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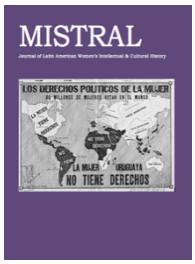

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Abstract: This article explores how, in the context of the country's most recent peace process, Colombian women memory activists have challenged the erasure of Colombian exile from both narratives of Colombian political violence and the wider scholarship on Latin American exile. Focusing on creative forms of memory activism deployed by the writer, Fabiola Calvo Ocampo, and the collective Mujer Diáspora, the article analyses how their individual and collective literary-testimonies contest the negation of their victimhood in Colombia and intervene in disputes over the meaning of exile in the Colombian context. Yet, while making visible the trauma of exile, the article shows how these creative texts also seek to move beyond dominant theoretical representations of the woman exile as being liberated from the nation, or nostalgically yearning for it, to instead configure her as an activist subject.

Keywords: Colombia; Exile; Diaspora; Memory Activism; Gender; Testimony

Exile and Diasporic Memory Activism in Colombian Women's Writing

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Introduction

In their major study of the phenomenon of political exile in Latin America, Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder argue that exile has been a key feature of Latin American states. Rooting exile, which they define as a "mechanism of institutional exclusion" used to ban political dissidents (2009, 11), in a longer history going back to the colonial and post-independence periods, they emphasise how political exclusion and forced displacement became a massive trend from the mid-twentieth century as authoritarian rule and military dictatorships took hold across the region. Although Roniger and Sznajder point out that exile as a strategy of political exclusion in Latin America has not only been an element of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes – as they state "exclusion has not been absent from democratic openings" (2009, 2) – the study of exile in and from the continent has largely been analysed in relation to the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone from the 1960s-1980s, or the civil wars in Central America in the same period.

Following Roniger's call for new lines of research that acknowledge more complex narratives about exile in the region and recognise how "democratic states have generated waves of exiles and refugees" (2016, 129), this article explores the emergence of a new narrative of Latin American exile over the last decade that has sought to make visible international forced displacement from Colombia, a country in which more than half a century of armed conflict has occurred within the framework of an ostensibly democratic state. While being home to Latin America's longest internal war, Colombia has not historically been recognised as having a large exile community nor an organised diaspora maintaining a collective identity and seeking to influence homeland politics (Bouvier 2007, 137). Indeed, scholarly and public-policy analyses have largely interpreted forced displacement in Colombia as an internal issue, with the country routinely listed as having one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world; with 5.1 million internally displaced as of end of 2023 according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.[1] This is despite large-scale emigration from the country since the second half of the twentieth century (Mejía 2012), with numbers rising exponentially during the 1980s and 1990s (Silva and Massey 2014, 175) to reach an estimated high of almost 5 million in 2012, approximately 10% of the national population (Bermúdez 2021, 13).[2] Yet, as Anastasia Bermúdez argues, this migration has largely been interpreted as economic (2021, 7); an interpretation compounded by the absence, until recently, of official statistics on the number of people forced to leave the country due to political violence.

[1] This figure is obtained from the *Registro Único de Víctimas* and is based on the total number of people displaced in Colombia since 1985.

[2] Sebastián Polo Alvis and Enrique Serrano López divide Colombian emigration into three periods in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries: the first in the 1960s; the second in the 1970s and 1980s (with numbers reaching more than a million in 1985); and the third from the beginning of the 2000s, to reach 4,700,000 in 2012 (2019, 315-316).

The 2012-2016 peace process, however, and the memory and transitional justice mechanisms emerging from this, represented a turning point in the visibility of Colombian exile and the participation of the Colombian diaspora in peacebuilding. The *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición* (CEV) has been celebrated as the first truth commission in the world to comprehensively take testimony from exiles and engage members of the diaspora in a truth-seeking initiative (Plana and Herbolzheimer 2023, 61) and its final report, which dedicates an entire volume to exile, has quantified the numbers of Colombians forcibly displaced from the country for the first time, stating that more than a million had to seek international protection between 1982 and 2020 (2022, 44). Yet, this official recognition of the existence of Colombian exile was not simply the result of top-down processes. The political opening signified by the beginning of the peace talks, which marked an attempt to resolve the conflict via a negotiated solution after a period in which its existence had been negated, resulted in a "proliferación de iniciativas cívico-políticas" (Martínez-Leguízamo 2022, 123) through which Colombians in the diaspora not only sought representation and influence at the negotiating table but began to reconstruct the historical memory of exile and insert exile narratives into the new memory and transitional justice landscape.[3] Significantly, this memory activism, which, following Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg can be understood as "the strategic commemoration of a contested past to achieve mnemonic or political change by working outside state channels" (2023, 5), has not just involved conventional political activities. Echoing how the experience of Latin American exile led "to an intense literary creation" in the twentieth century (Roniger and Sznajder 2009, 31) and illustrating how grassroots creative memory practices proliferate in societies transitioning from conflict (de Greiff 2014), over the last decade Colombian exiles have deployed diverse artistic and creative methods, including collective actions drawing on performance, ritual and the repertoire, as well as literary and testimonial publications.

