GENDER OPEN REPOSITORIUM

# Patriarchal Academia Is Violent for All, Just Not in the Same Way : Storytelling Body Maps of Our Harmed Female Bodies

**Linsalata, Lucia**

**2023**

**https://doi.org/10.25595/2876**

**Veröffentlichungsversion / published version**
**Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article**

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Linsalata, Lucia: *Patriarchal Academia Is Violent for All, Just Not in the Same Way : Storytelling Body Maps of Our Harmed Female Bodies*, in: Open Gender Journal, Jg. 7 (2023) Nr: 1, 1–23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2876.

**Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://doi.org/10.17169/OGJ.2023.253**

**Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY 4.0 Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de

**Terms of use:**

This document is made available under a CC BY 4.0 License (Attribution). For more information see:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

OPEN GENDER JOURNAL

# Patriarchal Academia Is Violent for All, Just Not in the Same Way.
# Storytelling Body Maps of Our Harmed Female Bodies

Lucia Linsalata (lucia.linsalata@correo.buap.mx)

**Abstract:** This article shares a body mapping experience facilitated as part of the postgraduate sociology program at the university Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) with the objective of recognizing and naming the patriarchal violence that harms our educational community. Within this text, we aim to organize and share this body mapping experience, focusing on the potential found in the creation of body-centered research methodologies in order to generate organizational processes within academic arenas to foster that institutions may name, analyze and collectively take responsibility for violence within their walls. This article will simultaneously present some of the violence that was reported and identified during our body mapping sessions through images and group story sharing.

**Keywords:** Gender Relations, Sexism, University, Violence

**Published:** 11 December 2023

**Citation:** Linsalata, Lucia (2023): Patriarchal Academia is Violent for All, Just not in the Same Way. Storytelling Body Maps of Our Harmed Female Bodies. In: Open Gender Journal 7. doi: 10.17169/ogj.2023.253

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.17169/ogj.2023.253

Translation from the original Spanish. First published: Linsalata, Lucia (2023): La academia patriarcal daña a todxs, pero no de la misma forma. Mapas-relatos de nuestras cuerpas dañadas. Debate Feminista, 66, 293–325. https://doi.org/10.22201/cieg.2594066xe.2023.66.2412

DEBATE FEMINISTA

The section "Gender-based and Sexualised Harassment, Discrimination and Violence in Higher Education Contexts" is a cooperation between Debate Feminista and Open Gender Journal.

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

Lucia Linsalata

# Patriarchal Academia Is Violent for All, Just Not in the Same Way. Storytelling Body Maps of Our Harmed Female Bodies

## Introduction

During the month of April 2022, a series of events transpired that we within the postgraduate community of the Sociology program at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (henceforth referred to as BUAP) would have never thought possible. Both professors and postgraduate students in the program gathered together for three days to discuss and reflect upon the multiple patriarchal forms of violence with which we had been faced as part of our university experience. These crucial days were extraordinary and flooded with many contrasting emotions, tension, words spoken through lumps in our throats, tears, laughter, hopes and fears. They provided an opportunity for honest conversations – ones usually stifled or avoided – regarding what harms us, hurts us, makes us sick and what we no longer wanted to experience or tolerate.

We named this reflective exercise *Hacia un posgrado libre de violencia patriarcal* (Toward a Postgraduate Program Free of Patriarchal Violence). It was a pluralistic and diverse dialogue, never before experienced in our academic environment, in which we managed to exclaim "No!" to many harmful practices that we would no longer tolerate and, in turn, proclaim "Yes!" to many other practices that we knew would contribute to the healing of our academic lives by limiting patriarchal violence in our place of work and study.

How did we arrive at this place? How did we activate a space that would clearly confront a set of violent practices for which we sometimes do not even have the words to name them?

It was a combination of different factors that made the creation of such a space within our Sociology postgraduate program at the BUAP possible; the determining factor was a research-activism project (Ruiz Trejo/García Dauder 2018) driven by the mutual work of postgraduate students, professors and members of the *Colectiva Caracola Tejedora* (the Weaving Snail Collective).

We named the project *Dibujar nuestra cuerpa antipatriarcal: ejercicios feministas de mapeo corporal en la comunidad del posgrado de sociología de la BUAP* (Drawing Our Anti-Patriarchal Female Body Together: Feminist Body-Mapping Exer-

cises within the Sociology Postgraduate Community at the BUAP). The project was conducted from August to December of 2021, facilitating eight collective body-mapping workshops in order to evaluate and confront patriarchal violence in our academic space.

Within this article, I organize and communicate certain key components of what we achieved through these workshops. In dialogue with the epistemology of women's standpoint, in particular that of Dorothy Smith (2005), I recognize that speaking from our personal experience has been and continues to be a vital epistemological practice for women. Creating spaces for ourselves in order to name together what we have lived through and give ourselves the opportunity to organize and put into practice what we have learned has been, and will continue to be for many women, an avenue to collectively produce knowledge bases and attain a sense of critical dissidence. These spaces and practices have been and will continue to be a practice for many women of getting to know their selves as capable of giving "shared experiences a political presence" (Smith 2005, 1).

With this article, resonating with the political and epistemological posture as discussed above, I seek to communicate a shared experience among a group of female colleagues dear to me; together, we have decided to shed light on a lived set of practices of patriarchal violence that affect our daily life.

I begin this text by introducing myself and explaining the stand point from which I share this life experience. Next, I present the methodology that we designed collectively to conduct violence-recognition exercises within our academic setting. Finally, I elaborate upon some of the emotional, physical and psychological harm that we successfully identified through our body-mapping workshops. In all this, I rely on the use of collective storytelling and body mapping collectively produced within the workshops.

## The Position from Which I Narrate and Why I Do So

My name is Lucia. I am a mother, daughter, friend, activist, relentless dreamer and – as I have been for some time now – a feminist. For the last seven years, I have worked as a research professor at the BUAP at the postgraduate Sociology department. Like the majority of women in academia, I have experienced and witnessed countless acts of violence within classrooms and hallways at the institution where I work, and from my feminist posture, I consider this violence to have profoundly patriarchal traits.

