The Autonomous Sex: Female Body and Voice in Alicia Kozameh's Writing of Resistance

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes Pasos bajo el agua (Steps under Water) and Bosquejo de alturas (Impressions of Heights), texts from the Argentine writer Alicia Kozameh, as examples of an embodied l'écriture féminine. The reading of the literary texts through the theories of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Michel Foucault, respond to the main arguments of the thesis. First, women empower themselves through language within power relationships established in patriarchal societies; the empowered female language is written through the female body. Second, l'écriture féminine is a style of writing not exclusive to women; it is part of heteroglossia and can be written by any person, regardless of the sex. Third, l'écriture féminine is a legitimate voice in social discourses, deconstructs the male/female dichotomy, and establishes a horizontal and dialectic relationship between different discursive voices. Finally, heteroglossia contributes to the reconstruction of gender relationships.

Approved: ________________________________

Nicole M. Reynolds
Assistant Professor of English
DEDICATION

To my daughter, Hannah

my “pirilampo” always illuminating my darkest nights,

all of my love.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank my parents João Eduardo and Maria Eugênia for their unconditional love and support. I would have never made it without them.

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Flashes, explosions, activated in hidden zones. No question of trying to find them in a blue sky, or even blended with the reds and purples of certain sunsets. Only in basements. In spaces where the air is dark, and so thick that it transmits wave of creaking, the sound of boots. Of big shoes banging against the floor above. Above heads here, heads there: heads and fingertips. That give off light. So many fingers and heads in random motion... Thirty heads, at least. Six hundreds fingers and three hundred toes... thirty women vibrating and communicating, jostling within a confine of inviolable space, like corpuscles in a blood vessel... People come in. People go out. Sounds emerge. Cries of pain, Laughter. Music. Swearing. It's important to try to anticipate whatever the ones walking up-stairs may decide to do to the women's bodies. It's important to guard the guards.

(Alicia Kozameh, Impression of Heights)

“the women I portray are strong and purposeful women of action”

(Alicia Kozameh)

INTRODUCTION

In Pasos bajo el agua and Bosquejo de alturas, Argentine writer Alicia Kozameh presents the female body as the locus for women's writing. The body is the same as language, which is written as écriture féminine. Kozameh's texts reflect her three years of experience as a political prisoner of the Argentine “dirty war” (1976-1983). During this period, murder, imprisonment, torture, and abduction were the political tools the state used to subjugate the individual body. In the twentieth century, the oppression of dictatorships invested power upon individual bodies in order to transform them into objects of the state through discipline and punishments the state justified as attempts to attain social order. This violence became the backdrop of a large body of literary work not only in Argentina, but in Latin America in general. The stories told by Latin American authors depict regimes that tortured individual bodies as means of silencing voices that were against the system. In the mid-twentieth century, women writers emerged as subjects of a female writing that depicts their own experiences as women
living under the oppression of a dictatorship. Later, in the 1980s, Alicia Kozameh draws from her personal experiences to narrate the atrocities lived by Argentine citizens during the “dirty war.” Her fictionalized memories add to the historical scholarship of the “dirty war,” a personal, but yet collective, account of Argentine history. Kozameh’s writing contributes to gender studies by highlighting issues such as violence against women within the context of an oppressive socio-political government. Through the lenses of l’écriture féminine my reading of Kozameh's texts will point to the political efficacy of Hélène Cixous’ and Luce Irigaray’s theories. In addition, my analysis will respond to the scholarship that is opposed to l’écriture féminine by considering it a backlash to feminism, as it leans on the same ideologies which it tries to deconstruct.

The Contextualization

In twentieth-century Argentina, there were a number of dictatorial regimes that ruled the country through oppression and violence. The dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, known as the “dirty war,” is the background for Alicia Kozameh's texts. Chapter One explains the history behind the escalation of political violence that culminated in the “dirty war,” and how that violence targeted the individual body. The chapter reviews Argentina's political history from the 1930s to 1983 in order to build an understanding of Argentina’s violent past and the use of violence during the “dirty war.” Moreover, the historical overview focuses on violence against the individual body as a common political weapon used by various dictatorships in the country. However, Argentina was not alone in its use of political extremism to achieve a capitalist social order. Thus, the importance
of considering the country's case in the Latin American context is also addressed in
Chapter One.

The consistent use of violence as political tool was characteristic of several
dictatorial regimes in Latin America in the twentieth century. The number of deaths,
exiles, and disappearances were extremely high in several countries. The political
regimes always justified their violence as necessary means for controlling subversive
convictions, namely, liberalism and Marxism. The state's control of the individual
became a frequent theme of literary texts in the twentieth century.

In *Women and Power in Argentine Literature*, Gwendolyn Diaz depicts how in
Argentina, and in Latin America in general, the “socio-political landscape becomes the
backdrop and often the theme of much of the country's literature” (Diaz 1). Since the
nineteenth century, a number of writers narrated and debated the social, political, and
economic dilemmas the Argentine citizens lived, for example, Domingo Sarmiento
(*Facundo*, 1845) and José Hernandez (*Martín Fierro*, 1872). Beginning in the 1950s,
through the 1970s (a period known as The Boom), authors like Julio Cortázar (*El libro de
Manuela*, 1973) and Jorge Luis Borges combined aesthetic experimentation with political
engagement. Although Borges did not emphasize socio-political issues in any of his texts,
his stories have been read as critiques of power. Regarding women writers, Diaz argues
that Argentina has been one of the leaders in terms of the numbers of female writers in
the twentieth century. In the 1940s, Victoria Ocampo, an anti-Peronist, was the first
Argentine woman writer to express political views and admiration for feminism through
her journal *Sur*. Ocampo believed that “the Latin American woman was doubly alienated
as a woman and as a Latin American” (Díaz 2). Other examples cited by Gwendolin Diaz are Beatriz Guido, who wrote during the 1950s, and Marta Lynch, who wrote during the 1960s and created narratives that had the Peronist movement as their backgrounds. During the 1970s, Luiza Valenzuela wrote novels that depicted issues of power, oppression, patriarchy, and social justice. In the 1980s, Alicia Kozameh wrote her memories in fictionalized texts that portray the agony of women imprisoned during the “dirty war.”

The Female Body, Discourse, and Power

In Latin America, the early 1970s was marked by the increase in the number of writings by women identifying their oppression within their respective societies. These women wrote, in a female language, narratives that reflected the social, political, and economic change they experienced during the last century. With the intent of representing collectivity rather than individual points of view, the women who wrote their accounts frequently switched between personal and collective voices. Women's language became part of literary and political discourses when women became politicized and agents of a discourse that challenged the dominant canon. While they left the assigned space of their homes and became socio-politically active by denouncing atrocities against individuals, they gave voice to the repressed and empowered themselves by becoming discursive subjects. Alicia Kozameh's texts, as I read them, are representative of women's empowerment through an embodied language.
Chapter Two reviews the theories I applied to my reading of Alicia Kozameh's texts. Beginning with the Greek definition of voices in a narrative (mimesis and diegesis), the chapter provides an overview of the French feminist's l'écriture féminine, Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of discourse, and Michel Foucault's theory of power relationships.

The French feminists (or post-structuralist feminists) Hélèn Cixous and Luce Irigaray wrote important essays in which they analyze the relationship between women and society, focusing on women's writing as a mode of expression. This activity they named l'écriture féminine. To describe how women are perceived in society, these feminists ground their analysis on psychoanalytic studies. One important aspect Cixous theorizes is the space women use for writing. In her essay, The Laugh of the Medusa, Hélèn Cixous argues that women are invisible in society; therefore, according to Cixous, women need to transgress traditional boundaries, break open the canon, and perpetuate their stories by writing in a female language for women readers. In essence, Cixous proposes that women write through their bodies, inventing a language through which they will “get beyond” imposed limits.

