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The Representation of the Female Body in the Multimedia Works of Regina José Galindo

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The female body is central to the performance art, poetry and blog site interventions of Guatemalan Regina José Galindo. While Galindo is best known for her performance work, this article compares the hereto overlooked, distinctive and often shocking representations of the female body across her multimedia outputs. We first consider the ways in which, in all three media, Galindo presents an 'excessive', carnivalised, grotesque and abject female body. Second, we analyse representations of the female body that has been subjected to violence at a private and public level. In so doing, we show how Galindo not only contests hegemonic visions of gender and (national) identity but also challenges the viewer/reader to engage with, rather than look away from, the violence to which women are subjected in patriarchal society.

Keywords: Regina José Galindo, Guatemala, multimedia artist, abjection, grotesque, body.

This article analyses the highly distinctive and often shocking representations of the female body in the multimedia works of the contemporary Guatemalan poet, writer, performance artist and blogger Regina José Galindo (b. 1974). The concept of multimedia is central to our analysis of her work. We use this term in both senses of the word provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2011) to refer to Galindo's 'use of more than one medium of communication and artistic expression' as well as to the way in which she incorporates 'a number of media, such as text, audio, video, and animation' within individual outputs. Galindo is primarily known for her performance art and since her first performance in 1999 of *El dolor en un pañuelo*, which will be examined later, her work has been shown at numerous international exhibitions. In 2005 she received the Golden Lion award for Best Young Artist at the Venice Biennale. The few existing journalistic articles and academic critical studies on Galindo, such as those by Goldman and Pérez-Rattón, focus almost exclusively on her performance work rather than her poetry or blog interventions. There are currently no studies which examine the interrelationship between Galindo's different artistic and literary outputs.

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The female body is central to Galindo's performance art, poetry and blog site but the similarities, as well as the differences, in terms of how the female body is represented in the various media have also been overlooked. By focusing first on the representation of the 'excessive', carnivalised, grotesque and abject female body, and second on the female body that has been subjected to violence at a private and public (national) level across Galindo's *oeuvre*, this study aims to fill some of the gaps in the critical appreciation of Galindo's multimedia work. In particular, we argue that a consideration of all media is essential if we are to acknowledge Galindo's efforts to access, and engage with, the widest possible audience. Furthermore, by examining Galindo's distinctive, often shocking bodily aesthetics, which we identify across her *oeuvre*, we aim to show how she challenges the viewer/reader to engage with, rather than look away from, the violence to which women are subjected in patriarchal society.

Given that Galindo's use of the body to explore female sexuality, notions of feminine beauty, race or domestic and national violence is not unique in the sense that other female performance artists of this region also use their bodies to explore such subject matter, Galindo's performance art must be briefly situated in the broader context of Latin American women's performance art. Other artists who share these interests include, for instance, Mexicans Gabriela León and Astrid Hadad and Guatemalans Sandra Monterroso and María Adela Díaz. Whilst these artists belong to different socio-political, geographic, class and ethnic backgrounds, it can be argued, as Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino have done, that they share 'certain histories of social engagement that allows us to think of them as Latin American artists' (Taylor and Costantino, 2003: 3). Like Galindo these artists use, each in her distinct way, performance art – broadly understood – and the female body to challenge 'a socio-political context that is repressive when not overtly violent' and to tackle 'systems of power that date back to the colonial times – church domination, imperialism and neoimperialism, political oligarchy and dictatorship, and [...] pervasive sexism and racism' (Taylor and Costantino, 2003: 3). The interest in the body in Galindo's work and that of other female performance artists ultimately serves to interrogate 'the normative habit of objectifying the female body' as well as the 'politics of representation and the strategies of power written across the female body, which serves as both message and the vehicle' (Taylor and Costantino, 2003: 22).

The representation of the female body and its fraught relationship to patriarchy is not only fundamental to Galindo's performance art but also to her poetry and blog site. The female body is particularly well suited as a site for exploring the relationship between womanhood and patriarchy because, as Mary Russo has observed, 'as a model of normativity, the severe and penetrating moral, social and aesthetic judgments seem to converge upon the female body' (Russo, 1994: 136). In Galindo's work, therefore, the corporeal becomes a site of postmodern tension and ambiguity, oscillating between the celebration of its base, sensorial and erotic functions and its depiction as a locus of violence. The body represents both ludic pleasure and a vehicle of contestation, where the carnivalesque, grotesque and abject female body challenges the rules of feminine sexual containment or beauty, thus working affirmatively to destabilise idealisations of the female body and sexuality. Indeed, the appeal of Galindo's work may reside in her focus on transnational issues relating to the female body. Nonetheless, whilst the artist's overall work deals with themes which are relevant to many women and their bodies across the world such as sex, state/domestic violence, sexism, racism, death and rape, yet so too is it necessarily local by dealing with these same issues framed within a specifically Guatemalan context. Though Galindo uses the female body to express the

private experiences of self, womanhood and sexuality, the corporeal, when it becomes associated with violence, also serves as a powerful tool to explore the 'public', that is, the Guatemalan nation. Thus, in Galindo's *oeuvre*, violence against the female body is presented as a legacy of the experiences of colonisation, the Guatemalan Civil War and, most recently, neoliberalism. As will be seen, the female body is compared to the territory which is to be colonised by man; it is used as a vehicle to condemn the practice of femicide during and after the Civil War and to critique body modification practices which aim to make Guatemalan women's bodies conform to Western beauty ideals.

