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ARTICLE

FEMICIDES OF MOTHERS-TERRITORY

A GENDER STUDIES LOOK AT THE *MNEMOSYNE ATLAS* AS A LIVING ARCHIVE

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Abstract

From a gender studies perspective, this paper focuses on understanding Aby Warburg's proposal of a *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a living archive, with the aim of elucidating the potential and limits of this methodology of collecting and organizing images as a tool for rethinking a patriarchal past and present.

Following this guideline, the photographs of sexual, gender and violence records occurring in the context of the war in Colombia, published in the book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social* (Violence in Colombia - study of a social process, 1962; 1964), are taken as a case study. These images show how women and their bodies, in the context of a patriarchy exacerbated by the war, become repositories of violence by being codified as territory and origin of life. These photographs are the axis of a *Mnemosyne Atlas*, taken as a methodology and considered as an archival device that compiles works of art from other contexts and temporalities that dialogue with the woman-land-life relationship.

Keywords: Gender Studies, Woman as Territory, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Armed Conflict in Colombia, Ecofeminism

Gender studies, along with postcolonial studies, have established themselves as a theoretical and methodological analytical tool that places the need for a political re-evaluation of the past as one of its fundamental principles. This involves settling historical debts, identifying systematic invisibilizations, and clarifying research biases that stem from a construction of history primarily carried out through a male and phalocentric lens. Although academic studies tend to categorize and label fields of knowledge,¹ gender, postcolonial, and queer reading practices have contributed in tandem not only to a criticism of the consequences of a patriarchal system but to contradict its basis on a hierarchical and dualistic mode of thinking, with queer theory focusing especially on transcending dualistic narratives.²

The discipline of history is rooted in 18th-century precepts of scientific truth, distant objectivity, and an insistence that the object of study must be detached from the observer.³ This view denies inherent biases and envisions the past as a remote entity that has no bearing on the present or on those who recount and construct it. On the other hand, as Griselda Pollock points out, dominant discourse in art history introduced a directional and developmental concept of time.⁴ This approach is notably linear, reducing historical narrative to a chronological succession of styles, classified as civilized or primitive based on their proximity or distance to an ideal of Western beauty. In other words, it's a hierarchical model that divides the past into opposing categories and justifies the supremacy of a pyramidal model that is always preceded and built by a very distinct figure: a white Western heterosexual man. In the case of art history gender biases, central figures in the discipline such as Vasari's biographies from the 16th-century and Ernst Gombrich's *The Story of Art* published in 1950 have erased half of the population from the narrative of the past, not to mention sexually dissident populations. Vasari briefly mentions four female artists in contrast to the over 190 male artists appearing in his writings, and Gombrich does not include any female artists in his survey of "universal" art history. This perspective becomes normalized and obscured by the principles of scientific truth and distant objectivity, disregarding inherent biases. Such an approach envisions the past as a distant entity, seemingly detached from the present and the individuals who narrate and construct its history.

From this model of history emerges a particular way of understanding the archive, one that promotes a chronological, hierarchical categorization of the past, constrained by rigid space-time associations and an emphasis on objectivity and distance. This perspective conceals biases in its construction and organization. However, the archive, when viewed through the lens of gender studies, can be a tool to rethink this model of history. Specifically, these lines aim to revisit, from a gender studies perspective, the methodology of studying and organizing images proposed by Aby Warburg in his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Atlas of Memory, 1921-1928), to analyze it as one that advocates for the creation of living archives, opening the door to new and necessary interpretations of the past.⁵

Aby Warburg, in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, proposed an approach to researching and organizing images based on his concept of "good neighborliness,"

which suggests that new meanings emerge when certain images are placed next to each other. In this sense, the image is not understood as a separate entity but is interpreted in relation to others. The guiding thread in this selection and organization procedure is a formal pattern or “gesture” that repeats. The value of repetition allows images from different historical periods and geographic locations to coexist in an *Atlas* because the aim is to show how a gesture that initially appears exclusive to one image is repeated in many others.

Therefore, for gender studies, Warburg’s methodology becomes relevant in the sense that by valuing repetition, it allows us to trace patterns of representation that transcend chronological and causal associations. This approach is especially relevant when applied to gender studies, as it unveils deep visual structures that patriarchy has globalized and extended across different moments and geographic spaces.⁶ In this sense, the *Atlas* proposes an archival view that is not constrained by chronological associations but rather privileges connections between times, proposing an organization of the past more akin to a rhizomatic structure than a pyramidal one. Likewise, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* not only proposes a history of art that resists being confined by rigid space-time borders but also opens a door to a non-dualistic understanding of the image. As will be explained in the following section, for Warburg, the image moves between polarities. However, as Margaret Iversen explains in her article “Retrieving Warburg’s Tradition”, they “tend to lose any strict hierarchical ordering and become dynamic, dialectical polarities.”⁷ Iversen sees Warburg’s early rejection of dualistic constructions of the past as a significant contribution to feminist theory, insofar as it transcends phallogocentric logic of dividing the world into irreconcilable opposites. In sum, for this essay, reviewing the possible connections and contributions of Warburg’s method to gender studies is based on understanding his proposal as one that resists a hierarchical, dualistic history of art and one that focuses on the search for repetitive gestures as a means of uncovering new narratives of the past.