The female language is the female body which is defined in comparison with the male anatomy. In This Sex Which is not One (1977), Luce Irigaray argues that the female body transgresses the phallogocentric society because it is autonomous. Irigaray deconstructs the concept of sexuality as an action of exchange between a woman and a man, and proposes that the female body because of its anatomy is sexually autonomous. This autonomy no one can expropriate; therefore, women’s bodies are their possessions and a safe space for their words. Women are agents of their bodies. As l'écriture féminine
suggests, women should write through their bodies and empower themselves, while they break the imposed silence and participate in the broader social discourse.

In *Discourse in the Novel* (1934), Mikhail Bakhtin argues that individuals express personal intentions through the language, they “populate language” and create, within the broader context of a social discourse a variety of voices that are related to each other in a dialogue. Language, therefore, is a social phenomenon. Furthermore, Bakhtin develops the idea of carnivalization in his essay *Rabelais and His World* (1940). In this theory, Bakhtin develops the concept of carnival as a mode of discourse in which there are no relations of dominance. The Bakhtinian carnival proposes there are moments in the social discourse during which voices relate to each other with no hierarchy. Carnival is the knowledge of heteroglossia, or the variety of legitimate voices that are acknowledged and regarded as discursive subjects. Both Bakhtin's dialogism and carnivalization shed light on women's collective activity as a discursive subject in an androcentric context. While they appropriate the dominant discourse, which is that of men, women populate language and develop a dialogue, within the system imposed upon them. Women, therefore, empower themselves through language. If the French feminists previously mentioned propose women should write through their language, women's language becomes their bodies through which they find the necessary power to relate to the power inscribed upon them. In other words, women's writing relates to the dominant discourse in a power relationship as described by Foucault.

Foucault emphasizes power relations over relations of meaning while studying discourses because he considers how history is written through war rather than through
language. In his text Discipline and Punish (1977), Michel Foucault argues that one should consider power not only as juridical repression through prohibitive laws. While studying power, one should accept the idea that power is productive, forms knowledge, and produces discourses. He also argues that punishment is a “social function” and a “political tactic;” and that power is “technology” and political punitive methods are the “political technology of the body.” Michel Foucault offers theories that contribute to the understanding of the violence that occurred during the “dirty war.” Foucault’s conceptualization of violence can be used to explain the empowerment of oppressed discourses during the regime. In my thesis, I focus on the oppression women experienced during the “dirty war” in Argentina. Moreover, I propose that a military regime is a patriarchal system that uses, as Foucault writes, the “political technology of the body” to create “docile bodies.”

Alicia Kozameh's Resistance through Writing

When women write with the intent to give voice to an oppressed discourse, there seems to be a political commitment implicit in the action of writing. While they write their experiences, they claim their “wild space” through their own points of view and metaphors. Because Alicia Kozameh creates in her texts her space for dialogue and justice, I argue that her writing is that of resistance. Chapter Three analyzes excerpts from Kozameh's texts Pasos bajo el agua and Bosquejo de alturas that I read as representative of an empowered female body. The chapter briefly reviews Kozameh's journey as writer and political activist and consequent incarceration during the Argentine “dirty war.”
Subsequently, it offers examples of the metaphors Kozameh creates with the intent of narrating the struggle of women in prisons where they were kept as subversives. Kozameh's texts are fictionalized memories that offer to the scholarship a unique point of view of Argentina’s political history. Moreover, Kozameh's narratives add to gender studies valuable material for analyzing feminist theories, such as l'écriture féminine and gender issues, such as violence against women as a political tool.

Although I do not claim this to be a historical study, I argue that Kozameh's memories shed light on Latin America’s violent past. In The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile, Steve J. Stern argues that, in general, there is a large body of work that records and analyzes social, political, and economic aspects of dictatorships. However, he highlights the importance of the history of memory in order to see additional aspects of life. Although his study focuses on the Chilean dictatorship experience, his argument that memories bring to light "the making and unmaking of political and cultural legitimacy, notwithstanding violent rule by terror" (Stern xx) is applicable to Kozameh's memories of the Argentine "dirty war." As Stern further argues, memories depict the agony that normally is suppressed by dictatorships; therefore, the "history of memory" leads us to go "beyond the dichotomies established by the regimes" (Stern xx).

Pasos bajo el agua and Bosquejo de alturas can be read as testimonials, given the reality of the facts and Kozameh's intention to make the event publicly known. However, she emphasizes her texts as fictionalized reality that is not only personal but also collective. Furthermore, Kozameh argues that there is a socio-political importance in recording specific moments in history; such records are key for the fight for justice.
Regardless of the point of view of the writer, there will always be a historical aspect in texts considered to be testimonials. Kozameh claims her texts are fiction with testimonial intentions (Andradi 172).

**Literature Review**

*Escribir una generación: la palabra de Alicia Kozameh* is a collection of articles about Alicia Kozameh's texts. Edith Dimo argues that the importance of this work lies in the cultural and artistic transformations Kozameh offers. Moreover, Dimo proposes that Alicia Kozameh's literature represents a historical legacy. Cynthia Margarita Tompkins' *Pasos bajo el agua y “Bosquejo de alturas” de Alicia Kozameh: Tortura, resistencia y secuelas* is the first article in the anthology. Tompkins reads the texts as testimonials and draws a parallel between the tortured characters and the real survivors' behavior post-torture. In *Patas de avestruz y 259 saltos, uno inmortal*, Graciela Lucero-Hammer also analyzes Kozameh's text as testimonial, and by describing the mechanisms of the narrative, she argues that female identity is constructed upon subjectivity. Also analyzing *Pasos bajo el agua* as a testimonial, Rhonda Buchanan addresses the act of writing as an act of liberation, and she focuses on censorship and the word as a tool for resistance. In *El cuerpo-texto en Patas de avestruz*, Erna Pfeiffer depicts the construction of one's identity, more specifically female identity in Kozameh's *Pata de avestruz*. The act of writing as filling the gaps of memories is addressed in Zulema Moret's *Ecritura, censura y representación del cuerpo*, while in *Alicia Kozameh: El indispensable juego fictiional*, Florinda Goldberg analyzes fiction as representative of prison. The body is analyzed in
comparison with the word as a dichotomy of physical/abstract, representative of
Kozameh's life as a writer in Graciela Di Bussolo's *Las novelas de Alicia Kozameh: caminar, a pesar de todo*. In this article, Di Bussolo addresses characters and author as intertwined. Finally, in *La construcción de los espacios en Alcira de amarillos u Mungos*, Edith Dimo addresses the patriarchal authority and violence upon the individual. In addition, Dimo argues that the preservation of individual inner space is an obsession and that both death and sexuality are aligned in the definition of the human being.

In the second part of the anthology, the articles address the meaning of Kozameh's characters, her style as “an adventure of language,” challenges of life and death, the fragmentation of the subject, and life as utopia. The book ends with an interview in which Kozameh talks about her act of writing and the importance of this activity. In addition, Kozameh tells her experiences in jail, her obsession about writing, and her commitment to her texts. This anthology represents the important role of Alicia Kozameh as a Latin American writer who, committed to her memories and her readers, records not only the history of her country, but also represents aspects from the life of any individual.

Through my research and writing, I intend to add to this scholarship a different point of view that analyzes Kozameh's writing as representative of the female body. Through my analysis, based on feminist theories, theories of discourse, and the theory of power relations, I intend to add to the literary criticism about Kozameh's texts a more specific analysis of the oppression upon women and the violence against women's bodies. Through history, philosophy, feminism, and literature, I intend to contribute to the
discussion about political violence justified by an attempt to control individuals. I argue that this violence is designed in order to destroy individuals’ identities, therefore women suffer specific tortures, and these experiences can be reflected in literary works as they are in Kozameh's texts. Moreover, I argue this thesis contributes to the discussion of women's writing as unique and a means of empowerment.
“Abducted in Buenos Aires she was taken for a long distance in a pick-up truck... They left her in a sort of room where she felt terrified and started to scream. Thus alerted, her captors put her into a tank full of water. Her breasts were hurting a lot, as she was breast-feeding at the time... They bound her hands and feet with wires and passed electric current through them. She began to have convulsions... She asked to go to the toilet. They took her naked along an open gallery full of soldiers... they made her listen to a recording... they would tell her that the recording was her son crying... they would parade her naked along the gallery and she was raped several times.”

