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Dreaming With a Future: Queer Memory Beyond National Trauma

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ABSTRACT

This article examines queer memory in Peru through the works of artists Christian Bendayán, Barboza-Gubo and Mroczek, and the collective *No Tengo Miedo*. I suggest that they construct alternative memories to the hegemonic one, as they denounce the violence against the LGBTIQ population during the years of political violence (1980-2000).

How can we make visible the memories of bodies that have continuously been invisibilized by the nation state? What types of narratives are necessary to construct a memory that respects the subjectivities of sexual dissidents? In a nation that does not consider one as a citizen because of gender, sexuality and/or race, how can a politically/socially dead body speak and reclaim its rights? In this article, I examine the recovery of post-conflict queer collective memory

of the times of political violence in Peru (1980-2000). Specifically, I focus in the work of Peruvian artist Christian Bendayán and his painting "La Huida"[2] (2017), the graphic work "Chuquichinchay" from the transfeminist collective *No Tengo Miedo*[3] and the photographic series "Padre Patria" (Fatherland, 2017) from artists Juan José Barboza-Gubo y Andrés Mroczek. I suggest that these artistic works propose different types of memory in Peru, as some of them try to enter into the national memory and others construct an unfixed and inapprehensible narrative as a gesture towards a possible collective queer future in the country. Together, these works make evident the regulatory system of sexualities and the trauma caused towards non-hegemonic identities as part of the system in which the nation of Peru is constructed.

Between 1980-2000 Peru went through a period of political violence that had as main actors the subversive groups *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and *Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru* (MRTA). During these years, Peru also had a period of dictatorship under the government of Alberto Fujimori that ended when finally he abandoned the country in 2001. After this period of violence that left more than 69,000 deaths, Peru went through a transitional government led by Valentín Paniagua, who initiated the creation of the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation (CVR) with the purpose of collecting the testimonials of the victims and determining the causes and consequences of the period of political violence. Inside the recollection of the testimonials, the CVR noted that gender violence and sexual violence were major components of the conflict. For this reason, the CVR dedicated a chapter on Violence and Gender Inequality[4] where they extended the research on violence against

[2] The Escape.

[3] I am not Afraid.

[4] Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación. "Informe Final" August, 2003.

women during the years of armed conflict. Surprisingly, the CVR did not include in this chapter the crimes committed against the LGBTIQ population in Peru. Upon reviewing the document, it should be noted that while they discussed gender as a factor for the crimes[5], violence against the LGBTIQ was just slightly mentioned and always within the male/female gender binary.[6] They just included the episode known as *La Noche de las Gardenias,* that occurred in May 31st of 1989 and where eight travestis and gays were murdered by the MRTA in what they called acts of "social cleansing." Yet, this mention was included in the chapter about the history of MRTA and under the title of acts of terror against sexual minorities, and not considered as part of the Gender and Violence chapter. Rachel McCullough (2017) has noted how in their narrative, the CVR does not considerate the homophobic and heteronormative character of MRTA and the State as causes of the violence. This homophobia and transphobia translated into the extermination of the queer population in different parts of the country, as sexual minorities were considered not to be part of the ideal of the "New Man" that the subversive groups claimed to be the future. Moreover, the recollection of the testimonies about *La Noche de las Gardenias* did not allow the victims to have a subjectivity in which the queer identities can be represented as agents. The violence extended to the narrative used by the CVR, in which they misgendered and did not respect the identities of the victims:

> ''Los subversivos aprehendieron a ocho ciudadanos a los que acusaron de delincuencia y colaboración con las Fuerzas Armadas y Policiales. Las ocho personas, que eran tra-

[5] https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/01/planeta_futuro/1459513097_580273.html

[6] Karen Anaya. "*Desde la Memoria Marginada hacia la De-construcción del Estado: Las personas LGBT como víctimas del conflicto armado peruano y los caminos para la no repetición*" Promsex, October 27, 2017.

