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Facultad de Humanidades y  
Ciencias de la Educación

# Violence against Women in Anglophone and Hispanic Contemporary Literature

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“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women” Maya Angelou

“I would like to be known as an intelligent woman, a courageous woman, a loving woman, a woman who teaches by being” Maya Angelou

“I raise up my voice—not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. ... We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back” Malala Yousafzai

I dedicate this dissertation to the courageous women and girls who, in the face of a patriarchal system, have been silenced and marginalised as well as those relentless individuals who persistently strive to eradicate violence against women.

Dedico esta disertación a las valientes mujeres y niñas que, frente a un sistema patriarcal, han sido silenciadas y marginadas, así como a aquellas personas incansables que luchan persistentemente por erradicar la violencia contra las mujeres.

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Esta tesis doctoral es el resultado de años de esfuerzo, sacrificio y dedicación. Espero y deseo que sea una contribución significativa al vasto mundo del conocimiento y que pueda inspirar a otras personas a seguir su pasión y perseguir sus sueños.

Con gratitud infinita,

María Herrera Cárdenas

## INTRODUCTION

The present doctoral thesis arises from the need to address the issue of the invisibility of women as part of a broader movement that encompasses violence against women, which oppresses and affects women and girls in the current heteropatriarchal society. This topic falls within the field of humanities with a feminist perspective. In particular, the aim of this dissertation is to investigate and analyse identity intersections regarding violence against women and the voices of women in contemporary Anglophone and Hispanic literature.

The importance of international cotutelage at the University of Siena, Italy, stands as a fundamental factor in the development of this thesis. This experience offers a unique opportunity to enrich the research process. Interaction with international experts, immersion in a diverse academic environment, and access to expanded resources and collaboration networks create a conducive setting for research development.

In addition to my research at the University of Siena in Italy, I have also had the invaluable opportunity to collaborate in the seminars "Humor y Feminismo" at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne in France. These seminars, organised by the Department of Iberian, Ibero-American, and Mediterranean Studies, have been spaces for meetings and debates with academics and specialists in the field. During these encounters, I had the chance to participate in presentations related to my research, which was fundamental in enriching the outcome of this doctoral thesis. Engaging in these seminars allowed for interdisciplinary dialogue and a broader perspective on humour and feminism, significantly contributing to my understanding of women's identities in contemporary literature.

Alongside the research conducted within this doctoral thesis, I have created and implemented a complementary project titled "Youth and Violence: Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers." This project emerged as a practical application of the obtained results. It was funded by the Diputación de Jaén and developed with the support and collaboration of the organisation Colectivo Gentes,

following my participation in a European volunteering program at La Maison de l'Europe in Agen, France. The volunteering, carried out under the European Solidarity Corps program, focused on eradicating discrimination in the European Union. This project aimed to prevent and eliminate violence against women, bullying, and cyberbullying. It was implemented in four secondary education institutes in the province of Jaén. The main objective was to raise awareness and consciousness among students about these issues, promoting a culture of respect, equality, and non-violence. Through workshops, talks, and interactive activities, the project sought to provide young people with tools to identify and confront violent situations, fostering the development of healthy relationships and mutual respect. This project served as a practical complement to the findings and reflections obtained in the doctoral thesis, allowing the application of acquired knowledge. The experience of working directly with students and teachers and contributing to the prevention and eradication of violence against women and girls, bullying, and cyberbullying was enriching and meaningful. Through this initiative, I witnessed firsthand the importance of raising awareness and promoting change from an early age, creating a fairer and more equitable society.

This dissertation focuses on the analysis of violence against women in Anglophone and Hispanic novels and plays. The territory to explore encompasses a broad and fascinating field, where the representations and experiences of women in these works are examined, with special attention to the types of violence against women suffered by more than half of the world's population and the critique of the heteropatriarchal system that sustains it.

The study is carried out through the method of close reading or exhaustive analysis of the selected works: a detailed textual analysis of literary, theatrical, and performative works focused on their formal and thematic qualities. Through this approach, the patterns followed by women's identities in the works are delineated, analysing recurring themes and the expression mechanisms used by the authors to give visibility to female voices. Additionally, it is complemented with interviews with authors and experts in female voices, allowing for a deeper understanding of the messages and perspectives present in contemporary literature. These sections include literature



review, research methodology, empirical analysis of the selected works with their corresponding discussions and conclusions.

The diversity in terms of context in this selection of literary works is evident through the thematic connections I have selected as the central axis: the exploration of different types of violence against women. This thematic choice provides a framework for analysing works by a variety of female authors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The selected literary works are analysed in three blocks. In the first block: Hispanic Authors. In this block, I focus on Hispanic female authors, Beatriz Cabur and Angélica Liddell. Both authors come from the Spanish-speaking world, but their works showcase diversity in terms of content and approach to the theme of violence against women. In the second block: Anglophone Authors. In this block, I shift to Anglophone authors, Sarah Kane and Caroline Bergvall. While both authors write in English, they represent a diversity of styles and thematic exploration. The diversity here is not just linguistic but also artistic and stylistic, highlighting the different ways violence against women can be addressed in English-language literature. In the third block: African Anglophone Authors. In this block, I continue with Anglophone authors but expand the diversity further by considering African and African diaspora voices. The diversity here is not only linguistic but also cultural, reflecting the experiences of women of African descent.

The analysed works of Beatriz Cabur are *Nefertiti and PIII* (2015), *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2016), *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), *Goodbye, Mother* (2020), and *Childbirth-19* (2021). In the same first block, the selected works of Angélica Liddell are *Belgrado* (2008) and *La casa de la fuerza* (2011). The second block focuses on the Anglophone authors Sarah Kane and Caroline Bergvall. The selected work of Sarah Kane is *Blasted* (1995), and the studied work of Caroline Bergvall is *Drift* (2012). The third block focuses on the Anglophone authors, considering Akwaeke Emezi and Bernadine Evaristo's afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism. The analysed work of Akwaeke Emezi is *Freshwater* (2018), and the selected novel of Bernadine Evaristo is *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). Each of these sections contributes to the development and understanding of

the central theme, offering a comprehensive analysis supported by scientific literature and data obtained in the research process. My selection of literary works organised into three blocks demonstrates diversity in terms of context through the inclusion of authors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These authors approach the theme of violence against women in various ways, reflecting the rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives that exist in literature. This diversity enhances the depth and breadth of this analysis, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of the central theme.

The research aims to highlight the relevance of empathy as a strength rather than a weakness, as well as the importance of sisterhood and support networks for women. Moreover, it seeks to distinguish genuine female empowerment from the commodification movement often observed today.

The objective of this doctoral thesis is to address the issue of the invisibility of women and explore how they feel legitimised to articulate a public message. Through the analysis of literary and audiovisual works, the study aims to examine the strength and contribution of contemporary works in legitimizing these identities. To achieve this, the following specific objectives are proposed:

- 1 Investigate how women artists can shape their identities outside of commodification, considering the transformation of their bodies and identities into marketable products;

- 2 Evaluate the possibility of subverting creative identities within commodification, analysing how women artists construct their public personality and work;

- 3 Reflect on the selling of anonymous identities as a harmful form of commodification of identity labels, contrasting it with contemporary works that promote active listening to individual voices and the destruction of sociocultural boundaries.

These objectives allow for a deeper understanding of women's identities in the context of contemporary literature and their relation to commodification and visibility in society, as they are essential to advancing knowledge on the intersections of identity regarding violence against women and women's voices in contemporary Anglophone and Hispanic literature and contributing to the

scientific community in the field of study. Additionally, it seeks to offer theoretical and practical contributions that may have relevant applications in gender studies and humanities with a gender perspective.

Contemporary literature is a cultural realm where women's identities are constantly represented, and literary writing techniques embody a way to reflect on the subject being addressed. By following the methods used in contemporary literary texts to represent women's identities, we can recognise a way of theorising that can be effectively created with expanded theorisations in the social sciences. The major tasks that make up the structure of the research are detailed below:

1. A primary search of documents and gathering of information in the current contemporary context was conducted as part of the theoretical framework. This compilation of documentary memory and information gathering allows for defining the concepts of identity and voice and gradually extrapolating them from general theoretical spheres to a specific and practical contemporary context. It is essential to emphasize that these concepts are defined, inscribed, and delimited in the current contemporary context, although they are supported by theoretical contributions from branches of the humanities and social sciences, such as gender studies.
2. The central hypothesis of the research is presented: How can women feel legitimate to articulate a message? The aspects defining the legitimacy of the message and the variations it has experienced over time due to progress in sociocultural approaches are explored. Issues related to the construction of contemporary identities are addressed, and questions about the criteria for evaluating women's voices in the publication of literary manuscripts are resolved.
3. The search and analysis of primary and secondary sources are carried out to study concrete cases of women creators and apply the concepts of identity and voice in a contemporary literary context. Different aspects intertwining in the joint explanation of the problem are explored, such as the effects of traditional language use, the breaking of traditional language codes, and the inclusion of alternative languages. The techniques and strategies used by women creators to make their voices heard and construct strong identities are investigated.

4. Interviews with contemporary authors and experts in female voices are conducted to obtain qualitative information about their experiences and perspectives regarding voice and identity. The interviews allow for in-depth insights into the challenges and opportunities women face when making themselves heard and how they feel legitimate in articulating their message.
5. Comparative analyses and critical reflections based on the research results are carried out, allowing for drawing conclusions and offering practical recommendations to promote the visibility and legitimation of women's voices in contemporary literature.

This doctoral thesis aims to address the issue of violence against women and girls in Anglophone and Hispanophone literature. Through the analysis of literary works and interviews with authors and experts in female voices, the study seeks to understand how women manage to express their messages and make themselves heard in a patriarchal society. This research contributes to academic knowledge in the fields of gender studies and humanities with a feminist perspective, and it also has practical implications by offering recommendations to promote the visibility and legitimation of women's voices in contemporary reality.

## 1. LITERARY REVIEW

Literature allows readers to experience unknown worlds by emphasising with different perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of the human experience. Recently, there has been an increase in literary works that challenge and disrupt conventional forms and voices, hence expanding the possibilities of contemporary literature. In this research of women's works by Beatriz Cabur, Angélica Liddell, Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo, I will explore how they utilise themes of identity, power, trauma, and resistance. Whereas the term 'women's writing' could be understood in a more simplistic manner, I use it to describe how these women have expressed, both in content and form, what Ellen Berry considers to be a "radical critique of dominant cultural, social, political, and economic structures" (Coy-Dibley, 2020: 24). This idea particularly refers to gender, race, and sexuality regarding women within the textual context. These contemporary authors disrupt conventional forms and narratives by pushing the limits of a more conservative literary expression. Therefore, women's experiences' complexities are portrayed in unique literary landscapes.

In this thesis, I include works from different time periods to allow a nuanced examination of the dynamic interplay between feminism, literary forms, and societal contexts. It is fundamental to acknowledge the contextual variations regarding feminism and the literary forms of every era regardless the fact that the corpus of my thesis refers to different temporal frames. Audre Lorde affirms that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984: 103), which suggests that by simply transferring power from one master to another, that is, changing between totalising systems, power structures cannot be dismantled. In this sense, a mere substitution of patriarchal power with another form might shift the hierarchical order yet sustains power relations. Hence, replacing one type of power with another lacks authentic transformation. By analysing different texts, I perceive them, to varying extents, as anti-patriarchal in their context, form, themes, and language. These writers' works create a language that legitimises women's experiences concerning trauma. In doing so, these women subvert and dismantle hierarchical systems of

oppression. The purpose of these texts is to transcend power structures, promoting a more equitable and inclusive paradigm instead:

Why do we still try to read women writers inside the confines of temporalities, genres, disciplines, and political and aesthetic movements that have been constructed to highlight the work and ideas of men? To understand the full scope of women's writing in the 20th and 21st centuries we have to read and think experimentally, beyond orthodox boundaries, and with the same expansive, rigorous, and radical approaches to forms of knowledge and ways of being [...] (Kennedy-Epstein, 2018: 281)

Kennedy-Epstein underscores the deeply enrooted norms in reading practices by shaping one's engagement with a text. Despite women writers' efforts to transcend limiting contexts, there is a persistent tendency to understand their works within the same structures governing men's literary productions. The acknowledgement of these norms indicates a more experimental and expansive view on reading, recognising the different and non-traditional nature of women's writing in the contemporary literary context.

By exploring these works, I analyse the textual theme of language as a tool to transcend boundaries and constructs. These authors show that when these limitations are dismantled by reading beyond them, women's language emerges through experimentation with form and style, which opens these texts to innovative and radical readings of what it means to exist in relation to another. DeKoven (1983) states that writing which "violates grammatical convention, thereby preventing normal reading" cannot convey meaning through "normative" reading conventions (Coy-Dibley, 2020: 9). By labelling this type of writing as "experimental" and "non-normative", there is a preoccupation that it might reinstate the idea of normative forms of writing. I argue that by subverting such norms, the authors present what is considered 'normative,' 'original,' or 'naturalized,' to be itself a construct; therefore, dismantling the 'naturalization' of certain modes of being, writing, and reading (Coy-Dibley, 2020: 9, 10).

In this thesis, I recognise the discussion of disparities between women's and men's language, which impacts women's political, historical and social positions within a patriarchal framework, promoting the development of particular female literary traditions. As DeKoven noted, these female literary conventions have subverted patriarchal norms in terms of content and literary form (Nin, 1975: 297, 298). Nonetheless, women's writing challenges patriarchal discourse at the level of linguistic structure, which makes it subversive. These variations' understanding requires a detailed analysis of the historical and cultural framework in which these works were created. For instance, a groundbreaking piece in the 1990s might not have the same level of impact with contemporary audiences since societal norms, feminist discourse, and artistic sensibilities change. What used to be revolutionary back then may now be seen through a different lens, influenced by the shifts in our understanding of gender dynamics. In contrast, it is fundamental to acknowledge that past works might contain elements that appear modern to contemporary readers. Hence, the consideration of modern elements in past texts shows the complexity of women's experiences as well as literature's capacity to transcend temporal boundaries.

The development of feminist theatre in Spain continued to develop throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. The presence of female playwrights such as Beatriz Cabur and Angélica Liddell normalised the presence of women integrally. Their theatre adopts and renews twentieth-century theatrical trends regarding the subject of violence against women, which adds updates to plays in an inclusive discourse beyond the scenic realm, influencing the audience's critical capacity. The plays develop from the general to the specific, showing sensitive issues affecting women that were previously rendered invisible by generalisations, such as violence against women. On the one hand, Beatriz Cabur's works explore trauma and resilience by integrating performance, visual art, and narrative to create a complex and diverse experience for the audience. On the other hand, Angélica Liddell creates from her own personal experiences to analyse trauma, mourning, and resilience in her works. Her texts make the audience confront challenging and unsettling subjects due to their highly confrontational and emotive nature.

Sarah Kane's works explore themes of violence against women. By subverting conventional forms and structures, Kane challenges the audience to confront the darker aspects of the human psyche and pushing the limits of what is possible in theatre. Similarly confrontational, Caroline Bergvall examines language, identity, and history by developing her works around a wide range of linguistic and cultural nuances. She often encompasses performance and sound, subverting the conventions of written language, opening the possibility of interacting with language in innovative ways. Additionally, Akwaeke Emezi's novels focus on the experiences of LGBTQ+ and transgender people of colour when exploring identity and power in the African and American contexts. Lastly, Bernadine Evaristo's novels provide with a broader approach to contemporary life by analysing the experiences of Black and mixed-race women in United Kingdom.

By analysing their works, I will explore how these six women use language, form, themes, and structure to subvert cultural, political, and social norms concerning women's legitimization. Sarah Kane uses fragmented and nonlinear language to show the experience of abuse in her play *Blasted*. Similarly, Angélica Liddell's plays include performance art, dance, and music to show women's experiences of violence. In her play *La casa de la fuerza*, Liddell uses physical movement and visual imagery to explore violence and its effects on both the individual and society. Beatriz Cabur uses performance art and visual media in her works, exploring the experience of violence against women. Caroline Bergvall and Akwaeke Emezi analyse the potential of language to create new meanings. For instance, Bergvall's works incorporate elements of sound poetry and performance art, while Emezi's works use elements of myth with traditional African storytelling. The relation between literature and theatrical representation in these texts shows the importance to challenge conventions.

In this dissertation, I will focus on analysing the following plays and novels to show how women are represented in contemporary Anglophone and Hispanophone literary works: Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018), Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), Beatriz Cabur's *Nefertiti III* (2017), *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2018), *Childbirth-19* (2020), *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking*



*Woman* (2019) and *Goodbye Mother* (2018), Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), and Angélica Liddell's *La Casa de la Fuerza* (2011) and *Belgrado* (2008).

I will analyse these works with the intention of showing women's experiences marked by trauma, thereby challenging traditional gender norms, such as gender stereotypes. I will also remark the relevance of diversity and complexity whilst analysing women's experiences of trauma. This dissertation acknowledges women who are presenting issues affecting women in diverse creative fields these days. I will support writing with purpose by using the privilege of academic writing to give a voice to those women who have been denied the right to communicate their truth by themselves.

In the past, women achieved access to the global market by fighting for their rights. Nowadays, their relationship with labour has shifted even though there is still a troubled area when considering the emancipation of women. Modern work is 'feminised', which means that working conditions that used to be linked to female employees now apply to the entire workforce. The term workforce includes transience, informal and flexible work contracts, care, and affective labour as well as home-based work. This dissertation will explore XXIst literary women's representations in Hispanophone and Anglophone literature and performance, understanding that a focus on this subject serves to legitimise women worldwide. This project will address literature from diverse Anglophone and Hispanophone contexts, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Nigeria and Spain, to show how contemporary literature written by women understands women's experiences these days.

Regarding their lack of legitimacy, women are still afraid of becoming visible. The fact that women lack the confidence to pursue opportunities in the workplace provides evidence for the fear they experience while trying to be legitimised in the world. Additionally, false empowerment movements contribute to the commodification of women since their bodies and personalities become a commodity, that is, a product for commercial gain. These movements work as a cover for the lack of women's self-esteem to enter the workforce since they paradoxically demand women's denial to inequality posing a negative impact on them. Consequently, the symptoms generated by instances of

violence against women are identified as psychiatric disorders, resulting in double suffering and re-victimization of women. This dissertation will provide evidence that an archive of existing literary representations of women from diverse international contexts can gain new significance in the analysis of their contemporary representation, thereby supporting contemporary disruptive literary methods. In addition, this research will contribute to the discussion of contemporary literature beyond literary studies by demonstrating how the examination of literary texts can generate new perspectives regarding the legitimation of women.

The principal research methodology employed in this study is close reading, characterised by a textual analysis of literary works that places particular emphasis on their formal and thematic attributes. This dissertation explores diverse Anglophone contexts, including British realist fiction, narrative and theatre, and postcolonial African novels. By incorporating feminist theoretical frameworks, the close examination of literary texts is subjected to critical inquiry. This doctoral thesis introduces an innovative viewpoint on present-day women's issues, focusing on the unconventional literary forms utilised in contemporary literature. These forms depart from entrenched historical gender conventions that have restricted and oppressed women for an extended period, their influence persisting into the contemporary landscape.

Over the last three decades, artistic genres have evolved beyond traditional authorship, enabling the ascent of feminism to shape the contemporary output of women. The emergence of modern feminist literature reflects both literary and social shifts that advocate for a reevaluation of the nexus between the validation of women's authorship and artistic expression. Identity, in this context, is construed as performative—emanating not only from daily actions and practices but also from the socio-cultural milieu inscribed in the bodies and lives of women. The central aim of this research is to formulate a theoretical synthesis elucidating the interconnections between contemporary women's issues and their legitimation in contemporary society.

### 1.1. Subverting Traditional Language; The use of experimentalism to legitimise women

This research's framework encompasses three approaches: First, an analysis of the meaning of legitimising women's ability to express public speeches, recognising the relevance of feeling legitimate to do so. Second, an exploration of Symbolic Domination and its repercussion on women's voices; Third, an examination of domains of influence of experimentalism, addressing how experimental works contribute to women's legitimation these days. By following these perspectives to delimit the base, it is possible to gain valuable insights into women's experiences of violence. The importance of feeling legitimate and empower women to express their truth through public speeches, the impact of symbolic dominance on their expression as well as the relevance of experimentalism to legitimate women today are three fundamental aspects to consider in this thesis.

### 1.2. Legitimising women: exploring the meaning of women's public speech

To legitimise women, it is imperative to recognise the crucial importance of freedom of public expression. Women suffer marginalisation or silencing in public spaces, with their voices and opinions being undervalued and/ or infantilised. As exemplified by situations wherein a discussion regarding violence against women unfolds among predominantly women alongside a minority of men, the prevailing dynamics grants undue privilege to male voices. This phenomenon in which men are granted the opportunity to verbalise their opinions on top of women, regardless the subject matter, continues to happen despite the subject matter being deeply linked to women's experiences. Therefore, women find inhibition to vocalise their opinions, limited by a perceived lack of safety due to repressed expression, while their male counterparts, despite lacking personal experience into the discussed topic, freely express their perspectives. Analysing this problem is fundamental to understand how women's self-perception and assertiveness in public spaces impacts affects their legitimation in society.

### 1.2.1. The effects of symbolic dominance and women's expression

Symbolic Dominance addresses the subtle ways in which power dynamics and social structures affect and repress the behaviour and expressions of people within a certain culture or group. This concept is also known as soft power since it includes actions to discriminate, such as gender dominance or racism.

Regarding women's legitimation, symbolic dominance affects the way women are expected to conform to social norms based on gender stereotypes and roles. By analysing the effect of symbolic dominance on women, the constraints imposed upon them reveal, which highlights the need to challenge and deconstruct these limitations. By acknowledging the diverse forms of symbolic dominance, such as media portrayals, cultural norms, and institutional biases, it is possible to gain insight into how women negotiate and resist these pressures, hence finally conforming their identities.

### 1.2.2. Women's presence exploring experimentalism's transformative impact

Experimental works in art, literature, and other creative disciplines play a significant role in the formation of new identities for women today. Experimentalism contributes to the exploration of unorthodox concepts by challenging established norms and providing room for alternative narratives.

By transcending the limitations of conventional representations, experimental works shed light on the legitimation of women's public speeches that have been excluded in mainstream narratives. Consequently, the works analysed in this thesis show a paradigm shift in the exploration of women, beauty expectations, and entrenched narratives that continue to confine women to archetypal roles. In doing so, these texts empower women to become agents of their own identity on

their own terms, that is, challenging and resisting restrictive forms. Additionally, women create spaces for alternative narratives, which embrace a diverse range of perspectives, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, and actively contributing to the eradication of dominant narratives that perpetuate stereotypes. By examining the effect of experimental works on the legitimisation of women, it is possible to observe how these texts inspire, empower, and provide alternative representations that show the complexity of women's experiences.

### 1.2.3. Reimagining tradition: the power of invention in women's writing

The traditional structure of language has historically worked by submitting to established rules, developing the hierarchies within language, that is, the criteria defining the perceived quality of a work. These rules have been internalised "with supposedly rational arguments [...] through habitus," as noted by Dr. Isabelle Touton (2018: 13). As a result, the structure of traditional language is not fixed, which means that the historically accepted convention can be redefined.

Women advocate for reimagining a tradition that is rooted in an oppressive patriarchal system. The rules of the game have historically shaped the form and content of traditional language by creating hierarchies within language itself. These hierarchies present the criteria that determine a work's quality or worth. Dr. Isabelle Touton (2018) explains that these norms have been internalised via habitus and apparent rational arguments, which perpetuates a system in which certain voices and opinions are privileged over others. Nonetheless, traditional language's structure can be changed, and the historically accepted tradition can be rewritten. As the writer Jessie Tu affirms:

it's about changing who gets to define what is worthwhile. "Every single book I read at school was by a straight white male author. Every piece of artwork or piece of music I studied was by a white guy [...]. The questions of who has value and what is important in this society have always been framed by a white male. And it's time that women and people of colour really challenged that (Cunningham, 2020)

For this reason, women propose an examination of the tradition to shape a more inclusive and relevant present in which their overarching goal is to promote women's authorship legitimacy.

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) addresses the relationship between language and symbolic power, analysing how language works to continue to develop social hierarchies. Judith Butler (1990) advocates for the disruption of identity categories, including gender, through instances of resistance and the performative nature of identity. Within the feminist discourse, the idea of rewriting tradition aligns with the broader goal of empowering voices from the margins. Additionally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) seminal work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* addresses the agency of marginalised groups in challenging dominant discourses. Spivak's focus is not particularly applied to women but her insights into power dynamics show fundamental perspectives regarding the potential for excluded groups, including women, to redefine their agency and identity within language.

It is fundamental to understand the intersections of language, power, and feminism to comprehend the rewriting of tradition in women's authorship. In *Feminist Practise & Poststructuralist Theory* (1996), Weedon analyses how language and discourse have an impact on women's legitimacy by providing a framework for feminist practises that challenge dominant structures. The rewriting of tradition by women is a complex task that encompasses the challenging of language-based power structures, the disruption of traditional conventions, and the development of alternative narratives. By using acts of resistance, experimentation, and the creation of new forms, women actively promote the emergence of a more inclusive and diverse literary context. Therefore, women assert agency over their identities by challenging the patriarchal system and establishing legitimacy within the domain of authorship.

This transformative process shifts the structure and content of traditional language and becomes a fundamental part regarding broader social transformations. By promoting the visibility and empowerment of women, a profound shift toward a more equitable and representative cultural narrative becomes possible.

### 1.3. Habitus unveiled: exploring the conformity to traditional language

According to Pierre Bourdieu, a person's perceptions, emotions, and actions are defined by a set of internalised dispositions known as *habitus*, which emerges by the interaction of the individual, group culture, and social institutions like the family and school nucleus (Bourdieu, 1991). The individual's experiences and social environment influence their habitus, which shapes how people interpret and interact with the world. Therefore, women can articulate their own realities embracing alternative and innovative linguistic forms.

Within this context, traditional language becomes obsolete since it does not recognise the reality that women, half of the world's population, face every day around the world. Individuals have normalised the established rules and conventions of the traditional language form with their habitus. In this way, individuals assimilate the existing hierarchies and power structures embedded within language. By proposing alternative linguistic frameworks to express their own realities and experiences, women reclaim control over their identities, challenging the subjugation propagated by conventional language norms, that is, women rewrite tradition.

Women's efforts to advocate for their own visibility and recognition contribute to the evolution of language by embracing their perspectives. Ultimately, women's revising of tradition promotes the legitimacy of women's authorship, which facilitate the celebration of their diverse contributions.

#### 1.4. Shattering the chains: breaking free from the constraints of traditional language

As Dr. Isabelle Touton affirms, women try to displace the codes of traditional narrative by using a certain formal freedom (Touton, 2018: 69). By pursuing this stylistic liberation, women disrupt textual elements. This transgression is necessary for accurately representing the experiences of women.

Multilingualism and translations in experimental works are examples of the way women promote the subversion of traditional language beyond traditional conventions. This emphasis on language as a site of subversion and investigation is echoed in the works of scholars such as Hélène Cixous (1975) and Julia Kristeva (1980), who have emphasised the significance of challenging traditional linguistic structures and embracing fluidity and multiplicity in women's writing. For instance, they may emphasise the meaning of bodily experiences, such as breathing, which simultaneously represents life and provides linguistic support to the reader. Different textual practises and the physical presence of one or more subjects, such as the author or embodied spoken text, contribute to the conventional context's disruption.

Women's representation is essential to the subversive narrative practises of women. Their works include a variety of voices, using different tones and accents in performing arts. By adding polyvocal sounds, rhythms, and songs into performative representations of language allows women to challenge the limits of traditional voices, which amplifies the diversity of women's voices. The analysis of women's voices resonates with the theories of scholars such as Mladen Dolar (2006), who researches the performative facets of language and voice. Additionally, women utilise new technologies to escape the limitations of traditional textual space. For instance, by incorporating digital elements such as electronic texts, virtual murals, and 3D projections, they disrupt traditional spatial boundaries, transcending the limits of representation. The application of innovative



technologies allows women to articulate innovative and immersive narrative experiences, hence transcending the constraints of normative forms.

The analysis of new technologies in literature is also consistent with the research of scholars such as Katherine Hayles, who examines the intersections between technology, literature, and the reshaping of narrative conventions in her book *Writing Machines* (Hayles, 2002). Therefore, women's rewriting of tradition addresses the subversion of textual elements, the detachment of traditional contextual boundaries, the examination of diverse voices, and the incorporation of new technologies.

These disruptive practices allow women to challenge the constraints of conventional narrative forms by escaping the limitation of patriarchal structures, thereby creating a more inclusive and dynamic literary context. By embracing these innovative strategies, women gain legitimacy regarding their own perspectives, which contributes to the larger movement for equity and diverse representation in contemporary literature.

#### 1.5. Women's immaterial labour: navigating precarity and its implications

Post-Fordism triggered a change in society, particularly regarding women's struggles to change the nature of employment and feminine production. This evolution becomes consistent with the concept of "immaterial labour" proposed by Negri and Virno. Contrary to the traditional industrial labour of the Fordist era, immaterial labour addresses the production of intangible goods through services and affection. As a result of a capitalist shift known as *informationalisation*, which shows dominance of technology in moulding human lives. This contemporary system of productivity represents a changed perspective of employment.

Regarding Silvia Federici (2008), Capitalism is the production of intangible benefits as opposed to tangible material goods. This immaterialism has resulted in the emergence of an innovative system of labour, but it has also led to the "precarisation" of labour interactions because

of the exploitative structures inherent to industrial and physical labour. In this analysis, I contend that immaterial labour is imposed on women and is not a fundamental feminist objective. Through literary forms, I will critically investigate the gendered nature of this labour transformation, focusing specifically on the 'feminisation' of labour and how theories of immaterial labour affect women while undermining their health.

Federici's intervention highlights an urgent issue regarding the historical attainment of working access by women, shedding light on the ambiguous nature of societal efforts to abolish labour barriers. She affirms that women:

entered the 'workplace' at a time of a historic, worldwide attack on workers' wages and employment levels... Not surprisingly, the jobs awaiting them have been at the bottom of the work-scale, among the most monotonous, hazardous, and poorly compensated (Federici, 2012: 188)

Federici emphasises the harsh realities women confronted upon entering the workforce, highlighting their systematic devaluation and exploitation. Despite the apparent expansion of opportunities, she stresses the need to investigate critically the structural inequalities and gendered divisions of labour that persist today.

Silvia Federici, an influential feminist scholar who has written extensively about the intersections of capitalism, gender, and labour, can be used to further contextualise the discussion on women's labour and the global attack on workers. The work of Federici casts light on the historical conditions and unique obstacles that have shaped women's entry into the workforce. By recognising the oppressive circumstances under which women have historically entered the workforce, we gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics at play and the pressing need for feminist interventions to challenge and transform the existing order. To investigate this transformation, I focus on a particular group of workers, namely cultural artists, with a concentration on writers and their artistic personas. This emphasis extends beyond the conventional conception of the labour force to include those who engage in affective and reproductive labour. Using Federici's critique of immaterial labour

and Nancy Fraser's interpretation of feminist discourse, I will argue that new forms of expression have the power to resolve this troubled area. These forms of expression can aid in the struggle against gender inequality, the dismantling of oppressive systems, and the eventual eradication of the injustices women continue to face in the modern world.

The pursuit of gender labour equality has been of central importance within the framework of 'biopolitics,' a political system in which the powers of production extend beyond merely economic spheres and encompass the entire domain of reproduction (Schulz, 2006: 2-3). In this context, the concept of 'biopower' is significant because it endeavours to challenge the capitalist-driven reproductive context, as highlighted by Mulvaney, by addressing the direct productivity derived from reproduction and the essential human interactions it requires:

we can recall the potential of a biopolitical understanding of (re)productive labour as a site of resistance in which the existing order can be disrupted and where new forms can be produced (Mulvaney, 2013: 42).

By invoking the ideas of Schulz and Mulvaney, the convergence of biopolitics and the eradication of gender labour inequalities becomes evident, providing a framework for imagining reproductive labour as a site of resistance and the potential for reshaping societal norms.

The works of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, especially *Empire* (2000), provide a critical analysis of globalisation and its implications for global power structures. In *Empire*, Negri and Hardt argue that traditional notions of sovereignty and nation-states have given way to a new form of imperial power characterised by networks, movements, and decentralised control. They illustrate how transnational capital and global institutions exert influence over economic, political, and cultural domains, thereby shaping the current world order.

Relevant in this context is Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of *cosmopolitanism*. Appiah's work *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) examines the concept of global ethics and the moral obligations of individuals in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism requires recognising our shared humanity and embracing

diversity while transcending limited national or cultural boundaries, which highlights the significance of dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation between diverse cultures and societies. The work of Appiah examines globalised power dynamics and the possibility of alternative forms of governance and human interaction. Both perspectives acknowledge the challenges and opportunities posed by globalisation, albeit from distinct perspectives. By refocusing on new objectives aimed at improving women's circumstances and rejecting the notion of women as a mere label, the subordinate nature of gender in relation to the priority accorded to males becomes apparent. Feminists have engaged in numerous determined efforts to combat this inequality. In this sense, developing subjectivities is a crucial component of this endeavour. Hardt and Negri propose the term *Empire* as a plausible method for dissolving the boundaries between production and reproduction:

Rather than speaking about a dissolution of the boundaries between production and reproduction, it would make more sense to analyse the restructuring of reproductive labour along with the categories “race, class, gender” on an international level. This would be the only way to realise a materialist approach to the “production of life,” something Hardt and Negri promise but do not carry out (Schulz, 2006: 4).

When confronted with the dearth of critical foundation provided by the term *Empire*, which fails to address the critique of gender regimes within the political economy, a sobering reality becomes apparent; its inability to subvert dominant subjectivity models reveals its limitations (Schulz, 2006: 4). Therefore, the politicisation of the female conflict must be viewed to create opportunities by instilling gender equality values in the minds of individuals, thereby shaping an egalitarian society.

In addition to the existing gender divisions, one of the most alarming aspects of gender issues is the negative effects these divisions have on women. These disparities emphasise the urgent need to deconstruct the historically derogatory and harmful associations with women. As Mulvaney emphasises, the scope of transformation extends beyond these partial changes and necessitates a more thorough examination:

With respect to gender as a social institution, in the same way that questioning the distinction between productive and reproductive labour, was necessary to call attention to the value of women's work, a critical examination of the political functioning of the categories 'man' and 'woman' as constitutive of the ruling ideology of gender can help us address the devaluation of women as labouring subjects and the devaluation of women's work (Mulvaney, 2013: 42).

The emphasis on the interdependence between "the expectations of unequal worth" and the concept of "sex category itself" (Mulvaney, 2013: 39) is crucial in addressing gender-based differences in worth. This relationship is consistent with sociological research on the gender wage gap and the "devaluation thesis," which states that activities conducted by women are undervalued relative to those performed by men because of the historical marginalisation of women (Mulvaney, 2013: 39). As women's subjectivity is objectified and commodified, their experiences in immaterial labour have been characterised by shallowness. The significance of production in immaterial labour emphasises the significance of symbolic production and the need to differentiate categories of work, such as cultural work, which contributes to the modes and forms of activism within these realms (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 31).

Within these activities, the diversity of activism can be both potent and precarious. Gill and Pratt suggest empirical research as a potential remedy for navigating this complexity. In this quest for renewal, the concept of "flexicurity" emerges, which encompasses the pursuit of social income and reliance on the state to resolve security concerns while protecting civil liberties. It is essential, however, to scrutinise critically the underlying assumptions about state-capital relations within this concept, as it may oversimplify the political nature of precarious labour. The concept of "ideal workers of the future" is inextricably linked to the concept of "model entrepreneurs," such as artists and creatives who serve as role models (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 31):

In recent years several qualitative and ethnographic studies have examined the lives of artists, fashion designers, television creatives and new media workers, and this research has raised

critical questions about the much-vaunted flexibility, autonomy and informality of these domains (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 20).

This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of creative labour, with an emphasis on microbusinesses operating within the culture industries. Ulrich Beck (2000), Leadbeater and Oakley (1999), and Ross (2003) have examined various facets of this phenomenon, including what Beck refers to as "me and company," what Leadbeater and Oakley refer to as "the Independents," and what Ross examines as the "industrialisation of Bohemia" (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 20). However, these perspectives do not sufficiently elucidate the issue of "self-exploitation," which is a central aspect of how women are positioned in this industry.

In this regard, the book *El Entusiasmo* (2017) by Remedios Zafra alludes to the concept of "self-exploitation" within the context of some industries, particularly those related to creative or immaterial labour. By exploring the concept of *enthusiasm*, Zafra is also concerned with the idea that individuals might voluntarily subject themselves to exploitation pursuing their creative passions. As a result, Zafra's ideas are connected to how enjoyment can become a disciplinary technique, which also explores self-exploitation involving a diverse range of theoretical approaches. On the other hand, the institutionalisation of "needs-talk" has become a central aspect of political discourse, surpassing gender politics. In this regard, Fraser (2013) contends that this discourse is a concrete political solution for confronting the gender gap and its associated inequalities. The combination of discourses concerning necessities, rights, and interests is a defining feature of late-capitalist political culture (Fraser, 2013: 54), which denotes a cultural framework that permits the identification and correction of gender disparities in a variety of work contexts. Fraser stresses the critical significance of interpreting political discourse to evaluate the efficacy of gender politics and its effect on societal norms and structures:

Some ways of talking about needs are institutionalized in the central discursive arenas of late-capitalist societies: parliaments, academies, courts, and mass circulation media. Other ways

of talking about needs are enclaved as socially marked subdialects and normally excluded from the central discursive arenas (Fraser, 2013: 59).

It is essential to recognise that these processes do not constitute a unified, coherent web. In contrast, they represent a heterogeneous field of polyglot possibilities and diverse options. A community shapes the horizon of interpretation, which fosters a more comprehensive understanding of women's needs. These societies are stratified and differentiated, with social groups having unequal status, power, and access to resources, and traversed by pervasive axis of inequality along lines of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

This diversity is structured unequally, posing obstacles for the pursuit of gender equality. Once a matter has been examined from multiple discourses, facts serve as a means of state legitimacy, according to Fraser. In addition to serving as mere representations, these interpretations are also acts and interventions that shape social dynamics.

The imperative transition to post-Fordist employment, emblematic of the ascendancy of immaterial labour, underscores the exigency for a nuanced scrutiny of gender roles. The inherent inequities intrinsic to immaterial labour have brought into sharp relief the gender disparities endemic to contemporary professional environments. This is particularly manifest in sectors characterised by predominantly female immaterial labour, as exemplified in the paradigm of childcare. The quest for substantive gender equality within the professional realm necessitates a profound reconceptualization of gender constructs and a deliberate deconstruction of traditional female roles. A potential avenue for addressing the entrenched negativities inherent in the present landscape of gender discrimination lies in the proposal to recalibrate regulatory frameworks.

This scholarly discourse contends that the trajectory of the gender struggle should not evade or marginalise the intrinsic injustices faced by women. On the contrary, it should meticulously engage with these perturbed facets within the gendered domain. The envisaged outcome is a trajectory of political reforms that not only confront but redress the prevailing gender disparities, fostering novel solutions and catalysing advancements in the discourse of feminism.

## 1.6. Women's oversexualization: challenging the illusions of the cultural industry

The cultural industry's focus revolves around the production of immediate and palpable morbidity through the exploitation of sexual imagery, particularly the sexualised portrayal of women. These depictions serve as artistic promises, ensuring swift pleasure for the audience. However, Adorno and Horkheimer critically examine the utilitarian nature of the cultural industry and advocate for aesthetic sublimation as the optimal means to harmonise and facilitate the coexistence of these elements within the realm of the arts. This necessitates a nuanced two-fold analysis of the cultural industry, considering it both as an autonomous entity and a social force.

In this section of the thesis, I provide a scholarly critique of Adorno and Horkheimer's work titled *The Culture Industry in Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1987). The analysis centres on the contextual implications of their work within the broader academic framework. Initially, I closely examine how shattered artistic promises, specifically those revolving around the over-sexualization of women, contribute to the ethical complexities of the cultural industry. This examination elucidates how the industry's output perpetuates misleading notions about women's lives and bodies, leaving consumers with impoverished content for imaginative interpretation. Subsequently, I delve into the phenomenon of disavowing denial within the cultural industry, rooted in the Freudian concept of sublimation as applied to sexual imagery—an aspect termed "aesthetic sublimation." This exploration aims to illuminate the psychological mechanisms at play within the industry, further deepening the understanding of its nuanced dynamics. Finally, I undertake an exploration of the intricate coexistence of aesthetics and the communicative message in works of art. This analysis highlights how these dimensions operate synergistically, prompting consumers to reevaluate the inherent artistic autonomy present in each creation. The overarching goal is to foster a thought-provoking and critical engagement regarding women's legitimation within the cultural artifacts produced by the industry.



The audience's perpetual deception by the illusory pleasures within the artistic “plot and packaging” since “the culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1987: 111). In the same way, the culture industry exploits female sexual imagery to incite and captivate. This manipulation results in a return to mythical stasis despite efforts to disenchant (Comay, 2006: 372). The show confines artistic freedom to the reproduction of sexual imagery, forming what Adorno labels "The Jargon," a monotonous sameness that renders art incapable of fulfilling its promises. Adorno asserts that the culture industry's deceptive nature aligns with the audience's desire to be misled, seeking transparent deception for even fleeting gratification (Adorno, 1991: 103). Rather than "good smut," Adorno, influenced by Sade, describes it as the "tedious administration of routine piled upon routine, bleached out, neutralized, antiseptic" (Comay, 2006: 372). Expanding the discourse, Penelope Deutscher's work on the aesthetics of violence and its intersection with feminist theory, influenced by philosophers like Derrida and Butler, adds depth to the discussion since she explores the intersections of violence and sexuality in her book *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (1996), investigating how the depiction of violence in art and literature can either challenge or perpetuate gendered power structures. Deutscher examines the ways in which violence functions as a form of spectacle, generating both fascination and revulsion.

Deutscher's analysis, which draws on Adorno's critique of mass culture and the culture industry, transcends a simplistic dichotomy between startling and neutralised depictions of violence. She investigates the intricate relationship between power, desire, and aesthetic forms, prompting us to query how violence is commodified, consumed, and reproduced within dominant cultural frameworks. Incorporating Deutscher's observations into the discussion alongside references to Comay's analysis of startling and tedious depictions of violence permits a more thorough examination of the aesthetics and politics at play, which provides evidence of the intersections between feminist theory, cultural critique, and the complexities of violence in modern society. Thus, Deutscher's

consideration affects a diminishment of the reality of these images to a lower and simpler state, which effectively derives into what Adorno conceives as an artistic disillusionment:

sodomy, incest, mutilation, torture, coprophagy, whatever, everything reduced to business as usual, Juliette as a gym coach, the bedroom as boardroom, boardroom as boredom, boredom as the congealment of the always-the-same (Comay, 2006: 372).

Thus, Deutscher's consideration not only enhances our understanding of the intricate dynamics between violence, power, and desire but also calls attention to the commodification and normalisation of violent imagery against women within cultural production. As Comay summarises, Deutscher's work prompts a critical reflection on the potential reduction of profound and shocking images to banal and mundane states, contributing to what Adorno conceptualises as an artistic disillusionment characterised by the trivialisation of the profound into the commonplace. This perspective prompts a reevaluation of the impact of violence within cultural representations and the potential consequences of its commodification within the broader socio-cultural milieu.

The search for aesthetic gratification falls into place due to the emergence of consumer culture. Mass consumption under the Capitalist crisis shows how labour time is the irrefutable measure for labour value. After the rise of the Capitalist crisis due to the excess of produced commodities, the increasing need to achieve a pleasurable feeling of anticipation is exploited to reach full satisfaction:

In the midst of the imageless world, the need for art intensifies—as it does also among the masses, who were first confronted with art through mechanical means of reproduction—tends to arouse doubts rather than, given the externality of the need for art, enabling art's continued existence to be defended (Adorno, 1991: 26)

Hence, the corresponding correlation to this “afterimage of magic as consolation for disenchantment” supposes a degradation of art to “an example of *Mundus vult decipi*” (Adorno, 1991: 26). By breaking the artistic promises and, in this way, lessening the consideration of arts as a fundamental means of human expression, the limitations of the human essence are delimited by the culture industry, which

promotes a consumer culture regardless of the intrinsic humanism that is fundamentally inherent in all arts. The purpose of the culture industry, therefore, becomes—rather than humanitarianism—pure consumerism.

The manifestation of a disavowing denial within the culture industry, as elucidated by Comay, becomes evident when reason itself disguises its inherent duality—the schism between its own emptiness and its desperate endeavours to seek fulfilment. This schism entails the infinite deferral of desire and its pre-emptive short circuit, resulting in a dissemblance wherein the subject simultaneously affirms and disavows the castrating nothingness at its core (Comay, 2006: 374).

This phenomenon alludes to the concept of aesthetic sublimation, characterised by the arbitrary projection of consumer impulses onto whatever is presented to them. Adorno explicates that the ideal identification carried out by the subject is not to make the artwork like themselves but rather to make themselves like the artwork (Adorno, 1991: 22). The satisfaction, in this context, lies in the unevenness of these artistic pieces—a mechanism to channel and pre-empt what strictly remains unthinkable within the terms of self-frustrating and self-enhancing desire (Comay, 2006: 375). However, a critical aspect concerning the culture industry lies in its suppressive nature, wherein pleasure is displaced to its anticipation by explicitly and deliberately revealing "the object of desire" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1987: 111). According to Lacan, the cultural industry's predicament can be traced back to Kant's reluctance to fully embrace his own ideas, particularly impacting the concept of autonomous self-regulation (Comay, 2006: 373), reinforcing the lack of freedom inherent in the exploitation of sexual imagery within the culture industry, thereby affirming the consumer's constrained position.

The correlation between the "ethics of pure desire" and the "ethics of jouissance" is disrupted by the culture industry's approach to reality, undermining the inherent autonomy of the arts. Instead of fostering autonomy, the culture industry facilitates a "contamination" of autonomous self-regulation through "historically determined heteronomies" and, ultimately, the suppression of individualistic thought (Comay, 2006: 373). This idea aligns with Hegel's argument in "the postulates

of pure practical reason" that pure desire is intrinsically linked to the aesthetic, and the constitutive negativity of the subject is essential for radical *creatio ex nihilo*, emphasising the inseparable connection between ethics and sublimation (Comay, 2006: 378). The reconciliation of generalities with specificities to construct a new reality is intertwined with the concept of aesthetic sublimation, suggesting that art can achieve this cohesive reconciliation. Moreover, the political nature of art as an instrument toward the external laws of commodity production becomes apparent. Adorno and Horkheimer advocate for an understanding of the culture industry based on its individual character, even if it permeates the lives of innumerable people (Adorno, 1991: 106). Consequently, the coexistence of aesthetics and factual communicative details becomes crucial, positioning art not as snobbism but as a social event with diverse social side-effects.

In this regard, the relevance of the culture industry lies in a critical reflection, taking it seriously in a way that challenges its monopolistic character (Adorno, 1991: 106). Despite the autonomously revealing character of imagery within the culture industry, the present reality contemplates a more morbid idea of the arts that manipulates individual ideologies. The individual plays the role of a critic by thoughtfully engaging with the provocative presentation of women in artworks, developing a solid ideology, and finding meaningful pleasure within artistic aesthetics as a coexisting means to make significant use of the culture industry.

The intricacies of aesthetic sublimation within the culture industry, as explored through the lenses of Comay and Adorno shed light on the suppressive nature of prevailing gender norms and their impact on individual autonomy. As we delve into the realms of art and cultural production, it becomes imperative to consider the role of these forces in perpetuating or challenging societal inequalities, particularly those affecting women and girls.

The critical analysis presented here unveils the potential for cultural artifacts to either reinforce or dismantle prevailing gendered power structures, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersections between feminist theory and aesthetic discourse. By conscientiously navigating the complexities of aesthetic sublimation, society can work towards fostering a cultural milieu that not

only refrains from perpetuating harmful stereotypes but actively contributes to the empowerment and emancipation of women, thus forging a path toward a future marked by gender equality and the eradication of violence against women.

#### 1.6.1. The male gaze

According to the Feminist theory, the male gaze is the depiction of women and the world, in literature and audio-visual material, from a masculine, heterosexual angle. This term was initially used by John Berger, English art critic, in *Ways of Seeing*, a series of films for the BBC released in January 1972, succeeding a book, as part of his analysis of women's consideration as objects in advertising and nudes in European painting. The male gaze soon became a subject of interest for the feminists, including Laura Mulvey, the British film critic who used it to review traditional media representations of women in cinema and neologised the phrase. Historically, women have not been intellectually involved in the creation and imposition of visual representations; It has been the male gaze that has done so.

Mulvey used the term “male gaze” in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in 1975, which refers to the act of representing women and their world, in film, literature and the arts, from a male and heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the heterosexual male viewer. In the visual and aesthetic perspectives of audio-visual narrative, the male gaze considers three perspectives: The one with the man behind the camera, that of the male characters within the same story that is being narrated and that of the viewer looking at the image. In this sense, the viewer consumes history made by men, with men and for men. Therefore, female characters are relegated to mere objects of desire, without having greater relevance in the narrative, that is, they do not have voices to express their opinions but bodies to show for the male pleasure.

On the other hand, the female gaze refers to the perspective that a filmmaker (director, screenwriter, producer, etc.) brings to a film and how it differs from the typically male perspective in

which the male figure, unlike what happens to the female figure in the male gaze, is not sexualised. While this concept was born in the cinematographic world, there is no denial regarding the fact that the male gaze carries over to other aspects of real life, such as beauty standards and how society perceives women in general. It even influences how women (especially heterosexuals) perceive themselves: through the male lens.

Regarding the effects of the male gaze on women, research has provided evidence for its detrimental impact on women's self-perception and self-objectification, which leads to a growing body shame and an impoverished mental state. For women, such normalised feelings of self-objectification are not the result of physical interaction with men. However, the anticipation of being the object of the male gaze is the cause for self-objectification, which is another effect of the male gaze along with feelings of anxiety about their physique and bodies.

A lifetime of watching women being sexualised on television, films, music videos, and advertising accustoms us as a society to assume the male vision as the standard. Considering this reality, the question "What is the consequence of the male gaze?" arises. Therefore, for the existence and perpetuation of the male gaze, women find it difficult or almost impossible to accept themselves as they are. An example of this lack of self-acceptance would be how women want to modify how they look to fit more into the male gaze, which has historically put beauty as women's pivotal centre and source of success. The male gaze can lead to eating disorders; objectification and can even encourage the display of sexual violence, street harassment, etc. Overall, understanding the male gaze and its repercussion on how women are perceived in society is fundamental since it invites us to question ourselves through which lenses people perceive women. To liberate women from this oppression, there needs to be an encouragement to see women without the male gaze's filter.

This idea can be connected to Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (2015) in which she analyses the societal pressures that women suffer trying to conform to oppressing standards of beauty. Wolf also argues that this fantasised beauty myth works as a tool to control and oppress women. First, Wolf delves into the concept of the beauty myth and how this perpetuates gender equality, which represents

a concern for societal expectations. Additionally, this impacts women's well-being with harmful consequences that women suffer, which aligns with Wolf's analysis of how beauty standards damage women's physical and mental health. In Wolf's exploration, there is also a call for liberation and self-acceptance. It is fundamental to emphasise the relevance of seeing women outside the male gaze filter. Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* calls for women's liberation from the beauty myth's limitations by embracing their authentic selves. Lastly, Wolf questions perceptions of women by inviting readers to wonder how women are recognised in society and challenge traditional narratives that objectify women. By comprehending the societal lenses through which women are observed, Wolf promotes a critical examination of the "male gaze", emphasizing the need for a more authentic and equitable representation of women. The author delves into the societal constructs that prescribe rigid beauty standards for women. These standards, reinforced by the media and perpetuated through the male gaze, create a negative environment that goes beyond the mere objectification of women. Therefore, it becomes evident that the beauty myth serves as a tool for societal control, diverting women's attention and energy towards conforming to these ideals.

The male gaze, as an extension of the beauty myth, not only objectifies women but also cultivates a culture where women are judged primarily on their physical appearance. This relentless scrutiny leads to the development of eating disorders as women internalise the pressure to attain an unrealistic and often unhealthy standard of beauty. Additionally, the objectification propagated by the male gaze contributes to a broader culture that normalises and, in some cases, even glorifies instances of sexual violence. Understanding the male gaze and its repercussions, in conjunction with Wolf's insights becomes crucial in dissecting the multifaceted challenges that women face. The perspectives through which society views women becomes a powerful tool in shaping perceptions and reinforcing systemic inequalities.

By encouraging a shift in perspective and promoting diverse representations of women, we can begin to break free from the constraints imposed by the beauty myth and the male gaze, which involves fostering an environment where women are seen beyond their physical attributes, valuing

their contributions, intellect, and agency. Only through such a paradigm shift can we strive towards a society that respects and celebrates women for their true worth, unencumbered by the limiting effects of the male gaze.

The gaze and standard set by men have been and continue to be imperatively present in our reality. Therefore, to assert that there are misogynistic artists but that art itself is not is a mistake, as the foundations upon which art is built have not conceived of women as full-fledged subjects, but rather as a means, as an object, as just another artistic resource.

### 1.6.2. The female gaze

The concept of the female gaze challenges the male-centric perspective's longstanding dominance in the visual arts and media, which signifies a shift towards more inclusive and empowering depictions of women, providing an alternative lens through which their experiences, aspirations, and perspectives are portrayed. The female gaze encourages a variety of narratives and aesthetics that reflect the complexities of women's lives by subverting traditional power dynamics and reclaiming agency. This section examines the role of the female gaze in challenging patriarchal norms, advocating gender equality, and reshaping artistic and cultural landscapes.

#### 1.6.2.1. Reconceptualising representation

The female gaze challenges the traditional conception of women as passive objects of the gaze and reimagines their depiction as active, multidimensional individuals. In contrast to the male gaze, which sexualises and objectifies women, the female gaze seeks to portray women in an authentic and respectful manner, emphasising their agency, desires, and interior worlds. Through this lens, women's experiences are no longer filtered through a male-centric lens, but are instead presented with nuance and sensitivity, reflecting their diverse realities.

The female gaze subverts the established power dynamics between the observer, originally considered as active and male, and the observed, as passive and female. It shifts the emphasis from



the objectification of women by the masculine gaze to an empathetic engagement with women's lives and experiences. By reclaiming their narratives, women become active participants in defining their representation, dismantling traditional hierarchies, and regaining control over their own narratives.

#### 1.6.2.2. Diverse perspectives and narratives

Embracing the female gaze invites a variety of historically marginalised or neglected perspectives and narratives. This all-inclusive approach permits the investigation of a vast array of experiences, identities, and cultural backgrounds. The female gaze promotes a richer, more nuanced understanding of gender and challenges essentialist conceptions of femininity by amplifying the perspectives of women from diverse communities.

#### 1.6.2.3. Shaping artistic and cultural landscapes

The influence of the female gaze transcends specific mediums, permeating a variety of art and media forms, which offers new visual languages, styles, and interpretations, thereby redefining aesthetic standards. Artists and creators pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse artistic and cultural landscape by embracing the female gaze. This transformation challenges traditional expectations and encourages audiences to engage with narratives that resonate with their own experiences, thereby fostering empathy and comprehension.

The female gaze signifies a paradigm shift in the portrayal and perception of women in art and media, which enables women to reclaim their narratives, challenging the objectification and marginalisation that the masculine gaze perpetuates. In this way, the female gaze contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society by amplifying diverse points of view, subverting power dynamics, and reshaping artistic and cultural landscapes, thus inviting us to imagine a world in which women's experiences are accurately represented, celebrated, and acknowledged as fundamental to the fabric of human existence.

## 1.7. Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism

Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism have become significant frameworks for people shaping their identities and engaging with diverse global cultures. Afropolitanism focuses on the experiences of Africans and individuals of African descent living in different parts of the world, highlighting the interconnectedness of their stories and cultural influences. Conversely, cosmopolitanism underscores the idea of global citizenship, encouraging people to transcend national borders and embrace a broader, more inclusive perspective on the world. These lenses offer nuanced approaches to understanding and navigating the complexities of identity and cultural interaction in a globalised society.

This thesis investigates the similarities and distinctions between afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism, as well as their impact on our understanding of contemporary global identities. Playwrights like Inua Ellams and Bola Agbaje, for instance, combine African and Western theatrical traditions to produce narrative forms that are both innovative and profoundly rooted in cultural traditions. Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism are fundamental to comprehend the connections between literature, theatre, and larger cultural and political movements. By embracing cultural diversity and celebrating composite identities, writers and artists can create potent works of art that challenge traditional boundaries and inspire us to reconsider our shared humanity in a new light.

Due to Selasi's essay *Bye-Bye, Babar*, afropolitanism gained popularity in 2005. Her essay appeared in print in March 2005 arguing that afropolitanism is concerned with identity, sensibility, and experience: "the Afropolitan must form an identity along at least three dimensions: national, racial, and cultural – with subtle tensions" (Selasi, 2005: 3). Critiques of afropolitanism, such as Susanne Gehrman's, contend Selasi's elitism and class-biased viewpoint (Susanne, 2016: 61-72). Nonetheless, this essay is significant because it highlights the position of African migrants within the African sphere. It is essential to note the developmental conversation regarding the relationship between identity and individuality because it addresses the individual, who may experience feelings of isolation as they seek identities to comprehend their place in the world.

Taiye Selasi devised the term Afropolitan as a liberating way of being in the world to describe her African experiences. Afropolitanism is a term that evolves with movement, as individuals seek out spaces where they can grow while maintaining a sense of identity and belonging. The term Afropolitan is derived from the fusion of Africa and the Greek word "polis," which means citizen, based on the concept of locality, where humans reside, as opposed to the concept of nationality, which is broader, less specific, and culturally rich. By employing this term, Selasi attempts to reconstruct African phenomena by accentuating the perspectives of African citizens.

Afropolitanism encompasses the experiences and perspectives of individuals of African descent who have a complex cultural identity shaped by their African origins and global experiences. This concept can apply to people and communities in different parts of the world where individuals with African descent have a variety of cultural backgrounds and international links. Therefore, afropolitanism is not connected to a specific geographical location and emphasises the interconnectedness between African cultures and the global context.

Afropolitanism acknowledges the complexities of African identities and celebrates the diversity and hybridity that result from the fusion of local, regional, and global cultural influences. It embraces the fluidity of identity and contests monolithic narratives regarding Africa and its diaspora. In contrast, cosmopolitanism transcends specific cultural identities and incorporates a broader concept of global citizenship, which emphasises a global perspective that transcends national boundaries and embraces cultural diversity and is open-minded and inclusive. Cosmopolitanism encourages individuals to engage with diverse cultures, languages, and points of view, thereby facilitating cross-border dialogue and understanding. Therefore, it encourages individuals to act as global citizens with a commitment to social justice and equality, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of humanity and the planet.

Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism share values and beliefs in common. They both oppose narrow-mindedness, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia, promoting empathy, tolerance, and respect for various cultures. Both concepts acknowledge the interdependence of our world and the interaction

between local and global forces that shape our identities. They encourage intercultural dialogue and exchange, thereby fostering mutual appreciation. Afropolitanism intersects with cosmopolitanism in its celebration of cultural diversity and rejection of fixed notions of identity.

It is essential to recognise that both afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism encounter obstacles and critiques. Some argue that afropolitanism can be elitist and detached from the realities of marginalised African communities, concentrating primarily on the experiences of the few privileged individuals (García Ramírez, 2019: 37). Similarly, cosmopolitanism has been criticised for its potential to propagate global inequalities, with critics claiming it can lead to cultural appropriation and the eradication of local cultures in favour of a homogenous global culture. These criticisms underscore the need for nuanced discussions and efforts to ensure inclusiveness and social justice. Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism honour cultural diversity, encourage dialogue, and challenge rigid conceptions of identity. Both emphasise the significance of empathy, mutual respect, and a commitment to social justice. Afropolitanism focuses on African experiences, whereas cosmopolitanism encompasses a broader global perspective. Individuals can forge meaningful connections, appreciate diverse cultures, and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable global society by engaging with these concepts (Selasi, 2005: 3).

Within the context of this thesis, the exploration of afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism extends to the literary works of Akwaeke Emezi and Bernadine Evaristo, specifically in *Freshwater* and *Girl, Woman, Other*, respectively. Emezi's depiction of Ada's intricate identity, marked by the coexistence of spiritual entities, aligns with the tenets of afropolitanism. Ada's narrative transcends national borders, echoing the fluid and multifaceted nature of identities within the Afropolitan framework. Regarding cultural hybridity, *Freshwater* explores the intersections of Nigerian spirituality and global experiences, reflecting the hybridity inherent in Afropolitan identities. Ada's journey becomes a symbol of the dynamic fusion of local, regional, and global cultural influences, contributing to the celebration of cultural diversity. Considering Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, cosmopolitanism in polyphony appears in Evaristo's novel, characterised by a polyphonic

narrative featuring diverse characters and interconnected stories, which epitomises a cosmopolitan ethos. The characters traverse geographical and cultural boundaries, embodying a global perspective that aligns with cosmopolitanism's emphasis on transcending national borders. In the novel, there is also a celebration of cultural diversity since *Girl, Woman, Other* actively celebrates the cultural diversity present in contemporary Britain, more specifically in London, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of the society portrayed. The novel challenges fixed notions of identity and engages with various cultural backgrounds, fostering an appreciation for the complexity of individual and collective identities.

Both Emezi and Evaristo contribute to the nuanced understanding of contemporary global identities within the literary context, as their works embrace cultural diversity and challenge conventional boundaries. The novels *Freshwater* and *Girl, Woman, Other* offer narratives that extend beyond national confines, exploring the interconnectedness of characters and their experiences on a global scale. This analysis within the framework of afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism contributes to the ongoing discourse on contemporary global identities.

## 2. BEATRIZ CABUR AND ANGÉLICA LIDDELL

The 21st century addresses the unresolved issues that have lingered from the preceding century, as humanity grapples with the aftermath of catastrophic events. This section examines Angélica Liddell and Beatriz Cabur, two prominent Spanish playwrights and directors who were born in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. The central issue in their theatrical work is how art can effectively respond to global catastrophes. Both authors began their careers with an emphasis on advocating for equality, transforming the landscape of Spanish theatre by highlighting the equal significance of women's and men's theatrical work. Emerging in the 1990s and 2000s, these playwrights established distinct and highly regarded artistic personas, selecting recurring elements that reflect their core personal concerns. Angélica Liddell and Beatriz Cabur leave an indelible mark on the Spanish theatre scene with a specific goal in mind. In this section, a comparative analysis will be presented, investigating the works of both authors, identifying the underlying themes of their artistic production, and highlighting the contemporary relevance of women's identities.

Angélica Liddell's performance art reflects her dedication through the staging of her body and her physical exertion. She returns to Modernist-originated ritual theatre. The Spanish playwright savours all the innovation generated by the avant-garde. However, she has been explicit about this from the beginning: “*Yo no hago teatro de vanguardia, hago teatro viejo, viejísimo, tan viejo como el primer hombre*” (Cornago, 2005: 320). Artaud's artistic legacy influenced the methodology of her artistic proposal; Liddell's staging brings her theatre to life, and it requires tremendous effort from both the actors and the audience.

In Liddell's theatre, the ritual must be comprehended from and through the body with accelerated and resonant pronunciation, intermittent vocal intensity in some syllables and words, ascending and descending gradualness, uncontrolled - controlled pauses, silences, screams, and breathing. All these actions occur within the body, so the term ritual represents the body's output. Liddell endeavours to achieve a trance state constantly, whether through movement or stillness.

Therefore, Angélica Liddell destabilizes the organism. Liddell seeks individual redemption through the effect of the word on the body, which is born and dies of it, as an individual, and which is born and dies of the rest of the audience, as individuals, equally from the self to the audience and the audience to the self.

Cabur humanises reality and emphasises the theme of racial diversity. She does not position herself outside the canon and thus remains within the system as a creator. *La Liga de Mujeres Profesionales del Teatro* in Spain is a clear example of how Cabur aims to stage her ideas within the existing theatrical landscape, as it is a common space with an open-ended mission that operates through connections and networks. Aware of who she is, what she desires, and optimistic about the possibility of change, Cabur seeks creative outlets. On the other hand, Angélica Liddell creates a self-exploration work about herself. Typically, Liddell performs as an actress in her own plays, representing herself and her body and thereby exposing herself as a subject. Her alter ego is reflected by the incorporation of autobiographical elements in her plays.

Liddell's theatre is ceremonial, in the sense that she views it as a ceremony, like classical Greek dramas Liddell recognises that the theatre serves as a spiritual and physical representation of the psyche. In addition, she employs Artaud's theatre of cruelty. On the other hand, Cabur proposes a categorization of telepresence in textual theatre as a continuation of Masura's research. She investigates modern, contemporary languages, the media, and the technological aspect. Therefore, Cabur's theatre is not a sacred theatre, as Liddell believes her theatre to be. Both authors create with the intention of changing future realities by making their audience question the possibilities of a more empathetic world towards women and girls.

In addition, Cabur's theatre is realistic; for example, *Childbirth 19* is an innovative play in which she combines characteristic techniques and mimetics to depict realistic spaces, such as the hospital and the living room of the house where the childbirth begins. In this way, we can assert that Cabur's works are more realistic than Liddell's, who employs a symbolic language based on rituals and reflected in symbols, such as when she decides to wear the Spanish flag as a garment. In this way,

Liddell's conflicted relationship with Spain is reflected in her critical view of the Spanish scene. Importantly, Liddell quit *RESAD* (*Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramatico*) because she did not share its values. Her theatrical premieres took place outside of Spain because the political climate of her native country did not permit her to exhibit her works there. As a result, she accelerated her career development outside of Spain. In contrast, Cabur departs the country to expand, as she works wherever she is, which is not here nor there but in a liminal space where she creates stages. In this regard, the motivations of the two authors are distinct. Both consider theatrical performance to be a serious, professional endeavour, which is reflected in the fact that they live it personally. Despite employing distinct scenic languages, they both compromise in their theatrical performance. Liddell does not accept a commercial compromise, as evidenced by the fact that she had to finance the production herself because her plays were not performed in Spain. Furthermore, as an actress, Liddell exposes herself on stage. Although Cabur writes and directs her plays, she does not perform in them.

However, theatre is sacred for Liddell; it is not merely a means to generate amusement, but a weapon against society. In this sense, both playwrights are transformative, as they anticipate that their theatre will transform the audience. Both authors contribute to social transformation, regardless of the unpleasantness of their stage narrative.

Angélica Liddell and Beatriz Cabur are playwrights whose theatrical beginnings occurred at the *RESAD* in Madrid, despite their very different personalities, which are expressed through their performative discourse, their production represents a reflection of their political commitment. However, Liddell refuses to be a part of its system, the Western world; her plays examine the system's weakest aspects.

In their respective works, both Angelica Liddell and Beatriz Cabur have developed significant contributions to the representation and empowerment of women. Liddell's works frequently address trauma, gender, and sexuality. She frequently employs her personal experiences to create performances that are profoundly emotional and introspective and that challenge societal norms. As opposed to the one-dimensional stereotypes prevalent in conventional media, Liddell frequently



depicts women as complex and multifaceted individuals in her work. She has also advocated for women's rights, including reproductive rights and sexual assault. In contrast, Cabur's work emphasises on the experiences of Spanish immigrant women. She produces performances that incorporate elements of theatre, dance, and music to create a unique and evocative artistic experience. Through her work, Cabur has given a voice to a marginalised community, illuminating the struggles and triumphs of immigrant women in a society that frequently overlooks their contributions.

Both Liddell and Cabur have used their work to shed light on the experiences of women and challenge preconceived notions about gender roles and societal expectations. Despite their distinct approaches and themes, both artists have made significant contributions to the representation and empowerment of women in Spanish theatre. In the following sections, I will analyse the plays of Liddell and Cabur from a feminist standpoint. I will focus on the investigation of violence against women in Beatriz Cabur's *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2015), *Nefertiti and PIII* (2015), *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), *Goodbye Mother* (2020), and *Childbirth-19* (2021) as well as in Angélica Liddell's *Belgrado* (2008) and *La casa de la fuerza* (2011).

## 2.1. Context

### 2.1.1. Exploration of contemporary dramaturgy written by women

Spanish women's theatre is a fascinating field of study, as evidenced by the emergence of an increasing number of scholarly works on the subject. In this section, I will discuss some of the most important works for the visibility of women in early twenty-first-century Spanish feminist drama.

Firstly, there are the anthologies by Raquel García Pascual (ed.), *Dramaturgas españolas en la escena actual* (2011) and Francisco Gutiérrez Carbajo (ed.), *Dramaturgas del siglo XXI* (2014); together with the European project DRAMATURGAE, whose main objective is the study of contemporary Hispanic theatre written by women, directed by Professor Romera Castillo (director of the *Centro de Investigación de Semiótica Literaria, Teatral y Nuevas Tecnologías*, UNED), who

includes contemporary female playwrights in *Las dramaturgas y el SELITEN@T*, both in his book *Pautas para la investigación del teatro español y sus puestas en escena* (Madrid: UNED, 2011, pp. 381-411) as well as with the promulgation of the European project *DRAMATURGAE*, in collaboration with the *UNED*, the *University of Toulouse* in France and the *University of Giessen* in Germany. This project has resulted in the corresponding publications: *Dramaturgias femeninas en la segunda mitad del siglo xx: espacio y tiempo* (Romera Castillo, ed., 2005), *El personaje teatral: la mujer en las dramaturgias masculinas en los inicios del siglo xxi* (Romera Castillo, ed, 2009), *Transgression et folie dans les dramaturgies féminines hispaniques contemporaines* (Garnier / Roswita, eds., 2007) and *Dramaturgias femeninas en el teatro español contemporáneo: entre pasado y presente* (Floeck et alii , eds., 2008).