The Grotesque, Abject and 'Excessive' Female Body

The corporeal in Galindo's poetic, performatic and web-based work can be usefully understood with reference to the Kristevan concept of the abject and the Bakhtinian notions of the carnivalesque and the grotesque. Sue Vice has highlighted five common interests in the work of Bakhtin and Kristeva: 'the margins of the body; the maternal; food; death; and the text', all of which are also evident in Galindo's multimedia works (Vice, 1997: 164). Vice has further noted that, while they have shared concerns, there are also important differences between the two theorists in that Bakhtin's approach seems to reclaim a positive sense of the grotesque while Kristeva focuses on the 'coarse and cynical', 'disgusting or obscene' aspects (Vice, 1997: 164). Our analysis aims to show how the artist, poet and blogger negotiates between the different meanings of the grotesque and abject in her works so that they vacillate ambiguously between the subversive and empowerment, on the one hand, and disempowerment, on the other.

Within a Kristevan framework, the abject is that which is 'radically excluded' but which 'from its place of banishment [...] does not cease challenging its master' (Kristeva, 1982: 2). Abjection is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva, 1982: 4). The abject threatens to destabilise the split between I and 'Other', inside and outside (Kristeva, 1982: 7). Abjection can be linked to the notion of the uncanny: elsewhere, in her discussion of Freud's concept of the uncanny, Kristeva (1991: 182–192) has noted that encounters with the 'feminine', death and the foreigner can lead to a sense of the uncanny or strangeness and similarly threaten the boundaries of self and 'Other'. We do not, however, reject the uncanny outright because of the strange within ourselves, because 'that uncanny strangeness [...] is as much theirs as it is ours' (Kristeva, 1991: 192). Indeed, despite one's efforts to maintain the boundaries between self and 'Other', 'the sense of strangeness is a mainspring for identification with the other' (Kristeva, 1991: 189). Such recognition of the self within the 'Other' prevents us from easily assimilating or rejecting the 'Other' and so can facilitate a more equal relationship (Kristeva, 1991: 192). The choice to disregard the experience of the uncanny comes 'at the cost of mental impoverishment', but through the recognition of '*our* uncanny strangeness' we are able to complete ourselves (Kristeva, 1991: 190, 192). In patriarchal society, 'woman' and the female body have come to be closely associated with the abject because they are cast as the negative 'Other' to the male body, particularly when pregnant. In addition, femininity has come to be associated with 'the fluid, the viscous, the half-formed, or the indeterminate' in opposition to the masculine unified whole (Grosz, 1994: 195). Aversion to fluids is related to 'the horror of femininity' which Grosz in turn connects with 'the fear of being absorbed into something which has no boundaries of its own', that something being characterised by excess (Grosz, 1994: 194). Galindo's poetry,

blog and performances, which include references to and representations of bodily fluids and waste, the female corpse and the pregnant female body, can be seen to harness the horror of the abject and, for a Western audience in particular, the experience of the uncanny in order to challenge hegemonic visions of gender and (national) identity.

In addition to challenging the existing patriarchal order, Galindo's performances, poetry and blog site celebrate the spaces which women are able to create for themselves within patriarchy. To do so, Galindo can be seen to draw on a Bakhtinian understanding of the carnivalesque and the grotesque which celebrates the transgression of boundaries and hierarchies (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin argues that during carnival latent anarchic, pre-oedipal energies led to the transgression of social and moral standards. Traditionally, therefore, carnival was anathema to authority and order. In his analysis of the corporeal and its excesses, Bakhtin connects the notion of carnival to the grotesque. In line with the Kristevan concept of the abject, for Bakhtin the grotesque 'means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth' (Bakhtin, [1965] 1968: 21). With its association with the inversion of hierarchy, the grotesque has a similar subversive function to carnival, and by extension the abject, as it serves to challenge pre-established conceptions of the controlled (female) body. Yet, as with the carnivalesque and the abject, the grotesque can also be linked to the notion of disempowerment, lack and abused female body.