This article focuses on two key literary-testimonial examples of this. The first, Fabiola Calvo Ocampo's *Hablarán de mí* (2013), an experimental literary-testimonial account of its author's political exile in Spain from the late 1980s; the second, *Memorias poéticas de la diaspora colombiana* (2019), a collective publication of photography and poetry by a group of Colombian women exiles, migrants and refugees in London, Mujer Diáspora. Self-published or produced by independent publishing houses, while *Hablarán de mí* is one of the first individual written testimonies of Colombian exile, Mujer Diáspora represents how collectives of Colombian women exiles have developed pioneering memory projects over the last few

[3] From the mid-2000s the Colombian state adopted a new approach to peacebuilding, transitional justice, which argues that a society can only come to terms with a legacy of violence through balancing punishment for perpetrators with truth, memory and reparations initiatives that can benefit victims. However, transitional justice was implemented within a paradoxical context in which the government of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) denied the existence of an internal armed conflict and refused to negotiate with guerrilla forces who were framed as narco-terrorists (Riaño Alcalá and Uribe 2016, 8-9). Thus, while the first transitional justice law, the 2005 "Justice and Peace" Law, provided for the first official memory initiatives in the country, it was also widely critiqued for attempting to minimise the state's own role in the conflict. This denial of state violence continued under successive conservative governments and subsequent transitional justice mechanisms, even despite the political shift during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) towards a negotiated solution with the guerrillas, but has also been countered by the emergence of a complex field of memory in the country in which victims' memories have increasingly emerged in the public sphere and "actors from below" have contested official definitions of justice and reconciliation (Díaz 2008, 199).

decades.[4] Both these projects, consequently, indicate the protagonism of Colombian women exiles in memory activism – demonstrating the need for a gender differential approach to exile – and have been key antecedents to the work of the CEV, which has also resulted in a range of recent collective literary-testimonial publications, such as *Exilios y lejanías: relatos de mujeres colombianas* (2023) published by the Inter-nodal Gender Group in support of the Truth Commission, emerging from the participatory processes set up to feed into the final report.

Exploring how these creative projects challenge the erasure of Colombian exile from both the wider scholarship about Latin American exile, and its numerous testimonial accounts, as well as from narratives of Colombian political violence, the first half of the article contextualises and historicises the primary textual analysis in the second half. Situating these cultural texts within theoretical debates about the definitions of "exile" and "diaspora", which since the late twentieth century have predominantly turned away "from histories of loss or dislocation" (Cho 2008, 12) to figure displacement as a metaphor for liberation from the nation state or gender repression, the article shows how, in contrast, the creative memory activism of Calvo Ocampo and Mujer Diáspora seeks to make visible the trauma of exile and contest the negation of their victimhood within Colombia. Moreover, illustrating the material and political effects of the invisibility of forced displacement beyond Colombia's borders, including the refusal of international protection because of Colombia's democratic status, these texts also intervene in disputes over the meaning of exile in the Colombian context. The article thus contrasts how Calvo Ocampo reinforces a definition of exile linked to the Colombian state's repression of social and political opposition in the country – and consequently shows how exile has been a strategy of persecution used by democratic states in the region – with other understandings of Colombian exile that highlight the complex heterogeneity of forced displacement from Colombia, and, in the case of Mujer Diáspora, shows how they seek to bring together diverse direct and indirect victims in the diaspora. In this way, while both projects challenge the erasure of exile's victimising and traumatic aspects, they also seek to move beyond dominant representations of the woman exile as being liberated from the nation, or nostalgically yearning for it, to instead configure her as an activist subject.

Writing Exile

In 1987 the journalist and academic Fabiola Calvo Ocampo was exiled to Spain where she would remain for the next twenty years. Active on Colombia's left, the sister of Óscar William and Jairo de Jesús (Ernesto Rojas), two of the leaders of the Maoist guerrilla group the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL), and the author of various testimonies detailing the history of the EPL and their participation in the mid-1980s peace process (Calvo Ocampo 1985; 1987), she received death threats after the assassination of her brothers by state armed forces and consequently fled Colombia. Calvo Ocampo's profile parallels that of other female journalists

