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## The photographic representation of the circle of the gender violence, in Salta, Argentina

*La representación fotográfica del círculo de la violencia de género en Salta, Argentina*

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### Abstract

This article addresses the visual ways in which gender violence is represented through the semi-pragmatic analysis of the photo essay by the photojournalist, Gastón Iñiguez titled, *Siete Vidas. Sobreviviendo a la violencia machista (2018)*, which portrays the multiple facets and consequences of gender violence through the story of seven women. Methodologically, the images were analyzed regarding the visual representations shaping the images, the decoding-coding clues, the relationship between the linguistic and the visual code and an analysis of both formal and compositional dimensions of the images. The analysis also included an in-depth interview with the author. One of the main results highlights that the visual representations that make up the essay function as metaphors of the known cycle of gender violence and, building up from that, allow us to critically address the issue they represent.

**Keywords:** gender violence; representation; photography; visual essay.

### Resumen

Este artículo reflexiona sobre los modos visuales en los cuales se representa la violencia de género a través del análisis semio-pragmático del ensayo fotográfico del fotoperiodista argentino Gastón Iñiguez titulado, *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista (2018)*, que retrata las múltiples facetas y secuelas de la violencia de género a través del relato de siete mujeres. Metodológicamente, se analizaron las imágenes atendiendo a las representaciones visuales actuantes en las imágenes, los códigos de decodificación-codificación, la relación entre el código lingüístico y el visual, y un análisis a nivel formal y compositivo de las imágenes. El análisis también incluye una entrevista en profundidad con el autor. El principal resultado que destacamos es que las representaciones visuales que componen el ensayo funcionan como metáforas del denominado círculo de la violencia de género que problematizan la temática que representan.

**Palabras clave:** violencia de género; representación; fotografía; ensayo visual.

## 1. Introduction

This article reflects on the visual ways in which gender violence is represented through the semio-pragmatic analysis of the photo essay *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista* by the photojournalist Gastón Iñiguez.<sup>1</sup> The photographs are based on and inspired by the personal stories of seven female survivors of sexist violence published at the end of 2016 in the seminar *Cuarto Poder* in the city of Salta, Argentina.

From its beginnings, photography has proven to be a reality-portraying device in that it builds and questions real visual moments in time. Every image constructs a point of view based on “politics of viewpoint” (Reguillo, 2008) which imply an ethical and political position on what they represent. Photography,

upon proposing what to look at, assumes an ethic, as it emphasizes a way of seeing others and otherness, it builds a logic of meaning, of appreciating the visible, what’s absent and what is present, nothing more than concern for the other and oneself (Olayo & Herrera, 2014: 95)

How is gender violence visually represented in photographic discourse? We ask this question about a specific cultural tool, the photobook *Siete Vidas*. In terms of aesthetic objects, the images contained within could lead to non-stereotypical ways of representing the effects that violence against women generates on feminine subjectivity and, as a result, contribute to the debate on the production and circulation of images regarding this theme in the media.

In communication media, the images of violence are built around fear, portrayed as the only possible depiction (Sontag, 2004). Therefore, bodies and victims are anonymously put on display to be observed as an example of the consequences, “the image of the abused body supposes the violent acts and their implications have been hidden” (Olayo & Herrera, 2014, p. 96). A robust corpus of research has widely documented the ways news stories on gender violence are constructed: how, why and in what way violent acts are portrayed using an approach that sensationalizes to its maximum dramatization. A semio-pragmatic analysis of the

images suggests that the use of close-ups that accentuate and replicate the terror of the victims, put the spectator face-to-face with the incomprehensible, the unthinkable: the perplexity before the (in)credible obfuscates seeing beyond the image which usually exacerbates the power of the victimizer and his capability to inflict death, depoliticizing the violent act (Olayo & Herrera, 2014).

The images of gender violence put us before a paradox: the photographs are, simultaneously, truth and darkness, immediacy and complexity of something that was hastily done and of death itself (Didi-Huberman, 2004). In this symbolic struggle for point of view, victims are left with nothing but silenced stories, and the absence of representation; death is two-fold.

