

CUENTOS CÍTRICOS: DOMESTICITY AND VIOLENCE IN THE SHORT STORIES OF CARE SANTOS

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Resumen: Este artículo evalúa la representación del femicidio y la violencia doméstica en una serie de cuentos de Care Santos considerando los cambios socio-políticos de los años 90 en España. Este análisis revela como las relaciones de violencia son un escenario para examinar los efectos de poder, tanto socialmente como artísticamente, al destacar las contradicciones dentro de los sistemas normativos de poder y los mecanismos que los sostienen.

Palabras clave: femicidio, violencia doméstica, cuentos, Care Santos.

Abstract: This article assesses the representation of femicide and gender violence in a series of short stories by Care Santos taking into consideration the changing political and social climate of Spain during the 1990s. This analysis reveals that violent domestic relationships in Spain are an important site for the examination of power effects, both socially and artistically, as they highlight the internal contradictions of normative operations of power and the mechanisms that sustain them.

Key words: femicide, domestic violence, short stories, Care Santos.

The cultural renaissance that took place in Spain following the political transition from dictatorship to democracy manifested itself in a variety of forms. In the 1990s diversity continued to burgeon as a result of the *movida* in the 80s. In many ways, Spain approached cultural and economic development with increased speed and fashioned its way into an era of globalization. People of diverse interests, backgrounds and sexualities sought new opportunities and relationships which highlighted the countries newfound flexibility in the post-dictatorship. Women in particular acquired the ability to participate in social and

economic life in ways never before accepted. As Spaniards continued to shed their socially constructed, francoist *modus*, a new interest emerged regarding identity issues marked by gender, class and ethnicity. At the same time, mass media technologies multiplied and the commodification of cultural production reached new heights. Many scholars have noted that 1992 was a paradigmatic year in Spain's recent history as it marked the country's official transformation into a fast paced, postmodern society. The Olympic Games were held in Barcelona, the country celebrated renewed ties with Latin America for the Quincentennial of Columbus's voyage to the Americas, Sevilla hosted the World Fair and Madrid was designated as the "European City of Culture." These events produced high-profile media coverage and introduced Spain as a cosmopolitan democracy, no longer in political transition.

This context of rapid cultural change, and the complex social consequences these changes had for women, provides a rich space for literary and cultural analysis. In particular, the broad social retraction or backlash to this fast-paced progress that occurred in Spain is critical to understanding the time period and the literature produced therein. Care Santos's short stories interact in a unique way within this evolving cultural framework as they depict both the advances and the recoil—the progress and retrogress of the time period. It is this interaction with cultural norms and the prefiguring of social movements surrounding domesticity and violence that is at the crux of Care Santos' *Cuentos cítricos* (1995).¹

An analysis of these short stories offers a better understanding of home life for women in Spain and a wide spread social ill—domestic violence. Santos succeeds at creating characters that represent both the typical abuser and what we might consider the unusual suspect. Her stories document a problem that would take years to find legal and cultural support in Spain. This is in part due to negligence by part of the Spanish State and the overarching mechanisms of continued patriarchy. Through a reading that sheds light on the obscurity of power relations, the notion of femicide and the myths surrounding domestic violence, we are able to better understand the cultural milieu of gender relations in 1990s Spain, how gender and culture can change simultaneously but at different rates, and more universally how gender, society and culture interact while maintaining independence.

In order to do so, it is important to take into account the political landscape of the early 1990s when Spain, both at the national level and within the parameters of the European Union was reforming laws and becoming committed to social equality. In 1992 the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women of the European Union made a recommendation to recognize gender violence as a fundamental violation of human rights and requested governments to implement preventative and educational policies on the roles and unequal treatment of women. In addition, associations of Spanish women had been calling for a comprehensive law against gender violence beginning in 1993.²

Three years later, in 1995, Spain concentrated on securing equality in the workplace by participating in the European Union's "Cuarto programa para la igualdad de oportunidades (1996 - 2000)." This plan sought to foster more female participation in the job market and workplace as well as to contribute to economic and social life. The following year, in 1996, the Spanish Socialist "reforma de la ley orgánica del régimen electoral" (18 September 1996) proposed an equal participation of men and women in the Spanish government. This equality appeared to have been achieved, in terms of political power, in 2004 and in the government led by Prime Minister José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero who appointed a woman Deputy Prime Minister, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega,³ the most prominent of the eight female cabinet members. For the first time in Spain's history, eight of the sixteen cabinet members were women.

