



Women talking to women: a meeting on Critical Routes 8

Mujeres conversando con mujeres: un encuentro en el seminario Rutas Críticas 8

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ABSTRACT The “Critical Routes” seminars, held since 2006, aim to discuss and present data on research and interventions regarding violence against women. This text presents a narrative synthesis of the International Seminar on Critical Routes 8, entitled “Feminicidios: We need to talk about this,” held in Porto Alegre in 2017. The interview format was used to present the narratives, theoretical references and specific situations of each region. Feminicidios have increased under the neoliberal model that is taking place in the countries of Latin America, and there is an excess mortality among young, migrant, unprotected, poor and racialized women. The publication of these types of syntheses is an opportunity to make public research data that denounce specific situations of risk and vulnerability. The article shares critical reflections and conversations among Brazilian and Spanish-speaking Latin American researchers, seeking to strengthen actions to combat violence.

KEY WORDS Violence Against Women; Gender-Based Violence; Vulnerable Populations; Latin America.

RESUMEN Los seminarios “Rutas Críticas”, realizados desde 2006, tienen por objetivo discutir y presentar datos de investigaciones e intervenciones sobre violencia contra la mujer. Este texto presenta una síntesis narrativa del Seminario Internacional Rutas Críticas 8, denominado “Feminicidios: necesitamos hablar de eso”, realizado en Porto Alegre, en 2017. Se utilizó el formato de entrevista para presentar las narrativas, referenciales teóricos y situaciones particulares de cada región. Los feminicidios aumentaron bajo el modelo neoliberal que está ocurriendo en los países de América Latina y hay una sobremortalidad de mujeres jóvenes, migrantes, sin redes de protección, pobres y racializadas. La publicación de síntesis como esta constituye una oportunidad de hacer públicos los datos de investigaciones que incluyen la denuncia de situaciones específicas de riesgo y vulnerabilidad. El artículo comparte la reflexión crítica y las conversaciones entre investigadoras brasileñas e hispanoamericanas, buscando potencializar acciones de enfrentamiento a las violencias.

PALABRAS CLAVES Violencia contra la Mujer; Violencia de Género; Poblaciones Vulnerables; América Latina.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

The Critical Routes 8 International Seminar was held in Porto Alegre from September 28 to September 29 of 2017. The theme of this eighth edition of the seminar was femicide, which is defined as the murder of women motivated by gender-based reasons. Critical Routes are thematic seminars concerning violence against women that started in 2006. There were eight seminars, some of which had international scope and the support of Brazilian funding agencies such as Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) [National Council for Scientific and Technological Development], Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel], the Ministry of Health, the Secretariat of Policies for Women, Universidad Federal de Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and United Network [Rede Unida]. The discussed topics were the critical routes taken by women in situations of violence, the tools to face violence, transversal approach to gender equality in public policies, femicides, gender equality and inequalities. These meetings were held in different Brazilian cities, and, based on the meetings, two books were developed^(1,2) and different texts in the digital journal *Athenea*^(3,4) and several articles in journals about the same topics were written.^(5,6,7)

Access to the seminars was open and free and in each of them there were more than one hundred participants, among them students, health, social sciences and legal workers, and social movement activists. The seminars provided an opportunity for research dissemination, and to report inequalities perpetrated against women, validated by the scientific community, the feminist activism and the network of services to combat violence, responding to a demand for permanent education to strengthen public policies for women.