CHAPTER 1 – THE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA

In Argentina, the dictatorial regime from 1976 to 1983 is known as “dirty war.” The military coup that overthrew president Isabel Perón and announced a Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganization Process) imposed their power on the country by subjecting leftist political figures and any person engaged in political opposition, to illegal arrests, torture, murder, and disappearance. During those years of state-sponsored violence in Argentina, thousands of people died in the hands of official murderers. These acts of violence were justified as necessary for the extermination of Liberalism, Marxism, which the military considered to be political diseases threatening the country. In 1982 the dictatorship started to fall apart when the Malvinas War (Falkland Islands War) highlighted the weakness of the military state, which gave way to social, political, and economic pressures of redemocratization in the country. One year later, with the end of the “dirty war” the Argentines began to live in democracy.

Understanding the emergence of the Right, the manifestations of the Left, the rise of the military, and the politics of the “dirty war” is key to understanding Argentina's violent past and violence targeted at the individual body. This chapter provides an
overview of Argentina's political history from the 1930s to 1983 to explain how violence against the individual body was justified by the military as a means by which to attain the ideal of a social order. And because capitalism was considered the social order and political extremism the best means to achieve it in Argentina and in other Latin American countries, I will briefly describe the political context that generated violence across Latin America.

Transformations and Violence in Latin America

The twentieth century witnessed a succession of political regimes that consistently used violence as a political tool in Latin America. The number of deaths, exiles, and disappearances perpetrated during this period by dictatorial regimes in several countries was extremely high. This form of political extremism was always justified by the necessity of controlling subversive convictions that opposed the dominant politics. Consequently, political violence in Latin American history was, overall, an oppressive mode of controlling the countries' political trajectory rather than a revolutionary or liberating force (Kay 160).

The origins of twentieth-century political violence can be traced back to the process of industrialization and consequent urbanization that led to conflicts among classes. While countries industrialized and became more urbanized, migration from rural areas to cities increased and the urban working class emerged and became the core of popular movements against the system. Ideally, the state was to be in control of society creating a “single nation-state in which resistance was managed” (Nagengast 109). However, the state's expectations for society and the demands popular groups made of
the state on their own behalf increasingly clashed since the late-nineteenth century. Moreover, technology, the market, and capitalism helped to empower new socioeconomic groups and to generate political movements as the “peripheralized people [...] through resistance created new subject positions that challenge[d] fundamentally the definition of who and what ought to be oppressed” (Nagengast 109).

The promotion of global trade by foreign economies in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries added to the social and political clashes brought about by industrialization and urbanization in Latin America. The spread of economic liberalism opened Latin American countries to foreign investment that expanded the countries’ exportation of raw material and importation of industrialized goods. North American and European businessmen established themselves in Latin America in order to build railroads, develop plantations, and promote commercial activities. Modern means of transportation, the free market and the development of agro-export industries represented the North American domination in countries such as Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil; in Argentina, the European influence was latent. The upper class (the landowning elite, or the oligarchy) justified their superiority and authority with philosophies such as August Comte’s positivism and Social Darwinism. The emerging working and middle classes, unsatisfied with their poverty and harsh working conditions, and the loss of capital to foreign business, respectively, protested against the ideal of “Order and Progress” supported by the elite. In this scenario, the United States played an important role in a “transformational mission” that promoted capitalism by any cost. As Thomas O’Brien argues in The Century of U.S. Capitalism in Latin America, the United States
became an important transformer of Latin America as a result of the support it offered regimes that fought against revolutionary movements that opposed a culture of consumerism, foreign investment, and growing social polarization.

While capitalism and the development of a consumerist society succeeded, social political movements emerged in Latin America against the U.S. “transformational mission” and for the achievement of social and economic justice.\(^1\) During the four last decades of the twentieth century, a few governments tried to fulfill the expectations of populist movements. For instance, the achievement of social and economic justice was the main goal of Fidel Castro's government in Cuba and Salvador Allende's in Chile. More frequently, however, military coups in other Latin American countries tried to control socialism and establish economic stability through capitalism. Because of its political and economic trajectory, Latin America became, in the last century, an important arena for the fight between adverse social, political, and economic ideals that created the appropriate conditions for various “dirty wars.”

**The Argentine Political Extremism**

In Argentina, political and economic disorders were consequences of World War I and the Great Depression. The 1930s became an important period for the development of

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\(^1\) The Great Depression (1929) led Latin America to an economic collapse and, after the Second World War, Latin American countries tried to find a way out of a competitive industrialized world. Governments focused on subsidizing national production, but had to rely on foreign banks. As a result, while the conditions nurtured Nationalism, as well as populist regimes that promised to protect national interests, the opportunities for U.S investments grew. North American companies exploited several areas, such as mining, automobile production, electricity, petroleum, and agriculture. Latin American manufactures, on the other hand, adopted U.S. standards and helped to shape a national economy based on consumerism. While the adoption of this economic model succeeded in promoting industrialization and national production, it also resulted in inflation, currency devaluation resulting in wage downgrade, and class disparity in Latin America (O'Brien 1999).
the Nationalists who, infiltrated into the military and close to the church, became militant and aggressive. In Authoritarian Argentina, David Rock explains the Nationalists developed an anti-imperialistic philosophy against the economic liberalism. They promoted, as well, an image of social justice in an effort to gain the proletariat’s support and control the workers’ movement. In this manner, Nationalists hoped to garner the necessary political force to fight against strikes, the presidency of Yrigoyen, and the Radicals. General José Felix Uriburu, who served in the army for forty years, was the conservative figure “who abandoned democracy as a lost cause and turned toward the Nationalists”.

Because of his inability to successfully respond to the political pressure that followed the great depression, Yrigoyen's popularity began to fall and democracy was seen as a weak system. On September 6, 1930, without resistance, General Uriburu led the army to overthrow the government. “Uriburu declared that 'democracy' itself was not at fault so much as the way the system had functioned under Yrigoyen” (90). The General pledged to restore democracy in a revolutionary institutional transformation. Yet, as the

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2 The Nationalist movement launched as a political nativist cult after World War I. According to the Argentine writer, journalist, and main supporter of the movement Leopoldo Lugones, the war contributed with “a renaissance of patriotism” (Rock 55) and based on the sense of nationalism The Nationalists established their political identity. Their main discourse was that of opposition to popular democracy and counter-revolution. Nationalists supported a military autocracy. The church represented a wing of the movement that supported local self-government and provincial autonomy (Rock 56).

3 The Argentine president from 1928 to 1930, Yrigoyen was the first president who attempted to control the labor movement through violent repression. He also tried unsuccessfully to gain support from the working class by connecting with the factions of labor unions that were linked to the radicals (DiTella 33-56).

4 In the beginning of the 20th century, a right wing Argentine oligarchy ruled the country. Although their project was to develop political unity, they encountered resistance by two other groups. The Radicals and the Socialists stood against the oligarchy and politically split the country into left wing, democratic center, and the right wing. Between the 1916 and 1930, because of growing opposition to Liberalism and an European immigration from countries affected by war, two important movements emerged in Argentina: the Liga Patriótica and the Nacionalistas (Deutsch 35-63).
depression deepened, Uriburu's support declined, and elections were called in April 1931. Since the Radicals won the elections, General Uriburu annulled it under the justification that “democracy could not be reformed and had to be replaced” (91). Uriburu openly undertook an aggressive fight for power and stood against the Radicals who opposed him and other political rivals, and in 1931 he imprisoned Radical leaders, including Yrigoyen. Through elections in 1932, Uriburu was succeeded by General Agustín Justo.

Under a democratic veneer, General Justo governed Argentina as its president from 1932 to 1938. His presidency represented the end of the dictatorship and the return of a powerful oligarchy. Justo posed himself as a natural successor to the Uriburu’s administration and maintained close relationship with the Nationalists and the army. As elections approached in 1937, General Justo, with the intent of maintaining the political dominance of the Nationalists, handpicked the next candidate to run for president: Roberto Ortiz, who had served as Justo’s minister of finance, was considered to be representative of the “line of succession from the 1930 revolution” (Dolkart 87).