It is apparent that in the 1990s gender and power issues in Spain took center stage, but despite women's more vocal and active participation in social and political spheres, a widespread social acceptance of these advances was lacking. According to the *Comisión de derechos humanos*, in 1995 over 16,000 domestic violence complaints were filed by women and 85 women killed on the same basis. Hence, while women became culturally relevant during this decade, a counterattack occurred against this forward movement. The Instituto de la mujer, the Minister of Culture (Carmen Alborch) and a number of contemporary women authors since then have documented this backlash.⁴

Care Santos, as a journalist and a successful author, is one of the few who draws attention to domestic violence in the 1990s, a topic largely overlooked by Spanish writers in general. Three short stories in particular tackle the issues of

sexual and domestic violence in Spain: “De la distancia y el tiempo,” “Debería darte vergüenza” and “La muerte invita.” In “De la distancia y el tiempo,” Santos portrays femicide—a woman being killed by their male partner. Femicide was first discussed internationally in the mid 1980s at the “Regional Seminar on *Femicide in the Pacific Asian Countries*” and later fully theorized by Jill Radford and Diana Russell beginning in 1990. Santos’ keen literary eye addresses, in as early as 1995, a social problem that would not be legally and politically adopted in Spain until almost a decade later. The “Ley Integral Contra la Violencia de Género”⁵⁵ went into effect in 2005, exactly ten years after Santos first writes about the topic in *Cuentos cítricos*. According to Montserrat Comas d’Argemir Cendra, spokesperson for the Consejo General del Poder Judicial:

Esta es una ley necesaria porque pretende alcanzar la igualdad real entre hombres y mujeres y reducir las insoportables cifras de violencia contra éstas: cuarenta y una mujeres asesinadas en los primeros siete meses de este año (2004) a manos de sus parejas o ex parejas; ochenta y una el año pasado. En mi opinión el problema es tan grave y las soluciones tan complejas que las nuevas formas de solución que se proponen merecen el máximo consenso social y político. Es un esfuerzo que nos corresponde hacer a todos. El Parlamento tiene la última palabra. (2004: 43)

It is surprising then, considering the sheer magnitude of the problem that so few writers have chosen to approach the subject matter. As Pilar Rahola observes: “El famoso ‘la maté porque era mía’ ha impregnado durante siglos toda nuestra mítica literaria, musical, teatral, poética...Nunca el arte ha puesto en evidencia que lo que conducía a la muerte de una amante no era la pasión, sino la dominación” (2000: 117). In this sense, Santos’ depiction of violence against women in *Cuentos cítricos* is particularly unique because it is a pioneer in representing how gendered socialization and gendered practices of domination of women in Spain are at the root of the violence against them.

Although intimate partner abuse had been the object of public policy initiatives in Spain since the mid-1980s, it was only after the shocking death of Ana Orantes in 1997, at the hands of her husband, that Spanish society at large was moved to consider the situation of battered women. On December 18, 1997 the headline in *El Mundo* reads: “Mata a su ex esposa prendiéndole fuego por denunciar malos tratos.” The article describes how Ana Orantes Ruiz, age 60, died calcinated:

Su ex marido, José P. A., la prendió fuego después de rociarla con gasolina en el chalet que compartían, la mujer arriba y el marido abajo, desde

la separación. El hombre se entregó a la Guardia Civil después de perpetrar su venganza por las declaraciones de la víctima a un popular programa de la televisión regional. Allí narró los malos tratos a los que estuvo sometida por el agresor durante los largos años que duró el matrimonio.

In 2003 we find similarly disturbing echos of Orantes's case in Barcelona. Ana María Fabregas filed eleven complaints of domestic abuse before she was hammered to death by her husband. Only after her death was the judge in her case investigated for neglect. Santos's story "De la distancia y el tiempo" foreshadows what in 2003 was still a brutal reality—the similarities between story and history are undeniable, as we will see below. Despite the laws and national plan that were in place, women still lacked the appropriate protection of the government.