The International Critical Routes 8 Seminar was organized and delivered by women who work in Latin American universities and research networks that address issues related

to gender studies and who are involved in teaching, research and extension activities. The following six women participated in this conversation. Montserrat Sagot is a sociologist, professor, and researcher at the Universidad de Costa Rica, where she coordinates the Centro de Investigación en Estudios de la Mujer (CIEM) [Research Center for Women's Studies], in addition, she is the coordinator for Costa Rica in the Encuesta Internacional de Violencia Contra las Mujeres [International Survey of Violence Against Women]. Betty Ruth Lozano Lerma is a sociologist and a PhD in Latin American Cultural Studies and she is the Research Director of research and a professor at Unibautista, Cali, Colombia. Stela Nazareth Meneghel, Aline Blaya Martins and Fernanda Souza de Bairros are professors and researchers at the Universidad Federal de Rio Grande do Sul, in the area of Collective Health, they conduct research studies on violence related to women, gender, public policies and the black population. Rita de Cássia Maciazeki-Gomes is a psychologist, professor and researcher at the Universidad Federal de Rio Grande and Universidad Federal de Rio Grande do Sul, in the areas of Collective Health and Psychology. All of them are involved in university extension activities and are feminist activists, and work with other women in situations of violence (Montserrat and Stela), public policies for women (Aline), peasant women and subjectivation processes (Rita) and Black Movement (Betty and Fernanda).

We present here a narrative synthesis^(8,9) about the effects caused by our participation in Critical Routes, which are still reverberating in our thoughts, talks, and daily practices, with the aim of continuing the debate and summoning more people, even those who were not there.

Critical Routes: the power of a Latin American connection in the fight against violence.

Rita: *How did the idea of conducting the Critical Routes Seminars come about?*

Stela: The “Critical Routes” seminars began with a research study that was inspired by a study conducted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), called “The critical route of the women affected by intrafamily violence in Latin America,”⁽¹⁰⁾ coordinated by researcher Montserrat Sagot Rodríguez, from the Universidad de Costa Rica. *Critical Routes* refers to the itinerary followed by women, which starts with the decision and determination to stop intrafamily violence and to take control of their lives and their children’s. The critical route is a process that is built on the decisions and actions undertaken by women to try to end violence and on the answers found in both their family and community setting, as well as their institutional setting. The research study on the critical routes of women in situations of violence accompanies the path of these women through the institutions to know the factors that drive them to seek help and the difficulties to make such a decision, in addition to the meanings of violence among the personnel of the services that should give an answer to this public health problem. The Critical Routes research study was carried out within the framework of the Project Strengthening and Organization of Women and Coordinated Action Between the State and Civil Society for the Prevention and Care of Intrafamily Violence, coordinated by the Woman, Health and Development Program of the PAHO. Such research study is a tool for integrated care of intrafamily violence. The fact that Brazil did not participate in this research study motivated us to propose a similar research study and to organize the first two seminars to talk about the critical route faced by Brazilian women. The third edition was held at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre in 2011 and was focused on the extreme situations of violence, including gender-based murder of women and feminized bodies.

The fourth edition was held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, thanks to the collaboration between the Universidad de Costa Rica and the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, as part of the 10th International Congress of the United Network [Congresso Internacional da

Rede Unida]. This edition discussed gender in the field of public policies as well as successful experiences in facing violence. The resurgence of serious forms of gender-based violence led us to propose a fifth edition, in 2013, focusing on femicides, which at that time, were a little discussed topic in Brazil, but an issue that was present in the Latin America and Caribbean agenda. The event aligned itself with the ongoing discussion in Brazil, coordinated by the Secretariat of Policies for Women. The sixth seminar was held in Fortaleza in 2014 within the framework of the 11th Congress of the United Network, focusing on the main topic of equality in the day-to-day service provision of basic health care. The seventh edition was held in the city of Campo Grande, in Mato Grosso do Sul, during the 12th International Congress of the United Network. This edition discussed gender inequalities as well as their impact on the health and well-being of women. The associated researchers from countries such as Costa Rica, Honduras, Argentina, Colombia, as well as from Haiti, Spain and Italy contributed at all times, in addition to the workers from Brazilian institutions.

Femicides: We must talk about this...