Although not a Nationalist, Rámon Castillo was nominated vice president. Ortiz’s government lasted from 1938 to 1942 and was marked by an economic recovery from the depression. In 1942, seriously ill, Ortiz gave up his power to Rámon Castillo who did not follow his predecessor’s political ideals and became involved in disagreements with the Radicals, thus failing in the attempts to build political unity in the country (Rock 125).

During his one year in the presidency, Castillo distanced himself from the Nationalists who did not trust his politics and he organized military officers to take over the government. In June, 1943, a revolution ended Castillo’s presidency and impeded the
elections in which Robustiano Patron Costas, appointed by Castillo, would run for president. The right wing political elite, supported by Nationalist military officers, believed that another coup would put them back in power and allow them to redirect Argentine politics. Juan Domingo Perón was part of the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU) responsible for the revolution that ended the period known as Decada Infame\(^5\) (Dolkart 1993). While the Nationalist military officers provided the right with the opportunity to regain their power, Juan Domingo Perón prepared his own way to power.

In “The Right and the Peronists, 1943-1955,” Richard J. Walter describes the revolution and Perón’s drive to presidency in 1946. Walter argues that “from the beginning the military government was authoritarian” (103). In pursue of their goal to “purify” Argentina, they ruled by decree, state of siege, censorship, canceled elections, dissolved the congress, and repressed their opponents through violence. During this government, Colonel Juan Domingo Perón “developed a web of allies within the military” and was nominated Minister of War. He was subsequently appointed head of the Labor Department, a position that allowed him to develop a relationship with the working-class that would later impel him to power. Aware of the untapped political force of this class, Juan Domingo Perón adopted populist social welfare policies and embraced the Argentine lower class (104). In 1944 workers gathered on the Plaza de Mayo to demonstrate their support when Perón became the vice president of Argentina.

Perón’s political convictions ranged from nationalism to the European fascism.

As David Rock writes:

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\(^5\) The years from 1939 to 1943 are known as Decada Infame because of the interruption of constitutional succession and the constant military interventions. Nevertheless, conservatives and Nationalists considered the period a “golden age” due to the rise of rightist thought.
“His affiliations with the Nationalists led him into the hackneyed outburst against liberals and Communists and into the clerical doctrine of “class harmony.” His Fascist side stressed national integration and mass mobilization, developing the country’s human potential through social justice and instituting the control of the state over civil society.” (149)

Rock also points out that Juan Doming Perón was the leading figure of a violent military regime that started in 1943 and that would reappear later in Argentina. He writes that detainees disappeared, prisoners were tortured and executed, and in 1945, when Perón arrested demonstrating students, their mothers gathered in protest (150). In this sense, the military regime that ruled Argentina in the second half of the 1940s resembled the future “dirty war” of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In 1945, “Perón was poised to assume total control” (Walter 107). After he eliminated Nationalist rivals, gained increased military and working-class support, and loosened the regime’s authoritarianism, Juan Domingo Perón positioned himself for a future election victory in February 1946. As Rock points out, the oligarchy was disintegrated and the Democratic Union, together with the Communists, was defeated in the 1946 election (157). The period between 1947 to 1950 represents the summit of Juan Domingo Perón's power when, together with his wife Eva Maria Perón, he further cultivated his relationship with the masses and developed a populist style of government – referred to as Peronism – that was well accepted in Argentina. Both Perón and his wife sustained their political power through the direct manipulation of the masses, whom they addressed as descamisados. Eva Maria Perón, or Evita, as she was called, promoted herself, as was perceived to be, a leader of the Argentine workers – a relationship that
made her an important tool for government control of labor movements until her death in 1952.

If on the one hand the masses supported Perón, on the other, the Marxists and the right-wing did not. The former considered Peronism a form of Fascism; and the latter, though a divided group, felt threatened by his relationship with the working class. “Perón was a strong, charismatic, and authoritarian leader, ruling with firmness and relegating the 'liberal' opposition to minor roles in the management of national affairs” (Walter 111). Therefore, although the Nationalists accepted the Peronist party as viable for the change they expected in the country, Perón's social policies, his democratic way of ruling, and Evita's increasing politicization, among other characteristics of his government, bothered the conservatives.

While these sources of political opposition threatened at times the stability of Perón’s administration, it was his clash with the Catholic Church that ultimately led to the collapse of his regime (Rock 176). David Rock explains that, in 1946, the church supported Perón’s election by forbidding Catholics to “vote for parties that upheld lay schools, divorce, and the separation of church and state” (176). In turn, Perón endorsed obligatory religious education in the schools, affording the church direct influence on school curricula and teacher training through a board of religious instructions. In the late 1940s, as Juan Domingo Perón began changing policies to meet his ideal of an “organized community” based on the development of a “socially just Argentina,” he determined the country needed “the religion of the poor, of those who feel hunger and thirst for justice.” As a result of his new policies, he abolished numerous religious
holidays, in 1950, and did not want religious curricula in the schools. Instead, Perón wanted the schools to nurture Peronism and loyalty to the regime. After these changes, the church declared Perón was a tyrant (177).

In mid-1955, Juan Domingo Perón fell after a series of struggles with the church and violent protests, the most critical among these was a church-organized student protest against Peronism in September of 1954. As retaliation, the government arrested or deported priests, restricted religious education, instituted divorce, legalized prostitution, and prepared a constitutional amendment that separated church and state. Perón proposed several laws that silenced the church and the conflict became a violent struggle between Peronists and Catholics that culminated in the burning of several churches in Buenos Aires. The final struggle happened in Córdoba and ended with Perón's exile and the proclamation of his defeat by General Eduardo Lonardi.

After Perón’s fall in 1955, Nationalists and Liberals struggled over the presidency, appealing alternatively to the military and to the lower classes for political support while searching for a leader that could govern “with power over the masses and leadership over the army” (185). During this period, Argentina became an arena for intense conflicts and another series of dictatorial regimes. The military was ready to fight against subversion and claimed the right to intervene in civilian government in order to ensure national security and economic development. Indeed, Arturo Frondizi, who rose to power as president in 1958, was overthrown in 1962 after conflicts with a military faction named Colorados (Reds). This faction was determined to fight against Peronists and dictatorships that remained in power. In September of 1962, the rival military faction
Azules (Blues), led by General Onganía, seized control and displaced the Colorados. The Azules believed state power should be in civilian hands, the role of the military being limited to security and defense, and elections held in July 1963 returned power to a civilian government led by Arturo Illia. Civilian rule was short-lived, however, and in June 1966 Illia, accused of inefficiency, was overthrown by a coup that established an Argentine Revolution based on strong Nationalist tendencies led by General Pascual Pistarini. The Nationalist goals continued to be pursued by General Onganía when he assumed power shortly after the 1966 coup. Onganía’s dictatorial tendencies, evident in his decision to close the congress, depose provincial governors, and ban political parties, led to his downfall in 1970, a year after the Cordobazo, a major worker and student protest that took place in May 1969 in Córdoba. The political instability of the early 1970s was aggravated by the activities of guerrilla movements, in particular the Montoneros, an armed faction of the Peronists who, in 1970, kidnapped and killed the former president Pedro Aramburu. In 1973, the Peronists returned to power with Juan Domingo Perón being elected president; he began restoring his politics and consolidating control over the nation (Rock 194-222).

In 1974, shortly after his election, Perón died. His vice-president and widow, the inexperienced María Estela (Isabel) Martinez de Perón, became president of Argentina and Peronism experienced a final and self-destructive phase. During her presidency the country lived with an increased brutal political violence. In 1975 alone, 359 people disappeared (Salama 23). Marxist guerrillas fought against Isabel Perón's government; the ERP (the Trotskyite Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo) and the Montoneros were
leading urban and rural terrorist movements. Different sectors of the population, but especially the young middle class, joined the fight and formed political unions. In an attempt to sort out the political chaos, Isabel Peron approved in February of 1975 violent measures to repress guerrillas in the Tucumán Province.