> vestis y parroquianos del bar, fueron asesinadas con disparos de armas de fuego. A los pocos días el semanario "Cambio", órgano oficioso del MRTA, reivindicó la acción como una decisión del grupo subversivo debido a que las fuerzas del orden supuestamente amparaban 'estas lacras sociales, que eran utilizadas para corromper a la juventud." (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003, p. 432)

The description of the murders link travesti and queer identities to the idea of perversion, delinquency, and 'social scourge' in a clear manifestation of how these identities are not only considered the same, but also as living out of the law and as a consequence deserving of the punishment and death not only by the lack of recognition of their rights by the government of Peru, but also by the subversive groups. I would like to link here the idea of these travesti identities as being illegible in the archive and testimonials collected by the CVR with what Adler (2017) explains as perversion in the archive; "To be perverse is to be vulnerable because being illegible and outside the law is to be at risk of being coerced into a category with a name and its rules or to suffer the painful consequences of failing or renouncing the law". (p. 5) The queer and travesti subjects perceived as existing outside the law is related here to their erasure or dislocation in the testimonials collected by the CVR.

In front of this neglect, authors like Saona (2017) has highlighted the need to construct collective memory as a search for reparations to the victims of the human rights committed during the years of political violence and as a way to generate information and to activate the empathy of new generations that might not have direct memory of those years (p. 11). As Saona explains, these acts of public memorialization that include cultural products and the arts, serve as a way to mobilize different types of affect and solidarity with the victims of the violence. Additionally, as Saona signals, it is

important to note that many of the people that were victims of violence committed by the subversive groups and the nation State, entered into the sphere of the public appearing as victims as this became a "legal category". (p.13) In a similar tone, the characteristics of collective memory as a political project have also been analyzed by authors like Villalón (2017) who asserts that one of the factors for the continuity of the seek for justice and rebuilding of memory is because of the "impossibility of justice" as a common outcome of new regimes in the hemisphere." (p. 2) In this text, Villalón recognizes a second wave of memory, truth and justice mobilizations in Latin America by both dominant and marginalized groups that had as main reasons the persistence of inequality in these countries. In the same way, Murphy (2016) addresses the different ways in which post-war memory is localized in cultural products that recover the memory of spaces, objects, images, narratives and ghosts, etc. These create different forms of affect and "heterogeneous frameworks for authoring, knowing and making-meaning". (p. 572) This would allow a recovery of the multivocal character of the construction of memory. According to the author, cultural production of memory also gives artists and cultural producers the possibility to construct a political and social change.

Another approach to the use of the arts and performance as a trench to collect memory is Taylor's (2012) idea of the possibilities to leave a trace with the body, both as presence and non-presence and creating an affect that is about "past, present and future" (p. 10). In performing collective memory, the body multiplies and becomes the performers and spectators' bodies, as they perform a different way of knowing; it becomes an action in movement; "a practice and an epistemology, a creative doing, a methodological lens, a way of transmitting memory and identity, and a way of understanding the

world". (p. 39) The acts are a way to make visible what is invisible to the institutional and normative national memory, using the language of the arts and performance that implies that the regular normative ways of constructing memory are not enough. Taylor highlights the works of the Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation that collect testimonies of the victims left by social conflicts as these reports form an important archive to understand the causes, victims and human rights crimes committed during the times of conflict. Additionally, different activists and actors use these narratives to reclaim forms of material and symbolic reparations. Yet, there is a part of the affective memory that is left outside these recounts in their search for truth and facts.

Following the work of these theorists, I look at the ways in which Peruvian cultural producers have addressed queer and travesti memory and identity in Peru from the episode collected as the CVR above mentioned. These memories become necessary to counter the repression of the narratives of the violence that they have suffered before, and that still continue to suffer after social conflicts. From this perspective, in this article I work over the concepts of post-conflict memory, and queer memory based in Peru, focusing on the diverse ways in which Peruvian artists and activists approach to the recovery of these queer and travesti memories. This specific time period helps us to demonstrate that, although this violence becomes more palpable during social conflicts, still keeps being perpetuated by the society and the nation state. I define queer memory as rehistorization processes of these events that include the identities, narratives and memories of sexual dissidents. For this matter, it is important to discuss the inclusion of the subjectivities inside these artworks that pays attention to the silence, the absences and voices that we do not hear

in the traditional narratives of the conflict. This attention carries a political power that helps to make visible the bodies and subjectivities left outside of history and the national imaginary.[7]

