

Between body and land: sexual violence and imaginations of justice in contemporary Latin American short stories /

Entre o corpo e a terra: violência sexual e imaginações da justiça em contos latino-americanos contemporâneos

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of sexual violence against women and its possible fictional elaborations in contemporary Latin American short stories by women authors, through the construction of forms of justice that escape institutional channels and are grounded in community practices and in a material relationship with the land and bodies. Starting from the observation that, in the social sphere, gender-based violence often goes unpunished or receives insufficient institutional responses, the study turns to literature as a privileged space for imagining other possible responses. The corpus consists of the short stories *La mansedumbre*, by Giovanna Rivero (2020), and *Sangre coagulada*, by Mónica Ojeda (2020), published in recent collections and representative of different geographical contexts. The analysis shows that, although distinct in their narrative and aesthetic strategies, the texts share the construction of scenarios in which sexual violence is addressed and reconfigured through acts of punishment against perpetrators of sexual crimes against women that are not presented as merely individual, but rather as situated practices shaped by ancestral knowledge and community logics. In these short stories, justice is not grounded in abstract legal principles, but in a concrete relationship with the body, the land, and non-hegemonic forms of symbolic organization. It is argued that these configurations, while challenging ethical and narrative boundaries, operate as devices for reworking female agency in contexts of extreme violence. In doing so, the texts not only denounce the brutality of these experiences, but also explore, on the fictional level, the possibility of displacing the effects of what

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Rita Segato (2013) describes as a pedagogy of cruelty, opening up space for other forms of action, perception, and elaboration of violence.

KEYWORDS: Gender-based violence; Latin American short story; Female authorship; Community feminism.

RESUMO

*Este artigo investiga a representação da violência sexual contra mulheres e suas possíveis elaborações ficcionais em contos latino-americanos contemporâneos de autoria feminina, a partir da construção de formas de justiça que escapam às vias institucionais e se ancoram em práticas comunitárias e em uma relação material com a terra e os corpos. Partindo da constatação de que, no âmbito social, a violência de gênero frequentemente permanece impune ou encontra respostas institucionais insuficientes, o estudo volta-se à literatura como espaço privilegiado de imaginação de outras possibilidades de resposta. O corpus é composto pelos contos *La mansedumbre*, de Giovanna Rivero (2020), e *Sangre coagulada*, de Mónica Ojeda (2020), publicados em coletâneas recentes e representativos de diferentes contextos geográficos. A análise evidencia que, embora distintos em suas estratégias narrativas e estéticas, os textos compartilham a construção de cenários em que a violência sexual é tematizada e reconfigurada por meio de atos de punição aos perpetradores de crimes sexuais contra mulheres que não se apresentam como meramente individuais, mas como práticas situadas, atravessadas por saberes ancestrais e por lógicas comunitárias. Nesses contos, a justiça não se funda em princípios legais abstratos, mas em uma relação concreta com o corpo, com a terra e com formas não hegemônicas de organização simbólica. Argumenta-se que essas configurações, ao mesmo tempo em que tensionam limites éticos e narrativos, operam como dispositivos de reelaboração da agência feminina em contextos de extrema violência. Ao fazê-lo, os textos não apenas denunciam a brutalidade dessas experiências, mas também ensaiam, no plano ficcional, a possibilidade de deslocar os efeitos daquilo que Rita Segato (2013) descreve como pedagogia da crueldade, abrindo espaço para outras formas de ação, percepção e elaboração da violência.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Violência de gênero; Conto latino-americano; Autoria feminina; Feminismo comunitário.

1 Introduction

The idea for this article stems from a statement made by Mexican writer Dahlia de la Cerda during the panel “Being a Woman in Latin America,” held at the Festa Literária de Paraty in 2025. When asked about her motivations for writing, the author stated that, throughout her trajectory as a feminist activist, she had always felt deeply troubled by being unable to express empathy for or even encourage more aggressive forms of justice. As an example, she mentioned how painful it is to hear from a mother who has brutally lost her child that she wishes to kill the perpetrators and to be unable to agree with that impulse. If, in real life, resistance to gender-based violence does not accommodate categories such as retaliation or revenge, exploring this path in literary texts presents itself, in my view, as a possibility that has been developed by Latin American women writers over the past decades.