In Galindo's poetry, the carnivalesque is associated with the celebration of the grotesque female body which eludes patriarchal control. The grotesque, carnivalised body enjoys a superior status to the mind and the spirit in Galindo's poem *Soy un lugar común* (*Vivir Poesía*, n.d.). This poem is a celebration of the carnivalised body, where its grotesqueness resides in both its imperfection and normality. 'Grotesque' bodily parts – '*tetas diminutas*', '*la nariz oblonga*', '*nalgas caídas*' and '*piel naranja*' – are a testament to the ageing and flawed body which, as the label of grotesque implies, is in 'opposition to the normative beauty which is expected of women' (Scott-Dixon, 2010: no pagination). The poetic 'yo' claims ownership of her body and revels in its physical averageness as the words '*la estatura del pueblo*' suggest. Bodily imperfection may be seen as a carnivalesque riposte to the manner in which the national is often imagined through ('pure') femininity and how national discourses equate ('natural') women to territory and to 'bearers of the collective' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 26), which the words '*Un lugar común*' and '*estatura del pueblo*' connote. Proclaiming bodily imperfection in the poem also works as a way of challenging traditional Western beauty ideals which uphold mainstream definitions of what constitutes a sexually attractive female body, including fulsome breasts and certain physical traits of youthfulness such as pert buttocks or smooth skin. In the Guatemalan context, allusions to the flawed female body – suggested in the references to small breasts, oblong nose and cellulite – which does not meet Western standards of beauty may be interpreted as a critique of twenty-first century consumer society's obsession with appearance and body-modification techniques such as breast enhancement, rhinoplasty and liposuction undertaken 'in pursuit of cultural belonging (or ''fitting'' in)' (Howson, [2003] 2004: 117). Such references present 'woman' as body and underline the negative psychological impact body-modification techniques can have on women because of the way in which 'they have the potential to reproduce dominant discourses about idealised femininity' which deprive women of a sense of ownership over their own bodies (Howson, [2003] 2004: 116).

The damaging effect which body modification techniques and contemporary neoliberal discourses about the female body have on women's bodies and body image is

further explored in Galindo's performance *Recorte por la línea* (Venezuela, 2005). In this performance, a plastic surgeon marked the areas of Galindo's body which would require surgery in order to achieve a 'perfect' body. The visual markings produce a tension between the domination of the female body and a resistance to that control. Indeed the extensive markings which identify the supposed flaws in the female body, such as excess fat, in fact produce a carnivalised body which paradoxically celebrates the corpulent excess as opposed to the controlled, contained body envisaged by the surgeon's markings. In contrast to the poem *Soy un lugar común*, the grotesqueness resides not in the imperfection and normality of the 'real' body but in the supposed perfection the markings represent and the abnormality and unnaturalness they would produce were the operations to be carried out. By exposing the grotesque body surgery would create, the performance, like the poem, challenges socially constructed, Western ideas of normative beauty and celebrates the unmodified female body. The focus on the objectified woman in Galindo's performance art resonates deeply with the work of some of the other aforementioned Latin American female performers in whose work the idea of woman as object serves to 'expose the social theatrics that circulate Woman and women as commodities in a landscape upon which capitalism, even more charged in the age of neoliberal economic treaties, so intrinsically depends' (Taylor and Costantino, 2003: 22).

In Galindo's work the presence of the carnivalised female body confronts the patriarchal order which aims to reduce women's bodies to mere objects by means of medical intervention. Gear has observed that in both Western and non-Western cultures, 'the female body has become a site for intervention, modification, and transformation' (Gear, 2001: 323). Furthermore, as Grosz points out, 'the increasing medicalisation of the body, based on processes of removal (incision, cutting, removing and reduction) or addition (inlaying, stitching and injection), demonstrates a body pliable to power, a machinic structure in which ''components'' can be altered, adjusted, removed or replaced' (Grosz, 1995: 35). In several performances, including *Recorte por la línea*, *Camisa de fuerza* (Belgium, 2006) and *Yesoterapia* (Dominican Republic, 2006), Galindo shows an abject and carnivalised female body subjected to medical procedures which seek to control it and contain its presumed excess. For *Yesoterapia* Galindo had her body covered in plaster cast in order to lose weight and remove cellulite from her body. The carnivalised body seen encased in plaster mocks social norms which require such procedures and contests the hegemonic view which sees women's bodies as excessive and in need of containment and moulding. Images of the performance *Camisa de fuerza* show the artist in a straightjacket in order to critique the way in which patriarchal society seeks to have power over women's (excessive) minds by controlling and containing their (excessive) bodies. Nonetheless, the viewer cannot be certain if the woman's mind has been successfully brought under control or not, suggesting that women may be able to find small spaces for self-expression beyond the limits of patriarchal control.