I use the term queer here following Vidal-Ortiz, Vitteri, Serrano (2011) that define the use of queer in the Southern hemisphere as a way to name the "transgressive practices that redefine the established relationships with the family, nation and citizenship."[8] I extend the use of this term to address the resistance to official and institutional memory that invisibilize non-normative identities and bodies. Although I acknowledge that the term queer does not extend to different nomenclatures used by the diverse sexual dissident population in Peru, I hold to its meaning as a critique of heteronormative systems and processes that constitute the State.

On National Trauma

> "Affects are the resonances and connections between body and place, object and body, haunting and being haunted, the presence of absence of those lost, and the life constantly being shaped around that lost."
>
> *Memory Mapping, Murphy, 2011*

Ann Cvetkovich (2003) speaks about the trauma and processes of remembering in queer communities as affective experiences that constitute what she calls archive of feelings. Inside this concept, feelings that are part of queer culture are included; love, intimacy, pain, shame. In these spaces of ephemeral affects is where queer

[7] Ginna Watts. *Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory*.

[8] Vitteri, Serrano, Vidal-Ortiz, 2011. *¿Cómo se piensa lo queer en Latinoamérica?* Iconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales, N 39.

memory locates. Trauma collection defies what constitutes an archive because it speaks about what cannot be grasped, named or represented. The author explains that this inapprehensible character of trauma needs other forms of representation, documentation and commemoration that are not conventional. Some of these ways of activating memory are the testimonial and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can become collective witnesses. In this way, to speak about queer memory and trauma we need to pay attention to the ephemeral character of the marginalized stories and affects, to document the emotions. As an example of these forms, authors like Cole Rizki (2020), in his work on the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina* have collected the ways in which trans memory and trans forms of remembrance locate trans bodies as existing inside the history of Argentina. "Installing photographic prints and ephemera from the Trans Memory Archive collection in such a space instills alternative visual narratives of trans memory within civic consciousness that insist on trans national belonging, albeit through death". (p. 199) In the same way Saurí (2018) explains how marginalized memories erect in opposition to official memories that have an anthropocentric and teleological formation.[9] The works presented here center the memory of non-normative bodies and sexualities that are considered abject, as a resistance to the erasure that comes from the authorized voices.

Travesti Memory and Chuquichinchay

Giancarlo Cornejo (2018) explains how the work of Peruvian artist and philosopher Giuseppe Campuzano mobilizes" *travestismo* as an umbrella term itself that can make room for 'inter-sex and transgen-

[9] Cecilia Saurí, Archivo de la Memoria Trans: cruces entre estética, memoria y género.

der', and not only for people but for 'narratives'. (p. iii) Following the work of Campuzano, Cornejo asserts that travesti narratives are also a reimagining of the past and of future the highlights the different forms of survival of the community. Giuseppe Campuzano understanding of travesti memory and narratives asserts the colonial power suppression of indigenous identities and historically links the term travesti to these; "*Travestis*, a term that has survived into contemporary times and is used in Latin America to describe those who cross genders, cross-sex and cross-dress, came from one of these surprising identities. The very concept of *travesti* (literally 'cross dressing') was born out of the colonisers' fixation with gender binaries including the imperative to dress according to one's place within a rigid gender dichotomy, in which there were two clearly defined sexes and two genders premised on these sexes. Pre-hispanic gender was read through this lens; *travestism* became, within this schema, dressing across the binary". (Campuzano, 2006, p. 34) Campuzano also highlights here the contemporary use of the term travesti by activists that have retaken the pejorative word and have made it into a symbol of power. Campuzano in the same text also gathers the persecution of MRTA and the *travesticidios* (hate crimes and murders of travestis) that occurred during the years of political violence; "A Report by the Citizens Commission on Human Rights notes that the Peruvian Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) tended to view gay men and lesbians as 'anti-revolutionary' or as 'products of bourgeois decadence' and therefore as a threat to the leftist political project. Chauvin (1991) reports that in 1990 and 1991, more than 40 travestis were killed in Lima Peru, by right-wing groups known as *mata cabros* or 'kill faggots.' By these means, the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report records the MRTA 'aimed to legitimate themselves before the population, encouraging the social preconceptions against homosexuality". (p. 36)