Spanish theatre is one of the main lines of research of the *Centro de Investigación de Semiótica Literaria, Teatral y Nuevas Tecnologías* (UNED, Madrid), one of its branches focuses exclusively on female playwrights, which can be seen in: *Estado de la cuestión: siglos xx y xxi. Women playwrights and SELITEN@T* (Romera Castillo, 2011). Likewise, in his line of research on the reconstruction of Spanish stage life in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there is a specialised section on Spanish female playwrights, as shown by the analysis of Miguel Ángel Jiménez Aguilar (2014), in issue 21 of the journal *Signa*, who cites Valeria Maria Rita Lo Porto and Anita Viola (Jiménez Aguilar, 2014: 496).

Spanish women playwrights are also studied by the *Research Centre* whose work is devoted to autobiographical writing, as evidenced in works such as: *De la historia a la memoria: recursos mitológicos y autobiográficos en algunas dramaturgas del exilio* (Romera Castillo, 2008).

Regarding the legitimisation of contemporary Spanish women playwrights, issue 21 (2012) of *Signa* stands out, in its *Estado de la cuestión I* it addresses the topic *Sobre lo grotesco en autores teatrales de los siglos xx y xxi*; together with issue 28 of *Acotaciones* (2012), which has a section devoted to emerging women playwrights: *Siete textos breves de siete dramaturgas jóvenes. Imágenes de una sociedad violenta* (Pérez Rasilla, 2012).

Lastly, special mention should be made of the annual *Theatre and Feminisms* conferences of the *RESAD* (Madrid); feminist associations, such as the *League of Professional Theatre Women* (LMPT) and the *Marías Guerreras*; along with monographic issues of different periodicals, for example, 21 (2012) of *Signa, Revista de la Asociación española de Semiótica (SELITEN@T, UNED)*; 28 (2012) of *Acotaciones (RESAD)*; Extra no. 1 (2016) of *Las puertas del drama. Mujeres que cuentan*. Special female authors (*Autoras y Autores de Teatro*), organised by Yolanda Dorado; the 30th (2017) of *Feminismo/s. Dramaturgia femenina actual*. From 1986 to 2016 (University of Alicante); vol. XLIII, no. 2 (2017) of *Estreno. Cuadernos del teatro español contemporáneo. 50 voces contra el maltrato*, a collection of short plays that denounces gender; volume 8 (2018) by *Don Galán*. Women and theatre in 21st century Spain (CDT). *Mujeres sobre escena: entre bambalinas de feminismo(s) y transgresiones de género* (Pablo Olavide University of Seville).

### 2.1.2. 21st Century theatre written by women in Spain

According to some critics, Spanish contemporary women's theatre was born from female playwrights of the 1990s, including Ana Diosdado, Paloma Pedrero, Carmen Resino, Lluisa Cunillé, Itziar Pascual, Laila Ripoll and Beth Escudé i Gallés, to name but a few<sup>1</sup>. Female playwrights of the 1990s, including Ana Diosdado, Paloma Pedrero, Carmen Resino, Lluisa Cunillé, Itziar Pascual, Laila Ripoll, and Beth Escudé i Gallés, among others, gave birth to contemporary women's theatre. This moment of major significance for Spanish theatre is known as the "renacer de la dramaturgia femenina" (Serrano, 2018: 1) or "desembarco de autoras en el teatro español" (Oliva, 2002: 322) and was born from the 1990s, however, Ragué-Arias dates it as early as 1985, due to several factors such as the appearance of the *Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas (CNNTE)* (Barrios, 2010: 88) and the *Asociación de Dramaturgas* (1986), directed by Carmen Resino with the mission to

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<sup>1</sup> Considering this generation of theatre written by women in the 1990s, one can examine, to mention a few examples, Serrano (2005, 2006, 2013, 2018), Oliva (2002: 297; 321-329), Barrios (2010), Gutiérrez Carbajo (2014) and Ros-Berenguer (2017: 212-216).

"reivindicar la actividad dramaturgica femenina y, a través del teatro, contribuir a mejorar la situación de la mujer dentro del contexto social, cuyo sistema se obstina todavía en cerrarle determinados ámbitos de actuación" (*M.V.O. El Público*. Abril, 187, pp.41)" (Resino, 2016). Research and anthologies helped to consolidate this awakening of women's theatre, to cite a few examples: Patricia O'Connor's anthology, *Dramaturgas españolas de hoy, una introducción* (1988); the articles by researchers such as Phillys Zatlin, *Women Playwrights in Madrid* and M<sup>a</sup> José Ragué-Arias, *Nuevas tendencias escénicas del momento*, both from 1989 (Bueno, 2018); and the publication *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español (1500-1994)*, dir. Juan Antonio Hormigón (1996, 1997, 2000).

According to Olga Barrios (2010: 85-86), this playwriting of the 1990s is not openly considered feminist despite the fact that it deals with conflicts that exclusively concern women. Certain authors such as Carmen Resino ("la decana de esta generación", (Serrano, 2018: 2)) advocate the elimination of labels because, according to her, the fact of writing in itself being a woman already poses a unique position, in accordance with the statements of Virtudes Serrano (2006: 98) and Gutiérrez Carbajo (2014: 34). However, a general "orgullo en la identidad femenina" (Patricia O'Connor cited by Barrios, 2010: 86) which is expressed through the gradually growing interest, in themes related to misogynistic discrimination, evident examples of which can be found in works such as *La llamada de Lauren* (1984), *Locas de amor* (1994), *En la otra habitación* (2006), *Ana el once de marzo* (2005) or *Mary para Mary* (2016), by Paloma Pedrero; *Tras las tocas* (2002), *Père Lachaise* (2003), *Pared* (2004) or *Variaciones sobre Rosa Parks* (2006), by Itziar Pascual; *¡Arriba la Paqui!* (2007), *La actriz* (1990), *Ultimar detalles* (2004) or *La última jugada de José Fouché* (2017), by Carmen Resino; or *Sancha, Zahra y Raquel (Trilogía de mujeres medievales)* (2009), *Las mil y una muertes de Sarah Bernhardt* (2005) or *Ángeles en el círculo* (2018), by Antonia Bueno.

Although Feminism in the Spanish transition was not taboo for everyone as it was a very powerful movement in the Transition, the decision of some female playwrights in the 1990s not to call themselves feminist is observed in Spanish playwrights during this context. From these fissures of the Transition, the crossing of ideologies with studies is born, as a representation with limits of the

past is reconstructed in which the assimilation of new terms, particularly those that address patriarchal injustices silenced in the past, become the work now developed by playwrights such as Beatriz Cabur, fundamental for the visibility of women in the public sphere.

However, Lidia Falcón (Barrios, 2010: 87) and the *Club de Vindicación Feminista* -who orchestrate the *First International Exhibition of Feminist Theatre* (Madrid, 1989) (Gutiérrez Carbajo, 2014: 39) -are the forerunners of feminist Spanish dramaturgy. These authors, according to *Dones i Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1983), are " las únicas representaciones profesionales de teatro feminista en los 80s" (Barrios, 2010: 88).

Several generations of women playwrights coexist in contemporary plays written by women as a consequence of a "desembarco de autoras en el fenómeno de la escritura teatral" (Oliva, 2006: 55). From then on, women playwrights in Spain developed their work with an awareness of the challenges they confronted as women and a desire to overcome the discrimination they encountered in the theatre. Although gender issues were not particular to women playwrights or to the period, it was then that they gained visibility, as Virtudes Serrano (2006: 101) explains, so that feminism allowed them to create a discourse through which to express their concerns. Such a gender perspective facilitates the access of female playwrights to Spanish theatre, since unfortunately today, we are faced with the bleak figure that: "solo el 23% de las obras de teatro españolas que se representan están escritas por mujeres" (*Diana Luque in Asociación Clásicas y Modernas 4 July 2016*). From another point of view, the legitimisation of women's own inequality and under-representation in the face of a disproportionate male representation (in the words of Celia Amorós, 2005: 40), reflects an undeniable need to redefine gender identity, which, until now, had been delegated to a patriarchal society, according to Lola Blasco (Gutiérrez Carbajo, 2014: 142).

Similarly, the feminism addressed by Beatriz Cabur could be defined according to the words of Lidia Falcón as: " una ideología filosófica, un movimiento social y un programa político " (2014: 212), which makes visible global problems resulting from the world crisis and proposes the

legitimation of productions written by women for the achievement of a more equitable world, deriving into a universalist feminism (Valcárcel, 2006:13), that fights for equality.

### 2.1.3. Women in 21st century theatre in Spain: recovery of women's voices

Gender issues were always present in the theatre of the 21st century. However, it is only now that their problematisation is being enacted. There is an evident presence of women in the outstanding works of certain authors such as José Sanchis Sinisterra with *La máquina de abrazar* (2009), in which two women appear connected through their friendship and solidarity; from the nineties, *Perdida en los Apalaches* (1990), *Bienvenidas* (1993), *Valeria y los pájaros* (1995) or *El lector por horas* (1999). Likewise, Paco Bezerra places four women protagonists in *El señor que ama los dragones* (2013). Moreover, the presence of female characters in some of his 21st century works such as *Grooming* (2009), *Dentro de la tierra* (2008) or *El pequeño poni* (2016) is especially significant. Alfredo Sanzol stands out with *Delicadas* (2011) and with the great protagonist of *La respiración* (2017).

According to María Pilar Jódar Peinado, analysing the presence of female figures in these plays, three areas can be highlighted in which the presence of women is predominant: "la historia, el mundo del teatro (donde se puede incluir, el mundo del arte, en general) y la violencia" (2018: 618).

The inclusion of female characters in the plays is very important, as it prompts the emergence of a group of plays whose protagonists are actresses and playwrights expressing gender-related conflicts within theatrical professions. On the other hand, the emphasis their plays place on male violence generates a trend in early contemporary theatre that had already begun in the twentieth century.

Regarding the theme of violence, contemporary plays contain numerous manifestations: "abusos, torturas o xenofobia" (Jódar Peinado, 2018: 621) that are specifically enacted against women and girls. Works emerge from the last two decades of the twentieth century, which follow the line of feminists such as Lidia Falcón with *No moleste, calle y pague, señora*, from 1984, such as, for example, *Comisaría espacial para mujeres* (1994), by Alberto Miralles and *Solo para Paquita*

(1991), by Ernesto Caballero, who also writes *Sentido del deber* (2005), a work analysed by Javier Huerta Calvo (2009), as an example of violence against women. In fact, the study of misogynistic aggressions represents a predisposition in the theatre of the 21st century, which is nothing more than a continuation of the trend of the previous century, which deals with violence against women in its various manifestations represented in plays such as *Hamelin* (2005), by Juan Mayorga; *Juegos prohibidos* (2002), by Alberto Miralles; or *Terror y miseria en el primer franquismo* (2002), by José Sanchis Sinisterra, to mention but a few.

According to Pérez Rasilla (2012), emerging female playwrights collaborated with this trend. A certain critique of patriarchal male violence in contemporary Spanish theater reminds us of Lorca's rural dramas. In Spain, people have these works in mind, which is why references to these plays seem to be developed. When one speaks of violence on stage against women, in certain contexts, for instance, when discussing the code of honor and a whole series of motifs related to violence against women, one inevitably thinks of Lorca's works such as *Bodas de Sangre*, *Yerma* or *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*.

Playwrights such as Beatriz Cabur engage with this trend (Pérez Rasilla, 2012). The particularity of Cabur is that she focuses on violence against women by applying a feminist perspective, which renews this theme, placing it in the context of the present in which the demands of the feminist movement are taking place. There are actresses that exemplify this, such as in *La puta enamorada* (2000), by Chema Cardeña; *Bel la Bella* (2013), by Antonia Bueno; or *Proyecto Bruckner* (2010), by Laura Rubio Galletero. Analysing the nineties, to the previous examples we can add E.R. (1995), by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet; or *Interpretación* (1999), by María José Ragué-Arias. Concerning female playwrights, *Juicio a una dramaturga* (2004) and *Caidos del cielo* (2009), both by Paloma Pedrero; *Nefertiti y PIII* (2016), by Beatriz Cabur; or *Y yo sin enterarme* (2015), by Antonia Bueno, stand out.

#### 2.1.4. Feminism in contemporary theatre in Spain.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Spanish playwriting flourished thanks to the works of the playwrights of the 1990s, who continue to be active and serve as an essential reference for their peers, as well as the publication of female playwrights between the ages of thirty and fifty. It seems that the reticence continues with this new generation that we still dare not name, as Ana Fernández Valbuena, the current director of the *Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y la Música (INAEM)*, questions:

¿Tendrá finalmente un nombre propio esta corriente de escritura dramática de mujeres españolas que hoy tienen entre treinta y cincuenta años, y que ha reclamado el derecho a portarse "mal" y a hablar de ello sin juicios morales? ¿O cabría incluso hablar de una generación a nivel europeo? (Valbuena, 2018: 18).

The names of female playwrights found in this generation is very broad and varies depending on the studies analysed, although essentially, it is a generational group made up of Spanish playwrights born in the eighties and who achieved prestigious awards, premieres and publications, both nationally and internationally, starting in the first ten years of the 21st century. Likewise, considering the reference of these criteria, it would be fair to mention Lola Blasco, Laura Rubio, Diana Luque, María Velasco, Vanesa Sotelo, Inge Martín, Mar Gómez Glez Glez, Denise Despeyroux, Carolina África, Gracia Morales, Victoria Szpunberg, Marta Buchaca, Lucía Carballal or Blanca Doménech<sup>2</sup>.

This brief catalogue of female playwrights constitutes the innovative theatre of the early 21st century, which is composed of both male and female authors. This group is the successor of postmodern theatre; Pérez Rasilla (2012), Lola Blasco (2014), and Rodríguez-Solás (2018) refer to it as "nueva dramaturgia femenina". We can define this as a group of female playwrights with great heterogeneity in terms of their origins, training, and aesthetic questioning; some characteristics they share are the relevance of the word, "la necesidad de tratar con normalidad temas que se han

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<sup>2</sup> This unfinished list of Spanish women playwrights creating in the early twenty-first century has been compiled from the contributions of Luque (2014: 48-49) and Rodríguez- Solás (2018).



considerado obscenos y su defensa de actitudes políticas como las posiciones feministas" (Valbuena, 2018: 16), and "reflexión sobre la identidad, sobre la posición del sujeto en el mundo" (Valbuena, 2018: 17). David Rodríguez-Solás argues that this innovative women's theatre "potencialmente ha contribuido a la sensibilización de las desigualdades de género, visibilizadas en los recientes movimientos feministas (*Yo también; 8M*)" (Rodríguez-Solás, 2018). In fact, in the first decades of the 21st century, the analysis of dramaturgy written by women has evolved in light of their gender consciousness and feminism, as evidenced by the research of Gutiérrez Carbajo (2014: 11), Virtudes Serrano (2006: 97), Wilfried Floeck (2007: 110), and José Romera Castillo, who defends the struggle for equality and dignity as a characteristic of her plays:

Han surgido algunos sujetos femeninos, sobre todo, que han reflejado en sus textos o han puesto en escena o han sabido captar los mensajes, con un afán de resistencia y trasgresión, sobre la defensa de la igualdad, la dignidad y el respeto que como seres libres merecen (Romera Castillo, 2007: 23).

Feminism is a fundamental aspect of contemporary women playwrights, and they cultivate it consciously and militantly to define a uniquely feminine identity, as well as denouncing the violence perpetrated against women and girls and asserting their legitimacy in the theatre. Similarly, the major themes in Spanish drama written by women include the exclusion of women from the artistic and especially the theatrical world, the recovery of past and forgotten voices, sexist violence, and the normalisation of the feminine, particularly in terms of beauty standards, gender roles, and female sexuality. All these themes are evident in the works of Beatriz Cabur.

Gender concerns are updated to address specific issues such as inequality and women's absence from the public sphere. It is inclusive theatre because it does not seek to marginalise women by addressing issues that affect their fellow women, but rather to bring attention to issues that affect half of the population. The presence of feminist themes and motifs in productions written by women is reflected in experimental feminist theatre, both in the subject matter and in the dramatisation of issues affecting them, which inserts women playwrights into the general concerns of contemporary

theatre by employing violence and including female characters in their plays. According to César Oliva, the end of the twentieth century signalled the consolidation of Spanish theatre written by women:

El deseo de afirmar un papel hasta el momento extraño a su campo de acción, hizo que aparecieran numerosos textos creados por mujeres. De manera que los últimos años del siglo xx han servido para normalizar el desembarco de autoras en el fenómeno de la escritura teatral (Oliva, 2006: 55).

While it is acknowledged that there has been an increased presence of women authors in the theatrical landscape, it's important to approach the notion of 'normalising' their entry into the field with a critical lens. The implication that the desire to assert a role previously perceived as foreign to women's domain has led to numerous texts may oversimplify the motivations behind women's engagement in theatrical writing.

It's crucial to recognise that women's participation in playwriting is not merely a result of a desire to claim a role but is often driven by a broader societal shift towards recognising and valuing diverse voices. The evolving landscape of the late 20th century has seen an increased awareness of the importance of gender equality in various fields, including the arts. Women's contributions to theatrical writing should be understood not solely as a desire to fit into a predefined role but as a response to the need for diverse narratives that reflect the richness of human experience. Furthermore, the framing of women's involvement in theatre as 'normalising' can inadvertently perpetuate the idea that their participation was previously abnormal or exceptional. This framing may overshadow the long history of women's contributions to literature and theatre, reinforcing a narrative of 'otherness' that may not accurately reflect the complexities of women's roles in the cultural and artistic spheres.

In essence, while acknowledging the increasing presence of women authors in theatrical writing, it's important to be cautious about characterising this phenomenon as a simple desire to affirm a role. A more nuanced understanding considers the multifaceted motivations, societal changes, and

the ongoing evolution of perspectives that contribute to the diverse and dynamic landscape of contemporary theatre.

From the beginning of this renaissance of women's dramaturgy in Spain (Serrano, 2006: 101), women playwrights produced their works with the goal of eradicating the discrimination they experienced in this field. At the time, the contributions of Carmen Resino, Paloma Pedrero, and Lidia Falcón, among others, were crucial. They established the *Asociación de Dramaturgas* (1986), under the direction of Carmen Resino, and published Patricia W. O'Connor's anthology *Dramaturgas españolas de hoy, una introducción* (1988).

This surge of women-written theatre from the 1990s onwards is associated with a conscious feminism, a characteristic of the plays produced during this period that would not be out of place in contemporary feminist theatre.

Contemporary playwrights like Beatriz Cabur and Angélica Lidell display this self-recognition. According to the author Diana I. Luque, this awakening of women playwrights would result in their incorporation into the Spanish theatre: "La toma de conciencia sobre la tradicional discriminación de las mujeres en el ámbito dramático está acelerando y facilitando su incorporación al panorama teatral español" (Luque, 2014: 44). Moreover, Lola Blasco, awarded for her theatrical work with the Premio Nacional de Literatura Dramática 2016, admits the existence of a clear polemic on the part of women playwrights against patriarchal society: "Las dramaturgas están buscando la forma de definirse, combatiendo las imágenes que les vienen siendo impuestas por una sociedad y una cultura patriarcales" (Gutiérrez Carbajo, 2014: 141). The connection between the theatre of female playwrights and a feminism that enables them to develop a discourse through which they can express their concerns, as well as the practise of its propagation beyond the solely dramatic, is therefore evident. In this way, women's issues, such as the violence suffered by women and girls, along with other issues, such as the demand for equal opportunities and the advent of female references in the artistic world, are called into question.

According to Vanesa Sotelo, the imperative need to employ a feminist perspective contributes to addressing the concerns of women playwrights regarding the landscape of women in contemporary society (Sotelo qtd. in Gutiérrez Carbajo, 2014: 398). Gutiérrez Carbajo coined this linkage between feminism and theatre in the introduction to her anthology (ed., 2014). Apart from the struggles of contemporary feminism, they address global conflicts resulting from the world crisis: " El feminismo contiene en su ideología y en su práctica, la denuncia de todas las opresiones y la defensa de todos los oprimidos" (Falcón, 2014: 213). Similarly, women work together to create a more equitable world. Such feminism is universalist, since, according to the philosopher Amelia Valcárcel: " El feminismo es, por descontado y por su raíz ilustrada, un universalismo" (Valcárcel, 2006: 13). Valcárcel and Amorós agree with the notion of female underrepresentation because, according to the theory of the "cruel dinámica de las excepciones", a woman who gains access to a thinking elite will not liberate her equals, but will be treated as if she were the exception, a peculiarity:

El que una mujer goce de un talento excepcional la convierte en una excepción sobre todo a su sexo; sin embargo, precisamente por ser considerada una excepción, no obliga a variar el escaso aprecio que se tenga del talento del sexo femenino en su conjunto (Simone de Beauvoir qtd. in Valcárcel, 2009: 31).

In order to capture the challenges women confront in a globalised society, I have examined feminist themes in four 21st century plays by Beatriz Cabur, which have received national and international acclaim. These plays examine the commitment to the modern context. This analysis does not include all of Beatriz Cabur's plays because this chapter seeks to construct thematic lines from which to explore the feminisms that are both ignored and acknowledged in contemporary Spanish theatre.

#### 2.1.5. Telepresence and contemporary Spanish theatre

In 2008 Abuín González published an essay on theatre and its connection with the digital world, explaining that we still live in "una época de incunabilidad electrónica, en la que echamos mano de

lo conocido para nombrar lo nuevo: las nuevas tecnologías, como antes el cine de los orígenes o la televisión, se anclan en la idea de teatro" (2008: 47). Despite the fact that more than ten years have passed since his statements on cyber-performance, the author's words continue to reflect the distancing caused by binary language in dramaturgical practice: while the awareness of witnessing an instant of passage, of transformation, was normalised, the time that separates the study from the current situation in terms of computer advances shows differences in the temporality of this progress: it is known that digital time does not correlate with the time of art, given that the rate of ageing of a written edition differs greatly from that of the obsolescence of digital instruments.

When we refer to the relationship between dramaturgy and technology, one aspect that usually raises controversy among critics is liveness, that is, live performance (Abuín González 2008: 33-37); indeed, dramatic art presupposes performance in front of an audience, however, in the current technological era, the question is complicated by the fact that, likewise, the central elements of the scene cease to be humans, both actors and audience, and become composed of a set of variants: digital and real actors collaborate in the scenography as well as specific or the consequence of a virtual language work. However, the diverse nature of theatrical elements allows for a performance that cannot always be considered as belonging to the theatrical genre.

Cabur states: "Siendo más concreta, todo empezó en el posterior análisis del uso de cámaras de vídeo y proyectores en la primera escena que tiene lugar entre Hamlet, Rosencrantz y Guildenstern" (Cabur, 2016: 76). This theatrical resource represents the seed of what we now call telepresence, however, it could not be conceptualised in a more developed way due to the limitations of the time, as it was 1997. There are various contexts, theatrical discourses or stagings, depending on the message to be communicated, in which telepresence can be used in text-based theatre. Through her theatrical experimentation, Cabur states: "Como dramaturga y directora de escena he experimentado con estos discursos dramáticos en once espectáculos y los resultados no pueden haber sido más diversos" (Cabur, 2015: 81).

The fundamental message conveyed using telepresence in a theatrical production is a declaration of intent that positions the responsible ensemble as experimental, with all the pressure that such a label entails. On the other hand, two very different situations occur in the staging; depending on whether the playwright has created the text considering telepresence as an integrating element of a scene or of the play and this is explicitly specified, or whether she uses telepresence as an option or product of a play created thanks to devised theatre.

Cabur defends the innovative stage genre of telepresence based on text theatre now, beginning with a pre-established structure and characterised using video cameras or projectors on stage, live actors, open communication with the audience, and coexisting visual and sound elements (Cabur, 2015b: 84). Similarly, the director attempts to develop new languages that accommodate her artistic interests. Cabur has written or directed over 40 plays that have been performed in Spain, the United States, Austria, Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. In 2012, she was invited to New York by the theatre directors' group "The Internationalists" to advance her career abroad. Her work positions her as the director of projects to internationalise dramaturgical work, such as the New International Theatre Experience -NITEcorp (USA) and NITEcic (UK)-, which allows access to certain projects while helping to remove the obstacles faced by dramaturgical associations (Cabur, June 2015); as well as the international dramaturgical journal *TheTheatreTimes.com*, which she founded in 2015 and directed until 2018.

In addition to the digital spectacle and historical and social concerns that characterise Cabur's theatre, she also involves the audience in some of her works in which the audience's participation, physically or virtually, is fundamental, as in *Lil' Bird* (2018), a play created for Facebook Live in which the protagonist addresses an online audience. The *Mind-boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), in which the audience is requested to collaborate based on the symposium OXYTOCIN, Birthing the world, in which the audience becomes the experimental subject of a group hypnosis, is also noteworthy. The only character in the play is a magician who hypnotises the collective into a state of vulnerability, helplessness, and extreme humiliation comparable to that felt by women who have been

victims of obstetric violence. The particularity of this play is that the audience was formed by medical professionals, doctors, nurses and midwives and the author is portrayed as part of the *dramatis personae*. In this way, Cabur's intention onstage was to make these professionals experience and understand the trauma women went through when they went to their working space in a vulnerable state, that is, the hospital. The level of discomfort they experience while watching the play can awake their empathy and understanding while thinking about the suffering of women who went to their hospitals asking for help and support and were diminished or treated in a inhumane ways, experiencing obstetric violence, such as diminishment, infantilization or severe aggressive and unnecessary surgical techniques.

As in the 2015 play *Nefertiti y PIII*, the audience is fictionalised and metatheatrical procedures emerge, as do characters related to the theatrical world, such as an Author or an Actor. This Meta theatricality is extrapolated to feminist reclamation in these plays, as well as in *The Mind-boggling Shrinking Woman*.

In the play *Nefertiti y PIII*, which was performed in Madrid's Sala Berlanga on October 8, 2015 (<http://www.beatrizcabur.com/nefertiti-pii/>) and is part of the European project directed by the same director, *365 Women a Year*, Cabur chooses the historical figures of Nefertiti of Egypt and Joan Fletcher, a British archaeologist. In the work, the author is portrayed as a *dramatis personae*, developing a Pirandellian vindication with the character who attempts to produce a theatrical piece in *El horizonte del sol* in which the character of Nefertiti is recovered due to her 20th-century discoverer: "Responsable y ejecutora de la primera revolución religiosa de la historia y condenada a ser un mero busto admirable en un museo. Reducida a la narrativa masculina. El mayor mérito de la mujer es la belleza. Qué ignominia" (Cabur, 2016:43).

Her story is about a woman who defies the patriarchal oppressions of the time, making it too subversive to be told without censorship. According to Cabur: "Esa historia no se puede contar ni tres mil años más tarde. Tuviste más poder ejecutivo del que tuvo ningún hombre en tu época, eso no se puede contar. Tú gobernaste como hombre. No siguiendo las normas del Club" (Cabur, 2016: 44).

The Woman in the Shadow, who rejects the embodiment of the role of Joan Fletcher, fearing and mistrusting the vengeance of the Men's Club, who are envious of the great archaeological discovery, the incontrovertible recognition of her worth that she became a part of history due to her beauty: "Nefertiti. A pesar de haber sido precursora y responsable de la primera revolución histórica religiosa, sufrió la reducción de la narrativa masculina: El mayor mérito de la mujer es la belleza. Qué ignominia" (Cabur, 2016: 43). Through the use of experimental language, Cabur's theatrical production reflects chaotic worlds in order to illustrate the threat of censorship and absolutisms that appear to be concealed in a country that trades security for the freedom of its citizens. Therefore, Beatriz Cabur's dramaturgy generates an experimental demand that is continuously repeated alongside social vindication.

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which the audience is requested to collaborate based on the symposium *OXYTOCIN, Birthing the world*, in which the audience becomes the experimental subject of a group hypnosis, is also noteworthy. The only character in the play is a magician who hypnotises the collective into a state of vulnerability, helplessness, and extreme humiliation comparable to that felt by women who have been victims of obstetric violence. The particularity of this play is that the audience was formed by medical professionals, doctors, nurses and midwives and the author is portrayed as part of the *dramatis personae*. In this way, Cabur's intention onstage was to make these professionals experience and understand the trauma women went through when they went to their working space in a vulnerable state, that is, the hospital. The level of discomfort they experience while watching the play can awake their empathy and understanding while thinking about the suffering of women who went to their hospitals asking for help and support and were diminished or treated in a inhumane ways, experiencing obstetric violence, such as diminishment, infantilization or severe aggressive and unnecessary surgical techniques.

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The audience becomes participants in the theatrical experience as a result of the transcreation of their experience. In this fashion, technology is integrated into the performance. Cabur's choice of a theatrical format is entwined with the obvious need for denunciation. Telepresence is a part of the actual experience, so Cabur attempts to depict reality as it occurs. The participation of the audience in *Childbirth 19* occurs via an email containing instructions; thus, the experience of telepresence theatre begins beforehand.

## 2.2. Beatriz Cabur, a playwright who transcends geographical and generational boundaries

### 2.2.1. Introduction

In the latter decades of the twenty-first century, a growing interest in legitimising contemporary Spanish female playwrights is evident in the context of modern feminist theories. In this chapter, I analyse her plays *Nefertiti and PIII* (2015), *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2016), *The Mind-Blowing Shrinking Woman* (2017), *Goodbye Mother* (2020), and *Childbirth-19* (2021) to examine Beatriz Cabur's theatrical practise. From a feminist standpoint, I will analyse Beatriz Cabur's published and performed plays in Spain and the United Kingdom, and the United States insofar as they respond to contemporary feminist demands. Cabur's dramaturgy defines the characteristics that a play must possess in order to be classified within the genre of contemporary experimental theatre through numerous practical examples addressing the experimental aspect of contemporary theatre. Specifically, Cabur experiments in a very particular field – especially for women – that is, new technologies applied to dramatic writing. In this chapter, I also discuss the need for appropriate critical and analytic models for the study of theatrical experimentalism, which, in addition to their academic value, will unquestionably contribute to the development of theatre towards the fulfilment of contemporary feminist demands.

*Nefertiti and PIII* (2015) discusses workplace power abuses and patriarchal submission. *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2016), written a year later, discusses abortion, reproductive rights, and the father-daughter relationship. In addition to alluding to women's reproductive rights, *The Mind-Blowing Shrinking Women* (2017) discusses obstetric violence and the postpartum depression caused by this form of violence. *Goodbye Mother* (2020) addresses domestic violence and the support system that perpetuates it. Lastly, *Childbirth-19* (2021) addresses the systemic racism, oppression, and obstetric violence that women continue to face in the present day. The theme of patriarchal submission manifests itself in every play through the various forms of violence that women endure.

In this way, the patriarchy's misogynistic power relations and the system that supports these forms of violence become evident.

In this section, I have identified feminist experimental elements in Cabur's plays to illustrate the challenges women face in today's globalised society. In a patriarchal society, the use of innovative dramaturgical practises breaks with tradition to acquire new solutions and offer new opportunities to the problems that women continue to face. In her work with artistic theatre, Cabur is devoted to the immediate context and artistic inquiry. This chapter establishes distinct thematic connections from which one can delve into the implicit and explicit feminisms of contemporary Spanish theatre, as well as the formation, development, and legitimisation of contemporary women's identities.

### 2.2.2. Beatriz Cabur

Beatriz Cabur, a Spanish playwright, and theatre director based in London, Beatriz Cabur is a director, playwright, producer, and promoter of numerous theatrical, technological, and transmedia writing projects. Founder of *La Liga de las Mujeres Profesionales del Teatro*, the Spanish division of The League of Professional Theatre Women, along with playwrights Yolanda Dorado, Inge Martín, and theatre editor Conchita Piña; she also chaired the project *365 Women a Year in Europe*, which encourages the production of dramatic texts to reclaim and legitimise women from history:

En cada edición hay dramaturgas del mundo escribiendo 365 obras sobre mujeres reales de la historia. Con esto se consiguen tres cosas: darles oportunidades a las dramaturgas dentro de un proyecto que tiene repercusión internacional, volver a escribir a las mujeres de la historia o escribirlas por primera vez y, en tercer lugar, darles a las actrices papeles interesantes, protagonistas que no sean la madre de, la novia de... (Reig González, 2017).

More than forty of Cabur's plays have been produced in numerous countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Italy, Austria, and Spain, where she graduated from *RESAD* in 2000 with a degree in Stage Direction and Playwriting. The playwright also possesses a Master of Arts in Audiovisual Communication from the *Universidad Complutense* in Madrid. She has delivered

numerous lectures, interviews, and courses in Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Lithuania, Turkey, and online, in addition to publishing a study on *Telepresence in Theatre* at the *University of Salamanca* and numerous contributions to books and publications, both in the US and Spain.

Since 2012, her international output has increased in tandem with his digital theatre career; she began experimenting with digital formats and pioneering digital works for *Zoom*, *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Skype*, *Twitter*, and *Twitch* prior to the COVID pandemic. Cabur has promoted all these technologies as fundamental support to continue facilitating public access to all facets of the Performing Arts. She was also the founder and first president of the *League of Professional Theatre Women* in Spain, the founder and director of the world's largest theatre news website, *TheTheatreTimes.com*. Beatriz Cabur's professional responsibilities also include delivering insightful lectures on the Performing Arts.

All the women working on Cabur's initiatives share a commitment to feminism. Together, they are viewed as champions on a common ground, whose mission is to liberate women from oppression and hardships they encounter on their journeys. The fact that women creators confront this struggle alone is an example of an obstacle they face. Not only do they feel alone, but they also perceive themselves to be alone. This aspect of solitude can be observed in Cabur's characters, as she explains at a conference for professors:

15 años de escritura profesional me costó darme cuenta de que no lo están. De que no lo estamos. Es parte de la lucha darse cuenta de que no lo estamos, de que tenemos un enemigo común y somos aliadas. Es parte de la lucha darse cuenta de que si gana otra también estoy ganando yo y que desbrozar el camino, por muchísimo que cueste, merece la pena porque deja el camino un poco más desbrozado para la siguiente. Y para nuestras y nuestros adolescentes, creo que nuestro trabajo es enseñarles su poder y su responsabilidad. Descubrirlos será su fortaleza. No podemos descartar el efecto que tuvo pasar por la universidad en mi obra sin

recapacitar en ello. Tomemos nota. Revisemos los contenidos que impartimos en las aulas. El efecto de ese contenido en las alumnas y en los alumnos es inmediato. Es nuestro poder y nuestra responsabilidad abrir puertas no cerrar posibilidades (Cabur, 2021, n.p.).

Beatriz Cabur admits that when she graduated from university after four years, she had written eight plays in which every main character was male. The author explains that she was unable to make a conscious decision because creating male characters as protagonists was a systemic choice, which is evidence of the androcentric perspective she was taught in university. She believes that the time has come to address internalised misogyny: "La misoginia internalizada es la internalización involuntaria de los mensajes sexistas presentes en nuestra sociedad y cultura" (Cabur, 2021, n.p.). After analysing all the great figures of universal theatre, including their great protagonists and directors, Cabur penned eight plays for and about them (men). She adds that it took her six years to be able to write *Erika Adler*, a female protagonist (Cabur, 2021, n.p.).

In 2013, Cabur's work received public recognition. She has had her work presented in New York seven times, where she was nominated for an international membership in *The League of Professional Theatre Women*. Geena Davis, actress and founder of the *Institute for Gender Equality* in Hollywood, was quoted in an article that changed the course of Cabur's career. Geena inspired Cabur to reconsider her power and responsibility as an artist after she read her article. After reading it Cabur said: "Mi poder y mi responsabilidad. Si yo lo escribo, pasa. ¿Cómo no lo voy a escribir?" After becoming a member of The League in New York and understanding her power and responsibility, the director founded *The League of Professional Theatre Women in Spain* and helped establish the *365 Women a Year Project* in Europe, and thus pursued her artistic mission's focus on helping to create opportunities for women and increase their representation and visibility and that of their work.

Even though most of her plays are written in English, Cabur is situated in a feminist context marked by her concern for issues of social justice, which places her in relation to her Spanish contemporaries. She also defends a new dramaturgy based on the possibilities presented by digital

theatre, which places her in an experimental context. All these characteristics of her theatrical production exempt her from any generational designations. According to Beatriz Cabur herself, she identifies more closely with the *Erasmus Generation*<sup>3</sup>, as travel as a way of life and openness to internationality are the characteristics that define her most.

Several specific characteristics of Beatriz Cabur's production make her theatre especially disruptive. First, there is the Agency's theatrical productions that centre women and their concerns. Moreover, Cabur experiments with language by incorporating bilingualism into her performances. She is also deeply committed to social justice, especially in regard to violence against women, such as obstetric violence and femicide. Moreover, Cabur's experimentalism transcends traditional theatrical genres, as she employs the cutting-edge stage genre of digital theatre to give voice to the victims and perpetrators of this form of violence. Beatriz Cabur places women at the centre of her works; there is an ongoing recovery of female voices in which the normalisation of the feminine is vindicated through the incorporation of female characters.

### 2.2.3. The Agency Theatre

Cabur presents the hypothesis regarding the authority and duty of artistic creators in the production of discourse and history through writing and instruction. How can this practise contribute to the construction of a more egalitarian world? Consequently, addressing the veracity of women, who they truly are and what problems they face, becomes the central axis of her work. In the same way that women occupy a place, they should occupy a place in fiction and official educational narratives, promoting a process of normalisation that is displayed to society by breaking with the anomaly of their portrayal. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the concept of Agency refers to “the

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<sup>3</sup> Arianna Fernández Grossocordón (2014) -who claims to have taken Beatriz Cabur into account in her study (Fernández Grossocordón, 2014: 81, note 1)- is the precursor of the term Erasmus Generation and despite alluding to the popular *Erasmus* scholarship programme, she does not refer to the fact that the playwriting professionals analysed by the researcher have been beneficiaries of them, rather Fernández focuses on a need to satisfy a certain artistic curiosity by going abroad, given the impossibility in Spain at the time, a situation that happened to Beatriz Cabur.

capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power”. In her plays, Beatriz Cabur investigates *Theatre of Agency* as an individual's capacity to act autonomously in the world and make their own decisions. As stated in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

agency is virtually everywhere. Whenever entities enter into causal relationships, they can be said to act on each other and interact with each other, bringing about changes in each other. In this very broad sense, it is possible to identify agents and agency, and patients and patiency, virtually everywhere. Usually, though, the term ‘agency’ is used in a much narrower sense to denote the performance of intentional actions (Schlosser, 2019).

There are influential factors, including social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability, customs, etc., that determine or restrict the agents, women, and their decisions. In an interview with *Godot* magazine, Beatriz Cabur describes the following characteristics of this theatre:

Las líneas que separan personajes y actores no están definidas en todo momento. A veces, la audiencia no sabe si el cuerpo que se dirige a ellos es una persona real o un personaje. Es común que los actores entren y salgan del personaje a lo largo de la obra y que la cuarta pared se rompa constantemente. Es un teatro posmoderno en el sentido de que puede haber una historia, o varias, pero no importa y hasta se puede dejar inconclusa (Cabur, 2021. *n.p.*).

Agency Theatre is postmodern because there may be a story or multiple storylines, but this is irrelevant, so the play may be unfinished. The significance of the play rests in the characters' or actors' emotional repercussions and their journey from oppression to reclaiming their agency and power. Other elements of her theatre of agency include the constant breaking of the fourth wall and the raw quality of her plays, which capture the excruciatingly truth so that there is strength in this vulnerability:

Hay rabia contra la sociedad. Hay una sensación de campo de batalla, de guerra. El mayor conflicto. La urgencia más imperiosa. Es un teatro que también se preocupa por los sentimientos de la audiencia abiertamente. Es un teatro sobre sanación e inclusión, que por extensión al viaje de los personajes o directamente interpelando y estableciendo una relación

con el público, también otorga agencia y poder a personas, grupos y comunidades oprimidas (Cabur, 2021. n.p.).<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, otherness, marginalised and oppressed groups and communities are given agency and power. It is the theatre of those who act in the face of injustice and the urgent need for change, and who, despite having other options for communicating their message, choose to do so through theatre. Therefore, theatre functions as a tool for social justice, working towards change in a context that restricts the freedoms and requirements of individuals.

It is evident that Cabur's Agency theatre is founded on women's dramaturgy because the central element is not the hero's journey but rather the emotional repercussions on the characters of the people on stage, as well as the bridge that connects oppression to the recovery of their agency and power. In agency theatre, a truthful territory is formed: “Es parte de la lucha darse cuenta de que si gana otra también estoy ganando yo y que desbrozar el camino, por muchísimo que cueste, merece la pena porque deja el camino un poco más desbrozado para la siguiente” (Cabur, 2021. n.p.).<sup>5</sup>

In the section that follows, I will discuss the three fundamental pillars of Beatriz Cabur's Theatre of Agency: the distance between reality and fiction, the continuous breaching of the fourth wall, and the justification of an alienating and violent social state.

#### 2.2.4. The distance between reality and fiction

The audience is essential to this endeavour to conceive of a living dramaturgy, particularly because their participation and collaboration are required and demanded. *Childbirth 19* is a brand-new digital theatre production created specifically for digital performance. The play depicts delivery in the year of the pandemic and explores how systemic trauma defines pregnancy and labour. Harmful childbirth practises and misconduct have increased, particularly during coronavirus procedures, thereby ignoring women's requirements and rights. The drama is based on true events and its principles adhere

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<sup>4</sup> This text is unpublished and provided for reference purposes only.

<sup>5</sup> Ídem.



to those of Agency's theatre. Virtuality, on the other hand, generates a distance between the real and the fictitious, as dictated by the artistic rule that the more illusion of reality one attempts to create, the greater the distance created from the frame of reference. Therefore, metatheatrical techniques such as breaking the fourth wall emphasise the fictional artefact nature of what we are seeing. This distance is manifested, firstly, in the mismatch between the protagonist Shani's desires and her actual experience of childbirth, in which she begins to live an unpleasant experience for which she is unprepared; secondly, in the final scene, Shani must do her best to maintain the interest of the public, her youtube channel subscribers - the source that will bring her financial gain - while concealing her trauma as a victim of the obstetric and institutionalist system. She must also justify the subject shift she will implement on her channel, which is commercial: "So today, instead of unpacking anything, I just want to talk about some things that have happened after having my gorgeous little baby girl (Cabur, 2021: 18).

This discrepancy between reality and fiction, between her dreams and real-life experiences, is evident in the moments when she expresses her trauma through direct claims about a system that neglects people. These outbursts are promptly replaced with a repeating mantra: "Life is a gift" (Cabur, 2021: 17, 22), whose magical power is confirmed at the end: "I'll go back to my usual joyful social self in my next video, do you know why? Because I have zero traumas after this. Zero mental health issues. Zero postpartum anxiety. Zero. Zero. Zero. If I keep repeating it, it will become true. Z E R O. I'm perfect". (Cabur, 2021: 22). However, her effort to feign naturalness and lack of trauma is indirectly proportional to her awareness of how this event, which the audience has witnessed and which she has lived in the two preceding scenes, has left her with excruciating scars.

Cabur states, "The fourth wall is constantly broken," particularly in *Childbirth-19*, where it is an integral part of the work as it seeks the provocation and active participation of the audience, the purpose of the work, which serves as the active resource of vindication against oppression. This phenomenon occurs repeatedly in the final scene when the protagonist asks her viewers to comment on her videos or subscribe to her channel. First, she poses a direct query to her audience: "What are

you guys doing? How are you doing? Is any of you going through something similar? I know I am not the only one. Please, let me know in the comments below. This is a safe sharing space. Ok?" (Cabur, 2021: 21). Shani begs her female audience not to abandon her:

I know. I know. These are way too many issues to talk about in just one little video, moment, conversation, even in a whole lifetime. Whatever. I know that this might be overwhelming for you, my dear watchers, it is just too much. Too much. I don't want you to unsubscribe from my channel because all of a sudden, I'm not fun anymore or I have become even political about some stuff. Me, political, right? (Cabur, 2021: 21).

Shani sounds ironical, as if she were the furthest away from a political being ever. While she struggles not to express the trauma that has destroyed her chances of becoming the mother she desires, her anguish is evident in her final plea for prayers and engagement with the video to gain more subscribers: "Pray for this to end as soon as possible. Thoughts and prayers, right? Thank you, guys. Don't forget to like, share and subscribe to everything. (Pointing at places around her). Here, here and here" (Cabur, 2021: 22). During these disruptive moments of our protagonist's story, which represent a direct interpellation to the audience members fictionalised in Shani's spectators, the fictional nature of the theatrical construct we are able to observe becomes apparent.

## 2.2.5. Main issues

### 2.2.5.1. The claim against a violent and alienating social state

The social state and the rule of law must work towards the achievement of the common welfare, as well as the security and protection of people, so that the government provides certain guarantees so that citizens can rely on their rights. In times of crisis like the present, when little commitment to the state's former meaning is evident, such a state does not act in this manner. First, the character of the Voice in *Childbirth-19* vindicates the excesses that our protagonist endures when she is not asked about the procedures performed on her own body. It also illustrates how women lose control over

their bodies during childbirth, becoming objects of a healthcare system that attempts to facilitate the cases it must attend to and resolve. From a different perspective, the distancing between the real and the fictional works due to meta-theatricality as a claim of the great bureaucratisation of the system during covid, demonstrating the mismatch between what should be done or should be and what is done or is.

April, the daughter of the protagonist, is four months old, and during this time, Shani does not have had access to medical consultations, the right to monitor her daughter's growth and development, or the ability to complete her immunisation schedule. The conflict arises after she is unable to register her four-month-late daughter in the birth registry. If she is not on the registration list, she has no health coverage, so when she falls ill, there is no way to get a paediatric visit, which causes Shani great exasperation and frustration: "That's when I lost it, guys, I cried my eyes out because I couldn't stop myself from imagining what could have happened, what could still happen if there is a next time, what is happening to other babies who are not as lucky as April " (Cabur, 2021: 20).

Along with the description of the newborn's lack of medical care, there are some reflections on her audience - her subscribers. This woman with a YouTube channel for unboxing realises that the system has deceived her. First, the system makes her believe that if she obeys and follows all the recommendations, medical tests, preparatory classes, etc., the moment of birth will be enjoyable and joyful because everything is ready: "I won't have any issues with the listening to me if we go with my perfect birth plan and all my homework done" (Cabur, 2021: 5). However, when she arrives at the hospital, she discovers that not only are her desires and needs disregarded, but she is also subjected to exceedingly painful mistreatment and abuse.

The current health situation has exposed the defects of a social protection system with numerous deficiencies, resulting in the exclusion of many individuals. The problem is exacerbated

by the fact that, rather than being addressed, it is becoming increasingly bureaucratized, making it even more difficult for citizens to access the security of institutions that they themselves fund.

#### 2.2.5.2. Violence against women

The current feminist concern regarding violence against women is a topic explored by Spanish female playwrights with the intention of appealing to and raising social awareness. In the analysed plays, instances of violence against women are depicted and resolved by disclosing the violent actions women endure. This violence is analysed alongside its causes, which reveal the pervasive presence of misogyny in a patriarchal society where women are subjected to violence simply for existing.

Contemporary dramaturgy features crude depictions of violence, as well as the investigation of its origins, such as the pervasive misogyny in our society, which manifests itself in more subtle threats such as street harassment. Considering "dramaturgical innovations of the digital age connected to relevant histories of theatre-making, issues of politicized form and content, and the technologies and (trans-)cultural contingencies of artistic expression" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 160), their use disrupts traditional theatre, allowing for the elimination of violence against women. Alongside the acknowledgment of violence against women, Beatriz Cabur emphasises the analysis of its causes and the accusation against institutions that are ill-equipped to assist victims. As I demonstrate in a selection of Cabur's works, the governing bodies responsible for the care of women's lives lack empathy.

In patriarchal discourse, a culture of violence is established, which promotes the trivialization and perpetuation of male violence through victim blaming. According to Duška Radosavljevic:

I trust it is now safe to assume that claims of paradigm shifts in the field of theatre and performance are no longer to be viewed in such categorical terms, but rather in terms of how dramaturgical strategies may be changing in tandem with technological advancements (2023:166).

Concerning the impact of mediatisation on text-based dramaturgy, Seda Ilter (2021) has demonstrated that technological advancements provide a foundation for the possibility of paradigmatic considerations of dramatic theatre itself. In conclusion, it is the responsibility of humanities research to seek "paradigm challenges" (Sterne, 2011: 220).

David Roesner provides a rebuttal to the concept of a paradigm in his concept of the "dispositif," which allows for the possibility of multiple overlapping, coexisting, and interacting perspectives (Roesner, 2014: 11). This is an appropriate suggestion for theatre and performance, which is always connected to multiple research fields of study and forms of artistic expression: "Whether or not the work under consideration constitutes a paradigm is of less importance than its capacity to be effectively analysed as a 'field' or even a scene. Nevertheless, multiplicity is crucial in terms of "oral dramaturgies and the theatre of speech and sound" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 166).

As a result of the system's inability to stop this type of violence, the victims are compelled to employ alternative survival strategies. Cabur constructs metafictional characters who address their message to the audience by breaking the fourth wall, thereby traversing the fictional boundaries to allow audience participation and transform them into active, collaborative subjects. I will then examine the trivialization of women's suffering and feminicides in the plays of Beatriz Cabur. To contribute to the visibility, identification, and eradication of violence against women, Cabur addresses a variety of problems women face in the present day.

### 2.2.5.3. Obstetric violence

Obstetric violence is one of the central themes of *Childbirth 19*, which refers to the set of behaviours that, carried out by health professionals, directly affect the body and reproductive rights of pregnant women, such as dehumanising treatment, lack of respect, unjustified medicalisation or the pathologisation of processes that are logical and natural"<sup>6</sup>. In the second scene of the play, Shani is horrified by this type of violence:

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<sup>6</sup> See: Andrea Canales Cuesta, <https://amecpress.net/El-derecho-a-parir-sin-violencia>.

I get an epidural. Finally.

Already?

Why is it so painful? Uh.

I don't remember being asked for consent for that pain. (Cabur, 2021: 10).

Similarly, the imposition of covid protocols exacerbates this aggravation, so that desensitisation, expropriation, and lack of control over the bodies and decisions of expectant women are all-consuming. Shani's stability is so severely compromised in this circumstance that it is the character of the Voice who demonstrates the discrimination against the woman's body, which continues to be mistreated, scrutinised, and injured: "Voice.- But still she gets assessed, and again, and again. Hurting her. Why? No respect for her body. No respect for her emotions " (Cabur, 2021: 10). In the second scene, at the time of childbirth, our protagonist becomes a mere body utilised for the benefit of the medical staff: "Voice.- She's asking for things she's not getting. / Asking again. / Not getting them. / Getting things she doesn't want. [...] But she's getting all of that. In vein " (Cabur, 2021: 12), which evidences the fact that hyper medicalisation is also apparent.

Shani's lack of control or connection with her own body is such that she is oblivious to the fact that she has given birth and must therefore confirm that her daughter has been born: "Is it out?" (Cabur, 2021: 13). During such a vulnerable time as labour, it is evident that the woman has no support or explanations for what is occurring around her and to her own body. Obstetric violence is also present in the play *The Mind-boggling Shrinking Woman*, in which The Magician describes how a woman used to be a pacifist prior to the trauma, but now the trauma manifests through her "fights" with people, "the wrong people to fight". The woman must deal with the pain she endured during childbirth, which has transformed her into an apathetic individual with a great deal of inner rage as a result of her vulnerability during the obstetric violence she endured:

You are a pacifist and these are the wrong people to fight. You can't fight the ones who made you shrunk. The giants.[...]All those doctors. Those nurses. Those midwives. The giants. I

know they stepped on you a million times. I know they are the ones who shrank you. But you cannot fight them. You will never win (Cabur, 2017: 4).

At this moment in the play, she is becoming angry with random people she encounters, but her anger is actually directed at "the giants" who caused her to feel insignificant in the present.

The play demonstrates how the mother's symptoms are the result of postpartum depression brought on by the traumatic effects of the obstetric violence she endures during childbirth. Thus, it is recognised that she is a victim of a type of systemic violence and that she cannot fight alone against a system, just as many women continue to suffer this type of violence in a system that disregards and minimises women's suffering.

#### 2.2.5.4. The trivialization of female pain

In her play *Childbirth-19*, Beatriz Cabur questions the complacent attitude towards women's pain and the paradox represented by the attribution of frailty and vulnerability to the female sex when it is accepted that women must conceal their pain: "Disbelieving and delegitimizing female pain is a form of oppression. Caroline Reilly"<sup>7</sup>. The protagonist is so disconnected from her pain and bodily sensations during pregnancy that she queries whether she is truly about to give birth and whether she should go to the hospital: "We can go again. Isn't this it?" (Cabur, 2021: 2). She had tried to go twice before and been rejected by the medical staff because it was not the appropriate time, so when she goes into labour she cannot rely on her own judgement: "What is the labour? Just the pushing moment or what? [...] What's labour?" (Cabur, 2021: 3). In fact, there is a reference to group therapy with other mothers in *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman*. When the woman expresses her pain, the therapist trivialises it by saying that it will pass, that it may change, which makes her even more sceptical about her potential improvement:

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<sup>7</sup> Beatriz Cabur opens her play *Childbirth-19* with Caroline Reilly's words regarding the dangers of disbelieving female pain. See: <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/it%E2%80%99s-all-your-head-dangers-disbelieving-female-pain-hearken>.

You are in a therapy session with other moms. The therapist says: “This will pass, this can change” and you reply “sure, this can change to worse”. The other moms laugh, and you apologize feeling absolutely right. That’s something you do a lot lately, apologizing. Weirdly (Cabur, 2017: 5).

When she again expresses her lack of hope about her own life improving, the other mothers laugh, thus trivialising the painful emotions she is experiencing. This situation is further evidence of how women's pain is often trivialised due to the internationalisation of misogyny, which infantilises women and invalidates them. Her invalidity is demonstrated by the fact that she apologises for expressing her pain, aware that it is rare for someone to apologise for not feeling well, for being ill, or, in short, for not playing the role of the ideal woman. In response to the trivialization of women's suffering, Cabur urges its legitimization:

Female pain exists in a crossroad of stigma, disbelief, and misogyny. The same world that tells us to be female is to be weak and fragile expects us to understand that to be female is also to grind our teeth through pain. We are expected to buck up and shut up about our discomfort, so we don't embarrass the same people who have the audacity to tell us our bodies are embarrassing. Female pain must be regarded as legitimate. It is more than important that we talk about our health free from stigma or embarrassment. It is necessary. Because disbelieving and delegitimizing female pain is a form of oppression. Caroline Reilly (Cabur, 2017: np).

Caroline Reilly's words remind the audience of the urgent need to recognise the silenced pain of women, as ignoring it and making it invisible is a form of oppression, i.e. the delegitimization of women's pain is a form of violence and thus contributes to the perpetuation of violence against women. The entire work derives its meaning from this concept, as Cabur's intention is to highlight the reality of violence against women, highlighting the fact that ignoring this problem leads to the greatest catastrophe, i.e. the murders of women or femicides.



Throughout the play, the Magician speaks to a woman who questions her sanity and who feels ignored, powerless, and helpless in the face of a system that has failed her and continues to trivialise her suffering. Particularly, there is a scene in which the Magician's voice describes how there appears to be no time or space for the person she has become following her violent delivery. When the mother conveys this feeling of being diminished and weakened, she is told, " It will pass, they say. It will pass. But this is now " (Cabur, 2017: 5). This demonstrates that neither this woman nor the pain she claims to experience are regarded seriously. Not only is her suffering not acknowledged, but the mother is infantilised with inappropriate laughter in response to the postpartum anxiety symptoms she expresses in the group. In this manner, no solutions are sought for her pain; rather, it is understood that she is the one who must endure and continue to suffer the pain, in silence and while requesting forgiveness for making her uncomfortable by displaying the image of a woman who is far from perfect and reveals her vulnerabilities in order to find solutions that are never offered by the group. In a similar manner, the system employs violence that devalues women.

In *Goodbye Mother*, Cabur's experimental dimension in relation to female suffering is the acknowledgment of it through a message explicitly addressed to the victim and, by extension, to all victims, women who were unable and/or unable to express their suffering:

If you've been under attack, you know what I am talking about, and I am sorry for you, I am so sorry it also happened to you. Hear me, sister. It doesn't matter if it happened once or a hundred times. It was never your fault. We know what we've been through. We know. We know that seeing the true face of a monster is the scariest shit that'll ever happen to anyone (Cabur, 2020: 1).

Cabur acknowledges victims of violence against women through the disruption associated with the vocative "sister" as a way of embodying the sisterhood that does demonstrate support for women, as well as the use of the first-person plural, which demonstrates a sense of genuine support based on the concepts of community.

Thus, Cabur challenges the audience to take action. Theatre as a "meta-political microcosm" has the potential to develop the inspiring effectiveness of Marxist critique, which is found in the concealed workings of ideology, which "can preclude dialectically perceiving the liberatory potential of the processes under critique". Consequently, vulnerability represents a "mode of relationality" that Judith Butler (2014:130) believes leads to "solidarity, political collections or coalitions, and even when we try to talk about resistance":

The dramaturgies of speech and sound present an opportunity to reexamine the applicability of the pre-existing critical tools because the ontological features of speech and sound in the first instance call into question the applicability of the entire Western metaphysical tradition (Radosavljevic, 2023:169).

Individuals in the audience are part of a collective voice that has the ability to change and end the perpetuation of violence against women by identifying, recognising, and responding when women express pain:

the audience are denied a reflective distance in the process of watching – and, in fact, they are not 'watching' but rather primarily listening/experiencing/imagining/cognitively participating in the piece – which simultaneously denies or delays the semantic closure (Radosavljevic, 2023: 170).

By extrapolating the term *semantic closure* to Cabur's practise, her violence against women-related performances demonstrate the absence of practical solutions. Consequently, victims of this form of violence require pragmatic alternatives; however, as the plays demonstrate, there appears to be a lack of semantic closure when addressing violence against women in contemporary society. Hence, the significance of the transformative power of vulnerability, active listening, and empathy in the face of the disdain that women continue to experience when they express distress. In this way, Cabur's theatre can be viewed as the foundation for "methexis/the intersubjective dramaturgy of speech and sound ('tell rather than show') over mimesis/the representational dramaturgies of dramatic theatre ('show rather than tell')" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 170).

#### 2.2.5.5. Racial violence

In *Childbirth 19*, not only are the protagonist's concerns disregarded during a pivotal moment in her life, the birth of her daughter April, but she is also mistreated as a person of colour: "I am not going to be listened to, I am not going to be believed, my pain is not going to be believed. I am a black woman". According to *Five Times More*,<sup>8</sup> black women die five times more frequently than white women during childbirth: "Black women in the U.K. are five times more likely to die in pregnancy & childbirth." In fact, this is the source of her constant preoccupation with documenting every instant of childbirth: "We need to document everything, remember? It's in the Five More Times website". Possibly this circumstance frightens Shani, as her desires will not be valued or respected: "I need to feel I have some control over this. It's my life. It's my body" (Cabur, 2021: 5). In this circumstance, the play poses the following inquiry: Is there a more fundamental right than that of a human being to his or her own body?

Again, Cabur identifies a problem that disproportionately affects women and, in particular, those who face additional discrimination due to the persistence of racism in contemporary society. The director illustrates a problem that affects and defines the identities of contemporary women in order to raise awareness and encourage action in response to the widespread racial discrimination suffered by women around the globe.

#### 2.2.5.6. Demystifying and decriminalising motherhood.

In her works, Beatriz Cabur addresses the demystification and decriminalisation of motherhood to legitimise life choices outside the tradition which held motherhood to be every woman's ideal. In this

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<sup>8</sup> Five X More is dedicated to driving legislative change through parliamentary lobbying and offering recommendations to the NHS in the UK. Their mission extends to empowering Black women and birthing individuals to actively participate in decision-making processes regarding their pregnancies and postpartum experiences. Additionally, they advocate for systemic alterations to improve outcomes for Black women, as evidenced by their successful government petition, which garnered over 187,000 signatures and led to parliamentary debate in April 2021. They have also contributed written and oral evidence to the Maternity Safety Enquiry held on December 15, 2020. See: <https://fivexmore.org/>.

way, the playwright makes alternatives visible and reveals the less-discussed aspects of the motherhood process by employing an innovative feminist realist perspective.

In the play *Childbirth 19*<sup>9</sup>, Shani is aware that she will experience childbirth alone because she has previously viewed the testimonies of other mothers in *YouTube* videos: " in those videos I have been watching of moms in labour during Covid, they are all alone" (Cabur, 2021: 4). She will also have to consider the distance that the masks create: "some of them even going through it with masks". "Masks control Time" is a metaphor for the pandemic era, in which social distance is implanted as a physical wall. Similarly, the individuals who treat her body for delivery have their faces covered: " I am feeling shrugged off. / People with masks around me. / I can't see the face of the midwife. / I don't feel connected to any of them" (Cabur, 2021: 10). The masks of the medical staff attending to her create a lack of confidence and a lack of physical sensations: " Doctors around her. Masks around her. This will make it end " (Cabur, 2021: 13). This double disconnection, on the one hand with the people who are treating her, and on the other hand with her own body and emotions, leads to a derealization experience in which the protagonist believes she is in a movie: "Who are all these people behind masks? This looks like a movie. Am I in a movie?" (Cabur, 2021: 11). Shani's degree of disconnection from reality causes her to lose touch with the reality of her body and senses.

Thus, we can comprehend the causes of the postpartum melancholy that has altered the protagonist so drastically after childbirth. In order to prevent contagion, health protocols during the pandemic attempt to distance humans, paradoxically generating a desensitisation that is incompatible with human situations that must be shared, such as labour. These regulations thwart the protagonist's desires for her special moment: "COVID rules sending the birthplan to hell in a handbag" (Cabur, 2021: 9). Shani must adhere to strict rules from the first scene on, the cruellest of which is her not being asked for consent for painful and perhaps unnecessary procedures.

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<sup>9</sup> Together with *Breakfast at Daddy's* and the monologue on obstetric violence and the postpartum depression resulting from this type of violence, this play makes up Beatriz Cabur's *trilogy of motherhood*. It was born because of the need to adjust to the context of creation and production affected by the pandemic together with the dramatic interest of completing a trilogy on motherhood, the right to choose and obstetric violence.

Another cruel incident is that Shani's spouse could not attend any of the medical tests beforehand: "As they didn't let you come in with me yesterday for the assessment or for any other consultations or visits or scans before that" (Cabur, 2021: 3). In the same way, her mother has not been allowed to enter in spite of her preparation for this moment: "But my mom has been quarantining for this!" (Cabur, 2021: 5). However, this social distancing is not limited to restrictions on relatives' visits; it reaches its tragic apex when the mother is prohibited from breastfeeding her own infant. As the newborn does not cry, they determine to transport her to intensive care: "The baby gets out in a transparent box on wheels" (Cabur, 2021: 13). Shani's desolate situation becomes even more apparent, as evidenced by the agony she experiences in her breasts when she is unable to feed her baby her expressed milk:

VOICE

Breast pain.

A Hungry screaming baby.

A Mommy expressing milk to be wasted.

Baby in the intensive care unit alone.

Mommy in the hospital room alone.

Daddy nowhere.

No visits allowed.

Floods of tears.

No sympathy or comfort anywhere to be found. (Cabur, 2021: 15).

Shani's profound sadness is a stark contrast to the joy that a woman who has just given birth to her daughter should feel: "Voice.- She cries because it reminds her of everything she is missing out on from being in hospital during Covid-19" (Cabur, 2021: 15).

According to Cabur, motherhood is a censored and criminalised subject in art: "si no estuviera penalizado, igual no sería taboo". The author explains that the reception of her works regarding

motherhood is very different. In the case of *Childbirth 19*<sup>10</sup>, the director employs digital theatre to represent the testimonies of several women who have endured traumatic childbirth experiences. According to Cabur, the consideration of motherhood in art alters the audience's reception: "it's because of the theme [of motherhood], not because of the content or the quality of the work or the characters or the depth or the arc or the construction or anything, it's just [motherhood]". However, motherhood affects all facets of society, so the welfare system must be considered in light of women's absence of control over their bodies. Cabur aims to address the difficulties that women still encounter today and considers it essential to disseminate this information to effect change.

In *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), Cabur reveals the less obvious side of motherhood, demystifying motherhood and illustrating the suffering that mothers continue to endure. The figure of the Magician hypnotises the audience by narrating the sensations and emotions of a mother who is diminished by the violence she endures at the hands of the system, so that her size in society shrinks after adopting the label of mother:

Stop shrinking.

Sometimes it feels it's either you or the baby like if you both won't make it.

You are lost. Aggressive. Sad. Overwhelmed. I know you are breastfeeding but exercising? Working and Working out. Feeling pressure. Sleep deprived. Sleep deprived. Resentful. Weak. Mentally weak. Mentally exhausted. Tiny in a hostile world protecting a baby. Sleep deprived.

Thoughts of hurting yourself or the baby. The baby is so fragile you could break one of his little arms in a second (Cabur, 2017: 4).

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<sup>10</sup> *Verbatim Theatre* is the base of *Childbirth 19*, as the play is created from real testimonies of women who have given birth and health workers, based on online births that the mothers uploaded to *Youtube*; *Google Forms* for both mothers and health workers and people from organisations such as *Rebecca*, which advocates for mothers' rights during childbirth in the UK, and *Five Times More*, which reflects how black women die five times more than white women in the UK, highlighting the alarming systemic racism that continues to be enacted today.

The moment a woman decides to become a mother, societal pressure regarding her duty as a mother begins to weaken her. Sleep deprivation and the ensuing emotional instability generate suicidal ideas. In this case, we can see how the mental exhaustion and abuse from medical professionals from the beginning of her pregnancy makes her feel small, and how her self-esteem is destroyed by the demands of a system that encourages her to continue with a normal life despite the rigours inherent in motherhood, especially her own having been a victim of obstetric violence during pregnancy and childbirth. The mother feels social and familial pressure to exercise to regain her physical shape and conform to beauty standards that promote thinness and feminine fragility as ideals of beauty. In addition to exercising, she must lactate her infant during the same period, concealing any difficulties she may experience due to sleep deprivation or mental exhaustion. As seen in the play, the woman lacks sufficient energy to cope, which leads to her developing alarming thoughts. The disruptive aspect of this fragment is reflected in the verbalization of these thoughts that have been historically concealed or rendered imperceptible in the face of an idealised conception of motherhood.

In *Breakfast at Daddy's*, Aisha's discourse consistently demystifies motherhood through her struggle to make a crucial decision regarding her own body. Tyrone Williams, her father, is a lawyer who identifies as a feminist. However, he opposes his daughter's decision to have an abortion because, according to him, motherhood has been bestowed upon her and she should embrace it with a fervour that is far removed from how Aisha feels about continuing the pregnancy. She has successfully divorced and has just landed her dream job, and she is fully aware that a pregnancy in her current situation would prevent her from pursuing the life she has chosen. However, it appears that her father has other intentions for her. Aisha, a 33-year-old adult, makes very compelling arguments to convey her conception of motherhood, which differs from her father's romanticised notions:

Ooof, ok, I'll tell you then. It's not raising the kid I'm worried about; it's the pregnancy itself. I still don't want to put my body through that. A pregnancy is a terrible thing [...] I mean, what it does to your body, terrible things, with permanent effects. I'm not ready for that. I

can't stand a single more day of these feelings, the crazy ups and downs, the morning sickness, this is changing me...(Cabur, 2016: 7).

Aisha has already begun to experience the initial pregnancy symptoms, and she is aware that if she delays her decision to have an abortion, the symptoms will persist. In effect, her body will undergo changes for which she is unprepared and unwilling to go through. Her father acknowledges that he is not against abortion but against, as, according to his ideas, this event will leave her filled with "anguish, guilt, sadness and nostalgia", to which Aisha responds:

Because I don't think I'll be filled with anything like that. I'll just be free to live my life. Those things you're saying happened to another generation. You had other things in your mind. [...] You were brainwashed by restrictive social norms, fanaticism and religion and stupid values, we're not... my generation is... freer... (Cabur, 2016: 13).

Our protagonist's argument about the generational divide demonstrates that for new generations, liberated from restrictive social norms, priorities have shifted, and it appears that motherhood is not one of them for Aisha, as it is for many women today.

From the feminist lobby *Malasmadres*<sup>11</sup>, which was founded due to the blog of its president, Laura Baena, who realised when she became pregnant that the reality of motherhood was quite different from what we had been told:

la realidad de la maternidad era bien distinta a la que nos habían contado [...] teníamos supermitificada la maternidad, el embarazo, y cuando lo vives realmente empiezas a sentirte engañada pensando por qué me lo han dulcificado tanto. [...] Yo era creativa en una empresa de publicidad y cuando dije que me había quedado embarazada me dijeron que ésa no era una empresa para mamás y bebés y me doy de bruces con la realidad", arranca Baena a explicar cómo surgió este movimiento social. [...] Intenté conciliar dos años, viviendo mal y perdiendo el control de mi vida personal y acabé renunciando a mi carrera profesional como publicista

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<sup>11</sup> Estos son los 5 lobbies feministas que presionan desde hace años en España para alcanzar la igualdad: [https://www.elespanol.com/mujer/actualidad/20200312/lobbies-feministas-presionan-hace-espana-alcanzar-igualdad/464703832\\_0.html](https://www.elespanol.com/mujer/actualidad/20200312/lobbies-feministas-presionan-hace-espana-alcanzar-igualdad/464703832_0.html)



porque era imposible. No había sido madre tampoco para no ver a la niña y no había forma de conciliar (Serna, *Estos Son Los 5 'lobbies'*).

Laura Baena refers to two important terms in the demystification of motherhood: renunciation and conciliation, which address the reality that many women face after becoming mothers. In a similar manner, the protagonist of *Breakfast at Daddy's* rejects motherhood after considering the negative effects it would have on her life. This play depicts the awakening a new generation of mothers experienced after confronting the romanticised conception of motherhood.