Through the death squads known as “Triple A” (Alianza Anticomunista Argentina) and Comando Libertadores de America the state and the military oppressed popular movements that were fighting for the control of the political unions. Their main target was the active left-wing citizens. José López Rega, boss of the AAA and minister of social welfare, was in command of the economy. High unemployment rates and severe inflation, however, caused labor unions to raise against the government and intensify their protesting of the “order” proposed by Peronism (Lewis 1993). Amid street protests and strikes, Isabel Perón tried to control the labor unions, appearing to them during manifestations and proposing labor agreements. Yet she had also to struggle with a divided government that could not agree on how best to deal with the strikes. Her appeal to the masses on July 7 of 1975, asking that they act responsibly in light of the economic crisis the country faced and the danger of hyperinflation, was not effective; that same day, a mass of demonstrating proletarians gathered on the streets of Buenos Aires in protest, further feeding the belief that they were a threat to the government's order. In October, when taken by fatigue and consequent health issues, Isabel Perón took a leave of absence, the interim president, Italo A. Luder, called the military to “annihilate” the subversives from the Argentine territory. The Army became more involved with
repression, the economy was deteriorating, and social movements were arising; the government was loosing control over the nation. (Salama 24).

Isabel Perón’s rapid loss of political support and control was an opportune moment for the military to strategically move in and increase their power. General Videla, for instance, the soon-to-be president, reached leadership position in the army and became commander in chief appointed by Isabel Perón (Lewis 103). Perón had failed not only controlling the economy of the country, but also of noticing the terrorist groups that wanted to takeover Argentina.

Under Isabel Perón law and order had collapsed. [...] Security forces estimated that, since March 1973, more than 1,350 people had died in armed clashes or from terrorist acts: 445 leftist guerrillas, 236 soldiers or police, and 677 civilian noncombatants, such as businesspeople, politicians, and anticommunist labor union officials. In the last months of the Peronist regime there was an average of one political killing every five hours and a bomb explosion every three. Capital fled the country, production was at a near-standstill, and inflation approached a yearly rate of 1,000 percent.” (Lewis 100)

On March 24, 1976, military tanks surrounded the Casa Rosada (the presidential palace in Buenos Aires) and Isabel Perón was sent into exile in Spain. Amidst a catastrophic economic crisis, where inflation was rising at monstrous annual rate, the military found its way to back to power. The army, navy and air force joined in a junta and immediately started working on implementing what they called Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganization Process), beginning by dismissing Congress and replacing the members of the Supreme Court. The country did not protest the junta or its Processo, on the contrary, citizens, mainly from the middle class,

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6 A council or a committee formed for political or governmental purposes usually after a revolutionary takeover. This practice has its origin in Spain, when in 1808 juntas were established to oppose Napoleon’s rule (Oxford English Dictionary).
supported what they thought would be a return to order disrupted by Isabel Perón's poor administration.

The Reorganization Process, now known as the “dirty war,” was a period marked by state-sponsored violence. This Reorganization Process killed, tortured, and abducted thousands of persons. Men, women, and children lived with the terror promoted by the state. Raúl Alfonsín admitted that it was “casi una guerra en la que era necesario recuperar la vigencia de las instituciones” (Salama 17). General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, moreover, warned the country that “[they were] going to have to kill 50,000 people: 25,000 subversives, 20,000 sympathizers, and we will make 5,000 mistakes” (Lewis 147). To the military, the “dirty war” was a necessary fight against subversion; it was an attempt to heal the social body from the cancer which they considered to be Marxism. The product of a military ideology based on a strong belief in authority, discipline, hierarchy, and the need to secure control over power at any cost (the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional), for the many people who experienced life in prison, and the loss of their children and relatives, was instead a nightmare. The “dirty war” lasted seven years and was eventually condemned by the Argentine court as genocide.

The Dirty War Tactics

Human rights have been part of the social and political agendas of several nations since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was ratified in 1948 containing thirty articles that outline rights guaranteed to all people. Included in that list are the right to life, the right to personal security, the right to a trial, the right to not suffer either inhuman
conditions of detention, denial of justice or summary execution (CONADEP 2).

Nonetheless, as documents gathered by the National Commission on the Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) report, Argentina violated every single human right during the repressive years of the “dirty war.” The army had a planned campaign which they followed with the purpose of healing the country and freeing it from subversive political agents who tried to implement socialist or Marxist ideologies. The military followed a pattern in order to kidnap, kill, and torture citizens, and its “calculated terror” was explained as an inevitable excess, a natural characteristic of the “dirty war” they were fighting (CONADEP 10-11).

Although the CONADEP report was prepared based on official documents, it may not be accurate. After the establishment of a civilian government in 1983, it became clear that the violence of the previous period was not faithfully accounted for in official reports. Therefore, the estimates vary: the CONADEP report estimates 8,961 permanent disappearances, while Amnesty International reports 20,000. The former police chief General Ramón Camps has declared that, he “disappeared” 5,000 by himself. Regardless of the accuracy of these numbers, the “dirty war” is considered to be the most violent and brutal period of political repression in Argentina.

The reports about victims of the regime argue that the thousands of people who died on the hands of official assassins were innocent civilians. The military, on the other hand, argues there were few innocents because whoever was not subversive him or herself was nevertheless personally linked to a subversive political agent. Students, social workers, journalists, professors, and others who had modern, secular, rational, and social
justice ideas were the target for punishment with violence against the individual body (Lewis 154).

As Lewis explains, “because the police and military intelligence had been drawing up lists for many years of left-wing labor and student activists, as well as left-wing priests, journalists, lawyers, and professors, many Argentines were convinced that mistakes were almost never made” (Lewis 149). However, now we know about stories of people not involved in any political activity who were arrested and tortured as “agitators.” Family members were also kidnapped to serve as hostages and to coerce the “guilty” into delivering the necessary information. While many citizens believed and supported the military, others were dying in secret detention camps, torture centers, basements, and were simply thrown in the ocean to drown.

The military followed a typical sequence to deal with the subversives: abduction, disappearance, and torture (CONADEP 11). The report also shows murder, rape, and extortion as common crimes committed by members of the security force. The first form of punishment, or detention, “took place at night or in the early hours of the morning, and usually towards the end of the week, so that it would be some time before the relatives of the person abducted could take any action” (11). The kidnappers were part of a grupo de tarea composed by heavily armed men who were either part of ESMA or the Battalion 601, former Triple A terrorists, or known criminals. They would organize their attack by first warning the police station not to respond to calls and would then force themselves in groups into homes after blocking the street and cutting off electricity. The men always

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8 The grupos de tarea were task forces or commandos formed by members of the Naval Mechanics School, known by its acronym ESMA. The Battalion 601 was the intelligence service unit of the Argentine army; it acted during the “dirty war” and the Operación Condor (political campaign in 1975).
wore masks and were fast in handcuffing and blindfolding or hooding the victim before dragging the person to the car. Anyone who happened to be with the victim would also be tied or handcuffed. The attackers would usually steal valuable personal belongings. The mother of a kidnapped described the action in the following manner:

“At 6 p.m. on 10 August 1976, a group of soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Flores went in a truck to the Santa Lucía sugar mill and arrested my son, who was working in the store there. They brought him to our home, where they threatened me and his father. They searched everywhere, then left with my son. We never heard anything more of him.” (File No. 5794, CONADEP 13)

According to the CONADEP report, there were about 340 Secret Detention Centers (SDC) throughout Argentina where victims of the military violence were kept for years in inhuman conditions. Prisoners rarely returned to their homes, and consequently were referred to as “disappeared,” or chupado (sucked up). In these centers the chupados were certainly tortured, if not physically, psychologically, by young guards between 15 and 20 years of age, through various methods. In the “operating rooms” the military used various means of coercion, subjecting people to unimaginable tortures that varied from beatings to electric shocks and other more drastic measures (CONADEP 51). The objective of this treatment was not only to make the individual reveal “subversive plans;” rather, it was about securing power over an entire nation. The number of political prisoners increased so much during that period that young soldiers were pushed into serving as torturers; many were attracted by the authority it bestowed on them, and by having “power over life and death” (Lewis 153). As one testimony reveals, survivors would never forget their moments of torture:

“If when I was set free someone had asked me: did they torture you a lot? I would have replied: Yes, for the whole of the three months... If I were asked that same
question today, I would say that I've now lived through seven years of torture.”
(Miguel D'Agostino – File No. 3901, CONADEP 20)

Female prisoners were often tortured with rape as a means to force their spouses
to talk. Those who were not raped were nevertheless constantly subjected to
“manhandling;” they couldn't even go to the bathroom without a soldier watching them.
From all disappeared people, thirty per cent were women, three per cent were pregnant,
and a total of 172 children were kidnapped either from their homes or when born in
prison (CONADEP 285). Aggression towards potential subversives was indiscriminate;
regardless of age or sex, people would be tortured according to what the military
considered necessary. A testimony recorded in the CONADEP relates that all pregnant
women were put together and forced to lie down on the floor while they waited for the
birth of their children. Once born, the child could be given for adoption to the next couple
in the list of those who could not have babies and who were waiting to receive children
from the disappeared; few were taken to the prisoner's family (CONADEP 289).

Although death penalty was not part of the Argentine system, during the “dirty
war” it was understood to be a necessary political weapon to exterminate or to prevent
subversive crimes. “Death as result of torture, electric shock, submersion in water,
suffocation; death en masse, collective or individual, premeditated, by drowning at sea or
firing squad (CONADEP 209)” was implemented as a means of protecting the regime. To
avoid having their victims become witnesses against the regime, the military had to
dispose the prisoners. Therefore the victims were “transferred” when they had nothing
more to inform the military. One common form of transfer was “the flight.” These
prisoners were sedated, “carried out like zombies and loaded onto the airplane” where
they were stripped and thrown into the ocean (Verbitsky 22). Adolfo Francisco Scilingo, a former naval commander, admitted to take part in two of these flights; he estimated that between 1,500 and 2,000 people were killed this way (Ibid).

Despite the government’s vicious attempt to suppress all political opposition, the continuous economic crisis, the excessive use of violence, and popular dissatisfaction with high inflation, falling wages, and rising unemployment, led to the increase of protest marches. But it was one event, the Malvinas War in 1982, that finally forced the downfall of the “dirty war.” When General Leopoldo Galtieri assumed power in 1981, in attempt to rebuild popular support around a nationalist agenda and distract the population from the economic chaos and abuses of the military government, he promised the nation that the following year would be “the year of the Malvinas.” Although Galtieri did not find support from other nations for the government’s plan to take back the islands, he nevertheless ordered the takeover of the Malvinas. His order was followed by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's dispatch of a highly prepared war force to fight against the weak and unprepared Argentine troops. It was a three month war (from April to June) that culminated in Galtieri's resignation and Reynaldo Bignone's (retired general) takeover. Bignone scheduled elections and managed the transition from the military regime to civilian rule (Lewis 2002). The failed military display of power paved the way to the dictatorship's downfall. The constant practice of torture, allied to failure attempts to relief the country's economic crisis generated instability in the government. The Malvina's war was the push needed to the collapse of the “dirty war.”
In essence, the Argentine “dirty war” meant state-sponsored violence. The human rights were completely disregarded and the law did not apply to those who justified their actions based on a conservative ideology. The individual body was permanently violated by those who promoted violence under the guise of protecting the social body. Favouring the social body, the state sacrificed the individual body. The experiences of life during the “dirty war” generated memories narrated in Kozameh's texts.
... and five men proceeded to question me for about an hour, roughing me up and insulting me. They obtained my in-laws' address and decided to go there, leaving me alone for several hours. When they returned from my in-laws' house they were furious. They tied me with my arms and legs spread out, and interrogated me again with worse treatment and insults than before. They said they had taken my two-year-old son prisoner so that I would cooperate; soon afterwards they took that back. Then they proceeded to insert what I afterwards knew to be a police truncheon into my vagina... they interrogated me once more, hitting me on head and threatening to stick the truncheon into my anus... it was routine for them to intimidate us with their guns, pushing them into our bodies... they 'prodded' me in the lower abdomen and vulva while questioning me. At midnight they announced that they would let me go... after driving over a rough, potholed terrain, he stopped the engine. He told me he had orders to kill me... He offered to save my life if in exchange I would agree to have sexual relations with him. I agreed to his proposal, in the hope of saving my life... I carried out his demands under threat of death, so I felt and consider myself to have been raped.”

CHAPTER 2 – LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DISCOURSE

Since the early 1970s, Latin American women writers have produced a large body of texts that represent their oppression by cultural and political forces within their respective countries. During the last century, Latin American countries experienced profound socio-political changes that became the backdrop for women's fiction. Women in women’s language conveyed the complexity of these changes (social instability, repression, and economic chaos); this female language became part of the literary and political arenas in Latin America. Women became writers and discursive subjects. Following patterns of resistance and transgression, women switched between personal and collective voices. As writers, women left the home and the family to talk about individuals who lived, suffered, and were silenced in society. Women's writing in Latin
America in the 1970s gave voice to the repressed; it represented women's change from object to subject.

Latin American women's literature represents an important body of texts that breaks the literary canon in the continent, a canon that has been comprised of male poets who used literature to trespass social barriers (Medeiros-Lichem 3). In addition, women's literature generally represents expression of an oppressed voice, a female voice that was expected to remain silent and subordinated to a man's. In this chapter, I address the relationship between women's literature, the canon, and women's position within society in order to establish the basis for an analysis of Alicia Kozameh's texts. From nineteenth-century psychoanalysis to contemporary feminist theories, these issues are addressed in a large body of scholarship. I propose that we begin with the Greek definition of voices in narrative: mimesis/diegesis. Subsequently, I will present theories that describe women's position within the social discourse and ideas that challenge the traditional understanding of the female writing as discourse (The Lacanian symbolic order and L'écriture fémine, respectively) followed by Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Finally, I will argue that different voices relate to each other in a reciprocal power relationship that empowers the oppressed. This relationship generates dialog and interaction without dominance of one over another, despite the constant attempt to exercise power.

Referring back to the Greek notion of narrator, we will find the distinction between diegesis and mimesis.9 These are Greek terms used since Plato and Aristotle.

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9 The notion of the voice in the narratives, since described by Plato in “Republic” (360 b.C), and by Aristotle in “Poetics” (330 b.C), has been addressed in various theoretical, literary, and linguistic
Mimesis is narration through imitation; it does not tell a story from a specific the point of view, rather, it repeats or imitates previous discourses. Diegesis, on the other hand, is narration through characters; it represents the act of telling stories from particular points of view. While diegesis refers to the voice that tells the story with control and knowledge of the facts, and consequently relates to the narrative as a powerful subject, mimesis is imitation of reality represented through characters' lines, and is therefore a subordinated voice that speaks through the dominant point of view of the facts. When searching for a voice of her own, a woman should avoid mimesis; she should write diegesis and establish her voice in a dialogue with the system by expressing her point of view as opposed to that which is the dominant one. A woman writer creates her own metaphors and delineates her own boundaries. As Alicia Kozameh does in her texts, women should tell their stories through their characters and by using their language, thus establishing a dialogue with the system while she creates a different language, as opposed to imitating the dominant discourse. In Kozameh's context, the dominant discourse is not only that of the patriarchy, it is that of a military dictatorship.