This is why, to understand the scope and limits of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a method for rethinking the past through the lens of gender studies, the case study will focus on the photographs published in the book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social*, which documents femicides that occurred during the period of Colombian history known as ‘La Violencia’. These photographs will serve as the central axis of an *Atlas* that will revolve around tracing the repetitive gesture of considering, capturing, and representing women as symbols of mother-territory. The objective is to illustrate how the darker side of this symbol becomes evident in the context of war: being synonymous with life and territory in the context of a patriarchy exacerbated by the conflict makes women the repository of violence both in reality and in representation. However, before delving into the case study, it is crucial to further explore how Warburg, in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, grasps the value of a repetitive gesture as a phenomenon associated with trauma. Additionally, we must consider how his historiography has, at times, sought to conceal this perspective and, at other moments, endeavored to revitalize the sense of trauma inherent in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

MNEMOSYNE ATLAS: A LIVING ARCHIVE OF TRAUMA-LOADED IMAGES

Through his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Warburg aimed to trace, in a variety of images, the survival of a pagan past — rational and balancing Apollonian forces alongside chaotic and emotional Dionysiac ones — during the Christian era of the Italian Renaissance. The objective was to unveil, in the repetition of forms from the past, an ailing humanity. This unfinished endeavor, halted by the death of its author in 1929, took the form of 40 panels comprised of over 1,000 images. Warburg's intention to expand the boundaries of images stemmed from his proposal to unravel unresolved traumas present in images from various temporalities. These traumas, left unhealed, repeated and resurfaced over time in ghostly forms.⁸ The image traced by Warburg was considered a 'pathos formel', meaning it functioned as a vehicle for emotions and passions from other times, which could dynamically resurface between its Apollonian and Dionysian polarities. In this sense, the search for repetition in the *Atlas* was not confined to mere formal reiteration (a formula - 'formel') but rather a pattern charged with ancient soul passions ('pathos') or symptoms of unresolved ailment.⁹

Georges Didi-Huberman has argued that the phantasmagoric and traumatic nature of Warburg was erased by his successors Ernst Gombrich and Erwin Panofsky, who positioned him as the founder of their discipline, iconology.¹⁰ However, they modified his principles, transforming them into a more comforting, structured, systematic, and clear theory. In this process, they eliminated anachronisms, survivals, and Warburgian ghosts from the discourse and the field of study. Didi-Huberman critically examined these constraints and simplifications of Warburg's figure throughout his extensive literature.

Specifically in the catalog of the exhibition *Atlas ¿cómo llevar el mundo a cuestas?*, Didi-Huberman proposes the *Atlas* as a framework for reflecting on the image. He does not conceive it as the outcome of a process of organization and classification of images but as the space where such a process of visual thinking takes place.¹¹ Similarly, he rescues the tragedy of the myth of the Greek Titan Atlas, the one who carries the heavens and with them the sufferings of the world. Warburg's *Atlas* is not only a framework for connections between images but also a support for human sufferings.¹² In this sense, recovering the intense and traumatic nature of Warburg, remembering that what the *Atlas* bears are images loaded with polarities and emotions: "gestures of love and gestures of combat, of triumph and of servitude, of ascent and of descent, of hysteria and of melancholy, of grace and of ugliness, of desire in motion and of petrified terror..."¹³ Consequently, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a support (Atlas) for human sufferings transmitted images as containers of memories from the past (Mnemosyne).

Didi-Huberman's recognition of the potential in Warburg's methodology to unravel the traumatic sense of the image is what Griselda Pollock envisions as a contribution to re-think the foundations of art history. In her article "Whither Art History?", Pollock suggests that after the upheavals of the 20th-century — the

Second World War, the genocide of Jews and Gypsies, the massacres in Rwanda — the classical imagery that serves as the foundation of Western art was destroyed, as the body idealized by the Greeks was irreparably violated.¹⁴ In this respect, we are facing an art history that must be contemplated from the standpoint of trauma and catastrophe. Warburg's methodology, grounded in the understanding of the image as a phenomenon loaded with passions, traumas, and psychological imprints, becomes a tool for "new formulations for suffering and affective intensity adequate to the unprecedented events that have horrifically shaped our world."¹⁵ For Pollock, merely lamenting conventional ways of writing art history is no longer sufficient. After experiencing the destruction of humanity, it becomes imperative to explore renewed approaches to understanding the image in relation to that destruction and trauma.