#### 2.2.6.8. Femicide/ Feminicide

Femicide/Feminicide represents a pressing global concern, characterised by the disturbingly high number of women facing violent deaths at the hands of those close to them. Despite extensive efforts, the United Nations' study<sup>12</sup> reveals that femicide remains resistant to eradication and continues to exert its devastating impact across all regions. Recognising the significance of closely monitoring this issue, this section emphasises the necessity for further research to unravel the complex enablers, drivers, and perpetrators behind these heinous crimes. This thesis focuses on the unexplored potential of art and theatre to contribute meaningfully to understanding femicide, shedding light on its intricacies, and working towards effective prevention.

In terms of equal rights, the consideration of issues impacting women is making significant progress. The perspectives of women are increasingly heard, and their concerns resonate with other women. Despite this progress, there is still a legitimate gap: the number of femicides continues to rise worldwide.

*Goodbye, Mother* is a play that addresses the murders of women, giving a voice not only to the women who can no longer speak, but also to the people behind this type of violence: all these people and their surrounding social communities, as well as the impact that each instance of femicide has on

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<sup>12</sup> See the United Nations study on femicide:  
[https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico\\_Nov2014/Session%203%20UNODC%20ppt.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico_Nov2014/Session%203%20UNODC%20ppt.pdf)

each individual. *Goodbye, Mother* demonstrates that the women assassinated each year are not mere statistics. Beatriz Cabur discusses the imperative need to identify them, to discuss their lives and the people closest to them, as we must see them for who they truly were to humanise them and deal with real stories as opposed to mere statistics:

She was my friend. She was my mother. She was my sister. I was alive and loved. I was surrounded by family and friends and my killer. She was my mother and I left her there. I had a daughter, and a husband. I had a father and I left him alone with her. She was my favourite aunt and all I have are beautiful memories of her, she baked me lemon muffins. My aunt Marcia, she was 32 (Cabur, 2020: np).

Since its inception, this endeavour has expanded substantially. In the initial phase, verbatim theatre was utilised alongside research and interviews with key individuals from Asunción, London, and New York. The website of Beatriz Cabur affirms the resolve to collect as much information as possible in order to hear the perspectives of those closest to the victims. Cabur's practise focuses on "the potential of polyphony and its constitutive tool, counterpoint, to encapsulate the dialectics contained within the multi-modal semantics of theatre" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 69-70).

According to David Roesner, polyphony functions as a "strategy of 'de-hierarchisation' of theatrical means" (Roesner, 2008: 18), which provides "greater autonomy on various meaning-making tools and personnel of theatre and allows the audience to 'widen and reflect on their own modes of perception and observation' (Roesner, 2008: 44) and without the obligation to work out 'what it means', the audience can concentrate on ' (Roesner, 2008:54-55). Thus, the voices will be incorporated into a global work that can be heard and comprehended regardless of their cultural and societal differences. With the intention of presenting the work in New York, London, and Madrid, the writing phase commenced after the completion of this study and its development.

Every year, thousands of women are murdered by their companions or family members. A United Nations<sup>13</sup> study concludes that femicide is "difficult to eradicate, has a significant prevalence in all regions, must be monitored, and requires additional research to better understand the motivating factors and perpetrators." *Goodbye, Mother* focuses primarily on the final point of the report, which, according to Beatriz Cabur, is "the only area where art and theatre can contribute, and it is our duty as artists to undertake the task." According to Bakhtin, there must be "participatory equality" between the author, the "performers of the text (if they exist)," and the readers or listeners who "recreate and thereby renew the text" (Bakhtin, 1981: 253). In fact, "the actual corporeal co-presence of the artist and the audience in a theatre opens up a different potential for dialogue, even when this dialogue is incommensurable, non-verbal, or merely consisting of an affective exchange" because "theatre can generate its own counterpoint between the affective and rational experience" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 71).

Margaret is the protagonist of the play *Goodbye Mother*, who is the victim of her husband's violence, not for the first time, but for the last, as her husband murders her at this moment. In this way, "the counterpoint represents a necessary cognitive dissonance or disruption that will engage the audience in order to make sense of it" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 72). Consequently, a sort of "intersubjective dialogue is at work between the content being presented and the audience's act of attending" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 72), in which a voice of sisterhood tries to offer support to the victim by conveying the notion that she is not alone or invisible.

The playwright apologises to both the victim within the play and the victims outside of it. They require an apology for the severe damage they have suffered. In this way, their suffering is publicly acknowledged and made visible, allowing them to feel secure in a cruel world that has abandoned them as they endure this type of violence alone, without anyone's support, during the femicide depicted in the play. When the play refers to the vocative "sister" ("hear me, sister"), it is logical to

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<sup>13</sup> See the UN study at the following link:  
[https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico\\_Nov2014/Session%203%20UNODC%20ppt.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico_Nov2014/Session%203%20UNODC%20ppt.pdf)

infer a connection with the #metooosister movement, a virtual feminist movement that aims to bring together, make visible, and give a voice to the victims of violence against women so that, with this network of support, strategies of defence and action against this type of violence can be developed, thereby working towards its eradication. The term "sister" is indicative of the sorority present in the work, which seeks to provide a secure space for Margaret and all other women who have experienced this and been silenced. The use of the first-person plural demonstrates a public recognition of the victim's position, as we are aware that violence against women persists, and male violence rates are increasing despite the rise of feminist activism in recent years.

In the *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, the poetic-performative element "derived from documentary evidence is ultimately far more potent than the purely scientific one in chang[ing] the way we think about people and their lives" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 68). As in the case of the performance, the recognition of violence against women to the victims from the collective reinforces and promotes empathy as a healing and transformative instrument for effective and necessary change in the eradication of violence against women. In the play, Margaret conveys her terror through references to her body, which are intertwined with her chaotic train of thought resulting from her husband's femicide: "I'm too scared. I'm out of my body and I don't know how to move it. If I try and jump and he stops me... would he be saving me?" (Cabur, 2020: 4). Once again, it is demonstrated that "the problem is not critique itself, but the so-far predominating voyeuristic, textocentric, hierarchical, and ocular-centric tools of the critic" (Radosavljevic, 2023: 68), which demonstrates the audience's passivity in the face of a clear call to action for the prevention and eradication of violence against women.

Margaret is experiencing derealisation and depersonalisation because of the violence she is experiencing. As a consequence of the trauma caused by the abuser's physical assaults, her survival instinct tells her to flee the situation in order to survive, but the fight-flight-freeze response manifests in her body as freeze. In this manner, the victim cannot act logically because she is paralysed by fear. As seen in the play, her immobility in a life-threatening situation is caused by her fear. On the other

hand, the victim is in the phase of acute or crisis violence. Margaret wonders, "Would he be saving me?" (Cabur, 2020: 4). In this stage of the cycle, victims of violence against women frequently attempt to survive the abuse by accommodating the abuser's demands or fleeing. Margaret's coping mechanism for being completely paralysed by fear is to consider whether the individual who is about to cause her death would save her. As it is perpetrated by a person who is supposed to adore her, it is extremely difficult for victims of violence against women to assimilate their suffering. In the play, Margaret engages in self-deception in order to shield herself from the severity of the atrocities committed by a family member who is also her abuser. In addition, the protagonist invokes the myth of romantic love, which reaffirms the notion of the male as Prince Charming, the person who must rescue the defenceless woman from the "monster" of the play. Margaret paradoxically believes that the monster can save her, revealing her self-deception when it is revealed that the abuser, the monster, is her own spouse, the purported saviour.

*In Goodbye Mother*, the femicide's progression intensifies as our protagonist's train of thought quickens:

Will I survive five stories fall? Is it safer to jump out of the window than staying? I think it is. Can I reach the window in time? Would he stop me? My nose is broken, I've peed myself. How is it possible these two things haven't stopped the monster, is he not seeing them? Is he not seeing me? Thoughts run faster than the speed of light. (Cabur, 2020: 4).

Beatriz Cabur captures in a raw and realistic manner the condition of the victims when a man commits femicide. Evidently, Margaret regards jumping out of the window as an extreme survival measure, i.e., she is aware that he might not stop before she dies. It is not planned. It's just happening and that the only way to avoid being murdered is by jumping out of the window. She continues to believe that her abuser will prevent her from leaping out the window, and as a result, will succumb to the violence he perpetrates against her. This survival thinking occurs concurrently with the perpetuation of the myth of romantic love of the male saviour. In her mind, he can still save her, despite the fact that her nose is broken, and she is covered in her own urine as a result of violence against women at the hands

of her spouse. She also expresses great anguish as she wonders how it is possible for her husband to be perpetrating this tragedy despite the visible traces of his violence on the victim's body. Margaret begins to doubt if her husband can see her due to her level of self-deception and confusion, which are characteristics of all victims of violence against women. Once more, the invisibility that women who are victims of violence against women experience in the face of a system that does not provide them with the necessary protection, safety, and security is evident.

At the conclusion of the play, the femicide occurs, and Margaret realises she is exhausted from all the violence she has endured: " Oh, God. How long have I been crouched down, getting punched and whacked and slammed and kicked and punched and punched and kick and whacked and slammed? Again. Again. Again" (Cabur, 2020: 6). The protagonist has lost track of how many times her spouse has assaulted her and how long she has been curled up on the floor while he attacks her. The repetition of 'again' three times conveys the destructive and constant rhythm of violence against women, which always returns with increasing intensity until it results in femicide. Margaret is so exhausted that she no longer recognises her emotions, nor does she care, because violence against women has reduced her to an inanimate object. She no longer believes she has the ability to save herself, so she accepts the violence with resignation because she is certain she will die: "When will he stop? Will he ever stop? I can't feel anything anymore. I don't care about anything anymore. I'm just... I'm... going to let go. I am ok with it. It's better to let go of all this. This is it. It's ok. I know I am dying" (Cabur, 2020: 6). The victim's loss of concept of time is a distinct indication of the trauma she is experiencing, as is her apathy, which demonstrates her complete surrender. Since she no longer has the strength to defend herself, her final statement reveals resignation: "It's better this way. I'm leaving. That's all I want. (To herself) Goodbye, baby. See you on the other side" (Cabur, 2020: 6). The victim's level of self-sacrifice is a consequence of the system's abandonment, which induces in her the same helplessness she has experienced from the system. Margaret has lost the will to continue battling because life should not be a struggle, but she must continue to fight against her abuser if she is to survive.

The protagonist finally bids farewell, knowing that this is the end of her existence. Femicide is the culmination of violence against women. Because she has no support system and the system has failed her, Margaret is aware of her impending death and accepts it. Therefore, she will join other female victims on the list of femicides committed that year.

#### 2.2.5.8.1. The normalisation of femininity

The patriarchal canons of beauty impose severe restrictions on women and normalise stereotypically feminine attitudes, which is considered symbolic violence. Celia Amorós (2005) and Angélica Liddell (2005) demonstrate how violence is perpetrated against women's bodies, which are sites of patriarchal dominance. Therefore, Angélica Liddell and Pilar Campos Gallego place the spotlight on women's bodies, both through the violence that women inflict upon themselves and through their transgressive mode, which produces a "resemantización de su corporalidad, su espacio" (Jódar Peinado, 2018: 629).

In contrast, women's sexuality is frequently not a normalised topic. The visibility of female sexuality is situated in the defence of women's freedom against patriarchal impositions. Beginning at an early age, women are bombarded with numerous incoherent messages that restrict their liberties. These expectations are viewed as a form of social violence because they contribute to the infantilization of women and the condemning of women if they do not comply with them, which is extrapolated to the right to determine what happens to their bodies.

In *Nefertiti and PIII* (2016), The Woman adopts an attitude that was not expected of her gender: her dogged determination to find a position in the world of theatre. It entails hazardous behaviour given that, as The Woman in the Shadow explains to the Author, "Ten cuidado con tanta ambición, no es un atributo que se les permita tener a las mujeres" (Cabur, 2016: 42). In reality, the Author is censored and Amenohtep abducts her. Amenohtep represents the Men's Club, an organisation whose work is predicated on the erasure of women, including the women in this play.

The Author and her character, the Woman in the Shadow, engage in conflict. A Pirandellian conversation occurs when she refuses to go out in public for fear of retaliation from the Club's men:

Los hombres de tu vida. Los hombres de la mía. [...]; los que ni se sabe que están y controlan todo; [...]; los que están mejor valorados aunque sean peores; los que llegan más alto que tú y son unos ineptos que no te llegan ni a la suela de los zapatos [...]. Los hombres en general.

Los que deciden nuestro rumbo y destino (Cabur, 2016: 32).

The Woman in the Shadow rejects her role as the play's protagonist out of dread, highlighting the tendency of public history to overlook women's protagonism. Cabur also seeks to vindicate Nefertiti's historical persona, who should play a preeminent role in official history: "Responsable y ejecutora de la primera revolución religiosa de la historia y condenada a ser un mero busto admirable en un museo. Reducida a la narrativa masculina. El mayor mérito de la mujer es la belleza. Qué ignominia" (Cabur, 2016: 43). As a female governor and lawmaker, her presence was too subversive to be revealed:

Esa historia no se puede contar ni tres mil años más tarde. [...]. Tuviste más poder ejecutivo del que tuvo ningún hombre en tu época, eso no se puede contar. [...]. Tú gobernaste como mujer. No siguiendo las normas del Club (Cabur, 2016: 44).

Nefertiti, along with other invisibilised women, represent characters " que no han tenido acceso a las narrativas canónicas y hegemónicas de la identidad" as stated by Celia Amorós (2005: 40) and need to be heard to be legitimised.

#### 2.2.5.8.2. Women's health

Beatriz Cabur dispels the myth that, historically, women's mental health has been stigmatised as an indication of madness or hysteria associated with the female gender. The director illuminates the mental health of women from a feminist perspective, i.e., she considers the violence endured by women as a root cause of their mental health. In addition, the playwright makes a taboo topic visible by shifting the focus from the victim to systemic masculine violence. In this way, the author argues against a system that continues to normalise violence against women, which directly effects their



health, in this case their mental health, as well as its immediate impact on their self-perception and perception in contemporary society. The effects of patriarchal society on the mental health of contemporary women define their identities in this manner.

In *Goodbye Mother*, Margaret endures the traumatic event of a gender-based assault that culminates in femicide. As a result of this threatening circumstance, the victim's emotional and mental equilibrium fluctuates swiftly. As she begins to comprehend the severity of the blows her husband is inflicting upon her, she considers the following options to defend herself and avoid murder:

Can I just get to the bathroom and lock myself in there? Is he still hitting me? I can't even feel anything anymore. I just see him everywhere I look. Parts of him. Here. The knee. There. An arm. There. Hair. There. A hip too close to the counter. Here. A hand. So red. All of him. There. Shirt. There are parts of the monster blocking my vision no matter where I look. There's also blood on the floor. Is that my blood? Must be. In the way towards the door. Get to the window (Cabur, 2020: 5).

This fragment depicts the victim's realisation that she is in a perilous situation. The author expresses a sense of alarm in brief, punctuated sentences. Thus, the audience experiences flashes in the same manner as the victim. On the one hand, she considers her escape options, ("Can I just get to the bathroom and lock myself in there?[...] I just see him everywhere I look. Parts of him. Here.[...] There[...] There[...] In the way towards the door. Get to the window") meanwhile, she is becoming aware of the harm these assaults have caused to her body, as she can see the blood and the blows that her husband continues to deliver to her:

Is he still hitting me? I can't even feel anything anymore. The knee. [...] An arm. [...] Hair.[...]. A hip too close to the counter.[...]. A hand. So red. All of him.[...] There are parts of the monster blocking my vision no matter where I look. There's also blood on the floor. Is that my blood? Must be (Cabur, 2020: 5).

It also demonstrates how the victim attempts to flee, but cannot due to a giant monster hitting her and stopping her physically from escaping: "How do I stand up? He's too close. He's too close. I can't even stand up. How am I going to jump all crawled up? Would he be saving me?" (Cabur, 2020: 6). Margaret does not know how to stand while receiving strikes. She is terrified because her assailant is very near and she is unable to move. Even though she has previously referred to her assailant as a monster, the victim questions if he could save her because, in her daily life, he is not a monstrosity. This violence just happens without the perpetrator caring enough to stop since Margaret's husband is in a deadly rage. As she screams at herself to stop betting on him, to stop believing in any sign of virtue from the hand that is causing her death, she intersperses more realistic and alarming thoughts "WHAT THE FUCK, MARGARET? WHAT THE FUCK? Stop betting on him. NOW" (Cabur, 2020: 6).

In the moment when Margaret is unable to recognize her husband, she hopes desperately that he will revert to being the love of her life, as she used to perceive him "Please shift back into the love of my life, please." This hope is accompanied by a profound doubt in her own sanity, questioning whether her contemplation of jumping out of the window instead of succumbing to her husband's potential deadly violence is a form of suicidal behaviour "Are you suicidal?". Amidst this mental turmoil, Margaret recognises the imminent danger: "Stop looking at him! Now! His rage is burgeoning. Don't look at him" (Cabur, 2020: 3).

In *Goodbye Mother*, the protagonist becomes acutely aware of her peril, which unveils the gravity of her situation. Margaret draws a parallel between her mental disorientation and alienation to her blindness, as she reflects on her past unawareness of her own bleeding: "I didn't know I was bleeding. But I can't see anywhere. I can't see anything. What's happening. I didn't know I was blinded" (Cabur, 2020: 5).

Apart from the psychological side effects victims endure, they also cope with the trauma of the violence. The protagonist begins to doubt her sanity in light of the extreme trauma she is experiencing and the subsequent survival-related thoughts that ensue. Although Margaret is

ultimately aware of the dangerous situation in which she finds herself when the femicide occurs, it is evident throughout the play that her mental process and rapid train of thought are the result of a trauma-induced survival response.

The woman in *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017) suffers from postpartum depression as a result of the obstetric violence she experienced during childbirth at the hands of the medical professional: "Everything around you is weird because you don't recognise yourself anymore. You were a giant yourself before all this shit fell on you.(...)You behave weirdly with acquaintances now(...) Without knowing how the hell did you get into it" (Cabur, 2017: 4).

The woman states: "Awareness comes in the middle of the fight. As if you were drunk when you started it" (Cabur, 2017: 4). She persistently repeats the self-doubt she feels: "You don't know yourself anymore. You can't navigate this boat. This is a tiny boat in a storm in the ocean. You can't navigate it while you keep a baby alive through the thunders and the waves" (Cabur, 2017: 4). As part of the postpartum depression, she is suffering from, the mother has suicidal thoughts: "thoughts of hurting yourself or the baby. Never. Shrunk. Weak. Mentally disabled. Disabled like a bomb. Defused" (Cabur, 2017: 5). In each of these instances, we can observe the deterioration of women's health due to the traumatising effects of various forms of violence against women. This is how Beatriz Cabur intends to demonstrate that women's behaviours have underlying causes that must be investigated to get to the root of the problem and thus be able to promote different, alternative actions to place the focus on the perpetrators and identify and act for social improvement.

To this end, it is crucial to eliminate the stigmatisation of the feminine as well as mental health related to gender. To progress towards the eradication of violence against women as well as the recovery and empowerment of victims, it is essential to comprehend and address care at the root level. Every day, millions of women and girls are diagnosed with psychiatric disorders that are medicated, resulting in enduring cognitive, metabolic, and brain function problems. As Dr Jessica Taylor, a psychologist, lecturer in forensic and criminological psychology at the *University of Derby*, and author of the book *Why are women blamed for everything?* and feminist activist describes on her

*Facebook* page: "women's natural responses to things that other people have done to them are being reframed as a mental illness, something in their head that they are supposed to solve with pills and therapy". In the case of girls and women who are subjected to abuse and trauma, they have a reason to be distrustful of people or the world. In the face of this problem, Dr Taylor poses the following questions: "What if everything we've been taught is wrong? What if it all had an agenda? What if we need complete reform?"<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.2.5.8.3. Women's choice over their own bodies

The theme of women's limited autonomy over their own bodies is evident in all of the plays examined in this chapter. In general, it appears that female characters are unable to make autonomous decisions, except for Aisha in *Breakfast at Daddy's*, who decides to have an abortion despite her father throwing her out of the house and disowning himself from his daughter. Obstacles appear in the form of an abusive husband in *Goodbye Mother*, medical staff inflicting obstetric violence on the protagonist in *Childbirth 19*, and the woman spoken about by the Magician in *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman*; the man who prevent the Shadow Woman from moving forward in *Nefertiti III*, and Aisha's father in *Breakfast at Daddy's* who tries to convince and persuade her, infantilizing and manipulating her. As can be seen, the women in these plays are not free despite their courage and bravery in advancing in a society that persistently presents them with obstacles to impede their advancement, legitimacy, and empowerment in a society governed by the prevalent androcentrism.

In *Breakfast at Daddy's*, Beatriz Cabur transcends the theme of motherhood, as the play encompasses many thematic layers related to women's right to decide about their own bodies, such as a woman's relationship with her father, the power that the father exercises over her, her relationship with all the men in her life as a result of her relationship with her father throughout her life, and men

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<sup>14</sup> Dr. Taylor proposes a feminist rethinking of girls and women's mental health in the video *What is wrong about mental health*: ([https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=5608888825804456&aggr\\_vids\[0\]=5608888825804456&notif\\_id=1644877231580289&notif\\_t=watch\\_follower\\_video&ref=notif](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=5608888825804456&aggr_vids[0]=5608888825804456&notif_id=1644877231580289&notif_t=watch_follower_video&ref=notif)).

and the liberties they take, i.e. what they are doing versus what they are supposed to be. All of the play's other themes are derived from the context of a father and daughter debating a life-altering decision in the kitchen, which is ultimately the play's central theme. Her father, Tyrone Williams, continually reminds her to reconsider a decision she has already made:

You should think about it carefully, reconsider it after meditating or something, because... I don't know... I'm really not sure we should go through with the abortion today. AISHA WILLIAMS We? TYRONE WILLIAMS What? AISHA WILLIAMS Dad! (Cabur, 2016:7)

In the discussion between father and daughter, Tyrone goes so far as to question Aisha's responsibility for her own body, calling her naive when she claims it is her body : "It's my right to get an abortion. It's my body. TYRONE WILLIAMS Don't be naïve" (Cabur, 2016: 9). In this way, he is infantilising her again, illegitimizing her regarding her own corporeality and thus identity. Finally, the father condescendingly explains to her that it is not about her body but that her female body is part of society. In Tyrone's words, it is evident how little legitimacy, in the eyes of the androcentric lens, women have with regard to decisions about themselves. According to Tyrone, as Aisha's body is not hers and belongs to society, to a system, it is not up to her to make decisions about it, but to the system that decides for Aisha and for so many other women who do not have full control over their life choices. Finally, the father continues to insist on the objective of controlling Aisha's decision: "TYRONE WILLIAMS I think you should have it. AISHA WILLIAMS The abortion. TYRONE WILLIAMS The baby!" (Cabur, 2016:9).

In the play, Aisha expresses her sense of betrayal at the lack of support from her father, who, like the welfare system, had promised to assist and support her. Aisha must adopt a childish and submissive attitude to receive her father's support, as Tyrone will only assist his daughter if she submits to his demands. Similarly, this relationship represents the submission that women in society must embrace regarding very important life decisions due to a patriarchal system that, rather than viewing them as equals, relegates them to otherness (Cabur, 2016: 11).

In addition, Aisha is resolute in her decision and rejects the infantilisation with which her father treats her, highlighting a systemic issue; society continues to treat women as if they are incapable of making their own decisions. However, Aisha consistently demonstrates that this is not the case; she never gives up and reiterates her desires, even if she must scream to be heard in order for her decisions to be respected.

Finally, the protagonist defines herself as a full grown woman in possession of her own body. Faced with this statement, her father responds negatively Aisha tries to explain this to her father when she has an abortion. Aisha responds:

AISHA WILLIAMS Because I don't think I'll be filled with anything like that. I'll just be free to live my life. Those things you're saying happened to another generation. You had other things in your mind. [...] You were brainwashed by restrictive social norms, fanaticism and religion and stupid values, we're not... my generation is... freer (Cabur, 2016: 13-14).

Thus, it is evident that Aisha feels she belongs to a different generation with very different values, fewer social restrictions, and, in short, greater freedom for women, who, despite having to suffer the consequences of this search for freedom, such as Tyrone expelling his daughter from the house and treating her as a ghost in his life when she decides to have an abortion. That instant marks the beginning of Aisha's independence; she now has complete control over her decisions, even if the price is the dissolution of her family.

It is evident that women's decisions in society are not viewed as liberation per se, as those who deviate from the normative androcentric pattern are still punished and pushed to the margins. Beatriz Cabur addresses this issue in her works and reaffirms this message in an effort to bring to light the lack of legitimacy that women continue to experience in the present.

#### 2.2.6. Conclusion

In the works analysed, technology, as an instrument and a structure, never takes precedence over the narrative or the task of acting on the character. In the same way, the consideration of dramaturgy in

the territory of the digital is also complicated. Cabur's plays are theatrical proposals that update the playwriting and directing situation in Spain from different perspectives, such as creative, productive, diffuse, etc., by connecting it with stagings that are developed abroad, thus circumscribing it in an international dimension and, therefore, with a greater social impact. It is also true that technology influences not only our daily existence, but also our cultural norms and our perception of the world. These alterations, which the director incorporates into her dramaturgy, affect both her production and enjoyment of her digital plays. In Beatriz Cabur's plays, the audience member is faced with the occupation of an innovative, theatrical and intellectual space at the same time.

Women's dramaturgy of the twenty-first century incorporates feminist themes and motifs, as demonstrated by Beatriz Cabur's theatrical productions. The feminist theatre that began to establish itself at the end of the 1980s and became fully established in the 1990s, thanks to the productions of Lidia Falcón, Paloma Pedrero, Ana Diosdado, Carmen Resino, and Antonia Bueno, among others, continues through feminist playwrights like the author. These contemporary female playwrights assert that it is a consciously developed feminism, as it normalises the appearance of women in the Spanish theatre scene and incorporates the female perspective into the problems arising from globalisation, evoking a conciliatory universalist feminism. The feminist essence that appears in the works of Cabur provides not only a vindictive scope, but also an investigation into the causes of masculine violence and inequality, which are the overarching themes. Thus, feminism seeks to raise awareness of the issues that affect half of the human population. This feminist theatre combines and renews the dramaturgy of our century for an update through a constitutive discourse, with the aim of expanding beyond the strictly scenic and thereby promoting the audience's critical capacity and social transformation.

Therefore, feminist themes and allusions place our playwrights within the concerns of contemporary dramaturgy, primarily through violence and an interest in female characters. In addition to uniting these tendencies of our theatre, they articulate them in a global discourse for extra-scenic claim and dissemination; that is, the authors take the theme of violence and concretize it in violence

against women, thereby providing a discourse that enables the analysis of its causes. The focus on female characters, on the other hand, renews feminist concerns by confronting more specific conflicts such as inequality, lack of public legitimacy, street harassment, and promotion of unattainable beauty standards. Most of the female characters represent gender issues that affect women solely by virtue of their gender, thereby highlighting violence against women and oppression against women and girls. Similarly, the feminist discourse contextualises their struggle, both for its visibility on the Spanish stage and for the development of an awareness of the problems that women still face around the globe. However, virtuality creates a separation between reality and fiction, as artistic tradition dictates. As a result, Cabur's metatheatrical techniques, such as the breaching of the fourth wall, function in reverse, capturing the fictional nature of what we are observing. In these instances of disruption in the protagonists' narrative, the audience is directly questioned so that the fictional essence of the theatrical construct we are contemplating becomes apparent. Cabur indicates her use of breaking the fourth wall, particularly in *Childbirth-19*, where she shapes an entangled portion of the work, as she intends to provoke the audience to actively collaborate in the problems that these women endure, thereby fostering their empathy; the active resource of vindication against oppression.

The current health situation has revealed the shortcomings of a social protection system, which has resulted in many women being excluded from the system and left without adequate protection, preventing them from living in dignity and safety. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that, rather than addressing its flaws, the system has resorted to severe bureaucratization, making it more difficult for taxpayer-funded institutions to provide security to women.

Telepresence is an innovative dramatic tool that Cabur supports. She also develops novel languages that reflect her artistic interests. To accomplish this, Cabur expands her activities internationally. Her theatrical production explores experimentalism through language, through which she makes chaotic worlds visible in order to expose the threat of censorship and absolutes that are hidden in a country that guarantees its citizens safety in exchange for their freedom. The dramaturgy of Beatriz Cabur enacts an experimental demand that, in tandem with the feminist social claim, is



repeatedly reiterated. Experience transcreation transforms the audience into an active participant in the dramaturgical experience. Because of this, technology is choreographed. The director has chosen a theatrical format that restricts the necessity of denunciation. Telepresence is rooted in actual experience, so Cabur seeks to reflect the current state of reality. The participation of audience members in *Childbirth-19* occurs via a shared online space; thus, the experience of telepresence theatre begins in advance.

The current concerns of feminism regarding male violence constitute the central axis that Spanish playwrights examine with the intention to denounce and raise social awareness. In Beatriz Cabur's stagings, the audience is exposed to crude instances of violence against women that women continue to endure today. These violent acts and their causes are analysed together, highlighting the social chauvinism that continues to exist in our society; women are subjected to violence simply by virtue of existing in a patriarchal society.

Cabur captures systemic violence by emphasising that women should not have to continue to suffer and struggle against an androcentric system that relegates them to the territory of otherness. The director develops an awareness of the victims of violence against women through active listening and empathy born from sorority support actions. In a similar manner, the figure who observes but does not act is challenged, as action is always possible and simple observation is an action in and of itself, although other forms of action are required to effectively address this problem. It is necessary to identify, make visible, and legitimise women's pain, as well as to devise action strategies when women express pain. Active listening and empathy have tremendous transformative power in the face of the handicap from which many women continue to suffer when they describe the abusive situations, they are currently enduring.

Beatriz Cabur also brings to light the double discrimination, misogyny, and racism, that women of colour face. The author describes a problem that affects how women are perceived in a society that continues to ignore the abuses perpetrated against them. As audience members and active members of society, we are thus obligated to act against this form of violence. Additionally, Cabur

addresses motherhood from a fresh perspective, as it demystifies aspects of it. Cabur also decriminalises abortion and provides alternatives so that women can feel completely liberated in their life decisions, without them being infantilised.

As the number of femicides continues to rise around the world, there is still a genuine gap in the advancement of women-specific issues. As a result, the vindication of women delegitimized by history is one of the primary feminist goals, as the patriarchal historical perspective has concealed innumerable relevant cases and deprived humanity, particularly generations of women, of female references. The restriction of women's liberties begins with the numerous messages women receive as children. This type of social violence results in the infantilization of women, as well as feelings of guilt if they do not conform with these sexist mandates pertaining to the autonomy over their bodies.

In the works of Cabur, women's health is worsened by the effects of trauma induced by various forms of violence that affect women exclusively. To promote various actions for women's safety, it is crucial to identify and address the stigmatisation of the feminine and of mental health. There is a lack of social support for women's choices in society, preventing them from feeling secure and free from male violence. Similarly, it is evident that women whose decisions deviate from the standard patriarchal pattern continue to be punished and marginalised. Beatriz Cabur addresses this issue in her productions and reiterates this message in an effort to legitimise the lack of visibility that women continue to experience today.

## 2.3. Angélica Liddell

### 2.3.1. Introduction

In a global context distinguished by a feminist perspective, the legitimisation of contemporary Spanish women playwrights becomes evident. In this chapter, I examine two of Angélica Liddell's plays, *Belgrado* (2008) and *La casa de la fuerza* (2011), to analyse her work as a playwright. I will explore Liddell's published and performed plays on a national and international level, focusing on

how they respond to some of the issues addressed by contemporary feminism. In this chapter, I also argue for the importance of a practical criticism and an adequate analysis for the exploration of experimental dramaturgical forms, which will bring intellectual and cultural value, as well as assurance regarding the security with which theatre advances towards equality, visibility, and inclusion of women in contemporary society.

First, *Belgrado* presents a depiction of international conflict, specifically that which occurred in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. This work illustrates the connection between national and international violence. On the other hand, *La casa de la fuerza* addresses violence against women, their damaged and wounded self-perception as a result of the trauma they have endured because of this violence, as well as the subsequent ethical issues. To clarify the issues that women face today, I have identified radical elements that Liddell includes in her plays with the intention of making the audience uncomfortable and proposing a rethinking of how we individually and collectively deal with these challenges. In both plays, the audience is asked to raise awareness and comprehend the significance of the individual as a change agent in a society that urgently requires a shift in the perception of women to eradicate violence against women.

Liddell is committed to experimental theatre and social activism. By analysing both elements in her plays, this chapter establishes distinct thematic boundaries that enable us to delve deeper into the representation of contemporary women's identities in contemporary Spanish drama, as well as their origin, formation, and legitimation.

### 2.3.2. Playwright in Spain in 1990s

#### 2.3.2.1. The Brandomín generation

The introduction of dramaturgical *avant-garde* in Spain began in 1965 and peaked in the 1970s. During this period, Spanish dramaturgy underwent a complete renaissance, marked by the channelling of protest movements through innovative theoretical perspectives that critically examined

the social context. The text ceased to represent ordinary entertainment and began to be used as a weapon to expose societally suppressed realities that were unsettling. Currently, theatre reflected genuine social issues requiring immediate solutions. It consisted of a functional transformation that revealed the various fissures caused by postmodernity:

Condujo a una interrelación entre los diferentes lenguajes estéticos y culturales, así como a la búsqueda de nuevos procesos de construcción y comunicación de significados y a la reivindicación de un espacio y una función diferente del arte (...) (Cornago Bernal: 1999: 19).

During this period of swift transformation, the theatre evolved in tandem with the times. This change signified renewal in accordance with the needs of the time's society. Thus, theatre directors began writing their own texts and becoming maximally involved in the productions they directed. They were not only directors but also playwrights who imbued their plays with their individuality. In 1969, the pupils of the new dramaturgical theory course taught by José Moleón and Renzo Casali at *Centro Dramático Madrid I* (CDM 1) attended the French festival in Nancy. This was a defining moment in Spanish dramaturgy, as it cast light on an innovative approach to theatre that would mark a before and after. The emergence of a political theatre was exemplified by harsher forms of expression, which highlighted the ideological crises that were occurring at the time:

Reflejó el nacimiento de un concepto de teatro político a través de formas de expresión menos dialécticas y serenas, a favor de un tratamiento más desgarrado y radical, que apuntaban a la crisis de ideología en el mundo contemporáneo (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 60).

In the national context, new theatre companies emerged, such as *Els Joglars*, directed by Boadella, who propagated a new, playful style of theatre from the 1960s that was very distinct from what the audience was accustomed to seeing at the time. In this manner, Spanish dramaturgy welcomed a more heterogeneous audience, eschewing pre-established stereotypes and transforming theatre into a sensorial experience that encouraged experimentation and interaction with the artists. The collaboration of the audience is demanded in a more realistic performance, which

denounces“(…) la necesidad de salvar la concepción de teatralidad ahogada por la teatrería ” (Cornago Bernal:1999: 279).

In the 1980s, these concepts began to solidify. A new generation of authors emerged who desired a more assertive and individualised relationship with the public. Consequently, a generation devoted to capturing the actuality of marginalised social sectors was born:“El resultado es una generación realista consagrada al reflejo testimonial de los sectores sociales desfavorecidos. Su heterogénea composición aconseja, sin embargo, la adopción de etiquetas-informativas.” (Cornago Bernal,2003: 36). This emergence of new playwrights is known as *teatro de texto*. Some of these new playwrights were labelled *la nueva dramaturgia española* or *la generación alternativa*. Even then, another name became important: *la generación Bradomín*, since the authors of this generation had won the *Bradomín Prize*<sup>15</sup> .

Some of the winners of the *Bradomín Prize* were writers who would try to find their place on the Spanish scene, some without success: Alfonso Plou, Rafael González, Paco Sanguiró, Rodrigo García, Antonio Onetti, Maxi Rodríguez, Margarita Sánchez, Juan Mayorga, Pablo Ley, Iñigo Reyزابال, Juan García Lanondo, Carmen Delgado, Toni Mescalina, Pilar Ruiz, Yolanda Arrieta and Manuel Veiga, among many others.

It was proposed to divide the expansive stage occupied by this innovative generation into two sections. First generation playwrights include Sergi Belbel, Leopoldo Alas, Eduardo Galán, Rodrigo García, Paloma Pedrero, and a lengthy list of 45 others who began publishing and premiering in the 1980s. The second generation included fifty-one playwrights whose works premiered in the early 1990s. In this second cohort, Angélica Liddell appears alongside authors such as Juan Mayorga, Yolanda Pallín and Itziar Pascual. This second generation did not aim to please the affluent audience, which flocked to classical theatres, but rather to reach a youthful and restless audience that tended to frequent alternative theatre venues:

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<sup>15</sup> In 1985, the *Instituto de la Juventud* (Youth Institute) announced for the first time the *Bradomín Prize*, aimed at authors under thirty years of age.

La experiencia cultural común de los autores nombrados está marcada por la pérdida de confianza en las utopías políticas, las soluciones totalitarias de los problemas sociales, el conocimiento logocentrista de la realidad, la constitución de sentido coherente, así como en la capacidad del idioma para lograr una reproducción objetiva de la realidad (Floeck: 2004: 47).

In 1992, the dominance of commercial theatre, i.e. theatre that achieved box-office success, began. There were private theatre companies such as *Dagoll Dagom*, *Els Joglars*, *La cuadrada de Sevilla* and *La Zaranda de Jerez*, which proposed a theatre-show, whose element of surprise was born of the scenographic device and the new lighting systems. In this way, an idea of theatre as if it were a business emerged: "En general, los autores se distinguen por quienes practican un teatro público o quienes lo hacen sin motivos comerciales que condicionen lo más mínimo sus productos" (Oliva: 2004:154). The audience crisis was already evident in the mid-1990s. Audience figures between 1984 and 1986 amounted to 2,600,000, while in the period from 1994 to 1995, they dropped to 1,600,000 (Oliva: 2004:198). There was "una casi absoluta marginación del autor comprometido en su escritura y en su estética, una difícil subsistencia de quienes incluso logran algún éxito en las carteleras, casi nunca repetible " (Oliva: 2004: 212).

Angélica Liddell produced her earliest works as a playwright during this challenging period between 1992 and 1996. Her work is classified as belonging to this generation of playwrights, while she is influenced by the anthropological theatre that emerged at the end of the 1970s. She is now analysing sociocultural reality and demonstrating her investigations through theatre.

Liddell is an actress, director, and writer who employs an intuitive, visceral, rapid, and critical language. However, there are significant differences between anthropological theatre and Liddell's theatre, as the message is central in Liddell's theatre while expression is central in anthropological theatre. According to Liddell, the audience cannot avoid the message; they must confront and endure reality. Before, theatre was viewed as merely fiction, but now, through the author-audience-actor connection, the author compels the audience to undergo an agonising catharsis. In this way, the

spectator cannot evade responsibility for what he or she observes, which is the cause of the rejection that Angélica Liddell frequently elicits from those who do not want to see the evidence, who choose entertainment to avoid contemplating what they must face as members of society and, therefore, agents of social change.

#### 2.3.2.2. Angélica Liddell and the Brandomín generation

Angélica Liddell discovers her own voice within the Brandomín generation, with a very distinct approach to writing than other authors of the same generation. This distinction resides in the purpose of her plays rather than in their presentation. Liddell is committed to making a livelihood solely from playwriting and to violently moving consciences, that is, she creates a "theatre of shock" to force the audience to confront and accept responsibility for social problems. In this way, the dramaturgy of our playwright attempts to attract the audience's attention through language or staging. Sometimes the author self-harms, which elicits unsettling feelings or unexpected responses from the audience, who are utterly stunned. This hostility is frequently what viewers recall when viewing her work. Second is the work's content, the claim made against reality, or Liddell's motivations for creating the work.

National and international critics have praised the originality of Liddell's plays, which are distinguished by their personal and tragic characters. Liddell advocates for telling the truth, elucidating the distinction between what is and is not, and being as steadfast and consistent as few others.

Except for Gumersindo Puche, Liddell did not have an established cast of actors at *Altra Bilis teatro*. Liddell typically works alone and alters the cast based on the requirements of each composition. Liddell admires choreographer and dancer Elena Córdoba tremendously. In *Mi puta perrera*, Liddell's personal blog, the director wrote the following about the artist:

Hay que ser valiente, muy valiente para buscar la belleza como la busca esta mujer. Hoy Elena me parecía la mujer más valiente del mundo en mitad de ese fango de banalidad que nos llena de mierda cada vez que pisamos un teatro, ese cieno de cobardes que jamás rozarán lo bello,

ni en sus pesadillas, pedazos de tocino que no producirán ni un instante hermoso del mismo modo que jamás lo podrán disfrutar, ridículos, torpes, pobres idiotas que frenan el mundo con su bobería y su incesante regodeo en la trivialidad, que compensan su carencia agrediendo a quien está iluminado. Hay que ser valiente, cojones, para entregarse con esa rotundidad, sencillez y serenidad, al mundo del espíritu. Las obras de Elena ponen a prueba nuestra capacidad de resistencia frente a la piedad. (Y por supuesto, no admito comentarios negativos de la gente a la que quiero, jamás, jamás, por eso les quiero, para defenderles como un chaleco antibalas, que se vayan a babear a otro sitio) (Liddell, 2009).<sup>16</sup>

Liddell has been excluded from public theatre for several years, but her situation has changed. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognise alternative venues as a platform for new creators.

### 2.3.2.3. Angélica Liddell and the feminist theatre in Spain

Contemporary Spanish women's theatre suffered from a strong invisibilisation during the 20th century. It began to form part of the theatrical programmes at the end of the century, experiencing a transgressive period at the beginning of the 21st century.

The dramaturgical representations in which the woman was played by a typical man are left behind: actresses now live in an imperative need for playwright-actress-directors, the culminating author of which is Angélica Liddell. This new trend provoked a critical reappraisal of society. It promoted an analysis of the role of women, who still had to defend themselves from the loopholes of a prevailing patriarchal society, defined by dictatorial macho terms that plunged Spanish society into stagnation and backwardness with respect to its education, values and beliefs. Through a theatre that is increasingly open to multidisciplinary discourses, the flaws of the Spanish system, which has prevailed over the years, become evident, calling for a new attitude on the part of women, who in turn represent one of the key witnesses with regard to the development and change of Spanish society:

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<sup>16</sup> The above quote, attributed to Angélica Liddell, derives from an old blog post that is no longer accessible. The website where the post resided was [www.miputaperrera.blogspot.com](http://www.miputaperrera.blogspot.com). Unfortunately, the content and context of the original blog entry have been lost to the passage of time, leaving only remnants of Liddell's artistic expression behind.



they are no longer victims of the most absolute otherness but represent an agent of change by taking to the stage and telling through intelligent discourse the capital progress that has been developed. In opposition to the male discourse, the social discourse of women through dramaturgy delves more deeply into the failings of a society having suffered directly from marginalisation, silence and the disparity of conditions generated by the state. Nonetheless, the representation of women today is paramount to the advancement of society. From this perspective, due to the centuries-long containment of their desires, having had to repress their thoughts and opinions, women have a deeper and more intense reflective capacity: they symbolise a group that has been relegated to exclusion and thus to non-participation in society as the main cause of the repression they have suffered: “A nivel teatral, la deconstrucción del modelo cultural femenino se produce con la invasión de la mujer en un terreno utilizado tradicionalmente por el poder masculino” (Henríquez-Sanguinetti, 1995: 117).

Women's dramaturgical discourse has evolved in two directions: one in parallel to the male discourse, born out of the idea of gender equality. The other aims to change it, opposing it in order to build a new cultural system of women, in which women represent active agents within the political system. This innovative stream of thought in a society that affirms the existence of freedom of opinion leads to the enrichment of a culture that in the past was linear and strongly limited.

Spanish drama was associated with an intellectual environment reserved for men. There was a clear lack of female playwrights, as the social role assigned to women in a backward and macho society was limited to domestic tasks. The role played by women for centuries has been that of procreators as the main objective. In the course of time, some women became literate, but they did not have free expression: all activities aimed at developing the intellect were reserved for men. Moreover, women who had the ability to rebel against power did not have the ability to communicate, which prohibited them from artistic development and thus from engaging entirely in intellectual activities such as authorship.

The education in force in Spain did not allow for the possibility of a woman to develop with the necessary training to assume an important or decisive role in society. In the 1940s, during the

Franco dictatorship, there was no known woman playwright except for Ana Diosdado. This is the reason why Liddell feels resentment and, consequently, is radically opposed to having offspring as proof of a dissatisfaction that has reached its peak. At present, Spanish women authors face a struggle to defend their work against producers who only finance commercial products.

Female education in Spain taught values such as humility or silence as good manners; it was continuously supervised and if limits were exceeded, the consequence was punishment. For this reason, abiding by these values as part of women's identity was a requirement for women. An example of a bedside book that perpetuated the values of a patriarchal, sexist and retrograde society was *La perfecta casada* by Fray Luis de León (1583), a work that was reprinted more than eleven times.

Subsequently, the repression of censorship prevented the realisation of women's desire to participate in the world of the arts. In 1870, 91% of women were illiterate and women's education was very precarious compared to that of other European countries, resulting in women's ignorance and lack of motivation. Thus, they were excluded from their desire to learn and to be an active part of society. Even in the case of the most privileged families, women's education was based on a culture of the superficial, instructing them in subjects such as painting, the French language or music, which prevented them from intervening in matters of relevance in society, such as politics.

The function of women in dramaturgy is to change the past, both the contents and the forms, adapting them to a social opening in which new interpretations are accepted, eradicating the theatre created by and for men, leading it towards an adaptation of today's real society. In this sense, it can be affirmed that Angélica Liddell finds herself for the first time in a leading position in the Spanish theatre scene, a fact that was reserved for playwrights, theatre theorists and stage directors throughout the history of Spain:

La literatura dramática es una actividad que exige un compromiso muy franco y contundente con el medio. Toda pieza de teatro es un ajuste de cuentas, un enfrentamiento inmediato con la sociedad. La escritura teatral es una escritura agresiva por su misma naturaleza, está hecha para ser llevada a la escena, y la escena tiene, no sólo la falta de pudor de todo arte, sino un

subrayado agregado por la corporeidad de los actores, por la confrontación física entre lo que sucede en el escenario y el espectador que escucha y sobre todo "ve." El texto dramático no está pensado para enmohecerse o incluso demorarse en los cajones, exige una confrontación inmediata con el público a través del escenario, a través de la movilización de un equipo. Sólo cuando las mujeres conquistaron un medio social, aunque fuera a medias, aunque todos sus derechos no le fueran reconocidos, pudieron franquear el bloqueo que les impedía escribir para el teatro, y casi paralelamente pudieron llegar a la dirección escénica (Griselda Gambaro: 1980: 19).

Women's discourse during the 1990s focused on problems such as violence against women, which caused so many deaths of women in Spain at the hands of men. However, there is also room for international conflicts such as terrorist attacks, wars, immigration... Likewise, the responsibility and power of the state as a mediating agent in these conflicts is pointed out. Today's female playwrights give voice to these real problems that continue to sustain a culture of violence. In doing so, they defend the oppressed sectors of society and censure the violence that is part of the international political context.

Angélica Liddell creates her works starting from a real existing problem such as, for example, the Kosovo War, paedophilia, the mistreatment of women (...). The author does not develop a feminine writing, although her condition as a woman represents a starting point and part of her experimental dimension. Liddell addresses a struggle within herself, as well as against injustice in different areas of the world. The presence of female protagonists in her works alludes to her own inner conflict, manifested through her alter ego or through herself. The director has renewed new concepts with her own style that does not go unnoticed, with a forceful objective that has managed to expand to the international scene. Her training is based on the rationalisation of reality, which promotes analysis and prompt action, changing the idea of the passive spectator into an agent of change, responsible for the social context. Liddell thus moves beyond the economic and political limits that hinder the visibility of current dramaturgy.

Angélica Liddell's theatre uses women's bodies as a space in which to symbolise the conflicts of culture; the pregnant body is transformed into a place of pain, directed by intelligence. She frequently employs images of excess, the violence of the body, such as floggings, beatings, bloody wounds... In this way, she makes visible the metaphysics of power, thus vindicating the state's misappropriation of her body through the rhetoric of power. Violence is a fundamental element in Liddell's theatre, manifesting the struggle and striving for women's full equality in the male-dominated world of theatre. Aggressive performative acts are required in order to capture the sacrifice that women suffer in order to belong to a group, that of the state-funded Spanish theatre.

Radicalism is another of the elements present in the author's theatre. Through the appearance of women playwrights in Spanish theatre, many have been forced to fight to achieve recognition on the stage so that the audience, critics and society as a group, consider the normalisation of women's access to the current theatrical context and not an exception along with the consequent prejudices.

Liddell takes a stand against many institutions, expressing his political demotivation, social marginalisation and existential angst publicly, as well as all that their failures generate. His works reflect his commitment to a core ethic, values and ideals. In 2006, Liddell staged two plays and acknowledges that she was able to eat thanks to the research grant that her partner, Gumersindo Puche, received. The director was unhappy that she did not fit into any of the scenarios offered by the current scene. On the one hand, she could not be considered a classical playwright. On the other hand, alternative theatre was beginning to opt for multidisciplinary works, which included performances, innovative scenography, audiovisuals in such a way that Liddell's scenography, based on her texts, was excluded.

Liddell's insistence on the theatre, despite the fact that the passing of the years and the improved quality of her plays did not increase her stage choices, which were dictated by theatre directors, is one of the most valuable aspects of her career: "El escritor occidental (...) tiene miedo de romper todas sus ataduras con los mecanismos burgueses con los que combate pero que en última instancia lo protegen y alimentan " (Fuster: 1970:39). Particularly at a time when creators are very

hesitant to rebel against the system, despite their disenchantment with it, Liddell manages to remain faithful to her values, with her coherent line of work and does not fail to deal with controversial, direct and not so commercial themes, even though this increases the difficulty of being able to represent her pieces.

### 2.3.3. Angélica Liddell

Angélica Catalina González, known artistically as Angélica Liddell, was born in Figueras and grew up in barracks due to her father's military profession. Her education was religious until the age of seventeen, when she began to study drama in Madrid. As a result of the disenchantment she felt for the *Royal School of Dramatic Art (RESAD)*, particularly disappointed by her teachers, she abandoned her studies in the final year to make way for her professional career as an entrepreneur. It was at this time that she completed her theatre studies along with a degree in psychology:

Cultura y educación están desvinculadas. Mira mis cinco años en Psicología: tiempo perdido.

Hay una cultura aventada por los grandes medios y los grandes capitales, que están creando una sociedad a su medida, alienada, masificada y apática: un mercado. Se invierte mucho en homogeneizar las conductas. Por eso reivindico al individuo, al capitán Ahab frente a las opiniones generales (Liddell, 2009).

In 1993, Liddell founded the theatre company *Atra Bilis* together with the actor Gumersindo Puche, which enabled her to continue with a coherent trajectory, without changing her dialogue, themes or staging, which were aggressive and visceral. On the other hand, her persistent commitment to the obscene led her for many years to perform only in small alternative theatres such as *Sala Triángulo*, *Sala Cuarta Pared* or *Sala el Canto de la Cabra*.

Liddell had begun a career with the aim of reconstructing the theatre, an extremely complicated activity considering that she herself was a director, playwright and actress. Liddell quickly suffered the most unpleasant side of the Spanish drama scene, since, after consecutive failures both critically and at the box office, not even her degree in psychology helped her to cope with her

economic precariousness. For this reason, she was forced to work in amusement parks and in different jobs that had nothing to do with her studies:

Estuve seis años en Port Aventura, haciendo un espectáculo de títeres vestida de china y otro con una faldita hawaiana. Así pagaba el alquiler. Íbamos a salto de mata. Estuve un año en el Retiro contando cuentos y pasando la gorra. Había que levantarse a las siete. Dejábamos todos los trastos puestos, para que no nos los quitaran -las reglas de la calle no son nada románticas e íbamos al Museo del Prado para estar calentitos viendo cuadros (Liddell, 2007).

Angélica Liddell suffered marginalisation from institutional support while critics attacked her artistic creations harshly for ten years. With no hope of receiving subsidies, the director continued her work, confident in the value of her work as well as in the need to continue creating her theatre. A contemporary of Rodrigo García, she is recognised today as the female version of him. However, there is a clear difference that distinguishes them: Rodrigo García emigrated after several years in Spain, to France in particular; unlike his contemporary, Liddell persisted in Spain until finally gaining recognition.

After several years working as a playwright, director and actress, Liddell was discovered abroad. However, in Spain her crowning moment did not come until 2007, when the director of the *Centro Dramático Nacional*, Gerardo Vera, invited her to premiere one of her plays at the *Teatro Valle Inclán* in Madrid: *Perro muerto en tintorería los fuertes*. After almost twenty years of effort, Angélica Liddell thus sees her coherent line recognised, a way of producing theatre that has brought about a resounding change to the Spanish drama scene.

#### 2.3.3.4. From the pain of her childhood

Liddell has always recognised the violent atmosphere of her childhood. She says that when her father was stationed in Valencia, they lived in a barracks house where she frequently heard expressions such

as: '¡que le mato!' or '¡si viene, le pego un tiro!' <sup>17</sup> It is important to go back to the author's childhood in order to understand the seed of pain that she reflects in her works. It is in this period of her life that we find the root of her rage, a stage in which she begins her vindication to change the imposed and unjustified order of things:

Mi padre es militar y hemos hecho todo el itinerario: nací en Girona, nos fuimos a Valencia, a Burgos, a Madrid... [...] Crecer así es fatal. Vivía en campamentos militares y, en cuanto me establecía, me iba. Era algo delirante. No veía más que gente con uniforme y pistolas. Ese ambiente cuartelario, duro, más o menos violento... ¡vaya sitio para una niña! (Liddell, 2007)

At a very early age, the director felt the loneliness, the inflexibility of her rigid religious upbringing in private schools, as well as the uprooting caused by the constant changes of city.

Un momento particularmente propicio para acabar con todo es la adolescencia. En esa época, mi vida era un desastre debido a los continuos traslados a distintas ciudades que teníamos que hacer a causa del trabajo de mi padre, que era militar. Cuando tenía trece años nos fuimos de Valencia, donde vivíamos en el campo y tenía a mis amigas. Fue una época complicada. Pasé la adolescencia entre médicos. Tuve una úlcera sangrante, algo muy inusual a esa edad, y sufrí una fuerte depresión. Lo recuerdo como mi etapa más angustiada y triste (Liddell, 2008).

Angélica Liddell's dramaturgy represents this pain in all its variants. It is a work of analysis of the current reality in order to make visible and denounce its most lurid parts. Likewise, her works have the memory present as if it were a proof of pain. "Quizás por ser hija única, quizás por determinadas cosas de mi infancia siempre he sido bastante pesimista" (Liddell, 1995, n.p.).

In this way, the director is better understood, as she affirms the greater importance of her work as opposed to her life: "Utilizo el teatro para encontrarle un sentido a la vida. Por eso es más importante que la vida. Porque gracias al teatro organizo el dolor, y lo comprendo" (Liddell, 2009, n.p.).

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<sup>17</sup> Interview by Liddell for Javier Vallejo, *El País de las Tentaciones* n°279, Friday 20 September (2002): <https://parnaseo.uv.es/Ars/Autores/liddell/westasphixia/prensa/prensa1.htm> .

### 2.3.5. Discomfort with the audience and the social question

According to Angélica Liddell, her production does not correspond to avant-garde theatre since it deals with something more primitive: humans and their conflicts. Nevertheless, her plays introduce transgression into Spanish dramaturgy, as they renew the contemporary theatrical context in a convincing and evident way. It is important to understand that for Liddell, transgression is not synonymous with scandal.

In her work, Liddell forces the spectator to become a participant in the dramatic action and confronts him with a hostile reality. To this end, he creates uncomfortable situations such as forcing the audience to sit on the floor, on straw or stones:

Me interesa que el espectador se relacione con el mundo a través del desasosiego. Quiero seducirle así. No es un ataque, sino el afán de que los dos nos entreguemos a una situación de vulnerabilidad, de máxima exposición, para llegar así a amarnos. Es algo maravilloso que sólo puede lograr el teatro. Dicen que el dolor está sobrevalorado, pero es el humor el que está muy bien pagado. La mayoría de la gente ha tomado la banalidad como motor. Hay una burla constante de lo bello. Y es producto de la deleznable educación actual, del fracaso de los planes de estudio y de los nefastos índices de lectura. Vivimos en el regodeo de la estupidez (Liddell, 2008, n.p.).

Angélica Liddell uses theatre as a weapon to vindicate and criticise the problems of today's society. She provokes her audience, pushing them to react to the most serious conflicts in society and preventing them from taking a passive attitude towards them. In this way, theatre gives voice and body to the marginalised victims of our society, while denouncing the alienation of a capitalist and bourgeois society. In the same way, dramaturgy represents a kind of fundamental mediator as an agent of social change and tries to provoke reactions to the state policies that this director denounces.



With this aim in mind, her plays continue a trajectory in which textual coherence and aesthetics are paramount. Her commitment to change is reflected in her strong belief in the reinvention of dramaturgy:

Pero no por originalidad, sino por un ansia desmedida de libertad respecto al lenguaje. Desprecio esa actitud decimonónica de la escena actual. Esa caspa tan siglo XIX que el teatro español no se ha quitado aún. Algunos, haciendo un teatro de monjas, van de incorrectos por la vida. Es ridículo. Así es la gran mayoría del oficio, lleno de gente ruin, mezquina y estúpida. La libertad pasa por asesinar el medio para el que trabajas. El milagro del teatro empieza cuando toda capacidad de análisis queda masacrada frente a un texto y un actor (Liddell, 2008, n.p.)

The violence in her plays is never gratuitous, as it is born of pain, expressed without shame and does not allow for indifference on the part of her audience. Given that her dramaturgical trajectory is marked by verbal violence, the dark and the perverse, it is not surprising that she has been labelled a cursed author.

Her dramaturgy uses all kinds of stimuli to develop the movement of consciences and makes visible the most current problems of our society: immigration, paedophilia, abuse of power, holes in democracy, etc. Liddell provokes analysis and does not allow passivity in the audience, which has guaranteed her both fans and detractors of her plays.

It is important to emphasise that, having received prestigious national awards, Liddell has continued to ridicule the system, as well as the country's dramatic elites. She continues to openly express her contempt for the *Sociedad General de Autores Españoles (SGAE)* or the *RESAD*. Politically incorrect, she highlights her lack of fear or modesty in stating what no one dares to listen to. In this way, she proves that one can be at the top without corrupting one's values.

### 2.3.7. Main Issues

Liddell's writing style is intense, excessive, and profoundly cultivated, which provokes a range of emotions from shock to disgust. In Liddell's writing, there are different artistic influences such as George Steiner, the Bible, Alda Merini, Chet Baker, Pavese, Cartarescu, Rilke, Bataille o Sófocles. Liddell expresses her desire for the spectator to break with the boundaries of the measurable, quantifiable, and rational world:

Quiero que el espectador rompa las barreras que le unen al mundo de lo mensurable, de lo explicable, de lo material. Quiero que experimente una Epifanía a través de la Belleza.

Devolverles un mundo interior mediante la catarsis. Algo antiguo (Corroto, 2022, n.p.).

Spectators are aware of the dark world they are accessing with her plays. However, Liddell also understands that: "Las tinieblas son el camino hacia la luz" (Corroto, 2022, n.p.).

It could be argued that by reexperiencing her memories, Liddell reveals herself in the process. She returns to ritual theatre, originated in Modernism. The Spanish playwright drinks from all the renewal produced by the avant-garde. The process of her artistic proposal is the result of Artaud's artistic heritage. Her staging is what makes her theatre real, which demands a great effort from the actors and the audience.

Liddell's theatrical production focuses on pain and is, essentially, the result of a personal search for human truth and its cruellest aspects. In Liddell's practice and writing, where the most physical sensation and emotion reigns and emotion prevails, from a vision of the stage as a "field of action", certain traits can be deemed that problematise the boundaries between the poetic and the theatrical realms, which are closely connected to the relevance of the presence on stage of the actress as the body of the text. They are works in which a multiple subject -actress, playwright, stage director and character - problematises the art-reality dichotomy in a meta-reflexive and spontaneous discourse characterised by subversion, expressive force, direct interpellation of the spectator and the direct interpellation to the spectator as well as by entailing a wide horizon of meaning.

In Liddell's theatre, the ritual must be understood from the body and in the body. The word's accelerated and resonant pronunciation, its intermittent vocal intensity in some syllables and words, the ascending and descending graduality, the uncontrolled -controlled- pauses, silences, shouts and breathing. Since all these actions take place in the body, hence the word is the result of the body. Liddell constantly attempts to reach a state of trance, whether it is through movement or stillness.

Liddell seeks an individual redemption with the effect of the word on the body, which is born and dies of it, as an individual, and which is born and dies of the rest of spectators, as individuals, equally from the self to the audience and from the audience to the self. For Liddell, theatre is sacred, it is not a banality to generate entertainment but a language to combat society. In this sense, the playwright is transformative, she expects her theatre to transform the audience.

Liddell uses a symbolic language that is reflected in symbols such as when she decides to use the Spanish flag as a skirt onstage. In this way, Liddell reflects a critical sense of the Spanish scene, which is evidence of her conflictual relationship with Spain. It is important to remember that Liddell left *RESAD* because she did not share its values. Her theatrical premieres took place first outside Spain, as the polemic of her country of origin did not allow her to exhibit her works in situ. Therefore, she developed her career earlier, outside Spain.

Liddell addresses different actions in her plays. In this section, I will explore four of them. First, the relation between the here and there while addressing war conflicts in *Belgrado*. Next, I will analyse issues regarding self-perception, ethics, and humanity in *Belgrado* and *La casa de la fuerza*. Lastly, I will develop an exploration on violence against women, more specifically femicides in *La casa de la fuerza*.

#### 2.3.7.1. War conflicts and the connection between the here and there

*Belgrado* is one of Liddell's longest plays, which was awarded the *Lope de Vega Playwriting Prize* in 2007 by the *Community of Madrid*. Once again, the director distances herself from symbolism to show reality and generates innovative reflections on the places and the specific events that took place

in them. The play is divided into thirteen scenes (*Vera Sophia, O gloriosa domina, Miserere, Venite, Pange Lingua, Christus Natus est, Veni redemptory, Liber generationis, Verbum Patris, Gloria Laus, Vexilla Regis, Christus factus est* and *Exultemus*), each preceded by liturgical verses as introduction. Baltasar takes centre stage in the narrative, joined by a cast that includes Dragan, Agnes (his spouse), his mother, his father (a Nobel laureate), a Serbian taxi driver, and his two sons, Zeljko and Borislav. The play addresses one of the cruellest periods in history, alluding to the war in the former Yugoslavia, in particular the conflict that took place in Belgrade: “se calculó la muerte aproximada de 8.000 personas de etnia bosnia en la región de Srebrenica y un total de 150.000 muertos y 80.000 mujeres violadas” (Vidal Egea, 2010: 483). The enormous violence by Serbs against Albanian independence fighters led to the first *NATO* attack in 1999 with the aim of resolving the conflict. *NATO's* action was not approved by the *Security Council* and was in breach of *Article 2(4)* of the *UN Charter*, which prevents the use of violence or force in international relations. Against this backdrop of moral deficiency, in which a pacifist institution took advantage of the chaos to advance its aims instead of supporting the civilian population, Angélica Liddell develops this dramaturgical piece, full of irony and cynicism.

The opening of *Belgrado* warns the audience member that the play will be a critique of international institutions and the barbarity of certain politicians who choose to defend their strategic position rather than support innocent civilians. The play opens with a quote from *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy (1828-1919):

¿Quiénes son? ¿Por qué corren así? ¿Para matarme? ¿A mí, a quien tanto quieren todos?

Recordó el cariño de su madre, de la familia, de los amigos, y la intención de los enemigos de matarle le pareció imposible.

In the play, we can observe a significant change in both form and content to which Liddell has accustomed us: it is a play with historical allusions, so that we learn from our mistakes and so that the all-important historical memory is not consigned to oblivion.

Liddell depicts the pain of war in the family during the time of Milosevic's funeral. The action takes place as two young people—the young man is the son of the *Nobel price* and is visiting Belgrade to write some reports about the war, the young woman works for an NGO—travel to the city of Belgrade to investigate the conflict and its consequences on the public and on public opinion. The woman falls in love with a murderous Serb, so that she fears for her life, yet chooses to venture into her potential tragedy rather than continue to investigate the misfortunes of others. Eventually, the he kills the young woman:

Es necesario, de alguna manera es necesario sentir que alguien a quien amamos no nos ama, alguien físico, sexual, no la humanidad, sino alguien que te haga sufrir de verdad, sexualmente, un sufrimiento que se retraiga en el (...) te pareceré idiota pero necesitaba lo voluptuoso, después de Kosovo, hacer crecer un tipo de angustia voluptuosa, necesitaba lo sentimental (...) Cuando aparece la niña desamada deja de existir la humanidad (Liddell qtd. in Vidal Egea, 2010: 490)

In Angélica Liddell's play, the character of the protagonist narrates what happened in Belgrade through the perspective of her interviewees, she makes the decision to actively participate in the terror, becoming truly involved in the story. As a result, the woman falls in love with a Serbian assassin, knowing the risk that she could die. In this way, she understands that she chooses a way of living in truth. The woman, like the author, prefers to experience pain (with self-harming, confessional works) rather than narrate the harm of others; it is her form of authenticity.

*Belgrado* is a play with a historical purpose, intending to prevent forgetting and promote learning from past mistakes. Liddell meticulously explores the individuals who played pivotal roles in the horrors of Balkan history—the perpetrators of events such as the Srebrenica massacre, Kosovo conflict, Balkan crisis, the Kamenica mass grave, and the presence of Slobodan Milosevic (Vidal Egea, 2010: 489)

### 2.3.7.2. Self-perception, questioning ethics and humanity

In the play *Belgrado*, the dramatist revisits familiar themes, such as the renunciation of motherhood, which she has previously explored in works like *Lesiones incompatibles con la vida* and Nubila Wahlheim's monologue necessary for the extinction of Nubila Wahlheim (Vidal Egea, 2010: 490). However, in *Belgrado*, the perspective takes on a more tragic tone. Here, the playwright contemplates the decision not to have children, driven by the notion of shielding them from the harsh realities of misery and the violence inherent in a hostile world that jeopardises their survival. The rejection of motherhood in the play represents a struggle against the established notion of woman-as-mother. It serves as a form of protest against the prevailing justice, with the dramatist using her own body to reinforce accumulated pessimism and resentment. Additionally, there is an element of pleasure found in the act of denial.

In *Belgrado*, the playwright captures the places she usually shows us, such as, for example, the renunciation of motherhood, already alluded to in *Lesiones incompatibles con la vida* and in Nubila Wahlheim's Monologue necessary for the extinction of Nubila Wahlheim. In this work, however, the perspective is more tragic, as she considers the option of not having children with the idea of protecting them from misery, from the violence of a hostile world that poses a risk to their survival:

Puesto que sé decir no y me gusta decir no, soy capaz de abrumarte con mis no, de hacerte descubrir todas las maneras de decir si como las coquetas que se prueban todas las camisas y todos los zapatos para no llevarse ninguno y el placer que les produce probárselos todos no es otro que el placer que les produce rechazarlos (Koltés, 2001: 35)

In this context, American feminist Camilla Paglia, a disciple of Harold Bloom, pointed out that what we call the miracle of birth is nothing but nature having its way. Every month represents a new defeat of women's will (Paglia: 2006: 38). Liddell forces a reconsideration of motherhood, defined as an act of irresponsibility in certain situations. This concern is reflected in the second scene in *Belgrado*: "Tal vez si hubiera tenido un hijo nunca más hubiera aparecido esta niña desamada totalmente horizontal.

Pero no podía traer un hijo al mundo y darle una familia como la mía, unos abuelos como mis padres..." (Liddell: 2008: 11). From the theatrical stage, Angelica Liddell rebels against all the stereotypes imposed on women, asserting the primacy of personal will and choice over tradition and received education (Vidal Egea, 2010: 249). As in scene number eight: "Son madres porque son mamíferas, sumisas a la fuerza, o porque no saben ser otra cosa" (Liddell: 2008: 72).

Another of the play's central themes is language and parental relationships. Liddell deals with the impulse to write about words that are not necessary, the effort to free herself from the guilt she feels when she expresses what she considers sentimental rubbish.

In the third scene of *Belgrado*, specifically in *Miserere Tres versos-plegaria*, an unnamed character representing the majority supporting the system engages in a monologue directed at Baltasar. This monologue is characterised by a simplistic discourse and a profound lack of conscience, as the character defends acts of murder without any thoughtful reflection. The arguments presented are notably weak, reaching a level of chilling extremeness due to their utter coldness. The character, devoid of remorse or shame, justifies all actions by invoking concepts of loyalty, honor, and his personal interpretation of justice. In the third scene, *Miserere Tres versos-plegaria*, an anonymous character who is part of the majority that defends the system, addresses Baltasar. It is a monologue of basic discourse, with a tremendous lack of conscience, as he defends the murders, without developing any kind of reflection, with arguments that are so poor that they are frightening due to their extreme coldness. One of these men, without any reflection of regret or shame, justifies all his actions with reasons that refer to loyalty, honour and his vision of justice.