There are numerous literary texts recently published by Latin American women writers that address the trauma of sexual violence and other forms of violence against women through the fictional imagination of scenarios of taking justice into one’s own hands. This production spans

different genres and can be observed, among other examples, in *Le viste la cara a Dios* (2012), by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara; in short stories such as *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego*, by Mariana Enriquez, and *Subasta*, by María Fernanda Ampuero; in the narrative poem *Nadine* (2022), by Luiza Romão; and in *Perras de reserva* (2022), by Dahlia de la Cerda. This set could also include works such as *Cometierra* (2019), by Dolores Reyes, and *Por qué volvías cada verano* (2018), by Belén López Peiró. This is, therefore, an extensive body of work that encompasses different genres and makes literary imagination a privileged space for elaborating forms of justice in response to crimes that, unfortunately, persist.

To offer a small comparative sample of this body of work, I chose to focus on short stories while also highlighting the diversity of approaches through the selection of women writers from different national backgrounds. I therefore center my reading on *La mansedumbre*, included in *Tierra fresca de su tumba* (2021), by Bolivian writer Giovanna Rivero; and *Sangre coagulada*, included in *Las voladoras* (2020), by Ecuadorian writer Mónica Ojeda.

In common, beyond the construction of explicit scenarios of justice in situations of sexual violence against women, the selected short stories establish a recurring relationship between the punishment of the aggressor and a logic deeply connected to the land and the female body. Although, in the selected narratives, justice is carried out by human subjects, I observe a dialogue with forms of knowledge and symbolic organization that escape institutional categories and are grounded in community practices, although very different from one another, and in a material relationship with the world, directly shaping the way in which this justice is configured and legitimized.

This literature therefore seems to challenge and redefine the notion of agency by imagining responses that confront the gender-based violence that permeates the Latin American territory. As a counterpoint to a logic of structural violence that affects female bodies, especially those belonging to marginalized groups, these women writers develop, on the fictional level, a response that runs alongside what Cristina Rivera Garza (2013) calls *necroescritura*, since they construct narratives that do not limit themselves to denunciation but, deeply affected by violence, depict the deaths of the aggressors rather than those of the victims.

Thus, it is through this articulation between violence, agency, and mystical-religious dimensions that I propose to understand the selected short stories. I am interested in examining how these narratives construct forms of justice that are not exhausted by human action, but are

permeated by symbolic imaginaries that challenge their own limits. In moving on to the analysis, I therefore seek to observe how each text organizes these layers and what kind of response to violence emerges from this composition.

2 Between Body and Land: Sexual Violence and Imaginations of Justice in Contemporary Latin American Short Stories

La mansedumbre, a short story from *Tierra fresca de su tumba*, by Giovanna Rivero, a Bolivian writer and journalist whose work is notable for its exploration of issues related to violence, the body, and women's experiences, is narrated in the third person and tells the story of Elise, a fifteen-year-old girl who lives with her family in an isolated foreign religious community somewhere in the interior of Bolivia. The text adopts a point of view very close to the protagonist and emulates the environment of extreme religiosity in which she is immersed. From the opening scene of the story, we follow the young woman as she is questioned by the religious leaders of her community. Nothing is stated explicitly, but the circumstances suggest that she has been raped. The narrative unfolds by alternating descriptions of the present with flashbacks to the interview, in which the religious leaders openly blame her for what happened and, in an attempt to protect the perpetrator, seek to convince her that she was possessed by the devil:

'While the Devil was in you, Elise, did he say anything? Did he whisper things in your ear? The Devil whispers. His voice mustn't have sounded very commanding, I suppose? The Devil seduces, you see.'