Pollock's response to the quest for new art histories, much like Warburg's in his time, is to open the boundaries of the discipline to approach the complexity of the image and its movements over time. In this sense, Pollock sees the methodology of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which she interprets as tracing "the promiscuous migration of images across a temporal-spatial planetary"¹⁶ as a path towards a more open art history, receptive to new worldviews and less inclined towards universalism and standardization.

This brief historiography on how the *Mnemosyne Atlas* has been interpreted reveals how, from its conception, it has been seen as a reformative agent in understanding the past and the image. At times, its contributions have been obscured, but at other moments, its elements related to trauma and affective aspects of the image have been rescued and brought to light. This perspective becomes particularly interesting when analyzing photographs linked to such a traumatic period in Colombian history that has been labeled 'La Violencia'. In this context, the notion of the *Atlas* as a support for human suffering, according to Didi-Huberman, and as a facilitator of more pluralistic art histories, as envisioned by Griselda Pollock, are fundamental concepts that gain meaning when confronting images of war.

THE BOOK *LA VIOLENCIA EN COLOMBIA*: REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS

The book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social* was first published in 1962 and 1964, during the context of the Frente Nacional,¹⁷ a political period that imposed a policy of silencing¹⁸ and forgetting the atrocities that occurred during the bipartisan conflict of 'La Violencia'. The prevailing discourse at the time was to consider this war as a cruel act perpetrated by a "barbaric" peasantry, thus blaming the country's most marginalized populations and absolving the elites of the role they played in the onset and development of the war.¹⁹ Isabel Cristina Díaz conducts a detailed study of the book, arguing that *La Violencia en Colombia* fulfilled the historical function of revealing what society tried to forget, and the photographs served as a documentary tool that left no doubt about the barbarism that occurred in rural areas to urban populations.²⁰ Díaz also delves

into the meaning of photographic records, suggesting that they played a part in a process of differentiation between the “civilized” city – the spectator of the photos – experiencing the irrational acts of a “barbaric other” – the peasants. In this sense, the author proposes that “the archive produces a visual shock [in the spectator], which translates into an encounter with an unrecognizable other.”²¹

This aspect, the insurmountable distance between the viewer and the suffering portrayed in the image of war, is further explored by Susan Sontag in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Sontag points out that those who have not lived through war, its sufferings, and violence “can’t understand, can’t imagine” the experiences that such images represent.²² As Díaz explains, the visual shock generated by the images in the book *La Violencia* quickly leads to creating a diametrical distance between the war experienced in rural areas and those who comfortably observe it from the city. Sontag challenges this approach to war images by raising awareness of such distance and emphasizing that the viewer’s experience in the face of war images should be permeated with empathy, sensitivity, and respect for the suffering depicted. Thus, Sontag poses the ethical challenge in considering the reproduction, study, and, above all, the observation of war images. While recognizing the possibility that these images of suffering may be exploitative and revictimizing, an ethical paradox arises: how can these same images, despite their potential negative impact, play a significant role in understanding and preventing violence?

At this stage, Warburg’s methodology may offer some insights, especially concerning the specific case of the sufferings depicted in the book *La Violencia en Colombia*. As previously stated, the war photographs published in this book are intertwined with a narrative that leads to an understanding of the portrayed violent acts as isolated and the product of unexplained barbarity. To comprehend these photos as part of a broader visual universe can be a way to make sense of the senseless. This is where Warburg’s method of a living archive becomes relevant to rethink this past, in which the visual shock, as proposed by Díaz, immobilizes and individualizes the event in the face of the horror of the photos, preventing us from seeing the structures that sustain and enable it. Therefore, Warburg’s methodology opens up as a possibility to attempt to give reflective and critical meaning to the senselessness. By analyzing the relationships these images, depicting “barbaric” acts, have with other images, it may be possible to decode their complex connections between traumatic pasts, specific historical events, human sufferings, and relationships with structures of oppressive systems. It is at this point in the ethical discussion of the war image that the photographs of femicides present in the book *La Violencia en Colombia* can be introduced.