In *Belgrado*'s sixth scene, *Christus Natus est*, we observe the cruel discourse that a Serbian taxi driver, a victim of the communist system, expresses to his client. This character criticises classism, the bourgeois tyranny that lives a contemplative life while the country is being destroyed, the hatred of Paris as a city of unreal culture, the injustice of the dictatorial political system that receives the support of the people. It is an impassioned speech in which the taxi driver attacks the

cruelty of the war, using precise data, which gives a faithful portrait of Belgrade. The final part of the speech is the most illuminating, when the taxi driver raises several thought-provoking questions: “¿Qué es lo que quiere? ¿Hacer de mi sufrimiento un tema literario? ¿Quiere convertirlo en objeto artístico? ¿Qué, qué, qué es lo que quiere? El turismo de la tragedia, el ocio de la brutalidad, el entretenimiento de la barbarie” (Liddell: 2008: 44).

In the seventh scene of *Belgrado, Veni redemptor*, Balthasar and Dragan are in the museum of the revolution and discuss the fate of children who have grown up in the war. The conversation touches on different issues; the children resulting from the rape of women by soldiers, adoption, the pain of a traumatised childhood, the generation of children who were forced to grow up hardened, thus becoming survivors of the tragedy. Dragan asks Balthasar to save his son from barbarism, taking him with him, as he does not think he can resist much longer: he is thinking of committing suicide. Balthasar addresses the following words to him: “¡Cómo puedes ser tan egoísta!” (Liddell: 2008:51). This discussion deepens the analysis of the extent to which we have responsibility for the things that happen around us.

In the tenth scene of the play, *Gloria Laus*, Liddell uses biblical verses to open the scene. Balthasar begins to make statements in which he disassociates himself from the past, forcing himself to forget the pain. He tries to avoid the memory of the terror of several continuous and putrid policies, the memory of which manages to torture and frustrate him even more.

In 2009, *La casa de la fuerza* became Angélica Liddell's longest production, lasting 5 hours and 30 minutes, including intermissions. This play represents one of her most daring and ambitious works to date. Through the creation of this play, Angélica Liddell establishes herself as the Spanish playwright responsible for one of the longest theatrical performances in the history of Spanish theater (Vidal Egea, 2010: 513).

After a two-year hiatus following *Perro muerto en tintorería: Los fuertes* in 2007, during which Angélica Liddell exclusively performed solo pieces, she once again collaborates with a group of actors. This ensemble includes Lola Jiménez, Getsemaní San Marcos, Cynthia Aguirre, Perla



Bonilla, María Sánchez, and María Morales, with three of them being Mexican. Gumersindo Puche, this time, takes on the role of a producer rather than an actor, while Carlos Marquerié returns as the lighting designer. This production boasts the largest cast in the actress, author, and playwright's professional journey, featuring a total of seven characters. In the musical realm, cellist Pau de Nut returns, previously collaborating on the 2009 piece *Venecia*, alongside six mariachis and the Solís Orchestra (Vidal Egea, 2010: 514).

In *La Casa de la Fuerza*, strength and the body are the protagonists of this play. The author delves into a more intimate dramaturgy that painfully reflects her vulnerability. In this case, she uses the figure of Juan Carlos Heredia El Porrúo (193cm, 173 kilos), multi-champion of press banca, national strongman champion in 2007 and 2009, awarded for being able to drag a lorry and lift four balls of an average weight of 145 kilos. The man with the most strength in the country represents the reference to fight against sadness and vulnerability, as if by exercising the muscles, a shell is formed with which the core of vulnerability can be protected. Strength in this work alludes to what is achieved through the exercise of persistence, leading to personal satisfaction, with the overcoming of mental challenges, psychic fragility. As one of the Mexican actresses from *La Casa de la Fuerza* exclaims: “Ojalá sobrevivan los débiles, porque si sobreviven los fuertes estamos perdidos”. (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. III parte). Liddell now focuses on the woman: “empujada, /a lo largo de su vida, / lentamente empujada, / hacia el suburbio sentimental”, as she did in *Belgrado*. It is important to clarify that the feminine does not necessarily have to coincide with womanhood: in the play, the evidence is the paradox of a strongman: Liddell uses the figure of Juan Carlos Heredia El Porrúo (193cm, 173 kilos), multi-champion of press banca, national strongman champion in 2007 and 2009, awarded for being able to drag a lorry and lift four balls of an average weight of 145 kilos. The man with the most strength in the country represents the reference to fight against sadness and vulnerability, as if by exercising the muscles, a shell is formed with which the core of vulnerability can be protected.

Liddell is presented as an example of fragility in opposition to the national strongman champion, although both can feed off each other to achieve a balance that allows for the enrichment of both extremes. This work aims to master the duality between the bodily and the mental to the point where material reality can be differentiated from mental phenomena. Liddell deepens her anxiety as she tries to annul mental pain through physical activity, attempting to evade her personal conflicts by devoting herself fully to the body.

*La casa de la fuerza* addresses disillusionment, the failure of love, the loss of illusion, considering the humiliation and loss of self-esteem that it entails. The play is a choral work with three parts, with a common point based on the effort and struggle to get up and continue after the fall. It is a piece that Liddell seeks the strength necessary to survive, that aims to break the frivolisation of love, so that in sentimental failure we find a greater failure, of greater depth and transcendence that transports us to existentialist philosophy.

### 2.3.7.3. Femicides

Within the context of Francoist Spain, perceptions of female sexuality play a crucial role, according to Liddell's stance on the role of women in a society that has not yet emancipated itself from Catholic morality and misogyny, as evidenced in *Belgrado*. The author, through the voice of Agnes, confesses her affiliation with a "familia de barrigas fecundas y sagradas" (mothers). It is worth recalling that during the forty years of political and religious repression, the Church maintained strong control over education and moral life. The so-called national-Catholic system combined elements of Catholic conservatism with fascism, and this fusion was clearly reflected in organisations such as the Women's Section of F.E.T. de las J.O.N.S. Established in 1934 and led until its dissolution in 1977 by Pilar Primo de Rivera, it was responsible for the education and training of Spanish women (Velasco González, 2016: 198).

The discussion about the ideal image of women was a component of the broader notion of ideological and moral renewal, as well as the "restauración del orden" during the Francoist period.

Franco personally underscored the importance of "la reconquista del hogar", emphasising tasks related to daily life, raising children, managing the kitchen, and taking care of household affairs. This perspective is elaborated upon by María Victoria Martíns:

El cometido social que se le asignó a la mujer fue básicamente el de servir a los demás, sesgando su propia autonomía, su libertad y la posibilidad de un proyecto de vida propio (...). La sumisión, el sacrificio y la abnegación son una constante del discurso de la Sección Femenina (Martíns, 2012: 278)

In *Tiempo de Cuaresma. Modelos de sexualidad femenina bajo el franquismo*, Dolores Juliano provides additional insights to complete the picture:

Se esperaba que las mujeres casadas tuvieran relaciones sexuales solo con fines reproductivos y como una concesión a los deseos masculinos (estos sí, reconocidos y legitimados). Así, el modelo de "buenas mujeres", que incluía a las madres y a las esposas, era un modelo casi asexual (...). Cualquier sexualidad femenina era vista como una sexualidad equivocada. No existía ningún modelo legitimado que permitiera a las mujeres desarrollar o manifestar sus impulsos sexuales (Martíns, 2012: 36)

This is the breeding ground for actions such as *Yo no soy bonita* ("I am not beautiful"), which Liddell interprets in the summer of 2009 within the context of another political system characterised by machismo: Mexico.

The femicide in Ciudad Juárez, exposed in the early 1990s, plays a significant role in *La Casa de la Fuerza*. This border city, adjacent to the United States, became emblematic of male violence due to the prevalent incidents of kidnappings, sexual assaults, and murders targeting young and economically marginalised women, who lacked societal influence. In some cases, the remains of these victims were never discovered (Velasco González, 2016: 199).

Authorities attempted to downplay the gravity of the crimes by labelling the victims as prostitutes and drug addicts. Concurrently, the investigative commission assigned to the cases since 1993 encountered obstacles in their efforts due to insufficient resources and support. In *La Casa de*

*la Fuerza*, Liddell recounts the discovery in 2001 of eight bodies of women and girls in a symbolically significant location near the headquarters of the *Sindicato de las Trabajadoras (Union of Female Workers)*. She also highlights that the group formed by the families and friends of the young victims, known as *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*<sup>18</sup> (*Our Daughters Back Home*), took their calls for justice beyond national borders, aiming to bring attention to the cases before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Velasco González, 2016: 201):

Las familias que participamos en este movimiento hemos convertido en fuerza nuestro dolor, después de enfrentarnos, además de al brutal asesinato de nuestras hijas, a la ineptitud, la intransigencia, al encubrimiento, a la corrupción, a la más indiferente actitud de funcionarios y autoridades.

Nos resulta complicado expresar con palabras el dolor desgarrador de saber asesinadas en tales circunstancias a nuestras jóvenes hijas, es un inmenso sufrimiento que no se extingue, así como las lágrimas que no podemos evitar cada vez que pensamos en ellas o miramos las cosas que dejaron y sus fotos. Nos angustia y crece nuestro suplicio al imaginar cómo pudieron ser los últimos momentos de nuestras hijas asesinadas a base de torturas. Es así como iniciamos nuestra organización: volcando esta indignación, este dolor y coraje en una fuerza que nos ha permitido soportar todo el aparato de la burocracia, y poder enfrentar a las dependencias corruptas e ineficaces, funcionarios cómplices y a la impunidad del poder político y económico, buscando además de la justicia que no hemos logrado, disminuir las causas de tantas muertes absurdas como las de nuestras hijas.

At present, civil organizations across the territory acknowledge and actively work against femicides (Velasco González, 2016: 201). The Plan Mexico, executed during the presidencies of Felipe Calderón in Mexico and George W. Bush in the United States, ultimately led to the severe militarization of Chihuahua, causing a 200% surge in violence (Velasco González, 2016: 202).

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<sup>18</sup> See blog from the organisation *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*: <http://nuestrashijasderegresoacasa.blogspot.com.es/p/origen-de-nuestra-organizacion.html>

*La casa de la Fuerza* is divided into three parts of similar length (around 1 hour and 45 minutes each). In the first part of the play, a girl of about six years old appears on stage and reads: "No hay cerro, ni selva, ni desierto, que nos libre del daño que otros preparan para nosotros". She then climbs into a small pink plane and disappears. Two Spanish actresses appear, dressed in typical Mexican costume, telling of their sentimental experiences from the floor, the piece begins with the phrase: "Una vez, un hombre al que amaba me dio una ostia " (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part I), which sums up the content of the whole piece.

Liddell bursts onto the stage dressed in black, combs their hair and kisses them. After drinking a third of a beer in one sitting, symbolising her ritual of self-destruction with alcohol and tobacco, the six mariachis enter the stage, singing and dancing rancheras such as *La tequilera* or *El preso número 9<sup>19</sup>*. In this way, the pain that is shared seems to be lighter, thus connecting the protagonists, what develops the love between them is their common wound, the defeat. For this reason, throughout the recreation of the celebration there is a hint of sadness that tinges everything. When the mariachis disappear, the three actresses are petrified, staring at the door through which they leave, creating a perfect diagonal through which the light emerges. Likewise, they are left in complete darkness, returning to the table, to the drink and the cigars, to that solitude that takes shape with its gravity during the fifteen minutes of silence in which the actresses say nothing to each other and think of no way to console themselves. One of the protagonists takes a dozen lemons and cuts them in two, smears the citric acid on her skin and hair, then bites into the lemon and eats it in bites, which seems to work as a reference to Lorca. A little later, they begin to talk, but the dialogue repeats the pain, using typical movie phrases: " Para que recuerdes mi nombre el resto de tu vida tendré que levantarte la tapa de los sesos " (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part I). Uncovering their breasts, they use their strength with weights until the mental pain is silenced by muscular exhaustion. The author repeats the phrase "Amar tanto para morir solos", as if it were the refrain of the piece. In the last scene, the

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<sup>19</sup> A song featured in the welcome on Angélica Liddell's website: [www.angelicaliddell.com](http://www.angelicaliddell.com).

protagonists are half-naked on the floor, exposed to the audience's criticism, constantly looking at her, but motionless.

In the second part, the work takes on a more reflective character, Liddell sadly confesses her most relevant story. Both the sensitivity and the authenticity of her words manage to move the audience, the artist manages to make the spectator feel the helplessness she herself feels, thus suffering with her: "Me ha dicho las cosas más hermosas y las más horribles [...] si yo le decía que le quería me hacía daño" (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part II). It is in this part that the character of Angélica Liddell explains why she self-harms: "empecé a cortarme por amor". In this way, there is a connection between personal suffering and the scenes of war between Israelis and Palestinians broadcast by *CNN*: "Todo recuerdo intenso nos pone en contacto con la fuerza" (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part II). Liddell shows the blood on her arm while doing weights. At the same time, Pau de Nut plays *Vivaldi*. In a moment of total sincerity, the director confesses that she has already managed to win all the awards regardless of whether the critics think she writes well or badly. However, she says that, if she is excluded from love, she cannot be loved. With the support of the two actresses who appeared in the previous part, Liddell recites the difficult letter she received from David Fernández onstage:

Sólo tolero el sufrimiento de los enfermos, el sufrimiento corporal es coherente, peor no ese regodeo en el mundo del espíritu (...). Porque sufres como los demás, por eso puedo joderte viva (...) Tú no eres un gran acontecimiento, eres una más. (...) Todos estamos solos por qué voy a defenderte a ti. (...) la gente que sufre es egoísta, soberbia, egocéntrica (...). Les pasó a todas. (...) Hasta que no te mates no te voy a creer. Cuando te mates te creeré. (...). Nunca entenderé por qué cuando te hago daño eliges llorar (Liddell, Angélica. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part II. 2011: 68).

A medical assistant appears on stage and draws blood from the protagonists, handing them a plastic tube with the liquid with which they begin to draw a heart on a white shirt. They wait standing facing the audience until the heart shape deforms and the blood trickles to the floor in the form of a thread.

Liddell uses metaphors related to the construction and destruction of a story, alluding to the effort and suffering that is part of these processes. To stage it, she places ten three-seater sofas in the centre of the stage. With the help of the protagonists, he moves the sofas and then leaves them in the same place as at the beginning. They also empty sacks of coal on the stage, which they later remove with shovels. All these ideas attract the audience's attention in a theatre where unexpected words and actions are expected. The delay in staging these objects that later have to be removed generates a desperation that the author wants to provoke in the audience so that they can feel their own frustration. In particular, the charcoal is an element wisely chosen by the author because it reflects a great heaviness, very useful for the audience to be able to identify with Liddell's feelings.

In the third part, wooden crosses appear as if the stage were a cemetery. Standing, the Mexican actresses, one of the three of whom is pregnant in the centre, express with innocence and crudeness their experiences of violence and corruption in Mexico. In this context of hostility and oppression, Pau de Nut enters the stage with his cello, singing three songs: *Here I am*, *Ne me quitte pas* and *Love me tender*. Following the order of the songs, the discourse reflects a beginning, middle and end according to pain, forgiveness and struggle and, eventually, new illusion, as a transition of emotional states until ending in healing and beginning. When the music ends, one of the protagonists exclaims: "Ojalá sobrevivan los débiles porque si sobreviven los fuertes estamos perdidos" (Angélica Liddell. *La casa de la fuerza*. Part III).

In opposition to the message of David Fernández's letter in which it is stated that we live to be happy and not good, as if goodness and happiness were not compatible; Liddell opts for the fragile and good-natured, rejects ambition, power and recognition, since, as the evidence shows, strength continually leads to evil. For the author, *La Casa de la Fuerza* is the place where resistance is trained, not where power is worked and nurtured. To end the play, Juan Carlos Heredia, the Strongman champion, enters the stage and shows his strength by overturning a car full of flowers on the stage. To do this, he lifts two metal barrels and a stone ball. The different forms of strength that exist are highlighted. On the one hand, the strength needed to survive heartbreak and loneliness.

The reality that Liddell tells from reality gives the audience a privileged position from confessor to confidant. The three parts of the play take place in different settings, each unfolding in real time. The author gives the necessary time to each action and word for its correct assimilation. The author's relaxation regarding the management of time is reflected in a staunch security that makes her theatre have the time of real life.

In *La casa de la fuerza*, Angélica Liddell manages to make the audience laugh for the first time. She transforms moments of great tension into comic elements. The way she uses to reflect her problems has a dramatic charge as well as moments of relaxation in which the audience becomes more involved in the play, in a less rigid and more natural context. However, in the tensest moments of the play, the director knows perfectly well the resources that intensify the effectiveness of her message. An example would be when she introduces one of the pregnant Mexican actresses in the third part of the play. In this way, she emphasises the problem and intensifies the audience's sensibility, as the figure of a more fragile victim is portrayed. On the other hand, Liddell is aware of the risk of staging a play that lasts more than five hours. For this reason, she introduces music<sup>20</sup> as a resource that reinforces the spectator's attention when there is a greater tendency to disconnect due to the density of the subject matter addressed in the play. Likewise, the rancheras provide a fast and cheerful rhythm that offsets the cruelty of the play, and Pau de Nut's cello alludes to beauty and helps to settle the emotions expressed. It is important to note that the music does not provoke evasion, but rather strengthens the content, softening the textual tension.

The author appears falsely present as the subject from which the theatrical gaze is born and to which the gaze of the audience is directed. In this way, she becomes a character who expresses, but does not seem to represent, in a neo-baroque dramaturgical space, in connection with the theatrical movement *in yer face*, a poetry and corporeality often influenced by dirt, which serves as a contrast to the musical works playing in the background, in the manner of an exquisite sophistication.

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<sup>20</sup> The role of music in theatre is multifaceted and extends beyond mere entertainment. It involves complex interactions with the narrative, emotions, and audience engagement. Due to its nuanced nature, a comprehensive exploration of the significance of music in theatre requires in-depth analysis and consideration.



There is the idea of the corporeal as the personal space, the space of the intimate and of identity, of the self, in which all struggles open up and where the state develops its maximum function of control and domination: “No quiero tener hijos. Es mi manera de protestar. Mi cuerpo es mi protesta. Mi cuerpo renuncia a la fertilidad. Mi cuerpo es mi protesta contra la injusticia, contra el linchamiento, contra la guerra” (Liddell 2003: 8). Liddell seems to express that the body, her body as a woman, is the authentic and unique reality, as the corporeal belongs to the absolute struggle. In conclusion, the director's response stems from an attitude that is essential to the different strategies of struggle or resistance against power relations: rebellion and disobedience.

At this point, Liddell has explored a language and taken up an outstanding level of maturity that is reflected in its strength. From the thematic perspective, the play is cemented between the individual lack of love, of people who feel the desperation caused by the rejection of the other or influenced by the violence they exert, from the male perspective, as well as the history of group violence seen in the murders of Ciudad Juárez. The piece explores the various forms of violence suffered by Angélica, Getse and Lola, the characters named after the actresses on stage, who give their testimony through their own confessions, which are extrapolated to the violence suffered by the other women.

In *La Casa de la Fuerza*, three different perspectives are superimposed: the personal point of view in the first person, the historical plane of all those women who were murdered and often disappeared, as well as the fictional perspective, in which a metatextual evasion of A. Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is presented. Constantly on stage, the main actresses create a world of women who are constantly threatened by men, e.g. a group of mariachis and the strongest man in the country.

Harassment is reflected through physical violence, as well as through imaginaries and gender roles that are transmitted through traditional music, literature or laws. The strength of the actions highlight the essential importance of language as the real driver of oppression, emphasising the relevance of the word, not silence, as these pre-modernising imaginaries are confronted. Liddell plays the character with the same name. On stage, she narrates personal histories, thus complicating the

division between autobiographical fiction and reality. She confesses to having read the letters of her lovers, her chaotic relationship with her parents and her aversion to them; she has publicly expressed the way she feels and, in part, the hatred she feels. She also makes her intimacy part of the show.

Indeed, it is through language that an atmosphere is created, enveloping the entire theatrical event. The works are propelled by the rhythm of words, which takes on physicality on stage through the embodiment (Fischer-Lichte, 2011: 169) of discourse and a marked use of language where tonal changes are exaggerated, and the speed varies constantly. It is a continuous, present, and immediate discourse that conveys experiences and emotions from subjectivity (Vidal Egea, 2010: 209) and keeps the audience in suspense, immersing them in “un mundo absolutamente emocional en el que confluyen contradicciones, injusticias, sensaciones dolorosas, rabia, cansancio. Impotencia. Frustración” (Loureiro Álvarez, 2019: 76).

In this sense, Liddell’s poetics connect with Viennese Actionism (Vidal Egea, 2010: 114-115) as it advocates for the use of cruel violence on the body itself to try to discomfort the spectator, provoking a reaction that elicits feeling and reflection. Liddell finds in dissonance, expressive radicalism, and an approach to ineffable pain the ideal way to move, awaken consciousness, and combat the degeneration of the world.

### 2.3.8. Conclusion

This chapter delves into the personality of Angélica Liddell in order to explore her theatre and career from a critical perspective. For this reason, I analyse the roots of the author, who began her career in the 1990s as part of the well-known *Bradomín Generation*. As a result of this analysis, I can affirm that Angélica Liddell is one of the most representative playwrights of current Spanish drama. Her professional and personal integrity, as well as her talent, have made her stand out, not only in the theatrical context in Spain but also on the international scene. The contextualisation of Liddell's work is fundamental to its understanding. This has been another of the objectives of this chapter: to guide

the reader to assimilate the dramaturgical style, life and values of the director's work. One example is Liddell's way of narrating, in which she uses repetitions continuously, alluding to the literary style of the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, of whom she considers herself a great admirer.

Angélica Liddel's career represents one of the two most consolidated parts of the Spanish dramaturgical scene, within what we can define as post-dramatic theatre, which is best developed from horizontality, in order to distract the public through the creation of deceptive fictional spaces. In this way, the real is introduced and analysed, occupying and invading the stage with those words, images and experiences that were silenced by their obscenity, in other words, by being relegated offstage. The reason why an image or verbal expression is relegated to marginalisation is related to the various considerations of each theatre system as reflecting a system of society, developing into the obscene; however, the critique of religion as well as government, the questioning of the moral order and the collective observation of experiences thought to be particular to the privacy of the individual have been excluded from the stage, as were certain imaginaries reflecting women's identities. For this reason, the new identities of women, the way of understanding presence and the interrelation of categories, both on and off stage, clearly explain an obscene, post-dramatic rather than post-modern dramaturgical aesthetic.

At the same time, however, her plays reflect an ethic, a political way of seeing the world and of relating to and living in it. This critical and analytical look at the new consideration of the individual and, particularly, at the problem of contemporary women's identities, a growing theme from which emanate, for example, those related to gender roles or male privilege. The use of the first person in theatre can be understood as a rejection, as the evident inability of others to express themselves, to take responsibility for others; however, it also serves to question a second person singular to which the author frequently resorts in her plays to accuse or provoke through exclusion, that is to say, it is a paradigmatic model of this dramaturgical tendency.

Liddell's personal life is part of her work and cannot be separated from it. By delving into her intimate world, we discover a playwright who is closer to the reader, with more humanism, who does

not try to evade her weaknesses and anxieties. This compassionate approach is crucial to dispel the clichés about a playwright who has aroused so much controversy.

The author's malaise is a hallmark of all her works, delving into the origin of her pain and exploring the most relevant episodes of her life. The aim of this chapter was also to provide a complete picture of the author, encompassing both her personal and professional spheres. As a result, Liddell presents a portrait that captures her inner and outer complexity, free of limitations.

Considering the playwright's roots, her father's profession, her complicated childhood, the strict upbringing she received and the loneliness she felt as an only child, we can understand her radicalism from a different perspective, based on understanding and respect. Liddell's mode of expression is unconventional, as she shows her pain without qualms. Her pieces are not politically correct, but they undoubtedly expose her truth in a visceral and authentic way. At a time when formalism and frivolity prevail, the author takes the risk of reflecting those truths that no one wants to hear. Liddell uses the morbid curiosity of the audience as a formula with the educated public that attends her plays. Her success as a theatre director is evidence that an interest in turbulent stories that reveal dark desires is common to human beings. The main reason for her success lies in her insistence and continuous effort to do what is in line with her values and beliefs. Despite being unsupported by any subsidy for a long time and relegated to alternative theatres, whose minority audience barely allowed her to survive, Liddell did not give up. Her example has helped theatre to transcend the merely commercial, which supports the regeneration of the Spanish drama scene.

The author already stands out in the history of Spanish theatre. Her recognition is increasingly valued as she is born from a dramaturgical scene in which, frequently, female playwrights find greater difficulties. For this reason, in this chapter it has been important to include a section on Liddell's theatre from its beginnings as well as her belonging to the Brandomín Generation. We can see how theatre written by women was relegated to otherness. Likewise, identifying this discrimination helps us to realise the serious flaws in research that sought to study Spanish dramaturgy in a time period that, nevertheless, totally marginalised women playwrights.

Liddell began her artistic career alluding to beauty or, especially, to sadness. Over the course of time, the director has radicalised her works towards what we can classify as a theatre of cruelty. By analysing her plays, it is easier to understand her progress over the years. Although her themes remain the same, the fight against social injustice or the defence of the oppressed sectors of society, her approach to them has become much more incisive. In this way, her theatre has grown stronger, more confident over time. Her latest plays provoke a greater shock because they are more grounded.

In the same way that the mastery of dramatic language has gone hand in hand with an increase in theatrical resources: Liddell's plays are increasingly equipped with more and more multimedia resources, as many include projections or montages, more unusual sets, such as a live horse on stage, as well as different techniques close to performance. All these multimedia elements are evidence of her move beyond the dramaturgy of cruelty. Angélica Liddell not only transcends with commercial theatre, but also with that dramaturgy of entertainment that numbs the consciences of the audience. In her plays, she appeals to deep reflection, to the awakening of the conscience of the individual in order to generate social change. The director has succeeded in ensuring that the playwright's dramaturgy is respected and massively attended to. Her career proves that a complex artistic team is not necessary to create quality theatre, and that a concise phrase in the right context has the same power as resources and special effects. In their totality, Liddell's plays enrich and expand the horizons of dramaturgy. It is not simply a creative exhibition, but aims to solve human problems of an affective, social or political nature. In the face of the conflicts that the author poses, no one, neither the audience nor the playwright, can remain passive. They must act together. It is essential to emphasise that, for the director, individual awareness is useless if it is not accompanied by collective action, which will generate real progress.

Liddell writes pieces intimately connected with her time, which could be understood as critical realism. Her plays are not about the imaginary, but reflect real situations. Her social activity as a playwright is evident in her portrayal of such sensitive issues in contemporary national society as violence against women, xenophobia and immigration from Africa in small boats and canoes. If the

director tackles the most lurid issues, it is in order to awaken social consciences, as well as to prevent future disasters. Through her words, we delve into contemporary reality and international conflicts such as child soldiers and war crimes. Liddell's dramaturgy is a denunciation of the most dangerous problems that arise as a consequence of the present social system. It also claims the viewer in particular, because if these catastrophes continue to happen, it is also due to the passivity of the individual, who does not face the problem actively. The themes of the plays affect the whole of society, even though they deal with particular aspects of Liddell's life: passivity has no place in the face of one's own oppression. Liddell focuses on oppressed and defenceless characters, victims of social exclusion, those who are left out of the system and therefore do not receive help. She uses her artistic power to give a voice to those who are silenced.

When Liddell portrays her protagonists, she reflects a profound sensitivity. With a unique perspective, she overturns the prejudices that have become established in the social imaginary over the years. The dramaturgy of this author cannot be separated from the human essence, since the feelings she deals with are universal. However, it is true that she emphasises the dark side or the pathologies hidden behind each person. Its aim is that, by recognising them, we can work with their most harmful traits. In this respect, it is important to remember that the author studied Psychology, a training that undoubtedly influences a theatre that never frivolises the humanity of each of its characters. Her theatre evidences the result of a system that prioritises political, economic and digital progress, to the detriment of humanity, which continues to be devalued. The author invites us to analyse the socially accepted values in a culture of violence by showing how each person incorporates them into their daily relationships, normalising them in families, couples and friendships. Liddell also proposes a rethinking of these values in order to change the prevailing system.

Liddell manages to involve the viewer without letting them go unnoticed. The audience has responsibility and power to change certain unjust situations or problems that continue to happen. This has been the aim that nourishes the theatrical experimentation of the author: to create an effective language that leads the spectator to assume an active role in the play. Theatre does not represent an

evasive place but an instrument to generate reflection on the darkest aspects of reality. The collective confrontation, on the part of the audience and the author, with the problems that govern our current society and thus generate a social commitment on both sides. The advance of the audience in a work of the author is born from the initial impact, in order to reach a certain reflection that guides them towards social action. Liddell's aim is not to provoke an emotional impact per se, since the impact has logic as a resource to activate the spectator and lead him or her towards a deep rational exploration of reality. The message that Liddell intends to convey with her works is that there is still time to change reality and find solutions to the problems that affect us as a society. For this reason, the director not only develops an existential analysis of life, but also emphasises the social responsibility of the agents of power, whom she holds responsible for the decadence of humanity.

Considering the Spanish dramaturgical renovation, Angélica Liddell has transformed Spanish theatre, putting it on a par with the European theatrical avant-garde. Her courageous commitment to the different, in an environment sceptical of change and non-canonical dramaturgical forms, has caused new generations to propose more daring or innovative works. One of the lessons that the director teaches us is not to give up in the face of adversity, as she herself has not given in to the difficulties caused by precariousness and scarce subsidies and resources, nor to the artistic marginalisation she suffered being relegated only to independent theatres. She has achieved success while at the same time criticising the political, social and economic situation that made it so difficult for her to advance her career.

Angélica Liddell is one of the most international playwrights in Spain, as her plays have been seen and recognised in countries such as Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Germany, France, Romania, Russia, Czech Republic and Cuba. She has also been invited to various international festivals<sup>21</sup>. Researchers

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<sup>21</sup> The works of Angélica Liddell have reached countries like:

- Colombia: *Casa del Teatro de Medellín, II International Theatre Festival of Barranquilla and at the University of Antioquia.*
- Portugal: *Guilherme Cossoul Foundation of Lisbon, Festival Citemor de Montemor O Velho.*
- Germany: *Cycle of Contemporary Spanish Theatre. Bremen Theater.*
- Brazil: *International Theatre Festival, Cena Contemporânea de Brasília*
- France: *Look! The insolent South*, held in Bordeaux
- Mexico: *Encuentro Internacional de Escena Contemporánea Transversales.*

such as Susanne Hartwig admire Liddell's dramaturgy in the international perspective of contemporary Spanish theatre. She herself cites it frequently in her various essays.<sup>22</sup>

While it's evident that Liddell rejects traditional motherhood as a societal expectation, it's essential to consider that her stance may not necessarily be a blanket rejection of motherhood itself. Rather, her refusal to conform to societal norms may be a critique of the rigid expectations placed on women within the family institution. By challenging conventional roles, Liddell might be highlighting the need for individual agency in defining one's path, including decisions related to motherhood. Liddell rejects her own motherhood as a claim on today's society. To do so, she refuses to act according to the family institution that society expects. In this way, she reflects her discontent, her frustration and pain in the face of the failure symbolised by continuous and excessive reproduction in a world where filth and cruelty reign.

It's crucial to recognise that not all rejection of societal expectations equates to a rejection of the underlying concept. Liddell's discontent could be seen as a reaction to the pressures and limitations imposed by a society that often measures a woman's worth solely based on her role as a mother. By refusing to adhere to these norms, Liddell may be expressing a desire for a more inclusive and flexible understanding of motherhood that allows women to navigate their unique paths without feeling confined by societal expectations. Moreover, Liddell's discontent, frustration, and pain could be interpreted not only as a response to the failure symbolised by continuous and excessive reproduction but also as a broader commentary on the state of a world characterised by filth and cruelty. In this light, her rejection of traditional roles might be a call for societal reflection and change, advocating for a more compassionate and humane world. In questioning Liddell's rejection of motherhood, it becomes essential to explore the nuances of her critique and consider whether it is

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- Bolivia: *Cochabamba*.  
- Argentina: *Rojas Cultural Centre* of Buenos Aires.  
- Belarus, Chile and the Czech Republic.

<sup>22</sup> *La mirada del otro: la posición del espectador en el teatro español contemporáneo* (Borja Ortiz de Gondra, Itziar Pascual, Angélica Liddell, Rodrigo García) and in *Teatro y sociedad en la España actual*.



directed at the institution itself or the societal constraints placed upon it. This perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of her motivations and the potential implications of her stance on contemporary society.

From her perspective, contemporary drama should represent a space that transcends place, but not temporality. Her plays explore and criticise the social impact of certain catastrophes that took place at the end of the 20th century. One example of such significant tragedies was the war in Belgrade, which produced mass destruction, a kind of genocide that Europe had not known since the years of the German Holocaust. Liddell chooses to eliminate the spatial-temporal dimension in order to reflect these incidents in her work. She also persists in the fact that humanity cannot be defined on the basis of the desires of a minority consisting of men; it is for this reason that her work represents a plea in favour of the individual. Often, we may feel the inability to put words to a strong feeling. This expressive obstacle can be understood as an individual failure, a limitation with the other. In this way, the word becomes a way of expanding the lie: the interlocutor is lost, does not understand, feels confusion. In each of the director's works, we observe the failure of dialogue. Immersed in their own conflicts, the characters are faced with the impossibility of dealing with the other. They try to communicate, but everything is transformed into monologues that are spoken aloud, without waiting or being interested in hearing any response beyond their own opinion.

Another element that stands out in Liddell's works is the radical nature of the forms. The author evolves from the staging of her pieces, which lacked action, towards other works in which she performs self-harm with needles, allowing blood to flow from her wounds at the same time as she recites the text. Thanks to this visual support, the word takes on a greater verisimilitude since the image is a common language. Her works disrupt the usual stereotypes, giving way to the recreation of scenes in which atypical situations are depicted, using unusual parameters that surprise the audience as they are completely unexpected, although they could occur. It is precisely in this thematic choice together with the way in which she invites the spectator into these themes that we find her

dramaturgical strength, which makes the difference thanks to the charisma of an author who insists on preserving her idiosyncrasy and her independence from the norm.

Liddell reveals very cruel realities such as incest, murder and necrophilia. In this way, another of her objectives is to show what most people strive to deny and hide; those truths that reveal the inner depravity of the individual. Liddell reflects that which many can imagine, but dare not act upon, and this is how the catharsis and excitement of seeing something staged that can only be imagined in intimacy develops. All of this represents Liddell's personal struggle against the hypocrisy that rules our society. It is also crucial to note that our playwright not only delves into the various modes of alienation of the human psyche, but also interpellates the gentrified audience and their human mediocrity, revealing a mixture of conformism and ignorance. On the other hand, it is important to mention that the author does not surrender to the institutions that now recognise and reward her work. On multiple occasions, she has publicly expressed her repudiation of the *RESAD*, the *SGAE* and the *Centro Dramático Nacional*, since for Liddell, these institutions only represent the false friendly face of a political system in which alienation and corruption prevail, which, consequently, produces the limitation of the individual. For these reasons, Angélica Liddell's theatre represents one of the most relevant innovations in the contemporary European dramaturgical context. The director fuses her own alter-ego with the creation of her characters; her plays merge the fictional with the real. Her plots are grounded in real and current socio-political conflicts, and her plays are a clear reflection of the century in which we live.

It is clear how Liddell's playwriting makes her a point of reference for understanding the progress and interest of her presence in the field of the performing arts in Spain, with a high level of artistic excellence that is relegated to otherness due to her scant public recognition. A view that reflects the situation in which people's lives develop today makes its dramaturgy a commitment between the artistic and the social. In this way, her aim is to achieve a society with greater justice and equality.



### 3. SARAH KANE AND CAROLINE BERGVALL

The innovative works *Blasted* by Sarah Kane and *Drift* by Caroline Bergvall challenge conventional notions of language, form, and the representation of violence. These potent texts subvert conventional narratives and employ innovative poetic techniques to investigate trauma, displacement, and the repercussions of violence on individuals and societies. In this section of the dissertation, I seek to examine, through a comparative analysis, how these works stretch the boundaries of language, challenge established theatrical conventions, and provide alternative perspectives on the human condition.

Sarah Kane's provocative and terrifying play *Blasted* exposes the audience to the harsh realities of war, sexual assault, and psychological trauma. Kane's fragmented and visceral language parallels her characters' shattered lives and fractured psyches. Kane forces the audience to confront uncomfortable realities about human nature and the inherent violence in society by employing graphic and explicit imagery. *Blasted* is a potent examination of the complexities of power relationships, agency, and the dehumanising effects of violence.

In a similar manner, *Drift* by Caroline Bergvall challenge traditional conceptions of poetic and dramatic form. Bergvall's use of experimental linguistic techniques disrupts conventional narrative structures, reflecting the dislocation individuals experience in a globalised, interconnected world. *Drift* examines further themes of migration, displacement, and the impact of geopolitical forces on individual lives, using innovative poetic techniques to capture the fragmentation and hybridity of contemporary existence.

This section of the dissertation seeks to investigate the thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and performative strategies of *Blasted* and *Drift*. I attempt to understand how Kane and Bergvall represent and communicate experiences of violence, trauma, and displacement by analysing the ways in which they both challenge established theatrical and poetic conventions. Through their

inventive use of language, imagery, and form, both artists subvert conventional modes of representation and elicit a visceral and thought-provoking response from the audience. In many of her plays, Sarah Kane explores power dynamics and the complexities of human relationships, including how women are affected by them. Her works frequently investigate themes of violence, sexuality, and the struggle for power, as well as conventional gender roles and expectations. Bergvall focuses more on the construction of gender through language and how it shapes our comprehension of identity, whereas Kane's examination of gender is frequently embedded within larger narratives of power and violence. Both authors contribute to ongoing discussions about gender in their respective works by pressing boundaries, challenging societal norms, and providing alternative perspectives. Through their art, they encourage audiences to investigate and question existing gender stereotypes, provoking thought on the complexity of women's identity and its effect on individuals and society.

By comparing these works, I will convey a deeper understanding of the poetics of violence, trauma, and displacement. In addition, I will investigate how these works challenge the audience's preconceived conceptions of power, identity, and the limits of language, ultimately forcing us to confront our own complicity in perpetuating cycles of violence.

In the following sections, I will examine in detail the thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and performative strategies utilised by Kane and Bergvall in *Blasted* and *Drift*. Through this investigation, I hope to shed light on how these artists expand the possibilities of language and form to convey the visceral realities of violence and displacement, offering alternative perspectives on the human condition and stimulating critical engagement with the most pressing issues of our time.

This section explores the works of Sarah Kane and Caroline Bergvall in order to cast light on their distinct approaches to gender discourse in contemporary literature and performance. Through their artistic visions, they encourage us to critically engage with and query the prevailing gender, power, and language norms. This investigation not only sheds light on their individual artistic contributions

but also contributes to broader discussions regarding gender and the potential for transformative social change. These chapters' analysis will reveal the complexities of their artistic endeavours and cast light on the innovative ways in which they challenge and reimagine conventional gender roles.

The works *Blasted* by Sarah Kane and *Drift* by Caroline Bergvall challenge conventional notions of language, form, themes, and the representation of violence against women. These texts subvert conventional narratives and employ innovative poetic techniques to investigate trauma, displacement, and the repercussions of violence on women and societies. In this section of the dissertation, I seek to examine how these works stretch the boundaries of language, challenge established theatrical conventions, and provide alternative perspectives on women's experiences.

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This section of the dissertation seeks to investigate the thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and performative strategies of *Blasted* and *Drift*. I explore how Kane and Bergvall represent and communicate experiences of violence, trauma, and displacement by addressing the ways in which they both challenge established theatrical and poetic conventions. Through their

inventive use of language, imagery, and form, both artists subvert conventional modes of representation and elicit a visceral and thought-provoking response from the audience. Sarah Kane and Caroline Bergvall contribute to ongoing discussions about women in their respective works by pressing boundaries, challenging societal norms, and providing alternative perspectives.

In addition, I will investigate how these works challenge the audience's preconceived conceptions of power, identity, and the limits of language, ultimately forcing us to confront our own complicity in perpetuating cycles of violence. In the forthcoming sections, I will examine the thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and performative strategies employed by Kane and Bergvall in *Blasted* and *Drift*. In doing so, they provide alternative perspectives on the human condition, fostering critical engagement with some of the most pressing issues of our time. In this regard, McNally contends:

At the heart of the concept of direct action is the notion that, in order to radically change the world, oppressed people need to change themselves too. From being dominated masses who feel powerless to affect the world, they need to begin experiencing themselves as makers of history, as people capable of understanding and changing the world (2002: 243).

This notion underlines the transformative power inherent in direct action, emphasising the crucial role of women's personal agency in effecting change. In addition to McNally's statement, Gills contributes to this discourse, asserting, "While the world may currently seem to be dominated by an entrenched ideology, there is yet the necessity (and the possibility) of purposeful resistance" (Gills, 2000: 4). This acknowledgment reinforces the agency of women in resisting prevailing ideologies, highlighting the ongoing potential for purposeful resistance against seemingly overpowering systems. Moreover, Jackson's (2011) insight adds depth to the discussion by emphasising the multifaceted nature of the framework. This aspect of the context encompasses both direct intervention to "disrupt the flow" (Jackson, 2011: 4–5) and indirect measures to ameliorate the situation temporarily,

concurrently with ongoing efforts for more profound and lasting change. This approach acknowledges the complexity of addressing systemic issues and recognises the need for a dual strategy involving immediate improvements and sustained, fundamental change. The aim is to create an understanding that not only appreciates the artistic endeavours of women but also draws parallels with academic discourse on resistance, agency, and societal change.

This section explores the works of Sarah Kane and Caroline Bergvall to cast light on their distinct approaches to violence against women in contemporary literature and performance. Through their artistic visions, they encourage the audience member to critically engage with and query the prevailing gender, power, and language norms. Not only does this investigation shed light on their individual artistic contributions, but also contributes to broader discussions regarding women's experiences of trauma and the potential for transformative social change. These chapters' analysis will reveal the complexities of their artistic endeavours and cast light on the innovative ways in which women challenge and reimagine conventional gender roles.

### 3.1. Sarah Kane

Sarah Kane (1971–1999) was a British playwright who made significant contributions to contemporary theatre with her plays. After studying drama at Bristol University and pursuing a Master's degree in playwriting at the University of Birmingham, Kane gained prominence with her debut play, *Blasted* (1995), known for its controversial and graphic depiction of violence. Her subsequent plays, including *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and her final work, *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), continued to challenge conventional theatrical norms. Despite her tragically short career, Kane's fearless engagement with dark and complex subject matter has left an indelible mark on modern drama, influencing subsequent playwrights, and solidifying her legacy as a groundbreaking force in the theatrical landscape.



This chapter<sup>23</sup> examines the interplay between the national and international spheres of violence in *Blasted* (1995) by Sarah Kane. This study investigates how *Blasted* serves as a compelling site for examining the construction of narratives regarding acts of violence within constructed narratives and how these narratives intertwine with broader cultural accounts of violence, trauma, and national identity. Moreover, this investigation explores the adaptability of such inquiries by illuminating the correlation between the unfavourable reception of her performative productions in the 1990s and the current responses, which acknowledge and value similar performances more and more. This study seeks to promote optimism by highlighting the transformative potential of radical theatre and its capacity to effect change by cultivating collective solidarity.

### 3.1.1. Introduction

Sarah Kane was an English playwright born in Essex who thought-provokingly explored delicate themes in her plays. She was considered to belong to Siersz's in-yer-face theatre movement. Despite the dismissal of her plays by critics after their premiere, they have been widely acclaimed internationally since her death. *Blasted* was her first play, which she wrote as a student and was staged at the *Royal Court Theatre* in London under the direction of James Macdonald. It was heavily criticised by critics who thought of it as provocative. However, other playwrights, such as Harold Pinter and Caryl Churchill, defended the value of her work.

Trauma theory emerged in the early 1990s in response to the "ethical turn affecting the humanities" (Craps, 2013: 1). This field offers the opportunity to transform our understanding of past traumas by examining literary and cultural works to gain a better understanding of "the real world". As Cathy Caruth argues, this textualist approach enables us to engage with history by rethinking its

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<sup>23</sup> Certain parts of the discussion in this chapter have been adapted from material previously submitted at *University of Westminster*. Part of the information introduced in this chapter was developed in different essays and my master's thesis, which were presented at the *University of Westminster* during my Master's Degree. The courses from which I have utilised essays in this section are: capitalism and culture, experimental women's writings, photography and film, institutions and histories in modern and contemporary fictions and themes and problems in modern and contemporary literature.

referentiality, rather than simply erasing or reinterpreting it, and thus can help to illuminate the previously overlooked experiences of women's history, or the concept "herstory" (Caruth, 1996: 5), in which story is now written by women through the female gaze ("her story") rather than the dominant patriarchal historical narrative, essentially written by white men through the male gaze ("his story").

The distinction between *ouvert* and *couvert* narratives delineates a crucial aspect of the origin of historical discourses. As the text in question is susceptible to multiple interpretations, the allegorical dimension assumes an inherent ambiguity, thereby revealing a hegemonic conception of the national construct. This nuanced depiction encompasses an internal domain characterised by violent acts permeating the fabric of trauma. The multidimensional nature of interpretation extends to a violated manifestation of unrelenting violence, whereby the presence of those who have been lost is reinstated in both texts through distinct symbolism. Notably, the juxtaposition of the explosion and its subsequent void in *Blasted* serves as an illustrative example. Therefore, the lack of a conclusive denouement serves as a catalyst for the absence of resolution, redemption, and contextualisation. Within this realm, the essence of history is violated, thereby creating an aura of the uncanny that permeates the narrative landscape with an overwhelming sense of unease.

This study focuses on Sarah Kane's perspective on the underlying motivations that drive her non-naturalistic approach to theatre production through the lens of her 1995 play *Blasted*. To provide a comprehensive analysis, considerable references will be drawn from the play itself as well as the essay collection *Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (2002) and Saunders and Laurens de Vos' *Sarah Kane in Context* (2010). This chapter seeks to clarify the intricate interplay between internal and external manifestations of violence within constructed narratives by analysing these performative works. Specifically, this section investigates how *Blasted* serves as a compelling site for examining the construction of narratives regarding violence against women, and how these narratives intertwine with broader cultural accounts of violence, trauma, and national identity.

Moreover, this investigation highlights the adaptability of such inquiries by illuminating the correlation between the unfavourable reception of Kane's performative productions in the 1990s and the current responses, which acknowledge and value similar performances more. Notably, this analysis acknowledges the significance of Kane's plays in addressing the socio-cultural void that persists between intimately encountered acts of violence against women within a society's borders and those that occur externally, beyond its national borders.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the presence of Sarah Kane's radical plays in national and international theatre settings, despite their negative critical reception in the 1990s. This chapter examines Kane's conception of radicalism as a strategy for bringing about social transformation in the face of repression and crises. Through literary and performative explorations, Kane's plays aimed to shed light on the application of her transformative social methodologies, especially within the context of contemporary socio-linguistic boundaries. As discussed earlier, language plays a pivotal role in constructing and governing gender norms, with limits imposed through hegemonic and patriarchal cultural discourse and binary structures. Hence, subversion serves as the means to emancipate women from established linguistic norms. Kane's work, by delving into the complexities of women's experiences and societal expectations, aligns with the notion of subversion discussed previously. Her play, through literary and performative means, sought to challenge and disrupt normative identities, showcasing characters and narratives that defy established linguistic constructs. In doing so, Kane's artistic endeavours can be seen as a form of resistance against the limitations imposed by language on women's expressions, echoing the broader discourse on subversion within the realm of women and language.

Kane's radical play employs transformative social tools, combining literary and performative elements to address the complex socio-linguistic boundaries of the contemporary world. This section's primary objective is to promote a shared understanding of how Kane's disruptive plays have succeeded in constructing narratives that establish connections between internal and external

manifestations of violence. Through a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between national and international spheres of violence in *Blasted*, this study examines the concept of ritualised cruelty as a lens through which to comprehend Kane's paradoxical fascination and revulsion towards the enduring presence of social voids. These vacancies are exemplified by Bosnia in the 1990s, Syria in 2017, and Afghanistan in 2022, among others.

This study's ultimate objective is aligned with the transformative potential of radical theatre within the context of contemporary global capitalism. As Zizek argues:

In the context of contemporary global capitalism, ideological naturalization has reached an unprecedented level. Few are willing to venture into the realm of envisioning utopian dreams or contemplating potential alternatives (2009:77).

This ideological naturalisation has reached an unprecedented level, discouraging many from envisioning utopian dreams or contemplating alternative possibilities. The assertion that theatre, at its core, revolves around storytelling and the imagination of alternative worlds resonates with the idea that under favourable conditions, theatre has the capacity to forge new narratives for living. This idea aligns with the notion that theatre is not merely a form of entertainment but a dynamic medium with the potential to influence both individual lives and broader societal structures. The inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives within Kane's aesthetic signifies a departure from the unilateral narrative dominance described as "hegemonologue" (Bogad, 2010: 542). The reflection on the equilibrium within its performance programming becomes crucial, as it resonates with the study's optimism regarding the transformative capacity of radical theatre. The encouragement to strike a balance between highlighting present dystopias, exposing systemic issues, and exploring new utopian possibilities alludes to the broader perspective that theatre can cultivate collective solidarity and effect meaningful change. As representations of extant realities, film, literature, and theatre have the

capacity to both reinforce and challenge dominant narratives, thereby influencing and shaping the societies in which they are situated.

### 3.1.2. Performative violence: Sarah Kane's ritualistic portrayal of ubiquitous violence

The play *Blasted* (1995) premiered at the *Royal Court Theatre* in London during a significant era characterised by societal shifts following the Thatcher administration. This historical context was marked by a developing detachment between the public and Thatcherite values, resulting in a centrist ideological shift.

In response to the ensuing social revolution, a new conception of theatre emerged, characterised by formal experimentation. In 1990 the theatre critic Aleks Sierz coined the term *in-yer-face-theatre* to refer to a group of British playwrights, including Martin McDonagh, Sarah Kane, and Mark Ravenhill, who produced works that were defined by "transgression of naturalism". Sierz argues that the plays of *in-yer-face* theatre created a "culture of shock" by disgusting audiences out of their complacency with cruelty, violence, and rituals. This culture of shock, according to Sierz, represented a consistent critique of modern life, a break with the past, and a violation of naturalism (Sierz, 2001: 99). The plays of *in-yer-face* theatre were intended to induce what anthropologist Kalervo Oberg termed a "cultural shock" (Oberg, 1954): a state of excitement, irritation, adjustment, and adaptation to a new sensibility and non-naturalistic aesthetic. They intended to elicit a feeling of public disidentification with the dominant culture and to investigate themes of absence (Kristeva, 1989: 223) and rituals (Brusberg-Kiermeier, 2010: 80). Despite the controversy surrounding them, the plays of "in- yer-face" theatre represented much more than a collection of shock tactics, a radical and compelling vision of contemporary life.

This period's dramatic developments exemplified what has been termed a "culture of shock". In 1954, Oberg coined the term cultural shock, which refers to a sensation of disorientation or anxiety felt by individuals immersed in a foreign or unfamiliar culture. In fact, Oberg identified four stages of cultural shock: excitement, irritability, adjustment, and adaptation. As a result, this culture of shock served as a tactic to provoke a profound reevaluation of the world by dismantling previously taboo and openly avoided notions of suffering. The aim of this theatre was a "rupture with the past" (Sierz, 2001: 99), a violation of naturalism's dictates, and a shift towards a new sensibility and non-naturalistic aesthetic (Sierz, 2001: 99). The purpose of this theatre is to create public disidentification by presenting characters who are disconnected from society and embody "nothingness" (Kristeva, 1989: 223). In her article *Cruelty, Violence, and Rituals in Sarah Kane's Plays*, Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier examines the complex relationship between food consumption and sexuality in ritualistic contexts (Ablett, 2020: 132) since she sheds light on the profound investigation of cruelty, violence, and ritualistic elements that permeate Kane's plays. As Brusberg-Kiermeier notes in her discussion of the role of "rituals" in this theatre (2010: 80), these plays also include rituals that serve to challenge the audience's expectations and generate a sense of discomfort.

As articulated by Sierz (2001), the concept of in-er-face theatre emphasises the new sensibility and non-naturalistic aesthetic that characterise traumatic experiences. It involves the deliberate and provocative presentation of distressing events to an audience to induce a response from the public. As a play, *Blasted* effectively encapsulates the essence of this theatrical movement, representing its apex. The play achieves an emotionally charged and disquieting effect by incorporating elements such as sperm and blood, provoking morally offensive responses from the audience. By challenging the prevalent portrayal of trauma as the norm, this provocative approach signifies a break with traditional theatrical taboos and a departure from established norms. Not in vain, "in-er-face" theatre is characterised by nudity, violence, sex and humiliations.

A pervasive public disidentification with the political and social norms associated with Thatcherism led to a discernible ideological realignment towards centrist values during the post-Thatcherite era. This shift in public opinion, which resulted from the convergence of ideas disputing the efficacy of free-market principles and traditional family values, paved the way for the 1995 premiere of *Blasted*. The play's performance marked a turning point in social consciousness, marked by a growing emphasis on individualism and the introduction of an innovative approach to theatre that purposefully broke with established conventions. These radical theatrical developments were inextricably linked to the concept of trauma, as they imparted a sense of subversion intended to provoke a reevaluation of societal norms and challenge previously taboo notions of pain.

*Blasted* marked a significant departure from the conventional depiction of violence on stage, ushering in a new era in the 1990s theatrical landscape. Non-naturalistic plays by Sarah Kane were crucial to this dramatic shift. Using the insights of Julia Kristeva, it is possible to comprehend that silence served as a protective cover for the underlying concept of 'nothingness' in Kane's works, highlighting the inherent tensions between internal and external conflicts that mirrored the harrowing realities of the Bosnian conflict during that time:

On the edge of silence the word 'nothing' emerges, a discreet defence in the face of so much disorder, both internal and external, incommensurable. Never has a cataclysm been more apocalyptically outrageous; never has its representation been assumed by so few symbolic means (Kristeva, 1989: 223).

The play depicts a young woman, Cate, who is the victim of sexual and physical violence at the hands of a man twenty years older than her, Ian, reflecting the experience of vulnerability of countless women and girls around the globe. The play's depiction of the connection between international and national violence and its effect on women is notable. *Blasted* illustrates the devastation that war and global conflicts have on women's lives. Cate becomes a victim of Ian's violence, but she is also

exposed to acts of violence beyond the hotel room in Leeds, such as explosions and war. According to Kane, violence against women is not an isolated or local problem but can be traced to larger systems of oppression and political conflicts. *Blasted* investigates how patriarchal structures justify and perpetuate domestic and international violence against women. The play emphasises the interconnections between international conflicts, national violence, and the oppression of women, emphasising how inequality perpetuates oppression and violence against women and girls.

*Blasted* signified a paradigm shift in the theatrical landscape of the 1990s with its revolutionary departure from conventional depictions of violence on stage. Non-naturalistic performances by Sarah Kane were instrumental in propelling this transformational movement. The insights of Julia Kristeva shed light on the significance of silence as a protective mechanism in Kane's works, which served as a shield against the overwhelming chaos and disarray inherent in both internal and external conflicts, which paralleled the turbulent realities of the Bosnian conflict during that era. Kristeva's words emphasise the emergence of the word 'nothing' on the verge of silence, representing a discrete defence mechanism in the face of profound disorder that transcends categorisation. The cataclysmic nature of internal and external conflicts is rendered apocalyptically outlandish in Kane's plays, where the representation of such upheaval is condensed through minimalistic and symbolic means. This parallels the chaotic wars that broke out between the United Nations and Bosnia because of the profoundly entrenched sociopolitical divisions that emerged in the United Kingdom during the Thatcherite era. Kane utilised repeated patterns of violence on stage on purpose to confront and interrogate these disconcerting realities. Kane's extremism hence represents her sense of idealism since she does not only ask her audience to empathise with the victims of oppression but to deconstruct entire structures of power to substitute them "with a society of possibilities and permutations where the psychology of the individual is allowed free expression unconstrained by the limits and confines of sexual norms" (Rayner, 2009: 62-63). At the same time, Kane was aware of the gap between this idealism and the realities of abuse. As Kane evidenced in interview (Langridge



& Stephenson, 1997) regarding her use of violence onstage, the playwright is alluding to patriarchy: “Class, race and gender divisions are symptomatic of societies based on violence or the threat of violence, not the cause”. Therefore, the termination of violence is directly connected in her plays to the end of sexual, gender and other forms of oppression (Rayner, 2009: 62-63). Hence, Kane's exploration of violence on stage serves as a poignant commentary on societal structures, particularly the patriarchal underpinnings that perpetuate class, race, and gender divisions. The allusion she makes underscores a fundamental connection between the eradication of violence and the dismantling of various forms of oppression, such as those based on sexual and gender disparities. By linking violence in her plays to broader societal transformations, Kane prompts a critical examination of the interwoven nature of violence and oppression within the fabric of society.

As described by Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier (2010: 80), despite the barbarism depicted in Kane's plays, there appears to be a lack of recognition regarding the underlying 'rituals' performed on stage. These rituals, which represent the chosen theatrical devices utilised by Kane, serve as a means of confronting the silence surrounding the national, or 'interior' spheres of violence as well as the international, or 'outer' spheres of conflict. Kane's works effectively expose and engage with the silence surrounding these multifaceted forms of violence, inviting audiences to confront and reflect on the complex dynamics at play by pushing the boundaries of traditional theatrical representation. Kane's plays explore the theme of extreme violence and repression, imbued with layered meanings that juxtapose various contexts, thus compelling the audience to draw connections between instances of national and international violence that may not appear naturally interconnected.

Jack Tinker, in *The Daily Mail*, mocked Kane's 1995 debut play *Blasted* as "The Disgusting Feast of Filth" due to its depiction of cannibalism, rape, defecation, and murder. As a result, Kane's works became associated with the *New Brutalist*, or “*In-yer-face*” theatre movement that emerged in Britain during the late 1990s. Alongside plays such as Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), in-Yer-Face theatre sought to elicit visceral responses from audiences and provoke responses

that diverged from the political complacency prevalent in the *Cool Britannia* era of the 1990s, which was marked by the rise of the *Spice Girls* and the emergence of Blairite middle-class socialism. This innovative generation of playwrights, including Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill, Judy Upton, Martin McDonagh, and Naomi Wallace, distanced themselves from their predecessors by prominently incorporating violence and sexuality in their works (Ablett, 2020: 78). Despite their distinct styles and dramatic approaches, this group displays a notable degree of cohesion. These playwrights explicitly opposed being "classified as a cohesive movement, perceiving such categorisation as a surrender of their artistic independence" (Urban, 2004: 354). Kane asserted, considering the theatrical landscape of the 1990s:

I do not believe in movements. Movements define retrospectively and always on grounds of imitation [...] the writers themselves are not interested in it. Some of the writers who are said to belong to the [In-Yer-Face] movement I haven't even met. So, as far as I am concerned, I hope that my play is not typical of anything (Saunders 2002:7).

In addition to their artistic innovations, the playwrights of the "in-yer-face" theatre movement were vehemently opposed to being pigeonholed as a unified group, perceiving it as a threat to their individual artistic autonomy (Urban, 2004: 354). Kane challenged the notion of conformity and emphasised the significance of artistic freedom and exploration in the 1990s theatrical landscape in the UK.

During this transformative period in British theatre, Kane argued that traditional storytelling norms and conventions were inadequate to address the complexities of contemporary society. Along with her fellow playwrights, she sought to depart from the realism- and pedagogy-based theatrical traditions of the time. Instead, they sought to create works that captured the raw and disturbing aspects of human experience, stretching the boundaries of what was considered acceptable on stage. The explicit depictions of violence, sexuality, and forbidden subjects in Kane's plays were a manifestation

of her refusal to conform to societal norms and artistic conventions. She embraced the liberty to investigate the darkest corners of the human psyche, daring audiences to confront unsettling truths and eliciting strong emotional responses. For instance, Ian's corrupting influence on Cate is depicted in physical terms, reinforcing the profound impact of their abusive relationship. One of the most unsettling moments in the play occurs when Ian ejaculates in Cate's mouth, leading to her frantic attempts to rid herself of every trace of him: "spits frantically, trying to get every trace of him out of her mouth. She goes to the bathroom and we hear her cleaning her teeth" (2:31). She rushes to the bathroom, audibly cleaning her teeth, yet she remains acutely aware that she carries the stain of his presence: "I stink of you" (2:33). In the moment when Cate discovers a hair in her throat, plucked from Ian's beard, serves as a visceral symbol of her revulsion: "'Cate begins to cough and retch. She puts her fingers down her throat and produces a hair'", the physical act of extraction, coupled with Cate's disgust and subsequent spitting, underscores the abhorrent nature of their relationship. Only by escaping through the bathroom window and cleansing herself can Cate evade Ian's grasp.

Scene two further unveils the extent of Ian's violence against Cate. It becomes apparent that he has violently raped her, and she still bears the physical wounds, including bleeding from a bite inflicted during an act of cunnilingus. Ian's characterisation of the wound as a "love bite" and his denial of the rape accusations reveal his disturbing lack of remorse: "That wasn't rape. Don't know the meaning of the word". The play also introduces another instance of sexual assault when Cate experiences a petit-mal episode, during which Ian takes further advantage of her vulnerability. Her stark declaration upon regaining consciousness, "you're a nightmare," encapsulates the terror and trauma that permeate their relationship.

Patricia Holland's observation about rape not being portrayed as a single brutal act but as an inherent feature of an unequal and self-pitying relationship underscores the systemic nature of abuse in the play: "rape is shown not as a single brutal act, but as structured into a deeply unequal relationship, and performed with a whingeing self-pity" (Patricia Holland, 'Monstruous Regiment',

Independent 27 January 1995). This abuse serves as a catalyst for the structural collapse of the play's first section, where the hotel room itself disintegrates, mirroring the psychological disintegration of the characters. The turning point in this section comes with the introduction of the soldier, who subjects Ian to a brutal ordeal, mirroring the earlier abuse Cate endured.

Kane's own words shed light on the crucial connection between Ian's actions and the cataclysmic effects of the play's second half. The violent dynamic between Ian and Cate is a self-perpetuating cycle of emotional and physical violence, where Ian's actions lead to the dire circumstances of the second section. Kane highlights the emotional reasoning behind the play, emphasizing that without understanding this connection, the play may appear disjointed, failing to achieve its intended impact. The soldier's role in the play is multifaceted. He serves as a link to the physical and mental abuse Ian inflicts on Cate, emphasizing the cyclical nature of their relationship. However, Kane's attempt to communicate through the repetition of rape in the play was met with mixed critical reactions, leaving her both frustrated and disappointed, as the audience's response did not always align with her intentions.

In the play, the soldier takes on a multifaceted role, one of which is serving as an embodiment of Ian's own psyche. Kane deliberately portrays the soldier as a darker reflection of Ian, as someone who surpasses him in violence and cruelty:

The soldier is a kind of personification of Ian's psyche in some sense, and it was a very deliberate thing. I thought the person who comes crashing through that door actually had to make Ian look like a baby in terms of violence—and I think that's successful. It's difficult because when you look at what Ian does to Cate it's utterly appalling, and you think 'I can't imagine anything worse' and then something worse happens'. Ian at least partly recognises the similarities he shares with his tormentor. When the soldier takes the last drops of gin from the bottle, Ian even chuckles in recognition—'worse than me' (3:40).

In an initial version of the play penned in Birmingham, the connections are more overt as the soldier is determined to commit a sexual assault against Cate. The sequence unfolds similarly, with the soldier discovering a set of Cate's undergarments during his search of the room:

(He stuffs them down the front of his trousers and rubs them over his genitals with pleasure. He stops suddenly and looks at Ian with hate.)

VLADEK. English shit.

(He spits in Ian's face. Vladek looks towards the bathroom.)

Is your girl in there?

Is she good?

Does she fuck?

I will see.

The soldier's actions within the hotel room, where the play predominantly unfolds, are designed to make Ian appear almost childlike in terms of his capacity for violence. This deliberate juxtaposition becomes evident when the soldier, upon finding the last drops of gin, causes Ian to chuckle in reluctant recognition of the soldier's depravity. Kane uses this moment to emphasize the escalation of violence, pushing the boundaries of what is considered morally reprehensible. Ian's acts of cruelty toward Cate, appalling as they are, are dwarfed by the soldier's atrocities:

SOLDIER. I broke a woman's neck. Stabbed up between her legs, on the fifth stab snapped her spine.

IAN. (Looks sick.)

SOLDIER. You couldn't do that.

IAN. No.

SOLDIER. You never killed.

IAN. Not like that.

SOLDIER. Not.

Like

That

IAN. I'm not a torturer.

SOLDIER. You're close to them, gun to head. Tie them up, tell them what you're going to do to them, make them wait for it, then...what?

IAN. Shoot them.

SOLDIER. You haven't got a clue (Blasted 3:47).

The soldier also serves as a link to the first part of the play, particularly in the reenactment of the rape Ian originally perpetrated on Cate. The repetition of this act, with a gun pointed at Ian's head, provides a direct connection between the two sections of the play. This harrowing moment serves as a powerful reminder of the cyclical nature of violence within the narrative. The soldier's emotional response during the act, crying his heart out, humanises him, as he physically replicates the horrors other soldiers subjected to his girlfriend. Kane highlights the soldier's experience as a form of reenactment, allowing him to comprehend the depths of suffering his girlfriend endured. The soldier's suicide

becomes a moment of realization and atonement, culminating in a narrative climax as he pulls the trigger.

Kane's *Blasted* explores the theme of extreme violence and repression, imbued with layered meanings that juxtapose various contexts, thus compelling the audience to draw connections between instances of national and international violence that may not appear naturally interconnected. *Blasted* is one of Kane's non-naturalistic plays in which she represents these thematic connections with talent. The play was initially perceived as excessively brutal, self-indulgent, and meaningless, but it eventually gained recognition as an inspiring, thought-provoking, and exhilarating piece of art. Historically, theatre aimed to reflect life and its difficulties through an artificial lens, illuminating the human subconscious in order to address social injustices.

In Germany, the “in-yer-face” theatre playwrights were immediately well-received and featured on the country's most prestigious stages. This led to a national discussion in newspapers about the inclusion of disgusting elements such as excrement, blood, and sperm in these works, prompting critics to devise the term *Ekeltheater* (or *disgust-theatre*) (Ablett, 2020: 78). Kane's work played a crucial role in this context because it provided a highly expressive and metaphorical influence, compelling the audience to transcend realism and empathise with the characters' distress by observing their suffering. The audience struggled to comprehend the extent to which Kane's symbols disclosed aspects of her inner self and psyche/psychosis, and how much was metaphorical in relation to her perception of the external world. When analysing Kane's depiction of violence as well as the audience's response to such deeds of violence, it is necessary to consider these aspects. To fully comprehend the social impact of *Blasted*, it is essential to understand the motivation behind such brutality and abuse, the significance of extreme violence in communicating a message, and the necessity of depicting brutality to make those points clear, without diminishing the impact of the shocking methods used. While Kane did not introduce unprecedented violence to the realm of theatre—Oedipus, Macbeth, and King Lear already contained explicit brutality—the criticism of

Kane's plays centred on the scale and concentration of violence, as well as the importance of contextualising national and international violence on stage.

Sarah Kane's non-naturalistic plays have established an enduring presence on the national and international stage, maintaining their relevance in the contemporary landscape. As emphasised by Hannah Arendt in her seminal work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), the normalisation of violence remains relevant in our culture due to its acceptability within our current social structure. Even though Kane's plays premiered at the *Royal Court Theatre* in the 1990s, they continue to exert a profound influence that transcends temporal and contextual differences between the past and present. By employing metaphorical elements and challenging conventional notions of realism, Kane's plays provoke critical contemplation on the complexities of human existence and the underlying social dynamics that shape our collective consciousness.

### 3.1.3. Interpreting Kane's on-stage acts of violence: a comprehensive analysis

Analysing the plays of Sarah Kane raises questions about the function and significance of violence in her dramatic works. Specifically, it provokes inquiry into how the violence on stage reflects or responds to broader social and cultural discourses about violence against women. Understanding Kane's violent acts necessitates an examination of their performative and symbolic dimensions, as well as their relationship to the aesthetic and thematic concerns of her play.

The exploration of violence in Sarah Kane's play, *Blasted*, unfolds as a disintegration of a previously fractured fictional realm, marked by a pronounced emphasis on dramatic disgust and a jarring transition from domesticity to a war-torn setting. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, delving into the psychological experience of repulsion and rejection beyond societal boundaries, is applied to scrutinize the representation of violence in *Blasted*. Within the context of the play, abjection manifests palpably through both visual and narrative elements, eliciting intense repulsion by breaching



conventional boundaries with extreme violence and grotesque situations. Kristeva posits that in such instances, abjection serves as a tool to confront and explore marginalised facets of the human experience: "Abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognise its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (Kristeva, 1982: np). Kristeva's theory further provides a conceptual framework to understand how the depiction of violence and degradation in *Blasted* challenges established cultural and social norms. This idea engenders an aesthetic and emotional experience that confronts the audience with what is conventionally considered unacceptable or taboo. Kristeva's assertion, "If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject," introduces the idea that the peak of abjection's strength is experienced when the subject, fatigued from futile attempts to identify with external entities, discovers the impossible within (Kristeva, 1982: np). This idea underscores the culmination of the abjection of self as the ultimate form of an experience, revealing that all the subject's objects are rooted in the foundational loss that shaped its existence. Kristeva contends that the overlooked notion of "want" plays a pivotal role, emphasizing that the experience of want, as a precursor to the being of an object, is intrinsic to abjection. She asserts that the true signified of abjection, especially the abjection of self, is found in the experience of want itself, and its signifier is none other than literature. This reflection sheds light on the profound connection between the human psyche, desire, and the artistic expression inherent in literature.