Why do I use the adjective "patriarchal" to define this violence? I conceive patriarchal violence as a central mechanism of domination that aims at main-

taining exploitative relationships that give structure to all levels of modern societies. In the words of Rita Segato (2019), this mechanism is characterized by the continuous establishment (through the systemic exercise of multiple acts of domination that are repeated through an endless cycle of deeds and social practices) of power connections and subjugation between what we call "masculine" and "feminine". The main objective of patriarchal violence as a means of domination is not only to bend the will of feminine or feminized bodies, but also – and above all else – to make an example of those dominated bodies or, as Segato (2003) argues, to use these dominated bodies as material or physical messages directed not just at women or bodies which are perceived to be feminine or feminized but also toward men. These messages, as Segato interprets them, become an asphyxiating masculinity mandate in which a masculine subject (or a subject that aspires to become masculine, which can also be a body read as female), in order to belong to the masculine "brotherhood", must demonstrate his ability to dominate other bodies, passing as insensitive or even cruel to some degree (Segato 2018, 42). In this sense, patriarchal violence reproduces a pedagogy of insensitivity or cruelty that afflicts all bodies, although always in a respectively distinct manner.

Throughout my university career, I have had the opportunity to share concerns with friends, colleagues and students about the repetition of violent practices within the academic environment that, in my opinion, conform to the above-mentioned pedagogy of insensitivity dictated by the social imposition of a tremendously damaged masculinity. At times, I have managed to create alliances with other women in order to respond together to these types of conduct. Over the years, attempts to confront such violence have been accompanied by other women and fairly well-organized. We have experienced several failures and frustrations when these confrontations were unsuccessful, only partially successful or superficial.

As val flores states, it is not easy to undo the done, the normalized, the commonly accepted. It is not easy "to pull away our 'skin in the game', which is stuck to corporal punishment and epistemic protocols" that patriarchal academia constantly imposes upon us (flores 2019, 14, translated by the autor). As it is said in Mexico, *"quien persevera alcanza"* (whoever perseveres reaches her goals).

The feminist desire to transform the world and imagine multiple and multidirectional ways of doing so has become contagious in many of the spaces that I frequent. In one of these continuous pushes to not give up or give in to the normalization of violence that is reproduced and experienced in daily life, my colleagues and I successfully blazed a new and unexpected trail. This new ini-

tiative came from a part of me that never tires of organizing in an autonomous, independent manner in order to open new counter-cultural paths. This deep place inside of me has a name: *la Caracola Tejedora* (the Weaving Snail).

The *Colectiva Caracola Tejedora* is a female collective of women that are diverse in age, education and origin. By all types of strokes of luck and destiny, we found one another in Puebla city, although we do not all live there. At the beginning of 2020, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we created a space for support and companionship among women. From within this space, we have given each other tools for greater self-awareness regarding the harm that patriarchal violence has inflicted on our bodies and our relationships. One such tool is, as I shall explain later, body mapping.

I personally participate in this space with colleagues and friends who are working on their doctorates at the postgraduate Sociology department alongside other women who, just like us, have experienced violence at their respective universities or workplaces.

We have noticed the frequent need to share our painful encounters and how they have negatively affected our bodies through externalizing our frustration at not being able to confront these problems within our institutions to a satisfactory level of resolution.

Within one such session of collective reflection, gathering strength from one another, we began to think in an alternative manner in order to open up a process of collective reflection within the university setting to process the patriarchal violence that we experience. We shared our thinking with other friends and colleagues at the Sociology department. We sought a small amount of funding that would allow us to formalize our ideas. Slowly, we started to give shape to the research project that is now the topic of this paper and which I had the honor of coordinating.

When we began to design our research-activism project, we defined two main objectives. Firstly, we aimed to set into motion a process of collective recognition that would allow us to map and name – from our own bodies and voices – some of the harm that patriarchal violence within our universities had produced, while also identifying bonds that we had created among ourselves within our respective academic communities. Secondly, we sought to imagine together collective strategies to take charge of the harm inflicted upon us.

Within this article, I shall limit myself to explaining the process that allowed us to achieve our first objective within the postgraduate Sociology program at the BUAP. Before doing so, however, I find it important to clarify what body mapping is and how we took ownership of this research technique in order to meet our goal.

## Storytelling and Body Mapping to Represent Our Harmed Female Bodies

A map is a representation. We all relate to maps regularly; we are accustomed to consulting them and assume that they are faithful reflections of the territory depicted. However, maps – in reality – are partial, subjective and always ideological. As Jerry Brotton (2012) proposes in his wonderful book "The History of the World in Twelve Maps", the production and use of maps throughout history has been a principal instrument used by dominant powers to impose a specific worldview and construct representations of functional territories and their subsequent appropriation. However, it is also true that maps can be used to create counter-representations or counter-narratives capable of disputing and contesting existing factual and hegemonic powers (Risler/Ares 2013).

In Latin America, a broad tradition of popular public education, research-based participatory action and research-activism has labored along these same lines. As part of this tradition, female-driven movements have been created from the worldview of Latin American Feminist Geography, such as the *Geo-Brujas* (Geo-Witches), the *Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador* (Ecuadorian Critical Geography Collective) and the *Proyecto Cuerpografías* (Bodygraphy Project). In dialogue with feminism offshoots, such collectives have sought to explore the subversive power of countermapping the body and its use as a political intervention and a tool of dissent set against the hegemonic narratives imposed upon our bodies and territories.

We have learned from these movements that countermapping the body can work as a highly fruitful tool that generates space for self-enunciation, which is a counternarrative in one's own space and body, edified from the fabric of lived bodily experience (Marchese 2020, 294). Like other research methods that explore the epistemological potential registered within bodily experiences, as for example by Mari Luz Esteban (2004), body-mapping exercises enable the verbalization and conceptualization of feelings and sensations (Ruiz Trejo/García Dauder 2018, 58) from the vantage point of lived experience and collective, incarnate reflection. In this sense, body maps are methodological tools that help to maximize the epistemic value of the body and break imposed norms that silence or normalize the effect of the dominant relationships that we encounter. Turning once again to the words of Dorothy Smith, we could say that countermapping the body allows us to create spaces where we can collectively practice "embodiment on the terrain of the disembodied of dominant

relationships" (2005, 13). These spaces make room for lived experience for us to then develop a voice capable of making visible the relationships that oppress us.