Rita: *Why was femicides the chosen topic in the eighth edition of the seminar?*

Stela: The concept of femicide is relatively new, it was coined by Diana Russell in 1976⁽¹¹⁾ before an International Court on Human Rights. According to her, femicides are the murder of women because they are women, that is to say, motivated by issues of gender inequality. In other words, the concept of femicide refers to the misogynistic murder of women perpetrated by male family members, partners, ex-partners, or sexual attackers –known or unknown–, when female bodies are objectified, used as trophies, as instruments of vindication in the name of ‘honor’ or revenge among men. Femicides dramatically express the inequality of relations between the feminine and the masculine and show

signs of extreme dominance, terror, social vulnerability, extermination and, even, impunity. New questions were raised because of the incorporation and use of this concept and authors such as Marcela Lagarde⁽¹²⁾ differentiate femicide, or misogynistic murder of women, from feminicide, or gender-based murder of women in a context of State negligence and impunity in relation to those deaths. However, this distinction made by Lagarde is questioned by other authors, including Diana Russell herself, as it moves the central axis of femicide/feminicide, misogyny and gender inequalities to impunity and the response from the State. As this is a relatively new concept, the debate continued and several countries chose to include the term femicide into the legal classification, whereas other countries opted for feminicide, both terms referring to the misogynistic killing of women. Brazil chose to use the concept of feminicide in the recent legal classification. Thus, we use this term as well.⁽⁵⁾

Women have been subjugated throughout history, raped and killed in wartime, traded and sold during peacetime. This happened during the colonization of the Americas, a history of genocide and forced assimilation, affecting indigenous women and women brought from Africa. More recently, the Hispanic American countries, in a context of super exploitation caused by neoliberalism, have become extremely violent areas for women, presenting the highest feminicide rates worldwide, along with sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, human trafficking, genocide of women belonging to minority groups or ethnicities, actions conducted by mafia or paramilitary groups. In these scenarios, hundreds of Mexican women disappeared and died in a context of torture, cruelty and sexual violence. These crimes were committed (and are committed) in the Mexico-United States border mainly against young female workers of 'maquilas' (multinational corporations located in these 'free trade' zones), and racialized migrant women coming from different regions of Central America. These women are attracted by job opportunities, travel alone with no

protection networks. The feminicides in Central America got worse in contexts of savage capitalism that settled in these territories. The criminal organizations, such as gangs, mafias and 'maras,' proliferate with the complacency of the State, legal, police, and political agents that use women as 'sacrificial victims' in a necrophiliac demonstration of power and strength.⁽¹³⁾

In the various territorial research delimitations that we conducted during the last decade,^(14,15,16) we observed an excess mortality in black Brazilian women in different territorial contexts. These murders include executions, many of which take place in territories occupied by drug trafficking organizations. These deaths do not arouse empathy in the population and are not considered feminicides because this crime is still deemed a consequence of domestic violence in the private lives of couples. In Porto Alegre, the data from police surveys in the 2006 to 2010 period shows that feminicides are, principally, executions in places where urban structural violence is high.⁽¹⁷⁾ In Colombia, black and indigenous communities are being displaced from territories that have been occupied since colonial times, in order to implement megaprojects of transnational interest. To subdue and deterritorialize these communities, mercenary armed groups terrorize, persecute and kill the most vulnerable members, and the feminicide rates have risen dramatically.^(6,18) It must be emphasized that the risk is not the same for every woman, feminicides have a color and a social class; the most vulnerable groups are young, migrant, indigenous, black, unprotected women and female workers of a stigmatized profession such as prostitution. This situation, plus the increase in conservatism in today's society, which especially makes women more vulnerable, has led us to choose the topic of feminicides in this eighth edition.