One way that activists and artists have reconstructed travesti memory is exemplified in the works of the transfeminist colectiva *No Tengo Miedo* (NTM) that is conformed by artists and investigators that have worked widely on collective queer memory. They originated in 2013 and from the beginning, collected stories of violence and abuse against the LGBTIQ community in Peru. As part of the collective work, they opened a space in their website called "Chuquichinchay" which is the name of a mythological and feline Andean deity whose presence is recollected by the group. The collective relies on the work of Horswell (2005) in which the author explains Chuquichinchay as a feline deity of the mountains, protector of the indigenous shamans 'qariwarmi' whose androgynous presence symbolized the masculine and the feminine in the same body. NTM explains that, part of their project is to recover the knowledge and history that was taken away by occidental culture and colonization, as colonizers have always seen feminized bodies as a threat. NTM reconstructs and recovers the travesti character of Peruvian history and the queer presence inside mythology as a way to reclaim their past. This queering of history also opposes the idea of queer identities as an invention of modernity. From this perspective, NTM resists the exclusion of these memories from the national and historical imaginary. This is a project that was started by Giuseppe Campuzano in the *Museo Travesti del Perú* that has as a purpose to trace the queer presence inside the history of Peru.

Part of their project is the illustration and narrative they created about *La Noche de las Gardenias*. These illustrations made by artist Ibrain Cerberos are based on the narrative reported by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The illustration uses the comic format as a way to educate the population about history using the "marica" language. "Marica" is a term that translates to the word "faggot" and that originated as a slur but has been reclaimed by

queer activists to empower themselves. As an example of this queering and reappropriation of the language used by the CVR, they use the term "mariconicidio" to name the homicide of queers or "maricones." *Marica* language is created to retell the story with our own words and subjectivities, generating agency in the queer population. This form of queer memory recovery, I suggest, is also proposed as a form of symbolic reparation that returns the power of the narrative to the community. NTM not only tells us the story of what happened, but they also use the language of queer culture in phrases such as; "*Bebita, no te cierres, esta historia también es tuya*" (Baby, do not limit yourself, this is also your story) to remind us that queer bodies are also part of the national trauma of the times of armed conflict. The transgression and reappropriation of the language used by the CVR takes away the power from the institutions that perpetuate the violence. Two important aspects appear in the vignette; on the one hand the presence of the animal *Chuquichinchay* helps to locate the episode in the jungle of Tarapoto and creates a queer temporality where the past and the present coexist, and on the other the presence of school children claiming this memory. This image breaks with the ideas that disconnect children, family and the future with queer identities.

When recovering this memory of the *mariconicidio* and the violence during the armed conflict, the collective demands the inclusion of queer identities in history and they register within the bodies and identities that deserve to be cried. The queer memory here is central, it inscribes the past and the present in which these bodies still haunt and are still being commemorated, and in this way, demand justice. Here I would like to gather an idea postulated by McCullough to understand how NTM exercises what the author calls "travesti or fag agency" (125). Travesti agency consists on the "disturbing return of the bodies from their abjection and exile" (124) to

the sphere of citizenship and in this case of history. This collection of memory through illustrations forces us to see what they want in the history of Peru, and is different from the speculative constructions that characterize, for example, the work of Bendayán that I will analyze later. NTM's work then tells us, "Look, this is your story, bebita" and in this way they queer the history collected by the CVR and build a queer memory of the nation. Finally, the presence of the animal[10] and mythology questions the gender binarism, as well as it criticizes the anthropocentric view of history. In this way NTM not only brings the past, but also traces a genealogy by connecting the history with the animal Chuquichinchay.