Similarly, in the *Caracola Tejedora* collective, we have reclaimed this tool for building embodied knowledge within our research-activism project with the dual-purpose objective of promoting the process of recognition of patriarchal violence in our postgraduate Sociology program and collectively constructing a counternarrative or counter story from our experiences within this space.

Encouraged by this political intentionality, we collectively designed body-mapping exercises to propose to our colleagues at the Sociology department. The *Caracola Tejedora* collective decided to employ a little-used phrase in academia: *la cuerpa colectiva* (the collective female body). In Spanish, the word *cuerpo* (body) is written with an "o", as it is a grammatically masculine noun. The *Caracola Tejedora* collective decided to re-gender the masculine noun by making it feminine, replacing the "o" with an "a", producing the word *cuerpa*, making it the female body.

Why did we re-gender *cuerpo* to *cuerpa*? In recent years, the word *cuerpa* has been widely used among female collectives as part of an exercise to feminize and resignify words. In many different contexts, the word cuerpa is now used to refer to collective reappropriation and resignification processes of our corporality. This reassignment is constructed within the community through shared empathy and spoken word. As will be discussed later, the introduction of *cuerpa colectiva* (the collective female body) within our workshops – particularly the harmed female body – allowed willing participants to explore the possibility of navigating together toward a collective fellowship and representation of a unique social corporality that is capable of holding space to feel, recognize and name the set of injuries that the bodies in this group have experienced. Similarly, the name *cuerpa* enabled us to invite participants to build a narrative robust enough to communicate – beyond the intimate space of our workshop – a deep reflection regarding the patriarchal damage that has negatively affected relationships within our community.

With the above-mentioned process, we not only directed ourselves toward body mapping that would allow for self-diagnosis and the representation of harm caused by patriarchal violence inflicted upon our collective female body but also toward constructing a collective story capable of narrating and exposing these damages.

## How Did We Create Storytelling Maps of Our Harmed Bodies?

In order to open up spaces to recognize and reflect upon patriarchal violence within the Sociology postgraduate program at the BUAP, we invited the entire Sociology community (students, professors, employees, staff and collaborators) through an open call to voluntarily participate in our first workshop series, titled *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* (Recognizing Together Patriarchal Damage Against Our Collective Female Body). The response was pleasantly surprising: approximately 40 percent of the community actively participated in our workshop proposal.

Considering the difficult and sensitive nature of the topic we were about to face, we decided to conduct each individual workshop with a maximum of eight participants. With these small groups, our goal was creating a safe, intimate space that would provide participants with the opportunity to open up emotionally and receive emotional support if necessary. Being highly aware of the seemingly "invisible" nature of sex/gender dissidences, we opted to separate groups into those who were raised as female and those who were raised as male, giving participants the chance to sign up for whichever group they felt most comfortable with. We hoped that this distinction – without minimizing sex/gender dissidences – would allow us to recognize violent practices from a heteronormative, gender-differentiated vantage point, which is commonly imposed upon bodies from the moment they are able to be read socially and educated according to male/female-binary gender norms. In total, we created five work groups, three groups with participants raised as female and two groups with participants raised as male. We conducted the same workshop with all five groups.

Each workshop consisted of two stages. In the first stage, we focused on recognizing forms of patriarchal violence that each participant had experienced as an individual, such as physical, emotional and psychological harm toward their person. We requested that each participant map the following on a previously drawn silhouette: 1. violence that was inflicted, received or self-imposed in public postgraduate spaces (seminars, colloquiums, conferences etc.); 2. violence that was inflicted, received or self-imposed within more intimate, less public relationships or spaces (tutoring or advising relationships, group work, friendships etc.); and 3. witnessed violence not suffered directly.

We instructed participants to map based on their own personal, intuitive understanding of patriarchal violence, trying not to impose a predefined notion

of patriarchal violence upon them. This allowed the emergence of a plethora of differentiated and complex images of violent experiences associated with patriarchal relationships within the academic space, which is demonstrated in Figure 1: each person works on their silhouette, marking the places where they have experienced and felt patriarchal violence.

Figure 1: Body Mapping



Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

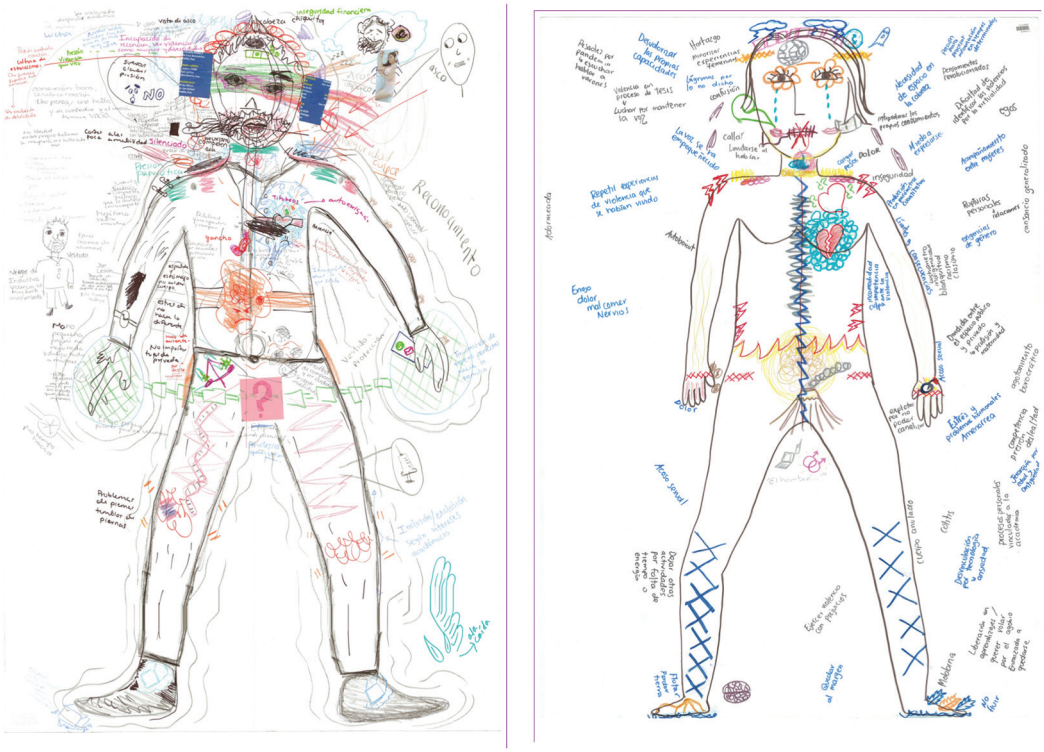
Once individual drawings were completed, we requested that each participant share their experience with the group. As individuals took turns when speaking – having been invited to listen deeply and empathetically to one another – the group conversation naturally evolved from recognizing individual damage done to each individual body to recognizing a set of patriarchal-violence behaviors that negatively affects the collective body and the relationships that are formed in shared spaces. Through this exercise, we sought not only to name specific exercises but to also foster recognizing shared experience in others in order to construct together a common voice capable of naming a set of violent practices that are often difficult to identify and articulate.