If the images of gender violence belong to “negative aesthetics” –the (in)visible, the (un)representable, the (un)figurable, the (un)imaginable– which Didi-Huberman (2004) speaks of and, instead of helping us visually understand its complexity, they become “ignored objects of inattention” that, by excess or absence, disappoint us; it becomes an obligation to persevere in the contemplation right at that point where it seems to fall short.

The semio-pragmatic perspective, the theoretical tools of Barthes (1986; 1989; 1994) to discuss the relation between the operative codes in the images, the semiotics of the image for a formal analysis of the photographs (Aumont, 1992; Joly, 1994), the politics of viewpoint (Reguillo, 2008) in terms of the representation of the violence (Imbert, 1992) and the historic-philosophic thought linked to the history and critique of the art of Didi-Huberman (2014), feed the focus for analysis. Finally, we discuss the social representations (Arancibia & Cebrelli, 2005) that come to play in the analyzed photographs.

Firstly, our methodological strategy included an observation and analysis of the fifty-six black and white images that comprise the photobook, decoding the unifying themes that on an iconographic level are repeated in the selected photographs. The images are grouped according to the narrative elements used to generate meaning: chains, locks and ropes, hand marks, fences, barbed wire and/or wooden boards. We also considered the tone that the image attempts to convey.

Then, once said themes are identified, we observe how the pictures dialogue with the written text, which is to say, what were the specific procedures of denotation and connotation that, supported by formal and compositional bases, took place and what were the degrees of equivalence, collaboration and/or (in)dependence between the significant materiality of the image and text. In a third phase, the social representations therein were identified by observing how said photographs used rhetorical figures to address gender violence.

Finally, the photographer was interviewed to establish dialogue between the project's anticipations and motivations and the results found by way of analysis. The interview consisted of two in-person meetings in which, firstly, the photographer was asked about his career, aesthetic inclinations, artistic-political objectives in regards to the photo essay and the premises that guided the work of art. Later, the artist was asked to review the images and try to group them based on the story he wanted to tell about sexist violence. These comments are confronted with the formal analysis to generate the results presented in this article.

## 2. Motivations and expectations regarding the photographic project

*Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista* is a photobook, a visual essay that photographically represents the story of seven female survivors of gender violence. The proposal was one of the winners of the 2017 Citizens Cultural Development Fund, public policy whose purpose is to finance projects that showcase cultural and tourism initiatives that have a social impact.

The photobook is structured around the stories of seven women from Salta who survived gender violence and whose stories appeared for the first time as comments on a Facebook thread of an article posted about a seminar held by the *Cuarto Poder*<sup>2</sup> newspaper in Salta. In their stories, Macarena, Luisina, Magalí, Rocío, Fernanda, Jimena and Guadalupe explore the multiple facets of violence perpetrated by men against women and dissidents. One of the stories in the photobook explores the specific nature of violence against a

transgender victim, an often-overlooked issue in media coverage of this problem (Deharbe & Zurita, 2019). Rosalyn Ruíz<sup>3</sup> is the model that embodies elements from all seven stories of resilience.

The province of Salta, Argentina is close to the top of the list nationwide in terms of femicide, sex crime, harassment and abuse. Confronted with this panorama, Iñiguez began to ask himself how the media could show such opposing images: those of women's liberation and empowerment, and the extreme examples of violent chauvinism branded onto feminine bodies, "the images that the articles presented showed despondent bodies or faces, accompanied with a sobering message" (Iñiguez, 2018, p.12). Vulnerability is also measured in the visibility (Reguillo, 2008) that communication media transmit when they legitimize certain visual models of seeing/looking/thinking about social aspects (Guasch, 2003; Berger, 1972).

A photobook is a combination of images coherently strung together in order to construct a visual story on a particular topic (Vásquez Escalona, 2011). In terms of a cultural artefact, it is a graphic product whose objective is to put into circulation the visual narration created by the photographer (Reyero, 2015). The story uses different tools to go in search of the otherness that it attempts to represent, putting into dialogue the artist's perspective. Iñiguez says that the essay *Siete Vidas* was part of a personal introspection and an attempt to rethink his own practices in regards to violence. It speaks, he says, to "a process of internal search upon facing and reinterpreting the original stories" (Iñiguez, 2018, p. 12).