Taken together, Galindo's performances and poems suggest that despite society's drive to contain women, their bodies and sexuality, female intemperance is constantly threatening to destabilise the status quo. As Kristeva has noted, female bodily fluids are seen as particularly uncontainable and threatening within patriarchy. Galindo includes such abject fluids in her performances in order to speak the 'unspeakable'. The performance *Himeoplastia* (Guatemala, 2004), for example, comments on society's obsession with controlling, whilst simultaneously refusing to speak about, women's supposedly excessive sexuality. For this performance Galindo underwent an operation to reconstruct her hymen, which is an operation that some young Guatemalan women

undergo in illegal clinics in order to 'restore' their virginity before marriage. According to Pérez-Rattón, Guatemaltecas are:

> responding to intense social pressure to marry as virgins [...] Galindo's action is not only a feminist tract: it is a political statement in which a woman risks her own body, in order to bring out into the open the clandestine practices that other women are led into by social pressures. (Pérez-Rattón, 2007: 140)

In an interview with Goldman (2006), Galindo describes how she saw a clinic advertising the procedure in a newspaper, spoke to other patients and arranged to have her operation filmed 'for a certain amount of money'. Following the operation, Galindo reported that she had to go to hospital as complications had arisen from the intervention, an experience shared by many of those Guatemalan women who have also chosen to undergo the procedure:

> They dressed me in a gown, laid me on a bed, stuck an anaesthetic in my arm, and as I was fading into sleep I could hear the nurses talking among themselves, feeling sorry for me as they had for the many other girls who had been admitted to the hospital bleeding from a botched medical procedure, be it an abortion or a hymenoplasty. (Goldman, 2006)

Unlike many of the young girls who have died as a result of failed medical procedures, Galindo, as Gear (2001: 323) has observed with reference to the live operations of French performance artist Orlan, was – at least to a point – in control of her own body, directing the action and thus an active participant and not a passive patient or victim. Still images of the performance show blood seeping out of the vagina, covering the surgeon's white gloves and the white sheets. Blood, like other visceral fluids, embodies utmost abjection in the way that its visibility challenges bodily boundaries between inside and outside. The performance thus confronts the viewer with an abject body but the horror and the experience of the uncanny produced by the presence of bodily fluids and 'the feminine' is redirected away from the female body because, as Kristeva has noted, experience of the abject is accompanied by fascination and the experience of the uncanny also entails identification with the 'Other' (Kristeva, 1982: 2; 1991: 189). Unable to look away and compelled to identify with the performer, the viewer's horror is redirected at the scandalous clandestine practice of hymenoplasty about which Guatemalan society prefers not to speak and which is symptomatic of a very dangerous and regressive panorama for the women who are pressurised into complying with social norms.

Abject fluids, including vomit and blood, also feature in Galindo's blog site entries. In the post dated 12 December 2005, the speaker describes herself as a 'bitch' (*perra*) and in so doing she collapses the boundaries between human and animal and casts her self as abject. The speaker goes round in circles, like a dog chasing its tail, trying to conform, but her inability to do so is signified by her bodily fluids which she cannot contain within the 'appropriate' bodily boundaries. Thus, the second verse closes with an image of an abject female/animal corpse drowned in her own vomit. The speaker's death is caused by the efforts she expended trying to conform to the demands placed on women and the female body in patriarchal society. In the final verse, Christ-like, she is resurrected after three days, but while Christ was redeemed and ascended to sit at the right hand of God, the speaker of the poem is relieved not to find herself at a man's side. Thus, it is suggested that only in death can women find liberation.

The theme of female 'excess' is also explored by Galindo in her poetic *oeuvre*. In the poems *Con mi mano basta* (copy provided by the author) and *Soy un lugar común* Galindo focuses on female sexual 'excess' in such a way as to defy the concept of woman as a site of lack, and to explore the 'dark continent' (Freud [1926] 1959: 212) of female sexuality from a feminist perspective. In her depiction of female sexuality she breaks with sexual taboos and rejects the view that sex is a 'dirty' activity whose legitimacy, at least for women, is restricted to reproductive purposes. The poems present an alternative discourse about female sexuality which critiques traditional Guatemalan national discourses which have served to oppress women and suppress female sexuality. Susan Berger notes that historically in Guatemala:

> symbolic codes sanctioned by the Catholic Church and by Civil laws meant that men should protect and provide for their women and that women, in turn, should obey and serve men. The female body was considered impure and women untrustworthy, necessitating the policing of the female body [. . .] supervised so as not to succumb to sensual pleasures. (Berger, 2006: 20–21)

The association of female sexuality with the impure and the illicit in dominant Guatemalan national discourses is repudiated in Galindo's poetry which explores the non-reproductive possibilities of sexuality. Specifically, in her autoerotic poem *Con mi mano basta*, the poet celebrates female masturbation which is an essential experience of women long obscured and silenced by the official text. Masturbation, a prime aspect of carnivalesque intemperance, gives vent to the irrepressible sexual energies of the 'excessive' grotesque body. Unrestrained sexuality serves here to condemn the way in which autoeroticism is publicly shunned since it is perceived as embarrassing and indecent. As Ávila suggests, in *Con mi mano basta* masturbation serves to defy patriarchy: 'se representa como todo un crescendo rítmico-ográsmico que, a la vez, manifiesta total rebelión ante un sistema falogocéntrico' (Ávila, 2004: 282). Indeed, masturbation permits women to express their sexual selves – as the words 'con mi mano basta' imply – independently of any (oppressive) male or national conception of female sexuality. The celebration of female orgasm via masturbation in this poem and *Soy un lugar común* can be seen as the expression of an essential aspect of female sexuality which, despite repressive public discourses of femininity which promote female sexual containment, cannot be ultimately repressed, certainly at least in the private sphere.