With this as our goal, a second mapping exercise was put into motion that would allow us to represent – from the concept of *cuerpa* – a unique corporality, capable of recognizing oneself as part of a collective. While each participant sha-

red their body map, two female colleagues, who are also members of *Caracola Tejedora*, represented the harm they had experienced and their reflections on it on a blank silhouette. This expression emerged from the safe speaking circle that we had created.

In closing the first dialogue encounter, we showed this collective body map to the participants of each workshop. Working under the idea that what happens to one happens to all, we invited participants to assume the map to be their own harmed collective body in order to create a story together regarding what this collective body had felt and experienced. This storytelling would anonymously capture the emotional range and narrated injuries relayed in the speaking circle to be presented as personal, taking on the damage to the collective body that we recognized together as ours. This way, we created five body maps accompanied by their respective stories.

Figure 2: Maps of the harmed collective body



Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

It is impossible to represent here the density of all that emerged through these storytelling maps of our damaged bodies. Even so, I shall attempt to present some of the most significant discoveries that these self-diagnosis exercises allowed us to make. In order to do so, in the following, I first present substantial differences in storytelling-map results between workshop participants who were raised as female versus those who were raised as male. Then, I present a set of violent practices that were reported within the five storytelling maps and

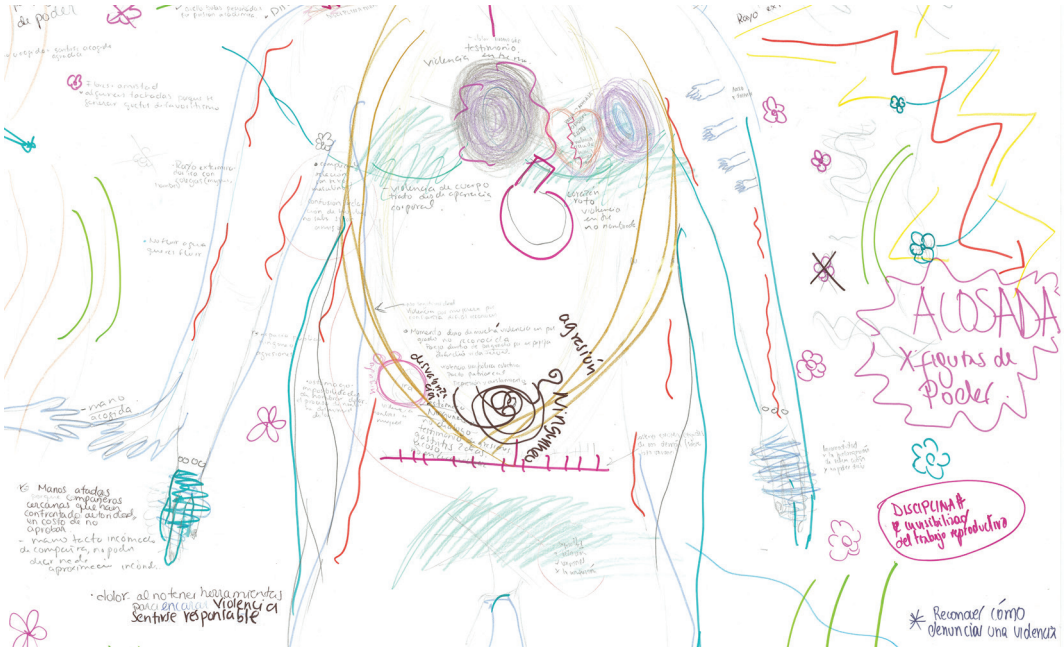
that, borrowing from Segato, could be associated with the masculine mandate in academia.

## Marks of Patriarchal Academia on Feminine Bodies

As we recorded patterns that emerged within stories during the workshops, we could not help but notice something that we felt was predictable yet still pained us and shook us to our core: our postgraduate Sociology program – like most academic environments in Mexico – is not a space that treats us as equals. No matter how radical or critical the thinking at our institution, women – here and elsewhere – are still working on an unequal playing field. Our bodies are still affronted by an array of violent practices that bodies socially read as male do not face, even though the cost of that violence negatively affects all bodies, including bodies of all genders. Three particular differences between "male" and "female" experience stood out to us as we engaged in dialogue regarding the storytelling maps of our harmed bodies.