Barrios (2018) sustains that the analysis of the photographs in terms of polysemic text must create a dialogue with those other intra and extra-discursive "texts" that make for a deeper interpretation of the reading. In this way, it is analytically pertinent to consider the photographer's history, the position from where he visually constructs his work, as well as his references and aesthetic criteria. Reyero (2015), in his reading of Ricoeur, warns us that "the problem of comprehension is not resolved via the simple return to the intention of the author" (2015, p.11); the analysis of the image requires a theoretical-methodological presentation to clarify in detail the possible questions and answers that analytical observation may inspire.

*Siete Vidas* is an essay organized by the theme (Vásquez Escalona, 2011) of gender violence. All visual essays begin with a premise or idea that works as a searchlight in the quest for intuition (Vásquez-Escalona, 2011. 308), in this sense, Iñiguez sustains that, "we started with the idea of showing the body, but not in an obvious way, and seeking to avoid the typical image of the woman, in this case, defeated and broken" (Iñiguez, personal communication, April 2019).

In it, the artist mixes, on one hand, influences anchored in the model of documentary photography that is clearly appreciated in the selection of the black-white aesthetic and, on the other hand, a realistic style that,

has to do with the world of facts; in this model, empiric reality influences science with a positivist or empiric tendency; and its function is analogical, that of a true representation that substitutes reality –'this is as it is-. Finally, there is documentary mode, belonging to the world of action, of the belief that photographs can have a practical effect on daily life or, more dramatically, can inspire action to change the current world for the better. (Sáenz, 2015, p. 247).

### 3. Aesthetic and political decisions made regarding images

In accordance with Aumont (1992) and Joly (2012), we will discuss the analysis of the compositional issues in the photographs describing the role of the device and address the effects of ideology and power that operate not only on content, but also on the ideological connotations of both formal and technical decisions. Later, in accordance with Barthes (1986) we will discuss the relationship between the images and the text, analyzing the use and function of text and photo captions.

In regards to the compositional issues, the majority of the photographs are centered; which is to say that the elements which the photograph wants the spectator to fix their gaze on are located on the four intersecting points, using the rule of thirds. The photographer uses visual tension created by the intersection of imaginary lines to emphasize

with reiterated enthusiasm the role of the hands and explore different moods via gestures of fear, pain, dread, anguish, sadness and loneliness that the model explores and experiences as it moves through the stories of the seven women.

One must consider that the shot and the frame not only speak of the process behind the cut, of the selection and conscious-subconscious fragmentation inherent to the photographer of that time, it also speaks to us of the symbolic distance that is built by what is represented. The use of close and medium shots produces an indirect effect in the spectator, shortening the distances, simulating a closeness to the subject, a sense of reaching out and touching, appealing to expressivity, proximity, and intimacy (Aumont, 1992). These elements are consistent with the objectives that the photographer had proposed in order to transmit empathy.

In regards to aesthetic choices, Iñiguez states that, firstly, the use of the monochromatic register was a decision tied to the budget and editing costs of the photobook in its printed version. Secondly, the author justifies the choice of using black-white as it allows,

the use of high contrast to show the separation of the figure in the forefront from the background and to create a pictorial effect in the textures. Finally, the differential focus and the shots taken out of focus were used to support the stories in some photographs (Iñiguez, personal communication, 2019).

It is key to reflect on how the senses interact, implied in the aesthetic choices of the author's first intention regarding how his work is perceived. In accordance with Newhall (2002), using black-white is typical of the documentary photographic style that had its golden age in the early XX century, particularly during the peaceful periods between wars, and later adopted by photojournalism. What at first was a response to the technical limitations of the device itself, with the rise of color photography, the use of black-white was associated to objectivity creating effects of nostalgia and/or distance from the subject while, on the contrary, the use of color was a clear indicator of the intervention of the author's subjectivity and an indication of an aesthetic product considered closer to an art form. As a visual composition technique, the objective is for the spectator to focus his or her

attention more on the shape and their relationship with the portrayal than on the color of the objects (Newhall, 2002).