The Female Body, Private/Public Violence and Nation

Galindo alludes in some of her poems to 'normal' heterosexual relationships and reproductive sexuality, but they are ultimately fraught as they become enmeshed with grotesque images of male-authored violence against women. Whereas the grotesque elements of carnival explored earlier on had positive and rejuvenating effects, they now turn threatening as they become associated with barbaric physical and mental abuse of the female body. Galindo provides an audacious exploration of abusive (sexual) relationships, and central to her multimedia work is male brutality towards the female body. Galindo's representations of rape and private and public violence act as a powerful social critique of women's victimisation by patriarchal social structures in Guatemala that confine and silence them. Pérez-Rattón notes that, of those contemporary Latin American female artists and performers whose work centres on the theme of violence,

Galindo 'is the one who most cogently reflects on the effects of violence, whether political or criminal, public or private' (Pérez-Rattón, 2007: 139). Galindo can also be seen to share a concern common to feminist art and literature since the 1970s with presenting the view of the victim in order to 'rewrite the rape story from one of sex and desire to one of power and gender' (Hesford, quoted in Villar-Argáiz, 2010: 3).

The theme of domestic violence against women is taken up in the poem *El dolor de un pañuelo* (Ávila, 2004: 289) and the performance of the same name (Guatemala, 1999). In the poem a woman gives birth to a male child borne of a relationship with a man who abuses her physically and emotionally. The pregnancy, described in impassive terms and in bold, capital letters ('EL VIENTRE VACíO SE LLENA. NUEVE MESES. SE ROMPE LA FUENTE, GRITOS SILENCIOSOS'), culminates in the birth of 'UN OBSERVADOR MÁS'. Here '*observador*' can be understood in the sense of spy or informer and could be interpreted as a symbolic reference to Guatemala's patriarchal state vigilance and control exerted via violent means over its citizens throughout its brutal 36-year Civil War. The term '*observador*' also suggests the notion of collusion, and so here the newly-born male 'observer' is set to continue, and co-operate with, patriarchal surveillance as a means of exerting his will over submissive women who, in turn, must comply. The poem suggests that one of the principal ways in which male power and control is exerted is by enforcing a culture of silence. Silence and silencing is central to the couple's relationship as the male partner forces his female partner into silent submission by threatening her with violence: 'LA BOCA CERRADA. ''SI LA ABRES TE BOTO LOS DIENTES'''. She suffers being silenced by him because to voice dissent would only lead to brutal reprisal or worse, even death. The only time we hear her speak is when she responds to his rough treatment with a compliant 'ACEPTO', painfully reinforcing an image of the powerless female self as well as reminding us of women's historical voicelessness and the denial of their authority to articulate their own lives and desires in the face of patriarchy. Galindo's exploration of silence serves to denounce the Guatemalan national cultural discourses of harmony and family cohesiveness which promote the silencing of domestic violence. Such discourses of social cohesion actively sanction a hush-hush attitude around the issue of conjugal (sexual) abuse.

In *El dolor de un pañuelo* the female body is fragmented, dehumanised and reduced to brutalised parts: 'PIEL MAGULLADA' 'LABIO REVENTADO' 'VAGINA SECA, EXPUESTA'. By focusing on the fragmented body the poem highlights the pain inflicted on the victim and a space is opened up 'where women's trauma can be recognised, expressed in and through their injured bodies' (with reference to Irish poet Dorothy Molloy; Villar-Argáiz, 2010: 12). The fragmented 'body' of the text further highlights the links and parallels between the physical and textual body. The poem lacks a smooth cadence and instead it is marked by a convulsive, jerking, jolting imperfect 'rhythm' reflected in the use of *enjambment*. Visually fragmented, 'el poema mismo se desvela como a golpes, fracturado, inestable' (Ávila, 2004: 282). Short or even single word sentences written in capital letters make this poem particularly uncomfortable to read:

LABIO REVEN-
TADO, LAS BABAS SE CHORREAN, SE MEZCLAN
CON LAS GOTAS DE PLASMA. NINGÚN PAÑUE-
LO LAS LIMPIA [. . .]
VAGINA SECA, EXPUESTA.
PUTA, HIJA DE PUTA, MADRE DE PUTA. HE-
RENCIA. 'ACEPTO'
(Galindo, in Ávila, 2004: 282)

This technique highlights the sense of the brutalised, fractured female self/body and each convulsive sentence/word represents the physical blows the woman receives by her batterer. In this way Galindo draws attention to the intimate connection between language and violence. Just as sexual violence is chiefly about domination, so too is this poem about forcing the reader to both listen to and observe the texture of violence. In this respect, it is clear that both form and content are inseparable and ultimately the two enhance each other.