[4] Since 2004 the Colectiva de Mujeres Refugiadas, Exiliadas y Migradas, which now operates as a transnational network in seven countries, has used participatory arts projects, as they state on their website, to "dar voz a la multiplicidad de impactos y efectos diferenciados que ha tenido el conflicto colombiano" on women forced to leave Colombia. Likewise, since its formation in London 2014, Mujer Diáspora, now active in other European cities, particularly Barcelona, as well as amongst *retornadas* in Colombia, has used creative methods as part of a project that seeks to create spaces for psycho-social healing, empowerment and recognition of Colombian women exiles, migrants and refugees as agents for peace and social transformation.

of the time forced into exile from the country, such as Laura Restrepo or Olga Behar, whose reportage on the peace process made them targets of state and para-state violence and whose stories significantly were included in Alicia Partnoy's canonical 1988 compendium of women's exile voices from Latin America, *You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile*. Partnoy's edited collection is one of the key examples of how political displacement from Latin America during the Cold War resulted in an outpouring of testimonial accounts documenting the experience of exile, as well as in a large body of academic research (Roniger 2016, 112-13), much of it in literary and cultural analysis, which has provided significant theoretical reflections on its collective and existential components (Roniger and Sznajder 2009, 3).

Yet, despite their inclusion in Partnoy's volume, Colombian testimonies of exile have essentially been absent from the literature and research mentioned by Roniger and Sznajder, and there are few or no examples of Colombian literary or testimonial texts dealing with international displacement from Colombia published in the last decades of the twentieth century.[5] Literary and cultural representations of Colombian displacement, in contrast, have reflected the social science and public policy focus on internal displacement and there is a significant amount of literature – as represented by canonical works such as Restrepo's *La multitud errante* (2001) or Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) – as well as scholarship about this (Rueda 2004). This is not to say though that Colombians writing outside of Colombia have been ignored. Over the last two decades scholars have begun to pay attention to the increasingly transnational nature of Colombian literature at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries (Casanova 2004, 206-7; Lindsay 2003, 81), exploring the work of well-known Colombian authors writing from Europe, such as Albalucía Ángel and Santiago Gamboa, or more recently the emerging canon of US Colombian writers, such as Patricia Engel and Ingrid Rojas Contreras, amongst many others.

This research has made important steps in challenging the invisibility of the Colombian diaspora, as well as mapping the emergence of "diverse representations of Colombian diasporic communities" (Mendoza 2023, 1), particularly within the US and Latinx studies (Rincón et al. 2020). However, these studies have mainly conceptualised transnational Colombian writing, and consequently the diaspora, through theories of hybridity (Mendoza 2023), transatlantic dialogues (Capote Díaz and Esteban 2017), or cultural nomadism (Rees 2022), in which migration has implicitly been figured as "voluntary" and a privileged site for the renegotiation of identity beyond the nation, in contrast to the experience of exile and forced displacement, which is not addressed. Indeed, even in the few exceptions where Colombian exile writers have been included in testimonies or scholarship on Latin American exile, like *You Can't Drown the Fire* or Kate Averis' analysis of exile in Hispanic women's writing, which incorporates Restrepo, narratives of Colombian exile are absent. As Averis states: "Remarkable in Restrepo's corpus is the total absence of narratives that explicitly relate the six years that the author spent in exile" (2014, 100).

This erasure of exile not only reflects the predominant understanding of Colombian migration as economic but trends in diaspora theory in which, since the "explosion of interest in diasporas since the late 1980s" there has been a "dispersion of its meanings" (Brubaker 2005,

[5] From the turn of the century, however, there are some examples, see Alfredo Molano's testimony of his exile in Spain in *Desterrados* (2001); in scholarship Luz Mary Giraldo's *En otro lugar. Migraciones y desplazamientos en la narrativa colombiana contemporánea* (2008) analyses some literary representations of exile, such as the novels of Óscar Collazos, within a broader study of literary narratives of displacement in Colombia.

1) away from its historical equation with forced displacement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012, 1). Thus, alongside the idea of the typical "victim diaspora", characterised by involuntary dislocation, trauma and nostalgically geared towards the homeland, there emerged another interpretation of diaspora. Developing from postcolonial theories seeking to problematise "nation-based articulations of postcolonialism" (Chariandy 2006, n.p.), particularly the influential work of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, this instead configured the diaspora through postmodern paradigms of nomadism, deterritorialization and hybridity, as "travelling communities […] which are constantly being reconfigured after the initial dispersion" (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, 686). Importantly, this turn towards displacement as symbolic of liberation from the nation, has also been paralleled in the theoretical work on exile. As Sophia McClennen states, against the traditional characterisation of the exile as trapped in a restrictive nostalgia, yearning for the lost nation – following Edward Said's classic definition of exile as "a condition of terminal loss" (2001, 173) – scholars have also affirmed that exile can be a space of freedom from "the repressive state of national identity" (2004, 1). This last argument has been particularly key for feminist scholars of Latin American women's writing who have argued that exile for women is not just a condition of trauma but can also represent a form of liberation from the restrictive gender norms of the homeland (Averis 2014, 163).