"De la distancia y el tiempo" narrates the ruthless murder of a woman by her husband. Santos dedicates this story: "A Don Joaquín Ortiz, que me dio lecciones de Derecho Administrativo y de Literatura" (49). Before becoming a reputable author Santos earned a law degree and her formal education has highly influenced her work—this first story condemns the inadequacies of men in power, the lack of proper law enforcement and the political and legal negligence of women in 1990s Spain. "De la distancia" reflects this lack of protection in the main character's repeated claims to the police: "mi marido me amenaza de muerte a diario y vengo a solicitar que me protejan" (57), but she is ignored by authorities. As exemplified by Ana María Fábregas' case described previously, Santos pinpoints a gross disregard for this blatant social problem. The protagonist's last words ring in the ear of the judge that turned her away: "el día que venga a levantar mi cadáver se arrepentirá de cuanto me ha dicho, pero no se preocupe que no le voy a hacer perder más tiempo" (57). The judge himself admits his negligence: "Muchos años después, Don Felipe pensaría de vez en cuando en aquellas palabras que, cuando fueron pronunciadas desde la semioscuridad de la enorme sala de primera instancia, le produjeron un vago escalofrío" (58). The title of the story points to his "distance" in the matter since "De la distancia" refers both to the figurative and physical distance that the narrator, the judge, must travel to realize that he has made a mistake in dismissing this woman. "El tiempo" refers to the fact that time is running out, that this woman is going to be killed by her husband, and that the numerous visits she has made to the police are futile.

Circularity is crucial here, both as a broad metaphor and as a concrete symbol. The circular structure of the story is underpinned by the unbreakable cycle of

violence and by the image of a wedding ring—described at the very beginning and end of the story:

Un anillo de boda sobre la barra de un bar de carretera.” The judge finds the inscribed wedding ring of “Olga y Rafael” at a road-side café as he is making his way to a town where he will be the new judge. The broken marriage is foreshadowed immediately: “Qué curioso, que alguien se deje olvidada en un antro semejante su alianza matrimonial (49).

The judge pieces together the puzzle months later, after coming to know “El chivo” the butcher, and hearing his complaints about a wife who does not love him enough. “El chivo” and his wife come from a small town in the province of Cáceres. They left their hometown, according to the husband, because “en el pueblo tenía demasiaos gachós locos por ella y por verme muerto a mí” (56). “El chivo” is in fact Rafael, and he regularly frequents this same roadside café where he leaves his ring on the bar while he sleeps with a prostitute. He justifies his behavior by arguing that his wife is a “provocadora.” It is already too late when the judge realizes that this butcher, Rafael “El chivo”, has killed his wife Olga, the very same woman who repeatedly claimed that her husband was threatening her. The story comes full-circle, closing with the memory of the Judge seeing the ring at the bar, suggesting the perpetual nature of domestic violence.

In this story the government and police, represented by men, disregard the wife’s grievances. Just days after her last visit to the local judge she is found slain: “Tanta sangre había por el suelo que resultaba difícil mantener el equilibrio. Sobre las baldosas, desnuda y espléndida, la rubia platino, degollada” (68). Santos does not mince words when describing the sadistic killing of this woman. Even after being slaughtered her beauty is still apparent and the author suggests that her looks provoked condescension from the police officers: “Vuelva a casa que ya verá como no sucede nada. El agente le acompañará y tranquilícese, por favor” (57). This simple but fatal dismissal represents the lack of government involvement in the mistreatment, violation and murder of women in Spain.

Santos’ also aligns the abuse of power by representing how Rafael equates his wife to an animal. Her death is paralleled to that of the animals in his “carnicería.” Santos highlights the idea that for this man, his wife was nothing more than another piece of meat and that the art of killing her is comparable to the art of his profession. He kills her as he would a cow or a bull:

Aquí todavía lo hacemos nosotros, artesanía pura, oiga. Todos esos sistemas nuevos son una mierda. Meten a la vaca por una cinta de esas eléctricas y la sacan cuarteá, sin su cuero sin nada....Hay que saber matá señor jué. Acabaremos todos mirando cómo lo hacen las máquinas, van a destrozá el oficio.... Hacen falta huevos para matar a un toro de quinientos kilos, señor jué. Muchos huevos, y no todo el mundo tié los que debería. (59)

This passage, when compared to the description of the wife's death by a "cuchillo de carnicero de más de sesenta centímetros de longitud," exemplifies the savage and grotesque nature of her murder. In this description, Santos also indicates that the wife was only a possession, easily disposable, like the remains of an animal from the "matadero." Her good looks challenge her husband's manhood and he imposes his power by having the "huevos" necessary to kill her. Since she undermines his power and authority by being a "provocadora" she would have to be killed. "El asesino había rebanado el gazonate a su mujer. La víctima tenía una soga al cuello. En la cocina, dos cubos de color azul llenos de sangre. Nadie lo entendía, pero el juez sí" (60).