'The Devil seduced me, Pastor Jacob? I thought it was Brother Joshua Klassen. I'm pretty sure those were his eyes and that was his birthmark by his mouth, like a grain of rice. . . I thought. . . ' (Rivero, 2023, p. 9)²

The collective pressure exerted on Elise to assume responsibility for the violence she suffered can be understood as a particularly clear example of the idea of a pedagogy of cruelty, a

² –Mientras el diablo te poseía, Elise, ¿te decía algo? ¿Te susurraba cosas al oído? El diablo susurra. Su voz no ha de haberte parecido muy autoritaria, ¿verdad? El diablo seduce.

–¿El diablo me ha seducido, Pastor Jacob? Es que yo pensé que era el hermano Joshua Klassen. Creo que tenía sus ojos y el lunar de arroz cerca de la boca... Yo pensé... (Rivero, 2020, p. 5)

concept developed by Rita Segato (2018) that will also serve as a key to reading the other short story analyzed in this article:

I call pedagogies of cruelty all those acts and practices that teach, habituate, and condition subjects to transmute the living and its vitality into things. In this sense, this pedagogy teaches something that goes far beyond killing: it teaches how to kill through a deritualized death, a death that leaves behind only residues at the site of the deceased. (Segato, 2018, p. 6).³

The author emphasizes that violence against women, and specifically sexual violence in this case, has a dimension of the demonstration of power that cannot be ignored. In this sense, sexual violence does not appear merely as an individual act, but as a practice that reaffirms hierarchies and produces collective effects. In the short story, the protagonist not only suffers various forms of violence, but is led to internalize it as guilt, incorporating a logic that shifts responsibility from the aggressor to the victim. Elise is treated by her community as a being stripped of vitality, and this process is enacted and reinforced in each of the passages of the conversation with Pastor Jacob that appear in the narrative.

It is particularly significant that the short story begins with the figure of the devil. Beyond its symbolic charge, historically associated, in the Western religious imaginary, with witchcraft and, consequently, with the feminine, this initial presence fulfills an important structural function: it inscribes violence within a religious regime of interpretation that displaces its materiality and allows it to be reinscribed as a spiritual phenomenon. At the same time, it establishes a fictional pact that will be progressively strained, preparing the ground for the ending.

The fragmented structure of the narrative, which constantly shifts between transcriptions of the dialogues between Elise and Pastor Jacob and passages in which the action is narrated in the third person, contributes to this same effect by producing an economy of revelation that refuses the direct explicitness of the violence. It is through scattered clues that the reader realizes that Elise was not the only victim and that the episode resulted in a pregnancy. This information does not appear as an immediate fact; rather, it is progressively constructed through a series of small perceptual shifts. The pregnancy, for example, begins to be hinted at when the young woman looks at her own feet:

³ Llamo pedagogías de la crueldad a todos los actos y prácticas que enseñan, habitúan y programan a los sujetos a transmutar lo vivo y su vitalidad em cosas. En ese sentido, esta pedagogía enseña algo que va mucho más allá del matar, enseña a matar de una muerte desritualizada, de una muerte que deja apenas residuos en el lugar del difunto (Segato, 2018, p. 9).

Elise looks at her shoes and thinks she should probably take them off, be more careful with them in case her feet keep growing. She's fifteen, true, but she's Heard that her grandmother's feet didn't stop growing until she had her first son at age eighteen. (Rivero, 2023, p. 10)⁴

This is not an isolated narrative procedure, but rather recurrent in the selected texts. Although they address such a sensitive subject as sexual violence, these narratives avoid reducing the female body to the condition of a mere object of that violence. By shifting the focus from the violent scene to its effects and to the characters' modes of perception, they produce a distance that can be read as a strategy of resistance to processes of dehumanization, understood here in the sense proposed by María Lugones (2008). In this context, Elise's pregnancy does not emerge as a central image or as a defining mark of her experience, but is inscribed laterally, without exhausting the complexity of the character.

