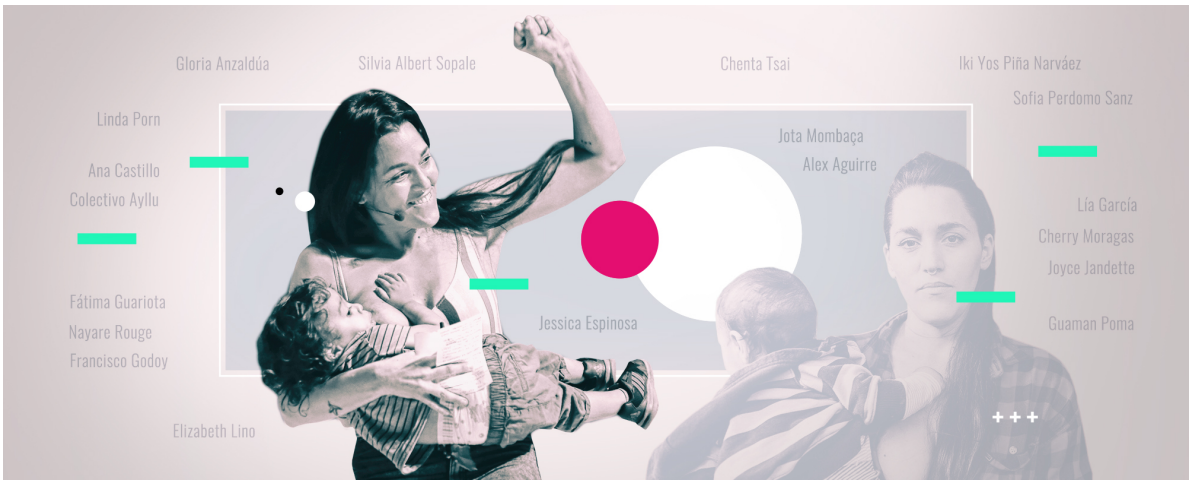
ART AS A STRUGGLE

Spitting out the rage in a hostile land. Anticolonial resistance through art

Daniela Ortiz



Nadia Sanmartin

Forget the room of one's own. Write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping or waking. I write while sitting on the john. No long stretches at the typewriter unless you're wealthy or have a patron –you may not even own a typewriter. While you wash the floor or clothes listen to the words chanting in your body. When you're depressed, angry, hurt, when compassion and love possess you. When you cannot help but write. These were the words of advice given to us by Gloria Anzaldúa in her 1980 essay *Hablar en lenguas. Carta a las mujeres tercermundistas* (*Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*).

And listening to Gloria we forgot about having our own room, our own house and even our own land, and somehow, in the land of the colonist and in the heart of the lion's den, we began to write, to draw, to paint, to narrate. Since then, with no financial means, no institutional forums and without even the legitimacy to be heard and, at last, be able spit out our rage, we shout: Fuck Virginia Woolf! Fuck her in her own room! We third world women share our bed with our children; we write, we do, we work with them in our arms. We write while we're cooking, while we're cleaning, and while we're sucking your husband, Leonard.

And it's from an inauspicious bathroom in hostile lands that Mexican artist Linda Porn films

her “Puta Mestiza” (“Mixed Race Whore”) performance in the visual style of amateur porn production. Linda’s performance exudes sensuality, that same sensuality that white, conservative, abolitionist feminism intends to eradicate to deny sex workers their financial independence. The eroticism of the imagery is accompanied, through Linda’s words, by an in-depth analysis of the continuing colonial logic imposed by the abolitionist rhetoric of white feminism. A feminism that not only denies the existence of the institutional racism that categorically conditions the lives of migrant persons, but also the political, ideological and financial autonomy of female Latin American sex workers. A white feminism that in 2019, positions itself politically to demand the outlawing of the OTRAS sex workers’ union or the cancellation of the event *De Puta Madre. La maternidad subversiva de las trabajadoras sexuales*, whose title plays on the Spanish colloquial use of “de puta madre” to convey a compliment, and roughly translates as *Mother Fucker: The Subversive Motherhood of Sex Workers*. The event criticises the patriarchal, racist violence of the custody removal machinery imposed on migrant families, single mothers and, above all, sex workers, whose children are snatched and locked up in juvenile centres using legal mechanisms based on racist, classist and sexist notions. And there they were again, the white women, the ones with their own room, a typewriter, a newspaper column, the ones with a microphone in parliament, silencing those who denounce one of the most despicable examples of colonial patriarchate violence; the theft and control of our children by European institutions.

There they were again, those white women insisting we swallow the rage and not spit it out, as we do with all the racist abuse they’ve tried to force down our throats. Abuse we’ve managed to expel from our bodies through works of creative resistance. Works we succeed in creating even without our own rooms, using the violence they try to impose on us as our raw material, as the yarn we spin to later weave.