While scholars such as McClennen have called for a theory of exile writing that moves beyond these binaries to "account for its complexity and inherent contradictions" (2004, 2) – prefiguring Roniger's affirmation of how testimonies of exile make visible "the gains and losses of displacement, as well as the tension, ambiguities, and conflicts" within exile communities (2016, 112) – these antagonistic definitions of both exile and diaspora clearly highlight the semantic, political and theoretical struggle over these categories, as well as other concepts related to displacement globally.[6] Indeed, while in Colombia, like the rest of the Spanish-speaking world, "exilio" – which has no legal status like the category of the refugee – is the preferred term to speak about forced migration as a result of political violence (Parmentier et al. 2022, 107), it is important to recognise how both exile and diaspora are contested terms indicative of disputes over the meaning and nomenclature used for victims outside Colombia as they seek political recognition (Iranzo Dosdad and Edson Louidor 2018, 17).

Political Contestations of Colombian Exile

The CEV's report defines Colombian exile as "la salida y separación forzada de quienes han tenido que salir del país debido al conflicto armado interno" (2022, 16), emphasising the political reasons behind the need to leave the country and significantly distinguishing between exiles and the broader diaspora. Therefore, for the CEV the Colombian diaspora refers to "el conjunto de población colombiana que está en otros países, independientemente de las razones de su migración", and includes those who left to study or for job opportunities, seeking a better life (2022, 15). While the CEV makes a distinction between exile (forced migration) and diaspora (voluntary migration), other scholars have used the term diaspora more in line with its historical origins to refer to Colombia's "conflict-generated" community abroad, albeit one

[6] As Claire Gallien emphasises, the words we use to speak about migration and the meanings we imbue in them are "always politically and ideologically charged", carrying positive or negative connotations, and moral evaluations about "good" or "bad" migrants (2018, 738), "forced" and "voluntary" migrations.

that reflects the heterogeneity, length and complexity of the armed conflict. Bermúdez states that one of the main factors behind Colombia's absence from the literature on diasporas is because it "does not represent a classic example of a political diaspora" (2017, 213). Unlike other cases then, it includes a variety of profiles, ranging from those forced to leave the country due to state or para-state violence – who could be defined as political refugees comparable to those escaping the Southern Cone dictatorships (e.g. left-wing activists, trade unionists, human rights defenders etc.) – to those fleeing guerrilla violence or other armed actors, such as drug cartels, as well as the more general environment of insecurity, poverty, or a mixture of these factors, and who could be defined as "accidental refugees" (Bermúdez 2021, 110).

Other scholars and activists, however, have argued that the term exile in the Colombian context should not be used to designate all those displaced by the armed conflict or by the actions of all actors in the conflict, but should refer more specifically to those political refugees mentioned above by Bermúdez. In Julia Carrillo Lerma's research she identifies a "diaspora within" the Colombian transnational community, referring to those who fled state persecution or were active in leftist militancy (2016, 222). Jeisson Martínez-Leguízamo similarly emphasises the importance of distinguishing between those forced to flee the country due to the general effects of the conflict or the actions of third-party groups, such as the guerrillas, and "el exilio como estrategia empleada por parte del Estado para la exclusión de sus adversarios políticos" (2022, 120). As he argues, this distinction and the experience of systematic political exclusion by the state from the 1970s, is closer to the expulsion strategies deployed by the region's military dictatorships, as defined by Roniger and Sznajder.

Carrillo Lerma and Martínez-Leguízamo's distinction is important for understanding the political significance of this specific form of oppression within Colombian democracy, as well as for the representation of exile in Colombian women's literary-testimonial accounts. Indeed, Calvo Ocampo's exile from Colombia in the late 1980s very clearly represents a specific generation of Colombian exiles and reinforces, in line with Carrillo Lerma and Martínez-Leguízamo, a narrative that connects exile to the state's persecution of the left. As the CEV points out in its analysis of the different time periods of Colombian exile, while there are antecedents in the mid-twentieth century, what they term the first major period of intensity (1978-1991) is initiated by the passing of the *Estatuto de Seguridad* during the presidency of Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-82), which severely limited civil liberties in Colombia and placed domestic security into the hands of the military (2022, 69). The human rights abuses of this period, under the logic of the "dirty war" which labelled all social and political opposition as part of the "internal enemy", resulted in the systematic persecution, that in many cases resulted in exile, of left-wing activists, trade unionists, social leaders, journalists, former guerrillas and political militants, particularly of the political parties formed out of the mid-1980s peace process, such as the *Unión Patriótica*.