In representing this woman's sheer reduction to animalization, the wife in this story is never addressed by her name and the only reference to her as person with supposed rights is the inscription of her name Olga on the wedding band that her husband leaves on the bar. The action of the story begins and ends with this gold wedding band—symbolizing the eternal cycle of violence against women. The government officials in this story represent the static culture that is responsible for the mistreatment of women—a culture that perpetuates the idea that domestic violence is a private affair and that women should stay put, at home, like "los ángeles del hogar."

This disjunction between legal equality and authentic, quotidian rights can be better understood through masculinity theories and theories of power. British pro-feminist and masculinity theorist Jeff Hearn acknowledges that his book, *The Violences of Men*, is framed by an understanding that 'men's violence toward women is clearly a form of exercising power—personal and political. It arises from and is underwritten by men's domination of women as a social group and it persists as a form of power in individual situations. Hearn also points to further factors complicating this equation. For example, women's agency and capacity for resistance and men's responsibility are not accounted for adequately in this theoretical orientation. Hearn calls for a theory of power that adequately and fully

deals with the complexity of men's violence toward women, a theory which recognizes the "societal realities of men's structural power over women; the power relations embedded in family ideology and family forms, heterosexuality and marriage; the specification of interpersonal relations; and intrapersonal/intrapsychic relations of those involved" (1998: 214).

It is difficult then, to pinpoint a theory that would fully convey the complexities of domestic power relations. However, Foucault's theories of power provide an architectural framework for understanding aforementioned power relations. Specifically, Foucault states that power acts upon the actions of others, whereas: "a relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things" (1995: 220). Domination then requires violence, but violence does not necessarily result in domination. He adds that "one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character" (1995: 97). For Foucault violence occurs on the social margins, whilst the exercise of power is an everyday occurrence. Violence does not necessarily result in powerfulness, nor is it available only to the powerful. In Foucault's terms this extreme point of the exercise of power is where it is least evident or visible, that is, where it has most successfully hidden its own mechanisms. This would suggest that romantic love, heterosexual interaction and family relationships might be some of the most operative spaces in which to seek the micro-dynamics of power which enable domestic violence. Care Santos' readers would find this to be true in the short stories analyzed here.

For example, in the story "Debería darte vergüenza," Santos portrays the rape of a woman by her long-term partner. Anastasia acts as a dutiful wife, though she is not legally married to her abusive partner. She cooks for him and dotes on his daughters who wickedly remind her that she is not his "official" spouse. "Pero tú no eres la mujer de mi padre" (81) says the eldest. Anastasia's role is that of the trophy partner, the beautiful woman that stands beside the businessman. She is nothing other than an object and this is made clear by her partner Martín when he says: "Tengo mucho interés en quedar bien con este cliente. ¿No lo estropearás, verdad?" (78). Anastasia and Martín appear to be a regular couple, but the first line of Santos' story indicates that Martín's temper controls their lives: "De puro cabreo, se ha ido hoy Martín sin tomarse el café que ella le ha preparado y sin besarla en la frente a modo de despedida, como cada mañana" (77).

One of the merits of this story is Santos' ability to portray Martín as an apparently "normal" but ultimately controlling man. He is aggressive—although only with Anastasia, but "normal" in the sense that he is a good provider for his family, he does not consume drugs or alcohol, nor does he seem to have psychological problems. He is a man of stature and class and Santos depicts a man who on the outside appears to be an ideal partner. Abusers have been characterized as outwardly obsessive, dependent, emotionally isolated and angry, yet many aggressors do not publicly manifest any cruel behavior. Carmen Magallón Portoles calls this "normalidad patológica," and describes it in the following terms. "La norma molde de normalidad se asienta sobre una base patológica...y esta normalidad patológica desemboca a veces en patologías individuales (asesinos, violadores) o institucionales (recorso a la guerra, al terrorismo) agudas" (1998: 103-4). At home, Martín is anything but normal. He does not share a room with Anastasia, and he leaves the dinner table every night "para proceder a la cotidiana higiene de su inmaculada dentadura postiza" (78). His temper tantrums cause Anastasia to live in a constant state of fear, making her ashamed of any happiness she feels:

La felicidad se desvaneció como una nube de humo cuando el espejo le devolvió el reflejo de Martín, que la contemplaba desde el umbral de la puerta. Sus ojos se cruzaron a través de la falsa distancia de la superficie cristalina y ella comprendió que aquello era el principio de algo terrible, pero no sabía aún qué (88).