Galindo's preoccupation with sexual violence continues in the performance *El dolor en un pañuelo* in which the artist has her hands and feet tied to a bed which is stood in an upright position (Galindo, n.d.). She is blindfolded and naked. Enlarged images of newspaper articles about incidents of violence against women are projected onto the artist's body. The headlines displayed include: 'Treinta violaciones en sólo dos meses', 'Violaciones sexuales deben ser tipificadas' and 'Asesinan a mujer. Dejan cuerpo en Planes de Minerva'. The headlines aim to bring to public attention the gravity of the situation for women in Guatemala where the numbers of women raped are increasing at an alarming rate, the legal system is inadequate in its response and perpetrators are rarely identified and brought to justice. As the viewer's sight is drawn towards the text rather than to the actual body, Galindo foregrounds how easy it is to lose sight of the unnamed victims and their suffering behind the headlines and statistics. While the victims of violence are often hidden behind the headlines, unable to communicate their trauma in written or spoken language, and are frequently silenced, as in the poem *El dolor de un pañuelo*, Galindo's performance suggests that the abused female body should be recognised as being capable of bearing witness and as being able to 'speak' for itself instead of being made to conform yet again to the demands placed on it by patriarchal legal and political discourses. Instead of repeatedly inscribing texts onto the female body, a process which is literalised in the performance, women's experience should stand alone, unmediated, and the body should be allowed to testify to the trauma to which it has been subjected. The tension with the always mediated performance body is, however, inescapable so that by redirecting our attention to text rather than to the actual body, this performance unwittingly alerts us to its own weakness, that is to the notion of the mediation of the female body in performance where performance is a mere representation which can never equate to the 'real' or the 'unmediated'.

Male brutality against women becomes enmeshed with Guatemala's history of political violence from its colonial period to the present. (A number of Galindo's poems are not titled. For purposes of clarity, the first line of the poem will be used, where appropriate, in order to identify one poem from another.) In the poem which begins 'Encontró la selva virgen' (Ávila, 2004: 286), Galindo allegorises the raped female body as colonised territory and harshly reinforces the view of women and their bodies as subject to and determined by patriarchal oppressive rule. Here Galindo also explores how pregnancy as a result of rape is perceived as something which has been forced upon the woman. The woman's body and identity is invaded by the monster foetus described as a blood-sucking parasitic '*gusano*'. The disgust the victimised woman feels for the '*gusano*' is symptomatic of the fear that she feels at the possibility that she will produce a monstrous offspring as the reproductive capabilities of women are harnessed to perpetuate the violence and existing power structures and inequalities which are endemic in Guatemala. In another poem (*Comenzó a las doce*; Ávila, 2004: 288) where a woman has an unwanted pregnancy, Galindo writes: 'Un doctor/diez mil contracciones y un hijo de puta [. . .] El matricida bañado en sangre mostró su cabeza'. Her description of the male baby as 'un hijo de puta' suggests the mother's horror

at the prospect of having given birth to a monstrous child who may reproduce the same violent character traits of the man who has impregnated her. The reference to her newly-born son as '*el matricida*' also suggests that she fears that, given the Guatemalan context, male-authored violence against women will be perpetuated through the male child. Nevertheless, there appears to be hope that some sort of redemption remains possible because, despite being the victim of rape, the woman who carries the '*gusano*' in her womb is unable to terminate the life of the progeny of her rapist as she feels unconditional, maternal love for this as yet unborn child: 'he intentado un aborto pero este amor no conoce la muerte' ('Encontró la selva virgen' in Ávila, 2004: 286).

Rape as a weapon of war in Guatemala's recent history is an issue which is explored across Galindo's *oeuvre*. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), charged with investigating human rights violations during the armed conflict which began in 1962 and officially ended with the signing of Peace Accords in 1996, found that during this period,

> the rape of women, during torture or before being murdered, was a common practice aimed at destroying one of the most intimate and vulnerable aspects of the individual's dignity. The majority of rape victims were Mayan women. (Guatemala Memory of Silence, n.d.: 91)

While it is possible to interpret Galindo's work as addressing issues of violence against women which cut across international borders, it is also important to keep the specific Guatemalan context in mind as much of it was produced at a time when violence against women in Guatemala was still escalating rapidly. The performance *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* (Guatemala, 2007), for example, explores the theme of rape and connects it to issues of nationhood, racism and Guatemala's violent history by referencing the rape of pregnant indigenous women by government soldiers during the Civil War. The majority of these crimes, carried out by representatives of the state against citizens marginalised because of their race and gender, went unpunished. As the title of the performance indicates, the men remain free and unidentified while the women can never be free from the physical and psychological traumas inflicted by the men.