Yet, despite the fact their profile parallels "those escaping the well-known military dictatorships in the Southern Cone" (Bermúdez 2017, 110), the political dynamics of the country and the nature of political violence in Colombia have limited both their visibility and their ability to seek international protection. This is reflective of how the country's democratic façade has masked the use of authoritarian practices by the Colombian state (Giraldo 1996; de Sousa Santos and García 2001), but it is also due to the internal dynamics of the social and political movements of which they formed part. According to Liz Rincón:

> Empero durante más de treinta años los defensores han tenido que esconder el exilio. Este hecho tiene que ver con que, por un lado, representa la marca de alguien que "podría ser guerrillero", es decir terrorista. Pero también es la marca de quien ha "huido", y, en consecuencia, su existencia se encuentra atravesada por la culpa, de tal manera que uno de los patrones en las trayectorias es asumir el exilio desde su invisibilización.
>
> (2020, 188)

This political context, arguably, is responsible for the silence about exile within the vast amount of testimonial literature produced about the conflict since the late twentieth century. Moreover, in Calvo Ocampo's personal case, it is also significant as it is not until 2013, almost thirty years after she goes into exile, that she publishes *Hablarán de mí*, a testimony detailing for the first time the repression which led to her forced displacement from Colombia, as well as the psychological and political experience of her time in Spain, in the context of the political opening symbolised by the FARC peace talks.

Echoing this, out of the eight women featured in *Memorias poéticas*, the persecution of Colombia's social and political opposition in the 1980s features predominantly. This can be seen for example in the story of Elizabeth Santander, whose husband Marino Escobar was disappeared by Colombia's intelligence agency DAS in 1987, or that of Amparo Restrepo, who was exiled to the UK in 1987 after her husband was tortured and kidnapped by the Charry Solano Battalion, a counterintelligence unit that committed serious human rights violations during the "dirty war". Yet, these stories of state repression are included amongst other narratives that also highlight displacement as a result of non-state actors or generalised violence, as well as those who migrated for reasons unrelated to the conflict but for whom "el conflicto armado atraviesa su experiencia vital" (*Memorias poéticas* 11). Importantly then, Mujer Diáspora, which brings together "posiciones políticas diversas y antagónicas, diferentes experiencias sociales y de clase, así como distintos tipos de heridas por el conflicto" (Flamtermesky 2018, 201), also indicates broader understandings of forced displacement beyond Colombian borders more in tune with the CEV's linking of exile with the armed conflict in general rather than Calvo Ocampo's focus on victims of state violence. As Rincón notes, "no se puede hablar de una "mujer exiliada", sino de mujeres muy diversas cuyas trayectorias son altamente disímiles" (2019, 26).

Moreover, while acknowledging the important link between state repression and exile – and without evacuating the meaning of exile from its specific link with, often deadly, political persecution (Kaminsky 1999, xi) – this significantly points to how the heterogeneity of Colombian international displacement complicates easy distinctions between "economic migrants" and "refugees", and "forced" and "voluntary" migrations (Bermúdez 2021, 9). Indeed, as Ángela Iranzo Dosdad and Wooldy Edson Louidor emphasise, official numbers have not captured the totality of victims in the diaspora as many have not claimed asylum or been formally recognised as refugees (2018, 13). This has not only been a consequence of increasingly restrictive refugee and asylum policies in destination countries, such as the US and Western Europe. The difficulty of categorising the Colombian population abroad "bajo una denominación unívoca" (Iranzo Dosdad and Edson Louidor 2018, 13) has also been reinforced by the Colombian state's own historical unwillingness to acknowledge forced international

displacement as a victimising act within the country.[7] Official attempts to minimise the role of the Colombian state in the conflict, and even to deny the existence of the armed conflict itself, alongside the international perception of Colombia as a democratic state rather than a dictatorship, has compounded the struggle for visibility and justice, both politically and legally, for those forced to leave the country as a result of diverse forms of political violence.

The Victimisation of Exile

Despite these differences, both Mujer Diáspora and Calvo Ocampo can be seen as sharing a common objective: to challenge the negation of their victimhood in Colombia. Paralleling the myth of the *exilio dorado* in the Southern Cone (Levey 2021, 197-198), as Helga Flamtermesky, who founded Mujer Diáspora states, the dominant imaginary in Colombia "desconoce los componentes traumáticos que conlleva el hecho migratorio" (Flamtermesky 2018, 198). This aim is clear from the representation of displacement in *Memorias poéticas*, which combines a short prose piece outlining each woman's life history followed by poems written by the women. In Amparo Restrepo's poem "Un perdón atrapado en el dolor" (42-43) she narrates the assassination of her brother Tulio by the guerrilla group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) in 1991 after she had been forced to leave Colombia. The poet explicitly depicts how the violent loss of her brother is compounded by the estrangement of exile and her inability to be there for her family:

Yo no estuve allá, para consolar a mi madre.
Yo no estuve allá, para ver a mi hermano.
Y decirle adiós.
[…]
Yo estaba, a miles y miles de
kilómetros
Con mi familia tan distante
y mi alma, completamente destrozada.
En exilio, con mi luto y mi dolor,
en lágrimas bañada.