Anastasia lives subordinate to his anger, reproaches and belittlement and while she appears to live the life of a liberated woman she is in fact a slave to the whims of Martín.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Spanish feminists would have hoped to achieve what critic Bárbara Zecchi calls *la posdomesticidad*. In regards to the contradicting roles of women in 1990s Spain, Zecchi outlines three problems:

A finales del milenio la mujer se encuentra delante de unas aporías que la narrativa contemporánea ilustra emblemáticamente. En primer lugar resulta evidente que la mujer tiene que buscar su propia realización fuera de las paredes del hogar....En segundo lugar, a pesar de tener un trabajo fuera del hogar que la satisfaga, la mujer no consigue alejarse de las ataduras domésticas....En tercer lugar, se ha hecho a la mujer responsable de que la vida doméstica y la familia sufran a causa de su nuevo papel....La aporía de nuestra generación de mujeres *posdomésticas* es, por lo tanto, la de tener todavía que luchar en contra del estigma de la ventanera. (2000: 456)

In “De la distancia y el tiempo” and “Debería darte vergüenza” neither woman works outside of the home. They represent the women that chose not to continue their education, and who were taught to be wives and mothers.

The notion of work has an added twist in “Debería” since before meeting Martín, Anastasia worked as a cabaret dancer. Martín essentially “domesticates” her by making her leave her work and her belongings—forgetting her past life, and molding her to an identity that is more “suitable” to him:

Un día, poco después de cruzar el umbral de la puerta cargada con sus cosas, Martín la tomó de la mano y la acompañó a aquella salita. Buscó el estante de más incómodo acceso, el que quedara más escondido, y lo desnudó de todo contenido. <<Ordena aquí todo aquello que quieras retener, pero no vuelvas a mirarlo nunca más>>, le dijo antes de besarla de aquel modo que nunca conoció antes, con ternura. (82)

As Martín’s partner Anastasia is no longer the wild entertainer. She entertains guests in their home, and knows how to behave as a “proper” and obedient woman. Her day consists of creating new menus for lunch and overseeing the housekeeper, cook, and Martín’s daughters when they visit. Nevertheless, Martín continues to neglect, disrespect and objectify her, as if she were still a lowly cabaret dancer. Anastasia considers herself “saved” by Martín because he took her away from a grueling job and a bitter lifestyle. Her friends envy the fact that she has been “rescued:” “La carcajada histérica de Maritere el día en que ella le anunció que dejaba el escenario por Martín. Qué suerte tienes, hija de puta. Nunca más tendrás que dejarte sobar el culo por el viejo famélico de la primera fila (91).” Martín masks as Anastasia’s knight in shining armor who liberates her from a loathsome profession entertaining depraved old men.

In a fit of boredom and nostalgia Anastasia decides to try on her old cabaret clothes and pretend for a few moments that she is a dancer again. When Martín encounters her in costume, his only words before he tears her clothes off are “debería darte vergüenza,” as he subsequently rapes her. This small instance of “empowerment” expressed in Anastasia’s breaking the rules and trying on the clothes that allowed her to dance, drives Martín into a rage. For Anastasia, dancing can be equated with agency and power. When she was a dancer she was not physically abused, as she is now. Power, for a dancer, it would seem, is a shifting property, but it would be false to suggest that erotic dancers merely reinscribe traditional power imbalances. Rather, it would make more sense to assert

that dancers, like other workers in general, exhibit a sense of personal agency and power that is at times confounded by structural inequalities.⁶ The concept of “empowerment” which is critical to the argument against domestic violence, is one which seeks to bring the victim an awareness of self as powerful, or at least potentially powerful. Martín destroys any sense of power that Anastasia may have gained by putting on her old cabaret clothes when he rapes her. In representing this type of violence Santos’ story shatters the image of the needy woman being “rescued” by her “prince charming.”

Anastasia shares no meaningful communication or moments of joy with Martín. Her entire sense of self is derived from her functions as “wife” and she defines herself through her husband’s satisfaction and happiness: “Silencio como de páginas en blanco, vacío y aburrido. Ella se había acostumbrado a ellos de tal modo que sabía con qué llenarlos. Y durante los constantes mutismos de él, diseñaba la jornada del día siguiente, o decidía lo que iban a cenar o dónde quería ir de vacaciones” (83).