Maternidad Frustrada (Thwarted motherhood, Figure 1) is one of the seventy photographs published throughout the seven editions and two volumes of the book.²³ It depicts an unidentified woman who fell victim to a femicide that occurred at some point in the 1950s in Colombia. Her death occurred under what was referred to at the time as *no dejar ni la semilla* (“not leaving even the seed”),

a wartime strategy to symbolically and physically annihilate the adversary by torturing, violating, and murdering pregnant women from the opposing side.²⁴

This strategy is part of a pattern that transcends this particular war. The report titled *La Guerra inscrita en el cuerpo* points out that “in the context of war [in Colombia], women’s bodies appear as a territory in which the power of patriarchal culture is expressed (...). Women’s bodies are a defined political field.”²⁵ This practice is part of what anthropologist María Victoria Uribe has defined as “killing and re-killing.” In this context, killing also meant symbolically attacking the body. In the case of



Figure 1

Anonymous. *Maternidad Frustrada* (Thwarted Motherhood), circa 1950. Photograph published in the book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social*, Ediciones progreso, 1968.

women, the records of their femicides reveal highly violent acts targeting the parts of their bodies associated with reproductive capacity.²⁶ In the various editions of the book *La Violencia en Colombia*, eight photographs were published in which the image or caption reinforces this pattern. It’s worth noting that all the captions were written by the priest Germán Guzmán Campos, a co-author of the book, who imparted his personal and moral interpretations in the descriptions of the images. Here are the captions that accompanied the cited photographs. The first one is the only image depicting a living peasant family, while the other seven document the murder of women and children:²⁷

- *Salvar el núcleo familiar, el honor de la mujer y la vida del hijo fue una de las causas determinantes de lucha* (Saving the family nucleus, the honor of women, and the lives of children was one of the decisive causes of the struggle)
- *El hombre, la mujer, el niño, raíz y esencia de la patria ... todo sucumbió* (Man, woman, child, the root and essence of the homeland... all succumbed)
- *Debía destruirse a la mujer* (Women had to be destroyed)
- *Para que nunca volviera a engendrar* (So that she would never engender again)
- *Maternidad frustrada* (Thwarted motherhood)
- *Crimen inenarrable: maternidad frustrada* (Unspeakable crime: thwarted motherhood)
- *No se respetó ni vida ni sexo* (Neither life nor sex was respected)
- *No debía quedar ni la semilla* (No seed must be left)

The relationship between the photos and the captions establishes a narrative that suggests that the femicides of these women did not occur because of their actions in the war but rather because they were strictly defined by their reproductive capacity. In other words, both reality and photographic records consider and capture women as symbols of motherhood, alienating the victims from their historical agency and individual identities. In this sense, it is understood that a woman's "honor" lies in her ability to "engender" and bear the "seed" of a large offspring, concepts that reference motherhood intertwined with the fertility of the land. Thus, the gesture of reducing women to symbols of Mother-Territory permeates the photographs of frustrated motherhood published in the book *La Violencia en Colombia*.

Connecting femicide photographs with ancient gestures and patterns of representation, such as the Mother-Territory, allows us to go beyond the undeniable visual impact generated by these images, surpassing the simplistic explanation provided by the book *La Violencia en Colombia*. This is why it becomes necessary to weave a *Mnemosyne Atlas* in relation to the gesture of representing women-mother-territory, which can be traced back to the so-called prehistoric Venuses, proposing what Warburg would call an "anachronistic coalition of the now and the past."²⁸

