to persuade people that their systen is unique in the world" (159–160). The extreme polarization and the totalization of meaning operated from the discourse of each bloc are here laid bare.

Thus, communication failure leads to

> a mute tragedy […] as words were absent from such stage [,] words which had lost their uniting power, […] shared meaning had got fractured […] so the outcome was that everything was defined by action and, being a man of action, or arms, which was almost the same, constituted a paradigm for a large portion of society.
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 38–39)*

This quotation from *Viene clareando* could well work for both novels. Then, what would be the alternative if words do not lead to an understanding, if such dogmatic discourse on both sides entails the demise of a generation? The proposal originates in these women who do not speak – since, on doing

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so, they would be condemned to that universe of quotes from hegemonic and dogmatic discourse – but who, eventually, discover another language: first, of the body and then, of the Nature surrounding them.

There is a chapter in Lisé's novel thus entitled: "the body", where the character reflects on this issue and comes to the conclusion that "the body compelled her to live, even if death followed her closely" (Lisé 2015, 63), an idea that is in keeping with the midwife's work she undertakes in her inner exile in Olpa, together with her uncle's friend Lupe, the Armenian obstetrician, with her hands on those bodies and that blood, which bore open the path to life.

In one of the most poetic chapters of the novel, entitled "Yucumaman", the only one where the narrator is not omniscient, rather where Berta is, that primal, missing language, that of union with Nature, with life, is appealed to:

> They say that water spoke sweetly with the peoples because they were quiet peoples, who knew what plants and animals had to say to them. But, when man turned evil and sold the forest's wisdom to make railway logs and other contrivances, the springs flowed inwards, as they had no longer anyone to converse with.
>
> *(Lisé 2015, 159)*

The references to the body, as a place of resistance and struggle for life, are intertwined with those of art. Born into a family of musicians, carrying along her guitar, she emphasizes body power in a letter she writes to her friend Trinidad: "you and your people of the valleys and your women knitters, potters, you, talking about their rights, persuading them of what they are capable, removing their fear, teaching through art" (Lisé 2015, 119). Berta's last words, written in a letter to her mother that she might never receive, close the novel: "One day, we were coming back from a childbirth with Lusaper (Lupe) when she told me: [...] Murderers, there have always been, but this, and she looked at her hands..., is stronger; it beats them" (178).

In Solá's novel, unquestionably more solemn, the same resources have a role, though in the opposite direction. While body, Nature and art lead Berta to life they reveal to Mercedes-Kind the danger and vulnerability of her generation. It is not the words that allow her to comprehend the world that surrounds her. Other languages warn her. The body is a puzzle of horror: the blue-eyed frozen gaze of her grandfather, a Nazist; the general's small black eyes; "the bodies that cry out at the top of their voices, what gazes say, that blur diffused by words" (Solá 1999, 17). Nature, in turn, seems to echo that dark scenario: "The sea was a huge mouth casting out words which ended up dying on the beach: jellyfish, rays, an endless bunch of dangerous things" (60).

Only music, intimately allied to silence, devises a healing language. It is through music that "history can be transcended", where Kind attains the "balance of silence with sound" and she can wish "what history ignores".

It is the accents of the surviving, though non-conforming women, who resist through the strumming of a guitar or who speak of "huge calm, of somebody who finally surrenders her body though, when on doing so, speaks of an almost inaudible hope which resounds in another dimension" (Solá 1999, 203) and that, precisely owing to it, they come dawning in the Argentine of the dictatorship.

Gloria Lisé and Marcela Solá are neither naïve writers who introduce characters that take pride in having survived horror. They are women who denounce the rifts of discourse types that totalize meaning and who are committed to writing history from another possible language, which does not pay respect to the tamed word, which neither confines them to the shelter of the tricks of the weak nor turns them into lonely, resilient individuals.

Their narratives distort, question, break into pieces dichotomies that only consolidate deceitful and harmful polarities. They speak about a social, political, epistemological violence that has not been able to reduce silence to its utmost evil mode. Finally, they manage to say a good deal about what cannot be said...

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Notes

1 The reflections that I share in this chapter form part of a piece of research into the forms of silence in the narrative of the last civic-military dictatorship, written by women, which I am undertaking for the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) (a national agency that fosters science and technology), in Argentina, seated in the Instituto de Filología y Literaturas Hispánicas "Dr. Amado Alonso" de la Universidad de Buenos Aires (University of Buenos Aires philology and hispanic literatures institution).
2 I have reflected on this issue, thinking about it within the discourse of the novels herein cited written by Traba and Lojo in some previous work though especially in: "El silencio de las ciudades en la última dictadura militar: Marta Traba y María Rosa Lojo en contrapunto". (See Crespo Buiturón 2019, 10–28.)
3 From English "resilience" and this, in turn, from Latin *resiliens* (*resilīre*: "jump backwards, bounce, retreat").
4 Gloria Lisé was born in Salta in 1961. She is a lawyer, writer and musician. *Viene clareando (it is dawning)* is her second novela published in 2005 by the publishing house Leviatán of Buenos Aires. It was reprinted in 2007, requested by the Comisión Nacional de Bibliotecas Populares (national committee of public libraries) and was distributed to schools and public libraries all over the country. Two years later, in 2009, Alice Weldon, translated it into English for The Feminist Press of New York and, in 2013, Liliana Costa Maciel de Castro translated it into Portuguese for the publishing house Incentivar of Sao Paulo. Finally, in 2015, the publishing house Biblioteca de Textos Universitarios de Salta (the university textbooks library of Salta) brings to light the second edition in Spanish.
5 Marcela Solá was born in Buenos Aires in 1936. She studied Philosophy. She collaborated in the national and foreign graphic media besides lecturing at several universities in the United States and Canada. With her book of poems *Acta de defunción* (*death certificate*) (1994) she won the First Award in the Second Contest of Poetry Arcano and, with this novel, *El silencio de Kind* (Kind's silence), she became a finalist for Premio Planeta 1997 (an award granted by publishing house Planeta).
6 Singer and songwriter of Argentine Folklore (1908–1992).
7 Unsubstantial individual, who speaks nonsense.
8 The quotation would be too long. However, it can be read from pages 36–37 of this novel. I just note down the final conclusion of the path trodden by Lisé.

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