In this sense, and addressing that indicated by the photographer, his affiliation with the documentarist tradition is evident and is seen his aesthetic choices. However, it is precisely these choices that, at some point, jeopardize his explicit interest in portraying gender violence from the perspective of proximity and empathy. This aesthetic operation of connotation (Barthes, 1982) marks the limits of visual representation for gender violence and reproduces the asymmetries that he plans to retrace. Therefore, the high contrast of the images accentuates a full array of iconographic productions that circulate culturally, and, regarding the subject, reduce it to its mere physical expression. The reiterative use of chains and locks produces an exotification of the violent act that blocks comprehensive reflection, naturalizing and legitimizing the exercise of symbolic violence that implies the reproduction of such images in communication media, whose consideration is absent.

Likewise, due to the premediated absence of color, the aesthetic choice hides the photographer's interest in portraying non-hegemonic feminine features of beauty via the election of a non-white model. Although Iñiguez admits that he chose her given the versatility that he saw in her bearing, a characteristic that would allow the visibility of certain intersecting variables such as race and gender identity, addressing the issue of violence transversally; said objective disappears in the poses and visual metaphors he used.

However, something important to note is the intention of the photographer to try to distance himself from the habitual places that determine the politics of viewpoint for the representation of gender violence, although the final product does not manage to totally achieve said intention. If all epistemological framework is political and ideological, the images bring the dialogue and thought associated to the decolonial shift closer, demonstrating the need to explore and present the deep ties between violence and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2012). According to Berlanga-Gayón (2014), violence against women and femicide in Latin America are color associated, and are expressed in the images of racialized women given that "the value assigned to racialized

feminine bodies and that translates into specific material circumstances: poverty, exploitation, and marginalization. The precariousness, however, can also be translated into silence or lack of visibility" (2014, p. 43). That the photographer would enunciate the need to show a non-hegemonic body demonstrates their awareness of "violence against women in Latin America is linked to the undervaluing of the race" (Berlanga-Gayón, 2014, p. 44) and that there is a hierarchy that regulates the value of the lives where, clearly and according to Butler (2010), the lives of women of color do not deserve to be mourned: "there are bodies that are worth more and there are bodies that are worth less" (Proyecto NUM, 2017).

A separate paragraph shows the choice of the scenario chosen for execution of the photographic production: The Caldera River.<sup>6</sup> According to the photographer, the choice of a natural location for the shots was an attempt to show the fact that, when women are murdered, it is precisely in the rivers, trash dumps or vacant lots where the perpetrators deposit the bodies of their victims. In Salta, the bodies of four of the twenty-four women murdered in 2017 were found on the banks of rivers or near courses of water.<sup>5</sup> According to Segato (2016), throughout history, female bodies have been a field of battle, disputed and appropriated, a trait the patriarchy has continuation in the production of a symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000) that guarantees the sustainment and the reproduction of the system of sex-gender inequalities, where women's bodies are part of that "symbolic trash" that power continuously produces (Silva-Santisteban, 2008).

The visual essay was a collaborative creative process in which female survivors participated, including the model, Rosalyn Ruíz. Said option, in Iñiguez's words, is "the taking of a political stance on the issue and a type of activism (...) this book was a process of internal search (...) it came by me beginning to question myself and question (...) think and re-think my own actions" (Iñiguez, personal communication, April 2019). No matter what, beyond the announced intentions, one must not lose sight of the asymmetry of power always intertwined in the relationship between those who block comprehension, and the represented object/subject.

The use of photography as a therapeutic medium is not new. In fact, there are studies that mention



the advantages of phototherapy in therapeutic intervention for female survivors of violence (Lockett, 2014; López-Ruiz & López-Martínez, 2019). It is understood as a process for and by which the creation of photographs, especially self-portraits, aid comprehension and reflection of traumatic situations in order to create areas of positivity in the thoughts and behaviors of participants. Phototherapy creates powerful visual metaphors that, for female survivors of gender violence, represents an opportunity to process the trauma and attach new meaning to the experience (Lockett, 2014). In the case of *Siete Vidas*, Rosalyn Ruíz carries out an exercise of exteriorization and personification of violence of the stories to build visual metaphors of a process of acceptance and healing via which, both she as well as those who feel questioned or affected by the images, argue the meaning of gender violence trauma.