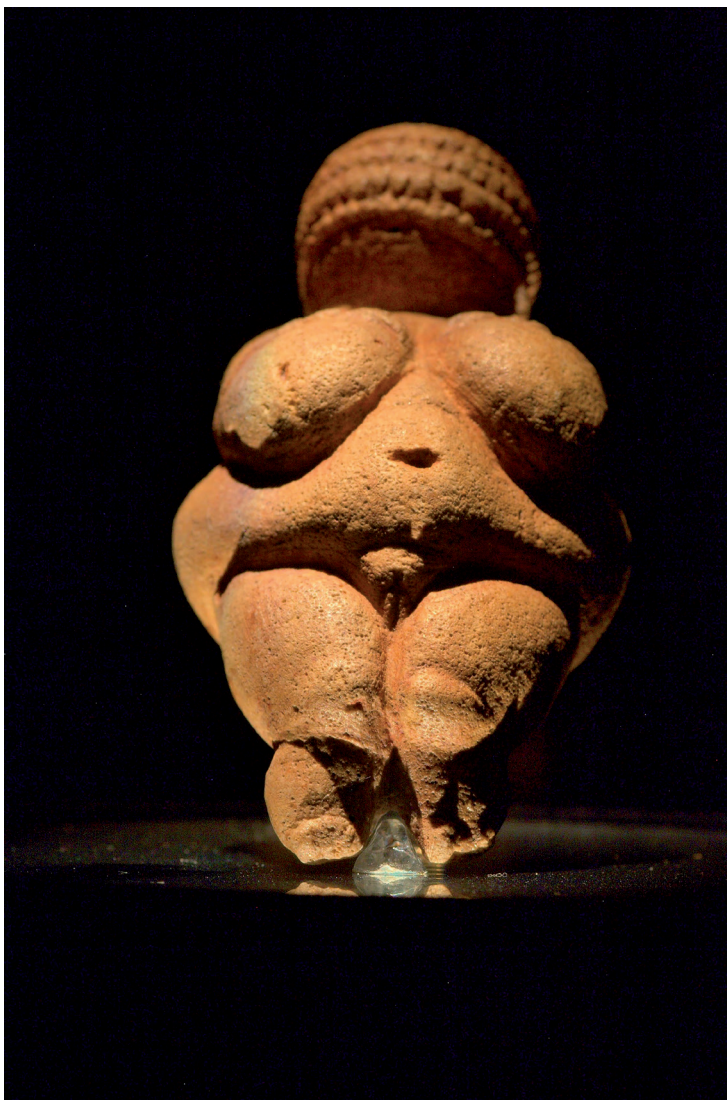


Figure 2

Anonymous. *Venus of Willendorf*, circa 26,000 .c.e. Limestone with ochre coloration. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Public domain.

ANACHRONISTIC COALITIONS OF WOMEN-MOTHER-TERRITORY

The *Venus of Willendorf* (c. 26,000 BCE, Figure 2) is a stone-carved figure that emphasizes women's anatomy linked to the process of gestation: breasts, belly, thighs, and a triangular genital area form a single group. It is challenging to determine the original meaning of this millennia-old figure, but historical narratives have suggested a correspondence between primordial female fertility and the fertility of the earth.²⁹ However, as proposed by Christopher Witcombe, "the ironic identification of these figurines as 'Venus' conveniently satisfied certain assumptions of that time about the primitive, women, and taste."³⁰ In other words, this figure found in Willendorf, Austria, in 1907, more than informing us about its original significance and use, highlights — much like *Maternidad frustrada* — how patriarchy has reduced women to their reproductive capacity, making them merely a "womb or ovary," as Simone de Beauvoir postulates.³¹

This glorification of women for their ability to produce a large offspring equates them with the fertility of the earth, and this close correspondence has been the subject of study in Ecofeminism. Val Plumwood, in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), argues that patriarchy has established a worldview organized by pairs of antagonistic concepts systematically constructed as superior and inferior: masculine-feminine, culture-nature, civilized-primitive.³² This dualistic mental structure has left women and nature as analogous concepts with the common denominator that they can engender life. This view of woman-nature takes away woman historical agency and turns her into a symbol that passively receives violence and a scenario where male dominance is enacted.³³ This view is reflected in the women who are victims of femicide documented in *Maternidad frustrada*, considered mother-territories where war takes place without their active participation.

This view of understanding women as view as territory is not only replicated in prehistoric Venuses but is also actualized and re-actualized in allegories of Nature, Continents, and the Homeland. The allegory of Mother Nature can be traced back to Greco-Roman times and has been a common motif in the Western world.³⁴ An example is this image from the 17th-century, *Atalanta Fugiens*, in which nature was personified as a woman breastfeeding in the shape of the world. This perspective is also replicated by representing continents as racialized female figures. The same logic was applied with the emergence of nation-states, where women no longer personified borderless continents but came to represent national territories as Motherland figures, as seen in the case of *Policarpa Salavarrieta [como madre Patria]* (circa 1990, Figure 3), or territorial divisions of countries, as in the photograph *Alegoría a Cúcuta* (1891). In these patriotic allegories, women carry the national flag and with their bodies symbolize the fertility and continuity of a nation-state. In this sense, women's agency is reduced to being a symbol of a territory from which they were "excluded from political participation until very recent times."³⁵ The long Western tradition of female allegories of territories reveals a process of territorialization of women's bodies in which, as Plumwood highlights,

women cease to be historical subjects and their identity is reduced to being a symbol of a fertile territory where the male sphere operates.³⁶

Débora Arango's painting *La República* (1957, Figure 4) satirizes this symbol by offering us an anti-symbol image of the Republic. The central theme of this painting is a denouncement of a country bled dry by misgovernment. In the central scene of the painting, a woman brought to the bone is devoured by carrion birds, one devours her face, and the other her womb. Her body lying on the Colombian flag reads as the personification of the defeated Republic, analogous to an allegory of a fallen nation. Furthermore, her thinness and sagging breasts stand in stark contrast to the normative fertility of mother-territories, such as the sexualized figure of the so-called *Venus of Willendorf*. This woman-republic antonym of the fertile nation is assaulted by a masculinized environment. A black animal is represented as an omnipresent deity, supported by a male audience. This painting highlights how women are symbols, but also anti-symbols of a nation governed by men.