The concept of the Anthropocene and how crises are articulated and conceptualized assume a poetic role, functioning as a literary device to explore and convey humanity's profound challenges. This intertwining of ecological crises with poetic expression echoes Julia Kristeva's assertion that literature becomes the signifier of abjection, illustrating the fundamental human experience of confronting the unfamiliar and the repulsive. In the context of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the depiction of violence against women and degradation becomes a powerful means to challenge societal norms, much like the Anthropocene serves as a literary vehicle to articulate the pressing issues of our time. Due to the tendency of criticism to focus on specific aspects of violence representations rather than

their broader societal implications, the concept of the Anthropocene can be applied to the idea that it is exceedingly difficult to comprehend the larger significance of violent acts depicted on stage. As opposed to viewing these acts in the context of the larger landscape of violence, they should be viewed as instances of trauma and painful experiences that simultaneously emphasize the transformative nature of change. This anthropocentric approach shifts the emphasis from the fetishization of trauma because of the broader depiction of violence to an analysis of the individual's experience of trauma and their unique encounters with such traumatic events. *Blasted*, for instance, depicts a world characterised by discomfort and oppression, devoid of answers, as exemplified by the physicality of a deteriorating room barely held together by a crumbling wall, within which individuals coexist in harsh conditions. What remains in the absence of answers is a fractured world that needs new forms of representation and cognition to manifest trauma, thereby challenging the conventional understanding of trauma itself.

Kane initially utilises rituals encompassing various aspects of life, such as love, food, religion, and medicine, which later serve as vehicles for illustrative, explanatory, and exploratory purposes pertaining to form and substance. The use of ritualised actions captures the attention of the audience while symbolically and emotionally stretching the boundaries of theatrical representation, resulting in a skilful fusion of realism and symbolism. The author employs a precise narrative strategy in response to the absence of visibility and recognition of victims by focusing on Cate. Kane bridges the distance between the audience and the experiences of women raped in Bosnian concentration camps by selecting characters whose faces are recognisable and relatable to a Western audience. In this way, Kane establishes an emotive connection that transcends cultural and national boundaries, validating and recognising women who have been marginalised and ignored in historical accounts of wartime suffering.

Kane challenges the prevalent narratives and prejudices that tend to privilege certain experiences over others by doing so. By focusing the narrative on Ian and Cate, she subverts the

hegemonic discourse that frequently perpetuates the silencing of marginalised voices. The intentional portrayal of relatable characters by Kane provokes a reevaluation of the visibility and value accorded to trauma victims, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to comprehending and representing their experiences. In this way, Kane demonstrates the power of storytelling to transcend understanding and empathy gaps with this nuanced approach. She emphasises the potential for trauma narratives to cultivate social awareness, promote empathy, and challenge existing power dynamics by recognising the broader implications of trauma beyond the individual. The work of Kane serves as a reminder that the depiction of trauma can be a catalyst for social change, inviting audiences to engage critically with the complexities of human suffering and the societal structures that shape its reception and interpretation.

Critics' use of lurid adjectives such as "disgusting," "disturbing," "degrading," and "depressing" to describe the play indicates the presence of a traditionalist audience that adheres to societal taboos and vehemently rejects the depiction of violent and traumatic acts on stage. Such responses can be viewed as coping mechanisms used to confront the unsettling and tragic aspects of reality, which a more privileged audience may not be accustomed to understanding or empathising with. Despite receiving severe criticism, initial responses to *Blasted* indicated that the play's text was perceived as incomprehensible and that its meaning appeared to have been lost due to its unconventional structure (Sierz, 2001: 95). It is essential to observe, however, that Kane intended to challenge and defy conventional theatrical conventions. By breaching the fourth wall, she intends to remove the barrier that separates the audience from reality, allowing them to confront their own complicity through passivity and inaction, mirroring the attitudes exhibited by audiences during tragic international conflicts. Through this deliberate violation of the fourth wall, Kane is able to create a visceral experience of violence for the audience by employing shocking and resonant events that can resonate with any audience member.

Kane's subversion of traditional theatrical boundaries elicits a reflection on the role of passive observation and complicity in the face of systemic violence and suffering from the audience. She elicits a critical engagement with the societal norms and power structures that perpetuate violence and oppression by confronting the audience with uncomfortable and provocative sequences. In this way, Kane creates opportunities for dialogue, introspection, and a reevaluation of individual and collective responsibility by dismantling conventional theatrical conventions. Therefore, *Blasted* is a potent and thought-provoking theatrical work that forces audiences to confront their own roles in the perpetuation or disruption of violence, thereby promoting social change and a reimagining of societal norms.

The necessity of validating and acknowledging pain is of the uttermost importance, yet the romanticisation of suffering presents a paradox in trauma literature. This occurs when trauma is romanticised, resulting in the glamorisation of suffering, which attracts attention while diminishing its actual gravity. As a result, the loss of meaning gives rise to phenomena such as "traumatophilia," a novel form of subjectivity that has emerged in the United States in which trauma is embraced as a new identity, thereby fetishising it in various ways. Despite the investigation of novel literary forms, the search for a definitive solution to trauma continues to be fruitless, which emphasises the need for a distinct approach to addressing violence, one that requires the author's deliberate and conscientious effort. It is crucial to navigate the complex terrain of trauma with sensitivity, avoiding the trappings of voyeurism and commodification that can perpetuate the cycle of suffering. Rather than succumbing to the allure of sensationalism, authors must explore trauma using a deliberate and ethical framework.

This unique course of action necessitates a heightened awareness of the ethical ramifications surrounding the portrayal of violence and trauma. Authors must approach their work with a sense of responsibility and consider the impact their narratives may have on individuals who have personally experienced trauma. It is essential to establish a balance between artistic expression and the preservation of the authenticity and dignity of those who have experienced trauma. Authors can

contribute to a more nuanced and compassionate understanding of the far-reaching effects of violence by doing so. In addition, this strategy requires a commitment to deconstructing the fetishisation of trauma. Instead of exploiting trauma for its shock value or capitalising on its marketability, authors should aspire to create narratives that challenge and subvert established narratives to foster empathy, understanding, and healing. This requires delving deeper than surface-level depictions of suffering and engaging with the complexities and nuances of the human experience following trauma.

Exploring trauma in literature requires a mindful approach that avoids glamorisation and fetishisation. It requires a heightened awareness of the ethical implications of depicting violence and trauma, as well as a dedication to challenging established narratives and cultivating empathy. Through this unique course of action, authors can contribute to a more profound and compassionate comprehension of trauma, thereby paving the way for healing, resilience, and transformative change:

we plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time. The representational challenges are acute, requiring creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects (Nixon, 2013: 10).

To represent trauma, it is necessary to use symbols that capture the elusive nature of catastrophic events and narrative structures that imbue these symbols with urgency. According to Nixon (2013), violence should be viewed as a multifaceted contest that transcends physical space and imminent spectacle. It involves a struggle for dominion over the very passage of time. The impact of trauma must be conveyed with a delicate balance between acknowledging its brutal realities and presenting it as an opportunity for transformative growth. Instead of avoiding trauma, it is essential to confront it head-on and actively engage with its aftermath. By doing so, we can bring to the public's attention the lasting effects of calamitous events that may lack immediate spectacle but have profound long-term implications. This approach necessitates innovative and inventive strategies that enable us to

navigate the inherent representational challenges of conveying the far-reaching effects of trauma. In the end, by acknowledging the struggle over time and actively confronting the complex dynamics of trauma, we can nurture a deeper understanding of its significance and work towards meaningful change. We can endeavour to improve our present circumstances and forge a future that is more resilient, compassionate, and enlightened by focusing on learning from the past.

Kane's role in depicting literary trauma is of the uttermost importance, as they navigate the dynamic and complex space where writers and movements intersect. This connection should not, however, be based solely on vulnerability to external and internal pressures that may contribute to fragmentation (Nixon, 2013: 6). Instead, it should be rooted in the agitation that motivates these authors, as well as their profound engagement with injustices they want addressed. Their goal is to expose and challenge these iniquities, dismantling silences through testimonial protest, rhetorical innovation, and the creation of counter histories despite formidable obstacles (Nixon, 2013: 6). Trauma connects disparate historical experiences, and the act of listening to the trauma of others can nurture cross-cultural solidarity, leading to the emergence of new forms of community (Craps, 2013: 2). Nonetheless, the portrayal of trauma in *Blasted* falls short of these goals, leaving the audience extremely disappointed. The promise of intercultural ethical engagement remains unfulfilled as a lack of authenticity undermines it. The limitations of *Blasted's* approach to trauma prevent it from effectively nurturing genuine connections and profound cross-cultural understanding. The dissatisfaction originates from the perception that the potential for genuine engagement with trauma has been lost, impeding the formation of a shared space where diverse voices can unite. To fulfil the promise of cross-cultural solidarity, depictions of trauma must embrace authenticity and seek a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences and perspectives that shape the collective human story. Only then can trauma be investigated in ways that foster genuine dialogue, empathy, and the formation of transformative community connections.

Craps (2013) brings attention to a significant flaw in prevalent trauma hypotheses, identifying four key areas of concern. Firstly, these hypotheses tend to downplay or disregard traumatic experiences within non-Western or minority cultures. Secondly, they often assume the universal applicability of trauma definitions and recovery models based on a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia, which may not be universally suitable for acknowledging trauma. Thirdly, they frequently overlook traumas that do not align with existing frameworks. Lastly, rather than promoting cross-cultural solidarity, these theories risk perpetuating existing injustices and inequalities (Craps, 2013: 2). This critique raises implications that may lead to larger conflicts, as trauma theory risks advocating for the preservation of unjust beliefs, practices, and structures instead of fostering genuine cross-cultural solidarity. Four criticisms underscore the need to recognize differences and power dynamics within trauma. Instead of employing cross-cultural witnessing as a tool for exclusion, it should be embraced as a means of unification and community-building. Craps suggests reevaluating psychological trauma as a product of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discourses stemming from Western experiences of industrialization, gender relations, and modern warfare (Craps, 2013: 3). Introducing a new perspective, in a 1975 interview, Marguerite Duras sheds light on the concept of 'feminine literature' as an emerging form born from the shadows:

Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness... Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language (Duras, 1981: 174).

Duras advocates for women to appropriate language, disrupting the oppressive language that denies them and creating a new language from the darkness. This approach marks a departure from conventional structures and manifests in Duras' writing style, incorporating elements of the inarticulate, utilizing fractured sentences, ellipses, and blank spaces on the page. Connecting Duras'

ideas to Craps' critique of trauma hypotheses reveals parallels in recognizing marginalized experiences. Duras' call to translate the darkness resonates with Craps' concern about downplaying traumatic experiences within non-Western or minority cultures. Both discussions advocate a reconsideration of prevailing frameworks — Duras proposes a new language, while Craps calls for a reevaluation of trauma constructs influenced by specific historical discourses. Furthermore, the emphasis on fostering unity and community-building, as proposed by Craps, aligns with Duras' implicit call to embrace a new language that transcends exclusionary practices. Together, these perspectives encourage a holistic reexamination of women's language, experience, and trauma within different cultural and historical contexts.

To comprehend the essence of women's trauma, it is necessary to examine its diverse components, which collectively convey the horrific effects of conflicts experienced by countless women. The power resides in the cumulative effect of representing multiple points of view, fostering a desire for positive change, and characterising trauma authors as restless and adaptable. These authors oppose vehemently the normalised silence imposed by unseen power structures, as described by Edward Said. They are faced with the subdued chaos and perilous anonymity that accompany slow violence. Nonetheless, there is an ongoing pursuit of immediate spectacle, as evidenced by the overuse of special effects in movie theatres and the drive for high TV ratings (Nixon, 2013: 6). From a narrative perspective, this implies the annihilation of expressive limitations through the public display of violence. *Blasted*, for instance, defies conventional constraints by lacking closure and exposing defended beliefs in a socially unconventional fashion, eliciting clear viewer responses. The lack of confinement and social constraints in the visual material vividly depicts the most barbaric form of violence. Trauma is a labyrinth of interconnected experiences that transcend distinct temporal and spatial boundaries. It involves various temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements that contribute to a decrease in violence and a reduction in human and environmental costs. These displacements also pave the way for forgetfulness, rendering once-inhabited places



irretrievable and passing unobserved in corporate media (Nixon, 2013: 7). The plays of Kane provide a potential method for combating amnesia and confronting traumatic experiences with fortitude. They convey the sense of violence through multiple platforms, both written and produced, making it more tangible and impactful for the audience. Kane's works emphasise the presentation of genuine distress using precise visual elements that inspire a sense of survival in the face of catastrophe. They present the possibility of an enlightened aftermath and heighten our awareness of our role as passive observers or audience members within displacements. This play serves as catalysts for authentic change by provoking new questions in the minds of readers.

In addition to its provocative interruptions, *Blasted* generated considerable controversy among its audience due to its purposely unconventional and provocative style. Kane courageously challenges the audience's preconceived notions of violence by proposing that trauma entails the dissolution of barriers between external and internal spheres of violence. Kane effectively positions the audience differently and alters their interaction with the performance by defying conventional theatrical forms. Observers of the *United Nations* who were unable to intervene in the Srebrenica massacre became complicit in domestic violence by discreetly observing and failing to intervene, thereby demonstrating indifference towards such abuse. Kane was astounded that the media appeared to be more troubled by the depiction of violence on stage than by actual violence, revealing the misogynistic, irresponsible, and hysterical tendencies of journalists (Sierz, 2001: 98). Some conceptions and taboos were banned from the stage due to the moral discomfort they caused. The emotional impact of *Blasted* is primarily attributable to Kane's powerful writing (Sierz, 2001: 101), as the play vividly depicts the West's position as a witness during the Bosnian War and forces individual audience members to confront their role as witnesses and the genuine implications of becoming involved in acts of pain. In addition to placing demands on its audience, the play explicitly depicted a conflicting situation occurring simultaneously with the Bosnian War on the other side of the globe.

Symbolism plays a significant role in depicting the distinction between the material and the ethereal, as well as between the human and the historically natural, within the context of “in-yer-face” theatre. In this theatrical style, characterized by its raw and confrontational approach to reality, the inclusion of symbolism adds an additional layer of complexity and depth to the representation. For instance, symbols representing the contrast between the material and the ethereal or the human and historically natural can intensify the audience's experience by transcending mere factual description. As a matter of fact, “in-yer-face” theatre employs symbolism to shockingly highlight the brutality and harsh reality of the events depicted. This use of symbolism enhances the emotional impact and resonance of the explored traumatic themes, allowing theatrical representations to transcend mere description and delve into deeper layers of the female experience. In this context, symbolism becomes a powerful tool for conveying the very essence of trauma, juxtaposed with the stark reality presented in a raw and unfiltered manner.

After recognising these conceptual obstacles, a path to solutions emerges, beginning with acceptance and leading to effective action. Participating in activities that promote trauma acceptance becomes a viable strategy for addressing trauma directly. In this way, walls fall not only between the external and internal, but also across the ephemeral boundaries of the past, present, and future. Understanding the past and developing new methods to act in response to the present-future period are the foundations of realistic strategies for transforming existing conditions. In this sense, *Blasted* provides potential evidence for understanding trauma affecting women as a lack of closure and through socially disruptive moulds; the audience is confronted with disturbing visual material that vividly raises social awareness about the pervasiveness of trauma, transcending internal and external realms. Unlike theoretical subversion, experiential subversion is primarily accomplished through outrageousness by introducing disruptive elements that establish connections between life zones and death zones elsewhere. Sierz's concept of in-yer-face theatre or 'culture of shock' is effectively exemplified, eliciting strong audience responses and revealing a lack of realistic comprehension of

contemporary instances of violence. Beyond its thought-provoking style, the disruption of naturalistic standards and the absence of social realism contribute to a subsequent lack of moral awareness, as many deviations from the norm are misconstrued. Kane argued that if *Blasted* had employed a conventional social realism approach, it would not have been subjected to such severe criticism (Saunders, 2010:12), adding to the barrage of negative comments *Blasted* received. The audience's intense emotional responses demonstrated that the play's radicalism was successful in demonstrating that internal and external acts of violence leading to collective trauma are neither normal nor inevitable. Audience members were not acclimated to witnessing such a dramatic breakdown of the barriers between the external world and internal struggles, which heightened their response to *Blasted's* alarms and provocations.

The play delves into a nuanced examination of language, its uses, and its abuses, while also delivering a scathing critique of sensationalist news reporting, the ways in which contemporary society consumes such content, and the overall involvement and responsibility of Western nations in relation to other nations. Kane finds an aesthetic approach to represent and bring to life the revolting and violent events and actions, such as conflicts and rape, that members of Western society encounter daily through their interactions with television, the Internet, and printed reports. The unconventional and thought-provoking style of *Blasted* provoked intense emotional responses and brazenly challenged societal norms. By blurring the distinction between internal and external violence, Kane brought to light the collective trauma that exists in both domains. The radicalism of the play and the fervent responses it elicited highlighted the significance of recognising and confronting acts of violence while rejecting their normalisation. Through her exploration of language and critique of sensationalist media, Kane revealed how society consumes and copes with traumatic events. *Blasted* is a powerful reminder that the arts could confront uncomfortable truths, prompting us to consider our own roles and responsibilities in the face of violence against women.

### 3.1.4. Formal components in *Blasted*: inner and outer violence

Kane's decision to avoid explicitly mentioning the Bosnian War in *Blasted* reflects her intention to embody the broader international mechanisms and procedures of war as opposed to providing a specific political commentary on a specific conflict. Even though the play is not apolitical, it adheres to a fundamental criterion of classic tragic drama by depicting universal structures as opposed to specific historical events.

The characters and the use of props, which usually represented a certain symbolic significance, contribute to the firm presence of unity of action throughout the play. For instance, the elements: “a large double bed; a mini-bar; champagne on ice; a large bouquet of flowers” (1:3) represent enticement, harassment, unrequited love and denial. In *Blasted*, these items change their appearance and function while the action takes place, which is to promote unity. An example would be when the bouquet of flowers in scene two are “ripped apart and scattered around the room” (2:24), which evidences the empty significance of Ian’s loving gestures towards Cate. The pivotal role of props is underscored by Sarah Kane's own dedication to them. In a letter addressed to the director, outlining casting and technical requirements for a Birmingham performance of *Blasted*, Kane explicitly designated certain props as "vital even in a workshop production." These essential props included not only the bed, mini-bar, and champagne but also a replica revolver, sniper rifle, under-arm holster, telephone, bouquet of flowers, bottles of Gordon's gin, and cigarettes. Each of these items played a distinct role in unraveling the narrative and reflecting the characters' emotional and psychological struggles. Intriguingly, Kane's grasp of the props' significance sometimes unfolded serendipitously during the rehearsal and performance stages. An example of this can be seen in the character Ian's actions during the play's opening scene when he carelessly throws newspapers onto the bed. Later, in an unexpected turn of events, he attempts to clean up a bodily function using these newspapers. This connection between the initial action and its later consequences became evident to Kane through the iterative process of rehearsing and performing the play, demonstrating the evolving and dynamic

nature of her approach to these symbolic elements. Kane's revelation serves as a testament to her meticulous craftsmanship and her ability to derive deeper layers of meaning from the seemingly mundane, infusing her work with profound symbolism and thematic richness. Throughout the first part of the play, Kane provides subtle hints and foreshadowing of the impending cataclysm. The hotel room setting, described as "so expensive it could be anywhere in the world," challenges the boundaries of locale from the outset. Cate's inquiry about Ian's sexual experiences prefigures the sexual violence he will later endure, while her use of the phrase "you're a nightmare" to express her disgust towards him in the earlier section recurs when she finds the blinded Ian inside the baby's grave. These instances blur the lines between drama and reality, further emphasizing Kane's dissection of the human psyche and the horrors it can manifest.

Formally, *Blasted* establishes a connection between the abusive and domestic first half of the play and the bizarre theatrical form of the second half, which combines elements of a combat zone and a dream. Kane contrasts the naturalistic depiction of domestic violence and internal trauma in the first half with a hallucinatory and symbolic depiction of war-influenced external violence and trauma in the second half. This abrupt and unanticipated change parallels the characters' lives, which are thrust into chaos without warning. Kane's assertion that the image structure should not be disregarded in favour of focusing exclusively on the words emphasises the significance of the play's form. She emphasises the significance of contemplating the context of the imagery because ignoring the visual elements diminishes the play's intended meaning. The wall with a massive physical breach is a potent symbol, representing the fragility of the boundary between life zones and death zones. It represents a relational space in which the interdependence of various realms becomes palpable, connecting the depiction of domestic violence in Leeds to the sexual violence during the Bosnian War. Essentially, the fusion of form and content in *Blasted* is evident in its deliberate omission of explicit references to specific conflicts and its use of visual symbolism to convey the interconnectedness of various spheres of violence. Kane's investigation of universal structures and her emphasis on the context of

imagery contribute to the artistic impact of the play and elicit deeper reflection on the nature of trauma and the repercussions of societal violence.

To preserve its naturalistic origins, the opening stage directions of *Blasted* provide concise yet detailed information regarding the two main characters. Specifically, the character Ian is depicted as being 45 years old, born in Wales but having spent a significant portion of his life in Leeds, which influenced his acquired accent. On the other hand, CATE is presented as a 21-year-old individual from the lower-middle class with a south London accent and a tendency to stutter when faced with pressure (Saunders, 2002: 42). Moreover, the initial versions of *Blasted* used in the Birmingham production take this level of specificity even further by offering additional indicators regarding the physical appearance and attire suitable for the actor portraying Ian. The playwright, Sarah Kane, specifies that Ian is to be portrayed as "fat," with cropped hair and a neatly trimmed ginger beard. The depiction of trauma presents a difficult challenge, especially when tales fail to be sufficiently personal or shattering due to the sheer number of deaths caused by conflicts. The depiction of traumatic experiences can have implications for social and economic capital (Tomskey, 2011: 1), implying that trauma should be portrayed in a manner that goes beyond the trauma itself and takes external benefits into consideration.

There is a relationship between Kristeva's analysis of *Journey to the End of the Night*, which examines the effects of abject manifestation on narrative structure, and the structure of *Blasted*. The narrative endures a transformation when the unbearable nature of the narrated identity challenges it. According to the outraged reviews of critics, *Blasted* also experiences a structural collapse that profoundly affects the audience, causing them to lose their bearings. Kane uses the disruptive dynamics of war to justify her departure from theatrical conventions, arguing that because war is chaotic and illogical, it would be improper to construct a predictable form. Life is filled with violence, but there is no dramatic crescendo to it. Megan Becker-Leckrone, referencing Celine's identical strategy in *Journey to the End of the Night*, argues that the seamless transition between the domestic

setting and the battlefield serves to illustrate the existential absurdity of war itself (Ablett, 2020: 137). According to Tomsky (2011: 1), when there are too many fatalities, the impact of individual acts of violence and the effects of traumatic experiences diminish. In *Blasted*, Kane confronts the oversupply and devaluation of war trauma resulting from the mass influx of Yugoslav refugees into the European Union by provocatively concentrating on the Yugoslav conflict. Tomsky explains that in a trauma economy, no traumatic experience has a fixed value or conclusion. Accepting the possibility that trauma has no fixed value becomes crucial. Tomsky illustrates this with the example of Dutch authorities granting asylum more readily to those claiming discrimination based on sexual differences than to rape victims of the conflict. This caused an influx of individuals to seize the opportunity, transforming the conflict into a national lottery. While some pursued their fortune as a result of genuine misfortune, others did so because the opportunity presented itself.

As a matter of fact, in *The Ministry of Pain* (2004) by Dubravka Ugresic exemplifies the need for a precise response to the multiplicity of claims made by refugees following the Yugoslav war. It is crucial to consider the journey of traumatic memories rather than adopting an outcome-focused perspective on trauma. Accepting trauma may require time, but it signifies the beginning of recovery and the first step towards progress. In this sense, *Blasted* engages in a sophisticated examination of language's uses and excesses, condemning sensationalist news reporting, society's consumption of such materials, and Western nations' responsibilities towards other nations. Kane uses dramatic imagery in stage directions and topical language to bring to life the repulsive and violent events, such as wars, rape, etc. that Western society encounters daily through the media (Ablett, 2020: 138). Therefore, Kane's work is essential not only for investigating the implications and significance of repugnant content but also, and arguably more importantly, for comprehending how they manifest and express themselves through form. A deeper comprehension of Kane's work requires a reading of her highly effective poetic language, which includes its rhythms, pauses, onomatopoeia, and orchestration (Ablett, 2020: 129).

The most evident connection with the initial segment of the play lies in the reenactment of the rape that Ian had previously inflicted upon Cate. Strikingly, this reenactment is conducted with a gun pointed at Ian's own head. However, what becomes apparent during this brutal and dehumanising act is that "the soldier is crying his heart out" (3:49). This act of violence can be understood as a form of replication, as the soldier physically replicates the atrocities committed by other soldiers against his girlfriend. The lines, "he ate her eyes. Poor bastard. Poor love. Poor fucking bastard" (3:50), vividly illustrate the extent of the horror and tragedy involved in this reenactment. Sarah Kane highlights an intriguing aspect concerning the soldier's subsequent suicide. According to Kane's insights during an interview with Nils Tabert, she points out that the soldier can only truly comprehend the torment his girlfriend endured at the moment he pulls the trigger, culminating in his own demise. This observation emphasises the profound link between the soldier's self-inflicted death and his pursuit of understanding the profound suffering his girlfriend had to endure (Saunders, 2002: 47). The symbolism of Kane distorts the distinction between the symbolic and the nonsymbolic, revealing the contradiction between human and natural history. The continuation of these contradictory relationships emphasises the connection between the material and immaterial realms, which transcends the tangible.

In the dramatic portrayal, Cate delivers a poignant speech that explicitly illuminates the profound sacrifice she was compelled to undertake to procure sustenance for both herself and Ian amidst the ongoing war outside. This depiction serves to accentuate the Beckettian motif, which revolves around the persistent theme of striving to depart from a situation but ultimately encountering insurmountable obstacles leading to failure:

CATE. Did it in the back of a van.

He smelt of cigarettes and sweat.

What he did-

What he did with his wife he said.



Did it quickly. Made me bleed. Gave me a sausage, some bread and this.

(She pours gin in Ian's mouth)

Want to go home now (Saunders, 2002: 50).

The exclusion of Cate's speech potentially introduces greater ambiguity into the trajectory of her long-term future intertwined with Ian, raising questions regarding the motives behind its removal. It is plausible that this omission marked the initial stages of a practice that Sarah Kane would later develop in her subsequent works, wherein the dramatic imagery would take precedence over linguistic expression.

The significance of Sarah Kane's work rests in its exploration of the implications and significance of disturbing subject matter, but its true value lies in recognising how these themes are brought to life through form. Kane's distinctive poetic language plays a crucial role in enhancing our understanding of her work. By exploring the relationship between content and form, Kane challenges conventional theatrical conventions and invites audiences to engage with the disconcerting aspects of the human experience in a profoundly thought-provoking manner. Thus, Kane pushes the boundaries of dramatic expression and invites us to contemplate the complexities of trauma, society, and the human condition through her innovative approach.

### 3.1.5. Conclusion

*Blasted* has been analysed from a feminist standpoint due to its critique of violence against women and the patriarchal structures that perpetuate it. Feminist critics have emphasised how Kane challenges dominant narratives that rationalise violence against women and the notion that men have the right to control and own the bodies of women. In addition, this work implies that violence is not a natural or inevitable force, but rather the result of unequal power relations between men and women. In this regard, *Blasted* is a play that condemns and combats violence against women.

Kane contests the dominant narratives that justify violence against women and the notion that men have the right to control and own the bodies of women, suggesting that violence is the result of unequal power relations between men and women. *Blasted* addresses the issue of violence against women in a raw and direct manner, connecting it to international and national violence, demonstrating the devastating effects of war and international conflicts on women, and highlighting the dehumanisation and vulnerability of women in societies that deny them rights and view them as objects. Kane uses rituals to illustrate how oppression and violence against women may stem from larger cultural structures that justify male dominance and female subordination. Throughout the centuries, the female body has been the plunder and the most effective weapon used in wartime conflicts. Women, viewed as territory owned by men, have not only been conquered through violence but also through humiliation, in order to assert male supremacy and victory. The rape and sexual humiliation of women have been effective tactics in social and wartime conflicts. Unfortunately, women's bodies have been and continue to be spoils of war to this day.

The sociopolitical aspects of Sarah Kane's work from the 1990s can be viewed as a direct reaction to the Thatcherite values that dominated the United Kingdom during that era. Kane's emphasis on imagery is a deliberate departure from reality, reflecting a wider unwillingness to confront the profound loss of lives. While Kane was not the solitary figure in the movement to revive British theatre in the 1990s, her contributions garnered exceptional media attention, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of her plays. The context of Kane's theatrical endeavours was influenced by the conservative political climate of Thatcherism. This political ideology, which was characterised by free-market capitalism, individualism, and the dissolution of social welfare programs, fostered a society characterised by economic inequality and social divisions. As a response, Kane's work can be interpreted as a deliberate counterattack, challenging dominant values, and advocating for a more critical and socially engaged theatre.

Kane's emphasis on imagery is one of her artistic approach's distinguishing features. She creates a sense of detachment from reality by utilising vivid and frequently startling visual depictions. This avoidance of reality represents a symbolic refusal to confront the brutal realities and consequences of societal problems and violence against women. Kane's use of explicit and provocative imagery can be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to shock audiences out of complacency and force them to confront unpleasant truths.

While Kane was a part of a larger movement of playwrights and theatre practitioners who sought to challenge traditional theatrical norms and stretch the boundaries of performance, the media gave her work considerable attention. This increased scrutiny is attributable to the provocative and controversial nature of her plays, which frequently dealt with violent and erotic themes and power dynamics. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of Kane's work is essential, as it not only illuminates her artistic vision but also depicts the zeitgeist of the 1990s British theatre scene. To fully comprehend the significance and impact of Kane's work, it is necessary to examine the play as a unified whole, as opposed to concentrating on elements. By analysing the play's structure, subject matter, and thematic concerns, we have gained a deeper appreciation for Kane's artistic intentions and the sociopolitical commentary incorporated in her work. Such an approach enables us to appreciate the broader significance of Kane's contribution to British theatre during a pivotal period in which the collision of political ideologies and artistic expression led to a reimagining of theatrical boundaries.

The themes of violence and maltreatment of women are central to *Blasted*. An older, more aggressive male character assaults the female protagonist sexually and subjects her to other acts of violence. The play exposes sexual and physical violence against women as an extreme form of patriarchal control and oppression by depicting such acts. The work of Kane illuminates the dehumanisation and vulnerability of women in a society that denies them rights and reduces them to objects. In addition, the play challenges the notion that men have the right to possess and control the

bodies of women. Within the context of gender inequality, *Blasted* effectively illustrates how women can be subjected to violent, dehumanising, and oppressive treatment.

*Blasted* addresses the issue of violence against women in a raw and direct manner, depicting the terror and brutality of war and rape without reticence. Through the narrative of a rape, Kane questions the patriarchal structures that facilitate and legitimise violence against women while condemning the cruelty and inhumanity of war. Moreover, Kane's work suggests that violence is a destructive force that affects everyone, regardless of gender or social standing.

Kane integrates rituals into *Blasted* that are closely associated with condemning violence against women. Several violent and disturbing sequences in the play resemble oppressive and ritualistic acts. The scene in which Ian rapes Cate, for instance, functions as a ritualised display of dominance. Through these rituals, Kane intends to illustrate how violence and oppression against women can have deep roots in larger cultural structures that uphold masculine dominance and subordinate women. In addition, the play raises concerns about how rituals of violence and oppression impact successive generations of women across time and space. Thus, *Blasted* uses rituals to reveal how violence against women can be embedded in larger cultural and social systems that perpetuate female subordination and oppression. The violence depicted in *Blasted* is extremely coarse, disturbing, and difficult to comprehend. Violence is used to condemn the subjugation and oppression of women in patriarchal societies, ultimately reflecting the reality faced by numerous women across the globe.

The pursuit of transcending present reality has always been a fundamental goal of the arts, contributing to the evolution of our worldview. *Blasted* sheds light on alternative methods to comprehend the world through extreme and performative imagery by continuously pushing boundaries and experimenting with new forms of theatrical expression. The potency of Kane's disruptive artworks, combined with their sociopolitical dimensions as a reaction against the

Thatcherite values prevalent in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, raises concerns regarding Kane's responsibility for effecting social change. By allowing the audience to reconstitute their own identities, her works provide a plausible opportunity to discover realistic forms of human expression through radical form and content, which are made manifest in both plays.

Revolutions play a crucial role in collective self-awareness, necessitating those countries present unique perspectives on their own revolutions while examining the public and political spheres of the past. This includes examining the role of revolutions in the collective memory and their contemporary impact on social changes that seek to achieve greater social equality. As urban space continues to evolve, various spaces influence a variety of observational and observing practices. Kane suggests that there are ethical limitations regarding the authenticity of individual experiences and their representation via experimentalism. This contradiction between violating social and ethical boundaries arises. Through the emphasis on imagery, a denial of reality arises, extending to a refusal to confront the staggering loss of human life. By depicting violent imagery on stage, Kane aimed not only to distinguish herself from other authors, but also to depict violence in ways that had never been seen before on stage.

While other writers shared a similar ambition to revitalise British theatre in the 1990s, Kane's work received extraordinary media attention. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of Kane's work is required, with a focus on the totality of her plays rather than on elements. Globally, horrific acts of violence occur daily, and Kane's disruptive writing conveys these catastrophes. Parallels can be drawn between Kane's parallels and the audience members who are forced to confront the depravity within human nature and their own daily decisions. Rather than merely shocking or thrilling the audience, the purpose of violence in Kane's plays is to provoke a social awakening based on in-depth self-examination.

*Blasted* immerses the audience in a way that forces them to confront this reality directly. The play depicts a harsh panorama in which violence transpires before the audience's eyes, placing them in the position of helpless observers unable to intervene in the violent acts being performed onstage. Although audience members pay for an artistic service expecting to be entertained, the play exposes them to savagery in a manner that causes discomfort. This parallels the way society treats individuals by placing them in a state where action is implausible.

Despite their desire to stay up to date on world events, people frequently find themselves unable to help those who are suffering from conflict. Consequently, spectators become passive observers, like the audience in *Blasted*. The audience reacts differently to this comparison between witnessing internal conflicts of violence and external violence. Kane's plays are still relevant because they reflect society's indifference to external acts of violence. Even though people may read numerous articles about the Syrian conflict as passive readers unable to intervene in the war, they are nonetheless drawn to continue following updates on the situation. Similarly, audience members may revisit provocative performances and provide negative reviews. This situation demonstrates a pattern of indifference towards external acts of violence, thereby validating Sarah Kane's plays' enduring relevance. *Blasted* functions as a theatrical reflection of the newspapers, utilising extreme radical content and form to address the social void without making explicit references to a specific social context, transcending the Thatcherite era.

The corpus of work by Kane explores the complexities of women's experiences and violence. Her artistic exploration focuses on the agony, sexual assault, and oppression that contemporary women face. Kane, like the other artists analysed in this study, represents these experiences through a range of literary techniques and approaches, from theatre to poetry. Moreover, her works frequently challenge the cultural and social norms that perpetuate women's subjugation, offering a critical and resilient perspective on these issues. In conclusion, Sarah Kane is comparable to other artists

examined in this research, as her work explores themes related to women's experiences and violence, thereby forging a connection within this group of artists.

## 3.2. Caroline Bergvall

### 3.2.1. Introduction

Fench-Norwegian Poet and aural artist, Caroline Bergvall, has made significant contributions to a variety of creative disciplines and languages. Born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1962 to a Norwegian father and a French mother, her formative years were spent in Switzerland, Norway, France, the United States, and United Kingdom, where she was exposed to diverse cultural contexts. Bergvall received an MPhil from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom and a PhD from Dartington College of Arts, in addition to her studies at Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. Her significant works include *Strange Passage: A Choral Poem* (Equipage, 1993), *Éclat: locations 1–10* (1996), *Jets-Poupée* (Rem Press, 1999), *Goan Atom* (Krupskaya, 2001), *Fig* (Salt Books, 2005), and *Middle English* (Nightboat, 2010). Bergvall demonstrates her artistic versatility in these works by deftly incorporating performative, visual, and literary elements. Her works have been commissioned and exhibited by such prestigious institutions as *MoMA*, *Tate Modern*, and the *Museum of Contemporary Art* in Antwerp, which have recognised her aptitude.

Bergvall's artistic approach to writing and language can be described as an exploration of the body's innate dialect, highlighting the social accents that distinguish individuals rather than conforming to a homogenous national literature. Bergvall has shared her knowledge and expertise as an educator, teaching at *Temple University*, *Bard College*, and the University of Southampton, in addition to her artistic endeavours. Notably, she served as the dean of the interdisciplinary writing department at Dartington College of Arts, where she was instrumental in fostering innovation and collaboration among students and faculty. Bergvall, who currently resides in London, frequently refers to her writing as a convergence of languages, which reflects her experiences and influences. Her poetry incorporates French, English, Middle English, Norwegian, and Latin into a complex tapestry of linguistic domains. While some may perceive the resulting texture as mysterious, it is an expansion of linguistic space that provides profound insights. Bergvall reveals multiple levels of



meaning through the application of multilingual puns and deconstructions. By defying conventional reading conventions and employing a language characterised by combination, concentration, and varying reading speeds, she challenges readers of diverse backgrounds to engage with British poetry in novel ways.

The artistic expression of Bergvall transcends the confines of a single narrative origin. She creates a dynamic interplay between linguistic domains by incorporating Middle English terms, contemporary English, excerpts from BBC broadcasts, and French words into her writings. This voyage through diverse territories parallels the transformative experience of a pilgrim, with Bergvall's poetry performances producing ever-changing utopian environments. In these displacements, she creates a "non-space" that challenges the notion of a unified national community, a unified self, and territorial boundaries (Erea). Bergvall disrupts the boundaries of national language and monolingual culture by incorporating foreign elements into her poetic practise, resulting in a distorted and disarticulated English. Despite her Norwegian ancestry, she adopted English as her primary language as an adult. The author defines plurilingual poetics as a form of writing that transcends and operates across languages, exemplifying the processing and assimilation of the foreign. Bergvall, who is a multidisciplinary artist, incorporates elements of performance, sound, and visual art into her written works. Her English text perpetually explores other languages and mediums, exceeding its own limitations. This investigation of Bergvall's work's language encourages readers to actively engage in the process of meaning-making.

The leitmotiv of this book, centred around a shipwreck off the coasts of Libya, adds a poignant layer to the exploration of women's representation and violence in *Drift*. Bergvall's work delves into the complexities of female identity, intertwining it with language, history, and a tragic contemporary event. Through an insightful examination, she uses the Anglo-Saxon epic poem Beowulf to challenge and deconstruct dominant patriarchal narratives. Bergvall's poetic intervention not only reimagines the role of women in literature but also serves as a potent critique of the limited and often reductionist

depictions of women throughout literary history. In this context, the reference to the Libyan shipwreck becomes a symbolic anchor, grounding the exploration of female identity and violence in a specific and resonant contemporary event. Bergvall investigates themes of displacement, identity negotiation, and the complex intersections of gender, ethnicity, and social belonging through the incorporation of diverse cultural elements. Bergvall amplifies the perspectives and narratives of migrant women by incorporating these cultural references, shedding light on their lived experiences and the challenges they face in a globalised world.

My research<sup>24</sup> aims to investigate the politics underlying Bergvall's work, specifically in relation to the concept of deterritorialisation as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deterritorialisation is a process that disrupts traditional language usage by separating sound from meaning and challenging established structures. In the context of Bergvall's writing, this concept becomes a means of urgently conveying the emergency at Europe's southern frontiers, emphasising the need for communication, and understanding in the face of humanitarian crises. I argue, with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kafka, that Bergvall's texts embody a materially intense expression, blurring the boundaries of language and allowing alternative narratives to emerge. I intend to demonstrate, through close reading of Bergvall's work *Drift*, how the multilingual lyric voice in her poetry becomes a potent weapon for combating the oppressive discourses that obliterate and marginalise the testimonies and experiences of refugees. Bergvall confronts concealed power relations, interconnected networks, capital movement, and transnational connection zones by adopting a Deleuzian reimagining of the world. She holds languages and their forms responsible for their complicity in compelled marginalisations and urges readers to confront these issues head-on. I also regard Bergvall's intermedial artistic practise as a catalyst for the deterritorialisation of text,

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<sup>24</sup> Certain parts of the discussion in this chapter have been adapted from material previously submitted at *University of Westminster*. Part of the information introduced in this chapter was developed in different essays, which were presented at the *University of Westminster* during my Master's Degree. The courses from which I have utilised essays in this section are: capitalism and culture, experimental women's writings, photography and film, institutions and histories in modern and contemporary fictions and themes and problems in modern and contemporary literature.

image, voice, and music within the scope of this analysis. Her work disrupts traditional boundaries and create a space where multiple forms of expression converge, allowing for a more thorough examination of the representation of women in Western culture. Specifically, I investigate how her artistic interventions address the tragic consequence of migration and displacement—the mass deaths occurring in the Mediterranean Sea. Bergvall sheds light on the human cost of these crises and encourages critical engagement with the systemic issues at play by interweaving various artistic mediums.

This study aims to provide evidence for the political dimensions of Bergvall's work and its capacity to challenge dominant discourses and open new avenues of understanding and empathy towards women refugees worldwide. I hope to demonstrate the transformative potential of Bergvall's artistic practise in confronting pressing social and humanitarian issues affecting women these days.

### 3.2.2. Amplifying testimony and solidarity: addressing sexual violence, migration, and feminist activism

Examining the interpretation and oral testimony of women in the context of asylum claims is a crucial and intricate topic. The work of Debora Singer on the *Protection Gap*<sup>25</sup> underscores the problematic area of translation and its effect on the asylum-seeking testimonies of women, which includes obstacles such as words having different meanings in diverse cultural contexts, the silencing of women's perspectives during the translation process, and the limited resources available for

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<sup>25</sup> Debora Singer is a MBE, Policy Manager and Research Manager of Asylum Aid, a national non-profit organization that works to safeguard those coming to the UK for safety from persecution and violations of human rights elsewhere. The Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum's goal is this protection gap. The Charter mandates minimal requirements for women applying for asylum in the UK. The Fawcett Society, Women's Aid, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Women for Refugee Women, and Southall Black Sisters are among some of the organizations that have signed it. See: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/blog/protection-gap-uks-double-standards-letting-down-rape-survivors-seeking-asylum>.

comprehending women's narratives during the asylum-seeking procedure. These issues contribute to the disparities and obstacles women face when expressing their experiences and seeking safety.

This section seeks to investigate the intersections of sexual violence against women, asylum, voice, and testimony by analysing the contributions of Bergvall's work to addressing institutional failures. A special emphasis is placed on the function of translation and the need for feminist representation that broadens the boundaries of legal expression. The objective is to promote the establishment of spaces where women can confidently share their experiences of sexual violence and have them properly understood. Incorporating feminist perspectives and the arts can assist in challenging and reshaping established narratives and practises. As case study of asylum seekers' testimonies, *Drift* by Caroline Bergvall is utilised to exemplify the difficulties of translating women's narratives as they are expressed. By analysing this work, this chapter sheds light on topics, such as the challenges encountered by women seeking asylum after sexual abuse and the implications for their ability to speak out and seek justice. The results of this analysis will aid researchers, decision-makers, and writers in addressing these issues in their scholarly and creative works. It highlights the potential of contemporary literature as an effective form of activism and a means of amplifying the voices of women.

Feminist academics in the field of legal humanities have taken up the issue of telling women's accounts of sexual assault. In works such as *Women and the Law Stories* by Elizabeth Schneider and Stephanie Wildman and *The Paths of Stories* by Kathryn Abrams, the significance of narrative and its contributions to legal analysis are acknowledged. Rosemary Hunter, Clare McGlynn, and Erika Rackley's *Feminist Judgements from Theory to Practise* examines alternative expressions in legal contexts. In addition, scholars such as Mairead Enright and Julie McCandless include art and literature in their book *Northern and Irish Feminist Judgements*. The theoretical exploration of law as narrative, literature, and rhetoric has also been pursued by scholars and practitioners, utilising works such as James Boyd White's *The Legal Imagination* and Peter Brooks' *Narrative Transactions*:

*Does the Law Need a Narratology?* These endeavours seek to comprehend the language of the law and stretch the limits of legal expression, thereby creating new avenues for research within the field. This section expands on previously discussed issues to cast light on the often-overlooked fields of sexual violence and asylum testimony. The purpose is to shed light on the obstacles women face when sharing their experiences and the devastating effects of sexual violence. The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance and assistance for traversing the complexities of obtaining testimonies from traumatised women, migrants, and refugees.

In *Feminism without borders: decolonising theory, practising solidarity* (2003), Chandra Talpade Mohanty shows the expressive power of writing in capturing and representing elements such as narrative fragmentation, mistranslation, silence, repetition, and hybrid languages. Similarly, the work of Caroline Bergvall, especially the experimental multi-media piece *Drift* (2014), exemplifies the illustrative capacity of writing and performance. Bergvall combines languages, contemporary human rights documentation of maritime disasters involving migrants, and ancient seafaring literature from Anglo-Nordic traditions. Her texts become malleable and abstract through the incorporation of performance and multi-media elements. This work contributes to an expanding corpus of literature that seeks to empower and amplify the voices of women who have experienced forced migration. The diversity and plurality of these works demonstrate the importance of writing and language in conveying women's experiences and creating new forms of literary activism that shape the representation of women. Mohanty addresses crucial and difficult issues confronting contemporary feminism by compiling classic and contemporary writings from her groundbreaking feminist theory. She has been at the forefront of Third World and global feminist thought and action for the past two decades, bridging the distance between daily life, collective action, theory, and education. Her book highlights the themes that permeate her work, including the politics of difference and solidarity, decolonisation and democratisation of feminist practise, cross-cultural exchange, the relationship between feminist organising and social movements, and knowledge and scholarship.

Mohanty provides a thorough critique of globalisation and argues for a shift in transnational feminist activities towards anti-capitalist movements. Her work begins and concludes with a reevaluation of her famous critique of Western feminism, *Under Western Eyes* (Mohanty, 1984), concentrating on the role of gender in racial, class, and national formations affected by globalisation. Mohanty reflects on a variety of topics in between these essays, including the experiences of women working at various points along the global assembly line in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States, feminist discourse on experience, identity, and community, prevalent notions of multiculturalism and citizenship, and the commercialization of North American academia. In addition, she considers the development of interdisciplinary courses such as Women's Studies and Race and Ethnic Studies, pedagogies of accommodation and dissent, and global movements of women advocating for consumer rights, health rights, and reproductive rights. Mohanty's in-depth and controversial analysis of home, sisterhood, experience, and community suggests a feminism that transcends borders and thoroughly engages with the realities of our global society. She states, "Borders suggest both containment and safety, and women often pay a price for daring to claim the integrity, security, and safety of our bodies and living spaces" (Mohanty, 2003: 1-2). By employing the term "feminism without borders," Mohanty emphasizes that "our most expansive and inclusive versions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (Mohanty, 2003: 2). In a parallel vein, Caroline Bergvall's *Drift* aligns with Mohanty's call for a feminism that transcends borders and engages profoundly with the realities of our global society. Bergvall, through her examination of women's representation and violence, echoes Mohanty's critique of globalized structures, challenging conventional narratives through a linguistic and historical lens. Just as Mohanty underscores the need for feminist activities to shift towards anti-capitalist movements, Bergvall employs poetic intervention, notably referencing the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*, to subvert traditional male-centric perspectives and reimagine the role of women in literature. Both works confront reductionist depictions and call for a nuanced understanding of gender in relation to broader structures of power, whether within the global assembly line, as explored by Mohanty, or in

the literary canon, as deconstructed by Bergvall. Together, these analyses prompt a reevaluation of feminist discourse, emphasizing the importance of transcending borders and engaging with the multifaceted realities of a globalized world.

### 3.2.3. On the relevance of legitimising women's writing

The questioning of the *place* or *space* of the *experimental feminine* is paradoxical. This expression, Rosmarie Waldrop originally used to describe her position as a woman and a foreigner in American poetry, illustrates the diminished status of women's experimental writings in the United Kingdom.

Broqua raises a crucial question about the whereabouts of women's experimental writings in his work: "how should one define the territory or, to take an overtly sociological term, the field of production of experimental poetry written by women in the UK?" (Broqua, 2008: 2). Broqua probes further: "Is there such a thing as 'British experimental feminine poetry', or isn't it all a question of articulating the community of women poets to the singularities of individual authors, as Julia Kristeva says of *l'écriture féminine*, that is, the writing task developed by women through the female gaze. In an issue of the magazine *How2* published in 2001, Caroline Bergvall argues that there is still a lack of a definitive guide or framework for understanding experimental poetry written by women in the United Kingdom. Broqua's research focuses on gaining a clear comprehension of the place of women's experimental writings in the literary landscape. He explicitly questions how to define the specific realm or field of production for British women's experimental poetry. In other words, he wishes to determine if there is a distinct category of experimental female poetry in the United Kingdom, or if it is primarily a matter of connecting individual women poets with their distinct artistic expressions. The mention of Caroline Bergvall's contribution to the magazine *How2* emphasises the ongoing difficulty of mapping out the territory of women's experimental poetry in the United Kingdom. Bergvall argues that, despite the progress made, a comprehensive framework or guide that

effectively encapsulates and represents this form of literary expression is still lacking. Importantly, the discussion explores the limitations of essentialist thought, particularly as they pertain to gender and identity. Essentialism proposes that there are inherent, fixed characteristics that characterise a group or person. Broqua and Bergvall's investigation contradicts this notion by emphasising the diversity and uniqueness of women poets and their experimental works, implying that it is insufficient to impose rigid categorisations or presume a single shared identity for this body of literature.

Most poets in the area of experimental writing support the concept of shifting poetic fields as a challenge to national, and primarily masculine, writing. Even though women write experimental poetry in the United Kingdom, it appears that their printed works are essentially non-existent and that they belong to a "non-place". Caroline Bergvall relates her poetic texts and performances to space, geography, and the limits that these concepts address. Bergvall sees her role within a broader artistic spectrum as that of experimental artists, which enables them to deconstruct categories and definitions, or "to displace and perhaps transgress the fixed territories of poetic language, national poetry, and sexual identity" (Broqua, 2008: 2). Due to the nature of experimental poetry to evade rigidity, it cannot be readily defined. Eric Vos defines four experimental writing dimensions:

Developments through time, particularly the issues of historicity, genealogy, and (opposing) stance towards prevailing poetic practice provide for one of these dimensions. The second consists of the range of the language-related concerns of poetic experimentalism, from auto-reflexive, linguistic invention to language's role as an instrument in ideological and political activism. The third involves an orientation on two not necessarily incompatible experimental objectives, namely analytic investigation of norms and rules – verbal, inter-artistic, sociopolitical, etc. – on the one hand and their purposeful excess or transgression on the other. In the fourth dimension, the poem becomes a "meta-poem", presenting both a sample and a (partial) theory of Experimental Poetry (Vos, 1996: 23-35)



According to Vos, it is too early to aspire to definitive definitions of experimental poetry, visual poetry, and concrete poetry. Experimental poetry is characterised by its inability to be categorised and its perception of itself as a work in progress.

There is insufficient room to display the experimental feminine. In *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry* (Hamilton, 1994), male authors such as Tom Raworth and J.H. Prynne were given a chance, but women from the same generation, including Denise Riley and Maggie O'Sullivan, were not. In this respect, anthologies make the non-place assigned to women poets even more apparent. One out of seventeen poets of the *British revival* in Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville's *A Various Art* (1990) were female; only five out of thirty-six poets were females in Iain Sinclair's *Conductors of Chaos* (1996), and only eight out of fifty-five poets in Caddel and Quatermain's *Other: British and Irish Poetry since 1970* (1999). These facts and figures may appear irrelevant to a reader of poetry who believes that poetry is acknowledged and represented because of its inherent value. In the process of selection lie both the privilege and the risk that the anthologist seeks to participate in. These facts demonstrate the historical underrepresentation of experimental writing by women in the United Kingdom. It is important to note that British poetry has historically been less experimental than American poetry, which developed as a result of the potential for experimentalism for creative and deconstructive poetics, particularly with Pound, Stein, Williams, Cage, and the Language poets. This idea may be the cause of the paradoxical absence of women. It could also be due to a reluctance to accept feminine voices, which would modify or decompose language to some extent. An additional justification could be that one of the characteristics of experimental poetry is that it is typically written on the periphery of accepted poetry; experimental poetry in the United Kingdom could be interpreted as being rejected by male poetic institutions.

The definition of non-place is derived from the clandestine existence of women's experimental poetry within the British poetry field. This concept also considers the need for a location from which women's experimental poetry in the United Kingdom could develop and progress from

underrepresentation to visibility. The non-place of women's experimental writings represents an aporetic space, which is the opposite of a rigorous territory that guarantees safety by defining essential boundaries with arrogance. Even though their work is shown and heard in the United Kingdom, experimental women artists in the United Kingdom have opened a space that embodies the non-place from which they have steadily developed their voices, in collaboration with North American experimental poets and through the construction of collective and extraterritorial venues. These sociological and political facts provide evidence for the covert presence of women who write experimental poetry in the United Kingdom, but they do not invalidate the concept of *non-place*.

#### 3.2.4. Caroline Bergvall: exploring singularities in the poetics of the non-essential

This section explores the realm of the poetics of the non-essential, concentrating on Caroline Bergvall's contributions. Bergvall's body of work challenges conventional conceptions of essentialism and explores a variety of topics, including women's representation, sexual violence, asylum claims, solidarity, and voice. This section attempts to illuminate the transformative power of Bergvall's work by analysing her artistic practice and creative interventions.

Caroline Bergvall's artistic exploration incorporates a variety of mediums, such as poetry, performance, multimedia installations, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Her creative endeavours challenge patriarchal narratives, push linguistic boundaries, and amplify the voices of marginalised individuals, especially women, migrants, and refugees. Bergvall constructs poetic spaces that challenge conventional interpretations and offer alternative visions of identity, history, and collective memory through her use of language, historical references, and intertextuality. This section will examine Bergvall's engagement with themes of violence against women and asylum-seekers' testimonies as one of its primary focuses. I will examine how Bergvall's work reveals the difficulties women face in trusting their voices and narrating their trauma experiences. In addition, I will

investigate the transformative potential of writing and performance in amplifying these testimonies, emphasising how Bergvall's works contribute to feminist activism and the development of new literary expressions. This section will also examine the concept of solidarity within the poetics of Bergvall. I will investigate how Bergvall's work embraces pluralism, pushes boundaries, and fosters feminist solidarity using Chandra Talpade Mohanty's transnational feminist framework and her concept of *feminism without borders*. By engaging with a variety of languages, cultures, and historical contexts, Bergvall's artistic practice serves as a catalyst for intercultural exchange, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between communities. This part seeks to shed light on the singularities and instances present in Bergvall's poetics of the non-essential through an in-depth analysis of her works, focusing specifically on her work *Drift*. Therefore, I seek to understand the transformative potential of Bergvall's work and its capacity to challenge dominant narratives, empower marginalised voices, and reimagine the boundaries of poetic and political discourse by analysing the ways in which she weaves together different languages, histories, and forms of expression. This section of the dissertation will explore the poetics of Caroline Bergvall, focusing on the singularities and instances present in her work. By analysing her engagement with women's representation, sexual violence, asylum claims, solidarity, and voice, I hope to decipher the force of her artistic production and its contribution to contemporary literature, feminist activism, and the development of new modes of expression.

The body, syntax, and poetry are among the ambiguous areas that Caroline Bergvall discusses in her poems. Her physical texts are born out of or are converted into performance by making references to and collaborating with contemporary artists. As a result, Bergvall places her work in the experimental domain. Her poetry is also fluid, perhaps forming a breach of the hard boundaries of "poetic language, national poetry, and sexual identity" (Broqua, 2008: 6, 7). In an interview with John Stammers, Bergvall discusses how she moved "in and out of languages" at the beginning of her writing career (Broqua, 2008: 7):

When I moved over into English is when writing became a public project to me, it then became the idea of getting it out. For me the idea of the move into another language became the idea of writing.

Therefore, rather than using her native speech to analyse the creative interrogations a writer faces, she draws inspiration for her creative work from a language different than her own. By choosing to immerse herself in a foreign tongue, she creates a paradox that is impossible to truly inhabit. Indeed, the examination and dismantling of grammar in her texts show a movement inside and between languages:

Je vous vois assez proche de certaines femmes-écrivains qui, partant de la situation d'exil, de la situation de dissidence, à laquelle on est confronté quand on se trouve être à la fois étrangère, femme, en d'autres cas juive ou autre chose, font un travail sur la différence, sur la différenciation qui est ouverture, amour, foi (Kristeva, 2007:145).

Kristeva's words could be used to characterise the work of Caroline Bergvall. Even though Bergvall is not a political exile, her political individuality has created a space in which her writing can be distinct and cannot be defined by a single country.

The fact that Bergvall writes her texts "at the intersection of languages" is something she brings up repeatedly (Broqua, 2008: 7). She combines French and English in her poetry to use a theme she likes (Middle English, Norwegian, and Latin). Some readers would protest the unreadable texture of her works, while others might see it as a beneficial step towards the liberation of introspective illumination; she did illuminate the significance of many ways of expression through her multilingual proposals and deconstructions. Although Bergvall's work focuses on the English language, it is international in scope. The reader thus encounters several linguistic meaning locations, which offer up novel forms of meaning. Bergvall situates her poetry performances amid these perpetual displacements, which can even be utopian settings. She can challenge the notion of the unique person,

of the distinct national group, and of territory because she creates a non-space. She moves back and forth between many conceptual realms, examining and challenging the experimental feminine space, hence giving women the freedom to play with language.

#### 3.2.4.1. *Drift* (2014): connecting text and performance

Premiered in the UK in November 2013 at the *Shorelines Festival* in Southend-on-Sea. At the conclusion of its UK tour, it opened Poetry International in the Purcell Room in London in 2014. *Drift* received a Cholmondeley Award for "contribution to poetry" in 2017 along with its published counterpart (with *Nightboat*, 2014), and the Bernard-Heidsieck Art Literary Prize (Paris) in the same year.

Thomas Köppel, responsible for electronic text projection, and Ingar Zach, contributing to sound composition and live percussion, played crucial roles in the performance *Drift*. Inspired by the 10th-century Anglo-Saxon poem *The Seafarer* and quotes from a recent maritime tragedy involving migrants, the performance reflects on themes of migration, exile, and maritime travel. Collaborating with artist Caroline Bergvall, Köppel, born in 1983 in Zurich and based in Geneva, showcased his interdisciplinary skills within contemporary performance art, particularly through a dense electronic text environment that dynamically connected live voice and written text. In parallel, Ingar Zach, a renowned Norwegian percussionist born in Oslo in 1971, contributed to the meditative and tribal pulse of *Drift* through subtle percussion work, including beats, resonances, and treated brushes. Together, their contributions created a visually and sonically immersive experience, transforming reading into a fluid and perceptually subtle connection between voice and text, amplifying the profound themes of the performance.

According to a Deleuzian interpretation, the text and performance demonstrate deterritorialization techniques that provide a startling account of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. Due to these difficult conditions, many migrants perish at sea every year while attempting to reach Europe. To investigate what it means to be without citizenship and recognition considering this humanitarian disaster, the arts dismantle language barriers. Deleuzian theories will supplement my study by enabling Bergvall to revive a multilingual politics of speech and performance that addresses the historical and contemporary overlay of Western culture in mass killings of indigenous people.

Since 2014, the *International Organization for Migration* has referred to the Mediterranean as "the deadliest sea in the world for migrants" (Brian and Laczko, 2014: 20). Each year, thousands of individuals perish while attempting to traverse the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Despite significant policy and media attention paid to these tragedies over the past few years, the annual death toll continues to rise due to the frightening ignorance surrounding where and how these people perish in the water. As a result of this widely accepted social norm for mass drownings, frustration was the driving force behind the establishment of *Drift* (2014). The purpose of this multilingual endeavour is to give these individuals a distinct voice.

*Drift* is characterised as a "contemporary meditation on migrancy, exiles and sea-travel" on Bergvall's website. *Drift* connects Old English and Nordic poetry with pop song lyrics and excerpts from a human rights report on the contemporary calamity of sea migrants. Bergvall and Ingar Zach, Norwegian percussionists, along with Swiss visual artist Thomas Koppel and dramaturge Michèle Pralong, were inspired to create *Drift* through a transnational, interdisciplinary collaboration. It was first performed in Geneva in 2012, and *Nightboat Books* published the work in Brooklyn in 2014 as a book. Later that same year, performances began in the United Kingdom. The initiative is concerned with artistic experimentation across languages and time periods. There are two primary types of intertext in *Drift*. It begins with the *Icelandic Vinland Sagas*, *The Seafarer*, an Anglo-Saxon poem

that tackles the difficulties of living at sea, and early Norse lyrics, employing hybrid forms and neologisms that combine the modern and archaic across various languages (Bergvall, 2014: 185–6).

The relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's theories for Bergvall's engagement with the contemporary Mediterranean panorama is based on the fundamental relationship between deterritorialising artistic practise and political change for the next generation of citizens (McMurtry, 2018: 11). In their view, deterritorialisation is an evolving term for processes that decontextualize a succession of relationships and transform them into the virtual. In their 1972 *Anti-Oedipus* study, they coined the term along with its counterpart, *reterritorialisation*: *deterritorialisation* is used to describe a deconstructive and disruptive moment, whereas *reterritorialisation* refers to the form of innovative systems or the recontextualisation of previous ones. It is connected repeatedly to processes of change and transformation, resulting in disruptive dominant temporal and historical notions that produce lines of flight that convey a new era and generation.

*Drift* consists of 180 pages organised into six text sections interspersed with sketches and drawings; the reading experience is confusing, and there are signals to orientate the reader. There are sixteen illustrations in black and white at the outset of the text. The horizontal black and white lines overlap with scribbles and inkblots. These sketches may allude to the interminable nature of the seascape or, in a more abstract sense, represent the confusion of unintelligible signals that create a barrier to comprehension. The compilation begins with the Anglo-Saxon text *Seafarer*, which contains over thirty pages of lyric sub-sequences with titles such as *Song*, *North*, and *Halfville*, which is derived from the Old Norse *halfvilla*, which means 'at sea' or 'lost at sea' (Bergvall, 2014: 153). In this section, there is a visual form associated with deterritorialisation to convey the experience of losing your bearings—letters are dislocated from words, mixed with other words, repeated for emphasis, and completely engulfed: "Most of those onboard completely lost their bearings; the crew had no idea in which direction they were heading; a thick fog that did not lift for days; the ship was driven off course; they were ossted about astray; they were ossted about" (Bergvall, 2014: 37).

As this section progresses, the reader experiences a gradual increase in textual disruptions on various pages, evoking the confusion of the poem's fog, in *Hafville 3* (Bergvall, 2014: 38) & *Hafville 4* (Bergvall, 2014: 39). By the end, the final 't' in the word 'boat' is repeated in two and a half pages in a way that, according to one reviewer, causes the eyes to drift, which might represent a recall on "ripples of water, their points hinting at tips of wavelets — a calm sea to cover the now-vanished text" ("Catching the Drift | *Poetry Magazine*"). The letter 't' is deterritorialised, which might also represent the Christian cross that is located upon the the the the tombs of the lost ones. As the audience observes the performance, "the syllables shatter on screen behind Bergvall, vowels vanishing as consonance emerges battered and improved by the storm" (Smyth, 2014: 31). When language sounds are placed at the centre of the stage, this drama with dislocated letters deterritorialises the audience member, both as a viewer and listener. In attempting to translate the visual signs into sound or semantic meaning, Deleuze describes creative stuttering in *Essays Critical and Clinical* as "what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium" (Deleuze, 1997: 111). According to Bergvall's text, the expanding abstract play with linguistic symbols renews the experience of lost and confused, which addresses real-life dislocation and language loss, whose destructive connotations are reflected in the vocal performance in *Drift*, which maintains the piece's cohesiveness with a type of Sprechgesang that reinterprets Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse lyrics.

Bergvall, as described by Sophie Mayer in one of her London performance reviews, employs ancient texts to reframe the current crisis surrounding migration in Europe. These texts serve as a reminder of Europe's cultural and economic connection to the sea, tracing a path from the Vikings to contemporary slavery that places prawns on our plates ("All at Sea"). Bergvall writes in the *Log*: "Languages function in profound ways. They intertwine and serve as opaque relays for one another. They invoke every language in the universe" (Bergvall, 2014: 161). The continuous articulation of her voice while performing enables the development of aural connections between languages, and the



incorporation of anonymous quotations legitimises additional identities. In the second section, which is composed of a sixteen-part *Song* cycle, the author references the Anglo-Saxon text, a 125-line poem from the tenth century that describes the difficulties of life at sea (Gordon, 1960: 1-2). She isolates the vocabulary and sound patterns from the ancient text, which serves as a jumping-off point for an in-depth examination of the meaning of being cast adrift:

#### SONG 7

Thus, traversing high streams on gebattered is hazardous.

With all the t-tossing, a ship's consciousness moves a nomad.

Therefore, no one has ever been so proud and courageous as this.

ohman of goes sailing without maegaworry

being deciphered Fer to feran far to fare

Fer to feran feor to proceed further heonan

Hereafter, Farout to the four elements depart.

It travels to distant countries on a wayfaring voyage.

seek out individuals selected from this eard

This earp and this instrument are acceptable for the bearded geese.

anon am I (Bergvall, 2014: 49)

These lines convey the sense of rapidity and surge of a voyage at sea while avoiding punctuation almost entirely. As David Kaufman (2014) argues, these lines follow strong alliterative patterns that

previously appeared in Anglo-Saxon verse and support the use of compound nouns, while the Germanic prefix 'ge-' transcends this movement into contemporary English verbs.

According to both Deleuze and Guattari, "nomads are the epitome of deterritorialization," and they provide a means of conceptualising a space that is not demarcated or divisible. According to John Sellars, Deleuze's notion of *nomadic distribution* constitutes "the foundation for what is arguably the closest thing to a political philosophy in his oeuvre" (Sellars, 2007: 33). This makes sense given the contextualization of a tradition that "holds that all human beings belong to a single global community and that this universal community is more fundamental than the local political states into which individuals are born" (Sellars, 2007: 33). Bergvall's multilingual work has a societal impact based on further investigation of *Song 7*. The combination of words beginning with *Fer*, which in Anglo-Saxon means *heart, spirit, or journey*, and *shared*, which in Old Norse means *shared*, operates according to a "homophonic call and response" (Bergvall, 2014: 144). Bergvall does not attempt to define etymologies methodically; rather, she distances the semantic meaning to pursue what she refers to as "the strongly sound-led rules of the original" (Bergvall, 2014: 144). In this instance, this endeavour draws parallels to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature": "the sound or the word that traverses this new deterritorialization":

no longer belongs to a language of sense, despite deriving from it, nor is it organised music or song, despite appearances to the contrary. (...) It is now a question of a becoming that incorporates the utmost of difference as an intensity difference, the crossing of a barrier, a rising or a falling, a bending or an erecting, and an accent on the word. (...) To make the sequences vibrate, to expose the word to unexpected internal intensities – in essence, an intensive use of language that lacks significance. In addition, neither the subject of the enunciation nor the subject of the statement exists. (...) Rather, there is a circuit of states that creates a mutual becoming at the centre of a necessarily multiple or collective assembly (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975: 21–22).

It does not appear to be a coincidence that Bergvall begins her lyric call with a word that transmits the concept of *journey* in two languages. The acoustical dimensions of language enable a pulsing connection of related voices that sounds like the calamitous separation of subject and object in a moment of connection. During the progression of this cycle, the final line "Blow wind blow, soon I shall be" echoes in the ambiguous concluding refrain. According to David Kaufmann (Kaufman, 2014), this generates a "lovely buff" because "[t]he speaker of the poem is "anon" in the sense that she is always on the verge of arriving and getting to the point." [...] At the same time, she is not "anon." While the speaker may be anonymous (as is the author of *The Seafarer*), the author, Caroline Bergvall, is not (Sellars, 2007: 30).

In this section, there are also echoes of Deleuze and Guattari, as in the older use of the English adjective "anon", there is an implicit promise of arrival, which facilitates a reading of the lyric songs as close to an instant of becoming. In modern English, however, the subject is omitted because the lyric text conveys itself as a collective representing those who have been cast adrift. Bergvall's work aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's concession to a nonfigurative aesthetic that rejects conventional identity politics by repositioning the subject position of *Drift* through a collective declaration. Despite this, postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have been extremely critical of the scope of their work. In her article titled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak criticises Deleuze's secretive essentialist agenda (Spivak, 1988: 285), accusing him of being a "first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent non-representor who lets the oppressed speak for themselves" (Spivak, 1988: 292). As a result of the complicity of post-representation in maintaining the status quo, Bergvall addresses the need for representation for women who are unable to speak for themselves.

Deleuze and Guattari (1991) described absolute deterritorialisation as essential to the purpose of philosophy to convene a new people—"the people to come" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996: 109)—exploring the future of the planet and its people as spaces of reterritorialisation. (Bogue, 2012: 98). Bogue considers John Sellars' perspective on Deleuze's cosmopolitanism to be "ultimately utopian"

(Sellar, 2007: 36) and his assertion that “It does not offer a model for collective political action but rather outlines a personal ethical project of self-transformation in which each individual alters their own relation to space and to traditional political states” (Sellar, 2007: 36). Bogue's perspective on “chaosmopolitanism's realistic utopianism”, which interrelates deterritorialized with the sphere of sociopolitical action, is analysed (Bogue, 2012: 111–12). Bergvall utilises her sociopolitical work to define diverse forms of solidarity and acknowledgement. Similarly, Spivak uses the author of *Drift's* consideration of her own privilege as a white Western subject. In *Explanation and Culture: Marginalia*, she argues, “The only way I can hope to suggest how the centre itself is marginal is by not remaining outside in the margin and pointing an accusatory finger at the centre [...] I might do it by involving myself in that centre and perceiving the politics that marginalise it” (Spivak, 1987: 107). By deterritorialising the centre, *Drift* advocates for novel legal protections and legitimacy for those who lack access to fundamental human rights and freedom. Bergvall implicates herself in her choice of artistic production instruments.