As Roniger and Sznajder argue, time in exile is often experienced as split into two frames, the inaccessible homeland and the new life in the host country, which is viewed as transitory: "Exiles are caught between the present and the past" (2009, 22). This sense of exile being a liminal space is also echoed in other poems in the volume. In Nelly Mosquera's 'Regreso' (21) she describes a woman who is here but "ausente"; through the process of migration she has lost her identity – her "cabello negro" and "piel bronceada por el sol", her "bellas palabras,/ hermosa lírica de tu canción" – which is represented as intimately connected to her origins: "Que todo en ti ha cambiado/ que ya no contemplas las verdes montañas,/ ni el río cristalino que baña la ciudad". If Mosquera represents a nostalgic yearning for the lost nation, in 'Poema

[7] This is also true for recent transitional justice mechanisms providing reparations for victims of the conflict. The 2011 Victims' Law, for example, included "victims outside of Colombia" for the first time. Yet, this only covered acts of victimisation that occurred within Colombian territory and does not recognise exile itself as an act of victimisation (CNMH 2018, 23).

51' (31) Sonia Quintero depicts the fracturing of the self and relationships through the migratory process: "Ser un extraño en los lugares donde crecí./ Ser una rueda suelta en la vida de los que me amaron".

In the same way, in *Hablarán de mí*, where Calvo Ocampo merges multiple time periods and fictionalises her own life story through an alter-ego, Amalia – reflecting what Averis describes as "the conscious hybridity of exiled women's writing" (2014, 40) – the psychological pain of exile is explicitly narrated. For Amalia leaving Colombia, "su tierra con mares, montañas, llanura, selva, desierto […] el lugar de sus ancestros" (121), echoes Said's famous description of exile as "the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (2001, 173). The "crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said 2001, 173) and loss associated with the exilic condition is consequently reinforced in *Hablarán de mí*, as Amalia experiences a rupture in her sense of identity, time and subjectivity after she arrives in Madrid. Unable to project herself into the future, "solo tenía pasado y distancia" (171) – constantly replaying the deaths of her brothers as well as other traumatic events in Colombian history – Amalia experiences her initial time in Madrid as a "limbo" (136), and she is described as in a state of "absoluto ensimismamiento" (153), which "fusionaba el pasado y este inmediato presente sin horizonte […] el presente estaba pero no existía" (137).

As Calvo Ocampo states, she not only wanted to "contar desde el punto de vista material como se vive sino desde el punto de vista emocional por donde se pasa" (personal interview); *Hablarán de mí*'s depiction of the trauma of exile clearly connects to other, well-known literary-testimonial representations of displacement. Indeed, the text itself makes clear Roniger and Sznajder's point about the significance of literary and testimonial accounts in elucidating its existential components. Amalia notes that her previous knowledge of exile came from "los escritos de Edward Said y novelas de la posguerra, por los testimonios de los argentinos y chilenos que publicaba la prensa o por la biografía de algún filósofo o escritor español que hubiese pisado territorio mexicano" (139). Indicating the ways in which exile memories operate multidirectionally (Rothberg 2009), the text at one point shifts perspective to narrate the story of Elisa, an Argentinian exile in Spain who befriends Amalia and whose family were tortured in the country's last military dictatorship.

However, alongside its focus on exile's emotional impact, *Hablarán de mí* also provides an important representation of the political effects of the invisibility of Colombian exile, as well as explores the tensions and complexities of the Colombian exile experience. Thus, despite conforming to the conventional image of the Latin American exile forced to uproot themselves "to avoid persecution, imprisonment or death in the imminent but unknown future" (Rowe and Whitfield 1987, 229), Calvo Ocampo evidences the difficulties Amalia faces seeking refuge in Spain as the Spanish state repeatedly argues against granting her asylum: "Siempre argumentaban que Colombia era un país democrático y en tales condiciones no podían conceder el asilo" (170). The text consequently represents not only the inadequacy of official juridical and political concepts to comprehend the dynamics of forced displacement from the country but the limits of the category of the "refugee" to comprehend the need for protection from a democratic state.