Queer futurity and counternarratives

The Iquiteño artist Christian Bendayán proposes another way of working queer memory that constructs a queer speculative fiction based in the narrative collected by the CVR. The title of his painting, "La huida" (The escape) reminds us of a form of queer memory that is still in motion. The episode presented by the artist, although based on the testimonies collected by the CVR, is not a petrified memory, but rather an ongoing construction of history that defies normative representations of trans bodies that continuously link them to violence and death. In this narrative, the trans women manage to escape within the imaginary of the jungle. Here, the trans women challenge the subversive group and burn the subversive flag. Inside the boat, the trans women carry with them personal elements

[10] The proximity between the queer and the animal also plagues the political discourse of people in Peru who protect the heteronormative idea of family, values and marriage. As an example of this, comments against the proposal for civil union take the form of "marrying with a dog" as being the same, or the infamous phrase by a priest during the March of the collective "Con Mis Hijos no te Metas", and anti-LGBTIQ group that opposes to the laws that intend to protect LGBTIQ populations and spread the idea of gender ideology.

as a part of their affect and history; the photographs that are also part of their own archive. Bendayán creates here a speculative fiction as a counternarrative of the episode collected by the CVR. This term is explained by Sneed (2019) as a combination of science fiction, historical fiction fantasy, and magical realism outside the limits of Western understanding. The images and narratives built by the artist, propose a review of the past and a speculation about a future that presents cultural and political criticism. This new memory is presented as an imagined past and a gesture that aims to imagine and build a queer future in which the victims, in this case trans women, manage to save themselves and defeat the subversive group. The women flee in a boat that takes them along the pink Amazon River. This representation, although it has not happened, builds a queer temporality, and it gives light to a queer future in which the survival of trans women prevails. Bendayán builds something that has not happened, in order to dream of a possible future. This queer intervention constructs a speculative fiction about the history and destiny of queer subjects in Peru. Bendayán in this work returns to this episode that "haunts" the memory of the queer community. He uses the "haunting" of these bodies - using the term proposed by Avery Gordon (2008) to talk about the ghost that returns again and again to visit these memories - and builds from here a fiction that returns identity and agency to these bodies. This knowledge – from the body, landscape and affect – is proposed as another type of subaltern knowledge. The fictional characters of this painting are located within the queer archive of affections in which the same characters escape with their own personal objects to restart their history. The idea of dreaming with a queer future has been largely studied in the disidentifications work proposed by José Muñoz (2009) and retaken by Rodriguez (2016) in her concept of queer gesture. This

gesture speaks about not giving up to the possibility of a future. Through their work, the artists and activists work the testimonial character of the stories collected by the CVR and through the use of objects, animals and places that do not appear in the archive, achieve an affection that "unlocks the commonly understood relationship between testimony and witness". (Murphy; 581).

Fatherland and the haunting of the queer body

In the imaginary and the memory of the years of political violence in Peru, the idea of the body – either present, absent of fragmented in images of hair and body traces found in the *fosas communes* – constitutes a constant image present in the mind of Peruvians that lived through those years. These images plague not only our cultural imaginary but also the cultural production – movies, theater plays, art exhibitions- posterior to the CVR Final report. As an example of this presence, the memorial *El Ojo que llora* (2005) represents the bodies of the disappeared ones and victims with a stone that had the name of the many victims of the conflict as a way to remember their names and identities. People visit this memorial and take flowers as how they would do if this were a tomb where a body is resting.

As Mbembe (2002) explains, the state chooses what to preserve for the memory in a way that removes all subversive actions and bodies. Travesti identities do not make it to the imaginary of the memory of political violence as their rights in Peru are still neglected. We can ask here what forms of the archive is then necessary to preserve queer and travesti memory? An approximation to this could be in Cifor (2017) and the idea of intimacy in the archive as being an important aspect of queer life that cannot definitely be conceptualized under a heteronormative narration and gaze:

> Intimacy, whether psychic, emotional, physical, institutional, or sexual, is a central aspect of queer life. Usually, intimacy is conceptualised within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipated kinds of love yet intimacy transcends the private into the public world as something to be protected, manipulated or besieged by institutions, the state, and the very ideal of publicness. Sexual intimacies typically defy archival capture. (17)