In order to draw our attention to the violence perpetrated against indigenous women during the Civil War, in *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* Galindo represents a heavily pregnant woman lying on a camp bed with her hands tied above her head and her feet bound so that her legs are held open. The bindings attaching her to the bed are made of real umbilical cords and the images on the artist's website include close-up shots of them. The usually positive association of umbilical cords with the provision of nourishment for the growing baby is overturned and, as in a number of Galindo's poems, grotesque elements become threatening as they are associated with the abuse of the female body. Here the abject, associated with the indigenous pregnant body as 'Other', and the umbilical cords, which are a kind of female bodily excretion, elicit a sense of disgust as well as provoking a feeling of the uncanny in the viewer. As was seen with reference to *Himenoplastia*, this feeling of revulsion and strangeness fascinates and arouses both a desire to understand the meaning of *Mientras, ellos siguen* and in particular a feeling of empathy with the brutalised victim because her 'Otherness' completes the viewer's sense of self. The horror and discomfort produced by the abject is thus redirected away from the 'strange' female body towards the soldiers as we realise that they (the *ellos* of the title) remain free following the systematic rape of indigenous women during the Civil War but about which society prefers not to speak.

The poem in the blog post of 8 March 2008 can also be interpreted with reference to the systematic rape of women which occurred during the Civil War. The female speakers of the poem recount with a collective voice how they were tortured at the hands of anonymous perpetrators. The torture these women describe included the removal of foetuses which was a practice employed by the army against the Mayan people during the Civil War and which has been defined as an act of genocide (Guatemala Memory of Silence, n.d.: 91). The killing of unborn children aimed to remove the indigenous population from the nation, and the burning of the women's tongues described in the poem represents the denial of the indigenous voice within the national community and the silencing of their protests. Despite suffering such atrocities, these women claim their voice, reject their status as silenced, passive victims, and assert their continued presence in the nation, '*no estamos muertas*'. As the next verse reveals, however, the women are, in fact, physically dead and have been so for 26 years since 1986 when Guatemala was emerging from the Civil War with the appointment of the civilian government of President Vinicio Cerezo. The reader, thus confronted with death, is likely to experience the feeling of uncanny strangeness identified by Kristeva, and is obliged to revise his or her reading of the poem. The reader, who as a result of the uncanny experience now identifies with the speakers, on rereading the poem comes to understand that, in spite of the genocide, the State's attempt to exclude the Mayan population from the Guatemalan nation was unsuccessful. The discoveries of mass graves and the findings of the CEH are a testament to the State's futile endeavour to erase from the collective memory the sufferings of these women and of the indigenous population as a whole. As the poem illustrates, the indigenous 'Other' cannot be easily expunged because it is part of the (national) 'Self' which must be accommodated (but not assimilated) and reconciled within if a sense of wholeness is to be restored to the Guatemalan nation.

The extended period of civil war left a 'legacy of violence in Guatemala' which has contributed to creating a 'culture of violence' in which femicide and violence against women is endemic and in which perpetrators 'operate in a climate of impunity' (Guatemala Human Right's Commission USA, 2009). The ramifications of the conflict are explored in Galindo's performance *Perra* (Italy, 2006) and the eponymous story posted on Galindo's blog site which draw attention to femicides in Guatemala and in particular to the common practice of inscribing the motive for a woman's murder on the body (Blemford, 2005). In the performance of *Perra* the artist is seated alone in an empty room with her left thigh exposed as she uses a sharp knife to cut the word 'PERRA' into her skin. Viewed alone, a Spanish-speaking audience may not connect the action to a Guatemalan context but would understand that '*perra*' is a form of abuse used to refer to women. The explanation accompanying the images of the performances on the website provides an extra level of meaning as it points out that the performance is 'Una denuncia de los sucesos cometidos contra mujeres en Guatemala, donde han aparecido cuerpos torturados y con inscripciones hechas con cuchillo o navaja' (Galindo, n.d.). Both text and visuals thus work together, forcing us to reflect on the brutal violence to which many Guatemalan women are being subjected, but whose tragic deaths often go unheard. Their voicelessness is made poignant in Galindo's silent performance.

The blog post dated 22 February 2006, which is accompanied by a photograph of the performance, presents yet a further layer of meaning and even, we suggest, added shock-value to the performance. The small colour photograph, which appears immediately after the title of the post and before the text of the story, is a close-up of the word 'PERRA' as it was cut into the artist's skin and clearly shows the blood seeping out of the wound. The short story incorporates details of the physical and psychological