The correspondence between the scrawny body of this infertile Republic and the slender body of the woman in *Maternidad frustrada* is unsettling because both, in representation and reality, were violated under their consideration as symbols of a territory to be conquered or ruled. This is how these two images relate to what Plumwood exposed in *Ecofeminism* when she reiterated that "To



Figure 3

Anonymous. Policarpa Salavarrieta
[as an allegory of the Homeland], circa
1900. Oil on canvas. 122.5 × 85.5 cm.
Collection National Museum of
Colombia, Bogotá. Public domain.



Figure 4

Débora Arango. *La República*, 1957. Watercolor. 77 × 56 cm. Courtesy of Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia.

be defined as nature in this context [in which masculinized power reigns] is to be defined as passive, non-agent and non-subject, as the environment or setting where white, Western, colonizing, male reason and culture act.”³⁷ However, in the specific case of *Maternidad frustrada*, to be defined as nature in a context of war (both in representation and reality) is to be defined as passive, non-agentic, and non-subject, functioning as the stage where the most decomposed form of domination acts: violence.

The only two photographs published in the book *La Violencia* that contradict this notion are *Todas son adolescentes guerrilleras* (All are teenage guerrillas, circa 1950, Figure 5) and *La mujer se mezcla en la lucha* (The woman blends into the struggle, circa 1950). These two images stand out as the sole records depicting women as active agents in the war, contradicting the assigned role portrayed in the rest of the book, where they are predominantly symbolized as mothers-territories-victims. These photos create tension in the narrative of the book as they challenge the sole role attributed to women: passive victims. In this sense, these women, portrayed alive, dressed not in military uniforms but in knee-length dresses, photographed alongside their male counterparts replicating the same frontal and stern pose, and identified as guerrillas, disrupt as subjects resisting being turned into passive symbols. Additionally, their presence in the book serves as a reminder

that other women portrayed as violated symbols of a territory to be conquered were, in reality, women with a history who were alive and active in the world. These two photographs challenge the patriarchal dualistic view in which the only real possibility for women is being passive entities that do not act or exert violence in war.

But although these two photographs resist the simplification of women into being symbols of mother-territory-victim and allow a break from the dualistic and dichotomous logic that a patriarchal vision has tried to impose—which permeates the narrative of *La Violencia*—the woman in *Maternidad Frustrada* was reduced to a body that was symbolized as the first step to justify her murder. In this sense, recalling Warburg's definition of an image as a contender from other times, the photograph *Maternidad Frustrada* contains countless other images of women-territories relegated to the realm of symbols and allegories that strip them of their status as historical agents. In other words, the femicides captured in the frustrated motherhood images from *La Violencia* are not isolated incidents but are part of a broader universe of images sustained by a worldview in which women have been constructed, regarded, captured, and represented as battlefields. Thus, *Maternidad Frustrada* exposes the darker side of the symbol of Mother-Earth, as in contexts of a patriarchy exacerbated by war, the strong association of women with life and territory predisposes them to femicide. It is important to note that at this point, reality and representation converge, in that the repeated representation of women as Mother-Earth solidifies imaginaries that play a role in actual violent acts.

Reaching this point, it becomes necessary to revisit the first section of this text, which explains how Warburg understands the repetition of a gesture from the



Figure 5

Anonymous. *Todas son adolescentes guerrilleras* (All are teenage guerrillas), circa 1950. Photograph published in the book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social*, Ediciones progreso, 1968.

past as a symptom of an unresolved trauma, one that, if not made conscious, will continue to reproduce over time. This understanding gives meaning to the exercise of bringing from the depths of the past representations of women turned into symbols-territory, positioning it as an exercise of bringing to consciousness that the suffering and trauma witnessed in the photographs of *La Violencia en Colombia* as individual tragedies are part of a broader network of representation dynamics. In doing so, the ethical dimension of seeking anachronistic clashes between images in *La Violencia en Colombia* is understood as unsettling the image by viewing it in relation to representation patterns that enable it and involves disrupting these representation patterns, complicating them, and nuancing them with the ultimate goal of transcending them. Thus, taking cues from Sontag, proposing a responsible and ethical approach to the suffering recorded and observed in these images.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE *MNEMOSYNE ATLAS* FROM A GENDER STUDIES VIEWPOINT

As such, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* put into practice here reveals an ingrained structure of a patriarchal worldview that Ecofeminism presupposes in the foundations of Western thought. In this sense, it is possible to say that the exaltation of women's connection to nature in the patriarchal system has been a way to deprive them of an active role in society's construction. Therefore, the relevance of applying the Warburg's *Atlas* methodology to gender studies lies in its "good neighbor" method, which allows us to observe long-lasting structures. This is particularly useful when studying a system in which there is historical continuity, as in the case between patriarchy in ancient societies and that of contemporary societies.³⁸ The *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a methodology enables us to analyze images not as isolated events, but as related elements which, in their turn, are connected to deep structures of representation and thought. Ultimately, this review of continuities calls for the construction of archives that are more open to an organization of the past that allows for non-chronological and non-geographical connections. The *Atlas* may be considered a living archive since more images can be included in this network, which will always lead to new readings of the past.