The notions of punishment and retribution thus become central to the development of the short story. Elise herself challenges this field by directly questioning the council of elders about whether her aggressor can be held accountable. However, it is with the introduction of a character referred to only as "indio" that this issue gains greater depth. Through him, the narrative shifts the framework through which violence can be understood, opening up space for imagining other forms of response to the crime. At one point, we follow this character's stream of thought, which makes this shift explicit:

What would Walter Lowen be like if he'd taken his family to live in the mountains? In El Alto, for example. There, no one would have got off scot-free. The men would have stood up full of courage, hungry as wolves, and the women, even worse, make no mistake. Petrol, kerosene, alcohol, sticks, dynamite, stones; they'd grab anything they could to bring justice. And the culprit – oh, the culprit! – would be made a mighty torch of redemption, crying out for mercy until his throat burst while the bystanders spat out his crime at him. But these *camba* Mennonites have too much faith. At most they leave, like this Walter Lowen guy, who claims he 'deserted' like some soldier from the Chaco War. But Pachamama doesn't just bury the past like that. Not even for these *camba* Germans, or wherever it is they come from – that's no way to move on from the damage done. (Rivero, 2023, p. 13)⁵

⁴ Elise mira sus zapatos y piensa que debería quitárselos, cuidarlos mejor por si el pie le crece. Tiene quince, es cierto, pero ha escuchado que a su abuela Anna el pie le creció hasta que tuvo su primer hijo, a los dieciocho. (Rivero, 2020, p. 4)

⁵ ¿Cómo sería Walter Lowen de haber llevado a su familia a un pueblo montañoso? A El Alto, por ejemplo. Allí nada habría quedado impune. Los hombres se habrían alzado llenos de coraje y hambre de lobos, y las mujeres, esas peor, esas sí. Gasolina, kerosene, alcohol, palos, dinamita, piedras, lo que sea habrían agarrado para hacer justicia. Y el culpable, ¡ay del culpable!, convertido en inmensa antorcha de redención, habría clamado piedad hasta que se le reventara la garganta mientras las gentes le espetarían su delito. Pero estos menonitas *cambas* confían demasiado.

El indio therefore assumes a decisive function in the narrative: through his perspective, the plot shifts from the enclosed space of the Mennonite community to a logic situated within the broader Bolivian context. His speech introduces another grammar of justice, one that breaks with the institutionalized passivity of that group and projects a community-based response to violence. In this imagining, the crime would not be absorbed or reinterpreted, but collectively confronted. Had it occurred in El Alto, as he suggests, punishment would not depend on formal institutions, but on direct action by the community, with an explicit leading role for women.

The scene evoked is marked by open and unmediated violence, in contrast to the narrative economy surrounding Elise's experience. While the rape is suggested through ellipses and silences, the aggressor's punishment is described in terms of exposure and excess: the culprit's body is turned into an "antorcha de redención" (RIVERO, 2020, p. 8), subjected to the gaze and collective action. This disparity is not incidental. It makes explicit an important inversion in the logic of representation: while the violence suffered by the victim is veiled, the violence against the aggressor is amplified and made visible. In this imaginative space, the rapist is neither protected nor symbolically attenuated, but fully exposed and punished.

This passage also introduces a central figure for understanding this character's conception of justice, one that will become especially important at the end of the narrative: the Pachamama. This female deity, worshipped by various Andean groups, is marked by her profound connection to the land and is associated with a demand for sacrifices and offerings that occupy this space:

Perhaps that's why she fails to notice the hint of glee that sparks when the events unfurl, perfect in their violence, sudden and beautiful in their simplicity: the Indian, still laughing, pushes Joshua Klassen into the deep, deep pit, while Walter Lowen, abandoning his own salvation once again, jumps up onto the tractor and starts to return to the jaws of the earth what they have spent the whole day wresting from it. Heap by heap, the dirt covers Joshua Klassen's cries, irate, incredulous at first, then increasingly weak. 'A sacrifice, that's what it is,' the Indian says, spraying his leaf of mouth-watering resin over that makeshift chullpa. 'You will be at peace, Pachamama,' he seems to be praying. 'A sacrifice, that's what it is,' he says. (Rivero, 2023, p. 17)⁶