There are excerpts from the Geneva premiere that can be viewed online with a blend of languages, live voice and percussion, and a 3D text panel. The technology she selects generates these text projections, which were modified from programmes developed by nautical scientists to track ships that became lost *en route* from Africa to Europe. These technological strategies are linked to capital movements that characterise trade between the African and European continents. The symbolic nature of the text projections transforms the narrative into a drifting language that serves as a metaphor for the process of linguistic change and evolution. Bergvall's performative compromise with the shipping technologies that become adaptations for humanitarian assistance consequently facilitates an original deterritorialisation of capital power in relation to what, in Deleuze's view, makes any external position impossible. In pursuit of aesthetic transcendence, *Drift's* materialism queries existence's formation from material waves of varying intensities.

This project's additional feminist dimensions are articulated explicitly, such as in *Log*, a reflection at the conclusion of the text in which the author discusses the relevance of feminist ideology to her methodology. Bergvall includes a quote by Sara Ahmed in *Drift*: "being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering the unfamiliar" (Bergvall, 2014: 139). Bergvall identifies Ahmed's empirical application of sexual orientation "to spatialise sexuality into directional dynamics" (Bergvall, 2014: 139) as providing inspiration for her own work by thematising gender and sexuality issues. Moreover, Bergvall discusses her personal struggle with the material dimension in *Drift* since she describes how following her own displacements, leaving old places and arriving at new ones, facilitates "deep magnetic oscillations across the entire spectrum of travelling and dwelling", allowing her to experience "the growing reality of collective departures and arrivals [...] as dynamic pattern formations, generative in a programming sense of how they affect any port of call" (Bergvall, 2014: 140). Bergvall responds imaginatively to Ahmed's criticism regarding Rosi Braidotti's symbolic interpretation of the nomad in *Nomadic Subjects* (1994). Ahmed accuses Braidotti of eradicating "cultural difference through the depiction of the nomad as a general mode of thought", i.e., a concept that alludes to an inherent separation of nomadism "from the material social relations in which thought itself is idealised as the rational capacity of educated subjects" (Ahmed, 1999: 335). At the conclusion of her *Log*, she expresses her solidarity with other minorities as a lesbian, alluding to her relationship with a woman and the ensuing fear that results from their decision to be in a relationship. Bergvall's interest in nomadism stems from her desire to connect more specific concepts with the experiential blindness and times of tension that generate broader solidarity and liberation. As a result, Bergvall recognises that the last legal protections for the LGBTQ+ community have heightened her awareness of others' precarious lives, in light of Deleuze's reflection on the minor writer's notion of "expressing another possible community" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975: 21–22) and Spivak's question regarding her own involvement in the centre:

For her to be with me, she must inform her husband, children, and family. This profound and life-altering impulse reawakens in me a primal terror. Are you secure. (...) Legal protection adds a collective dimension to the situation. Families, vigilantes, and coastguards can no longer act with complete impunity against haflings and skraelings. However, the threatening fear and the profound collective memory persist at the point of crossing, at the point of sailing, as the anchor is raised and the ship sets sail. They are sustained by the more obscure aspects of one's life and reengage with full force in the face of those who must still live in varying degrees of lawlessness and hiding (Bergvall, 2014: 165-6)

The affective relationship conveyed in these lines refers to concealed aspects of personal experience that emerge in moments of felt recognition of these alarming situations, as well as her personal awareness of white privilege. In the centre of her text, Bergvall depicts a mass drowning in the Mediterranean. The author draws the reader's attention to a human rights document regarding the *Left-to-Die Boat*<sup>26</sup> case in the fourth section of *Drift*. She explains that she read about the incident on April 11, 2012, in *The Guardian*. (Bergvall, 2014: 132). As a matter of fact, the report determines a damning indictment as the migrants' boat was unsupervised and drifted gradually "within one of the most surveilled maritime areas in the world, inhabited by at least 38 naval assets" (Heller et alii, 2012:48). All those who were in contact with the vessel evaded their responsibility to act and prevent the deaths of the people at sea. The author's *Log* emphasises the significance of the forensic principle that "every action or contact leaves a trace" for her personal procedure, declaring her intent to "relay the report's complex piece of memorialisation, interpretation, and investigation through live recitation". To record the events via recitation (Bergvall, 2014: 134), Bergvall cites directly from the

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<sup>26</sup> Researchers at Goldsmiths, University of London, investigated "the spatial analysis of data surrounding the case of the left-to-die boat using a vast array of digital mapping and modelling technologies". As part of the ERC-funded and Turner Prize-nominated Forensic Architecture research initiative, the report collects survivor accounts and spatial research. Its website is dedicated "to the reversal of the forensic gaze, to ways of turning forensics into a counter-hegemonic practise capable of challenging state and corporate violence," and its explorations are intended to "take place primarily in zones outside the effective control of states and its criminal justice frames" ("Forensic Architecture"). The research intends to collect and analyse data, documents, and human narratives to determine " what happened to the "left-to-die boat" and who was involved in the events leading to the deaths of 63 migrants? " (Heller et alii, 2012:48).

human rights report for approximately eleven pages in the fourth section of her text, including pauses between paragraphs and using italics in the typescript of the published version of her textual work addressing survivor testimonies. The author employs white ink on a black background to emphasise the graphic nature of her attempt to depict the experience of migrants at sea. In contrast, meander describes what transpired after their vessel began to “meander in high waves on March 28, 201” (Bergvall, 2014: 80).

Combining proven formulations from the report that demonstrate human alarm with silenced witness testimonies whose simplified syntax compels a potent means of drawing attention to the abrupt evidence of the case. The fourth section of *Drift* coexists with the preceding lyrical sections through an enigmatic tension. In shifting the experimental form, there is evidence of a connection with the human rights report, which represents a decision that considers the project's intention to claim responsibility for the committed humanitarian offences. In line 2, there is a connection between ‘mind’ and ‘nomad’ evoking timelessness regarding the journey across the high seas. As argued by John Sellars, Deleuze’s idea of nomadic distribution therefore compounds “the foundation for what is arguably the nearest thing to a political philosophy within his oeuvre” (Sellars, 2007: 33), which makes sense considering the contextualisation of a tradition that “holds that all human beings belong to a single global community and that this universal community is more fundamental than the local political states into which individuals are born” (Sellars, 2007: 30). Deleuze’s political understanding of nomadism is useful to interpret Bergvall’s polylingual project since it emphasises the level to which the lyrical style of *Drift* is used to rethink fixed borders and signifiers as well as to consider the crisis in the Mediterranean.

The societal impact of Bergvall’s multilingual work is rooted in further exploration of *Song 7*. The combination of words starting with *Ferð*, which is written in Anglo-Saxon to name the *heart*, *spirit*, or *journey*; the latter word means shared in Old Norse, which works according to a “homophonic call and response”. Bergvall does not meticulously try to define etymologies; instead,

she distances the semantic meaning to pursue what she calls "the strongly sound-led rules of the original" (Bergvall, 2014: 144).

As a nomadic narrative text, *Drift* urges action regarding a perilous journey through a shifting space of ancient words, polylingual neologisms, and textual slippages that function as metonyms by disclosing instances of human displacement and reconnection. The heterolingual ways obliterate linguistic divisions, demonstrating that language is in a constant state of contention and division and addressing Europe's space in which innovative forms are formed through migratory processes. In this sense, *Drift* promotes innovation by addressing deterritorialised rights and split citizenship, which, as noted by renowned political theorist Seyla Benhabib (2004: 174) "permit individuals to develop and maintain multiple allegiances and networks across nation-state boundaries, in inter- as well as transnational contexts". *Drift* renews a polylingual politics of speech and performance that intertwines lost words in letters and sounds to create a connection between older sightings and sounds and contemporary narratives that would otherwise be hidden and forgotten by shifting the central position to generate linguistic forms to hold accountability for their forced marginalisation.

### 3.2.5. Conclusion

Bergvall situates her poetry performances in ever-changing, utopian settings by means of continuous displacements. She constructs a *non-space* to challenge the notions of a single national community, a unified self, and territory. Caroline Bergvall's poetic practise integrates foreign elements to create a distorted and disarticulated English. Her multilingual texts challenge national language and monolingual culture and highlight the impossibility of a singular, French cultural origin. Continually endeavouring to transcend language and medium boundaries, the written English language continues to break out of its own confines. This double crossing of language and genre also double-crosses the reader, requiring their active participation.



Bergvall's pioneering production focuses on themes that recur, such as the politics of difference and solidarity, decolonising and democratising feminist practice, cross-cultural exchange, the relationship between feminist organising and social movements, and knowledge and scholarship on the subject. Her work is part of a growing corpus of literature that seeks to empower and broaden the testimonies of women who have endured and continue to endure forced migration. Plurality and diversity in these works demonstrate the relevance of writing and language to the expression of women's experience and the development of new modes of literary activism that contribute to the representation of women. Bergvall's work addresses violence against women, asylum, voice, and testimony by analysing the contributions of the arts and humanities to institutional failures.

In the field of legal humanities, feminist academics have taken up the issue of telling women's accounts of sexual assault. The examination of interpretation and oral testimony is an essential aspect of asylum claims. The primary need is to open spaces for women's expression when relying on their testimonies and the impact of sexual violence, and to implement feminist representation that expands the boundaries of legal expression. Women's experimental poetry written in the United Kingdom must be understood in relation to the concept of ongoing extraterritorial shifts, as it exists in relation to both the here and now and an elsewhere or there.

Most poets in experimental writing support the concept of shifting poetic fields as a challenge to national, and primarily masculine, writing. The optimistic outlook of these diverse voices has facilitated women's contribution to the growth of experimental poetry in the United States. In contrast, experimental poetry is still viewed as predominantly male in Britain. There is insufficient room to display the experimental feminine.

The *non-place* of women's experimental writings represents an aporetic space, which is the opposite of a rigorous territory that guarantees safety by defining essential boundaries. Even though this work is somehow exhibited and heard in the United Kingdom, experimental women artists in the

United Kingdom have opened a venue that embodies the *non-place* from which they have steadily developed their voices through collaboration with North American experimental poets and the construction of collective and extraterritorial venues. The dialectics supporting women's experimental writings and their *non-place* are fertile areas of intersecting disciplines that foster the development of the individual writer. From this *non-place*, women write in dialogue with others, thereby avoiding the constraints imposed by nationalism, a category and field they investigate and dissect.

*Drift* is a nomadic narrative text that explores the shifting space of ancient words, polylingual neologisms, and textual slippages that function as metonyms. It proposes a polylingual politics of speech and performance that intertwines lost words into letters and sounds to create a connection between older sightings and sounds and contemporary narratives. It also explores Old Norse, the language and imagery of the sea, and experiences of drift as a characteristic of language, a feature of emotion, and a symptom of political paralysis. *Drift's* multilingual lyrical framework demonstrates an affective connection with the dominant fundamental discourse that conceals the reality of women migrants, thereby transforming older texts into a contemporary lyrical reflection on the current mass drowning. Through the connection of essentially material links between language and sign systems, *Drift* proposes a necessary transformation of the present. Bergvall places herself at the centre of her creative practice in opposition to Western technologies used to supervise vessels travelling from Africa to Europe, as well as the deterritorialization practice that transforms the forces and technologies of capitalism for other purposes.

#### 4. AKWAEKE EMEZI AND BERNADINE EVARISTO

Contemporary literature has persistently stretched the boundaries of traditional narratives, challenging conventional notions of identity and narrative. Two novels that exemplify this innovative attitude are *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi<sup>27</sup> and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo. These outstanding works explore themes of multiplicity, fluidity, and the complexities of selfhood, inviting readers to investigate the complexities of identity formation and the influence of narrative on our worldview.

In *Freshwater*, published in 2018, Akwaeke Emezi explores Igbo cosmology and the complexities of identity through Ada, a young Nigerian girl with multiple selves. As the narrative progresses, the reader is immersed in Ada's voyage of self-discovery, as her various selves represent various facets of her personality, desires, and traumas. Emezi's evocative prose depicts the collision of cultural, spiritual, and psychological forces, blurring the distinction between the internal and external worlds and challenging traditional notions of selfhood.

Similarly, *Girl, Woman, Other*, written by Bernardine Evaristo in 2019, defies traditional narrative conventions by interweaving the tales of twelve diverse characters, predominantly black British women, navigating their own unique experiences of race, gender, and sexuality. Through a fluid and multifaceted narrative structure, Evaristo dismantles the notion of a single, fixed identity, highlighting the interconnectedness and shared struggles of these individuals. The novel presents a rich tapestry of intersecting identities, challenging societal norms, and illuminating the complexities of contemporary lived experiences.

This section of the dissertation seeks to examine the resonances and intersections between Emezi's *Freshwater* and Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, focusing on the themes of fluidity,

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<sup>27</sup> In this dissertation, I respect the preferred personal pronoun of the individual being referenced. Emezi, the author being discussed, identifies with the personal pronoun 'they,' as an expression of their gender identity. To honor their choice and promote inclusive language, the pronoun 'they' will be utilized throughout this work when referring to Emezi.

multiplicity, and the transformative force of storytelling. By analysing the narrative strategies employed by both authors, I will investigate how these novels challenge preconceived conceptions of identity, disrupt linear narratives, and offer alternative ways of understanding and representing the self. Thus, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the complexities of identity formation, the role of narrative in shaping our perceptions of ourselves and others, and the transformative power of literature through comparative analysis. By examining the shared thematic concerns and narrative techniques in both novels, I hope to shed light on the broader cultural and social implications of embracing fluidity and multiplicity in contemporary literature. As a matter of fact, I will analyse the ways in which Emezi and Evaristo challenge conventional storytelling structures and negotiate the complexities of identity through their narrative techniques. Through this investigation, I aim to contribute to the ongoing literary discussion on identity, representation, and narrative innovation.

#### 4.1. Akwaeke Emezi

##### 4.1.1. Introduction

Akwaeke Emezi (born 1987) is a Nigerian artist and author who published their debut fictional novel, *Freshwater*, in 2018. Emezi has also published *Pet*, her debut novel for young adults, and *The Death of Vivek Oji*, which was published in 2020 and debuted on *The New York Times* bestseller list shortly thereafter. In 2018, the *National Book Foundation* honoured Emezi as one of the *5 Under 35*. *Freshwater* was nominated for the *2019 Woman of Fiction Award for Best Novel*. This is a historic nomination, as it is the first time that a non-binary transgender author has been nominated for this award. *Freshwater* is a novel that encourages Western readers to reconsider their conceptions of gender identity and mental health as they are commonly understood in the West.

*Freshwater* was written as a component of a larger project titled *The Unblinding*; the novel is part of a multi-year, multidisciplinary series of self-portraits that also includes paintings and videos.

Emezi's primary objective is to demonstrate the author's self-development from awareness to clarity as an Igbo, *ogbanje* (Emezi, 2018). Although the author argues that pronouns are not particularly significant, she acknowledges that she could switch from *he* to *she*. However, the author considers 'they' to be the more flexible pronoun addressing "neither male nor female, neither plural nor singular" (Waldman, 2018), which may better reflect her current self-identification.

According to Nigerian Igbo cosmology, an *ogbanje* is a spirit-child who constantly toys with the realms of spirit and body, life and death; thus, an *ogbanje* has both a human and a numen component. Their ostensibly mischievous essence is doomed to be born and expire endlessly. This figure embodies multiple consciousnesses with a precocity and imagination that transcend humanity (Ogunyemi, 1996: 39-52). Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how *Freshwater* demonstrates an understanding of Igbo and western ideologies in a perpetual conflict, a back-and-forth movement that pursues the redefinition of spirituality-, self-, and gender-related hybrid terms. I will define Igbo *ogbanje* ontology's foundational concepts and rituals in order to facilitate comprehension of *Freshwater*'s worldview. This investigation will address three primary concerns. First, I will focus on spiritual matters as well as the intersection of Igbo cosmology and Western ideas. Second, I will examine the identity dynamics between the ego and a multifaceted reality in fictional works. In addition, I will emphasise the thin line between mental illness and trauma, as well as Igbo precolonial worldviews, which are inscribed in the novel along the meta/trans contemporary axis of contemporary literary criticism. Finally, I will concentrate on the gender issues addressed by the novel's primary characters.

The artistic production of Akwaeke Emezi is founded on liminal spaces, with liminality understood as the space or transitional experience between stages. The concept of liminality is developed in *Les Rites de Passage* (1977) by Arnold Van Gennep, a German-born French folklorist and ethnographer, and in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* by Victor Turner, a British

cultural anthropologist who reoriented his study in 1969. The concept of liminality refers to instances, such as rites of passage or rituals, in which normality emerges:

If liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs (Turner, 1969: 167).

Consequently, liminality—moments in and out of time—is frequently associated with those instances of symbolic renewal in which a society or community reaffirms its collective identity. As a matter of fact, Victor and Edith Turner (1978: 2) consider that liminality applies “to all phases of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behaviour are subject to revision and criticism, when hitherto unprecedented modes of ordering relations between ideas and people become possible and desirable”. Therefore, it is essential to understand that Emezi's artistic practise is rooted in the metaphysics of the black spirit and employs diverse artistic forms of expression, including video, performance, writing, and sculpture, to create rituals that process her incarnation as a non-human entity, an *ogbanje* in Nigerian culture, that is, the daughter of a deity. Emezi identifies as a trans person who is non-binary.

The author examines mental health from an Igbo perspective, providing an innovative viewpoint for the Western world. An *ogbanje* refers to a person who is believed to have existed prior to a deceased infant and is associated with divine beings and a malevolent form of rebirth (Sunday, 2007: 239–240), that is, a child who is destined to die and be reborn to the same mother, causing unhappiness to the mother and family and being referred to as a plague or bad luck. The *ogbanje* life cycle is founded on the belief that divine beings mediate the process of existence. Chiukwu (the Supreme Deity), Mmadu (the corporeal or physical person), Chi (the human spirit), Nne-mmiri (the water mother), Mammy Water, and Onabuluwa ('one who defies destiny') are examples of this cycle.

According to Ada, Emezi's main character, Ashugara and Saint Vincent (two of the *ogbanjes* that appear in the novel) explain her mental illness and non-binary sexual orientation.

#### 4.1.1. Revolutionising African literature

In terms of *Freshwater* and the evolution of the contemporary African novel, there are distinct tendencies that have emerged in the last decade. These trends indicate a growing interest in three major issues: liminal and vital experiences, episodes of expatriation and afropolitanism, and both methods of seeing and telling. Recent African novels, despite their diversity, share a concern predicated on two primary issues. On the other hand, there is a struggle to provide explanation, a concern often associated with metafiction. Consequently, these tendencies appear to define a classification of African authors.

According to Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi (Osinubi, 2016: vii-xxiii) two categories can be distinguished: Those authors who address normativity and poleptic designation constitute one group. The author discusses the post-independence nation state in this passage. The second group is composed of authors with liminal authorship, such as Akwaeke Emezi. The first group is located in Africa and uses literature as a cultural reaffirmation of colonialism-eradicated normalcy. The second group consists of cosmopolitan authors from the Global North who have a particular understanding of the situation in the Global South. This band exhibits "diasporic, exilic, hybrid, in-between, cosmopolitan sensibilities" (Timothy Brennan qtd. in Jeyifo, 1990: 53). It is essential to note that these groups are not rigid categories; authors may choose elements from both groups. Interstitial refers to any type of in-betweenness or space-filling occupation. A distinction between them could be that liminality refers to a transition from one state to another. Despite the fact that Akwaeke Emezi makes no reference to this concept in *Freshwater*, she uses it. As stated by Dunton:

a way of understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life can seldom be understood

as being shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organisation of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves (Dunton, 2020: 2).

By considering intersectionality as an analytical tool, as Collins and Bilge do, the multiple nature of singular identities becomes apparent. In addition, intersectionality demonstrates how varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and citizenship position the individual differently. Furthermore, interpersonal experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and ability are connected to larger systems of oppression, privilege, and power. Intersectionality has grown as an ideally indivisible mode of critical inquiry and practise. Collins and Bilge contend that "intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry cannot flourish by separating itself from its critical praxis [in combating social injustice and defending human rights]" (cited by Dunton, 2020: 3).

In her essay *What's New in African Writing in the Twenty-First Century* (2015), Lindsey Green-Simms (2016) discusses, in addition to interstitiality and intersectionality, writers who endeavour to address new issues and the persistence of African Literature's gatekeepers. In addition to interstitiality and intersectionality, the term emergent becomes crucial. In contrast to the past, there is now a developing desire to discuss previously taboo subjects. The methods of seeing, knowing, and telling are additional central themes in contemporary African fiction. Such concerns regarding the most recent African novel demonstrate the necessity of considering identities in the plural, as their complexity cannot be reduced to individual models of the past.



#### 4.1.2. Perspectives on the Igbo worldview: examining key concepts and ideas

From the outset of *Freshwater*, the reader is provided with an accurate description of certain *ogbanje* spirits with a half-conscious presence within and outside a foetus, which must transform the protagonist, Ada, into the Ada that they believe she is. In the first few pages of the novel, three crucial narrative developments are introduced. First, the entrance that is normally opened when an *ogbanje* enters the world as a human child is intended to be closed after the child is born to a human mother, so that the deity within the child will have memories of their previous existence. Different narrators affirm that the Igbo spirits are typically capricious and indifferent to human suffering. Therefore, on account of one of these random errors, they neglect that the gates to the two worlds have been opened, "those carved monstrosities, those clay and chalk portals" (Emezi, 2018: 33). As a result, the gods punish Ada and the *ogbanje* gods within her by making them cognizant of their multiplicity and multiplicity of existence.

According to conventional West African tradition, an *ogbanje*—"one who returns" in Igbo— or *abiku* child—"born to die" in Yoruba— is coerced to stay with the family by means of different rituals such as the killing of animals, sprinkling of palm oil, palm wine libations, scarifications on the infant's chest, cheeks, palms or back, or attaching notches to their ears (García Ramírez, 2001: 171-73). These signs strive to end the cycle of reproduction. Chidi Maduka (1987: 17) includes some other Nigerian languages; specifically, *igbakhun* (Edo), *mfumfum* (Efik), and *menji ogbo* (Ijaw) and asserts that people have described seeing infants with these marks, which were imposed upon them in previous lives.

It is important to note that if the *ogbanje* or *abiku* infant develops beyond childhood, they will continue to exist in the human world. If an *abiku* child remains on earth and matures into an adult, it is because the potent *Ifa babalawo* [priest] of the physical realm has trapped him against his will, according to Laura Smalligan. When this occurs, the *abiku* child's relationship with the spiritual realm is severed, and he is forever cut off from the spiritual realm (Smalligan 2015: 361, quoted in Ossana, 2021). Ada's circumstance, however, is different because she is required to live among humans.

Consequently, an additional crucial definition of the *iyi-uwa*, namely the "oath of the world" (Emezi, 2018: 14), becomes essential. The *iyi-uwa* represents a physical object that must be concealed in order to guarantee the return of the *ogbanje* to their community. If the child's family destroys this token, the *ogbanje* will become immortal, which will prevent them from returning home.

Through yet another spirit ruse, the gods who host Ada placed the *iyi-uwa* within her vaginal walls. Consequently, the infant becomes simultaneously the occult site and the pact, which serves "to destroy [the *iyi-uwa*], they must destroy her" (Ossana, 2021: 83). The path of Ada's existence appears to be marked by irresponsibility, unreliability, and confusion, as a result of the complexities of her fortune. Thirdly, a comment is made regarding the significance of labelling a newborn infant in Nigerian culture. Ada signifies "the egg of a python," which transforms an infant into Ala's daughter, also known as "the source of stream, [...] the earth itself, the judge and mother, the giver of law" (Ossana, 2022: 256). The uniqueness of Ada is revealed with a threatening tone: "the egg of a python is the child of Ala, and the child of Ala is not, and can never be, intended for your hands" (Emezi, 2018: 9).

#### 4.1.3. Identity: disintegration or multifaceted complexity?

Waldman (2018) concentrates on one of *Freshwater's* most significant achievements, which is providing a clear answer regarding the definition of the individual self. Emezi appears adept at creating "tension between the affirmation of owning a single identity and the freedom and mutability of being multiple". Ada's contradictory and diversified identity displays exemplify "a self that is defined by indefinability". Emezi emphasises that "[Ada] is not fractured or fragmented, even when she believes she is. The fragment is a stratum, not a fragment. It is not a single reality that has been disrupted, but multiple realities that have merged" (Emezi, 2018).

Emezi describes Ada's identity as a "boiling cloud" of selves (Isen, 2018, qtd. in Ossana 2022: 266). Since conveying the coexistence of these realities in writing is a difficult concept to grasp, they believe that these diverse voices represent a resource they are obliged to accept. Emezi affirms that

writing *Freshwater* allowed her to accept “the jumble and layers” her multiple existence is developed into, while not separating her different identities. Thus, It is important to note that the boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as between the author and the protagonist, are quite distinct. However, the reader must confront the artificiality of the writing process, especially when demonstrating the transcendental complexity of reality and the ego, as immersing into the different selves:

Ada tries to split them apart and get rid of the selves and she’s making all these little boxes, which is a very human thing to do, to make boxes and try and make everything fit neatly, and it’s still all just a jumbled, overlapping mess (Isen, 2018).

Emezi notes our contemporary inability "to acknowledge multiple realities, and this insistence that there must be one dominant reality, and everything outside of that reality is false and untrue" (Emezi, 2018a qtd. in Ossana, 2021: 85). The author recognises how dominant discourses influence the reality of worldviews. People arrived and imposed a reality by saying:

Well, if you believe in anything else, if you believe in your indigenous deities, if you believe in these spiritual entities, then you're ignorant and backwards, and it's because you haven't been educated by the West. And you know, there's this notion that everything that exists outside of the prevalent reality is pathological. And in my work, I have no interest in persuading anyone to alter their centre; I simply refuse to do so myself (Emezi, 2018a qtd. in Ossana, 2021: 85).

#### 4.1.3.1. Western categorisations: trauma and the spectrum of identity dissociation

*Freshwater* reading evolution is non-linear because the various *ogbanje* entities that reside in Ada provide a description of her life, which may resemble a transient order, but the reader is frequently confronted with unexpected births, new voices, and shifts in focus. Ada's story requires reconstruction, as its fragmentation demonstrates its similarity to trauma fiction. Trauma literature

demonstrates particular narrative characteristics regarding the representation of these horrifying experiences.

Different literary elements, such as the language of affect through symbolism, have been consistently employed to depict psychological unrest and illness. Frequently, delayed referentiality appears to indicate a hazy memory and avoidance of the traumatic event. As dreams frequently invade the repressed, literary devices like repetition of events and unexpected flashbacks also appear in the narrative. Herrero states that traumatic time "is characterised by ellipses and stasis, but also (in the best cases) by returns and abrupt progressions" (Herrero, 2014: 284). *Freshwater* shares these characteristics, especially in regard to the presence of pauses in relation to Ada, whose voice is heard directly and sounds distant and estranged.

In addition, the narration is disjointed because time and space share a fragmented structure, giving the reader the impression that they are in an atemporal setting. This approach to time is consonant with some conventional African temporality. The present and the near future are the two temporal concepts in African languages like Kikamba, which Bantu people speak in Kenya, and Kiluba, which they speak in southern Zaire. Thus, yesterday and tomorrow are viewed as "the day next to this one". Certainly, the terms "past and future" only make sense in relation to the present. The past comprehends the present and the future due to the established concept of return and repetition of constant cycles. Therefore, the concept of cyclic temporality is founded on the idea that the past, present, and future coexist. "There is no need to 'return' if one never truly left." (Booth, 1975: 87). According to *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) by theologian John Mbiti, outside the reckoning of the year, the African concept of time is mute and indifferent. People anticipate that the years will pass in an interminable cycle similar to that of day and night and the waxing and waning of the moon. They anticipate that the rain season, planting season, harvesting season, drought season, rain season again, planting season, etc. will continue forever. Each passing year adds another dimension of time to the past" (1969: 21). The western linear temporal conception of time is in

opposition to Mbiti's concept of circular time. And so circular time operates in the case of Igbo ontology by means of *ogbanje* entities. Strictly speaking, the cycles encompass a conflict between *Sasa* and *Zamani* (Mbiti, 1990: 31-33), the two principal temporal concepts in many African religions:

El *Sasa* representa el tiempo más significativo para el ser humano, sobre el que tiene conciencia inmediata y capacidad de control. Cubre básicamente el presente, ampliado hacia el pasado y el futuro más próximos. Por su parte, el *Zamani* es el tiempo que escapa a esos límites y que, por tanto, ya no pertenece a los hombres sino a los espíritus (García Ramírez, 2001: 173).

The manner in which the novel's narrators approach time is comparable to that of victims of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. The spirits (Asughara, St. Vincent, Yshwa, Smoke and Shadow,) live with the Ada (the *ogbanje*) from the very beginning of her existence.: ““I am my others. We are one and we are many” (Emezi, 2018: 215). For example, in Chapter Ten of *Freshwater*, the reader is told the story of Ewan and Ada before the birth of Asughara. One is confronted by an innocent Ada who does not appear to have a strong grasp on violence and self-harm. In addition, in Chapter Eleven, Asughara's birth is retconned with Saint Vincent's a second time. Suddenly, the reader returns to Nigeria, where she observes Ada's adolescence and the difficulty of her feminine body's development. In Chapter Twenty, Smoke and Shadow are confronted with Ada's childhood memories. One discovers that her relatives and friends are abusing her physically and sexually all of a sudden. According to the spirits, "we did our best" (Emezi 2018: 207). However, *Freshwater* distances itself from traumatic narratives when discussing the focal point of these horrifying events. As Ada is a preternatural being condemned to exist imprisoned in a human body, there is a recurring situation in the novel.

The multiple identities of Ada would be classified as *Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)* by western medicine: "Dissociative Disorders are characterised by a disruption and/or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behaviour" (DSM5, 2013: 291). The medical reference book also states that these disorders are typically the consequence of repeated childhood or adulthood traumatic abuse. With DID, there are also symptoms such as dissociative amnesia, a state of depersonalisation or derealisation, or events that provoke a detachment from the individual's consciousness, self, and body. "The defining feature of dissociative identity disorder," according to the medical manual, is "the presence of two or more distinct personality states or an experience of possession" (DSM5, 2013: 292). The belief that a preternatural being has possessed a person's personality, resulting in altered behaviour, reveals these identities.

Asughara places Ada on a diet "to see how close [she] could get Ada to the bone" (Emezi, 2018: 69) after Ada's rape, which is indicative of a DMS5 (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*) diagnosis. On multiple occasions, the protagonist self-harms "next to the old scars and watched the thin red lines form" (Emezi, 2018: 170). In Chapters Nine, Fifteen, and Nineteen, Ada surrenders to her own existence without further justifications and decides to seek logic and medical explanations, including therapy and books about symptoms such as personality disorders: "disruption of identity, self-damaging impulsivity, emotional instability and mood swings, self-mutilating behaviour, and recurrent suicidal behaviour" (Emezi, 2018: 140). Her situation is so precarious that she winds up in a mental institution. Asughara accompanies Ada when life becomes too difficult for her and she attempts suicide with medications and alcohol, which is related to Asughara's encounter with her *ogbanje*, the 'Dagger'.

#### 4.1.3.2. Delving into the depths: uncovering the Igbo narrative

Caroline Rooney explains in *African Literature, Animism and Politics* (2000) that Animism is connected to a set of definitions "concerning what crosses over from life to death to life, and crosses species" (Rooney, 2010: 10). The Zimbabwean critic argues that Animism relates to specific characteristics that creatively shape reality, which demonstrates its "empathetic understanding" (Rooney 2000:14). Consequently, this reality construct operates in opposition to the intellectual culture of the West, as evidenced by its obstacles and criticism of the world. Western belief systems are predicated on opposites and the objectification of observed reality.

In this manner, Rooney realises that the existence of existence is not the antithesis of absence, from invisibility to visibility, has a close relationship. In other terms, "absence does not necessarily imply nonexistence" (Rooney, 2000: 20). She comprehends the notions that all of nature is imbued with spiritual energy and that "spirit is considered in terms of movement where there is also a question of movement". Spirits move us in the sense that they animate, affect, and inhabit us" (Rooney, 2000: 20). The Ada context is familiar with these concepts and relationships. Not in vain, Ada's background is important for the development of the novel: "the only reason it's considered make-believe is because a bunch of white people showed up and told everyone there that the reality they'd been living in was fake, and they'd been believing things that weren't real" (Isen, 2018). The interior voices of the protagonist support various manifestations of being. Accordingly, what is referred to in western thought as dissociative identity disorder is viewed from an Igbo perspective as distinct spiritual beings or realities.

In this sense, what is known as self-injury in the west is a mark of sacrifice in Igbo cosmology; what is interpreted as suicidal compulsion could be viewed as deliverance for the *ogbanje* cohort; and what is understood as a broken self by psycho-medical theories could be viewed as diverse layers of the self. Ada eventually recognises and embraces her *ogbanje* essence and Ala's motherhood, which

brings her peace. In Chapter Twenty-two, the protagonist embarks on a journey of self-discovery to Nigeria, which also signifies her personal repatriation. It is evident that Ada has reconciled with her new voice, which demonstrates "how futile it had been to attempt to become a single entity" (Emezi, 2018: 219). She acknowledges that being an *ogbanje* "was the only path that brought [her] some peace" (Emezi, 2018: 218).

Regarding spiritual possession, which the *DMS5* refers to as consciousness delusions, Rooney explains that "spirit could be viewed as an animating creative force, whereas possession and death could be viewed as being overpowered by stronger forces" (Rooney, 2000: 22). Therefore, the emphasis shifts from entities to other modes of being. Rooney combines a theory of trauma with a theory of spirit possession because she argues that there is an animalistic principle in introjection, which is a period of life during which every subject may experience a specific "partial destruction of the self from the external environment" as a "means to creative construction" (Rooney, 2000: 141).

Nevertheless, she views identification as "a receptivity to the other not as an object but as a subject: a displacement of a personal narcissism by that of the other" (Rooney, 2000: 143). Regardless of the unique human characteristics of each individual, Rooney concludes that "the philosophical concept of the 'one-and-only-subject' is a denial of the existence of a creative subject" (Rooney, 2000:149). Ada's consciousness provides her with a means of survival in the novel. By acknowledging that Ada's body is both hers and theirs, the use of multiple narrators symbolises the complexity of existing in a conjunction of selves. The spirits also assert that they "were greater than both Asughara and Saint Vincent. We were a delicate balance, greater than what the namings had created, and we desired to reflect that by transforming the Ada into ourselves" (Emezi 2018: 187). In this sense, the protagonist does not experience harmony until she is ready to take her place. The pronoun 'we' portrays the connection with the *ogbanjes* living in her, which act as a Greek chorus in some of the events of the novels.



#### 4.1.3.3. The Intersection of literary Meta- and Trans-modernity: exploring new narrative frontiers

Several contemporary fiction characteristics in *Freshwater* pertain to the shift from postmodernism to meta-modernism or trans-modernism. Diverse global events in world history, according to Alison Gibbons, have led to the end of postmodernism or its expanding union with a shift she terms meta-modernism. The 9/11 assaults and the fall of the Berlin Wall, according to Gibbons, have contributed to a sense of failure in the capitalist system. Gibbons contends that "the cumulative effect of these events and the accompanying hyper anxiety brought on by twenty-four hour news" has made the Western world feel more precarious and volatile, such that we can no longer take our safety or future for granted. According to Gibbons (2015) and Vermeulen with van den Akker (2010), the contemporary literary shift towards realism serves as a means "to reconnect fiction to social reality." This shift is exemplified not only by the emphasis on original genres such as autofiction but also by a renewed focus on emotions and human decency. The emergence of new ethics in literature reflects an innovative approach that addresses the precarious nature of life in the world (Gibbons, 2015; Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Contemporary literature addresses some troublesome aspects, such as the transient nature of space and time in a world that is constantly changing. *Freshwater* places its fiction in this category (autofiction) when Emezi depicts the revival of mythical and spiritual consciousness. Heterochrony is another metamodernist characteristic that appears in *Freshwater*. This group is described by Vermeulen and van den Akker as "a deliberate being out of time, an intentional being out of place, and the pretence that this desired atemporality and displacement is actually possible when it is not" (2010: 12). As a fantastical context, this structured yet hazy sense of place-time may represent Emezi's conception of the demiurgic and the traditional African experience of time. Regarding *Freshwater's* postcolonial approach, Emezi's novel could also be categorised within what Rodríguez Magda (2017) refers to as narratives of fracture or narratives of the limit, i.e.,

those fictions engaged in the recovery of repressed, excluded, or erased precolonial knowledge and traditions.

Enrique Dussel (2012) argues that these emerging narratives seek to fathom the plural dialogue of transmodern liberation. He develops a bicultural project referred to as a dialectics of the borders, or a sincere conversation that confronts (post-)modernity and precolonial (or premodern) narratives. This culture is utterly innovative in its discourse. Due to its departure from the borderlands of modernity, the primary negotiation is transmodern. Pluriversal dialogue concentrates on the union of aspects of modernity, such as scientific evolution, and the consideration of postcolonial peoples' and communities' cultural evolution. *Freshwater* is concerned with such cultural negotiations. Igbo ontology is intricately intertwined with western religious and sociocultural values though "Igbo ontology typically defies western canons of logic and therefore, the popular concept of "polytheism" which they identify Africans with is always adjudged as primitive and in most occasions fetish" (Ibeh, 2013: 49).

#### 4.1.4. Beyond Limits: Gender Dysphoria, Leopard Spots, and Python Moltings

Emezi poses the following question in *The Cut*, "Did *ogbanje* even have a gender to begin with? Gender is ultimately a human trait" (Emezi, 2018b). Indeed, Emezi questions if being an *ogbanje* is to be ostracised. The protagonist is transgender and a member of a marginalised existential category, i.e., she is a spirit inhabiting a human body, so she is subject to discrimination. Many literary reviews have placed *Freshwater* in the category of gender transitioning. Consequently, Emezi has been awarded the *Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Fiction* (Isama, 2019), placing *Freshwater* within Transgender Literature (Halderman, 2018).

Saint Vincent's birth signals the beginning of Ada's transitioning process. Prior to puberty, Ada relished her freedom in both boy and girl contexts because she was physically confident.

However, when she reaches twelve, "her hormones completely transform her body". She was unable to halt the "blackish blood, a swelling chest, and hair sprouting like an evil forest" (Emezi 2018: 123). Shade and Shadow were dissatisfied with being compelled to occupy a space they detested, "a marked plane that was too clear and wrong" (Emezi 2018: 123). Ada wore clothing resembling her father to conceal her female form, disregarding her classmates' comments about her curvy silhouette.

From the perspective of the medical manual *DSM5*, Ada's emotional state could be diagnosed as Gender Dysphoria, which is the distress that may accompany the mismatch between one's experienced or expressed gender and their ascribed gender. Even though not every individual encounters stress as a result of this incongruence, many are likely to experience distress if hormonal and/or surgical interventions are not provided (DSM5, 2013: 451). Ada's adolescent physique transforms, allowing her to express new aspects of herself, such as Saint Vincent and Asughara.

Her dissatisfaction with her feminine body prompts her to engage in unrestricted sexual activity, which is primarily encouraged by the sexually powerful Asughara. Ada then alters her body to conceal her breasts and begins dating Donyen. Ada's discomfort with her body and the world's perception of her *ogbanje* condition as insanity led to a depressive episode and a suicide attempt. The *ogbanje* within herself desired to return to a time when they "were not capable of biological things, when [they] were neutral" (Emezi, 2018: 190). Ada's various selves desired to "become what [they] desired, now that reconfiguration was complete" (Emezi, 2018: 192). According to Smoke and Shadow, nebulous forms of her childhood, they desired a physical transformation to better reflect their interior selves. The plural demigods are aware that in the western world, there are terms for what they understood to be sculptures, namely "gender reassignment, transitioning" (Emezi, 2018: 189). It is evident that what the western world considers gender dysphoria, the *ogbanje* community considers Ala's child discarding. In this sense, Ada's physical form must evolve for her personal *ogbanje* spiritual essence to be at ease.

Ada's initiative to make her exterior reflect her interior self, consisted of trimming her hair and waxing her eyebrows. Moreover, the breast reduction surgery represents a loss of identity for her

and her interior voices. When Ada undergoes an aggressive surgical procedure that mutilates her, the multiple narrators demonstrate that their sexual lack of repression pales in comparison to what they have accomplished: "After such carvings, how could one human matter?" (Emezi, 2018: 186). In addition, Ada's self-inflicted cuts to channel the agony caused by spirits were replaced with tattoos. In Chapter Twenty (Emezi, 2018: 207), the line "I am letting the leopard go" describes how Ada marks her skin as a reminder of her former voices and to honour the selves that helped her survive.

Ada's newfound tranquilly resembles "a broken mango leaf, sharp and clinging to the inner rind of our skin" (Emezi, 2018: 193). After achieving a place that felt like home, they were defeated:

It was too late for the Ada to do anything but attempt to keep up with us and avoid drowning in the liminal fluid we swam in [...] Occasionally, this is referred to as the crossroads, the message point, or the fulcrum. It is also known as flux space, the line, or the edge — as we previously stated, resurrection (Emezi, 2018: 193).

Even though Ada and Emezi's trip to Nigeria was crucial for them to comprehend their metaphysical contradiction, it is evident that they have gained an understanding of the transphobic landscape in the country. Under the *Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act*, the Nigerian government punishes same-sex couples with up to fourteen years in prison and up to ten years in prison for those who support homosexual organisations or display same-sex public behaviour (Green-Simms, 2016). Therefore, it is evident that many diaspora writers, such as Emezi, have a comprehensive understanding of the current cultural shift strategy they support. In this sense, *Freshwater* gives voice to a reality many African states attempt to hide with laws that only are useful for a non-existent heteronormative reality<sup>28</sup>.

The pronoun *we* used by Emezi refers to the protagonist as *Ada* or *she* (our body). According to Western psychiatry, these varying narrative voices may indicate a mental disorder, which the reader may construe as borderline personality disorder. However, the fact that Asughara acknowledges that

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<sup>28</sup> Homosexuality is criminalised in many African states. A complete list appears in the following link: <https://antigaylaws.org/regional/africa/>

it occurs during a period of acute suffering in Ada's life seems to effectively corroborate this theory. Emezi desires the reader to comprehend the protagonist's complexity. According to Igbo cosmology, Ada is an Obganje, whereas Western tradition would consider her to be unwell or diseased. Emezi draws parallels between western and non-western traditions for the reader to develop empathetic understanding and appreciation for cultural differences.

Asughara, who forces Ada to trim her long, thick hair into an androgynous style, forbids Ada to eat, forces her to drown her sorrows in tequila, and satisfies her appetite with casual sex, thus causing harm to those around her. Asughara ultimately leads Ada to devastation and extinction, driving her/we to suicide. On the other hand, Saint Vincent represents a gentler personality. With the emergence of Saint Vincent, Ada begins dating other women, thereby developing a new identity. She eventually undergoes surgery to substantially reduce the size of her breasts. The use of *we* is lyrical, whereas Asughara's voice is unaffected; Emezi's speech contains foul language and Nigerian colloquialisms, which represent the protagonist's anger and anguish.

The use of Nigerian colloquialisms is an endeavour to connect emotionally and culturally with her mother tongue. Due to a lack of familiarity with the language, the use of Nigerian expressions startle Western readers. However, because the presence of African colloquialisms in her mother tongue conveys a great deal of emotional expression, it is easy to comprehend Asughara's frustration at being unable to communicate herself in her language, which is her means of self-expression. For this reason, she feels compelled to return to her native language to discover her sense of self.

Asughara's voice is clearly marked by outbursts of anger, an emotion that stems from her own helplessness at feeling abused and for not having been able to avoid all the abuse that Ada suffers and desires, i.e. Ada's vital need for connection that she cannot express in a healthy manner. On the rare occasions that Ada does speak, she does so with a fatigued, calm, and deflated tone. Context is crucial because *Freshwater* is not a memoir but is based on Emezi's own lived experience of dissonant identities. Rather than pathologizing these experiences, as Western tradition does, or interpreting

them as evidence of demonic possession, as stated by Nigerian tradition, Emezi has made it abundantly clear that Ada's complex interiority is a singular collective or a plural individual, a single self, comprised of this chorus of voices according to traditional Igbo cosmology.

In the end, Emezi encourages us to challenge science and logic. Her ability to make the experience of a fragmented identity tangible is astounding; *Freshwater* requires readers' immersion and concentration. Readers are reminded that although Western medicine could physically transform bodies, it still adheres to a reductionist paradigm by which these bodies are made to adapt. Looking at other cultures allows for new perspectives on gender identity, as well as the discovery of new concepts through the lens of fiction. *Freshwater* invites readers to query a particularly illuminating method of decolonising their own understanding (Magaqa and Macombe, 2021: 26). Ada's sense of self-identity in *Freshwater* is contingent on her embrace of her complexity. Ada finds serenity not by eliminating herself, but by accepting her complexity. When she returns to Nigeria, the narrator is Ada, a voice ingrained in the poetic cadence of *We* and Asughara's scorching yet intimate tone.

In *Freshwater*, Ada realises that she is irrevocably a composite of all her beings and people who are distinct from her. *Ogbanjes* are born to perish, and Asughara desires Ada's death. Nevertheless, Emezi's novel is not a book about succumbing to one's demons, but rather about coping with them. The protagonist seeks a home in the liminal spaces between genders, between life and death, and between God and humans, as well to play within all of them. The novel addresses the richness of the community's diversity, demonstrating empathy for the individual and collective facets of identity complexity:

The Ada, just like the ogbanje, is an 'other' being whose life and sexuality challenges existing norms. Emezi pushes the idea that humans are both natural and spiritual beings to the limits by suggesting that it is possible to live both a genderless (spiritual) and gendered (natural) life. (Magaqa and Makombe, 2021: 28)

#### 4.1.5. Examining the Concept of Existence within the Igbo Cultural Context

In *Freshwater*, the *ogbanje* demonstrates the complexity of identity within the Igbo community. Emezi addresses thematic concerns regarding the text as well as the complexity of Igbo society and the position of homosexual desires and identities in Igbo cultural contexts by illustrating the diversity of ontology, identity, and sexuality.

Emezi encourages the reader to reconsider binary frameworks that rigorously label sexuality. Emezi enigmatizes identity through Ada's ontological duality and her gender fluidity. The Ada symbolises diverse sexual orientations and modes of being, i.e., her multi faceted identity. Due to her distinct characteristics, society labels her as mentally ill. Emezi's description of the Ada addresses the complexities of being a member of the Igbo community while challenging fundamentalist notions of gender and sexuality. The Ada represents this dual identity as it combines all the *ogbanjes* living on the protagonist of the novel. This is the reason why they are referred to as *we*, as I previously mentioned.

By considering the *ogbanje* as a narrative context, Emezi concentrates on the limitations of fixed identity labels as she rejects humanist approaches that marginalise 'others' such as homosexuals, thereby incorporating queerness into Igbo culture. *Freshwater* is a disruptive and decolonial text as a result of its narrative with multiple voices and its thematic preoccupations, which seek to re-position 'otherness' in relation to Igbo culture and spirituality. Thanks to the Ada, which symbolises otherness and dissimilarity, the author dismantles the fallacy that homosexuality is *unAfrican* as well as preconceived Eurocentric dualisms that categorise humanity into rigid categories. Ada is Ala's daughter; she has the form of a python and represents a spiritual connection to Ada that acknowledges her intertwined presence as another means of existing as a human.

According to Igbo cosmology, the universe has three dimensions: the sky, the earth connected to water, and the spiritual world (Nwoye, 2011). Every dimension operates in a manner that is

"interconnected, contiguous, continuous, and non-hierarchical" (Nwoye 2011: 307). The Igbo community believes that all ecosystems are interconnected holistically. In contrast to the Christian and hierarchical concept of the Trinity, Igbo cosmology recognises the interconnectedness of all forms of being. Therefore, the Igbo comprehend that humans are responsible for establishing a durable relationship with their environment in order to maintain social harmony (Okafor, 2004: 85-96). In this view, natural elements such as territories, rivers, mountains, and caves are under the control of deities. The relationship between the *Ada* and the animal world demonstrates the connection between the human and non-human realms according to Igbo ontology. Consequently, the *Ada* personifies three aspects of life: the human, supernatural, and animal realms; that is, the *Ada* is comprised of multiple entities. In this regard, the use of the definite article is indicative of her complex identity. Emezi challenges dualism regarding the identification of humanity with gender, whether one is male or female, by presenting an alternate world distribution in which neither gender nor boundaries exist.

Emezi positions queer identities within the Igbo community by establishing a connection between *ogbanje* and queerness (Magaqa and Makombe, 2021: 28). She emphasises that humans possess dualism because they are simultaneously natural and spiritual entities. Similarly, it is possible to live an existence that is both genderless (or spiritual) and gendered (or natural). *Ada's* ancestors have no control over her identity because, according to Igbo cosmology, she has already been created and her earthly existence is the consequence of a spiritual existence.

In Igbo belief, *Chukwa* or *Chineke* is a supernatural being residing in the sky, accompanied by entities like Lightning, Thunder, the Sun, and the Moon. The significance of various spirit categories is crucial in relation to human existence and the general welfare of humanity. As a matter of fact, Igbo cosmology posits that the human world is a dynamic universe shared by humans and numerous malevolent spirits, acknowledging the coexistence of physical and spiritual aspects in earthly existence (Nwoye, 2011: 307). According to Western philosophy, including *Satre's*



existentialism, humans are autonomous and determine their own destinies. In contrast to existentialist philosophy, in Igbo cosmology, the fate of humanity does not depend solely on the individual, as the material and spiritual are interconnected. Emezi demonstrates the significance of 'emerging out' of a closet of cultural repression due to the Ada's direct and rebellious nature. Acceptance of her *ogbanje* identity, according to Ada, is the key to achieving personal liberty. She embodies *freshness* due to her diverse sexual orientations and innovative methods of existing in her body. The author is not the first to examine the effects of cultural colonialism on indigenous information systems, religiosity, and modes of life. Emezi's use of *ogbanje* terminology demonstrates that human existence is interconnected with other lives around the globe.

In the *ogbanje* community, the undefined boundaries between the human and the material permit alternative modes of existence. The fragmented textual narrative style of Emezi encourages diverse modes of being. Multiple voices are utilised to develop the narrative, demonstrating the complexities of being human. Although the novel consists of twenty-three chapters, Ada's voice appears in only three of them (chapters nine, nineteen, and twenty-two). Most of the narrative is told by Asughara, who adopts the plural pronoun *we*. The multiple entities become the chapter-by-chapter narrators of the twenty-three chapters. In contrast to humans, the case of the Ada is unique because of its multiple pregnancies. First, spirits are discovered within her, which exemplifies the fusion of the spiritual and material realms. Second, the spirits, which she names Smoke and Shadow, emerge from her body (Emezi, 2018: 19, 42). This second birth binds the two domains together. The third birth occurs when the spiritual being Asughara manifests as Ada's weapon against violence (Emezi, 2018: 5). As Asughara typically appears when Ada is in difficulty, this birth symbolises the connection between the spiritual and material worlds. The various births facilitate the disruptive essence of the *ogbanje* and the notion that humans are represented by spiritual beings.

#### 4.1.6. *Ogbanje* as symbolic representation

Emezi appropriates the figure of the *ogbanje* to subvert traditional Western cultural values while simultaneously situating queer identities in the African cosmos. The dynamic and fluid nature of the *ogbanje* demonstrates that the Igbo cosmology allows for multiple ontologies and sexual identities.

In most African societies, homosexual identities are stigmatised as *unAfrican* (Tamale, 2011: 19). Recently, queer and feminist academics have fought against the view that queerness is *unAfrican*, a myth with colonial origins. Emezi legitimises queer identities within an African context in *Freshwater*. In attempting to situate queer identities in Igbo culture, the author departs from Western myths entangled with colonialism and concentrates on the issue of an African culture. According to scholars such as Tamale, Nyanzi, and Ratele, culture is a construct that develops within a particular historical context. While Nyanzi believes that discourses on African culture are based on colonial law, biomedical sciences, and Christianity (Nagadya and Morgan 2005; Tamale 2007a, 22). Tamale argues that African culture is “is largely a product of constructions and (re)interpretations by former colonial authorities in collaboration with African male patriarchs” (Tamale 2020: 4). The belief that homosexual identities are *unAfrican* is predicated on the notion that there exists a pure African culture that has not been influenced by colonialism or Western culture. As previously stated, academicians such as Amadiume and Lugones argue that the imposition of Western culture on Africa has resulted in the formation of a binary and biomorphic gender system (Amadiume, 1987; Lugones, 2010). In *Freshwater*, the *ogbanje* deconstructs these established notions of gender, thereby situating alternative sexualities within the Igbo cosmology. The text alludes stylistically to the freedom and subjectivity that result from embracing one's own gender and sexual identity. *Freshwater* structurally imitates Ada's experiences as an *ogbanje*, which causes queerness to be conflated with the *ogbanje* identity in the Igbo community, given that, like *ogbanje*, queer people also experience various forms of discrimination in certain African societies. The *ogbanje* is viewed as an alternative method of being

within Igbo spirituality. Ada is genderless and transcends the boundaries of sexuality and gender (Emezi, 2018b).

According to Butler, gender is neither a fixed nor an inherent characteristic. It comes into existence "through repeated actions" (Butler 1988: 519). The complexity of Ada's identity validates Hall's view that "identity lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (Hall, 2000: 4). Ada's sexual enlightenment occurs after the birth of Ashugara, her spiritual master. Emezi asserts that Asughara serves a combative function because she demonstrates that society can be cruel to those who are distinct and transgressive (Emezi, 2018b). In this respect, Asughara represents a sexual force that compels Ada to engage in sexual encounters with her body without contemplating the possible repercussions. Emezi explains sexual orientations that are deemed aberrant by society by describing Asughara's sexual experiences.

The experiment of having traditional Igbo healers in the hospital, as described in the academic journal *ogbanje/abiku and cultural conceptualizations of psychopathology in Nigeria* by Sunday T.C. Ilechukwu, illuminates the similarities between Ada, the protagonist of Akwaeke Emezi's novel *Freshwater*, and the patients examined by Igbo healers. The experiment involved the observation and monitoring of patients suspected of being *ogbanje*, a belief in Igbo cosmology in which certain individuals are believed to be imprisoned in a cycle of death and rebirth. The practitioners were able to diagnose the patients based on specific patterns and characteristics, such as a 5:1 ratio of female to male patients and the patients' socioeconomic disadvantage and absence of fathers. This experiment is significant because it challenges Western comprehension and diagnosis of mental disorders such as Dissociative Identity Disorder. Ada's struggles with self-identity and mental illness in *Freshwater* are readily diagnosable as DID in the Western world. However, the novel challenges readers to consider transcultural interpretations and understandings of mental illness.

This experiment investigating the effects of traditional Igbo healers on the treatment of *ogbanje* patients in Nigerian hospitals provides a valuable lens for comprehending Ada's struggles in Akwaeke Emezi's novel *Freshwater*. Ada struggles with mental illness and self-identity in *Freshwater*, and the novel challenges readers to reconsider their understanding of mental health in a transcultural context. Ada is a young woman who, like the patients observed by the Igbo healers, contends with suicidal thoughts and an awareness of her *ogbanje* heritage. Additionally, the study exposes the effect of Western education on indigenous gender roles, which is pertinent to Ada's experience as a recipient of both indigenous and Western education. The findings of this study suggest that traditional healers may play a significant role in the treatment of mental illness in Nigeria and that understanding mental health within a transcultural context is crucial for providing effective care to individuals who may not neatly fit into Western diagnostic categories. The experiment also demonstrates the significance of self-awareness and suicide among those believed to be *ogbanje*.

The experiment provides a deeper understanding of the cultural and traditional beliefs that influence mental health and self-identity in Nigeria, as well as the impact of Western education on indigenous knowledge and gender roles. Through Ada's struggles with mental illness and self-identity, these themes are also explored in *Freshwater*, making the novel a significant contribution to transcultural comprehension of mental health and identity. This analysis provides evidence of many similarities between Ada, the protagonist of *Freshwater*, and the individuals examined by Igbo healers, including her age and gender. This section examines Ada's and these patients' struggles with suicide and self-awareness.

#### 4.1.8. Conclusion

Emezi's use of literary elements highlights the originality of *Freshwater* in relation to the contemporary African novel. First, the thin narrative of this novel features little social interaction

between its characters. Next, the novel concentrates on Igbo cosmology while simultaneously employing humour and playfulness, as evidenced by the dedication, and opening of the text. In addition, the use of the plural pronoun *we* by the narrator illustrates the shared focalisation of a young woman, Ada, and the entities that inhabit her. Asughara, the primary focaliser, is one of Ada's obganje spirits and her alter ego. Lastly, Emezi's account of sex with evocative details, the description of a suicide attempt, and the final emphasis on the corporeal are crucial elements in this metaphysical text with vertical depth, as all of these elements are uncommon in African novels. In this way, Emezi's disruptive writing sheds light on the literary evolution of the modern African novel.

Emezi's voice is humorous because she constantly plays with the sentence rhythms and the conflicting and contrasting voices in Ada's head. The plural voice *we* is the most startling because it is strange enough to sound like a foreign presence in the mind of a human, but human enough to persist. *Freshwater* immerses the reader in Ada's mind, demanding that they feel what she feels and see the world as she does, which is not an easy experience given that it is a tale of trauma, violence, and sorrow. Nevertheless, *Freshwater* is also a tale of survival, dignity, and fortitude, as well as the acceptance of what it means to survive traumatic events. *Freshwater* becomes the narrative that reminds readers of the significance of reading and critical thinking in developing empathy and the transformative power of empathy to change the world.

Emezi addresses female agency in *Freshwater* by incorporating supernatural elements to introduce a new discourse on Nigerian female bodies. Thus, she demonstrates how feminism is utilised in the literature of the Global South. Emezi adheres to but also opposes Nigerian gender roles because of her intercontinental upbringing. This ambivalence demonstrates her subversion of Western patriarchal gender norms and feminism. In *Freshwater*, Emezi presents a new type of Nigerian feminism that takes into consideration all feminine bodies, whether they are binary. The connection between Emezi's discourse on the body and agency. Recent trends in the number of publications by Nigerian female authors provide evidence of a larger social issue, namely the need to alter how the

world perceives Nigerian female authors, such as Buchi Emecheta, Sefi Atta, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Regarding the legitimacy of bodies that do not conform to societal standards, Emezi takes descriptive liberties with the *ogbanje* cosmology in the novel and provides evidence for the ways in which society exploits female bodies for its own purposes, as well as for the author's connection to the protagonist. Emezi depicts taboo topics such as mental health and sexuality in her novel, which provide diverse perspectives from culture to culture, demonstrating how knowledge of cultures leads to the emergence of diverse worldviews. In *Freshwater*, gods explain Ada's mental illness and non-binary sexual orientation. Alternatively, in the Western tradition, dissociation may be the consequence of a post-traumatic experience, i.e., a resistance experience. *Freshwater* emphasises the need for transversal approaches in regards to gender differences. The novel exposes the need to rebuild ideologies (theories) and studies (experiences), i.e., there is an emerging need to rebuild women's representations by disrupting the conventional in contemporary society.

The novel also raises uncomfortable concerns about Emezi's personal struggle, which serves as an effective literary device for shifting the narrative regarding women's identities. The author exposes herself by constructing a character who experiences comparable traumatic events. She amplifies her own voice as a creator and a woman in this manner. In this respect, the innovative element exists within the text itself, which provides hints about the type of discourse the reader can construct. New discourses on women's contemporary identities correlate to new ways of relating to others and being perceived. To comprehend the protagonist's complexity in *Freshwater*, there is cognitive fragmentation resulting from new discourses on women's identities. Emezi demonstrates that contemporary women's identities must be understood from a collective perspective, i.e., it is not just one voice, but the multiplicities within that voice. In *Freshwater*, the concept of divided voices becomes apparent when Emezi uses cognitive fragmentation to illustrate Ada's ambivalence regarding mental illness and *ogbanje* deities. Due to the novel's stylistic freedom, which makes space

for the concept of translation as a transformative experience, the novel is innovative. In addition, Emezi employs her native language to immerse the reader in a multicultural dimension. In this sense, textual context becomes crucial, as the author encourages readers to reconsider culture through identity while fostering multicultural awareness.

Emezi has asserted that "Igbo ontology is about more than 'folklore and superstition. It is a means of interpreting physics, science, and spirituality" (Emezi, 2018a qtd. in Ossana, 2021: 90). The aesthetic progression that captivates her may represent her personal journey of self-discovery and employing alternative perspectives to comprehend reality. The outer cosmology is reconstructed, thereby promoting discussion of contemporary issues that require legitimization. *Freshwater* raises the need to query metaphysical identities and gender, as well as the emergence of an innovative spirituality. The novel's great accomplishment lies in its unique combination of western and Igbo perspectives, devoid of interpretation. Is the protagonist a person in need of medical assistance, or is she interested in innovative spiritual growth? Are her personality disorders the consequence of traumatic experiences, or does she experience a variety of selves in order to liberate herself? Does she define her identity? Does she undergo a gender transition? Or is she contemplating the possibility of genderlessness? Does she perceive the universe from a human or spiritual perspective? She may signify the intertwining of all of them. The novel's diverse Igbo narrators provide answers to all these concerns. Nowadays, it is essential for everyone to engage in alternative modes of thought, which could lead to a more moral lifestyle. Particularly today, innovative narratives must be made visible in order to reform individuals and create a more equitable system. Since western values are revealing their superficial and dehumanising side, *Freshwater* demonstrates a new perspective by suggesting that the postcolonial situation of the diaspora writer is intended to be in a state of constant evolution, which is conducive to hybrid conditions. Despite *Freshwater's* vision, which can feel chaotic and even startling, the novel encourages debate on contemporary issues that need to be discussed. The

novel works as a point of reference for the global present, marked by migration and instability. Therefore, home is the journey itself rather than the destination.

## 4.2. Bernadine Evaristo

### 4.2.1. Introduction

This chapter argues for the need to recognise the other as a member of the self-narrative to identify acts of self-representation. *Girl, Woman, Other* proposes an invitation for the reader to deconstruct the sense of otherness empathically, hence considering their stories' importance regarding contemporary realities. Stuart Hall, Nash, and Giles form a critical backdrop for the discussion on self-representation in this novel. Hall's insights underscore the importance of recognizing the other as integral to the self-narrative. *Girl, Woman, Other* extends an invitation to readers to empathetically deconstruct notions of otherness, emphasizing the significance of diverse stories in addressing contemporary realities. Nash and Giles contribute to theoretical reflections on self and other, offering a foundational understanding for exploring acts of self-representation within the novel. The theoretical reflections on the concepts of self and other will provide a ground to further understand acts of self-representation in this novel.

This chapter explores *Girl, Woman, Other*, a pivotal work by the British writer Bernardine Evaristo. This novel not only clinched the Booker Prize in 2019 but also marked a historic milestone as Evaristo became the first black woman and black British person to receive this prestigious accolade in its fifty-year history. The narrative success continued with additional recognitions, including being named the *Fiction Book of the Year* and Author of the Year at the *British Book Awards*, as well as earning the *Indie Book Award for Fiction*. Notably, it secured the coveted #1 spot on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list for an impressive five weeks, with Evaristo making history as the first woman of colour to attain such a position in the paperback fiction chart. The novel's enduring presence in the



Top 10 for 44 weeks speaks to its literary significance and global resonance, with translations into over 60 languages reflecting a widespread readership spanning more than 40 linguistic communities.

Before delving into the critical apparatus of the analysis, it is important to present a comprehensive overview of Bernardine Evaristo's multifaceted literary career. Born in Woolwich, south-east London, to an English mother and a Nigerian father, Evaristo's personal background significantly informs her literary perspective. Beyond her role as a prolific author, she is a lifelong advocate for inclusion and representation in the creative industries, championing schemes that amplify the voices of artists and writers of colour. Evaristo's literary pursuits extend across various genres, including fiction, verse fiction, short fiction, non-fiction, poetry, essays, literary criticism, journalism, and radio and theatre drama. Her profound fascination with the African diaspora is a recurring theme in her works, exemplified by her non-fiction endeavours.

In October 2021, she released *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up*, her inaugural non-fiction work published by Penguin UK, followed by Grove Atlantic USA in January 2022. The exploration of non-fiction continues with *Look Again: Feminism* (Tate Galleries/Tate Publishing 2021), a survey responding to the representation of women of colour in British art. This work emerged in the wake of a significant rehang of the galleries in *Tate Britain*, the *National Collection of British Art*, launched in 2023. Evaristo's creative collaborations, notably with Pierpaolo Piccioli, Creative Director of *Valentino*, highlight her interdisciplinary approach to literature and the visual arts. Their 2020 collaboration resulted in *Collezione Milano*, a captivating coffee table book published in 2021, featuring poetic text accompanying photographs by Liz Johnson Artur.

Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* is deeply rooted in the exploration of multiculturalism and feminism. Her narrative imagination is intricately connected to the Afro-American movements, drawing inspiration from the struggles and triumphs of black women across the Atlantic. Evaristo delves into the complexities of black British identity, grappling with the idea of belonging and the unique challenges faced by individuals navigating the intersection of race and gender. Her portrayal of characters from various backgrounds contributes to the multicultural tapestry

of the contemporary British society, particularly in the cultural sphere. Additionally, the strength and relevance of her work within the cultural landscape make Evaristo a compelling force in contemporary British society. Furthermore, Evaristo's engagement with Afro-American movements is evident in her thematic exploration of empowerment, resilience, and the shared experiences of black women. By drawing upon the narratives of Afro-American movements, Evaristo adds a layer of global resonance to her storytelling, transcending geographical boundaries to create a profound impact on readers worldwide.

Beyond her own literary works, Evaristo's commitment to supporting fellow authors is evident in her over twenty book introductions since 2020. Notable among these are introductions for the reissue of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2002) and Ntozake Shange's *For Coloured Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (2024). Evaristo's intellectual and artistic pursuits are further underscored by her distinguished fellowships and academic affiliations. Her significant role as the 19th President of the *Royal Society of Literature* since 2021, succeeding Dame Marina Warner, establishes her as the first woman of color in this position since the society's inception in 1820. Moreover, her global influence is acknowledged with honors such as being a *Forbes 50 over 50* honoree in the Europe, Middle East, & Africa region in 2022.

This chapter aims to provide a holistic understanding of Bernardine Evaristo's literary contributions, setting the stage for the analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* within the broader context of her transformative and impactful career.

#### 4.2.1. Navigating the duality: exploring the self and the other

The novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo is a captivating examination of the complexities of identity, focusing on the dynamic relationship between the self and the other. Evaristo explores the intersecting lives of black British women through a diverse ensemble of characters, each grappling with their own unique experiences, struggles, and aspirations. In this narrative, the concept of the self is intricately intertwined with the presence of the other, prompting readers to consider concepts of

identity, belonging, and the social forces that influence individual lives. Evaristo's deft depiction of these characters and their interactions, which challenges conventional notions of selfhood, reveals the nuanced and complex nature of human existence. This brief section examines the themes of the self and the other in *Girl, Woman, Other* and illuminates how Evaristo's novel functions as a poignant exploration of identity, community, and the intricate interplay between the individual and society. Through an analysis of key characters and their narratives, I will investigate how Evaristo challenges traditional boundaries, challenges stereotypes, and illuminates the transformative power of accepting diverse identities and accepting others. This section aims to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between selfhood and otherness and to celebrate the richness and diversity of human experiences as depicted in Evaristo's ground-breaking novel.

#### 4.2.1.1. Correlation of Notions of Self and Self-Representation

In Bernadine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, the exploration of self and self-representation is a central theme. Evaristo intricately examines the complexities of self-identity through interconnected characters, challenging societal norms and embracing the diversity of human existence. The narrative delves into how individuals navigate their identities and the profound impact of self-representation on their lived experiences. Evaristo's storytelling highlights the fluid nature of identity, prompting readers to question traditional notions of selfhood.

This section aims to delve into the dynamic relationship between notions of self and self-representation in *Girl, Woman, Other*. It will shed light on the characters' voyages of self-discovery and the influence of representation on their lives. By analyzing key instances of self-representation and the characters' struggles with societal expectations, the discussion aims to reveal how Evaristo challenges imposed limitations and celebrates the freedom found in genuine self-expression. Through this exploration, a deeper appreciation of the complex relationship between self-identity and self-

representation, as well as the transformative potential of embracing diverse narratives of selfhood, will be demonstrated, as depicted in Evaristo's novel. As Oliver Sacks asserts: "each of us constructs and lives a narrative" (1985: 105). He suggests that every individual inherently engages in the construction and living of a narrative, which aligns with the exploration of identity and self-representation in Evaristo's novel. The characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* are, in essence, constructing and living their own narratives as they navigate their personal journeys and grapple with societal expectations. Sacks' perspective supports the idea that storytelling and narrative construction are fundamental aspects of human existence. As a matter of fact, Marya Schechtman emphasizes: "we ought to construct our lives narratively, that we must do so to achieve full personhood" (1997: 119). Her emphasis on constructing lives narratively reinforces the importance of narrative in the process of achieving full personhood. In the context of Evaristo's novel, the characters' self-discovery and representation contribute to their development as fully realized individuals. Similarly, Schechtman's idea aligns with the exploration of identity in this novel, where characters construct their narratives not just as a means of expression but as an essential element in the realization of their complete personhood. It underscores the transformative power of narrative in shaping and understanding one's identity. Additionally, Strawson's argument introduces two critical components—an Episodic approach to self-experience, where the self is a "now" phenomenon detached from the past and the future, and a defense of a non-Narrative form of self-representation, challenging the dominance of the Narrative form. Strawson's objective is to reconfigure the terms and conditions of the discussion surrounding the relations between the self and its representation (Strawson, 2004: 430). Therefore, the Episodic/ non-Narrative approach to self-representation stands on equal footing with the Diachronic/Narrative approach (Battersby, 2006: 27), further reinforcing the novel's exploration of diverse and transformative narratives of selfhood.