In relation to Warburg's method as one that can propose a path on how to observe the war image, it can be said that the strategy of viewing images of suffering through others helps us transcend the painful specificity of the war image, revealing patterns of representation that give meaning to violent acts. Revisiting Sontag's ethical question, the *Atlas*, conceived as a living archive, offers a methodology for addressing war images responsibly. By creating anachronistic associations between images, it enables the revelation of representation patterns that provide a deeper understanding of femicidal violence associated with war. Furthermore, it allows painful images not to exist in isolation, turning the *Atlas* into a space where other images can support and accompany the suffering. Returning to Didi-Huberman's

concept of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a support for human suffering and traumas.

However, it is important to note that Warburg's methodology always teeters on the edge of proposing ahistorical studies of the past, as it can lead to the study of repetitive gestures as timeless signs. In other words, the repetitive gesture can be understood as an essential quality that invariably emerges in different historical and geographical contexts. This would suggest a historical immobility that gender studies have focused on contradicting because an ahistorical reading proposes the existence of immutable qualities understood as natural facts and not as historical constructions.³⁹ Precisely, the patriarchy has been responsible for establishing its constructions about gender as natural, establishing fixed femininities and normative masculinities. Approaching this methodology entails taking into account that repetition does not imply lack of variation, and that the tracking of repetitive gestures does not imply that such gestures, such as considering women as symbols of mother-territory without agency, are an unchanging fact but rather a historical construction that has been embedded in Western thought. In other words, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, understood as a methodology, could be a useful tool for studying panoramic structures of representation and making them visually evident, without losing sight of the fact that these structures are in themselves constructions with history, transformations, and variations.

One last factor to consider is that Warburg's proposal focuses on tracing historical continuities rather than discontinuities. This perspective may potentially obscure subtle changes in history and subversions carried out by marginalized groups in power. However, it is important to note that this limitation does not invalidate its use in gender studies. As the task of rethinking history requires a variety of methodologies that can examine the past from both a structuralist and a detailed perspective, these approaches are not contradictory but two necessary facets for establishing disciplines and archives that are aware of their inherent biases.

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- 1 Griselda Pollock, "Whither Art History?" *The Art Bulletin* 96, no. 1 (2014): 21.
 - 2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick "Introduction," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2003), 1-2.
 - 3 Georges Didi-Huberman, "El Arte Muere, El Arte Renace: La Historia Vuelve A Comenzar Ide Vasaria Winckelmann)," in *La imagen superviviente: historia del arte y tiempo de los fantasmas según Aby Warburg*, trans. Juan Calatrava (Madrid : Abada, 2009), 15.
 - 4 Pollock, "Whither Art History?" 13.