Her days are spent alone and filled with silence—she lacks any positive interaction with others and receives no affection. The couple’s sexual relationship consists of encounters in which he violates her: “Duró poco. Ella aguardó en silencio, con los ojos cerrados, las manos agarrotadas sobre el suelo, los labios apretados, a que terminara. El llanto a punto de explotar, el dolor de las palabras hirientes clavado en el alma...puta, puta, puta (89).” Martín not only physically violates Anastasia but he also verbally abuses her. His language reinforces his behavior both in private and in public, as he calls her “puta” at home and “estúpida” in front of his client. The flagrant language in this story emphasizes the emotional wounds caused by Martín’s insults. Santos also articulates Martín’s ominous physical power: “Fue directo al culo, apartó mecánicamente la estrecha franja de tela que se introducía entre nalga y nalga y la penetró con su dedo índice con la fuerza que ni él mismo recordaba haber tenido jamás (88).” The language that she uses is reflective of the raw violence and emotional rage that Martín inflicts on Anastasia.

After Martín reaches a climax Anastasia kisses his forehead and whispers “te quiero” while she cries silently. Her response is indicative of the fact that she does not believe Martín’s behavior to be criminal. She, like many women who are in sexually abusive relationships, is unsure about her victimization. Santos

invokes the age-old image of the violent man and the subjugated woman— it is Anastasia’s willingness to be brutalized and ability to internalize violence that makes her the perfect partner for Martín. According to Medina-Ariza and Barbaret in their article “Intimate Partner Violence in Spain,” women who suffer sexual abuse seem less likely to perceive themselves as victims of abuse:

We suspect that this is related to the public construction of this social problem and perhaps to the social construction of the duties of Spanish wives. By not emphasizing sexual abuse as an important dimension of the problem of domestic violence, the government and the media may be helping to keep this dimension hidden in a way that denies women a voice and an opportunity to seek assistance. (2003: 318)

Anastasia represents the numerous and sometimes voiceless women who are abused by their partners in Spain. According to Spain’s Ministry of Interior, in 1995 (the year *Cuentos cítricos* was published) there were 16,000 complaints of violence against women. However only 7,600 of those complaints became official charges of sexual assault against women.⁷ Many of these women, like Anastasia, are afraid or unwilling to file official charges against their partner.

A common misconception in society in general is that sexual violation is perpetrated by strangers. In this story, Santos deals precisely with this myth and shows that often times abuse begins at home. The author depicts the brutal treatment of Anastasia by her “family,” and the physical, verbal and emotional abuse she endures as she is continuously reminded by her partner and his daughters that she is unworthy. Thus, “Debería darte vergüenza” exemplifies the precarious situation of some women in Spain, who live with legal freedom and protection in the 1990s, but whose surroundings do not render equality or respect for women. Ángela Alemany Rojo, of the Spanish Lawyers Association believes that the persistence of such cases proves that in the 90s (and today) it is imperative to raise awareness, particularly in the legal profession. Even when courts have the tools against gender violence, they are often used in a minimal fashion or not at all. She notes other recent rulings in which a 13-year-old girl's sexual experience was a mitigating factor in the conviction of the rapist, who was a police officer. Another ruling by the all-male Supreme Court cited drunkenness by a sexual assailant as a reason for leniency. “The judges are a reflection of the society we live in,” she said. “And we are still faced with a society that considers this a private problem, and not a crime to be dealt with by society.”

In the last story that depicts violence against women, “La muerte invita,” death is presented both physically and metaphorically. The young man who narrates the story is a soldier in World War II who rapes a nurse. Here, the sexual perpetrator is in fact a stranger. Unable to assimilate the atrocities of war, the wounded and bedridden soldier physically dominates his young nurse and rapes her while his fellow soldiers cheer him on:

Chilló, La empujé. Las bragas, de algodón y de adolescente. Mi experiencia de hombre a lo largo de los años me ha enseñado que las bragas de mujer están hechas para no resistir los embites de un hombre. En aquella ocasión tampoco resistieron un ligero tirón. Sonrió un sexo con tirabuzones, recreándose en ser descubierto. Los viejos de la sala dejaron un momento de agonizar y se formaron dos grupos: el que babeaba y aplaudía y el que simplemente animaba, eufórico, a grandes gritos. (111)

The rape scene is narrated by the soldier in retrospect and maintains an unremorseful perspective. The nurse’s body is a scapegoat for the soldier. He is physically and psychologically hurt and he dumps his misery onto her: “Duro poco, el tiempo de *descargar* dentro de ella tanta mierda (112 emphasis mine).” The soldier repeats “nadie vio lo que yo ví” insinuating that witnessing brutal deaths should be considered a justification for his act of violence. This comment makes it abundantly clear that rape is not about sex, but about power. By insisting that he was “descargando mierda” the narrator exposes how his act was about overpowering and dominating her.