#### 4.2.1.2. Unveiling the tapestry of self: exploring personal narratives

The exploration of the self, acts of self-representation, and others will provide evidence for the impact caused by the incompleteness of the term *true self*, especially when referring to acts of self-representation. This interconnection is important to understand *Girl, Woman, Other*'s analysis since the twelve women are the result of their socio-cultural time and place, together with a precise familial history, which causes a repercussion in the individual without them being aware of it, like society considering the bigger picture. Hall's questions on the self and identity are recurrent in Evaristo's novel: "I return to the question of identity because the question of identity has returned to us" (Hall 2019: 64). The question of 'who am I?', which is at the centre of human beings, is crucial when exploring the Western world, particularly in its cultural environment: "Who we are, and more often, who we are not, shapes the self-perception of a person as they strive towards their "unique 'true' selfhood." (Giles and Middleton 2008: 34). Every act of self-representation is based on this belief, which conforms to "the ground for action' in philosophy" (Hall, 2019: 65). The authenticity of acts of self-representation is examined according to the validity of those acts, which attempt to depict a person's intrinsic truth. Moreover, this theory seems to convey the idea that a person's truth could represent an incomplete part of their whole being. According to Hall, the psychological discourse of self is a "notion of the continuous, self-sufficient, developmental, unfolding, inner dialectic of selfhood" (Hall 2019: 65), therefore, this truth within the individual's core or self is based on negotiation. The self is the result of the practice of self-narration, a very personal observation of reality: "The personal narratives we tell are never simply mirror reflections of a lived reality, but are mediated by the need to represent the self as possessing a sense of identity and control". The values, goals, and beliefs that a person holds shape the 'sense of identity', which seems to be only obtained with control and the capability to perform this control over mental depictions, or real people, that instills the self with the sensation of power and agency. This sense of power and agency generates a significant narrative that works, according to values and beliefs, towards the truth (Giles and

Middleton 2008:58). The "increasing social diversity and plurality, the technologies of the self which characterise the modern world in which we live" (Hall 2019: 68), continually degrade the self by using a practice that permits the constant term of change as the innovative status quo (Hall, 2019:67–70). Hall considers the self's subjectivity through "the notion that identity in that sense could be told as two stories". Therefore, the recognition of "the unspoken silences between that which can be spoken' represents 'the only way to reach for the whole history" (Hall, 2019: 70). This multiplicity allows people to position themselves within or outside the establishment, whose standard continues to be the healthy white heterosexual cis-gender male.

#### 4.2.1.3. Embodying authenticity: exploring the art of genuine expression

To better understand the other within, the exploration now deals with acts of self-representation and how the other might influence them. As previously mentioned, the inclination to build the self as the main character of one's narration is not enough when considering the "whole history" (Hall, 2019:70). This preference to consider an only truth regarding the self is increased in the elaboration of the other: "much of our discourse of the inside and outside, of the self and the other, of the individual and society, of the subject and the object, are grounded in that particular logic of identity" (Hall, 2019: 65).

In assuming subjectivity to build one's identity, the ones recognised as others are objectified with reductionist perspectives. Hall explains that reductionism clarifies the skeleton of social constructs, simplifying their depth of articulation to a line of resolution. It reduces the term "determination [...] to that of a mechanical function" (Hall 2019: 28). Reductionism denies the dialectic essence of the self and the other, as well as their capability to think, adapt, and develop. In *Girl, Woman, Other's* British society, there is a clear exploration of the true self, a presumable

individual matter, develops into a political issue, such as the characters' "legal invisibility" (Nash, 2014: 48).

Despite this multiplicity offering the possibility for change in relation to a group's story time, blackness is still the defining element of *otherness*. (I'Anson, 2003: 23). The large use of cultural codes seems to unite the black British experience by providing a sense of belonging, acknowledgement, and some degree of historical importance; however, being black continues to represent a guarantee for being the *other* in the Western world. Thus far, there is political and social control associated with the black group. Afua Hirsch considers the capability to associate with a category as desirable since "when it comes to the black British experience, Sam's world is its epitome" (Hirsch 2018:6). According to her, identification, and the sense of belonging to a category disintegrate the lack of stability she experiences in her idea of self and fixes power into personal acts of self-representation as they increase meaning and social importance. The reality that the masculine body is positioned at the core of the "black British experience" (Hirsch 2018: 7) points to a dominance within the *other* that perpetuates the idea of a consolidated collaborative identity, which could be addressed as if they were particular actors in their unique right yet which, deposited and permitted us to comprehend, the indispensable of the individual self: "the great collective social identities of class, race, nation, gender and the West" (Hall, 2019: 66).

Considering an individual truth regarding the *other* dissipates the relationship between *self* and *other*, since the other's truth denies every ambiguity, quietening every voice that cannot belong to the group. *Girl, Woman, Other* evidences how dominance is reproduced and black women's narrative is undermined by being marginalised in the conformation of the other, at the same time as by the West and the category *black*. According to Nash's consideration of Western societies and their lost chance to "remedy black women's legal invisibility" (Nash, 2014: 48), the exploration addresses the affirmation and states that black women are automatically and legally disregarded from belonging to the other. This situation provides their importance to the socio-historical past and their conforming

role to the bare minimum. The disregard of others has created the narrative of self and others, which evidences the fact that all history is associated with the narrative of black others. In fact, “ Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus, it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself” (Beauvoir, 1949, introduction).

#### 4.2.1.4. Exploring identity and connection as the essence of belonging

According to Zanib Rasool, "in the UK, there is an increased focus on social cohesion and integration". She adds that young people belonging to minority ethnic communities suffer pressure to adapt to the dominant narrative and feel that they should dress and present themselves physically according to British sociocultural practices. The distress between adopting a British national identity and the impossibility to do so due to their belonging to the social labels *black* and *female* ends up in "young people from minority ethnic communities [spending] a lifetime on self-exploration and negotiating their contested identities" (Rasool 2018: 73). The adverse potential intrinsic to experiencing such a competitive identity is particularly intense for second- or third-generation immigrants whose connection to their diasporic roots is not as solid as it was in previous generations. In *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), Maya Angelou affirms, "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go on as we are and not be questioned". In this sense, home represents the availability of a place where nobody needs to justify their existence. Additionally, Hirsch affirms the relevance of belonging: "When it came to my identity, I felt impoverished. I longed to be around other black people, to have a sense of black culture and community, to see a flicker of recognition in a person's face when I told them my name" (Hirsch 2018: 8).

This study argues that this perspective of a home where existence does not need to be explained is not realistic due to plenty of internal and external debate regarding the *true self* within



the family and in relation to *Girl, Woman, Other*, particularly the relationship between the mother and daughter. Regarding Rasool's affirmation about the increased need to "fit in with the national narrative of 'Britishness'" (Rasool 2018:73), it becomes a complex issue since the family itself has conformed to an essentialist approach of building itself, evading their own history, and adopting the "black British experience" (Hirsch 2018:7). Acts of self-representation leave the individual with a superficial sense and provide meaninglessness to the acts themselves. The interest in accepting a social position that is created in a fundamentalist practice does not fulfil the need to belong (Hirsch 2018: 8). Rasool criticises the tendency towards "cohesion and integration", contending that, as emotional and historical beings, individuals defy essentialism, homogeneity, and contradiction (Rasool 2018: 73; Hall 2019: 67). Evaristo's novel challenges the concepts of subject and subjectivity, demonstrating their significance in the discourse. Similarly, Linzer comments on the irony of personal expression, suggesting that if creation is intended to accommodate others, it must also entail personal contraction (Grand and Salberg, 2017: 5). Together, these ideas challenge the notion of uniformity and advocate for a nuanced understanding of individuals as contradictory, complex, and subjective entities. They illuminate the limitations of cohesive frameworks and highlight the complex relationship between individual expression and the coexistence of diverse perspectives.

#### 4.2.2. Empowering feminist realms: exploring identity and resilience

*Girl, Woman, Other* could be what Caroline Edwards defines as connected novels that "knit together a disparate set of temporal (and frequently disjunct spatial) locations that are interconnected at the level of narrative structure, as well as being thematically interlaced" together with "characters that are dotted throughout historical time to present a story that takes as its primary figural terrain the image of the network" (Sarıkaya-Şen, 2021:3). Edwards considers that using such unusual temporal scheme is favourable for "the transtemporal, transmedial and transnational patterns of connection experienced in the twenty-first century, in which time and space are felt as increasingly compressed, accelerated and abstracted" (Edwards, 2019:15). Therefore, she agrees with the elements that

Rodríguez Magda addresses in her definition of transmodernity, that is, interconnectedness, transnationalism and accelerated temporality.

Rodríguez Magda finds a “festive, rupturist, hedonistic discourse” in the postmodern period and postmodernist culture since she considers that postmodernity “represents a past age” now. The increasing growth of globalisation’s impact shows that we experience ‘a period of transformation, transience, and of accelerated time’. In this rapidly changing world, marginalized people such as women have been ‘denied, made invisible or subalternised’. This position of marginalization and oppression evidences the need for “a systematic criticism of what was claimed to be universal but which was in fact only the perspective of the lords, of land masters, of the bodies, of the unlawfully upholders of power” so that they could “recover the voices that did not manage to enter [such as the voices of women], to challenge the criteria of that canon if necessary” (Rodríguez Magda, 2019: 23, 24, 25, 25), particularly considering the narratives of the limit. Many contemporary feminist critics have emphasized the issue of women’s silencing and offered diverse alternatives.

In accordance with Irena Ateljevic's viewpoint, transmodernity is characterised as "essentially postpatriarchal," recognising the crucial role of women's visions and intuitions in co-creating innovative and imperative solutions (Ateljevic, 2013: 203). This acknowledgement of women's contributions is consistent with María del Carmen García Aguilar's argument, which emphasises the possibility of attaining a discursive feminist community by normalising both modernity and postmodernity. Through the creation of a secure space within this community, marginalised women find comfort and acceptance (García Aguilar, 2014: 160, 161–62, 163, 171.). These concepts converge to emphasise the significance of recognising women's voices, perspectives, and experiences within transmodernity, thereby promoting inclusive and transformative spaces from which innovative solutions can emerge.

#### 4.2.3. Critical analysis of stereotypes and feminism in Black British intellectual discourse

Considering that Black women have long been marginalised in academia, many black female intellectuals have used their outsider position to create black feminist thought that conveys a particular outlook on self, family, and society.

The sociologist Patricia Collins (1986: 14) researched the sociological meaning of feminist thought. She argued that black women have been represented by marginal positions in academia and that many "black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality—their "outsider within" status—to produce black feminist thought" which deliberates on a particular perspective regarding the self, family, and society. These women writers now use their voices to denounce injustices and issues regarding inequality to improve their situation in society. This innovative black literature offers the reader a profound analysis of black women's minds, which provides a new perspective on black women who were never positively described according to patriarchal discourse.

Bernadine Evaristo's novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, most certainly considers her skills at utilising the strengths and exceeding the limits of her academic and black British background. Afro-American female intellectuals work towards the enrichment of the contemporary sociological discourse since, as strangers within, marginality' has become an enthusiasm for creativity. Considering this group as the core of analysis might show elements of reality shaded by more traditional perspectives. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the sociological meaning of black feminist thought caused by black women's outsider status.

Evaristo defines the novel as fusion-fiction, that is, a "very free-flowing" form characterized by "the absence of full stops, [and] the long sentences" (Evaristo, 2019). In interview with Alison Donnell, Evaristo shed light on this sort of fiction, which "employs a kind of poetic patterning and compression redolent of prose poetry" (Evaristo, 2019: 101). For instance, the utterance to describe Carole's traumatic experience of gang rape is presented as lines of verse:

Then  
her  
body  
wasn't  
her  
own  
no  
more  
it  
belonged  
to  
them [...]  
it was hurtinghurtinghurting  
onandonandonandon into infinity (Evaristo, 2019: 125–26).

This organization of words and the lack of punctuation show how fusion-fiction transmits the trauma Carole suffered. According to Evaristo, it permits her to get under the characters' thoughts as if they are speaking in the first person. Additionally, Evaristo affirms that it also contributes “to present them [the characters] externally, while...their stories also flow into each other's. The surface narrative describes what is happening externally, but this is always fused with the deeper levels of private interiority” (Evaristo, 2019: 101). For instance, Shirley perceives herself as a dedicated teacher assisting Carole in her education, however, Carole thinks that Shirley has “harrassed her for four years” (Evaristo, 2019: 130), to which she is not grateful for. When time passes by and they meet at Amma's play, Shirley cannot cover her disappointment and tears whereas Caroline believes Shirley “was probably only trying her best, she just didn't go about it in the right way” (Evaristo, 2019: 422). Their stories combine into one as well as their past, which are now aligned with their present, showing diverse approaches to the same even and person. Therefore, the novel points at the particularities and

the complexity of excluded black British women's experiences. *Girl, Woman, Other* shifts transmodernity with the stories of vulnerable yet simultaneously resilient black British women.

Petersen and Rutherford's *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing* (1986), a compilation of essays and writings they edited, sheds light on the experiences of women writers within these contexts, highlighting how gender and race intersect to affect their lives. The concept of a dual form of colonisation, including both colonial and postcolonial contexts, arises as the book's central theme.

This racist ideology in post-colonial African contexts is one of the reasons why African feminists add the race issue to their struggle for liberation. Black writers such as Toni Morrison, Aminatta Forna or Mikki Kendall, who proceed from very different backgrounds and circumstances, argue that the depiction of black women as others justifies any sort of oppression, which shows why their black female characters defy the negative stereotypes linked to black women and their fight against injustice. Fortunately, the current generation of African women writers supports innovative shifts that “seek not only to reinterpret, but to change the world in favour of women” (Ekpa, 2017:28), which is Evaristo's purpose in her novels. She describes “the ways in which the contemporary generation can improve” (Ng'umbi, 2017: 88) towards the eradication of black women's stereotypes.

As a member of the current generation of African women writers, Bernadine Evaristo identifies herself with the innovative shifts identified by Ekpa that seek to reinterpret and transform the world in favour of women. The purpose of Evaristo's novels, including *Girl, Woman, Other*, is to challenge and eradicate the long-standing stereotypes of black women.

Through her captivating narratives and diverse ensemble of characters, Evaristo sheds light on the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of black women, providing a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal that defies simplistic stereotypes. She provides a forum for voices and narratives that have been historically marginalised or ignored, granting them the autonomy and visibility they deserve.

By depicting the improvement potential of the current generation, Evaristo emphasises the significance of collective action and societal change in overcoming harmful stereotypes. Her novels serve as catalysts for critical discourse and introspection, prompting readers to examine their own prejudices and presumptions. Evaristo's work is representative of the larger movement of African women writers who strive to alter the narrative landscape and dismantle oppressive structures. By challenging conventional conventions, Evaristo contributes to the ongoing literary and societal dialogue concerning the empowerment and liberation of women, particularly black women.

In confronting and subverting stereotypes, Evaristo not only reinterprets the experiences of black women but also endeavours for tangible change, inciting readers to scrutinise the existing power structures critically and work towards a more equitable and inclusive world. By engaging the innovative shifts identified by Ekpa, Evaristo demonstrates her dedication to reshaping narratives, amplifying marginalised voices, and ultimately eradicating stereotypes about black women. She encourages readers to accompany her on this transformative journey by emphasising the possibility of growth and development.

Overall, Bernadine Evaristo's *novel Girl, Woman, Other* reflects the vision of the current generation of African women authors. She actively contributes to the reimagining of narratives and challenges existing power structures to create a world in which black women's voices and experiences are celebrated, respected, and no longer constrained by harmful stereotypes. Not in vain, *Girl, Woman, Other* is a novel that features a variety of characters, each with their own story and perspective. The book focuses on the lives of twelve characters, mainly women, and explores themes such as motherhood, sisterhood, lesbianism, and many other relevant issues. Presented below is a delineation of key characters, categorised according to these themes:

#### 4.2.3.1. Motherhood

In the novel, Amma is a strong and determined woman who has dedicated her life to the fight for equality. She is the mother of Yazz and Morgan, and her relationship with her children reflects the complexity of modern motherhood. On the other hand, Dominique is Amma's daughter and experiences motherhood in a unique way, challenging traditional expectations. Her story shows how family dynamics evolve over time. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, there are different depictions of maternal identities, such as Amma, Bummi and Winsome. Amma's and Bummi's maternal identities, characterised by the fact that they are black, single, and working mothers, differ from the traditional image of the good, stay-at-home white mother. Additionally, their sense of maternal empowerment comes from their complex gender roles and their interest in anti-sexist parenting education. An example of this is when Amma works and needs others to contribute to looking after Yazz rather than doing it all by herself (Evaristo, 2019: 36-37). She also wants Yazz to be "free, feminist and powerful" (Evaristo, 2019: 38) since she "was the miracle she never thought she wanted, and having a child really did complete her, something she rarely confided because it somehow seemed anti-feminist" (Evaristo, 2019: 36). Similarly, Bummi considers mothering empowering. As a result, she raises Carole to study a degree in Maths at Oxford, which helps her access higher positions in the corporate ladder in spite of her traumatic past experience of gang rape. When she is studying her first semester at Oxford, she thinks of herself as "crushed, worthless and a nobody", which makes her want to give up (Evaristo, 2019: 132). However, Bummi explains her the potential outcomes of this decision since she might end up working in nightclub toilets or concert venues and encourages her to "go back and fight the battles that are your British birth-right...as a true Nigerian" (Evaristo, 2019: 133). Eventually, Carole obeys her mother and abandons the idea of dropping out university, which means that she can advance in her career, working as a bank's vice president. The depiction of Amma's and Bummi's maternal journeys illustrates the potential for societal and political transformation through the nurturing of empowered offspring. This process allows women to reclaim the abilities denied to them within the confines of patriarchal motherhood.

#### 4.2.3.2. Sisterhood and Lesbianism

Megan, subsequently identified as Morgan, emerges as the focal character in a narrative that delves into her sexual identity and the dynamics of her relationship with her partner. Within the novel, Hattie, a character characterized by her courage, defies societal norms by openly embracing her lesbian identity.

Carole, an accomplished businesswoman and staunch feminist, exemplifies the significance of sisterhood and the interconnectedness among women in the pursuit of gender equality through her relationship with her friend LaTisha. The narrative further underscores the pivotal role played by Bumi, Amma's sister, in illustrating the diverse manifestations of sisterhood across various stages of life. Within the storyline, Amma's closest confidante, Dominique, emerges as a central figure whose life journey involves overcoming the adversity of a sadistic relationship and the subsequent challenges of reintegration into society after facing exclusion as an actress. Dominique's evolution into the founder of *The European Legacy of the Women's Art Festival* in Los Angeles is portrayed as a transformative trajectory mirroring Amma's own experiences.

Parallel to Amma's narrative, Dominique encounters rejection in a Victorian play, ostensibly justified by the director's erroneous claim that black individuals had no presence in Victorian England, a historical inaccuracy refuted by Evaristo (2019: 7). In her adulthood, Dominique faces disillusionment not only from the prevailing white patriarchy but also from a radical feminist African American lesbian, Nzinga, during a brief visit to London. Initially perceiving Nzinga as a benevolent guide to self-discovery, Dominique soon realizes the disconcerting and even sadistic nature of Nzinga's demeanour, prompting her fortunate escape from the toxic relationship. Subsequent to this ordeal, Dominique seeks solace in a counselling group for female survivors of domestic abuse, culminating in her marriage to Laverne, whom she meets within the same support network. Together, they establish the Women's Arts Festival (Evaristo, 2019: 107-13), thereby contributing to the



thematic exploration of how sisterhood and sorority serve as catalysts for women to heal emotional wounds and extend empathy towards other marginalized women.

The experiences of these women serve as illustrations of resilient black lesbians who not only surmount personal challenges but also transcend the exclusionary politics of the predominant white society. In essence, their narratives elucidate the transformative potential of sisterhood in fostering healing, resilience, and solidarity among women.

#### 4.2.3.3. Women's Identity

Noni, a close associate of Amma, serves as a representative embodiment of the varied spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations present in the narrative. The character of Yazz, Amma's non-binary activist offspring, accentuates the narrative's emphasis on the significance of representation and identity within contemporary society. Additionally, Polly, a transgender woman, contributes an additional layer to the exploration of gender identity and the experiences of individuals within the transgender community.

In the novel, Evaristo articulates the theme of transcultural feminism, grounding it in transsexual feminism. Dominique's perspective posits that transwomen may lack an understanding of the oppression and societal rejection faced by women. Conversely, Amma advocates for the acknowledgment and commendation of transwomen, asserting that a multitude of women, particularly transsexual women, are reshaping feminism, which is exemplified in her statement, "many more women [especially transsexual women] are reconfiguring feminism...and millions of women are waking up to the possibility of taking ownership of our world as fully-entitled human beings" (Evaristo, 2019: 438).

Yazz further explores the theme of gender fluidity, contending that a future characterized by non-binary identities, transcending traditional male and female distinctions, is imminent. Yazz additionally emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanitarianism and feminism, positioning them

as endeavors existing on a comparable plane (Evaristo, 2019: 39). Simultaneously, Amma and Bummi, through their non-conformity to conventional gender roles, challenge societal expectations—Amma as a lesbian and Bummi engaging in a same-sex affair with one of her friends.

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, the exploration of gender identity is seamlessly interwoven with the diverse narratives of its characters. The nuanced portrayals of Noni, Yazz, and Polly exemplify the richness and complexity of gender experiences within the narrative. Evaristo navigates the intricacies of transcultural feminism, particularly in the context of transsexual feminism, through the contrasting perspectives of Dominique and Amma. While Dominique raises questions about the ability of transwomen to fully comprehend the oppression faced by women, Amma's advocacy for the recognition and celebration of transwomen highlights a progressive vision of feminism inclusive of diverse gender identities. Yazz's reflections on the future of gender fluidity and their connection between humanitarianism and feminism further broaden the spectrum of gender discourse. Simultaneously, Amma and Bummi challenge conventional gender roles through their own non-conforming identities. Through these various perspectives, this novel emerges as a literary exploration that not only embraces the multiplicity of gender identities but also engages in a thoughtful and nuanced dialogue on the evolving landscape of feminist discourse.

#### 4.2.4. Exploring three key themes in Black feminist thought

While black feminist ideas might be spread by others, black women produce black feminist thought. Secondly, this concept considers that black women have a unique approach regarding their experiences, which provides evidence for a common point for all black women as part of a community. The inequalities regarding class, geographical origin, age and sexual orientation, which affect black women's experiences have resulted in different expressions of these common aspects.

Black female academics aim for the creation of fact and theories to visibilise the black female stories, which will help explain black women's experiences for black women, in other words, they will be showing the fact that black feminist thought has the potential to describe Afro-American women's observations and interpretations, which justify diverse expressions of common issues they still suffer these days.

#### 4.2.4.1. Embracing self-definition and self-valuation

The significance of how black women define and value themselves is the primary focal point that accentuates historical and contemporary affirmations about black feminist thought. By engaging in self-definition, black women confront the political process of validating knowledge, which has resulted in stereotypical and externally imposed depictions of African American women. In contrast, self-evaluation highlights the significance of black women's self-definitions, particularly by replacing stereotypical depictions with authentic depictions of black females.

On the one hand, King proposes the idea that stereotypes create externally defined, dominating images of Afro-American women, which have been at the core of their dehumanisation and exploitation. However, Gilkes emphasises that black women's refusal to accept the complex oppression they face and their unwavering self-confidence have presented an ongoing threat to the existing order. To undermine black women's assertiveness, numerous negative portrayals have been created. King and Gilkes' analyses cast light on how dominant groups utilise stereotypes to maintain control. Both scholars acknowledge that merely replacing negative stereotypes with positive ones can result in additional problems if the underlying function of stereotypes as tools of dominance are overlooked.

In an interview with Nancy White (a 73 year old black woman) John Gwaltney (1980) suggests that typical black women become aware of the influence these controlling images have on their ordinary experiences. The following excerpt demonstrates that the dominant images imposed on African American and Caucasian women differ in degree rather than in nature:

My mother used to say that the black woman is the white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now, she said that to say this: we do the heavy work and get beat whether we do it well or not. But the white woman is closer to the master and he puts them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain't gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person (Gwaltney, 1980:148).

This extract shows that while there are stereotypes created for both categories, albeit differently, the purpose of the images is to dehumanise and dominate both. Consequently, it does not make sense for black women to substitute one set of dominating images for another, although positive stereotypes are better treated in the short run. The demand for self-definition by black women revolutionises the entire discourse by shifting the emphasis from merely designating the technical aspects of an image to highlighting the power dynamics inherent in the definition process. Black feminists have investigated the comments made about black women and scrutinised the veracity and intentions of those with the power to define them, who enjoy a privilege black women have consistently rejected.

María del Carmen García Aguilar sees transmodernity as committed to the feminist purpose, shifting the elements of exclusion, subordination, exploitation, and violence that women suffer. Additionally, she remarks that accepting the basic principles of transmodern philosophy could contribute to women's appropriation of "their own images with a distinctive genealogy that makes them subjects of history" and push beyond their position as marginalised subjects, by embracing "an inclusive and plural feminism, mobile and random; a feminism that is beyond post-modernity, a transmodern feminism" (García Aguilar, 2014: 160). *Girl, Woman, Other* introduces the reader to a transmodern, diverse and inclusive cultural world that intertwines different cultures and respects

difference, particularly regarding the lives of black British women. In her interview with Simon Scott, Evaristo said that her aim was to “put as many black British women into it [the novel] as possible—to show the heterogeneity of who we are in this society, and to explore us as fully realized, complex, driven, flawed individuals whose stories are worthy of telling as anyone else’s” (Evaristo, 2019). Among such stories is that of Amma, who has been exposed to discrimination in the theatre for nearly forty years but is now celebrating the performance of her play at the *National Theatre*. Years earlier, when Amma first tried to get a part in a play, she was only offered menial roles of a slave, maid, prostitute, baby-sitter or criminal and, what is worse, ended up not even getting these roles. She therefore spent “decades on the fringe, a renegade lobbing hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her” (Evaristo, 2019: 2). However, by joining a black women’s group, she got the opportunity to relate to the experiences of other black and lesbian women. Together with them she discovers what it means to be a black feminist, for “white feminist organisations made them feel unwelcome,” and to elaborate on black women’s feelings when “white men...gave up their seats on public transport for white women (which was sexist), but not for them (which was racist)” (Evaristo, 2019: 13). Dominique heals from being an excluded actress and a victim of an abusive relationship and becomes the founder of the *Women’s Art Festival* in Los Angeles. Like Amma, Dominique is first in denial of her role in a Victorian play since, as the director explains to her, black people did not exist in Victorian England, which clearly was not the reality (Evaristo, 2019: 7). In her adult life, Dominique was disappointed again, this time by Nzinga, an African American radical feminist who was staying in London for a short visit. She considers that Nzinga is an angel meant to guide her in her discovery of her real self, however, she soon realizes that Nzinga’s apparently good attitudes are in fact abusive. Luckily, Dominique regains her lost self by running away from Nzinga. Next, she decides to attend a counselling group for women victims of domestic abuse. There, she meets Laverne, to whom she will marry and together they will create the *Women’s Arts Festival* (Evaristo, 2019: 107–13). Amma and Dominique’s experiences evidence the importance of sisterhood and sorority to help oppressed women to recover from the abuse and find a sense of healing by feeling

the support of other women who have suffered ostracism. Additionally, both are depicted as strong black women since they cope with their personal issues, yet they manage to transcend the marginalizing politics of the white dominant discourse.

Rodríguez Magda considers that ‘the postmodern individual locked in his or her hedonistic bubble, exhausted and indifferent’ has been substituted by the transmodern being that expresses themselves through “new forms of relationship, social networks (such as chatting sites, Facebook, Twitter), a style of static connectivity” (Sarıkaya-Şen, 2021: 6). Similarly, Jean-Michel Ganteau explains that the static connectivity and empathic individualism typical from transmodern philosophy contrarily “insist on isolation and relationality” (Ganteau, 2019: 78). This sort of connection is at the core of the relationships shown in *Girl, Woman, Other*, an example being Megan/Morgan’s connection to her partner Bibi. Throughout her challenging childhood, Megan’s parents unwittingly repeated patterns of gender-based dominance, such as obligating her to use pink puffed-up dresses and to play with the Barbies (Evaristo, 2019: 307–10). Feeling estranged from her family and refusing to accept women’s traditional roles, Megan/Morgan lives in a hostel, looking for a life free from people’s definition. Although the teenagers’ noise in the hostel “exacerbate[d] her alone-ness,” she knew she was in need for the solitude she used to find in chat rooms (Evaristo, 2019: 318). This need of her to isolate herself from the rest correlates to Rodríguez Magda’s idea of the transmodern subject the constructor of a static interrelation with her surroundings through a computer screen. Even though she wanted to be isolated, Megan/Morgan develops a solid online friendship, which later becomes a loving relationship with Bibi. As a matter of fact, their connection is so strong that they feel they are missing each other when they are separated for a short span of time, “[t]hey feel vulnerable being so far away, after six years together the two of them are in sync with each other’s rhythms” (Evaristo, 2019: 331). Their reciprocal empathic relationship expands beyond simple pleasure, which ends up becoming a source of life for Megan/Morgan. By advocating for black female self-definition, black women's power is recognised, regardless of the actual significance of their self-definitions. Black

female self-validation transcends this entire procedure because it addresses the power dynamics entwined in the definition of self and community images. It reveals these self-definitions' true substance:

When Black females choose to value those aspects of Afro-American womanhood that are stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned in academic scholarship and the popular media, they are actually questioning some of the basic ideas used to control dominated groups in general (Collins, 1986: 17).

There are two main reasons why black women's emphasis on self-definition and self-valuation and the need for a black female-centred analysis are meaningful. First, defining and appreciating one's awareness of one's self-defined perspective regarding images that portray a self-definition as the degraded *other* is a crucial way to avoid the dehumanisation fundamental to systems of oppression. The position of being the *other* assumes representing something other than or different from the accepted norm of white male behaviour.

Following this model, authoritative white males consider themselves subjects and position women, particularly black women, according to their status, where the white male is at the core. Since women have not been allowed to develop the authority to challenge these concepts, this model addresses images that label black women as hostile, which are in opposition to positive white male images. All forms of oppression diminish the interior experiences, perspectives, and subjectivity of the oppressed. Both racist and sexist values share the common trait of addressing oppressed groups, that is, the *others*, as objects without humanity:

For example, seeing Black women as obstinate mules and viewing white women as obedient dogs objectifies both groups, but in different ways. Neither is seen as fully human, and therefore both become eligible for race/gender specific modes of domination. But if Black

women refuse to accept their assigned status as the quintessential “other,” then the entire rationale for such domination is challenged (Collins, 1986: 18).

In essence, mistreating an animal is viewed as a significantly less frightening act than mistreating another human by exploiting one's own humanity. The statement reveals a disquieting truth regarding the possibility of cruelty and mistreatment since mistreating an animal may appear less morally and emotionally challenging than mistreating a fellow human, despite the fact that both actions involve injury and abuse. This observation highlights the complexity of human relationships and the responsibilities inherent in our shared humanity. By highlighting this distinction, the statement prompts us to consider the ethical ramifications of our actions and the criteria by which we regard and value different beings. It serves as a reminder that acts of malice, regardless of their target, violate our shared values and the fundamental principles that should govern our interactions with others. The statement serves as a poignant reminder that the mistreatment of any living creature, whether human or animal, should never be taken lightly or disregarded as unimportant and urges us to recognise the interconnectedness of all existence and to cultivate empathy, compassion, and respect for all species. When one's agency and autonomy are compromised, there is a risk of succumbing to the influence of others who seek to dictate one's identity (Gwaltney, 1980:152). Therefore, self-definition and self-valuation are not privileges but imperative necessities for the survival of women.

Self-definition becomes a form of resistance and empowerment, enabling black women to confront the dehumanising forces that seek to diminish their value and agency. In the novel, this connection reaches its highest point at Penelope's, the only black character in the novel, meeting with Hattie, her black mother, regarding their separated lives. Penelope understands that she is adopted, which makes her feel very disappointed in her life (Evaristo, 2019: 280–84). When years pass and Penelope becomes a grandmother, she opts to take a DNA test to identify where her British biological parents are originally from. Nonetheless, after testing herself, Penelope realises that she is not the pure white European she considered herself to be. In fact, she is the result of mixed descent (Evaristo,



2019: 446–50). When she meets Hattie on the farm, she experiences a revelation: "Who cares about her [Hattie's] colour?" (Evaristo, 2019: 452). More significantly, she understands that "this is not about feeling something or about speaking words" yet "this is about being together" (Evaristo, 2019: 452). In this way, Black women reclaim their power, challenge oppressive narratives, and contribute to the larger struggle for justice and equality by recognising their inherent value and asserting their individual identities. Their insights emphasise the significance of self-definition and self-evaluation as crucial elements for the survival and liberation of black women. Therefore, Black women assert their humanity and demand recognition and respect by reclaiming their agency, challenging external definitions, and asserting their own narratives. Through these acts of self-definition, black women are able to negotiate the complex terrain of oppression, dismantle stereotypes, and forge paths to empowerment, not only for themselves but also for future generations.

The significance of self-definition and self-evaluation are crucial elements for the survival and liberation of black women since they assert their humanity and demand recognition and respect by reclaiming their agency, challenging external definitions, and voicing their own narratives. Through these acts of self-definition, black women are able to negotiate the complex terrain of oppression, dismantle stereotypes, and forge paths to empowerment, not only for themselves but also for future generations.

#### 4.2.4.2. Intersections of oppression: exposing the entangled nature of injustice

Black feminists have had a strong ideological commitment to addressing intersected forms of oppression, which means that they are not only concerned with gender issues but also recognize the importance of addressing other forms of oppression such as race and class. The reference to Angela Davis is significant since she is a prominent African American activist and feminist who has advocated for gender and racial equality as well as social justice more broadly. Her words explain the idea that Black feminists have been willing and committed to addressing multiple forms of oppression

but have faced barriers in doing so within coordinated feminist movements. Therefore, the exclusion of Black women from feminist movements after the 1980s is not due to a lack of feminist awareness but rather to discrimination and a lack of inclusion in feminist movement spaces and power structures, which has evidenced the need to recognise and address this marginalisation to create a more inclusive and effective feminist movement that can address all dimensions of oppression.

Refusing black women literacy if they do not possess the skills for sensible judgement shows another example of assuming a group's inferior position and then spreading that inferior status as evidence of the community's inferiority. Eventually, rejecting black women's agency as humans and abusing them as objectified others provides evidence for another level of the dominance that dual contrasting constructs possess while maintaining systems of oppression.

Rodríguez Magda emphasises the potential for women to “be in a better position, to make ourselves, to reinvent ourselves, to choose us.” She considers that “the [individual] woman is responsible for all women. Each individual action that denigrates or limits us is a step back for all women . . . what is valuable for women is also valuable for the human being” (Rodríguez Magda, 2012), which means that Rodríguez Magda recognises the status of transcultural feminist discourses regarding the local and the international at the same time. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bummi considers the concept of women fighting for humanity and rescuing the world from various cruelties, such as environmental destruction. She envisions establishing a cleaning company staffed by women from diverse regions, including Africa, Oceania, and the Arctic. The women in Bummi's dream venture on a mission to clean up the environmental damage caused by activities such as oil extraction, using their mop and broom handles to oust the oil companies and purify the rivers and creeks of thick slicks of grease. Bummi's aspirations reflect her belief that women should assume responsibilities for the greater good of humanity, echoing Rodríguez Magda's notion that whatever is valued for women is significant for the entire human race. This novel examines these facets by delving into gender discrimination and intersecting topics such as race, sexuality, class, and genealogy. *Girl, Woman,*

*Other* reinforces this element, by introducing black women belonging to diverse generations. Her viewpoint reinforces an idea traditionally masked by the multidiverse British society. In the novel, diversity does not stand for a communal black voice; on the contrary, we must stress the singularised voice of the different black communities who live together in the United Kingdom.

The interconnected nature of race, gender, and class oppression recurs throughout the writings of black feminists. The exclusion of black women from conventional feminist movements cannot be attributed to their lack of feminist consciousness. In contrast, black feminists have long been ideologically committed to confronting the intersections of oppression; however, they have been systemically marginalised and excluded from spaces that could have facilitated this work. Black women's experiences are shaped by their inferior status within dualities that intersect. They frequently experience the harsher side of these dualities, as racism, misogyny, and classism compound one another. A cycle of oppression has been perpetuated using stereotypes depicting black women as emotionally charged and hypersexualised in order to justify their sexual abuse. Denying black women access to education and denigrating their intellectual abilities reinforces their subordinate position within society, reinforcing the alleged inferiority of the community. By denying black women autonomy and objectifying them, oppressive systems maintain dominance and perpetuate negative stereotypes. This oppressive cycle is perpetuated by contradictory structures that designate inferior positions for black women, treating them as subhuman and subjecting them to abuse and exploitation as Evaristo clearly denounces in her novel.

The writings of black feminists disclose the interconnectedness of oppression based on race, gender, and social class. Through their analysis and criticism, these intellectuals illuminate the intricate power and dominance structures that shape the experiences of black women. Recognising and opposing these interlocking forms of oppression is crucial for dismantling the structures that perpetuate inequality and advancing towards a more equitable and just society.

#### 4.2.4.3. The examination of the sociological significance: an analysis of the influence of the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class oppression

The significance of self-definition and self-evaluation, the interconnectedness of oppression and redefining culture have made significant contributions to the understanding of the experiences of black women. To achieve this purpose, black feminist thought incorporates two crucial dimensions. First, it recognises that black women's ideas have been formed and developed through ongoing dialogues across various disciplines. Second, it acknowledges the profound impact of black women's marginalised position in academia, which has not only shaped their distinctive perspectives but also contributed to the development of original ideas.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 289) introduced the concept of the "outsider within" to characterize the dual positionality of being both marginalized and privileged within the academic sphere. In the context of *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo captures this dynamic through the character of Bummi, illustrating how Black women scholars navigate academic spaces where their experiences, perspectives, and contributions are frequently overlooked or undervalued. Bummi's role as a mother is portrayed as an empowering experience, particularly in raising her daughter Carole, who defies societal expectations by excelling academically and ascending the corporate ladder despite facing the challenges of a disadvantaged background and the trauma of gang rape. Carole's initial struggles at Oxford reflect the pervasive feelings of insignificance often experienced by marginalized individuals in academic settings. Bummi's guidance encourages Carole to persevere, emphasizing the importance of confronting and overcoming systemic challenges. The narrative underscores the transformative potential of empowered motherhood in effecting social and political change, enabling women to reclaim agency and develop strengths denied to them by the constraints of patriarchal norms. The portrayal of Amma and Bummi's mothering experiences serves as an exploration of how

raising empowered children can contribute to dismantling oppressive structures and fostering positive transformations in women's lives. The status of being outsiders, as experienced by the characters in Evaristo's novel, endows them with a discerning perspective that enables the critical examination and interrogation of prevailing narratives, fostering innovative and transformative thinking. Bernardine Evaristo, through her portrayal of strong black mothers such as Amma, Bummi, and Winsome, establishes a profound connection with their resilient daughters. By treating women as unique individuals rather than conforming to stereotypical groupings, the narrative emphasizes the transcendence of marginalization, presenting an opportunity to showcase both the suffering and strength of these women. The intergenerational connections depicted underscore the importance of recognizing and understanding historical and geographical roots, aligning one's self-perception with a specific genealogy. Therefore, the novel demonstrates that the strength of black British women is intimately linked to their experiences of motherhood.

Adrienne Rich's conceptualization of motherhood, as outlined in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976):

between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution which aims at ensuring that that potential (and all women) shall remain under male control (Rich, 1976: xv).

Rich distinguishes between the potential relationship of any woman to her reproductive abilities and the institution that seeks to maintain male control over that potential. Rich argues that, in a patriarchal context, motherhood becomes a status of oppression, while the experience itself could embody a source of female power. *Girl, Woman, Other* aligns with Rich's assertion, depicting various maternal identities, including Amma, Bummi, and Winsome, whose experiences as black, single, and working women challenge traditional notions of idealized motherhood and question norms surrounding female

sexual pleasure. The novel further challenges patriarchal ideals through Winsome's unconventional extramarital affair with Lennox, her daughter Shirley's husband. Winsome's lack of guilt in this matter highlights the necessity for a more inclusive feminist discourse that addresses the diverse needs and desires of mothers, including their sexual satisfaction. The characters in the narrative, such as Amma and Bummi, do not adhere to conservative gender roles, as evidenced by Amma's lesbian identity and Bummi's same-sex affair with a friend. Their maternal strength emerges because of their defiance of traditional gender roles and their commitment to anti-sexist parenting styles. Amma, for instance, embraces collaborative parenting and accepts her daughter Yazz's personal choices, fostering an environment where Yazz can be "free, feminist, and powerful" (Evaristo, 2019: 38). Despite the complexities inherent in their roles as mothers, these women embody strength and resilience, challenging societal expectations and contributing to a more inclusive feminist discourse.

As stated by Rodríguez Magda, there are “many voices without voice, many victims without names,” and she further states, “we will not be really human as long as death is for a single woman the payment for her freedom” (Sarikaya-Şen, 2021: 10). *Girl, Woman, Other* addresses this idea by voicing twelve black excluded British women as well as by remarking their strength and empathic relations. This connection reaches its highest point at Penelope's, the only white character in the novel, meeting with Hattie, her black mother, regarding their separated lives. Penelope understands that she is adopted, which makes her feel very disappointed in her life (Evaristo, 2019: 280–84). When years pass by, Penelope becomes a grandmother, she opts for taking a DNA test to identify where her British biological parents are originally from. Nonetheless, after testing herself, Penelope realizes that she is not the pure white European she considered herself to be. In fact, she is the result of mixed descent (Evaristo, 2019: 446-50). When she meets Hattie in the farm, she experiences a revelation: “Who cares about her [Hattie's] colour?” (Evaristo, 2019: 452). More significantly, she understands that “this is not about feeling something or about speaking words” yet “this is about being together” (Evaristo, 2019: 452). By positioning black and white British women on the same level

with the mother-daughter connection developed between Penelope and Hattie, the novel emphasizes the unavoidability of human interconnection as well as its relevance for black women particularly.

Evaristo's novel emphasises the unavoidable need for human interconnection in a more general frame as well as its relevance for black women specifically. Contemporary feminism poses the need for a wider transformation together with the transmodern philosophy of relationability. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, there is a dramatization of the lives of a marginalised group of black British women, where the author legitimises them by celebrating their strength, their human interconnectedness and empathy.

#### 4.2.5. Acknowledging the importance of cultures emphasised by African American women

It is imperative to acknowledge that Bernadine Evaristo, the author under consideration, is not an African American woman or writer; rather, she is a Black British author. However, the undeniable influence of Afro-American culture is discernible in shaping her identity and literary work. Despite residing in the UK, Evaristo remains acutely attuned to the sociocultural dynamics and events unfolding in America. This attunement stands as a testament to the interconnectedness of global Black experiences and underscores the profound impact of Afro-American culture on her perspectives. This influence significantly contributes to the multiculturalism reflected in Evaristo's literary contributions. Rodríguez Magda's emphasis on the individual woman's responsibility for all women resonates within this framework, highlighting the potential for transcultural feminist discourses to articulate voices at both the local and international levels simultaneously: "the [individual] woman is responsible for all women. Additionally, within the realm of black feminist thought, efforts to underscore the significance of black women's culture emerge as a key motif. This pursuit unveils previously unexplored facets of the black female experience, revealing specific social contexts where African American women actively contribute to and disseminate their self-definitions and self-

evaluations. Such endeavours are integral for addressing the diverse oppressions faced by black women and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of their lived realities.

Amma's narrative in *Girl, Woman, Other* offers an account of resilience and triumph in the face of long-standing discrimination within the theatrical realm. Over the span of nearly four decades, Amma grapples with systemic biases that limit her opportunities in the theatre. Initially relegated to menial roles such as a slave, maid, prostitute, babysitter, or criminal, Amma encounters the added frustration of not even securing these roles. Consequently, she occupies a marginalized position on the periphery, adopting a renegade stance as she metaphorically lobbs "hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her" (Evaristo, 2019: 2). Amma's trajectory takes a transformative turn when she joins a black women's group, providing her with an avenue to connect with the shared experiences of other black and lesbian women. Within this collective, Amma explores the dimensions of being a black feminist, particularly in response to the unwelcome atmosphere within white feminist organizations. Amma's sense of being overlooked by the dominant white society, including feminists within it, undergoes a transformative shift with the premiere of her play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*. The play not only represents a significant milestone in Amma's career but also garners acclaim from mainstream audiences, marking a pivotal moment that elevates her standing within the broader cultural landscape (Evaristo, 2019: 434). This narrative arc in Amma's life within the novel exemplifies the broader theme of resilience and the transformative power of artistic expression, ultimately challenging and overcoming entrenched societal biases in the process.

In contrast to perspectives that view culture as originating solely from the unique and ahistorical values of a given community, black feminist perspectives have emphasised the historical contexts that shape specific cultural phenomena and their enduring resilience. A crucial aspect of this theme in black feminist thought is the defence of the significance of black women's culture. Black feminists place greater emphasis on the historical contexts that shape and define the resilience and agency of cultural subjects, in contrast to cultural perspectives that emphasise the distinct, ahistorical



values of a single community. Black feminists assert that the significance and value of black women's culture derive from its historical roots, tenacity, and dynamic nature since they demonstrate how they have navigated and negotiated their identities within a complex web of oppressions and forged their own paths of resistance, survival, and empowerment. By emphasising the historical dimensions of black women's culture, black feminist thought disrupts dominant narratives that frequently disregard or gloss over the nuanced experiences and contributions of black women. Bummi's perspective in the novel provides a profound reinforcement of the broader theme that women, by taking on a collective responsibility, have the potential to positively impact humanity and address global challenges. Bummi's aspirations extend beyond the conventional spheres of women's rights, encompassing a broader mission to safeguard the world from a spectrum of calamities, including environmental disasters and pollution. In her dream, Bummi envisions the establishment of a cleaning company comprising an international coalition of women from diverse regions, spanning Africa, Oceania, and the Arctic. This envisioned group of women would embark on a planetary mission to rectify environmental damage, employing mop and broom handles to expel oil companies and meticulously cleansing rivers and creeks of thick slicks of grease (Evaristo, 2019: 170–71). Bummi's dream encapsulates the idea that women, by embracing a collective responsibility, can transcend individual concerns to contribute significantly to the well-being of humanity. This perspective aligns with Rodríguez Magda's assertion that values and pursuits beneficial to women inherently hold value for humanity. Bummi's visionary outlook, therefore, serves as a narrative element within the novel, suggesting that women, through collaborative and purposeful action, possess the agency to address not only their own rights but also to actively participate in the broader stewardship of the planet for the greater good. In addition, black feminist thought has actively engaged with the social dynamics that influence black women's self-definitions and self-evaluations. Black feminists acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the unique experiences of black women from their historical, social, and economic contexts since they reveal the complex web of power relations, oppressive structures, and systems of dominance that affect their lives by analysing the specific historical economies in which

black women have existed. This viewpoint challenges narratives that reduce the experiences of black women to fixed stereotypes or essentialized notions of culture.

The character Megan/Morgan portrays the quest for self-discovery and autonomy as she distances herself from familial expectations and rejects conventional gender roles. Seeking a life not defined by the influence of others, she takes up residence in a hostel with fellow teenagers, a move that, while exacerbating her sense of aloneness amid the noise of her peers, paradoxically aligns with Rodríguez Magda's characterization of the transmodern subject, who establishes a profound connectivity with the environment through computer-mediated solitude (Evaristo, 2019: 318). In her isolation, Megan/Morgan discovers a powerful online companionship and subsequently a romantic relationship with Bibi, demonstrating that genuine connection and emotional resonance can transcend physical proximity. Their relationship evolves into a life-defining bond, illustrating the transformative potential of empathic connections. This theme of care and solidarity extends beyond Megan/Morgan's story, resonating in Yazz's supportive relationship with Waris, a Muslim hijabbed Somali woman who faces discriminatory treatment post-9/11. Yazz, witnessing the prejudiced slurs directed at Waris, expresses genuine disgust at the insults, demonstrating empathy without condescension (Evaristo, 2019: 60). This instance exemplifies the extension of attention and care, not “in a patronising way” (Evaristo, 2019: 60), from an individual friend to a transnational and transcultural dimension. The solidarity between Yazz and Waris, despite their different cultural backgrounds, becomes a source of mutual support that shields them from exclusionary forces (Gilsenan & Hansen, 2013: ix–xxvii). The novel weaves these narratives together, portraying the transformative power of empathic relationships that transcend physical boundaries and cultural differences, ultimately highlighting the potential for genuine human connection to overcome societal prejudices and foster inclusive bonds.

Exploration of the third theme in black feminist thought emphasises the ongoing effort to establish the significance of black women's culture. Black feminists have provided new insights and

perspectives on the experiences of black women, while recognising the social forces at work that influence their self-definitions and self-evaluations. Their thought challenges essentialist viewpoints and celebrates the resilience, agency, and cultural contributions of black women by emphasising the historical context and its impact on black women's cultural expressions. They have, through their scholarship, not only increased our comprehension of black women's experiences but also paved the way for greater recognition, respect, and appreciation of their distinct cultural identities.

#### 4.2.7. Conclusion

Evaristo writes the history of women invisibilised by the patriarchal structure of history since she questions the narrative as well as its legitimacy. In this way, she reconstructs the hidden history of black women in Britain by arguing that the classical depictive systems in literature had one focus centred around the male subject. By positioning black and white British women on the same level with the mother-daughter connection developed between Penelope and Hattie, the novel emphasises the unavoidability of human interconnection as well as its relevance for black women in particular. Contemporary feminism appears to require a great evolution, considering the transmodern philosophy of interconnectedness.

Bernardine Evaristo, through her lens that is deeply attuned to Afro-American, Black British, and multicultural perspectives, paints a vivid portrait of a specific London landscape within *Girl, Woman, Other*. The intricacies of multiculturalism unfold against the backdrop of the city, capturing the diverse experiences of Afro-American and Black British characters navigating their identities within a particular London milieu. Evaristo's exploration of these identities is not just a narrative choice but a deliberate effort to portray the multicultural society that defines contemporary London. Evaristo weaves elements connecting her work to Afro-American feminist movements and African feminisms. The echoes of empowerment, solidarity, and the shared struggles of women resonate with

the ethos of Afro-American feminist thought. Simultaneously, her engagement with African feminisms reflects a commitment to a broader, global dialogue on gender and identity. Evaristo's nuanced portrayal of London and her thematic connections to feminist movements showcase her ability to bridge geographical and cultural gaps, offering a profound commentary on the complexities of identity within a multicultural urban setting.

*Girl, Woman, Other* has a hybrid style (prose-poetry) in which long sentences and eschewing punctuation are utilised. This transmodern text narrates the stories from the XXIst and XXIst centuries happening in Africa, the Caribbean, America, and Britain. Evaristo's novel follows transtemporal and transnational patterns in which three key aspects emerge: diversity and connectedness. This way, Evaristo addresses the genealogy of black British women, more specifically, black British women who are marginalised and interconnected at the same time. There are also several geographical spaces/places mentioned in the novel. Bernadine Evaristo considers that this is fusion fiction, that is, a very free-flowing form, which can be seen with long sentences and the absence of full stops. Evaristo's work represents a networked novel of the limit in which Transmodernity from a black feminist perspective, shows values of interconnectedness, transnationalism, and accelerated temporality. Evaristo addresses the singularities and multidimensionality of excluded black British women's lives since her novel shows stories of vulnerable and strong black British characters. On the one hand, they are silent and negative black British women whose resilience challenges patriarchy. As a result, they show a strong and empathetic sense of solidarity among themselves. On the other hand, they also represent strong intergenerational legacies by embodying maternal empowerment.

The theory of intersectionality is a way to explore the diverse forms of exclusion and oppression that intertwine to form powerful hegemonic systems that represent one of the biggest challenges for contemporary feminism. This section sheds light on the intersectionality that is present in the identities of the black women in Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. By analysing intersectionality theoretically, supported by Anna Carastathis's seminal ideas of Kimberlé Crenshaw, an exploration

of Evaristo's work provides evidence for the presence of the four key aspects of intersectionality, that is, simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity, to understand their correlation with race, class, gender, and sexuality (Carastathis, 2016: 25). In this way, the recognition of women's hyphenated identities in Britain becomes legitimised. This term changed the path of black feminism since it expanded its reach, transforming it into a fundamental part of any feminist discourse. Black feminism was born due to a social and academic movement to eradicate racist, classist, and sexist ideologies. The main aim of the black feminist movement was to create a theory addressing the issues of oppression of race, gender, and class affecting black women. The lack of agreement and comprehension amongst the feminist movements of women of colour and white women provoked the structure of the new discourse of intersectionality, which attempted to shed light on the reality that black women always had to fight abuse due to race, class, and gender simultaneously.

Evaristo's strategy is different since she shows a feminist concern regarding the traditional exploration of sexual identity that has represented an instrument for the exclusion of women of colour. She develops awareness regarding conventional literary traditions, which tend to equalise women under the myths of romantic love, motherhood, and femininity. Evaristo's fictional frame addresses black women's struggle in Britain and intends to help them. By freeing black women in her polyphonic novel, Evaristo seeks authenticity in their voices so that they can delete controlling images that have historically objectified and dehumanised them.

*Girl, Woman, Other* readdresses this point by legitimising black women from different generations. Evaristo establishes a correlation between strong black mothers and their resilient daughters. For this purpose, she considers them as individuals by breaking with ideas linked to stereotypical groups. In this way, she conveys a sense of overcoming their marginalisation, which allows the disclosure of both suffering and resilience. The possibility of creating intergenerational relationships strengthens the relevance of identifying and comprehending a single historical and geographical tradition to regulate self-perception with a different genealogy. Therefore, socio-

political change is plausible by operating from a model of education that can develop the competences that patriarchal motherhood denied women.

Globalisation means a period of transformation, transience, and accelerated time in a complex and fast changing world in which subaltern peoples and social minorities, such as women, are made invisible or subalternised. In this way, they become relegated to a state of exclusion and dominance. *Girl, Woman, Other* criticises a system of what was considered universal but was the perspective of the powerful ones. In this way, the novel manages to "recover the voices (of women) that did not manage to enter the canon and challenge the criteria of that canon if necessary" (Rodríguez Magda, 2019: 23-25).

Transmodernity attempts to transform the conditions of exclusion, subordination, exploitation, and violence that women still suffer nowadays. By alluding to a plural and inclusive world, Evaristo uses transmodernism since her aim was to show that sisterhood and sorority contribute to supporting marginalised women in their healing process so that they can feel understood by relating to the suffering of other excluded women.

The experiences of black women, who frequently find themselves on the periphery of a society that initially marginalises them, demonstrate the immense pressure they face in their pursuit of acceptability within a more powerful and dominant community. In this context, individuals from diverse backgrounds can gain insight into the experiences of black women as social outsiders, particularly those who have never felt the discomfort of social marginalisation and have benefited from the privileges associated with white male insiderism.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The themes of violence against women and the legitimisation of women becomes evident in the works of Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo, which have been explored in this dissertation. By developing an interdisciplinary analysis of their works, this study has shed light on the multifaceted essence of violence against women and its repercussion on women's lives. This investigation has also examined how these women challenge social norms by empowering women with their production.

By stretching the boundaries of conventional storytelling and representation, these authors collectively contribute to a broader discussion on violence against women. Their works challenge societal structures that perpetuate violence and oppression by disrupting dominant narratives. They provide a forum for marginalised voices, amplify women's experiences, and advocate for social change. In addition, this thesis demonstrates that these literary works not only cast light on the harsh realities of violence against women, but also serve as a means of empowerment and legitimisation for women. These authors contribute to the ongoing fight for gender equality and the abolition of oppressive systems by giving voice to their experiences, challenging stereotypes, and presenting alternative narratives.

As future research and activism in the field of gender studies continue, it is essential to further investigate and analyse the works of other women authors and artists who address similar themes. This study lays the groundwork for future research into the representation of violence against women and the legitimisation of women in literature, theatre, and other artistic mediums. Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angelica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo have made significant contributions to the comprehension of violence against women and the legitimisation of women through their works. They challenge societal norms, amplify marginalised voices, and inspire social change through their artistic expressions. This study emphasises the significance of their work in nurturing a more inclusive and equitable society.

Beatriz Cabur's innovative dramaturgy intersects with the digital sphere, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about this constantly evolving art form. In her theatrical proposals, technology takes precedence over traditional narrative and character-driven approaches. Her works traverse the landscape of contemporary Spanish dramaturgy, offering novel perspectives and stretching the envelope. Cabur recognises telepresence as a valuable resource that facilitates experimentation and promotes connections between distant realities. This dynamic element enables the creator to investigate new possibilities and assume responsibility for cross-boundary communication. Through her performances, Cabur encourages the audience to confront and combat violence against women and girls worldwide. The acknowledgment, visibility, and legitimisation of women's suffering are crucial measures in effecting change. Cabur emphasises the need to prioritise the safety of women by devising strategies to resolve women's pain expressions and by promoting collective action.

To make tangible progress, it is necessary to focus on the victims, identifying and confronting the stigmatisation of femininity and the associated mental health issues affecting women. By instituting educational initiatives and enacting pertinent legislation, it is possible to develop solutions to address these urgent problems. The dramaturgy of Beatriz Cabur exemplifies the potential of theatre as a medium for social engagement and transformation. Through her innovative use of technology and unwavering commitment to feminist perspectives, Cabur contributes to the ongoing evolution of Spanish dramaturgy, inspiring others to reimagine the limits of theatrical expression and bring about positive social change.

Angélica Liddell emerges as a highly influential and representative playwright in contemporary Spanish drama, renowned for her professional integrity, exceptional talent, and unconventional style of expression. Liddell, a prominent figure in the post-dramatic theatre scene, uses deceptive fictitious spaces to captivate and challenge her audience, reflecting an ethical and political lens through her works. The use of the first person in Liddell's plays is a potent device for dismantling gender roles and addressing masculine privilege, emphasising her rejection of societal



norms. Her personal life and artistic creations are intertwined, further obscuring the distinction between reality and performance. Liddell's unapologetic and visceral approach may not adhere to political decorum, but it authentically reveals her truth, captivating audiences with turbulent narratives that explore dark desires.

Liddell's success as a theatre director demonstrates her dedication to artistic integrity and the revitalisation of Spanish drama, despite confronting financial obstacles and being relegated to alternative theatres without government subsidies. She aspires to inspire social change by means of productions that are intellectually stimulating and visually enticing, often integrating elements of multimedia. Liddell's plays demand audience participation, evoking a social commitment on both sides and demonstrating that concise phrases can have the same impact as ornate stage effects. The works of Liddell address affective, social, and political issues in an effort to address human issues and generate social solutions. By critiquing the social repercussions of catastrophes such as the Serbian conflict and by challenging prevalent notions of motherhood and spatial-temporal dimensions, she challenges prevalent societal constructs. Furthermore, Liddell emphasises the significance of not defining humanity solely by the desires of a select few privileged individuals.

Through her unconventional narratives, Liddell subverts stereotypes and confronts uncomfortable truths, casting light on taboo subjects such as incest, pederasty, murder, and necrophilia. Her works unabashedly compel the affluent audience, revealing a mixture of conformity and ignorance. Within the context of contemporary European dramaturgy, the theatre of Angélica Liddell stands out as a remarkable and timely innovation. By combining her alter ego with her characters, Liddell's dramaturgy explores real and contemporary sociopolitical conflicts, bridging the divide between artistic expression and social activism. Her ultimate objective is to contribute to a more just and equal society by encouraging her audience to confront the limits of human mediocrity and aspire for greater justice and equality. The contributions of Angélica Liddell to the field of theatre demonstrate the capacity of art to challenge conventions, reveal truths, and inspire social

transformation. She has left an indelible impression on both the artistic and social realms with her distinctive voice and commitment to pushing boundaries.

The play *Blasted* by Sarah Kane is a potent feminist critique of violence against women and the patriarchal structures that perpetuate it. Through the portrayal of a young woman who becomes the victim of sexual and physical violence, Kane challenges dominant narratives that rationalise such acts and reveals the unequal power dynamics between men and women that underlie them. In the play, Kane uses rituals to demonstrate how oppression and violence against women can be rooted in larger cultural structures that maintain male dominance and female subordination. *Blasted* is a reaction against the Thatcherite values prevalent in the United Kingdom during the 1990s and offers a sociopolitical dimension that reflects the societal context of the time, which can be extrapolated to acts of violence against women and girls still happening these days. Hence, Liddell provides evidence for the normalisation of violence against women and interpellates the audience's moral and sensitivity to act upon its eradication.

The play rejects the notion that men have the right to possess and control women's bodies by depicting the horrors of war and rape to emphasise that violence is a destructive force that impacts everyone, regardless of gender or social standing. Kane's depiction of violence is crude, unsettling, and purposefully difficult to comprehend, with the intention of provoking audience discomfort and shedding light on the reality of such barbarism. As long as society continues to be entertained by depictions of violence without taking action to address it, Kane's plays will remain relevant. This indifference to acts of violence is reflective of current responses to global conflicts in which individuals passively ingest news articles without actively engaging or working towards resolution. The plays of Kane, including *Blasted*, serve as a theatrical reflection of societal realities, transcending historical and political contexts to address the universal conflicts inherent to human existence. Kane confronts the audience through her artistic manifestations with the ugliness of human nature and the daily ethical responsibilities of individuals. The distress spectators experience serves as a reminder of the barbarism present in society and demands active participation rather than passive observation.

The works of Kane serve as a mirror, exposing the reader or viewer to brutal realities that are frequently overlooked or disregarded, thereby challenging society to confront and address violence head-on.

Ultimately, Sarah Kane's contribution to the theatrical landscape rests in her examination of agony, sexual assault, and women's oppression. Her works, such as *Blasted*, provide a critical prism for examining these issues and challenging cultural and social norms that perpetuate women's subjugation. Kane encourages a resilient and transformative perspective, imploring society to actively work towards dismantling patriarchal systems and promoting equality and justice for all, by exploring these difficult and unsettling topics.

The literary practise of Caroline Bergvall challenges conventional notions of language, culture, and feminism. Bergvall disrupts the dominance of national language and monolingual culture by incorporating foreign elements and generating a distorted, disarticulated English. Her work touches on a variety of topics, such as the politics of difference and solidarity, decolonisation, feminist practise, cross-cultural exchange, and the connection between feminist organising and social movements. Bergvall's investigation of sexual violence against women, asylum, voice, and testimony reveals a profound analysis of institutional failures and the potential contributions of the arts and humanities to addressing these urgent issues. She aims to effect positive change and transcend conventional boundaries through her experimental forms of artistic expression, inviting audiences to engage with alternative perspectives and challenge established norms. The poetic practise and initiatives of Caroline Bergvall contribute to a broader understanding of language, feminism, and the effectiveness of artistic expression. She challenges established norms and encourages audiences to reconsider conventional boundaries through her inventive use of language and exploration of urgent social issues. Bergvall's artwork exemplifies the power of art to inspire transformation, promote dialogue, and pave the way for a more inclusive and dynamic cultural landscape.

*Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi is a remarkable and original African literary work that challenges traditional narratives by incorporating humour, frivolity, and the plural pronoun "we."

Emezi explores trauma, violence, survival, and the agency of Nigerian women and girls in this novel, presenting a new discourse on Nigerian female bodies and demonstrating the strength of feminism in Global South literature. Emezi's innovative approach is exemplified by their investigation of the *ogbanje* cosmology and their willingness to tackle taboo subjects such as mental health and sexuality. Emezi draws attention to the need for transversal approaches to understanding gender differences and challenges conventional notions of identity by taking descriptive liberties and integrating supernatural elements. The novel's freedom of style and use of the author's native language immerse the reader in a multicultural dimension, emphasising the significance of textual context and nurturing multicultural awareness.

*Freshwater* is a decolonial text that challenges Western ideologies and investigates queer identities within the Igbo cosmology. Emezi defends the significance of Igbo ontology, arguing that it transcends "folklore and superstition" and provides a framework for understanding physics, science, and spirituality. The novel challenges traditional conceptions of gender and identity by destabilising heteronormative notions and situating homosexuality within Igbo spirituality. Moreover, *Freshwater* functions as a catalyst for critical discussions on contemporary issues and as a reference point in the global present, which is marked by migration and insecurity. It provokes readers to ponder metaphysical identities, innovative spirituality, and the true meaning of home, which is portrayed as a voyage rather than a final destination. *Freshwater* not only contributes to the richness of African literature, but it also pushes the boundaries of literary discourse by providing a novel and thought-provoking perspective on gender, identity, and spirituality. Through their narratives, Emezi challenges societal norms, encourages dialogue, and invites readers to engage with complex themes and narratives that resonate well beyond the novel's pages.

Bernadine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* depicts the lives and experiences of marginalised black British women in a complex and potent transmodern narrative. Through its interconnected stories, the novel celebrates the strength, familial relationships, hybridity, and empathy of these women, emphasising the significance of human interconnection and its relevance

not only for black women, but for all of society. As evidenced by the mother-daughter relationship between Penelope and Hattie, Evaristo places black and white British women on an equal footing, demonstrating the transformative power of their connections. The novel embraces the transmodern philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of all beings by investigating the themes of diversity, connectedness, and relationality.

*Girl, Woman, Other* employs a distinctive narrative structure, with four sets of three intertwined characters representing various generations and origins. This networked approach exemplifies transmodernity from the perspective of a black feminist person by emphasising the values of interconnectedness, transnationalism, and accelerated temporality. Through the experiences of twelve women, Evaristo aims to expose and challenge the interlocking structures of race, gender, and sex that shape their lives. Transmodernity emerges as a transformative force with the aim of dismantling the exclusion, subordination, exploitation, and violence that women continue to confront in the present day. The novel advocates for a more inclusive and equitable society by shedding light on the intricate intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class, and genealogy.

In addition, the analysis of women's voices arises as a crucial aspect of this research. The works of Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo provide women with potent platforms for reclaiming their narratives and asserting their presence in the discourse on violence against women. These authors delve deeply into the experiences of women, giving expression to their suffering, resiliency, and aspirations. By means of their writings, they contest the historical suppression and marginalisation of women, creating spaces where their stories can be heard and acknowledged. By amplifying women's voices, these authors not only expose the prevalence of violence against women, but also emphasise the diversity of women's experiences within this context. Their artistic expressions cultivate a transcendent sense of shared humanity among readers by fostering empathy, comprehension, and unity.

In doing so, these works contribute to a larger movement that aims to deconstruct patriarchal structures and establish a more equitable society. These women encourage readers to query

entrenched beliefs, confront uncomfortable truths, and actively pursue gender justice. In addition, they challenge the status quo and inspire others to join the ongoing fight for gender equality by providing voice to the silenced. By emphasising their perspectives and experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of this issue and devise more nuanced strategies for addressing and eliminating violence against women. The inclusion of women's narratives in the works of Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo is fundamental for shedding light on the reality of violence against women that is shown through the female gaze.

These writers empower women through their art, challenge societal norms, and inspire social change. By amplifying women's voices, we cultivate a more inclusive and egalitarian society in which the experiences and perspectives of every individual are valued and respected. This study has cast light on the complexities of violence against women and its profound effects on the lives of women through an interdisciplinary analysis of their writings. In addition, it has investigated how these authors defy societal conventions and empower women through their artistic works. By challenging the boundaries of conventional storytelling and representation, these authors contribute to a broader conversation about violence against women. By disrupting dominant narratives, their works challenge the social structures that perpetuate violence and oppression. They advocate for social change, provide a platform for marginalised voices, and amplify women's experiences.

Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that these literary works serve as a source of empowerment and validation for women in addition to shedding light on the brutal realities of violence against women. By giving expression to their experiences, challenging stereotypes, and presenting alternative narratives, they contribute to the ongoing fight for gender equality and the elimination of oppressive systems.

As future research and activism in the field of gender studies advance, it is crucial to investigate and analyse the works of other authors and artists who explore similar themes. This study

provides the groundwork for future research into the depiction of violence against women and the legitimisation of women in literature, theatre, and other art forms.

These writers depict women as complex individuals with multifaceted identities, challenging the often-imposed monolithic and essentialist view. They present narratives that defy stereotypes and emphasise the diverse lived experiences of women from a variety of backgrounds. In doing so, they not only address the particular forms of violence experienced by various groups of women, but also emphasise the interconnectedness of these experiences within larger systems of oppression. For instance, the novel *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi examines the violence experienced by non-binary people, casting light on the unique challenges they face in a society that fails to recognise and validate their identities. Similarly, *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo also champions the diverse experiences of Black women, recognising the intersecting oppressions they face and the resilience they exhibit in the face of systemic violence. These authors challenge essentialist conceptions of womanhood and promote a broader comprehension of violence against women. They demonstrate that violence against women is not a singular, isolated problem, but rather intersects with other forms of oppression, resulting in distinct experiences and vulnerabilities for women of various backgrounds.

Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi, and Bernadine Evaristo elucidate the significance of women in the discourse on violence against them with their respective works. By recognising the trauma of women's experiences, these writers present nuanced depictions that challenge stereotypes and elevate the perspectives of marginalised women. Recognising the interconnected nature of oppressions and advocating for the rights and experiences of women and girls from diverse backgrounds is fundamental to focus on the preventative stage of the matter, hence advocating for the eradication of violence against women and girls around the world.