A lo mucho, como este señor, el Walter Lowen, desertan, según dice, como si fuera soldado de la Guerra del Chaco. Pero la Pachamama no entierra así nomás el pasado. Ni aunque sean alemanes cambas, o de dónde serán pues, pero ni así se hace tres cruces al daño. (Rivero, 2020, p. 8)

⁶ Quizás por eso no puede distinguir el destello de felicidad cuando los hechos se desencadenan perfectos en su violencia, súbitos y hermosos en su sencillez: el indio, todavía riendo, empuja a Joshua Klassen al pozo hondísimo, mientras Walter Lowen, desertando una vez más de su propia salvación, se sube de un salto al tractor y comienza a

The ending thus condenses the logic of justice that the short story constructs throughout the narrative. The aggressor's punishment is not organized around hegemonic legal or institutional categories, but is inscribed within a cosmological order in which violence demands reparation through sacrifice. The invocation of the Pachamama does not function as a mere decorative element, but as a principle that reconfigures the meaning of the action: what we encounter here is a form of restitution, an attempt to reinscribe the harm within a balance that has been disrupted. This configuration makes it possible to understand the aggression against the woman also as a violation of the land.

In this sense, the scene establishes a significant contrast with the figure of the devil that structures the beginning of the short story. While, at that moment, the violence suffered by Elise is displaced into the realm of possession and individual guilt, here it is reinscribed within a logic that recognizes it as a collective rupture. What was previously interpreted as a moral transgression is now understood as an imbalance that demands a response. Justice is therefore not achieved by attributing blame to the victim, but by eliminating the aggressor.

This operation produces a fundamental shift: in addition to changing the agent of violence, it also alters the symbolic framework through which it is interpreted. If the devil serves to conceal and justify the crime, the Pachamama makes its recognition and reparation possible, even if through equally extreme violence. In this gesture, the short story articulates a form of justice that escapes Western categories, approaching a communal and ritualized logic that, albeit provisionally, reverses the initial asymmetry.

Finally, the short story also allows us to consider the protagonist's agency, particularly through the gesture that brings the narrative to a close. The final passage of the short story is especially significant in this regard:

Elise does not know what he means by sacrifice, but it's her girlish heart, and not her mind, that needs to understand. That same startled heart which now impels her, like a faithful animal, to outstretch her white, calloused hands and grab fistfuls of dirt, carefully, furiously, breaking her nails. She looks at those fistfuls as if it were the first time she'd encountered the grainy consistency of that substance, then she throws them over the mound of earth like an offering of her own, a small bunch of dirty, precious flowers. For her, for Leah Welkel,

devolver a las fauces de la obra lo que le han usurpado durante toda esa jornada. Montón a montón, la tierra va cubriendo los gritos, primero iracundos, incrédulos, luego desmadejados, de Joshua Klassen.

–Sacrificio es –dice el indio, mientras rocía su hoja de resina apetitosa sobre esa improvisada chullpa–. Tranquila estarás, Pachamama –parece que reza–. Sacrificio es –dice. (Rivero, 2020, p. 11)

and for Carolina. For Carolina, too. (Rivero, 2023, p. 18)⁷

Elise is not the character responsible for her aggressor's death. In the context of the short story, this would be quite implausible, since we are dealing with an adolescent who was raised in an extremely religious environment. This does not mean that she is passive in relation to what happened to her. Although she does not seek an explicit form of subversion, or a more canonical idea of freedom, she acts within the power relations imposed upon her. In line with Saba Mahmood's (2019) understanding of agency, the character moves within the universe in which she has always lived. The protagonist's participation in the act of revenge is symbolic, but no less significant for that: she throws flowers onto the grave of her aggressor, who has been buried alive. Even at this moment, Elise does not think only of herself, but also of other victims of the same crime, one of them an animal, since the name Carolina, which closes the story, refers to a cow that was also violated by the man. Her expression of gratitude also repeats the collective logic that governs the idea of justice throughout the short story.