1. First, we could not ignore the reiteration of stories and testimonies given by our female colleagues about sexual harassment, which were reported and represented on the storytelling maps of our harmed collective bodies as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Marks of harassment on our collective female body




Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

> "Here, we can observe that the space around the collective body has been reduced.This sensation of constriction is associated with the academic environment, a space which [...] has been violent toward her and has touched her without her permission. The multiple hands on her shoulders and on her arm precisely indicate that this collective body has been harassed by powerful figureheads that have made her feel vulnerable, silenced, sometimes alone." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, Damaged collective female body 8 October, 2021)
>
> "This body has her sexual organs, breasts and hands 'cancelled' to signal that on many occasions, she has felt uncomfortable in those parts of her body while relating to male colleagues. This uncomfortableness is associated with a set of behaviors full of ambiguities and double entendres that are difficult to decipher – behaviors that confuse her and have forced her to set boundaries, which have not always been successful or have come at a great cost." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)
>
> "[This body] has suffered harassment within academia to such a degree that she now sees that patriarchal pacts established within academic settings have woven male colleagues together in collusion, forcing female colleagues to completely turn their lives upside down and leave the program when they had already constructed important projects for themselves." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)

This reality is not negated within the stories told in our workshops by participants raised as male. In texts created by our male colleagues, at least two key elements were mentioned that further highlight the problem at hand. First, one of the stories openly recognizes the collective male body as a potential collective aggressor. Second, we saw recognition of the collective male body's preferring to remain silent when witnessing, perceiving or hearing about episodes of harassment, taking on a conformist, passive posture that reinforces the pact of silence within the overarching male brotherhood – a pact that binds the collective male body to inaction despite the unrest it feels (Figure 4).

> "This harmed collective male body features a covered mouth because he has been conditioned to not speak of what he sees and hears. When toxic relationships between professors and students become known, the body prefers to not get himself into trouble, keeping quiet. Faced with a violent situation, the body looked the other way and now feels deep shame for it. (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 17 November, 2021)"

Figure 4: Marks on the collective female body created by the pact of silence



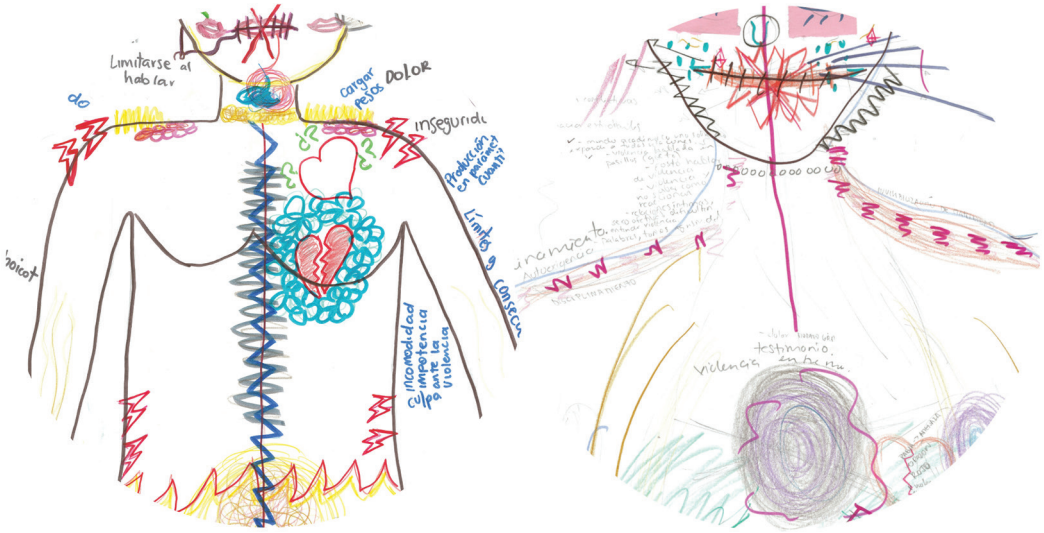

Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

2. A second noteworthy difference between storytelling maps belonging to participants raised as female and those raised as male is the enormous difficulty that women face when confronting our postgraduate studies or teaching work when the role of motherhood that many of us assume is made invisible – or worse yet, denigrated – along with the immense workload that reproduction and caregiving represents, as we sustain human life while we exercise academic work. Our bodies denounce this (Figure 5):

> "This female body feels cut in half, divided between her public academic life and her private life, which mostly revolves around her motherhood. She perceives these two spaces to be profoundly separated and feels that she cannot reconcile these two aspects of her life. This feeling increases when she receives opinions from postgraduate professors regarding her decision to become a mother. These opinions make her feel judged and uncomfortable." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 15 October, 2021)

> "This female body experiences lower back pain for carrying more than is hers to carry, sustaining processes and fixing mistakes made by others, mostly men who do not take responsibility for their mistakes. This back pain can also be attributed to a large dose of self-imposed pressure, brought on by patriarchal dynamics within academia, an academia that – among other things – permanently hides her motherhood and reproductive work that this female body carries out alongside her academic work." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)

Figure 5. Marks created by overwork from reproduction and caregiving




Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

Remarkably, these types of physical pain (like the body cut in half by the impossibility of reconciliation between child-rearing labor and academic labor or lower back and shoulder pain associated with an overload of caregiving work) are not represented on maps created by participants raised as male. While several male colleagues who participated in the workshops are in the process of child rearing, none of them mentioned their paternity as representing a barrier or difficulty to developing their academic life or conducting their studies, which is in sharp contrast to the women in the workshops, who highlighted this problem emphatically. Relatedly, one map created by men stood out to us because the collective male body shown on it had a small hand, which showed the tendency to defer responsibilities to female colleagues and not take full charge of obligations.