Women’s Writing and the Female Space

In the mid-twentieth century, women started writing from the margins and representing those who were oppressed. The Latin American female writing represented the unheard. Moreover, the feminine voice and style distinguished their texts from those studies such as Mikhail Bakthin's “The Dialogic Imagination” (1934), Roland Barthes' “Image, Music, Text” (1977), and Tzvetan Todorov's “The Poetics of Prose” (1971), only to mention a few.
of men. Male-authored texts position men as subjects of discourse while women are objectified. In a patriarchal society, women have to write through the language of the dominant; thus, women write through male language. Elaine Showalter argues that women create the “female space, or wild zone” when challenging the male order. And this wild zone

must be the address of a genuinely women-centered criticism, theory, and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak. (Showalter 201)

While the locus for the female speech is for Showalter the “wild zone,” for Hélèn Cixous it is a continent that women were made to believe is dark. She writes:

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. (Cixous 354)

In her essay The Laugh of the Medusa (1975), Cixous describes women as invisible; a woman writes white on white because she “is never far from mother,” and mother is a metaphor of the woman giving her best to another woman who will love herself as a woman. In addition, because women are frequently perceived as mothers, Cixous proposes they write with mother's milk. Since their locus for writing is the white continent, women remain silent and invisible because their white ink (the milk) cannot be read on white surface (352). Women are absent in the Symbolic. That is why Hélèn

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10 The Symbolic order in Lacanian theory is associated with language, speech, and the subject of the speech. Language is what “restores the 'I' [...] its function as subject.” The symbolic order is therefore what constitutes the ego while there is recognition and order of a law. It is also understood as being linked to law, pact, and kinship structures. “The law that encompasses the history of each individual and which is unconscious in its structure, is the foundation of the symbolic” (Libbrecht 198). The law and the language are those of the male, consequently the subject of speech is the male. This means women are the “other”, or the object of speech, and therefore absent in the symbolic.
Cixous urges women to write and make themselves present in history, with their own language to challenge the male order. However, we should question whether or not women are able to articulate their oppression by using language of patriarchy. Moreover, the study of women's discourse should open a window as how their difference is inscribed. When Cixous urges women to write for women, she proposes that female language must deconstruct and transgress the literary boundaries so far established by male language. She writes: “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond” (352)...

While a woman “writes through her body” she becomes a discursive subject. Through her body she goes beyond the imposed limits and body becomes language because that is what she owns and what makes her a woman. In order to understand women's journey from object to subject within discourse, I propose we take a look at how women, language, and power relate to each other. The Brazilian psychoanalyst Henriette Karam explains that language is individual expression that manifests singularities of being and supports the collectivity in the Symbolic (Karam 185)\textsuperscript{11}. Women are individuals described by their bodies; their anatomy is culturally defined through comparison with the male body. In this comparison between female and male anatomy, women have been described as the castrated individuals in society. The physical castration described by psychoanalysis was transferred from the realms of sexuality to

\textsuperscript{11} Henriette Karam is a literary critic, psychoanalyst, and member of the “Associação Psicanalítica de Porto Alegre” (Psychoanalyst Association of Porto Alegre) and of the Catholic University in Rio Grande do Sul State. Among several texts published in the fields of psychoanalysis and literary criticism, she published the article “A linguagem e as mulheres” (Language and Women).
discourse to symbolize the silencing of the female voice. The deficiency, or castration, lived by women can be described as a deficiency of discourse promoted by a patriarchal culture. Therefore, the answer to Freud's question about what women want can be found in the realms of discourse. Women's desire is for the position as subjects in the discourse (186), because women want to own their language, which I argue is their body, and female body has been objectified, or expropriated by men.

In patriarchy, women are reduced to silence, since the owners of discourse have been men. Through their discourse and the power of their language, men have designated to women only a devalued body. The female identity, its voice and body as silenced by the dominant culture, and its means of empowerment, are the focus of the post-structuralist feminists Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Their studies not only urge women to express themselves, but they also help analyze the increase of female literary production. Not only did the number of women writers increase during the mid-twentieth century; the style of women's writing changed, as well. The peculiarity of women’s writing was identified by French feminists as L’écriture féminine. It is essentially a discourse opposed to male dominance, or patriarchal discourse. According to the feminists cited above, male discourse is that of linearity, rationality, supremacy (or the belief of it), authority, and self-control. In addition, opposed to the male language écriture féminine represents protest and a disconnection from the dominant social and symbolic orders (Magalhães 2002). The French feminists explain that female discourse is fragmented as result to the fragmentation of the body.12

12 This notion is observed when feminists propose there is no unity in the female body as a result of the male dominance of discourse. Ann Rosalind Jones explains in her essay “Writing the Body: Toward an
In *Elements of Semiology* (1977), Roland Barthes writes: “to perceive what a substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of a language: there is no meaning which is not designated, and the world of signifieds is none other than that of language” (10). The meaning of things is within language, social control, and power alike; therefore, the world is controlled by language, because power is inscribed by language. By linking Barthes' ideas to Michel Foucault’s argument that “the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body]” (Foucault 25), I find that the body as language can become a means of empowerment, for power is inscribed both upon language (Barthes) and body (Foucault). Therefore, as subjects and owners of a language, women will find themselves empowered and in control of their being because they will designate their own meanings. The female body is women's language.

I find a connection between the theories about language, discourse, and power and the definition of *l’écriture féminine*. They explain the way women’s body is culturally represented (it is the castrated and therefore incomplete body/language). If Roland Barthes argues that a discourse emerges in a context by repeating previous enunciations because “signs are repeated in successive discourses and within one and the same discourse (although they are combined in accordance with the infinite diversity of various people's speech) that each sign becomes an element of the language,” (15) the female

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Understanding of *L'écriture Féminine*, that the French Feminists ground their studies on analysis of Western culture, which is oppressive and phallogocentric. She writes: “‘I am the unified, self-controlled center of the universe,' man (white, European, and ruling class) has claimed.'The rest of the world, which I define as the Other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of the phallus.' This claim to centrality has been supported not only by religion and philosophy, but also by language” (370). If men are unity and centrality, women, as the other, are fragments depending on the dominant discourse.
discourse will empower itself by appropriating the dominant language; in other words, the signs women repeat will become signs of their language. I argue that through the appropriation of the dominant discourse, women are reinventing it, which thereafter results in the recreation of themselves as women and reestablishment of their position in society. In Chapter Three, I analyze excerpts from Alicia Kozameh's texts that represent women’s empowerment through the appropriation of the dominant discourse. When women repossess language, they repossess their bodies and power. Discourse will then be redefined, or deconstructed\(^{13}\) and become a social knot that ties together differences.

*L’écriture féminine* proposes a discourse that is not constructed on the idea of otherness, as the patriarchal discourse does in establishing the subject/object, male/female dichotomies.

The feminist theologian Rebecca Chopp sheds light to *l’écriture féminine* in her book *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (1995). She discusses women's writing based on her female students' experiences. What she finds is that while narrating their facts and spaces, their stories become so obvious that they are invisible; this recalls the white space and white ink proposed by Cixous. Therefore, Chopp argues, the writing process should be elucidated and nurtured with creativity. The feminist process, according to Chopp, must be an exercise of imagination, dialogue and justice.

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13 Here I refer to Jacque Derrida's theory of Deconstruction. Derrida grounds his theory on Ferdinand de Saussure's argument that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. If there is no logic in this relationship, one cannot be seen as subordinate to another; moreover, signifier and signified cannot be seen to determine one another. This knowledge results in the idea that language is a system of differences. Therefore, “the other is not something outside and alien. It is a necessary part of the identity that thinks it is using the other as something to define itself against. The outside is truly inside. The different is truly part of the same. In this way, all binary oppositions can be deconstructed” (Fuery 57). In this way, the male/female dichotomy can be deconstructed; women must deconstruct the male dominant discourse.
The first one is explained as an act of survival, for it is the ability of thinking the new and consequently creating space where there is no space. For example, in a social, collective discourse, dialogue will result from the opening of space; it requires interaction among embodied people with mutual respect. It results in communicative action in the fight for freedom, which is achieved with respect, education and creativity, as Paulo Freire argues.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, Chopp mentions justice as an important fact in the writing process. Writing here is understood as the act of telling one's story, or history. In this process of retelling facts, one must have voice (106-108).