If, in *La masedumbre*, agency manifests itself through a silent and symbolic gesture inscribed within a religious logic that the character does not ultimately break with, in *Sangre coagulada*, a short story included in *Las voladoras* (2020), by Ecuadorian writer Mónica Ojeda (Guayaquil, 1988), this same notion is challenged through a different configuration. The author of novels, poetry, and short stories, Ojeda is known for a body of work that brings together elements of horror and the Gothic with representations of violence and power relations. Among other distinctions, she was included in the 2017 Bogotá39 list and in Granta's 2021 selection of young Spanish-language authors. Here, the narrative is constructed in the first person and is driven by an equally young voice, but one marked by a more radical departure from expectations associated with age and gender.

The protagonist, who is never named and is identified only by the nickname "Ranita," is an adolescent who escapes conventional stereotypes, establishing a singular relationship with her own body and with nature. Unlike Elise, whose body is progressively revealed through the effects

⁷ Elise no sabe qué significa esa palabra en español, "sacrificio", pero no es su conciencia la que necesita entender, sino su corazón de chica. Ese corazón asustado que ahora la obliga, como un animal fiel, a estirar sus manos blancas y callosas y tomar puñados de tierra, con cuidadito, con furia, quebrándose las uñas. Mira esos puñados como si fuera la primera vez que entra en contacto con la consistencia granulosa de su materia y los arroja sobre el promontorio como una ofrenda propia, un ramito de flores sucias y preciosas. Por ella, por Leah Welkel y por Carolina. También por Carolina. (Rivero, 2020, p. 11)

of violence, the narrator of *Sangre coagulada* actively claims this body, establishing with it a relationship of exploration and experimentation centered, above all, on blood. This element, which gives the short story its title, runs throughout the narrative and serves as the organizing axis of her experience:

I like blood (...) I don't remember a single day when I didn't open my body to watch the blood gush out like fresh water.
Pure garden water.
Warm poppy water.
I remember that as a child I would fall on purpose. I would pick at my scabs and leave them on the sheets, in the bathtub, on Firulais's cold plate.
I touched my blood. I smelled my blood. (...)
I like the way my fingernails get dirty underneath, as though they are going to come off. The way my fingerprints show. The way evening falls and the clouds rust.
(Ojeda, 2020, p.5)⁸⁹

Another female figure is then introduced: the protagonist's grandmother. In *Sangre coagulada*, the narrative is constructed from a point of view that is not guided by a canonical perception of the world, which is reflected in the way everyday elements are described. The language, marked by a poetic and frequently dislocated register, perhaps also shaped by the narrator's young age, makes what is being narrated less immediately apprehensible, requiring the reader to engage in a constant process of interpretation. It is within this framework that the figure of the grandmother takes shape, her practice becoming intelligible only through images that articulate themselves at the boundary between the familiar and the unsettling:

But with the girls it was different because they shed clots and dense pieces onto the bed. It was like giving birth, but in reverse, because instead of something alive, something dead came out. "Death is born too," Grandmother would say, and I would gather the clots like little children. Some of the girls looked at us with hostility, cleaned themselves quickly, and did not even stop to look at their insides scattered across the sheets. They had no curiosity, no

⁸ *Sangre coagulada* has not been officially translated into English. Therefore, all English translations of excerpts from the story in this article were prepared specifically for this text.

⁹ Me gusta la sangre (...) No recuerdo un solo día que no haya abierto mi cuerpo para ver la sangre brotar como agua fresca.

Agua pura de jardín.

Agua tibia de amapola.

Recuerdo que de niña me caía a propósito. Me quitaba las costras y las dejaba sobre las sábanas, la bañera, el plato frío de Firulais.