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## 7. APPENDIXES

### a. Beatriz Cabur

#### i. *Goodbye, Mother* (2020)

Beatriz Cabur's *Goodbye, Mother* is a potent and socially pertinent play that confronts the issue of femicide, gives voice to the silenced women, and sheds light on the experiences of those left behind. The play examines the profoundly troubling phenomenon of violence against women and its devastating effects on women and communities. *Goodbye, Mother* amplifies the perspective of a woman who is suffering violence, leading to a femicide on behalf of her husband. The play emphasises the systemic issues and societal factors that contribute to the prevalence of such violence, thereby raising awareness and facilitating a dialogue about this pressing matter. In addition to lending voice to the victims, Cabur's play focuses on those left behind: the friends, families, and communities impacted by these tragedies. *Goodbye, Mother* is a stark reminder of the ongoing conflict for gender equality and the urgent need to address violence against women. By addressing the brutal reality of femicide, Cabur's play challenges societal norms and encourages a critical examination of the systems and attitudes that perpetuate violence against women. It is a courageous and powerful play that amplifies the perspectives of a femicide victim, shedding light on a pressing issue that requires attention and action. The play represents a call to address the root causes of violence against women and to unite in opposition to this lamentable loss of life.

#### ii. *Childbirth-19* (2021)

Beatriz Cabur's *Childbirth-19* is an important play that analyses the experience of obstetric violence of a woman giving birth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The play illuminates the unique challenges and uncertainties that expectant mothers confront during childbirth. Cabur deftly captures the emotional toll of isolation and dread that accompany the protagonist's childbirth at hospital during

the pandemic. This play is a powerful reminder of the impact of obstetric violence on one of the most vulnerable moments of a woman's existence.

*iii. Nefertiti and PIII (2015)*

The play *Nefertiti and PIII* by Beatriz Cabur juxtaposes the stories of Nefertiti, an ancient Egyptian monarch, and a modern archaeologist. Through these two characters, the play investigates the pervasive influence of "The Men's Club" on society and poses questions regarding the possibility of reclaiming a more balanced and equitable world. The play opens with a depiction of how "The Men's Club" dominates the world, providing a severe illustration of power dynamics and gender inequality. Nevertheless, the narrative takes an intriguing turn as it delves into the past, highlighting Nefertiti's reign as an instance in which the balance of power was distinct. The play implies, through Nefertiti's story, that there was a time when women had more power and influence in society. As the modern archaeologist delves into the past and uncovers Nefertiti's story, the play raises the issue of whether a more egalitarian society can be reclaimed. By drawing parallels between the past and the present, Cabur encourages the audience to consider the possibility of change and the role that individuals can play in reshaping societal norms. *Nefertiti and PIII* represents an examination of power dynamics, gender roles, and the possibility of social transformation. Through the parallel narratives of Nefertiti and the contemporary archaeologist, the play invites the audience to consider the possibility of creating a more equitable future and to query the prevailing power structures.

*iv. Breakfast at Daddy's (2016)*

The play *Breakfast at Daddy's* by Beatriz Cabur examines the delicate relationship between a woman in her early thirties and her father as they navigate a significant decision. The story begins in the father's kitchen, where they are patiently discussing the woman's abortion. At first glimpse, the father appears to support his daughter's decision wholeheartedly. The play explores the intricate dynamics between the two characters, highlighting the tension and unspoken feelings that lie beneath their

placid exterior. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that there is more to their interactions than meets the eye. The young woman begins to question the sincerity of her father's encouragement, wondering if his outward display of encouragement accurately depicts his inner feelings. Through touching dialogue and personal moments, Cabur examines women's decisions regarding their own bodies as well as the infantilisation of women when deciding about their lives. The play explores both the woman and her father's inner conflicts, revealing their vulnerabilities, doubts, and anxieties. It examines the impact of such decisions on familial relationships and individual identities, challenging societal expectations and norms surrounding reproductive choices.

v. *The Mind-Blowing Shrinking Woman* (2017)

Beatriz Cabur's *The Mind-Blowing Shrinking Woman* is a play that traces a woman's metaphorical voyage from being a normal-sized individual to becoming almost imperceptibly small and voiceless due to being a victim of violence against women. The metaphor of the shrinking woman is a potent representation of the ways in which women's experiences and concerns can be minimised, infantilised or disregarded. Cabur's play offers a compelling examination of the treatment of women, compelling the audience to consider the complexities and detrimental consequences of societal attitudes towards women's experiences of trauma.

b. Angélica Liddell

i. *La casa de la fuerza* (2011)

Liddell writes about the desire to love and be loved as a consoling relief from the emptiness that always accompanies humans in the face of profound pain (and dread) caused by solitude and the passage of time. With the violence of drug trafficking and the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez as a backdrop, in a beautiful (and wounded) Mexico, Liddell expresses her opposition to a threatening and violent sexism in a world where women remain victims even after their deaths. *La casa de la fuerza*

interweaves Mexican songs with a shocking list of crimes in Ciudad Juárez and a series of terrifying confessions to create a mosaic of screams and voices that attempts to capture the dread of solitude and death.

*ii. Belgrado (2008)*

*Belgrado* revolves around the capital of Serbia during the funeral of Slobodan Milosevic and the tragic events of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The play is a meditation on the cruelty and violence inherent in human nature, and it explores the relationship between personal suffering and collective tragedies. It is set in Belgrade during the funeral of Slobodan Milosevic, the former Serbian president who was on trial for war crimes at the time of his death. The funeral represents a backdrop to explore the relationship between personal suffering and collective tragedies, with a focus on the war-torn region of the Balkans. In Angélica Liddell's play *Belgrado*, a war correspondent, who also happens to be the son of a Nobel Prize-winning author, chronicles his father's experiences during the Balkans conflict. The reporter's voyage becomes illuminating and transformative because of their conversations and encounters. As the reporter ventures deeper into the conflict, he is confronted with the harsh realities of war and its devastating effects on individuals and society. Through the lens of the conflict in the Balkans, Liddell examines the broader themes of the inherent darkness that resides within us all. She emphasises the closeness of the "genes of war" to our lives and draws attention to the pervasive misogyny, Catholicism, and masculine chauvinism within our society. In this reflection, Liddell depicts life as an oratory of terror, where daily experiences are tainted by violence and the corruption of human nature. The play challenges the audience to investigate the dark undercurrents that permeate society and the shared responsibility we all must confront and eradicate these destructive forces. *Belgrado* provides a powerful and thought-provoking examination of the human condition, shedding light on the complexities of conflict, society, and the inherent capacity for both transformation and corruption. Through the intimate journey of the war reporter and his father, the

play inspires a deeper comprehension of the need for compassion, empathy, and change in our collective consciousness.

c. Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995)

Sarah Kane's debut play delves into an abusive relationship between Ian, a 45-year-old journalist, and Cate, his 21-year-old ex-girlfriend. Set in a Leeds hotel room, the play begins with a domestic scene that escalates into a metaphorical state of civil war between the couple. The destructive nature of their relationship becomes evident when Ian commits an act of rape against Cate. The emergence of a soldier symbolizes the intensification of the conflict between Ian and Cate. As the play progresses, Ian becomes the target of extreme abuse inflicted by the soldier. He endures unimaginable suffering, including rape, blindness, and starvation. The play unflinchingly portrays graphic scenes that explore themes of sexual violence, self-harm, and degradation. Throughout the chaos and brutality, moments of connection and respite briefly appear. Cate returns to the scene, offering Ian food, which carries a sense of compassion amid the devastation. These moments highlight the complex dynamics and potential for empathy even in the darkest situations. The play takes a deeply critical stance on power dynamics, gender roles, and the devastating consequences of abuse. It confronts the audience with uncomfortable truths about violence and its impact on individuals and society.

d. Caroline Bergvall's *Drift* (2014)

In Bergvall's work *Drift*, Anglo-Saxon and early mediaeval North Sea literature has had a significant influence on the full release of texts and studies, as well as a report on a tragic migrant passage of the Mediterranean that was let to drift despite being seen by numerous radars. *Drift* consists of a lengthy essay, two ink drawing sequences, abstract maps on black pages, and three lyrical sequences. It is also a live performance that transports the audience member or reader through time and space, where languages collide, live percussion meets live vocal, and the past and present coexist. Tales of exile

and sea passage from the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon eras reappear to cast a shadow over the tragic deaths and lives lost on today's Mediterranean crossings. Each component of this piece is combined and shaped into a cohesive, occasionally almost archaic sensation of sailing through the historical seas.

e. Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018)

*Freshwater* explores the life of Ada, a young woman who, like the author Akwaeke Emezi, is the daughter of a Nigerian father and a Tamil mother from southeastern India and a portion of Sri Lanka. Saul, Ada's father, is a physician, while Saachi, Ada's mother, is a nurse. The narrative offers a distinct perspective on Ada's existence through her multiple identities. *Freshwater* reveals the difficult life of Ada, who is also a Nigerian ogbanje born in the body of a girl, with her deity mother Ala. Throughout the Bildungsroman, Ada's personal development progresses from naiveté to the gradual realisation of her unique situation, which is distinguished by suffering and a dogged spiritual quest.

f. Bernadine Evaristo's *Woman, Girl, Other* (2019)

In her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernadine Evaristo offers readers a broader perspective by delving into the lives of twelve black British women in London. Through the characters' narratives, Evaristo encourages a personal engagement with the passage of time, allowing them to articulate thoughts, emotions, and narratives rooted in both the present and the past. The novel's unique form combines verse and prose, punctuated by queries and exclamations, and avoids traditional punctuation on purpose, reflecting Evaristo's perspective on the nature of self-narration. Each of the twelve primary characters narrates their introduction in the first person, reflecting on their relationships with their families, mothers, and society. Evaristo depicts the emotions, intentions, and motivations underlying each of the twelve women's actions, as well as their concealed secrets and silences. *Girl, Woman, Other* is a story of connection and disconnection with society, other people, and oneself. By recounting the lives of these women, a truth arises that transcends ethnicity, religion, social class, and

culture. Throughout the narrative, Evaristo exposes the intricate interplay between these social elements, demonstrating their interdependence, autonomy and therefore the conformation of their unique identities.

## 8. ANEXO

### 8.1. Introducción

La presente tesis doctoral surge de la necesidad de abordar la problemática de la invisibilización de las mujeres como parte de un movimiento más amplio que conforma las violencias de género que oprimen y afectan a las mujeres y niñas en la actual sociedad heteropatriarcal. Este tema se sitúa en el campo de las humanidades con perspectiva feminista, abarcando también aspectos relacionados con la sociología. En particular, se busca investigar y analizar las intersecciones de identidad en cuanto a las violencias de género y las voces de las mujeres en la literatura anglófona e hispánica contemporánea.

En este contexto, la importancia de la cotutela internacional en la Università di Siena, Italia, se erige como un factor fundamental en el desarrollo de este trabajo. La Università di Siena, reconocida por su excelencia académica y su destacado enfoque investigativo, brinda una plataforma ideal para el desarrollo de esta tesis doctoral. Esta experiencia proporciona una oportunidad única para enriquecer el proceso de investigación. La interacción con personas expertas internacionales, la inmersión en un entorno académico diverso y la posibilidad de acceder a recursos y redes de colaboración ampliadas, constituyen un escenario propicio para el desarrollo de la investigación y el logro de resultados de alto impacto.

Además de mi investigación en la Università di Siena en Italia, también he tenido la invaluable oportunidad de colaborar en los seminarios "Humor y Feminismo" organizados por el departamento de Cultures Hispaniques et Hispano-Américaines (CHISPA) de la UFR Langues et Civilisations en la Université Bordeaux Montaigne, Francia. Estos seminarios, organizados por el Département des études ibériques, ibéro-américaines et méditerranéennes, han sido espacios de encuentro y debate con académicas y especialistas en el campo. Durante estos encuentros, he tenido la oportunidad de participar en ponencias relacionadas con mi investigación, lo cual ha sido fundamental para enriquecer el resultado final de esta tesis doctoral. La participación en estos seminarios ha permitido



un diálogo interdisciplinario y una visión más amplia sobre el humor y el feminismo, contribuyendo significativamente a mi comprensión de las identidades de las mujeres en la literatura contemporánea.

Junto con la investigación realizada en el marco de esta tesis doctoral, he creado e implementado un proyecto complementario titulado "Jóvenes y Violencia: Construyendo Puentes, Derribando Barreras" que surge como una aplicación práctica de los resultados obtenidos. Este proyecto fue financiado por la Diputación de Jaén y pude desarrollarlo gracias al apoyo y acogimiento de la organización Colectivo Gentes de Jaén, tras mi participación en un voluntariado europeo en La Maison de l'Europe en Agen, Francia. El voluntariado, realizado en el marco del programa European Solidarity Corps, se centró en la erradicación de la discriminación en la Unión Europea. Este proyecto se enfocó en la prevención y erradicación de la violencia contra las mujeres y niñas, el bullying y el ciberacoso. Fue implementado en cuatro centros de educación secundaria en la provincia de Jaén. El objetivo principal era sensibilizar y concienciar al estudiantado sobre estas problemáticas, promoviendo una cultura de respeto, equidad y no violencia. A través de talleres, charlas y actividades interactivas, se buscaba brindar herramientas al alumnado para identificar y enfrentar situaciones de violencia, fomentando la construcción de relaciones sanas y el respeto mutuo. Este proyecto fue un complemento práctico a los hallazgos y reflexiones obtenidos en la tesis doctoral, permitiendo llevar a la acción los conocimientos adquiridos. La experiencia de trabajar directamente con el estudiantado y con el profesorado y poder contribuir en la prevención y erradicación de la violencia contra las mujeres y niñas, el bullying y el ciberacoso fue enriquecedora y significativa. A través de esta iniciativa, pude ver de cerca la importancia de generar conciencia y promover el cambio desde edades tempranas, creando una sociedad más justa y equitativa.

Esta disertación se enfoca en el análisis de la violencia contra las mujeres en novelas y obras de teatro anglófonas e hispánicas. El territorio a explorar abarca un campo de estudio amplio donde se examinan las representaciones y experiencias de las mujeres en estas obras, poniendo especial atención en los tipos de violencias que sufren más de la mitad de la población mundial así como en la crítica al sistema heteropatriarcal que las sustenta.

El estudio se lleva a cabo mediante el método del close reading o lectura exhaustiva de las obras seleccionadas. El análisis textual detallado de obras literarias, teatrales y performativas centrado en sus cualidades formales y temáticas. A través de este enfoque, se delinear los patrones de violencia que sufren las mujeres en las obras, analizando las temáticas recurrentes y los mecanismos de expresión utilizados por las autoras para visibilizar las voces femeninas. Además, se complementa con entrevistas a las autoras y expertas en voces de las mujeres, permitiendo una comprensión más profunda de los mensajes y las perspectivas presentes en la literatura contemporánea.

Estos apartados incluyen: revisión bibliográfica, metodología de investigación, análisis empírico de las obras seleccionadas con su perteniente discusión y conclusiones. Las obras literarias seleccionadas se analizan en tres bloques. El primer bloque aborda a las autoras hispanistas Beatriz Cabur y Angélica Liddell. En primer lugar, las obras de Beatriz Cabur analizadas son *Nefertiti and PIII* (2015), *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2016), *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), *Goodbye, Mother* (2020) y *Childbirth-19* (2021). En el mismo primer bloque, las obras seleccionadas de Angélica Liddell son *Belgrado* (2008) y *La casa de la fuerza* (2011). En segundo lugar, el segundo bloque aborda a las autoras anglófonas Sarah Kane y Caroline Bergvall. La obra seleccionada de Sarah Kane es *Blasted* (1995) y la obra estudiada de Caroline Bergvall es *Drift* (2012). En tercer lugar, el tercer bloque aborda a las autoras anglófonas, considerando el afropolitanismo y el cosmopolitismo de Akwaeke Emezi y Bernadine Evaristo. La obra analizada de Akwaeke Emezi es *Freshwater* (2018) y la novela seleccionada de Bernadine Evaristo es *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). Cada uno de estos apartados contribuye al desarrollo y la comprensión del tema central, ofreciendo un análisis exhaustivo respaldado por la literatura científica y los datos obtenidos en el proceso de investigación.

La investigación se orienta a destacar la relevancia de la empatía como fortaleza y no como debilidad, así como la importancia de la sororidad y las redes de apoyo para las mujeres. Asimismo, se busca distinguir un empoderamiento femenino real.

La presente tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo general abordar la problemática de la invisibilización de las mujeres y explorar cómo se sienten ellas legitimadas para verbalizar un mensaje público. A través del análisis de obras literarias y audiovisuales, se busca examinar la fuerza y la contribución de las obras contemporáneas en la legitimación de estas identidades. Para lograrlo, se plantean los siguientes objetivos específicos:

- 1 Investigar cómo las mujeres artistas pueden dar forma a sus identidades fuera de la commodificación, considerando la transformación de sus cuerpos e identidades en productos comercializables;
- 2 Evaluar la posibilidad de subvertir las identidades creativas dentro de la commodificación, analizando cómo las mujeres artistas construyen su personalidad pública y su trabajo;
- 3 Reflexionar sobre la venta de identidades anónimas como una forma dañina de mercantilización de las etiquetas de identidad, contrastándolo con obras contemporáneas que promueven la escucha activa de las voces individuales y la destrucción de los límites socioculturales.

Estos objetivos permiten profundizar en la comprensión de las identidades de las mujeres en el contexto de la literatura contemporánea y su relación con la commodificación y la visibilidad en la sociedad, ya que son fundamentales para avanzar en el conocimiento sobre las intersecciones de identidad en cuanto a las violencias contra las mujeres y sus voces en la literatura anglófona e hispánica contemporánea y para contribuir a la comunidad científica en el campo de estudio. Asimismo, se busca ofrecer aportes teóricos y prácticos que puedan tener aplicaciones relevantes en los estudios de género y las humanidades con perspectiva de género.

La literatura contemporánea es un terreno cultural en el que las mujeres están continuamente representadas y las técnicas de la escritura literaria encarnan un modo de reflexionar sobre el tema que se está abordando; siguiendo los métodos que utilizan los textos literarios contemporáneos para representar las identidades de las mujeres podemos reconocer un modo de teorizarlas que puede crearse efectivamente con teorizaciones ampliadas en las ciencias sociales. Las grandes tareas que

conforman la estructura de la investigación son las que se detallan a continuación: El enfoque principal de la tesis recae en las voces de las mujeres y en cómo logran expresar sus mensajes y hacerse escuchar en una sociedad patriarcal donde a menudo se las menosprecia, infantiliza o no se las toma en serio. Esto implica la exploración de la creación de lenguajes alternativos no tradicionales o experimentales, a través de los cuales las mujeres pueden hacer oír su voz y expandir su mensaje.

Asimismo, se busca distinguir entre un empoderamiento femenino real y el movimiento de comodificación que a menudo se observa en la sociedad actual. Las grandes tareas que conformaron la estructura de la investigación se detallan a continuación:

- 1 En primer lugar, se llevó a cabo una búsqueda documental y un avance de la información en el contexto contemporáneo actual como parte del marco teórico. Esta compilación de memoria documental y búsqueda de información permite definir los conceptos de identidad y voz y extrapolarlos gradualmente desde ámbitos teóricos generales a un contexto contemporáneo específico y práctico. Es importante destacar que estos conceptos se definen, inscriben y delimitan en el contexto contemporáneo actual, aunque se sustentan en aportes teóricos de ramas del saber humanístico y las ciencias sociales.
- 2 En segundo lugar, se plantea la hipótesis central de la investigación: ¿Cómo sentirse legítimas para verbalizar un mensaje? Se exploran los aspectos que definen la legitimidad del mensaje y las variaciones que han experimentado a lo largo del tiempo debido al progreso en los enfoques socioculturales. Se abordan cuestiones relacionadas con la construcción de identidades contemporáneas y se resuelven preguntas sobre los criterios de valoración de las voces de las mujeres en la publicación de manuscritos literarios.
- 3 En tercer lugar, se lleva a cabo la búsqueda y el análisis de fuentes primarias y secundarias para estudiar casos concretos de mujeres creadoras y aplicar los conceptos de identidad y voz en un contexto literario contemporáneo. Se exploran diferentes

aspectos que se entrelazan en la explicación conjunta del problema, como los efectos del uso del lenguaje tradicional, la ruptura de los códigos del lenguaje tradicional y la inclusión de lenguajes alternativos. También se investigan las técnicas y estrategias de las mujeres creadoras para hacer oír su voz y construir identidades fuertes.

- 4 En cuarto lugar, se realizan entrevistas a autoras contemporáneas y expertas en voces femeninas para obtener información cualitativa sobre sus experiencias y perspectivas en relación con la voz y la identidad. Las entrevistas permiten obtener conocimientos en profundidad sobre los desafíos y las oportunidades que enfrentan las mujeres a la hora de hacerse escuchar y cómo se sienten legítimas para verbalizar su mensaje.
- 5 Por último, se llevan a cabo análisis comparativos y reflexiones críticas basadas en los resultados obtenidos en la investigación, lo que permite extraer conclusiones y ofrecer recomendaciones prácticas para promover la visibilidad y la legitimación de las voces de las mujeres en la literatura contemporánea.

A través del análisis de obras literarias y entrevistas a autoras y expertas en voces femeninas, se busca comprender cómo las mujeres logran expresar sus mensajes y hacerse escuchar en una sociedad patriarcal. Esta investigación contribuye al conocimiento académico en el campo de las humanidades con perspectiva feminista, y también tiene implicaciones prácticas al ofrecer recomendaciones para promover la visibilidad y la legitimación de las voces de las mujeres en la realidad contemporánea.

## 8.2. Introduzione

La presente tesi di dottorato nasce dalla necessità di affrontare il tema dell'invisibilità delle donne come parte di un movimento più ampio che comprende la violenza contro le donne, la quale opprime e colpisce le donne e le ragazze nell'attuale società eteropatriarcale. Questo argomento rientra nel campo delle scienze umane con una prospettiva femminista. In particolare, l'obiettivo di questa dissertazione è indagare e analizzare le intersezioni identitarie riguardanti la violenza contro le donne e le voci delle donne nella letteratura contemporanea anglofona ed ispanofona.

L'importanza della cotutela internazionale presso l'Università di Siena, Italia, si configura come un fattore fondamentale nello sviluppo di questa tesi. Questa esperienza offre un'opportunità unica per arricchire il processo di ricerca. L'interazione con esperti internazionali, l'immersione in un ambiente accademico diversificato e l'accesso a risorse variegate e reti di collaborazione ampie creano un contesto favorevole allo sviluppo della ricerca. Oltre alla mia ricerca presso l'Università di Siena in Italia, ho avuto anche l'inestimabile opportunità di collaborare ai seminari "Humor y Feminismo" presso l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne in Francia. Questi seminari, organizzati dal Dipartimento di Studi Iberici, Ibero-americani e Mediterranei, sono stati spazi di incontri e dibattiti con accademici e specialisti del settore. Durante questi incontri, ho avuto la possibilità di partecipare a presentazioni relative alla mia ricerca, il che è stato fondamentale per arricchire l'esito di questa tesi di dottorato. Partecipare a tali seminari ha consentito un dialogo interdisciplinare e una prospettiva più ampia sull'umorismo e il femminismo, contribuendo significativamente alla mia comprensione delle identità femminili nella letteratura contemporanea.

Parallelamente alla ricerca condotta all'interno di questa tesi di dottorato, ho creato e implementato un progetto complementare intitolato "Giovani e Violenza: Costruire Ponti, Rompere Barriere". Questo progetto si configura come una applicazione pratica dei risultati ottenuti. È stato finanziato dalla Diputación de Jaén e sviluppato con il supporto e la collaborazione dell'organizzazione Colectivo Gentes, in seguito alla mia partecipazione a un programma europeo di volontariato presso La Maison de l'Europe ad Agen, in Francia. Il volontariato, svolto nell'ambito del

programma Corpo Europeo di Solidarietà, si è concentrato sull'estirpazione della discriminazione nell'Unione Europea. Questo progetto aveva l'obiettivo di prevenire ed eliminare la violenza contro le donne, il bullismo e il cyberbullismo. È stato implementato in quattro istituti di istruzione secondaria nella provincia di Jaén. L'obiettivo principale era sensibilizzare e rendere consapevoli gli studenti e le studentesse su questi problemi, promuovendo una cultura del rispetto, dell'uguaglianza e della non violenza. Attraverso workshop, incontri e attività interattive, il progetto ha cercato di fornire ai giovani strumenti per identificare e affrontare situazioni violente, promuovendo lo sviluppo di relazioni sane e il rispetto reciproco. Questo progetto è servito come integrazione pratica ai risultati e alle riflessioni ottenuti nella tesi di dottorato, consentendo l'applicazione delle conoscenze acquisite. L'esperienza di lavorare direttamente con la comunità studentesca e quella docente e contribuire alla prevenzione e all'estirpazione della violenza contro le donne e le ragazze, il bullismo e il cyberbullismo è stata arricchente e significativa. Attraverso questa iniziativa, ho potuto constatare di persona l'importanza della sensibilizzazione e della promozione del cambiamento fin dalla giovane età, creando una società più giusta ed equa.

Questa dissertazione si concentra sull'analisi della violenza contro le donne in alcuni romanzi e opere teatrali anglofone ed ispanofone. Il territorio da esplorare comprende un campo vasto e affascinante, dove le rappresentazioni e le esperienze delle donne in queste opere sono esaminate, con particolare attenzione ai tipi di violenza contro le donne subiti da più della metà della popolazione mondiale e alla critica del sistema eteropatriarcale che la sostiene. Lo studio viene condotto attraverso il metodo della lettura attenta o analisi esaustiva delle opere selezionate: un'analisi testuale dettagliata di opere letterarie e teatrali in senso lato focalizzata sulle loro qualità formali e tematiche. Attraverso questo approccio, vengono delineati i modelli seguiti dalle identità femminili nelle opere, analizzando temi ricorrenti e i meccanismi espressivi utilizzati dagli autori e dalle autrici per dare visibilità alle voci femminili. Inoltre, lo studio è integrato con interviste ad esperti in voci femminili, consentendo una comprensione più approfondita dei messaggi e delle prospettive presenti nella letteratura

contemporanea. Queste sezioni includono: revisione della letteratura, metodologia di ricerca, analisi empirica delle opere selezionate con le relative discussioni e conclusioni.

La diversità in termini di contesto in questa selezione di opere letterarie è evidente attraverso i collegamenti tematici che ho individuato come nucleo centrale: l'esplorazione dei diversi tipi di violenza contro le donne. Questa scelta tematica fornisce un quadro per analizzare opere di autrici eterogenee provenienti da diversi contesti culturali e linguistici. Le opere letterarie selezionate sono analizzate in tre blocchi. Nel primo blocco: Autrici ispanofone. In questo blocco, mi concentro su autrici ispanofone, Beatriz Cabur e Angélica Liddell. Entrambe provengono dal mondo di lingua spagnola, ma le loro opere mostrano diversità in termini di contenuto e approccio al tema della violenza contro le donne. Nel secondo blocco: Autrici anglofone. In questo blocco, mi concentro su due autrici anglofone, Sarah Kane e Caroline Bergvall. Entrambe scrivono in inglese, rappresentano una diversità di stili ed esplorazione tematica. Nel terzo blocco: Autrici anglofone africane. In questo blocco, continuo con alcune autrici anglofone ma amplio ulteriormente la diversità considerando le voci africane e della diaspora africana. La diversità qui non è solo linguistica, ma anche culturale, riflettendo le esperienze delle donne di discendenza africana.

Le opere analizzate di Beatriz Cabur sono *Nefertiti y PIII* (2015), *Breakfast at Daddy's* (2016), *The Mind-Boggling Shrinking Woman* (2017), *Goodbye, Mother* (2020) e *Childbirth-19* (2021). Nel medesimo primo blocco, le opere selezionate di Angélica Liddell sono *Belgrado* (2008) e *La casa de la fuerza* (2011). Il secondo blocco si concentra sugli autori anglofoni Sarah Kane e Caroline Bergvall. L'opera selezionata di Sarah Kane è *Blasted* (1995), e l'opera studiata di Caroline Bergvall è *Drift* (2012). Il terzo blocco si concentra sulle autrici anglofone, considerando l'afropolitanismo e il cosmopolitanismo di Akwaeke Emezi e Bernadine Evaristo. L'opera analizzata di Akwaeke Emezi è *Freshwater* (2018), e il romanzo selezionato di Bernadine Evaristo è *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). Ciascuna di queste sezioni contribuisce allo sviluppo e alla comprensione del tema centrale, offrendo un'analisi supportata dalla letteratura scientifica e dai dati ottenuti nel processo di ricerca. La mia selezione di opere letterarie organizzate in tre blocchi dimostra la diversità in termini di contesto



attraverso l'inclusione di autrici provenienti da diversi contesti linguistici e culturali. Queste autrici affrontano il tema della violenza contro le donne in modi diversi, riflettendo il ricco tessuto di esperienze e prospettive che esistono nella letteratura. Questa diversità arricchisce la profondità e l'ampiezza dell'analisi, consentendo un'esplorazione più completa del tema centrale.

La ricerca mira a evidenziare la rilevanza dell'empatia come una forza piuttosto che una debolezza, nonché l'importanza della sorellanza e delle reti di sostegno per le donne. Inoltre, cerca di distinguere il vero *empowerment* femminile dal movimento di mercificazione spesso osservato oggi. L'obiettivo di questa tesi di dottorato è affrontare il problema dell'invisibilità delle donne e esplorare come si sentono legittimate ad articolare un messaggio pubblico. Attraverso l'analisi di opere letterarie e audiovisive, lo studio mira ad esaminare la forza e il contributo delle opere contemporanee nel legittimare queste identità. Per raggiungere questo fine, vengono proposti i seguenti obiettivi specifici:

1. Indagare come le artiste donne possono plasmare le loro identità al di fuori della mercificazione, considerando la trasformazione dei loro corpi e delle loro identità in prodotti commercializzabili;
2. Valutare la possibilità di sovvertire le identità creative all'interno della mercificazione, analizzando come le artiste donne costruiscono la loro personalità pubblica e il loro lavoro;
3. Riflettere sulla vendita di identità anonime come una forma dannosa di mercificazione delle etichette identitarie, contrastandola con opere contemporanee che promuovono l'ascolto attivo delle voci individuali e la distruzione dei confini socioculturali.

Questi obiettivi consentono una comprensione più approfondita delle identità femminili nel contesto della letteratura contemporanea e del loro rapporto con la mercificazione e la visibilità nella società, in quanto sono essenziali per far progredire la conoscenza sulle intersezioni dell'identità riguardanti la violenza contro le donne e le voci delle donne nella letteratura contemporanea anglofona ed ispanofona, nonché contribuire ad una loro maggiore conoscenza all'interno della comunità

scientifico. Inoltre, cerca di offrire contributi teorici e pratici che possono avere applicazioni rilevanti negli studi di genere e nelle scienze umane con una prospettiva di genere.

La letteratura contemporanea è un ambito culturale in cui le identità femminili sono costantemente rappresentate, e le tecniche di scrittura letteraria incarnano un modo di riflettere sul soggetto affrontato. I principali compiti che compongono la struttura della ricerca sono dettagliati di seguito:

1. È stata condotta una ricerca primaria di documenti e raccolta di informazioni nel contesto contemporaneo attuale come parte del quadro teorico. Questa compilazione della memoria documentaria e la raccolta di informazioni permettono di definire i concetti di identità e voce e di passare gradualmente da sfere teoriche generali a un contesto contemporaneo specifico e pratico. È essenziale sottolineare che questi concetti sono definiti, iscritti e delimitati nel contesto contemporaneo attuale, anche se sono supportati da contributi teorici provenienti da rami delle scienze umane e sociali, come gli studi di genere.
2. Viene presentata l'ipotesi centrale della ricerca: Come possono le donne sentirsi legittimate ad articolare un messaggio? Vengono esplorati gli aspetti che definiscono la legittimità del messaggio e le variazioni che ha subito nel tempo a causa dei progressi negli approcci socioculturali. Vengono affrontate questioni legate alla costruzione delle identità contemporanee e risolte le questioni relative ai criteri per valutare le voci femminili nella pubblicazione di manoscritti letterari.
3. Viene condotta la ricerca e l'analisi di fonti primarie e secondarie per studiare casi concreti di donne artiste e applicare i concetti di identità e voce in un contesto letterario contemporaneo. Vengono esplorati diversi aspetti che si intrecciano nella spiegazione congiunta del problema, come gli effetti dell'uso del linguaggio tradizionale, la rottura dei codici linguistici tradizionali e l'inclusione di linguaggi alternativi. Vengono indagate le tecniche e le strategie utilizzate dalle donne artiste per farsi sentire e costruire identità forti.
4. Vengono condotte interviste con autrici contemporanee ed esperte in voci femminili per ottenere informazioni qualitative sulle loro esperienze e prospettive riguardanti voce e

identità. Le interviste consentono approfondimenti sulle sfide e le opportunità che le donne affrontano nel farsi sentire e come si sentono legittimate nell'articolare il loro messaggio.

5. Vengono effettuate analisi comparative e riflessioni critiche basate sui risultati della ricerca, consentendo di trarre conclusioni e offrire raccomandazioni pratiche per promuovere la visibilità e la legittimazione delle voci femminili nella letteratura contemporanea.

Questa tesi di dottorato mira ad affrontare il problema della violenza contro le donne e le ragazze nella letteratura anglofona e ispanofona. Attraverso l'analisi di opere letterarie e interviste con autrici ed esperte in voci femminili, lo studio cerca di comprendere come le donne riescono ad esprimere i loro messaggi e farsi sentire in una società patriarcale. Questa ricerca contribuisce alla conoscenza accademica nei campi degli studi di genere e delle scienze umane con una prospettiva femminista, ed ha anche implicazioni pratiche offrendo suggerimenti per promuovere la visibilità e la legittimazione delle voci femminili nella realtà contemporanea.

### 8.3. Conclusión

Los temas de la violencia de género y la legitimación de las mujeres se hacen evidentes en las obras de Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi y Bernadine Evaristo, que han sido explorados en esta disertación. Mediante un análisis interdisciplinario de sus obras, este estudio ha arrojado luz sobre la esencia multifacética de la violencia de género y sus repercusiones en la vida de las mujeres. Esta investigación también ha examinado cómo estas mujeres desafían las normas sociales al empoderar a las mujeres a través de su producción literaria y teatral.

Los hallazgos de esta investigación indican que las obras dramáticas de Sarah Kane, como *Blasted*, confrontan al público con representaciones crueles de la violencia de género, exponiendo así las dinámicas de poder subyacentes y los efectos deshumanizantes de dichos actos. La exploración poética de Caroline Bergvall, como *Drift*, proporciona narrativas alternativas que interrumpen las convenciones lingüísticas y desafían las estructuras opresivas, afirmando en última instancia la autonomía de las mujeres y las voces marginadas. De manera similar, las provocadoras obras de Angélica Liddell, como *La casa de la fuerza* y *Belgrado*, buscan crear una experiencia catártica que expone las realidades de la opresión patriarcal. Las obras de teatro de Beatriz Cabur difuminan los límites entre la ficción y la realidad, invitando a los lectores a cuestionar las normas sociales y ofreciendo oportunidades de resistencia y transformación.

La novela *Freshwater* de Akwaeke Emezi desafía las binariedades de género y examina la interseccionalidad de la identidad, centrándose en la violencia experimentada por las personas no binarias y la compleja relación entre el trauma personal y las expectativas sociales, mientras que *Girl, Woman, Other* de Bernadine Evaristo celebra la diversidad de las experiencias de las mujeres racializadas, destacando su resistencia y fortaleza al tiempo que expone la violencia sistémica a la que se enfrentan.

Al estirar los límites de la narración convencional y la representación, estas autoras contribuyen colectivamente a una discusión más amplia sobre la violencia de género. Sus obras desafían las estructuras sociales que perpetúan las violencias contra las mujeres y niñas y la opresión

al interrumpir las narrativas dominantes. Estas autoras proporcionan un espacio para las voces marginadas, amplifican las experiencias de las mujeres y abogan por el cambio social. Además, esta tesis demuestra que estas obras literarias no solo arrojan luz sobre las duras realidades de las violencias de género, sino que también sirven como un medio de empoderamiento y legitimación para las mujeres. Contribuyen a la lucha continua por la igualdad de género y la abolición de los sistemas opresivos al dar voz a sus experiencias, desafiar estereotipos y presentar narrativas alternativas.

A medida que la investigación y el activismo futuros en el campo de los estudios de género continúan avanzando, es esencial investigar y analizar aún más las obras de otras autoras y artistas que abordan temas similares. Este estudio sienta las bases para futuras investigaciones sobre la representación de las violencias de género y la legitimación de las mujeres en la literatura, el teatro y otras formas artísticas. Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi y Bernadine Evaristo han realizado contribuciones significativas a la comprensión de la violencia de género y la legitimación de las mujeres a través de sus obras. Desafían las normas sociales, amplifican las voces marginadas e inspiran el cambio social a través de sus expresiones artísticas. Este estudio enfatiza la importancia de su trabajo para fomentar una sociedad más inclusiva y equitativa.

La innovadora dramaturgia de Beatriz Cabur se cruza con el ámbito digital, lo que dificulta obtener conclusiones definitivas sobre esta forma de arte en constante evolución. En sus propuestas teatrales, la tecnología prevalece sobre la narrativa tradicional y los enfoques basados en personajes. Sus obras atraviesan el panorama de la dramaturgia española contemporánea, ofreciendo perspectivas novedosas y ampliando los límites. Cabur reconoce la telepresencia como un recurso valioso que facilita la experimentación y promueve las conexiones entre realidades distantes. Este elemento dinámico permite que la creadora investigue nuevas posibilidades y asuma la responsabilidad de la comunicación transfronteriza. En obras como *Childbirth-19*, donde la ruptura de la cuarta pared funciona como un vehículo para el discurso feminista, la dramaturgia de Cabur en el siglo XXI

incorpora temas y motivos feministas. A través de sus actuaciones, Cabur alienta al público a enfrentar y combatir la violencia contra las mujeres y las niñas en todo el mundo. El reconocimiento, la visibilidad y la legitimación del sufrimiento de las mujeres son medidas cruciales para lograr un cambio. Cabur enfatiza la necesidad de priorizar la seguridad de las mujeres mediante la formulación de estrategias para resolver las expresiones de dolor de las mujeres y mediante la promoción de la acción colectiva.

Para lograr un progreso tangible, es necesario centrarse en las víctimas, identificar y enfrentar la estigmatización de la feminidad y los problemas de salud mental asociados que afectan a las mujeres. Al instituir iniciativas educativas y promulgar legislación pertinente, es posible desarrollar soluciones para abordar estos problemas urgentes.

La dramaturgia de Beatriz Cabur ejemplifica el potencial del teatro como medio de compromiso y transformación social. Su enfoque interseccional fusiona el arte y el activismo, arrojando luz sobre problemas sociales apremiantes e incentivando al público a desempeñar un papel activo en la promoción de la seguridad y el bienestar de las mujeres y las niñas. A través de su uso innovador de la tecnología y su compromiso inquebrantable con las perspectivas feministas, Cabur contribuye a la evolución continua de la dramaturgia española, inspirando a otras personas a reimaginar los límites de la expresión teatral y generar cambios sociales positivos.

Angélica Liddell emerge como una dramaturga sumamente influyente y representativa en el teatro contemporáneo español, reconocida por su integridad profesional, talento excepcional y estilo de expresión no convencional. Liddell, una figura destacada en la escena teatral postdramática, utiliza espacios ficticios engañosos para cautivar y desafiar a su público, reflejando una mirada ética y política a través de sus obras.

El uso de la primera persona en las obras de Liddell es un potente recurso para dismantelar los roles de género y abordar los privilegios masculinos, enfatizando su rechazo a las normas sociales. Su vida personal y sus creaciones artísticas están entrelazadas, lo que confunde aún más la distinción entre realidad y representación. El enfoque sin complejos y visceral de Liddell puede no adherirse al

decoro político, pero revela auténticamente su verdad, cautivando al público con narrativas turbulentas que exploran deseos oscuros.

El éxito de Liddell como directora de teatro demuestra su dedicación a la integridad artística y la revitalización del drama español, a pesar de enfrentar obstáculos financieros y ser relegada a teatros alternativos sin subsidios gubernamentales. Aspira a inspirar cambios sociales a través de producciones que sean intelectualmente estimulantes y visualmente atractivas, a menudo integrando elementos multimedia. Las obras de Liddell exigen la participación del público, evocando un compromiso social en ambos lados y demostrando que frases concisas pueden tener el mismo impacto que efectos escénicos ornamentados.

Nuestra autora plantea cuestiones afectivas, sociales y políticas con el objetivo de abordar problemas humanos y generar soluciones sociales. Al criticar las repercusiones sociales de catástrofes como el conflicto de Belgrado y desafiar las nociones predominantes de maternidad y dimensiones espacio-temporales, Liddell cuestiona constructos sociales prevalentes. Además, enfatiza la importancia de no definir la humanidad únicamente por los deseos de unos pocos privilegiados.

A través de sus narrativas no convencionales, Liddell subvierte estereotipos y confronta verdades incómodas, arrojando luz sobre temas tabú como el incesto, la pederastia, el asesinato y la necrofilia. Sus obras obligan a actuar a la audiencia adinerada, revelando una mezcla de conformidad e ignorancia. En el contexto de la dramaturgia europea contemporánea, el teatro de Angélica Liddell se destaca como una innovación notable y oportuna.

Al combinar su alter ego con sus personajes, la dramaturgia de Liddell explora conflictos sociopolíticos reales y contemporáneos, acortando la brecha entre la expresión artística y el activismo social. Su objetivo final es contribuir a una sociedad más justa e igualitaria al alentar a su público a confrontar los límites de la mediocridad humana y aspirar a una mayor justicia e igualdad.

Las contribuciones transformadoras de Angélica Liddell al campo del teatro demuestran la capacidad del arte para desafiar convenciones, revelar verdades e inspirar transformación social. Ha

dejado una huella indeleble tanto en el ámbito artístico como en el social con su voz distintiva y su compromiso de romper barreras.

La obra teatral *Blasted* de Sarah Kane es una poderosa crítica feminista de la violencia contra las mujeres y las estructuras patriarcales que la perpetúan. A través de la representación de una joven que se convierte en víctima de violencia sexual y física, Kane desafía las narrativas dominantes que racionalizan tales actos y revela las dinámicas de poder desiguales entre hombres y mujeres que los sustentan.

En la obra, Kane utiliza rituales para demostrar cómo la opresión y la violencia contra las mujeres pueden estar arraigadas en estructuras culturales más amplias que mantienen la dominación masculina y la subordinación femenina. *Blasted* es una reacción contra los valores thatcherianos prevalentes en el Reino Unido durante la década de 1990 y ofrece una dimensión sociopolítica que refleja el contexto social de la época.

La obra rechaza la noción de que los hombres tienen derecho a poseer y controlar los cuerpos de las mujeres al representar los horrores de la guerra y la violación, lo que enfatiza que la violencia de género es una fuerza destructiva que afecta a todo el mundo, independientemente de su género o posición social. La representación de la violencia por parte de Kane es cruda, inquietante y deliberadamente difícil de comprender, con la intención de provocar incomodidad en el público y arrojar luz sobre la realidad de dicha barbarie.

Mientras la sociedad continúe entreteniéndose con representaciones de violencia sin tomar medidas para abordarla, las obras de Kane seguirán siendo relevantes. Esta indiferencia hacia los actos de violencia refleja las respuestas actuales a los conflictos globales, como la situación en Siria, en la que las personas ingieren pasivamente artículos de noticias sin participar activamente o trabajar en aras de una solución. Las obras de Kane, incluyendo *Blasted*, sirven como un reflejo teatral de realidades sociales, trascendiendo contextos históricos y políticos particulares para abordar los conflictos universales inherentes a la existencia humana.



Kane confronta al público a través de sus manifestaciones artísticas con la crueldad de la naturaleza humana y las responsabilidades éticas diarias de las personas. La angustia que experimentan los espectadores sirve como recordatorio de la barbarie presente en la sociedad y exige una participación activa en lugar de una observación pasiva. Las obras de Kane actúan como un espejo, exponiendo al lector o espectador realidades brutales que a menudo se pasan por alto o se desestiman, desafiando así a la sociedad a enfrentar y abordar la violencia de frente.

En última instancia, la contribución de Sarah Kane al panorama teatral reside en su examen del sufrimiento, la agresión sexual y la opresión de las mujeres. Sus obras proporcionan un prisma crítico para examinar estos problemas y desafiar las normas culturales y sociales que perpetúan la subyugación de las mujeres. Kane fomenta una perspectiva resiliente y transformadora, instando a la sociedad a trabajar activamente para dismantelar los sistemas patriarcales y promover la igualdad y la justicia para todo el mundo, al explorar estos temas difíciles e inquietantes.

La práctica literaria de Caroline Bergvall desafía las nociones convencionales del lenguaje, la cultura y el feminismo. Bergvall interrumpe la dominancia del lenguaje nacional heteropatriarcal y la cultura monolingüe al incorporar elementos extranjeros y generar un inglés distorsionado y desarticulado. Su trabajo aborda una variedad de temas, como la política de la diferencia y la solidaridad, la descolonización, la práctica feminista, el intercambio intercultural y la conexión entre la organización feminista y los movimientos sociales.

La investigación de Bergvall sobre la violencia sexual contra las mujeres, el asilo, la voz y el testimonio revela un profundo análisis de las fallas institucionales y las contribuciones potenciales de las artes y las humanidades para abordar estos problemas urgentes. Su objetivo es lograr un cambio positivo y trascender las fronteras convencionales a través de sus formas experimentales de expresión artística, invitando al público a involucrarse con perspectivas alternativas y desafiar las normas establecidas de un sistema que sustenta las violencias de género contra mujeres y niñas en el mundo.

La práctica poética y las iniciativas de Caroline Bergvall contribuyen a una comprensión más amplia del lenguaje, el feminismo y la efectividad de la expresión artística. Ella desafía las normas

establecidas e invita al público a reconsiderar los límites convencionales a través de su uso inventivo del lenguaje y la exploración de cuestiones sociales urgentes. La obra de Bergvall ejemplifica el poder del arte para inspirar transformación, promover el diálogo y allanar el camino hacia un paisaje cultural más inclusivo y dinámico.

*Freshwater* de Akwaeke Emezi es una obra literaria africana notable y original que desafía las narrativas tradicionales al incorporar humor, frivolidad y el pronombre plural *we* (*nosotras*). Emezi explora el trauma, la violencia, la supervivencia y la agencia de las mujeres nigerianas en esta novela, presentando un nuevo discurso sobre los cuerpos femeninos nigerianos y demostrando la fuerza del feminismo en la literatura del Sur Global.

El enfoque innovador de Emezi se ejemplifica en su investigación de la cosmología *Ogbanje* y su disposición para abordar temas tabúes como la salud mental y la sexualidad. Emezi llama la atención sobre la necesidad de enfoques transversales para comprender las diferencias de género y desafía las concepciones convencionales de identidad al tomar libertades descriptivas e integrar elementos sobrenaturales. La libertad de estilo de la novela y el uso del idioma nativo de la autora, nos sumergen en una dimensión multicultural, enfatizando la importancia del contexto textual y fomentando la conciencia multicultural.

*Freshwater* es un texto decolonial que desafía las ideologías occidentales e investiga las identidades queer dentro de la cosmología Igbo. Emezi defiende la importancia de la ontología Igbo, argumentando que trasciende el folklore y la superstición y proporciona un marco para comprender la física, la ciencia y la espiritualidad. La novela desafía las concepciones tradicionales de género e identidad al desestabilizar las nociones heteronormativas y situar la homosexualidad dentro de la espiritualidad Igbo. Además, *Freshwater* funciona como un catalizador para discusiones críticas sobre temas contemporáneos y como un punto de referencia en el presente global, marcado por la migración y la inseguridad. Provoca a los lectores a reflexionar sobre identidades metafísicas, espiritualidad innovadora y el verdadero significado de hogar, retratado como un viaje en lugar de un destino final.

*Freshwater* no solo contribuye a la riqueza de la literatura africana, sino que también amplía los límites del discurso literario al ofrecer una perspectiva novedosa y provocadora sobre género, identidad y espiritualidad. A través de sus narrativas, Emezi desafía las normas sociales, fomenta el diálogo e invita a los lectores a interactuar con temas y narrativas complejas que van más allá de las páginas de la novela.

La novela *Girl, Woman, Other* de Bernadine Evaristo retrata las vidas y experiencias de mujeres negras marginadas en Gran Bretaña en una narrativa compleja y potente de carácter transmoderno. A través de sus historias interconectadas, la novela celebra la fuerza, las relaciones familiares, la hibridación y la empatía de estas mujeres, enfatizando la importancia de la interconexión humana y su relevancia no solo para las mujeres racializadas, sino para toda la sociedad.

Como se evidencia en la relación madre-hija entre Penelope y Hattie, Evaristo sitúa a las mujeres racializadas y blancas británicas en igualdad de condiciones, demostrando el poder transformador de sus conexiones. La novela aboga por la filosofía transmoderna que enfatiza la interconexión de todos los seres al investigar los temas de diversidad, conexión y relación.

*Girl, Woman, Other* emplea una estructura narrativa distintiva, con cuatro conjuntos de tres personajes entrelazados que representan diversas generaciones y orígenes. Este enfoque en red ejemplifica la transmodernidad desde la perspectiva de una persona feminista racializada al enfatizar los valores de interconexión, transnacionalismo y temporalidad acelerada. A través de las experiencias de doce mujeres, Evaristo tiene como objetivo exponer y desafiar las estructuras interrelacionadas de raza, género y clase.

La novela ofrece una visión crítica y realista de la experiencia de las mujeres negras en Gran Bretaña, abordando temas como la identidad, el racismo, el feminismo y la sexualidad. Evaristo desafía los estereotipos y prejuicios arraigados al presentar personajes complejos y multifacéticos, rompiendo con los límites impuestos por la sociedad y la literatura convencional.

Las obras de Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi y Bernadine Evaristo abordan la violencia de género y la legitimación de las mujeres desde diversas perspectivas y mediante diferentes formas artísticas. Sus obras desafían las normas sociales, amplifican las voces marginadas y contribuyen a la lucha por la igualdad de género y la justicia social. Cada una de estas autoras ha dejado una huella significativa en sus respectivos campos y ha inspirado a otras personas a repensar las narrativas dominantes y trabajar en aras de una sociedad más inclusiva y equitativa. Al reconocer el trauma de las experiencias de las mujeres, estas escritoras presentan descripciones matizadas que desafían los estereotipos de género y elevan las perspectivas de las mujeres marginadas. Reconocer la naturaleza interconectada de las opresiones y defender los derechos y las experiencias de las mujeres y las niñas de diversos orígenes es fundamental para centrarse en la fase preventiva de esta problemática y, por tanto, abogar por la erradicación de la violencia contra las mujeres y las niñas en todo el mundo.

#### 8.4. Conclusione

I temi della violenza di genere e la legittimazione delle donne, che sono stati esplorati in questa tesi, diventano evidenti nelle opere di Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi e Bernadine Evaristo, che sono stati esplorati in questa dissertazione. Attraverso un'analisi interdisciplinare delle loro opere, questo studio ha illuminato analizzato l'essenza sfaccettata della violenza di genere e le sue ripercussioni sulla vita delle donne. Questa ricerca ha anche esaminato come queste donne autrici sfidano le norme sociali potenziando le donne attraverso la loro produzione letteraria e teatrale.

I risultati di questa ricerca indicano mostrano che le opere drammatiche di Sarah Kane, come *Blasted*, confrontano mettono il pubblico con davanti a rappresentazioni crude della violenza di genere, esponendo così le dinamiche di potere sottostanti e gli effetti disumanizzanti di tali atti. L'esplorazione poetica di Caroline Bergvall, come in *Drift*, fornisce narrazioni alternative che interrompono le convenzioni linguistiche e sfidano le strutture oppressive, affermando in ultima analisi l'autonomia delle donne e delle voci emarginate. Allo stesso modo, le provocatorie opere di Angélica Liddell, come *La casa de la fuerza* e *Belgrado*, cercano di creare un'esperienza catartica che espone mostra la realtà dell'oppressione patriarcale. Le opere teatrali di Beatriz Cabur sfumano i confini tra finzione e realtà, invitando i lettori e gli spettatori a mettere in discussione le norme sociali, e offrendo anche un'opportunità di resistenza e trasformazione.

Il romanzo *Freshwater* di Akwaeke Emezi sfida le binarietà di genere ed esamina l'intersezionalità dell'identità, concentrandosi sulla violenza vissuta dalle persone non binarie e sulla complessa relazione tra trauma personale e aspettative sociali, mentre *Girl, Woman, Other* di Bernadine Evaristo celebra la diversità delle esperienze delle donne razzializzate, mettendo in evidenza la loro resistenza e forza mentre espone denuncia la violenza sistemica che affrontano.

Allargando i confini della narrazione convenzionale e della rappresentazione, queste autrici contribuiscono collettivamente a una discussione più ampia sulla violenza di genere. Le loro opere sfidano le strutture sociali che perpetuano le violenze contro le donne e le ragazze e l'oppressione interrompendo le narrazioni dominanti. Queste autrici forniscono uno spazio per le voci emarginate, amplificano le esperienze delle donne e promuovono il cambiamento sociale. Inoltre, questa tesi dimostra che queste opere letterarie non solo illuminano ma accendono i riflettori sulle dure realtà delle violenze di genere, ma servono anche come mezzo di potenziamento e legittimazione per le donne. Contribuiscono alla lotta continua per l'uguaglianza di genere e l'abolizione dei sistemi oppressivi dando voce alle loro esperienze, sfidando stereotipi e presentando narrazioni alternative.

Mentre la ricerca e l'attivismo futuri nel campo degli studi di genere continuano a progredire, è essenziale indagare e analizzare ulteriormente le opere di altre autrici e artiste che affrontano temi simili. Questo studio pone le basi per future ricerche sulla rappresentazione delle violenze di genere e la legittimazione delle donne nella letteratura, nel teatro e in altre forme artistiche. Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi e Bernadine Evaristo hanno dato contributi significativi alla comprensione della violenza di genere e della legittimazione delle donne attraverso le loro opere. Sfidano le norme sociali, amplificano le voci emarginate e ispirano il cambiamento sociale attraverso le loro espressioni artistiche. Questo studio enfatizza l'importanza del loro lavoro per promuovere una società più inclusiva ed equa.

L'innovativa drammaturgia di Beatriz Cabur si interseca con il dominio digitale, il che rende difficile ottenere conclusioni definitive su questa forma d'arte in continua evoluzione. Nelle sue proposte teatrali, la tecnologia prevale sulla narrativa tradizionale e sugli approcci basati sui personaggi. Le sue opere attraversano il panorama della drammaturgia spagnola contemporanea, offrendo prospettive nuove e ampliando i confini. Cabur riconosce la telepresenza come una risorsa preziosa che facilita la sperimentazione e promuove le connessioni tra realtà distanti. Questo elemento dinamico permette alla creatrice drammaturga di esplorare nuove possibilità e assumersi la responsabilità della comunicazione transfrontaliera. In opere come *Childbirth-19*, dove la rottura

della quarta parete funge da veicolo per il discorso femminista, la drammaturgia di Cabur nel XXI secolo incorpora temi e motivi femministi. Attraverso le sue performance, Cabur incoraggia il pubblico a confrontarsi e combattere la violenza contro le donne e le ragazze in tutto il mondo. Il riconoscimento, la visibilità e la legittimazione della sofferenza delle donne sono misure cruciali per raggiungere un cambiamento. Cabur enfatizza la necessità di dare priorità alla sicurezza delle donne attraverso la formulazione di strategie per risolvere le espressioni di dolore delle donne e mediante la promozione dell'azione collettiva.

Per ottenere un progresso tangibile, è necessario concentrarsi sulle vittime, identificare e affrontare la stigmatizzazione della femminilità e i problemi di salute mentale associati che colpiscono le donne. Istituito iniziative educative e promulgando legislazioni pertinenti, è possibile sviluppare soluzioni per affrontare questi problemi urgenti.

La drammaturgia di Beatriz Cabur esemplifica il potenziale del teatro come mezzo di impegno e trasformazione sociale. Il suo approccio intersezionale fonde arte e attivismo, gettando luce sui problemi sociali urgenti e incentivando il pubblico a svolgere un ruolo attivo nella promozione della sicurezza e del benessere delle donne e delle ragazze. Attraverso il suo uso innovativo della tecnologia e il suo impegno incrollabile con le prospettive femministe, Cabur contribuisce all'evoluzione continua della drammaturgia spagnola, ispirando altre persone a reimmaginare i limiti dell'espressione teatrale e generare cambiamenti sociali positivi.

Angélica Liddell emerge come una drammaturga estremamente influente e rappresentativa nel teatro contemporaneo spagnolo, riconosciuta per la sua integrità professionale, talento eccezionale e stile di espressione non convenzionale. Liddell, una figura di spicco nella scena teatrale postdrammatica, utilizza spazi fittizi ingannevoli per catturare e sfidare il suo pubblico, riflettendo una visione etica e politica attraverso le sue opere.

L'uso della prima persona nelle opere di Liddell è una potente risorsa per smantellare i ruoli di genere e affrontare i privilegi maschili, enfatizzando il suo rifiuto delle norme sociali. La sua vita personale e le sue creazioni artistiche sono intrecciate, confondendo ulteriormente la distinzione tra

realtà e rappresentazione. L'approccio senza complessi e viscerale di Liddell può non aderire al decoro politico, ma rivela autenticamente la sua verità, catturando il pubblico con narrazioni turbolente che esplorano desideri oscuri.

Il successo di Liddell come regista teatrale dimostra la sua dedizione all'integrità artistica e alla rivitalizzazione del dramma spagnolo, nonostante gli ostacoli finanziari e l'essere relegata a teatri alternativi senza sussidi governativi. Aspira a ispirare cambiamenti sociali attraverso produzioni intellettualmente stimolanti e visivamente attraenti, spesso integrando elementi multimediali. Le opere di Liddell richiedono la partecipazione del pubblico, evocando un impegno sociale su entrambi i lati e dimostrando che frasi concise possono avere lo stesso impatto di effetti scenici ornamentali.

La nostra autrice pone questioni affettive, sociali e politiche con l'obiettivo di affrontare problemi umani e generare soluzioni sociali. Criticando le ripercussioni sociali di catastrofi come il conflitto di *Belgrado* e sfidando le nozioni predominanti di maternità e dimensioni spazio-temporali, Liddell mette in discussione i costrutti sociali prevalenti. Inoltre, enfatizza l'importanza di non definire l'umanità unicamente dai desideri di pochi privilegiati.

Attraverso le sue narrazioni non convenzionali, Liddell sovverte stereotipi e confronta verità scomode, gettando luce su temi tabù come l'incesto, la pedofilia, l'omicidio e la necrofilia. Le sue opere obbligano ad agire il pubblico benestante, rivelando una miscela di conformità e ignoranza. Nel contesto della drammaturgia europea contemporanea, il teatro di Angélica Liddell si distingue come una piattaforma per affrontare le disparità e per riflettere criticamente sulla società.

L'opera di Liddell sottolinea l'importanza di riconoscere il dolore degli emarginati, trattando temi difficili che sono cruciali per raggiungere cambiamenti significativi. La sua influenza nel teatro contemporaneo spagnolo è un potente esempio di come l'arte possa servire come veicolo per il cambiamento sociale, affrontando questioni sociali urgenti e incoraggiando il pubblico a svolgere un ruolo attivo nella promozione dell'uguaglianza e della giustizia.

Combinando il suo alter ego con i suoi personaggi, la drammaturgia di Liddell esplora conflitti sociopolitici reali e contemporanei, riducendo la distanza tra l'espressione artistica e l'attivismo



sociale. Il suo obiettivo finale è contribuire a una società più giusta ed equa, incoraggiando il suo pubblico a confrontarsi con i limiti della mediocrità umana e aspirare a una maggiore giustizia e uguaglianza.

I contributi trasformativi di Angélica Liddell nel campo del teatro dimostrano la capacità dell'arte di sfidare le convenzioni, rivelare verità e ispirare la trasformazione sociale. Ha lasciato un'impronta indelebile sia nell'ambito artistico che in quello sociale con la sua voce distintiva e il suo impegno a rompere le barriere.

L'opera teatrale *Blasted* di Sarah Kane è una potente critica femminista della violenza contro le donne e delle strutture patriarcali che la perpetuano. Attraverso la rappresentazione di una giovane che diventa vittima di violenza sessuale e fisica, Kane sfida le narrazioni dominanti che razionalizzano tali atti e rivela le dinamiche di potere diseguali tra uomini e donne che li sostengono. Nell'opera, Kane utilizza rituali per dimostrare come l'oppressione e la violenza contro le donne possano essere radicate in strutture culturali più ampie che mantengono la dominazione maschile e la subordinazione femminile. *Blasted* è una reazione contro i valori thatcheriani prevalenti nel Regno Unito negli anni '90 e offre una dimensione sociopolitica che riflette il contesto sociale dell'epoca.

L'opera respinge la nozione che gli uomini abbiano il diritto di possedere e controllare i corpi delle donne rappresentando gli orrori della guerra e dello stupro, sottolineando che la violenza di genere è una forza distruttiva che colpisce tutto il mondo, indipendentemente dal genere o dalla posizione sociale. La rappresentazione della violenza da parte di Kane è cruda, inquietante e deliberatamente difficile da comprendere, con l'intenzione di provocare disagio nel pubblico e far luce sulla realtà di tale barbarie. Finché la società continuerà a intrattenersi con rappresentazioni della violenza senza prendere provvedimenti per affrontarla, le opere di Kane rimarranno rilevanti. Questa indifferenza verso gli atti di violenza riflette le risposte attuali ai conflitti globali, come la situazione in Siria, in cui le persone consumano passivamente articoli di notizie senza partecipare attivamente o lavorare per una soluzione. Le opere di Kane, incluso *Blasted*, servono come un riflesso teatrale delle realtà sociali, transcendendo contesti storici e politici particolari per affrontare i conflitti universali

inerenti all'esistenza umana. Kane confronta sfida il pubblico attraverso le sue manifestazioni artistiche con la crudeltà della natura umana e le responsabilità etiche quotidiane delle persone. L'angoscia che sperimentano gli spettatori serve come promemoria della barbarie presente nella società e richiede una partecipazione attiva anziché un'osservazione passiva. Le opere di Kane agiscono come uno specchio, esponendo al lettore o spettatore realtà brutali che spesso vengono trascurate o ignorate, sfidando così la società ad affrontare e affrontare la violenza di petto.

In definitiva, il contributo di Sarah Kane al panorama teatrale risiede nel suo esame della sofferenza, dell'aggressione sessuale e dell'oppressione delle donne. Le sue opere forniscono un prisma critico per esaminare questi problemi e sfidare le norme culturali e sociali che perpetuano la sottomissione delle donne. Kane promuove una prospettiva resiliente e trasformativa, esortando la società a lavorare attivamente per smantellare i sistemi patriarcali e promuovere l'uguaglianza e la giustizia per tutti, esplorando questi temi difficili e inquietanti.

La pratica letteraria di Caroline Bergvall sfida le nozioni convenzionali di linguaggio, cultura e femminismo. Bergvall interrompe il dominio del linguaggio nazionale eteropatriarcale e della cultura monolingue incorporando elementi stranieri e generando un inglese distorto e disarticolato. Il suo lavoro affronta una grande varietà di temi, come la politica della differenza e la solidarietà, la decolonizzazione, la pratica femminista, lo scambio interculturale e la connessione tra l'organizzazione femminista e i movimenti sociali.

La ricerca di Bergvall sulla violenza sessuale contro le donne, l'asilo cura, la voce e la testimonianza rivela un'analisi approfondita dei fallimenti istituzionali e dei contributi potenziali delle arti e delle discipline umanistiche per affrontare questi problemi urgenti. Il suo obiettivo è ottenere un cambiamento positivo e trascendere i confini convenzionali attraverso le sue forme sperimentali di espressione artistica, invitando il pubblico a coinvolgersi con prospettive alternative e sfidare le norme stabilite di un sistema che sostiene le violenze di genere contro donne e ragazze nel mondo.

La pratica poetica e le iniziative di Caroline Bergvall contribuiscono a una comprensione più ampia del linguaggio, del femminismo e dell'efficacia dell'espressione artistica. Sfida le norme

stabilite e invita il pubblico a riconsiderare i limiti convenzionali attraverso il suo uso inventivo del linguaggio e l'esplorazione di questioni sociali urgenti. L'opera di Bergvall esemplifica il potere dell'arte di ispirare la trasformazione, promuovere il dialogo e aprire la strada verso un panorama culturale più inclusivo e dinamico.

*Freshwater* di Akwaeke Emezi è un'opera letteraria africana notevole e originale che sfida le narrazioni tradizionali incorporando umorismo, frivolezza leggerezza e il pronome plurale "noi". Emezi esplora il trauma, la violenza, la sopravvivenza e l'agenzia delle donne nigeriane in questo romanzo, presentando un nuovo discorso sui corpi femminili nigeriani e dimostrando la forza del femminismo nella letteratura del Sud Globale. L'approccio innovativo di Emezi si esemplifica nella sua ricerca sulla cosmologia Ogbanje e nella sua disposizione ad affrontare temi tabù come la salute mentale e la sessualità. Emezi richiama l'attenzione sulla necessità di approcci trasversali per comprendere le differenze di genere e sfida le concezioni convenzionali di identità prendendo libertà descrittive e integrando elementi soprannaturali. La libertà di stile del romanzo e l'uso della lingua nativa dell'autore ci immergono in una dimensione multiculturale, enfatizzando l'importanza del contesto testuale e promuovendo la consapevolezza multiculturale.

*Freshwater* è un testo decoloniale che sfida le ideologie occidentali e indaga le identità queer all'interno della cosmologia Igbo. Emezi sostiene l'importanza dell'ontologia Igbo, affermando che trascende il folklore e la superstizione e fornisce un quadro per comprendere la fisica, la scienza e la spiritualità. Il romanzo sfida le concezioni tradizionali di genere e identità destabilizzando le nozioni eteronormative e situando l'omosessualità all'interno della spiritualità Igbo. Inoltre, *Freshwater* funziona come un catalizzatore per discussioni critiche su temi contemporanei e come un punto di riferimento nel presente globale, segnato dalla migrazione e dall'insicurezza. Provoca i lettori a riflettere sulle identità metafisiche, sulla spiritualità innovativa e sul vero significato di casa, ritratto come un viaggio anziché una destinazione finale.

*Freshwater* non solo contribuisce alla ricchezza della letteratura africana, ma amplia anche i confini del discorso letterario offrendo una prospettiva nuova e provocatoria di rottura su genere,

identità e spiritualità. Attraverso le sue narrazioni, Emezi sfida le norme sociali, promuove il dialogo e invita i lettori a interagire con temi e narrazioni complesse che vanno oltre le pagine del romanzo.

Il romanzo *Girl, Woman, Other* di Bernadine Evaristo ritrae le vite e le esperienze delle donne nere emarginate in Gran Bretagna in una narrativa complessa e potente di carattere transmoderno. Attraverso le loro storie interconnesse, il romanzo celebra la forza, le relazioni familiari, l'ibridazione e l'empatia di queste donne, enfatizzando l'importanza dell'interconnessione umana e la sua rilevanza non solo per le donne razzializzate, ma per tutta la società. Come si evidenzia mostra nella relazione madre-figlia tra Penelope e Hattie, Evaristo situa le donne razzializzate e bianche britanniche su un piano di parità, dimostrando il potere trasformativo delle loro connessioni. Il romanzo promuove la filosofia transmoderna che enfatizza l'interconnessione di tutti gli esseri investigando i temi della diversità, della connessione e della relazione.

*Girl, Woman, Other* impiega una struttura narrativa distintiva originale, con quattro gruppi di tre personaggi intrecciati che rappresentano diverse generazioni e origini. Questo approccio a rete esemplifica la transmodernità dalla prospettiva di una persona femminista razzializzata enfatizzando i valori di interconnessione, transnazionalismo e temporalità accelerata. Attraverso le esperienze di dodici donne, Evaristo mira a esporre e sfidare le strutture interrelate correlate di razza, genere e classe. Il romanzo offre una visione critica e realistica dell'esperienza delle donne nere in Gran Bretagna, affrontando temi come l'identità, il razzismo, il femminismo e la sessualità. Evaristo sfida gli stereotipi e i pregiudizi radicati presentando personaggi complessi e sfaccettati, rompendo con i limiti imposti dalla società e dalla letteratura convenzionale.

Le opere di Sarah Kane, Caroline Bergvall, Angélica Liddell, Beatriz Cabur, Akwaeke Emezi e Bernadine Evaristo affrontano la violenza di genere e la legittimazione delle donne da diverse prospettive e attraverso diverse forme artistiche. Le loro opere sfidano le norme sociali, amplificano le voci emarginate e contribuiscono alla lotta per l'uguaglianza di genere e la giustizia sociale. Ciascuna di queste autrici ha lasciato una significativa impronta nei rispettivi campi e ha ispirato altre persone a ripensare le narrazioni dominanti e lavorare per una società più inclusiva ed

equa. Riconoscendo il trauma delle esperienze delle donne, queste scrittrici presentano descrizioni sfumate che sfidano gli stereotipi di genere ed elevano le prospettive aspettative delle donne emarginate. Riconoscere la natura interconnessa delle oppressioni e difendere i diritti e le esperienze delle donne e delle ragazze di con diversi background diversi è fondamentale per concentrarsi sulla fase preventiva di questa problematica e, quindi, sostenere l'eradicazione lo sradicamento della violenza contro le donne e le ragazze in tutto il mondo.