#### 4. The circle of violence and its representation in images

*Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista* is an allegory dedicated gender violence. Of the variety of images that comprise the essay, some photographs serve as metaphors for what is known as the circle of violence: silence, prison, submission, loneliness, sadness, isolation, invisibility. Turning to Barthes (1989), we identified the hegemonic cultural codes operating in the visual representations created as a response to *studium*, given that every image denotes/connotates meaning. Therefore, the aspects denoted and that are reinforced in the presence of the epigraphs are highly fetishized images, where elements like chains, locks, wires, wooden planks simulating fences represent such state of enclosure, a denial of freedom not only physical but also emotional (**Photograph 3**) that suture in the sadness or anguish that the emotionality of Rosalyn's gestures transmit (**Photographs 1 and 2**).

We identify unifying themes capable of organizing the photographs. These were built in the process of analysis via a detained observation of the scenes represented and of the dialogue presented with the captions of the pictures that, in the majority of cases, work to reveal information not contain-

ned in the images and that aim to provide context and the issue addressed by the essay. Afterwards, considering the register and turning our attention to the aesthetic codes operating in the images, we sought to find in what way the connotated meanings function under the rhetorical figures. In this case, the majority use analogy and metaphor to refer to the cycle of gender violence, especially emphasizing the representation of physical violence. Finally, we discuss and argue our preliminary observations with the photographer and author, establishing a back and forth dialogue between the images, the context of production, the intentions of the artist in terms of his work, feeding an analysis that also recognizes the conditions under with the essay was produced.



**Photograph 1. Untitled**

Source: INIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprismo, 2018, p. 56.



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**Photograph 2. Untitled**

Fuente: INIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 53.

**Photograph 3. "I lived in a state of complete physical and mental submission".**

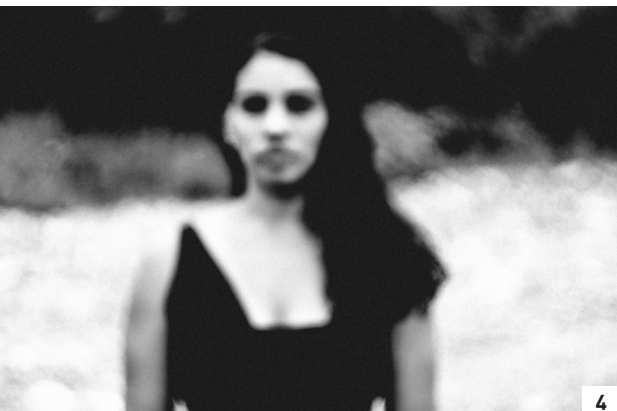
Source: INIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p.43.

The photobook contains fifty-six black and white photographs. Given the large visual corpus analyzed in this paper, the images included as examples in this article are those that, with most clarity, demonstrate the rhetoric of sexist violence. The images themselves are high impact stereotypes and depict certain visual clichés that usually circulate in different mediatic textualities that address gender violence, such as chains and locks to illustrate denial of freedom, enclosure or imprisonment (**Photograph 1**). There is also the explicit use of fences and bars to symbolize situations of forced isolation (**Photograph 2**). Muddy handprints on different parts of the body serve as traces of abuse, a stabbing pain, a permanent scar (**Photograph 3**). Blurred faces via the explicit use of an out-of-focus shot as an analogy of the invisibility of victims in society (**Photograph 4**). Flesh and bone gags that silence the stories of patriarchal cruelty (**Photography 5**). Bodies in fetal position, alone, sitting in dark environments, beaten, defeated, conquered by the weight of a raised hand that discharges all the blame on one's gender (**Photographs 6 and 7**).

The central role of hands is not a random choice: our culture reserves a special place for them. In

our Judeo-Christian influenced culture, the hand of God is what creates, what gave Adam life and made him in his image. It is the hand that heals and resuscitates the dead. Etymologically, it comes from the Latin word *manus* that symbolizes authority, power and the strength of *pater familiae* in Ancient Rome. In other words, it refers to the male citizens, owners of private property (including slaves, children and women).