3. Another noteworthy aspect of storytelling maps created by participants raised as female was the repeated theme of cancelled, censured or sewn-shut mouths, with similar representations of throat and jaw pain associated with guarded silence without the possibility of expressing oneself and raising one's

own voice. The constant cancelling of the female voice seems to be a structural problem within our academic space. This cancelling is manifested in several ways. Some more notorious and more often reported forms of cancellation are the predominance of male voices in the classroom and in debates that take up inconsiderate amounts of time, space and topics of discussion, inhibiting female participation; the prevalent attitude among many men – both students and professors – to edit, correct, invalidate or stigmatize what women say or do, including in their research; and the difficulty in proposing topics and research methods of interest to women. Our harmed female bodies recount this (Figure 6):

Figure 6. Marks of cancellation of the female voice




Source: *Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva* workshop

> "The mouth on this collective female body is usually closed, too, self-censured and even cancelled at times, sometimes because of insecurity when speaking in seminars, like the feeling of needing to keep silent when faced with injustices either directly experienced or witnessed." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)
>
> "This female body is represented with three mouths. One mouth is drawn sewn shut because it has discovered that its voice cannot get out, as it is cancelled, silenced and afraid to express what it thinks and feels because it has been told that it doesn't know what it wants and doesn't know what it is talking about. Another of the mouths represents the voice of men that speak for it because she isn't ‚enough'.
>
> The final mouth represents women who judge her when she says something because those women think the mouth is pretentious, arrogant or overly masculine. The mouth feels like she doesn't have enough resources as she doesn't know how to posture her voice and finally ends up keeping thoughts to herself." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 15 October, 2021)
>
> "This female body has another large lump in her throat. Her throat has many strikethrough marks on it because of the continual feeling that she cannot speak in academic spaces. This throat is related to the mouth, which is also crossed out because it has felt censured, cancelled or sealed shut on multiple occasions because there are 'things that cannot be said' as you actually want to say them in academia – there is

> a specific, structured language that limits your capacity for expression. This mouth feels rejected and blocked by professors that impede creating her own voice." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 22 October, 2021)

Just like the cases detailed above, this problem is recognized in different ways within the stories told by men when, for example, they describe the collective masculine as a body that tends to pay more attention to what men say than women, as a body capable of editing the words of its female colleagues from a certain masculine rationale that assumes itself to be more valid or as a body that reacts aggressively to female criticism – stigmatizing women and writing them off as hysterical – or even as a body that monopolizes discussions, incessantly seeking to dominate visual fields. This is exemplified in an eloquent fragment within a story telling body map created by a colleague raised as male:

> "Another manifestation of 'deafness' that harms the collective male body is its predisposition to pay more attention when men speak than when women speak [...] Another violent reflex – bound to this inability to listen – emerges from the arm of this harmed collective body. This body feels a certain 'soft' imposition over the voice of some female colleagues when the privilege to reinterpret what a woman says from a masculine rationale is granted and the result is assumed to be more valid. Frequently, male voices repeat or reedit what female colleagues say in order to express their statements with 'more order', with a certain way of speaking or creating pause that he considers to be better." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 17 November, 2021)

These three manifestations of patriarchal violence that we see exercised predominantly toward the female body – harassment, the invisibilization of reproductive work and the cancelling of the female voice – are intimately related to multiple other forms of violence that affect both bodies raised as male and bodies raised as female.

## The Harm of Masculinized Academia

An evident continuity exists between the constant cancelling of the feminine voice and a culture of disqualification that frequently results in open mistreatment. Male and female workshop participants insistently reported this culture of disqualification in each of our encounters, consistent with Segato's work, which I associate with a pedagogy of cruelty from the masculine mandate. As I mentioned earlier, when Segato speaks about the mandate of masculinity, she is referring to the social demand that imposes that "a man must prove himself male at all times" (Segato 2019, translated from Spanish). In this sense, masculi-

nity, "in contrast to femininity, is a status, a hierarchy of prestige that is acquired like a title and its validity must be renewed and proven as such" (Segato 2018, 42). In order to "renew" this status, one must exhibit force through aggression or domination over those who display signs of femininity, namely those who are in a subjugated position in the eyes of those who oppress them. This social demand is imposed mainly on bodies raised as male but does not leave out women entirely, as women – in a certain manner – are obliged to respond to the masculinized pattern that governs sociocultural practice within patriarchal society.

Therefore, within this dynamic, men are obligated to demonstrate their strength in order to maintain their power status. Some women adhere to the mandate of masculinity to acquire similar status and develop aggressive or other behaviors complicit with the masculine brotherhood.

The stories shared about our harmed collective female bodies clearly demonstrate that the space we inhabit within higher education is deeply influenced by the mandate of masculinity that continually demands both students and professors to attack, challenge and violently question one another. Academia demands toughness, sacrifice, competence, rigor and – thus – promotes punitive, exclusive, selective, hierarchical, productivist, insensitive and unempathetic behaviors. These behaviors leave behind deep wounds on the bodies of those who inhabit these spaces.

For example, within the storytelling maps, we observed that many academic spaces we inhabit are structured around a behavioral pattern that constantly imposes the construction of hierarchical relationships based on the devaluing of those who are situated – from the viewpoint of those who harm – on the lowest levels of the hierarchical order. These bodies must be imposed upon in order for the abuser to receive affirmation. Both bodies raised as male and bodies raised as female alike recognize having suffered from these behaviors within academia, and, in the case of men, having actively reproduced these behaviors in professor-student, student-student and professor-professor relationships.

The damage associated with these types of practices is represented in and on bodies in different ways (Figure 7). Some of the most notorious damage we observed was demonstrated in drawing with disqualifying labels on the forehead or with belittling phrases on the chest; representing oneself with a small head or with clipped wings due to feeling continually diminished for what one may think, say or write; drawing the body with slumped shoulders and a chain on the chest that represents oppression, with hands and forehead perspiring or with tears in the eyes, which indicates discomfort associated with a feeling of low self-esteem and constant insecurity; or drawing the body with pains and

ailments on the mouth to indicate different types of violent verbal expression received.