trauma suffered by a woman who has been gang-raped and then murdered. The men have complete control over the dead female body which they cut into pieces, and the narrator describes how the leader of the gang had written 'PERRA' on the woman's thigh using a knife while she was still alive. As the men cut off the woman's tattooed leg the narrator describes the men's horror as the blood spurts out: 'La sangre salpicaba de forma sucia y descontrolada manchando todas las paredes. El Kalaka, sin pensarlo, alegó por el desorden que se estaba haciendo – a la gran puta vos, esta mierda si nos va a costar limpiarla, trabaja más limpio manito, como profesional'. In keeping with the Kristevan concept of the abject, the men are horrified by the dirty, excessive blood spurting out of the female body. When it comes to male fluids, however, one of the rapists is said to be particularly eager to expel his own bodily fluid even after he realises his victim is dead: 'Igualmente siguió, una y dos veces, una y veinte veces, no iba a quedarse con el semen dentro, ya que eso luego le causaba grandes retorcijones en la base de la verga'. While women are expected to contain their internal fluids, such as blood or vaginal excretions, within their carefully policed bodily boundaries, men, as Grosz observes, see it as part of their '"function" [. . .] to extend bodily interests beyond the male body's skin through its proprietorial role, its "extended corporeality" in the mother whom he has impregnated and the child thereby produced, making them *his* products, possessions, responsibilities' (Grosz, 1994: 199). In Galindo's short story, even though the woman is dead, the gang member still needs to possess her by means of his semen, and the contrast between the male insistence at expelling his own bodily fluid and his horror at the woman's blood serves as a reminder of the double standard in patriarchal society. The representation of rape in this short story is, however, potentially problematic as, whilst the woman is still alive and being brutalised, she (imagines that) she experiences an orgasm: 'Este tiene que se un orgasm se decía ella para si misma, del que tanto me habían hablado, el que tanto había esperado'. One way to read this element of the story is as a highly problematic encoding of rape as pleasurable and orgasmic for the female victim. Although this particular perspective is shocking to the reader, the story can be said to use this representation as a means to critique the conventional patriarchal ploy of encoding rape victims as taking pleasure from, and 'asking for', rape and therefore relieving the perpetrator from responsibility for the crime. In Galindo's story the inscription on the woman's leg underlines this point powerfully as it suggests that the gang feel entitled to commit the crime as they view the 'victim' as a 'loose' woman who deserves such treatment. An alternative reading of the story would be that the woman deliberately escapes physical pain by seeking refuge in her imaginings and so, as in *Camisa de fuerza*, Galindo can again be seen to highlight that while men may succeed in gaining control over women's bodies, women's minds cannot be so easily modified or contained and remain beyond patriarchal control even in such extreme situations as that represented in this blog post.

Throughout this article, we have drawn attention to the often shocking bodily aesthetics used to address gender and national politics in Galindo's multimedia outputs. As demonstrated, the different media discussed here are as powerful as each other in terms of the way the body is represented, and our understanding of Galindo's *oeuvre* is greatly enhanced by considering the interrelationships between blog, poetry and performance. Seen and read together, what emerges in Galindo's writing and performances is a female body which is an ambiguous and conflicting site of repression and contestation which ultimately serves as a powerful vehicle through which to articulate those, at times joyous, but mainly brutal, experiences of women which have been silenced and ignored. Whilst some critics suggest that Galindo's representation of the visceral and brutalised female

body is dated (Leydier, 2005: 75), others continue to assert the horror Galindo's depictions of violence produce in the viewer (McDonald, 2005; *The Toronto Star*, 2005). In the latter case, such reactions may be attributed to the fact that the outlook presented in Galindo's multimedia work is far from comforting as there appears to be almost no space for women which is outside the reach of patriarchy. Consequently, women struggle to assert ownership of their own bodies. Faced with such discouraging content the viewer or reader may prefer to turn away, close the book or the web browser. The viewer's reluctance is likely to be further exacerbated by the form as Galindo's poetry and blog entries and above all her performances are extremely graphic in their depiction of the female body that has been subjected to violence. To an even greater extent than her poetry, Galindo's performances advocate that the body should be allowed to speak for itself and force the viewer to confront violence and its consequences. At the same time, they inevitably also foreground the mediated status of bodily experiences and therefore the impossibility of representing 'truth'. In many ways, then, artistic self-consciousness unwittingly devalues the socio-political critique Galindo is trying to convey. Despite this particular shortcoming, we believe that the artist–blogger–poet compellingly presents a carnivalised, grotesque and abject body that simultaneously horrifies and fascinates the viewer. Ultimately, in a similar way to performance artist Orlan, Galindo's exposure to the gaping, seeping, bloody body produces 'a crisis in viewing in much the same way as watching a horror film' (Gear, 2001: 323). In keeping with Kristevan theory, upon seeing the female body and bodily fluids, the viewer experiences abjection and the uncanny, both of which threaten to collapse the boundary between self and 'Other', inside and outside. Creed considers the act of looking away as a mechanism for reconstructing the boundary between self and screen (Creed, cited in Gear, 2001: 323). The viewer of Galindo's work may want to look away and re-establish the boundaries which have been disrupted in the presence of the abject, strange yet familiar 'Other', but to do so would be to suppress part of the 'Self' and replicate the actions of a society which has so often looked away from the problems Galindo's work addresses. The viewer is thus caught between a desire not to see and the realisation that a response is required in order not to be complicit, and it is this difficult position into which he or she is thrust which makes Galindo's work so effective in conveying a political message.

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