And this is what the Afro-descendant artist Sofia Perdomo Sanz does during her recital at the “Escupir la rabia” (“Spitting the Rage”) anti-racist poetry meeting organised by the Ayllu collective in 2018.

> How can such beauty come from such violence? How is it we succeed in subverting colonial power to the point where we can even use their own symbols against them?

Sofia uses the legal mechanisms employed by the Spanish state to exercise violence against migrant persons as her raw material. Putting the clinical formality of the regulations, laws and protocols in the spotlight. She covers her face with a white mask and adopts the tone of bureaucratic violence; a Spanish accent with such a formal intonation, so measured it explodes with cynicism when we realise the legal language is being used to explain the outlawing, persecution, deportation, and death imposed on migrant persons. Processes that, far from being a fault in the system or an exception to the norm, form part of the genealogy of colonial violence, exercised through the framework of European legality and

its aggressive imperturbability.

Sofia contrasts the rigidity of bureaucratic violence with an incarnate tale, translating the legalese into the reality of her childhood. A childhood like that of so many wawas, conditioned by a brutal Law on Foreigners and institutional racism. And so, from within a hostile land, Sofia Perdomo Sanz ends the act of poetic resistance by inviting a migrant public, a racialised public, to tear up a copy of the document denying her a residence permit; the collective act of symbolically destroying the power of white supremacy invokes such feelings of joy that the audience is moved to get up and dance.

Celebrate the resistance

And it was in that same Ayllu space that months later, Lía Garcia, La Novia Sirena (The Mermaid Bride), would dance to the beat of Chayanne's *Tiempo de Vals*, in a performance that invokes and reclaims the popular *Quinceañero* tradition (the celebration of a child's 15th birthday) through the commemoration of Lía's transition. The Mermaid Bride makes rebellious use of this intrinsically patriarchal celebration; one at which women who have passed from childhood into adulthood are publicly presented and socially exhibited as available for marriage. Lía, wearing a long dress, defies the Eurocentric rationale which uses allegations of machismo as a weapon to reinforce racism against the global South. A celebratory Lía defies the rationale of pity and silence that nullifies the resistance of transsexual and transgender bodies.

Lía takes the music, the lights and the chamberlains and confronts the patriarchal violence in a profoundly radical way, using her own symbols, her own outfits, her own food, her own balloons, and her own Chayanne. Thus, Lía not only confronts machismo but also the racism that, on many occasions, through the logic imposed by white feminism, takes advantage of the anti-patriarchal struggle to delegitimise all popular cultural symbols and channel a deeply colonial discourse. Lía García transforms us into godmothers, chamberlains and guests at a party, a party where her pain, the product of patriarchal violence, is transformed into a celebration of resistance.

Also wearing a dress and a crown, and with flowers in her hand and heels on her feet, the Peruvian poet, actress and artist Elizabeth Lino made a pilgrimage from the city of Cerro de Pasco to the Cuilacocha lagoon. The pilgrimage was a road to a funeral; the funeral of a lagoon completely contaminated by tailings from the Volcan mining operation. A priest, musicians and flower-bearers accompany Elizabeth Lino along a dirt road. The artist, wearing a crown, a dress, heels and a red sash emblazoned with the words "Miss Cerro de Pasco" in gold, performs a ceremonial flower offering and says goodbye to the life of a lagoon whose waters hold no fish or frogs, a lagoon with rust-red shores left dry and infertile by the violence of colonial resource extraction. The Volcan company, owned by the creole Letts family, operates a licensed open-pit mine in the middle of Cerro de Pasco. A mine from which they extract silver, copper, zinc and lead; a lead that poisons the blood of the city's inhabitants. Lead, copper, zinc, and silver that support not only the ostentatious lifestyle of the Letts family in Lima but a resource extraction system that sacrifices lands in

the global South and inflicts death on the Cuilacocha Lagoon, its waters and those who live nearby.

The lagoon is given a dignified send-off by a woman dressed as Miss Cerro de Pasco carrying a bouquet of flowers, a public figure who receives recognition and praise as she journeys through the city's streets en route to her pilgrimage.

Elizabeth Lino uses the publicly prominent figure of a beauty queen to draw the attention of the city's neighbours; attention that leads to her appearing on TV and radio shows which, after introducing her as "The last queen of Cerro de Pasco" give way to the beginning of Elizabeth's speech. She begins in a subtle voice by sarcastically suggesting that the incredible Raúl Rojas open-pit mine should be officially recognised as a "wonder of Peru" to promote it as a tourist destination. The voice changes slightly, and we find ourselves surrounded by the words of Miss Cerro de Pasco condemning the Peruvian state, condemning the mining company, condemning the resource extraction system, condemning their violence, condemning them all with a crown on her head, a bouquet in her hand and a sash on her chest; condemning them with their own imposed version of beauty, while they expropriate our chance to even contemplate the beauty of something given to us by the land; that water, that plant, that lagoon.