Figure 7: Marks of disqualification




Source: *Cuerpa colectiva dañada* workshop

> "This harmed collective body is drawn with a disqualifying label on his forehead, with exoticizing pyramids on his head and many belittling phrases on his chest. This body has often felt disqualified by both professors and colleagues. This body has been met with disqualification because of his perspectives, for his academic background outside of sociology, for his young age, for lack of political or organized activism experience, for his need for support in the learning process, or simply for asking for help [...] This has caused fear and insecurity. This body has received belittling comments from professors, which are now etched on his heart, undermining his confidence – phrases such as 'You don't know anything' or 'I don't know how we admitted you to this program' or 'if you don't want to read and learn, watch videos on YouTube'." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 17 November, 2021)
>
> "This collective body feels that his wings have been clipped; he feels contempt toward his ways of thinking and feeling; he feels that his capacity to desire has been amputated. The body is drawn with a small head, as if he had been disqualified and the contempt toward what he thinks and feels has caused the head to shrink." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 17 November, 2021)

The marks associated with these types of harm are particularly evident within collective male bodies. In the two storytelling maps created by male colleagues, we clearly perceive the incessant presence of many ailments and negative emotions associated with this harm, such as feelings of profound, paralyzing insecurity, low self-esteem, nervousness, stress, anxiety or, worse still, of being trapped in the repetition of arrogant and aggressive behaviors that cannot be controlled.

The repetition of these behaviors is strongly reported within the stories of female participants, who also recognize that they exercise considerable aggression through spoken words. This is exemplified by the following story:

> "This female body recognizes oftentimes exercising violence through spoken words, although many times, this aggression is defensive as it is the one way she has found to make boundaries in such a tense environment. This violence has clouded her thoughts and cast shadows over her feelings toward colleagues, deeply wounding her." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)

Another dimension of patriarchal violence intimately related to the forms just discussed was shown in the way in which women emphasized, in their stories, the physical and emotional harm associated with intragender violence. While this problem is recognized by both men and women, women emphasize it much more, indicating how conflicting and debilitating it is for us to recognize and suffer from dynamics of competition or explicit aggression toward and from women that we should, ideally, see as allies. We read, for example, in the storytelling maps:

> "This collective female body also has a knot in her chest in shades of grays and purples, which represents the pain that has been left in her body – the grays of feminisms and invisibilized violence between female colleagues – a violence that is perceived as highly present and constant in the postgraduate program but that cannot be talked about openly. This collective female body has a broken heart for the same reason as she recognizes violence committed between women – including women who are considered friends or allies – but feels it without the legitimacy to name it." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)

Even so, we must note that within the three storytelling maps created by female participant groups, while negative dynamics among women were reported, the storytelling maps also recognize that it has been alliances and bonds of cooperation, care and the fabric of affection with other women in the academic environment that have limited – on some occasions – multiple forms of aggression and fostered spaces of wellbeing for us.

Another very noteworthy form of violence that can be related to the presence of the mandate of masculinity in academia is associated with an excess of theoricism exercised largely by men. With excess of theoricism, we refer to an academic practice that, while privileging the production and transmission of primarily abstract and metatheoretical knowledge – which is not easily understood or absorbed by most individuals – disregards other forms of knowledge production or teaching practices that are commonly feminized, denigrated or written

off as excessively empirical and less academic. The damage associated with this practice was portrayed persistently in storytelling maps in the area around the bodies' heads and was represented in several forms: entangled thoughts associated with harmful mental activity; a fragmented brain at its feet associated with ideas that remain stagnant and are not successfully appropriated; migraines and headaches associated with mental overload from an excess of theoretical knowledge introduced in too little time with inaccessible and excluding language; nightmares or sleeping problems associated with a form of academia that demands that students learn, regurgitate or perfectly quote a set of "sacred" authors (predominantly masculine voices) that are perceived as distant from reality. Let us observe how this damage is detailed in storytelling maps.

> "We see on the head [...] a knot that weighs it down from the confusion produced by not understanding a large amount of content that is covered in the postgraduate program, when supposedly academia should help us to understand reality. This knot presents itself within both the conscious and unconscious through recurring nightmares that increase in times of academic deadlines [...]. This knot is fed by the superhuman effort to bring order to a myriad of ideas and thoughts that do not flow naturally, which clouds the mind and causes headaches nearly all the time. This feminine body feels that academia leads to harmful mental activity that is difficult to live with as it does not allow the mind to be at peace, frequently preventing sleep." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 22 October, 2021)
>
> "This female body experiences arm and shoulder pain accompanied by general pain caused by stress, pressure and patriarchal dynamics that negate the female body and its feelings, not allowing for one's own experience. Her work has frequently been written off as excessively empirical or too phenomenological, as if the only important element in the postgraduate program were theory. Thus, the body perceives a constant hierarchization between means of producing knowledge and her structural difficulty in validating her own vital experiences within the research process." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 8 October, 2021)

This type of violence is clearly associated with a trait of dominant masculinity within the academy that exalts the mastery of rationality, denying emotions and continuously imposing hierarchy and a stark divide between mind and body. This divide, just as it was expressed in one of the storytelling maps, denies knowledge that comes from life experience, intuition or the capacity to feel, continuously prioritizing rational knowledge instead. The harm associated with this

practice is represented in the collective body maps through a series of highly illustrative images, such as a head disconnected from the rest of the body; a closed off, broken or negated heart; or an image of floating bodies that have lost contact with that which is real.

> "[This female body has] a broken heart because she perceives that the academic space continuously imposes a division between the mind and feelings; this division negates knowledge that comes from the heart, always prioritizing rational knowledge. This same feeling is reflected by a thread that separates the head from the rest of the body, indicating how the patriarchal academy leads us to separate rationality from what we perceive through our body, leaving us to see only what the academy wants." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 22 October, 2021)
>
> "This male body feels a strong stoicism from the academy, which is a product of a culture that imposes strong control of one's emotions, constantly exercising rational violence that reverberates within the emotions and tells the body, 'Don't look emotional because that is weak.' The body feels that the academy continually exposes weaknesses. This violence makes the body often feel as if it were shrinking and that it is making other bodies smaller as well." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 19 November, 2021)

An academy that negates emotion is an academy that negates the body in its entirety. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why the body maps created in our workshops indicate a plethora of damages associated with the imposition of the logic of highly productivist and competitive work – in no way benign – that does not take into account necessities associated with the care and wellbeing of individuals, permanently bringing bodies to their limits, evidenced by muscle tension throughout the body, joint pain associated with a constant seated position in front of a computer, stress, gastrointestinal issues, irregular menstrual cycles, migraines, exhaustion, visual problems, erythema etc. Our bodies seem to have no respite!