When thinking about these possible forms of queer memory, I look at the different ways the episode known as *La noche de las gardenias* reaches the recollections of travesti death and their bodies enter into memory of the conflict and into the museum. I want to focus here on how death of queer people is narrated by the CVR records, and how the testimonial of this episode is used in a photographic project called "Padre Patria"[11] by photographers Juan José Barboza-Gubo and Andrew Mroczek as this one has been presented in the *Lugar de la Memoria* in Peru and that has become a record of the testimonials of the violence against queer and travesti bodies. I want to see how the artists keep records of the appearance and disappearance of the travesti body and how their bodies and identities are exposed to be legible in both forms of narrations, visual and testimonial. I suggest that this action is connected to the fact that cisgender voices are the ones narrating the travesti experience in both projects. Moreover, as I explained above, the *travesticidios* collected by the CVR failed to name the victims and located them into the binary as they did not use their preferred names; "*Las ocho personas asesinadas en Tarapoto… fueron César Marcelino Carvajal, Max Pérez Velásquez, Luis Mogollón, Alberto Chong Rojas, Rafael*

[11] http://www.barbozagubo-mroczek.com/fatherland/gardenias

Gonzáles, Carlos Piedra, Raúl Chumbe Rodríguez, Jhony Achuy" (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003, pp. 429) This is a way in which the heteronormative gaze reproduces a violence of a *travesticidio* by failing to recognize the identities of the victims. It is also important to think about the fixation of the narrations and the identities in the archives with the idea of *travestismo* as a moving category already reluctant to a fixation. I argue that the relationship that the archive constructs towards travesti bodies replicates the relationship of the Peruvian state with non normative identities; one of a fascination with their death tied to the neglect of their identities and erasure of their subjectivities.

The photographs of Barboza Gubo and Mroczek show us the landscape of the places where violence against queer bodies in different part of Peru occured. They collect the testimonials of what happened and therefore the trauma caused by the violence against queer and travesti identities, but by removing the travesti body. The name of the work *Padre Patria* evokes the colonial legacy of the term "madre patria" to refer to the nation as a mother. With this gesture they highlight the chauvinistic character of the nation, where violence and machismo is always against feminized bodies. Yet, this presents the danger to showcase Peru as not a place for queer survival, collaborating in a way with the belief that the West is a place for queer freedom.

The image in which I want to focus is the one collecting the episode of "La Noche de las Gardenias" and that is based in the testimonies. The photographers do not show us the travesti bodies, although their presence haunts the space through the narrations by the CVR. They show us recognizable landscapes of the city and tell us how the nation and the spaces of the city are not safe and rather are traumatic for queer and travesti bodies. The testimonies of the violence that accompany the images speak to us of a type of archive

as they are presented as non-linear fragments that create an affect through a memory map. This piece does not only refer to the episode of political violence of *Las Gardenias*, but articulates this episode as the ongoing presence of the violence and how the country does not welcome travesti lives. The removal of the queer and travesti bodies, and the streets without people in them give the images a ghostly character. The isolated and silence also suggest the presence of the persons that haunt these memories. Yet the victims of the violence become present in the images and in memory through their death and the haunting of these places often invisible to the state. Unlike the common representation of queer death in the newspapers and media, the places in the images do not show the bodies or the violence. The testimonials in the images have no direct voice, not either they present the subjectivities of the queer people. The identities of the queer exist only on those letters, in that dessert and in the desaturated landscape as it is related to death. The conscious way they portray these spaces where the violence occurred reproduces a gaze that once again repeats the fascination with queer and travesti violence and death. Even while trying to denounce the violence, the work of Barboza-Gubo and Mroczek repeats the voice of the authorized witness, with a conscious choice to represent particular places, where also travesti people live, form a community, work and survive daily, as spaces of violence, darkness and poverty. They do not show bodies; they use the same language that misgenders the victims and takes away their subjectivities.

The three works examined here recover and reconstruct the episodes of violence against the LGBTIQ community in Peru while also inserting them inside the national memory, they also propose a construction of a counternarrative that returns the agency and survival to the marginalized identities in the country. Yet, we still need

to reflect in the ways in which some of these artworks, while trying to denounce and trace a map of the violence, may still replicate the heteronormative gaze that often times segregates sexual dissidents from the recounts of national memory.

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