How can such beauty come from such violence? How is it we succeed in subverting colonial power to the point where we can even use their own symbols against them? How is that, even without our own rooms, so many of our sisters and friends can weave such a thick fabric of creative resistance as we elegantly, dance our rage, write our rage, spit out our rage?

> And so, we spit out the rage from our kitchens and bathrooms, and we spit in the face of the colonist, exploiting and reshaping everything they created to violate us, grabbing the horns of the language they imposed over ours to twist it and use it against them, even turning their laws into anticolonial resistance poetry

Chenta Tsai, a musician and artist of Asian origin in Madrid, deactivates colonial violence using the racist and macho insult *PutoChinoMaricón* (BloodyChineseFaggot) as a stage name. He uses his reinvented identity to guzzle up colonial violence and transform it into resistance. In an interview, he explains that "good music comes from the intestines and extreme hatred, that's why I always say I write from anger while I'm washing the dishes, that's where all my songs come from", and it's that kitchen that inspired the lyrics for songs like *Gente de mierda* (*Shitty People*) or *Tú no eres activista* (*You're Not an Activist*). Musical compositions performed by Chenta Tsai include those in spaces as hostile as the set of the Spanish channel 2 Television News, where he was invited to perform prior to the transmission of the 2019 Eurovision song contest held in the colonial state of Israel. In his

performance of *Se me da mal ser mayor* (*I'm No Good at Being Old*), he critiques the daily life of urban capitalism with romantic and rabid sobriety.

And it's from that place that *PutoChinoMaricón*, while delighting the ears of viewers with his electric piano, sings the words "boycott Eurovision" in the middle of his song. Our heart skips a beat. One of ours has made it on to the television, one of ours has delivered the perfect blow, one of ours has sung out in defence of the Palestinian lands on primetime television. One of ours has only gone and boycotted the colonist with his own tools, one of ours has reclaimed the South-South alliance, one of ours has responded to the political call of the Palestinian resistance BDS movement to boycott, sanction and disinvest in Israel.

One of ours has shown how different racialised communities continue the traditional South-South alliances that have existed throughout history. Alliances that were forged between Angola and Cuba during Operation Carlota, alliances we can read about in *Nosotros los indios* (*We the Indians*) in which Bolivian writer Fausto Reinaga quotes Frantz Fanon in 1970. Alliances like the joint resistance among enslaved Africans who escaped from white exploitation to unite with the nature and indigenous populations of different Abya Yala territories and form liberated settlements called Quilombos. Alliances like the one generated through the publication of *Este puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas* (*This Bridge, My Back: Voices of Third World Women*), by Cherry Moragas and Ana Castillo, in which the voices of indigenous, Asian, Afro-descendant and Latino women articulate a critique of white feminism, in which Gloria Anzaldúa told us: Forget the room of one's own! Write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom!

And so, we spit out the rage from our kitchens and bathrooms, and we spit in the face of the colonist, exploiting and reshaping everything they created to violate us, writing on the bus or in the queue at the Aliens Office. Grabbing the horns of the language they imposed over ours to twist it and use it against them, even turning their laws into anticolonial resistance poetry.

This is how we spit out the rage; this is how we spit in the face of the colonist. Just as Silvia Albert does by inviting an entire audience to sing out against white privilege in her theatrical piece "Black Face", as Jota Mombaça does when she uses her own blood to write "Spain does not exist without colonial theft" in front of the Museum of the Americas, as the Ayllu collective does at every meeting, every event, every non-mixed exhibition it organises, as Joyce Jandette does with every word she writes and every poem she sings, as Iki Yos Piña Narváez, Nayare Rouge, Fátima Guariota and Alex Aguirre do in their pedagogical publication *Chocha, culo, teta. La combi completa* (*Vagina, Arse, Tit: The Full Set*), as the artist and tattoo artist, Jessica Espinosa, does with every needle that penetrates skin with black ink, as the poet Francisco Godoy does, naked and drunk before monuments of white men reading the words of the colonist to dismember them one on one; using the mirrors exchanged for gold to reflect the pathetic existence of the heirs of the colonial order. This is how we spit rage at them: with every word, every dance, every embroidery, every sketch. From Guaman Poma to Gloria, from Linda to Sofia, we spit rage in the face of the colonist.

Daniela Ortiz

Daniela Ortiz (Cusco, Perú, 1985) lives and works in Barcelona. Her work aims to generate visual narratives where the concepts of nationality, racialization, social class and gender are critically understood to analyze colonial, capitalist and patriarchal power. Her recent projects address the European system of immigration control and its link to colonialism and the legal mechanisms created by European institutions to exert violence against migrant and racialized people. In addition, she has developed several projects on the Peruvian upper class and its exploitive relationship with domestic workers. Recently, she has focused again on the visual and manual fields, working on ceramics, collage, drawing and formats as children's books, trying to move away from the Eurocentric conceptual aesthetics. Apart from her artistic work, she is also mother of a three-year-old girl and participates in talks, workshops, discussions and fights against institutional racism and the European immigration control system.