When the hands are feminine they represent warmth, tenderness, care, protection; all of which are qualities that the patriarchy attributes to women, romanticizing the gender inequalities that, by extension, also permeate the extremities (Fernández, 1993). The hand of Fátima, known in the Eastern world as *Jamsa*, a sacred amulet of protection and good fortune, evokes one of the symbols of world feminism: the raised hand that demands the stop of chauvinist violence. On the contrary, masculine hands symbolize power, physical force, aggressiveness and power of material and symbolic destruction that, historically, have been attributed to the universal masculine subject (Segato,



**Photograph 4. "...I was invisible".**

Source: IÑIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 24.



**Photograph 5. "She who has already seen monsters and knows they are real is always more afraid".**

Source: IÑIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 68.

2003; 2016). An example of the aforementioned is that the discourse of advertising and public service campaigns to create visibility and awareness about gender violence use the same scene: masculine hands in the forefront that, with closed fist, raised, tense and tight, we see ready to exert their physical power on the defenseless, fragile, vulnerable body of a women that, crouched and cornered against a wall, covers her face with her hands and, in some cases, begs for mercy with a raised hand (**Photograph 7**).

Many of the photographs included in the essay use highly ritualized symbols in our culture to represent domination and submission, as we mentioned earlier with forced enclosure. The hands appear imprisoned with handcuffs and heavy chains, the visual representations explore and accentuate the vehicles and the tools via which violence is exercised.

The captions of the photos show "the set of informative marks/brands that tend to explain in a written, spatial, temporal and operative record the elements in the photo" (Vilches, 1993, p. 73-74). In the case analyzed herein, this function is attributed to small fragments of the stories that are told in the book and that constitute, in Barthes words, "a technique to attach a floating chain of meanings" (1986, p. 36). According to the photographer and author, the choice of the epigraphs

"was personal; they are phrases from the stories that affected me and that I thought would cause the same effect in others" (Iñiguez, personal communication, April 2019).

The circle of violence does not imply only submission and a physical denial of freedom. The isolation inherent to violence pushes women into (self) silencing and (self) isolation (Photographs 3 and 4) in which the mechanisms of inhibition, shame and blame act as disciplining devices that prevent the possibility of undoing or erasing the multiple acts of violence and gender stereotypes (Fernández-Boccardo, 2016). For example, in the case of Photograph 3, the photograph's blurry appearance is used to represent the fact that, although society does not perceive it, gender violence is always present. Not only is the problem invisible but also those who suffer from it. In the case of Photograph 4, the caption refers to those discourses that justify violence identifying it as a pathology, an abnormality, a monstrosity. Resorting to terms like insanity, monstrosity and anomaly to make gender violence intelligible perpetuates the naturalization and banalization of the problem. It also cancels the discussion of violence and hegemonic mascu-