Hablarán de mí extends this critique of the limitations of established legal and political categories, such as "asylum" and "refuge", for those fleeing violence, to explore Amalia's own complicated feelings towards both going into exile and gaining refugee status. The text makes clear the feelings of guilt described above by Rincón, particularly when Amalia deliberates whether to stay in Colombia and continue "en la lucha por una sociedad igual para todos"

despite knowing that "la muerte [estaba] tocándole los talones"; "sentía que marcharse podría ser una traición" (121). Reinforcing Iranzo Dosdad and Edson Louidor's point that official numbers of Colombians with refugee status do not capture the totality of victims abroad, it also shows how many Colombian exiles have not wanted to recognise themselves as such, out of fear of stigma, victimization, or guilt, and have correspondingly not applied for, or been awarded, refugee status (Rincón 2018, 169). Amalia therefore does not accept "la propuesta de salir desde su país anunciando que pediría asilo" (133). She also describes her exile not as choosing a right but as a "marca indeleble y un *status* olvidado y degradado" (139) and in this way echoes critical scholarly and activist perspectives on how the identity of the refugee means "being reduced to a demeaning, monolithic, and judicial category" (Gallien 2018, 741).

Correspondingly, the text depicts the anti-immigrant sentiment Amalia and her family experience in Madrid, when they are attacked by a group of strangers in the street who shout "¿Por qué no os marcháis a vuestro país?" (143). This is extended through the representation of Amalia's economic difficulties and the humiliation of losing a professional career and being unable to work as an exile: "Trabajar en su profesión era difícil pues la solidaridad se encuentra hasta que alguien cree que peligra su puesto de trabajo" (169). In this sense then, and in contrast to the heroic standing awarded to other left-wing Latin American exiles in the 1970s and 1980s by international solidarity networks (Roniger 2016, 115), Calvo Ocampo emphasises the material limits of solidarity for many refugees and forced migrants. This is furthermore extended in her exploration of the complexity of the Colombian exile community in Spain and the maintenance of sectarian divisions which have limited Colombian diaspora politics (Bouvier 2007, 137). Although Calvo Ocampo shows how Amalia and her family find an apartment near other Colombians when they arrive in Madrid, often sharing "algún alimento para matar nostalgias" – and therefore illustrates the networks of mutual aid between Colombian migrants and refugees in the host country – she also describes how "las antiguas militancias afloraron y comenzó el distanciamiento entre dos de las tres familias" (141). Amalia herself is described as looking upon other Colombians in Spain with suspicion: "Eran un híbrido, estaban europeizados sin olvidar sus ancestros; sentían dolor de país pero no estaban en su piel ni en la de los que quedaron lejos" (136).

Configuring Activist Subjects

If *Hablarán de mí* testifies to the tensions, conflicts and ambiguities of the Colombian exile experience this is not to say though that the text solely reinforces a history of trauma or the idea of exile as a state of restrictive nostalgia. Amalia is not depicted as a passive victim, she is shown as continuing her activism within Colombia in exile – "que le permitía buscar un apoyo a la gente que luchaba en su tierra, era una forma de continuar viviendo por los que habían muerto" (137) – and Calvo Ocampo's representation of the trauma of exile is importantly embedded in a highly literary and emotive text that juxtaposes its political testimony with poetry, music, lyrical musings and surreal set pieces. As the author herself states, the aim behind this was to "quitarle de alguna manera todo el trauma que tiene" (personal interview) and to ensure the text did not read like a political pamphlet: "yo creo que el ejercicio de escribir no solamente es racionalidad y la única manera de salir desde la palabra de la racionalidad es también dándole otro sentido a la palabra" (personal interview).

This focus on the role of the creative text in reconfiguring trauma has an important echo in the practice of Mujer Diáspora, as exemplified in *Memorias poéticas*. Yet, in contrast to

Calvo Ocampo's emphasis on the divisions of the Colombian diaspora and use of creative methods for individual healing, Mujer Diáspora have sought to bring women together in dialogue as part of an attempt to reconcile diverse direct and indirect victims of the conflict, as discussed above. In the same way though, while making visible the trauma of exile, they have also challenged the figuring of women victims of the conflict, as well as refugees and migrants, as passive "*objetos* violentados por la violencia, traumatizados por la migración" (Flamtermesky 2018, 209). To do so, they have developed a distinct methodology, which they term "active memory". Based upon principles of feminist participatory action research, this contests the idea of testimony-giving as an extractive process of documentation and instead reconfigures it as a collective practice in which the women cook and eat together, engage in creative and ritualised activities and actively listen and reflect on the testimonies, transforming them into creative and artistic pieces that become sources of knowledge "útiles para la incidencia" (Flamtermesky 2018, 195).