The title “La muerte invita” suggests that death provokes silence and pain, and in turn, the need to perpetuate violence. In raping the nurse the soldier is using sexuality in an attempt to express power and anger: “Era la primera vez que veíamos un hombre muerto y la muerte invita, sobre todo, al silencio. También a la complicidad de deshacerse de ella como de algo tan feo como la vida misma (109).” Santos does not outwardly reprove the act of rape making her description of it secondary in light of the violence of war. While the text does not condemn the rapist outright, the reader intuitively feels that rape victims should be read like war victims. The reader is situated within the mind of the rapist instead of the victim—and his story is essentially about the war, the repercussions of war as we see him perpetuate violence. Nevertheless, the story describes the brutal nature of the soldier and the pain and suffering he inflicted on the nurse, counteracting any type of mislead sympathy toward the soldier. In portraying a condemnation of rape in “Debería,” and the violation of the nurse in “La muerte,” it is apparent to

readers that the sexual violation of women is a significant topic for Santos. Each of these three stories highlights the fact that violence against women needs to be examined socially, politically and artistically.

Beyond the works mentioned previously, the depiction of femicide and domestic violence has not been prevalent among contemporary Spanish women authors. While many have dodged domestic violence as a literary topic, Santos' sharply drawn stories like "De la distancia y el tiempo," "Debería darte vergüenza," and "La muerte invita" challenge the belief that domestic violence is a problem of class, color or culture, which confines it and promises immunity to those outside of its mysterious boundaries. Santos makes domestic violence visible, depicting the often unspoken abuse of women in contemporary Spain. She focuses on the power mechanisms at work in the normative aspects of domestic and romantic relationships. An analysis of these stories in conjunction with the social and political realities at the time reveals that violent domestic relationships in Spain were and are an important site for the examination of power norms in general. These stories highlight the internal contradictions characteristic of Spain's speedy progress in the 90s and offer an understanding of the standard operations of power and the mechanisms that sustain(ed) them.

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¹ Author (b.1970) of over fifty works, Santos began her career as a journalist for the *El Mundo* newspaper. Most of her literary works include an important social component—presenting issues surrounding women, youth and minorities in contemporary Spain.

² A number of campaigns were carried out until 1998 when the Socialist Party invited women’s associations to prepare the first drafted law against gender violence, filed at Parliament by the Socialist Parliamentary group in 2001. A vote was taken to accept the proposal, but was ultimately rejected due to the votes of the ruling Popular Party. See the “Act on Integrated Protection” on <http://www.redfeminista.org/nueva/uploads/THE-ACT-ON-INTEGRATED-PROTECTION.pdf>

³ Former President José María Aznar also appointed three women to his cabinet; Esperanza Aguirre Gil de Biedma as Minister of Education, Culture and Sports, Margarita Mariscal de Gante Mirón as Minister of Justice and Isabel Tocino Biscarolasaga as Minister of the Environment.

⁴ See for example works by Dulce Chacón *Algún amor que no me mate* (1996), Lucía Etxebarria *La Eva futura/La letra futura* (2000), Anglea Vallvey *No lo llames amor* (2003) and others including various articles by Rosa Montero for her weekly column in *El País*. For statistics: <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/estadisticas/>

⁵ Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2004-21760>

⁶ We should not forget that strippers and sex workers have argued that they are in control of her bodies and should not be considered mere “sex objects.” Debi Sundahl in “Stripper,” describes her experiences with dancing and sex work as feminist and liberating. She counters the notion that female sex workers perpetuate the sexual oppression of women, stating: “In fact, to any enlightened observer, our very existence provides a distinction and a choice as to when a woman should be treated like a sex object and when she should not be” (*Sex Work*, 176).

⁷ See statistics gathered by the Centro de Reina Sofia para el estudio de la violencia.