Rita: *Why do you present the issue of racially motivated feminicides?*

Fernanda: In Brazil, the map of violence⁽¹⁹⁾ shows that the homicides of black women

rose in the last decade, whereas homicides of white women decreased. Thus, the debate about femicide must take into account the topic of race. Isabel Clavelin participated in this seminar; she is a journalist and feminist activist and she has a long professional record in the Black Women Movement. After reading Sueli Carneiro,⁽²⁰⁾ Isabel Clavelin demonstrated how all the types of violence –physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial and lethal- had been constant against black women in Brazil, but it had been hidden under the myth of racial democracy. Thinking about the femicide of black women means remembering the transatlantic traffic and visualizing the torture and rape that took place during the colonial times and those that black women historically suffered. Racism is a decisive factor for these types of violence, violations of rights, and feminicides to be perpetuated against black women, and for these deaths to be naturalized and banalized. Thinking about racism is bringing back the discomfort of the racial inequality myth, which conceals the premature deaths of black women. Now, we need to talk about feminicides from the viewpoint of black, poor, and historically silenced women.

From social-fascism to the resurgence of violence

Aline: *Which are the determinants of those deaths in our society?*

Montserrat: Violence against women is acknowledged as a major social concern, arising from a structured social organization based on inequality. We no longer believe that this is just a personal problem or a problem derived from conflictive interpersonal relationships or generated by poverty, but a problem arising from social inequality. Violence is an extreme manifestation of discrimination, a lethal weapon to maintain the subordination of women and feminized bodies. A yawning gap divides the scenarios of violence against men and women: around 60-70% of female homicides are committed for sexual reasons

by men who are close to them, while less than 8% of male homicides are committed for sexual reasons too and also by women who are close to them. Men are killed due to criminal violence or issues of the public sphere. Feminicides are the most extreme expression of gender-based violence against women, committed by men to dominate and control them.⁽¹¹⁾

We need to think about gender in relation to other social categories such as social class, race, age, sexual orientation, on which gender is built and operates. Feminicides take place when there is a logic of power inequality between the sexes and the marks on the body of a raped woman who is treated as an object are indicators of this inequality. For this reason, it is necessary to fully understand the context, the reasons of the murder, and how and where the body was disposed of. Thus, feminicides evidence the inequality between the feminine and the masculine and the relationships of dominance, terror, social vulnerability and, in many cases, impunity. The causes are not found among the personal features of the perpetrators, but in the social status of men and women. Women's bodies become an expression of a highly unequal social and gender system. The femicide category demystifies the idea of violence as a personal issue and shows its political character, which stems from unequal power relationships. This category indicates that women are not only subject to violence that is inflicted on a biological body, on an individual body, but also on a cultural body marked by economic, racial, and gender-based relationships, by insecurity, and a State that does little to avoid those deaths. Femicide establishes relationships between the micro level (personal relationships) and the macro level (gender and other social determinants). The more authoritarian a society is, the more dangerous it is for women; the greater inequality, the greater the risk of femicide and other types of violence. In addition, the risk is not the same for every woman, there are groups that are quite disproportionately exposed to violence because they are in more intimate situations or more dangerous social relationships, or both.

Studies show that unemployment, poverty, age, race, social class, isolation, migration, crime levels in the places where a woman lives, lack of resources, and lack of support impact those women who will be more affected, will suffer violence, and will be at a greater risk of dying. However, we do not have to associate violence with poverty, but acknowledge those women who are in greater danger than other women to avoid falling into generalizations and making bad science that can result in bad public policies. It is necessary to identify the particular situations of vulnerability that women experience and the risk factors of femicide, including the local culture history, economic inequalities, the impunity concerning crimes against women, sexism, and racism.

Femicide is a weapon of patriarchy, racism, economic oppression, xenophobia, heteronormativity, and colonialism; it is a mark on the bodies that had suffered many forms of injustice, which not only is a consequence of a functioning social stratification system and individual practices of the killer, but also of collective actions that I have called "biopolitics of female disposability."⁽²¹⁾ Femicide has a systemic and vital role that becomes established as necropolitics, a term coined by the 20th century African philosopher Achille Mbembe who speaks about racist violence. The author starts from the concept of biopower developed by Michel Foucault⁽²²⁾; however, he claims that it is insufficient to account for the contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death. In this way, Mbembe⁽²³⁾ defines the concept of necropolitics, which constitutes the sovereign power that will decide who can live and who must die. Exercising sovereignty is exercising control over mortality and defining life as the implementation and manifestation of power. The notions of necropolitics and necropower explain the various forms in which, in the contemporary world, there is an interest in the maximum destruction of individuals and the creation of "death-worlds," such as the refugee camps and *apartheid*. Hence, necropolitics and necropower refer to a particular form of social existence that makes entire

populations live below the line of the human. Necropolitics causes the convergence of the racist violence, class violence and gender-based violence, which construct a stratification system of discourses and practices that give rise to a lethal policy that makes some bodies more susceptible to being discarded.