- 5 Didi-Huberman, "DISPAR(AT)ES 'Leer lo nunca escrito,'" in *Atlas ¿cómo llevar el mundo auestas?* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía and TF Editores, 2010), 14-58.
- 6 On this point, it is important to provide a conceptual clarification. Gender studies indeed examine the consequences and oppressive models derived from the patriarchal system, but their scope extends towards a more comprehensive understanding of the inherent complexities in the social construction of gender. This involves not only analyzing gender inequalities but also acknowledging the diversity of experiences and giving visibility to historically marginalized voices. Furthermore, gender studies address the intersection of gender with other categories such as race and class. They also stand out for their commitment to transcending traditional categories and questioning heteronormative norms.
- 7 Margaret Iversen, "Retrieving Warburg's Tradition," *Art History* 16, no.4 (1993): 541.
- 8 Georges Didi-Huberman, "Ouverture. L'Histoire de l'Art comme discipline anachronique", in *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'Art et anachronisme des images* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000), 39-48.
- 9 Georges Didi-Huberman, "La Pathosformel," in *La imagen superviviente: historia del arte y tiempo de los fantasmas según Aby Warburg* (Madrid: Abada, 2009), 172-183.
- 10 Georges Didi-Huberman, "Warburg nuestro fantasma," in *La imagen superviviente: historia del arte y tiempo de los fantasmas según Aby Warburg* (Madrid: Abada, 2009), 24-30.
- 11 Didi-Huberman, "ATLAS «Portar el mundo entero de los sufrimientos»,", in *¿Cómo llevar el mundo auestas?* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía y TF Editores, 2010), 91.
- 12 Ibid., 66.
- 13 Didi-Huberman, "DISPAR(AT) ES «Leer lo nunca escrito»,", in *¿Cómo llevar el mundo auestas?* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía y TF Editores, 2010), 23.
- 14 Pollock, "Whither Art History?", 13.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The Frente Nacional (1958-1974) was a political pact between the ruling elites who established an alternation of Colombia's presidency between conservatives and liberals, the two traditional Colombian parties. This pact was a strategy to remove General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla from power and pacify the bipartisan civil war that had divided the country into two political factions, conservatives and liberals. This policy of amnesty and oblivion truncated the clarification of the elite's role in the conflict. See Alberto Valencia Gutiérrez, "La Violencia en Colombia de M. Guzmán, O. Fals y E. Umaña y las transgresiones al Frente Nacional," *Revista Colombiana De Sociología*, no. 35 (2012): 21. <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/recs/article/view/37195>.
- 18 The Frente Nacional policy of silencing transcended from a state policy to one adopted by the means of communication. In October 1962, under the government of Guillermo León Valencia, the Colombian press signed a pact in which they committed to not mentioning facts related to 'La Violencia' of the 1950s. See: Maryluz Vallejo Mejía, *A Plomo herido. Una crónica del periodismo en Colombia (1880-1980)* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2006), 329.
- 19 Isabel Cristina Díaz Moreno, "La Violencia en Colombia: reconstrucción y análisis visual de la Colección fotográfica del libro de Germán Guzmán Campos" [Master's thesis] (Bogotá: Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, 2018), 32.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., 116.
- 22 Susan Sontag, *Regarding The Pain Of Others* (New York: PICADOR, 2003), 98.
- 23 The book *La Violencia en Colombia - Estudio de un proceso social* had two volumes, the first published in 1962 and the second in 1964, a descriptive version titled *La Violencia en Colombia, parte descriptiva* published in 1968. The book has seven editions, in which photographs and captions have varied. Isabel Cristina Díaz Moreno

noted that between the first and the second book volumes existed a change in the type of published photographs, in 1968 the tone of political denunciation sharpened, reflected in the decision to include twenty records of violent deaths. All the photos are part of the photographic archive of Monseñor Germán Guzmán, co-author of the book. It is presumed that this collection of photos is much more extensive. See: *Ibid.*, 37-41.

- 24 María Victoria Uribe, *Antropología de la inhumanidad: un ensayo interpretativo sobre el terror en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Derecho, Ediciones Uniandes, 2018).
- 25 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *La guerra inscrita en el cuerpo: Informe nacional de violencia sexual en el conflicto armado* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2017), 157.
- 26 María Victoria Uribe, "Introducción," in *Matar, rematar y contramatar. Las masacres de La Violencia en Tolima 1948-1964* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1990), 27-34.
- 27 Of the eight photos published in *La Violencia en Colombia - Estudio de un proceso social*, only *Maternidad Frustrada* will be reproduced in this document since it is considered that the latter and the photograph captions are sufficiently solid to support the argument. For the author, these photos of highly violent content that portray real victims must be reproduced with a conscience to avoid falling into revictimization cycles. If desired, they can be consulted in the text by Isabel Cristina Díaz Moreno, "La Violencia en Colombia: reconstrucción y análisis visual de la Colección fotográfica del libro de Germán Guzmán Campos," pages 54-55 of the PDF downloadable at <https://expeditiorepositorio.utadeo.edu.co/handle/20.500.12010/3845>
- 28 Didi-Huberman, "Gestos memorativos, desplazados, reversos: Warburg con Darwin," in *La imagen superviviente: Historias del arte y el tiempo de los fantasmas según Aby Warburg* (Madrid: Abada Editores, 2009), 228.
- 29 Naturhistorisches Museum Wien. August 14, 2023. <https://www.nhm-wien.ac.at/forschung/praehistorie/forschungen/venus-forschung>
- 30 Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, "Women in Prehistory: Venus of Willendorf."
- 31 Simone De Beauvoir, *El segundo sexo, Vol. I: Los hechos y los mitos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Siglo Veinte, 1995), 29.
- 32 Val Plumwood, "Dualism: the logic of colonization," in *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 33.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Hesiod, *Theogony* [circa VII b.c.e.] (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 2007).
- 35 Julia Tuñón, "Cuerpos femeninos, cuerpos de patria. Los iconos de nación en México: apuntes para un debate," *Historias*, (65): 42. <https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/historias/article/view/2199>
- 36 Val Plumwood, "Introduction," in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 4.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Gerda Lerner, *La creación del patriarcado*, trans. Mónica Tusell (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, S.A. 1990).
- 39 Gerda Lerner, "Introducción," in *La creación del patriarcado* (1990).