The entirety of *Memorias poéticas* can therefore be seen as an example of the use of arts-based participatory methods by Mujer Diáspora, and this creative methodology is interwoven into its form and content. As much a book of photography as it is of poetry, portraits of the eight poets featured in the volume appear alongside multiple photographs that document the women engaging in artistic expressions such as dance, participating in rituals connected to Colombian cultural practices, such as the *día de las velitas*, smiling, chatting, listening to one another in various workshops and, importantly, cooking together. Moreover, many of the poems themselves reflect this transformative methodology and show how it seeks to refigure the psychological and existential pain of exile into a narrative of collective transformation and activism. In 'Ella y ellas' (61), for example, Angélica Quintero represents how the process of cooking "la comida de la región de donde viene, del lugar en donde nació" creates a space to symbolically repair the often broken relationship with Colombia and find solidarity through the sharing of trauma:

> La energía se va transformando, el calor de la estufa está ahora en la piel de cada una. Ella ya no está sola, cada una va tomando un poco de su dolor, de su historia, de su pasado. Ellas van recobrando la fuerza juntas, al mismo tiempo, al unísono.

Patricia Díaz's "Albeiro", meanwhile, translates the public testimony of Francy in one of Mujer Diáspora's workshops – which detailed the impact on the family of the assassination of her brother, a trade unionist – into a poem that both brings Albeiro's memory to life and represents an active reflection on the story of pain: "Muchos años después, resucitas en un grupo de mujeres que escucha a tu hermana en una tarde de nieve en Londres […] Te haces presente allí, con tu valor, tu alegría, tu sonrisa" (70).

As Bárbara López states in her poem "Amamos la Vida" (52), "El dolor No nos define/ nos une y nos alienta,/ nos hace fuertes y decididas". Thus, out of the pages of *Memorias poéticas*, another image of the woman exile emerges, in which alongside the trauma she has suffered she is configured as an active citizen or activist subject. This is not only seen in the short profiles, which highlight, for example, Nelly Mosquera's activism in the UK with Latin American community organisations or Bárbara López's work as a teaching assistant and community interpreter, but is heavily emphasised in the photographs. Indeed, in the portraits of the eight women they are clearly positioned as protagonists, often smiling and looking

directly at the camera; the images of Mujer Diáspora's internal workshops are complemented by numerous photographs that document their public activism, such as their participation in public protests, peacebuilding forums and academic events.

Consequently, *Memorias poéticas* could be seen as reinforcing, as feminist scholars of Latin American women's exile writing have argued, the idea that exile is not just a psychologically painful condition of longing and nostalgia for the homeland, but also "offers other possibilities: the discovery within the self of a capacity to survive and grow in the new environment, and transcendence" (Kaminsky 1993, 37). In one sense then, and in contrast to *Hablarán de mí*, *Memorias poéticas* arguably constructs a diasporic memory based on hybrid identities, understood as "the outcome of a collective migratory trajectory" rather than the traumatic conditions of exile (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, 687). Yet displacement in the collection is not simply a metaphor for liberation from the state or its gender norms. Rather than showing how women in exile move "beyond the restrictive and alienating roles within which women are often confined in the birth country" (Averis 2014, 163), Mujer Diáspora, like Calvo Ocampo, highlight the ongoing repression and loss of identity – including the activist identities for which they were exiled from Colombia – women suffer in exile.

Yet, in making visible the traumatic and victimising aspects of Colombian exile, as well as its tensions and complexities, they do not deny the agency of women exiles but importantly show how agency in displacement does not only signify freedom from the nation but can also be geared towards transforming both the homeland they have left behind and the new nation they inhabit. Thus, *Hablarán de mí* makes an important intervention in Colombia's memory debates at the beginning of the FARC peace process. Bringing to memory the silenced story of a specific exile community – left-wing activists persecuted by the Colombian state – and making visible their victimisation both within Colombia and in migratory contexts, *Hablarán de mí* not only contests the negation of their victimhood within Colombia but also problematises official narratives that have sought to erase how strategies of state persecution, including exile, have been used "to disrupt, dismantle and destroy all viable opposition" (Raphael 2009, 163) within Colombian democracy. Mujer Diáspora, meanwhile, though also challenging the erasure of exile's victimising effects and the exclusion of exiles and migrants from peacebuilding processes, have influentially intervened in Colombia's ongoing transitional justice and memory landscape to show how Colombian women migrants' and exiles' experiences in Colombia, as well as in processes of migration and displacement, have also given them the skills, capacity and knowledge to contribute to processes of social change within Colombia and in the countries they reside (*Memorias poéticas* 11).

In this sense then, both *Hablarán de mí* and *Memorias poéticas* are key examples of emerging forms of testimonies of exile in the Colombian context, which are contesting the erasure of Colombian exile narratives from histories of the conflict, as well as broader analyses of exile and diaspora in Latin America and globally. Moreover, in foregrounding the role of creative and artistic modes in expressing these new exile narratives, these texts show how grassroots individuals and collectives both within Colombia and in exile, are constructing other forms of knowledge, collective memory and social change that have both influenced and exceeded official forms of memory and transitional justice.

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