Rita: *Which are the new determinants of violence against women and their deaths?*

Betty: Answering this question requires us to sharpen the analysis to avoid falling into the typical explanation of patriarchy or *machismo*. It is necessary to go beyond the analysis due to the fact that crimes against women are usually interpreted as intrafamily violence, intimate partner violence, or crimes of passion. Based on our experience as a black/Afro-Colombian people, violence against women has increased in the last 20 years in areas of African-descendant peoples and has continued to increase at an unprecedented pace in the context of the implementation of free-market and development policies in the Colombian territory. In this respect, I identify two relevant aspects to understand the different types of violence against women, many of which have deadly consequences. The first aspect is the process of territorial expropriation of peoples and communities and the second aspect is the transformation of the subjectivity of these peoples. I am proposing here that the murder of women in ethnicized and racialized territories such as those of black peoples in Colombia as well as in all the American continent and the Caribbean are part of a colonization process (incomplete) of the territories, the bodies and the imaginaries of black and indigenous communities. Women are killed because their sense of community and their ancestral practices, which lay the basis for the formation of a community, are an obstacle to the advance of neoliberalism which requires isolated individuals for the free-market. I would like to mention, though very briefly, that building individuals is also the role of the neopentecostal evangelization of the theology of prosperity and the spiritual warfare. Consequently, an all-out

war has been declared against the religions of African origin, which have been the spiritual support of maroon battles of the Afro-descendant people in the continent. Women are murdered, also because, as Rita Segato⁽²²⁾ says, these crimes are useful for the development of a pedagogy of cruelty: a mutilated and massacred body, killed a thousand times, teaches the community, other women and the entire society that this woman deserved it; therefore, she deserves neither our solidarity, our compassion nor even our empathy. It is a way of teaching us not to feel anything for the other, to set us apart, to disarticulate ourselves. This is the role of the pedagogy of cruelty exercised on women's bodies. Moreover, we become acquainted with terrible ways of killing. The question "what is happening in our society that men are killing more women than ever before, considering the fact that *machismo* has always existed?" has led us to the following conclusions. Femicide is more than just a crime of passion. Femicide is a state crime as it involves situations that are structural to the colonialist, racist, and capitalist world system. We need an explanation for the events that have taken place in Brazil in the last fifteen years in which feminicides have boomed. We must ask what is happening in Colombia, in Guatemala, or in Honduras, the country with the highest rate of violence against women in the world. What is happening? The analyses seek to understand what is happening in the socio-political, economic, and cultural context: what transformations have taken place to cause deaths of women on a mass scale. Historically, the thoughts of the black peoples from the Colombian Pacific Region did not intend to cause irreparable damage to other people, and currently, in the same region, large numbers of women are killed and go missing. What transformation has taken place in the subjectivity of these individuals? Indeed, these men are part of a patriarchal structure; however, there is a current patriarchy that commits women's murders in an unprecedented way. Why is this happening? Despite the historical violence against black and indigenous women in this continent by the conquest and the colonization,

the black women managed to overcome this violence and became leaders in the construction of worlds which restored humanity as an Afro-descendant community. What has been happening for thirty years in the Colombian Pacific Region is the destruction of those worlds created under the leadership of black women. This destruction exerts a symbolic castration on men, which precludes them from responding, given the ontological transformations generated by neoliberalism and neoconservatism, to the cultural demands regarding their masculinity. Therefore, men can only exercise their power in their home and on their wives; this is the only control they have and they cannot lose it because if they do, they will have no value at all. In this way, men become a weapon of the modern, racist, patriarchal, colonial world system and neither the left nor the Afro-descendant social movement still understands this fact.