> "An instrument of violence on this male body has been the wristwatch drawn on the arm. The clock pressures students to comply with the efficiency criteria of Conacyt (an academic scholarship by the Mexican government). The body demands but also has demands placed upon it [...]. This body feels enormous pressure to comply with all requirements, being 100% efficient. There are times that this body feels very bad for not having enough energy to satisfy these demands [...]. He feels that in the academy, there is no rest, and that even amidst a pandemic, it did

> not stop demanding that work be turned in [...]. This body is so pressured that his knees hurt for lack of rest. His knees hurt and his gums are bleeding. The gums are bleeding because he is constantly clenching his jaw, which is an effect of imposed pressure on the body due to excessive workload. This body feels his eyes darken because of excessive screen time imposed by the pandemic and virtual work. This body feels as if his skin were falling off, healing, then falling off again." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 19 November, 2021)
>
> "The stomach of this female body is also very damaged; this damage is represented by a knot that is a tangle of many feelings. One of these feelings is hunger; she has gone many hours without eating because of a strong self-imposed effort to put academia, work, deadlines, lectures etc. before vital necessities such as the need to eat properly [...]. This female body has poor circulation in the legs, which has produced many varicose veins, because she has had to remain seated for so many hours to comply with the demands that the academy imposes upon her." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 22 October, 2021)

Finally, without overextending the analysis of problems that emerged within our workshops, I want to mention two aspects of patriarchal violence exercised within our academic space that were reported emphatically in our workshops and that we consider to be intimately related to the patriarchal culture of competition and the reification of hierarchy in the postgraduate Sociology program. These two elements refer to a constant grappling of egos and the subsequent emergence of factious groups that reproduce and magnify infighting, creating dynamics of exclusion and rivalry inside of the postgraduate community, much to the detriment of efforts to construct a pluralistic, dialogical academic space. Let us listen:

> "This collective male body feels that his ego is in continuous battle. There is a constant battle of egos in academia, within both colleagues and professors. The entire body perceives a feeling of inclusion-exclusion associated with this academic practice that both male and female professors reproduce in order to form factious groups, functioning for their personal interests. Within this dynamic, this body does not know where he stands. 'You are either with me or against me', the patriarchal brotherhood says. This body feels those words over and over on his skin. This discomfort is drawn around the skin but is located on the entire body." (*Cuerpa colectiva dañada*, 19 November, 2021)

## In Closing

As has become clear, the problems we were allowed to collectively discover, articulate and problematize within our body-mapping workshops are not few. For many of us who pushed this initiative, the simple act of having created a space in which the sum of these problems could be articulated through the development of a collective, legitimized voice is an extraordinary achievement.

Be that as it may, we know that articulating problems is just a first step in confronting them, and there are many more steps to be taken in that same direction. For this reason, the second series of workshops that we designed for our postgraduate Sociology community, entitled *Dibujar juntxs nuestra cuerpa anti-patriarcal* (Drawing Together Our Anti-Patriarchal Female Body), was directed toward the construction of a body-mapping exercise that would allow us to begin to explore collective responses to this mapped violence. What we imagined throughout this second set of workshops allowed us to arrive at a work platform that is still in use now. One of the results of this work platform was the organization of the meeting *Hacia un posgrado libre de violencia patriarcal* (Toward a Postgraduate Program Free of Patriarchal Violence) – that I mentioned at the beginning of this article – , where the Sociology postgraduate community collectively discussed the results of the two series of workshops and began writing a collective document which we titled "Manifiesto por un posgrado libre de violencia" (Manifesto for a Postgraduate Course Free of Violence).

One of the most moving aspects of this research-activism project that we were able to set in motion rests on the fact that our postgraduate Sociology community has now, to some degree, recovered the collective capacity to delve into its own reality, imagining multiple avenues to depatriarchalizing the academic environment and, most importantly, to creating practical ways to navigate them. Without a doubt, the work ahead will be arduous, but we now have more tools to face it.

## References

Brotton, Jerry (2012): The History of the World in Twelve Maps. London: Penguin Books.

Cuerpa colectiva dañada (8 October, 2021): Account from the Workshop: Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva (Work Document). Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

Cuerpa colectiva dañada (15 October, 2021): Account from the Workshop: Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva (Work Document). Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

Cuerpa colectiva dañada (22 October, 2021): Account from the Workshop: Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva (Work Document). Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

Cuerpa colectiva dañada (17 November, 2021): Account from the Workshop: Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva (Work Document). Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

Cuerpa colectiva dañada (19 November, 2021): Account from the Workshop: Reconocer juntxs el daño patriarcal en nuestra cuerpa colectiva (Work Document). Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

Esteban, Mari Luz (2004): Antropología del cuerpo. Género, itinerarios corporales, identidad y cambio. Barcelona: Bellaterra.

flores, val (2019): Una lengua cosida de relámpagos. Buenos Aires: Hekt.

Marchese, Giulia (2020): Subvertir la geopolítica de la violencia sexual. Una propuesta de (contra) mapeo de nuestros cuerpos-territorio. In: Cruz Hernández, Delmy Tania/Bayón Jiménez, Manuel (Ed.): Cuerpos, Territorios y Feminismos. Compilación latinoamericana de teorías, metodologías y prácticas políticas. Mexico City, Quito: Editorial Abya-Yala.

Risler, Julia/Ares, Pablo (2013): Manual de mapeo colectivo. Recursos cartográficos críticos para procesos territoriales de creación colaborativa. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.

Ruiz Trejo, Marisa/García Dauder, Dau (2018): Los talleres "epistémico-corporales" como herramientas reflexivas sobre la práctica etnográfica. Universitas Humanística, 86, 55–82. doi: 10.11144/Javeriana.uh86.tech

Segato, Rita (2003): Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Segato, Rita (2019): Patriarcado y Violencia Hoy con Rita Segato. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzD0yNAHkUI (06.10.2023).

Segato, Rita (2018): Contra-pedagogías de la crueldad. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Smith, Dorothy (2005): Institutional Ethnography. A Sociology for People. Lanham, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.