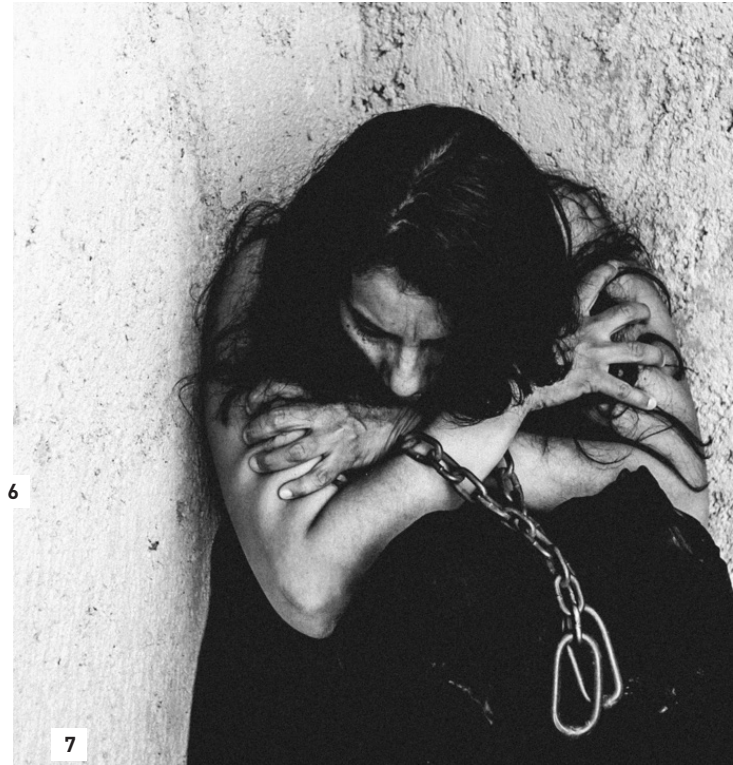


**Photograph 6. "Walking with fear, close to the walls".**

Source: INIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 16.

**Photograph 7. Untitled.**

Source: INIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 60.



linities as the only possible conclusion, on whose codes and cultural pacts the patriarchy sustains and perpetuates itself (Segato, 2003)).

The stories of *Siete Vidas* attempt to overcome the fear, denouncing the culture of femicides (Pineda, 2019) and violation. In that context, sexual harassment in work environments and in public emerge as common places in the stories of these women. The caption "walking with fear, close to the walls" (Photograph 6), in this way, tries to make it visible.

## 5. From pain to desire: reinventing the abused body

Our initial premise sustained that the photographic project could contain non-stereotyped modes of visually representing gender violence. These expectations mainly stem from the anticipated meanings contained in the title of the photobook, which expresses that the stories found within were those of female survivors of gender violence. In this sense, they emphasize the stories that today have little or no presence in communication media that, in contrast, prefer stories of horror and death in gender violence.

Based on the process of interpreting and visually analyzing of the essay *Siete Vidas*, we can state that this reproduces and legitimizes the hegemonic visual frames regarding the representation of gender violence as it builds stereotypes that explore and accentuate only the physical manifestation of the violent act, considering it the entirety of the act, just as we observed in other mediatic textualities, like discourses in advertising and public service and/or violence prevention campaigns. In this sense, they visually participate in what Barthes calls *studium*, in that there are elements in said photographs that can be identified, analyzed by any spectator and that relate with the culturally influenced perception of periods in history and cultures, and therefore are the visible part of the ideology. Likewise, it is these elements that allow said images to be understood as the expression of gender violence and not as belonging to scenes of another nature.

The photographer's representation by metonymy and analogy in regards to violence and its intention to reflect the stories of the seven women that served as inspiration for the project, lead it

to a common mistake. According to Reyro (2015) “placing some aspect of the reality of the other in images tends to reduce it to certain iconographic standards of representation and also feeds all types of fantasies related to ignorance” (2015, p. 10). Lñiguez mentions in several passages of the book, as well as in the interview conducted for this article, that *Siete Vidas* is an act of justice with the images of beaten and broken women that circulate in communication media. However, in his attempt to “repair” a situation of vulnerability, “the camera acts as legitimizer of a role of authority (...) photography therefore becomes valued (...) from its supposed metonymic capability of showing part of reality” (Reyro, 2015, p. 10). The aesthetic artifices used to represent scenes of violence becomes more important than the act of narrating from a distance and, unfortunately, falls into attitudes that it intended to redirect.

The images included in the article analyzed are, to a certain degree, “objects of inattention”, visual paradoxes that prevent deeper, necessary debate on the subject, especially, on the relevance of symbolic violence as subsidiary mechanism of the reproduction of inequalities and the difficult situation in their representation and visual regime puts us. Nevertheless, said difficulty comes tied to the very characteristics of the photographic device and its condition as a sign; its iconic-indicial character conditions the possibilities of representing the footprints and marks left behind the exercise of the symbolic power on the psyche of victims. In this sense, another observed obstacle is related to the little relevance that, on a social level, this type of violence is given: it is banalized, it is questioned without understanding that, just as Bourdieu states, it is a support for the reproduction of inequalities. In the words of Femenías (2013), it is that which “isolates, segregates, imprisons, marginalizes, divides, condemns and even annihilates or exterminates, if not directly at least indirectly, to the extent that it justifies or legitimizes physical violence” (2013, p.101).