Political action and the strengthening of community ties: a strategy against violence and women's deaths

Aline: *What are the chances of resistance to that reality?*

Montserrat: Femicides are marks that enable us to read the reality of a country. Femicides reflect the social exclusions, the precariousness of life, racism, classism, and sexism. Therefore, the social structure and social inequality can be identified from the body of a murdered woman. This means that in order to face a femicide, it is necessary to change the social structure, starting by transforming the social fabric and the communities, to establish new forms of solidarity and combat exacerbated individualism. There are a great number of examples drawn from the native peoples, the black communities, and the peasant populations of how to rebuild the social fabric and establish new relationships of solidarity. The only way to survive in this world is by rebuilding social relationship networks, starting from a bottom-up approach.

Evidently, we also have to ensure a quick response to feminicides. We know that

family, neighbors, close acquaintances are essential to prevent a feminicide. Therefore, it is essential to work with the families, local institutions, and networks to enable them to identify danger signs: a woman abused by her intimate partner, a young woman becoming involved with trafficking. We must ensure that there is a suitable local response and we have to change the State as well, to fight against the neoliberal model, against the patriarchal model, against a racist and colonial model. If we do not fight against these models, we will not be able to transform reality and think of a world without feminicides, and without violence against women and populations that have been historically excluded.

This is a monumental task; however, feminicides reflect this structure of social exclusion. It is essential to think of daily life actions, assume our responsibilities and not to delegate them to others, because if we do not lead the way and we just wait for someone else to do it, we will not survive.

Stela: *Colleagues, which are your final words? What did we learn and share in these two days of reflections and conversations with Latin-American women, joining forces to fight against violence and femigenocide?*

Rita: We will start by explaining what femigenocides are according to Rita Segato,⁽²⁴⁾ who tells us that this term is a concept that must be used for systematic and impersonal crimes, which has the destruction of women as its specific target, just because they are women, without the possibility of personalizing or individualizing the perpetrator's reason for committing the murder nor the relationship between perpetrator and victim. In this way, we introduce the particle "geno" to name those feminicide targeting the woman as *genus*- that is to say, as gender, under conditions of impersonality. This generic, impersonal and systematic character is essential to approach these murders to the profile of crimes against humanity and to include them in the

international criminal law forum, which is in charge of dealing with genocide and crimes against humanity. In view of this challenging scenario, political actions and the commitment of each one of us is required- that is, the strengthening of the networks, the creation of places for debating, listening and welcoming the personal stories of black, indigenous, white, poor, migrant, young, and elderly women, seeking to identify situations of risk and vulnerability and to respond to each and every one of them in accordance with their needs.

Aline: In the search of changes in this difficult situation that we live in our society, in particular for women, I think that we need, now, more than ever before, collective efforts which may contribute to the change of this brutal reality that we have been able to empathize with and discuss during the International Seminar on Critical Routes 8. In this sense, it seems necessary to integrate forces, in different sites of the network, with the aim of strengthening actions to face the violence and build more egalitarian relationships in our society. For this reason, we need to reconsider the role of universities, or the work in the different territories, and the participation in primary health care much closer to families and their realities.

Stela: Without forgetting that one of the disputes of feminicide is the politicization of these deaths, by identifying the real factors that include the patriarchal, sexist, racist, xenophobic, and colonial capitalism, as noted by my colleagues. Political actions encompass not only the ability to be outraged, to organize ourselves into groups, to report these deaths, but also to honor and to respect the memory of the victims, to use art as an instrument to cope with grief and mourning, in fact, to ally ourselves with the progressive forces of society and with those people who have been historically excluded, considering that we need once more to organize ourselves in order to resist this reality.

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