Tocaba mi sangre. Olía mi sangre. (...)

Me gusta que las uñas se ensucien por debajo, que parezca que se van a salir. Que se noten mis huellas digitales. Que atardezca y se oxiden las nubes. (Ojeda, 2020, p.5)

desire to know themselves. They left quickly, leaving parts of their bodies behind with us. According to Reptile, this was because, on the other side of the river, people said that Grandmother was a witch. (Ojeda, 2020, p. 8)¹⁰

Thus, the figure of the grandmother takes on more defined contours. Described as a witch, she embodies a body of knowledge that falls outside legitimized forms of knowledge, encompassing practices related both to terminating pregnancies and to the use of medicinal herbs and plants. Far from being merely a marginal figure, this character emerges as a central agent in the short story, responsible for establishing a form of justice that, as in *La masedumbre*, is grounded in ancestral knowledge and in a deep relationship with the land.

The writing of Mónica Ojeda, like that of Giovanna Rivero, rejects the construction of a linear and transparent plot. As Cristina Rivera Garza (2013) argues, these narratives are organized around fragments and traces, in which reading becomes an exercise in recomposition and displacement. In this sense, rather than leading the reader through a stable sequence of events, the text invites them to inhabit a perspective marked by discontinuity and strangeness, bringing them closer to the singular point of view of its narrative voices.

It is in this same complex tone that we are introduced to Reptil, another character in the story, the protagonist's abuser:

At that time, Reptile did a lot for us. He helped deliver the animals' young. He distributed the manure. He fed the pigs. He removed ticks from the livestock and crushed them with his fingernails against the fence. He kept the children who crossed the river to insult us at bay. He ate with us and never asked about the girls. In front of Grandmother, he barely spoke to me, but sometimes, when we were alone, he would ask me to tell him about Firulais, and I would cry because I missed him terribly and we had no dog on the farm. Other times, he would give me something bitter to drink that made me fall asleep in the bushes. When I woke up, I would return home exhausted and with pain between my legs, but I pretended I was fine so that Grandmother would not get angry. (Ojeda, 2020, p.9)¹¹

¹⁰ Pero con las chicas era distinto porque ellas tiraban coágulos y trozos densos sobre la cama. Era como un parto pero al revés, porque en lugar de salir algo vivo salía algo muerto. «La muerte también nace», decía la abuela, y yo recogía los coágulos como niños pequeños. Algunas chicas nos miraban mal, se limpiaban rápido y ni siquiera se detenían a observar su interior sobre las sábanas. No tenían ninguna curiosidad, ninguna gana de conocerse. Se marchaban rápido dejando parte de sus cuerpos con nosotras. Según Reptil eso era porque al otro lado del río contaban que la abuela era una bruja. (Ojeda, 2020, p.8)

¹¹ En ese tiempo Reptil hacía mucho por nosotras. Ayudaba a parir a los animales. Repartía el abono. Alimentaba a los cerdos. Le quitaba las garrapatas al ganado y las aplastaba con sus uñas contra la valla. Mantenía lejos a los niños que cruzaban el río para insultarnos. Comía con nosotras y jamás preguntaba por las chicas. Frente a la abuela él apenas me dirigía la palabra, pero a veces, si estábamos solos, me pedía que le hablara de Firulais y yo lloraba porque lo extrañaba mucho y en la finca no teníamos perro. Otras, me daba de beber algo amargo que me hacía dormir en

As in *La masedumbre*, the short story avoids a direct description of the rape. The violence is suggested through clues: exhaustion, pain between the legs, induced sleep, all of which require the reader to engage in a process of inference. This narrative economy, however, contrasts with the way the aggressor's death is subsequently constructed:

Two days later, we ate with Reptile. I remember his tongue swelling like a sparrow, the purple blood on the table, the veins in his neck the size of cold worms, the clean, gleaming machete cutting through the air. I remember singing loudly while Grandmother watched him writhe. I sang: "Ay, ay, ay, the girls cry, the frogs jump, the chicks cheep, cheep, the cows moo, moo, the men pant, ah, ah, ah, the owls hoot, ooo, ooo, the girls cry, ay, ay, ay." I remember that we buried him among the bushes. (Ojeda, 2020, p.11)¹²

In this case, the violence, previously hinted at, becomes fully visible. The scene of Reptil's death is marked by an intensification of imagery that shifts the register from silence to excess, exposing the aggressor's body in detail and in an almost ritualized manner. This contrast, far from being merely stylistic, points to a reorganization of the narrative logic: what is concealed at the moment of the assault is made explicit at the moment of punishment.

Justice, although less explicitly articulated as a communal practice than in *La masedumbre*, is also configured here as a collective gesture. The absence of proper names reinforces the recurring nature of the violence, suggesting that this is not an isolated case but a repeated structure. The aggressor is not punished through institutional channels, but through the actions of a figure close to the victim, her grandmother, who poisons Reptil, cuts off his head, and watches him die at the table with her granddaughter. Once again, the economy in the representation of the rape seems to find its counterpart in the depiction of the aggressor's death.

In this case, agency takes on an explicitly feminine form, but the victim's participation remains inscribed within a limited field of possibilities. As in *La masedumbre*, this is not a direct action upon the aggressor's body, but a situated gesture that takes place within the scene of

los matorrales. Cuando despertaba volvía a casa con cansancio y dolor entre las piernas, pero fingía estar bien para que la abuela no se enojara. (Ojeda, 2020, p.9)

¹² Dos días después comimos con Reptil. Recuerdo su lengua engordando como un gorrión, la sangre púrpura sobre la mesa, las venas de su cuello del tamaño de gusanos fríos, el machete limpio y brillante cortando el viento. Recuerdo que canté duro mientras la abuela lo veía retorcerse. Canté: «Ai, ai, ai, las niñas lloran, las ranas saltan, los pollitos pían, pío, pío, las vacas mugen, muuu, los hombres jadean, aj, aj, aj, las lechuzas ululan, uuu, uuu, las niñas lloran, ai, ai, ai». Recuerdo que lo enterramos entre los matorrales. (Ojeda, 2020, p.11)

punishment. While in that story the ritual takes material form in the act of casting an offering onto the earth, here the narrator participates through song, a children's rhyme that may initially sound childish, but that encapsulates her perception of what is taking place and symbolically inscribes her in the act.

Considerações finais

In this way, the short stories analyzed in this article constitute an exercise in imagining justice that escapes institutional and legal channels, echoing the same impulse that drives the reflection by Dahlia de la Cerda mentioned in the introduction to this article. Far from promoting the use of violence by victims of sexual violence in material life, these stories foster a heightened awareness of the demand for justice, demonstrating that reparation does indeed have the power to rehumanize.

These narratives thus challenge what Rita Segato describes as a pedagogy of cruelty, not only by exposing the logic that naturalizes violence against women, but also by displacing its effects. If, within this pedagogy, violence functions as an instrument for maintaining power by teaching submission and dehumanization, the short stories analyzed here seem to rehearse, on the fictional level, the possibility of unlearning this lesson. They are exercises in what the same author, in another work, called counter-pedagogies of cruelty.

Although confined to the realm of imagination, these narratives do not constitute a form of escapism, but rather forms of symbolic confrontation with a violence that is not episodic, but structural, linked to a colonial and patriarchal logic of the production and reproduction of power. The great profusion of literary texts of this kind in contemporary Latin America is an example of a collective recognition of the need to confront this violence.

The short stories do not, however, suggest that women should murder rapists. The lessons of literature cannot and should not be taken so literally, of course, but they point to the centrality of collective forms of action. By mobilizing community practices and non-hegemonic symbolic frameworks, the narratives suggest that resistance to violence can be constructed outside institutional frameworks, opening up space for other possible configurations of justice.

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