The problems indicated above are not exclusive to the project or its author, but rather form part of current debates regarding policies of representation and the search to find visibilities that penetrate, sting and burn, stirring up the calm waters of the prevailing trends in cultural products; one that threatens the daily attempts to depoliticize

the personal. The inability to think in other ways of visibility for gender violence is directly proportional to the difficulty that represents imagining a violence-free world for gender diversity. The images of horror lead us to continuously reset the limits of what is tolerable, the visual anesthesia that said visual stereotypes feed the silence of the gaze that is, at the same time, the silence of the dead women and of the survivors who are denied the chance to tell their story. They are *subjects* that fall outside the fated definition of the victim.

What new horizons appear for the women living with fear? Is it possible to survive gender violence? What are the maps of hope that no one talks about? Is freedom impossible? The general abundance of accounts other than horror stories is evidence of the urgency of telling the other stories out loud, those that show that there is a life outside the circle of violence. In this sense, *Siete Vidas* is an attempt at justice against what is forgotten and generalized social indifference.

The stories and the histories of these seven women from Salta -Macarena, Luisina, Magalí, Rocío, Fernanda, Jimena and Guadalupe-, are proof that there is life after violence because it is possible not only to be alive, but also free, happy and one of longing and desire (**Photograph 8**).

Didi-Huberman sustains that the exercise of imagining despite all the photographer’s claims, requires a level of awareness that will come head-to-head with “the difficult ethic of the image: not the invisible per excellence (sloth of the aesthete), nor the symbols of horror (sloth of the believer), nor the simple document (sloth of the wise). A simple image: inappropriate but necessary, inexact but true” (2004, p. 67). It is here where the work of Lñiguez stands out because, at least and in contrast with many who prefer *not to look*, the photographer tries not only to imagine and think about these stories and figuratively depict them, but also advances in representing them and even proposes to himself, consciously, to do it from other, uncharted places. Some images fulfill their original purpose and others resort to visual clichés, in those stereotyped forms that culture has enabled and legitimized to show and speak of violence: “I recognize that the images fall indefectibly in certain common places, showing the fear, hands with chains, the persecution, etc. and I also understand

that I wouldn't have been able to make them any other way", states the photographer (Iñiguez, personal communication, 2019).

Nevertheless, the attempt to represent the unimaginable, those small fragments of truth that try to contemplate and understand violence against women from a different perspective is laudable. They disturb, destabilize, and question us politically. They poke us in that hurt silent place, they

burn our eyes with flames of varying intensity; the stories multiply, the phrases resound, there is an echo and they move us, they turn into a shouting crowd, they overcome the silence and they tear us from our rooted stance of passiveness and inaction reserved for accomplices. The urgency unites us, we become a wave, and we are visible. In an accomplice society, where our lives are worth nothing, it is imperative, paraphrasing Didi-Huberman, to live despite all.



**Photograph 8. Epilogue.**  
Source: IÑIGUEZ, G. *Siete Vidas. Sobrevivir a la violencia machista*. Salta: El Pentaprisma, 2018, p. 72.

## Notes

1. Gastón Iñiguez was born in Buenos Aires on June 18, 1983. He is a 37-year-old photojournalist and teacher of photographic technique in the Graphic Design program at the Terciario Provincial de Bellas Artes of the city of Salta. He studied photography at the Instituto Fotográfico Argentino and worked as a correspondent for various graphic communication and online media outlets. He has lived in the city of Salta since 2012 where he works as a photojournalist for local media like *Cuarto Poder*, *Cuarto* and *La Gaceta*.
2. Printed weekly newspaper in the province of Salta, Argentina.
3. Artist and dance teacher from Salta. Female survivor of gender violence.
4. The Caldera River and the town of the same name that is located on its banks are located north of the city of Salta, Argentina, along Interprovincial Highway No. 9.
5. The body of Daniela Guantay was found in the Mojotoro River; the body of Paola Alvarez, on the Banks of the Caldera River; the body of Camila Rodríguez, in the reeds next to a course of water in Orán, and, finally, the body of Cintia Carmen Tapia appeared on the banks of the Cabra Corral Dam.

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