In the Argentine context, marked by censorship, writing implied overcoming the oppression of the state. The dictatorship established boundaries that writers, in general, had to overstep. For women writers, the boundaries were established not only by the regime; women were already living in an assigned space which society determined. Therefore, “women [had] to surmount the boundaries of prescribed silence, of moral and political restraint, and search for their own codes beyond the ascribed passive role” (Medeiros-Lichem 11). In fact, women had to construct their voices, as Chopp argues, with creativity; women had to transgress barriers of censorship and open up literary canons in order to find a genuine voice. If women want to be heard, their voice must be that of women. As Cixous suggests, women write from woman to women, thus breaking

\textsuperscript{14} Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator whose theories are influential in the field of education not only in Brazil, but worldwide. He was an activist against oppression, and was arrested, in the seventies, by the Brazilian dictatorship as a traitor and sent into exile in Bolivia and then Chile. His texts are famous and widely translated. In his book “Pedagogia da autonomia” (Pedagogy of Autonomy), published in 1996, Freire discusses the importance of autonomy of the language and argues that communication must be based on dialogism as a key to intelligibility; this way, communication will result in a correct manner of thoughts, for it is not polemic, but dialogic.
the male writing canon. Only transgressing and challenging will women be heard in a patriarchal society.

There seems to be a political commitment implicit in women's writing, because their writing embodies culture, desires, experiences, and ideologies, therefore it expresses women. Women's writing depicts women's own points of view and metaphors; it emancipates and it explores women's space. Women's writing is women's voice in female language. Because Kozameh's texts are the space she constructed with creativity, dialogue, and justice, and because she writes from woman to women, I argue that Alicia Kozameh's writing is that of resistance; I propose it represents the female body.

Feminist Latin American scholars raise questions about feminine voice and discourse, and more specifically about feminine writing as that of resistance to the dominant male model. As Lucía Guerra-Cunningham points out, while analyzing the female writing, scholars face questions such as whether or not women really write in a distinct way; if it is possible to depict through a woman's literary text the social and cultural facts imposed by their sexual difference; and what authentic feminine writing is (22). These seem to be natural questions since it is easy to establish characteristics that subordinate women to men in the well known and accepted as truth male/female dichotomy. However, in the Latin American androcentric context, it is difficult to establish an autonomous meaning for the female. That is why women should resist the dominant discourse, as the French feminists argue, and repossess their voice and empower themselves in a discourse they construct as their own. Lucía Guerra responds to
the questions she poses, providing us with an outline for the feminine writing. She argues:

[The feminine writing is] to rebel against feminine subordination and the image of the angel in the house, to write the body or replace decorum with culturally silenced corporeal feelings; to denounce the system that has kept women in marginality through false images of Mother Earth, and to play the inverted game of creating masculine archetypes from the dark shadow of the feminine collective unconscious (cited in Medeiros-Lichem 8).

In her essay *This Sex which is not One* (1977), Luce Irigaray proposes that the female body and sexuality are transgressive to the phallogocentric society. While she develops arguments that describe male and female sexuality, Irigaray presents a familiar metaphor within the patriarchal tradition: sexuality means exchange between a man and a woman (363) because it is understood as being part of heterosexual relationships. Subsequently, she deconstructs that concept while arguing for women's autonomy over their own bodies. Furthermore, she writes that this autonomy cannot be taken from women; the female body has genitals that “are formed of two lips in continuous contact” (Irigaray 361). A woman constantly touches herself and no one can forbid her. She exercises her sexuality by herself, consequently there is no exchange; women are sexually autonomous. Women's sex is not one; it is not a unity, it is fragmented. In a society that values the objective, the visible, the calculable, the female sex, that which is not one, but plural, fragmented, imprecise, is marginalized in the attempt to control the voice that shadows the male discourse (363). We should consider the female body as women's space; it is the locus for the female voice, and therefore the female body is women's language, for she possesses it and she is the agent to her body.
Women's Voice in the Novel: An Empowered Discourse

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism sheds light to the French feminists' ideas of women's writing and women's language, because not only he acknowledges and explains the differences among discursive voices, he also argues that the novel is locus for diverse speeches. Reading Bakhtin's theory we can analyze women's writing and women's empowerment through discourse. In *Discourse in the Novel* (1934), Bakhtin explains language is “social phenomenon” and the novel is an organized mode of plural speeches; his arguments grounds the feminist theories that propose there are differences between male and female discourses, and these differences are legitimate and should be regarded. Twentieth-century women's fiction in Argentina and in Latin America in general read through “Bakhtinian lenses,” is understood by the feminist scholarship as a reflection of the socio-political and cultural context.

Bakhtin begins *Discourse in the Novel* by arguing that a variety of languages, or diversity of speeches, is present in a novel and results from a stratification of a given national language, and that this stratification results from historical existence. He writes:

> The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour [...] this internal stratification present in every language of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre (Bakhtin 32).

Stratification is a result of genres, because each genre carries its intentions. For example, there might be in a give text a professional intention (a marketing piece intended to sell a
given product, for instance) which will represent a “professional stratification of language;” it is a homogeneous mode of language. Social stratification, on the other hand, Bakhtin explains as being “autonomous and peculiar;” the forms used to express various ideas differ among each other. He explains that:

stratification expresses itself in typical differences in ways used to conceptualize and accentuate elements of language [...] all socially significant world views have the capacity to exploit the intentional possibilities of language through the medium of their specific concrete instancing. (33)

The Latin American context of political stratification originated diverse ideologies defended by different groups; consequently, it resulted in stratification of the language. As I describe in Chapter One, Latin America, in general, lived a much turbulent process of changes in the last century. This context originated various socio-political groups each one fighting for their ideologies, each one using their own languages.

Language, Bakhtin develops, is not unitary, except for its grammatical norms. Therefore, language can only be analyzed as a unity, or as a “unitary national language” when isolated. Furthermore, literary language can only be understood as unitary in its linguistic aspect, because in fact, literature is heteroglot, it contains a variety of languages as social expression. Language represents contradictions between the groups, the historical moments, ideologies, tendencies, and so forth; all modes of speech are embodied and presented in a peculiar format. Languages intersect and create new languages (Bakhtin 35). Variety of languages, Bakhtin proposes, is heteroglossia; it is the co-existence, in a given time, of a variety of socio-political groups' discourses.
Heteroglossia, or a heteroglot opinion (language), is according to Bakhtin, in the “borderline between oneself and the other” (35). He further explains:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes “one's own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention (35).

In order to help the reader understand the meaning of “to populate” the language, Bakhtin argues the words used in a speech are not those one chooses from a dictionary, because that would be langue\textsuperscript{15}. The dictionary contains the collective meanings of a given word (those assumed by a nation), whereas while populating the word, the speaker gives an individual meaning to it. In addition, speakers choose words from previous discourses, each term is therefore appropriated to the discourse in which it is used; “words are not neutral,” he states, “they exist in people's mouth” (Bakhtin 35), or only when pronounced and according to people's intention. The process of creating discourse is then the process of appropriating words into a speech and thereafter transforming what once was other's language into private language. To populate language is to give it intention\textsuperscript{16}. While Bakhtin argues that language exists in people’s mouths, I expand this idea and suggest language is the embodiment of thoughts. Moreover, female language, as represented in Alicia Kozameh's texts, is female body.

\textsuperscript{15} Parole and Langue are terms described by Ferdinand de Saussure in Course in General Linguistics. Parole relates to the speech, which in turn refers to individual acts, utterance, and statements. Langue is language, or tongue. It is internal to a person (each one of us internalize languages we learn), however it is collective, and represents a system; therefore, it is beyond any individual's will to change. I do not thoroughly address this linguistic aspect, nonetheless, I suggest Roy Harris’ “Reading Saussure – A Critical Commentary on the Cours de linguistic générale.

\textsuperscript{16} Bakhtin's knowledge of language and discourse was grounds for Roland Barthes' theories on Semiology, some of them described earlier in this chapter.
Mikhail Bakhtin argues that when discourse is composed by parole as opposed to langue, when it incorporates a plurality of consciousness, and when it relates to different voices with no relation of dominance, it becomes a dialogic action (36). And because discourse is a social phenomenon and the novel an organization of speeches, I read Kozameh's texts as creative organizations of speeches from within the “dirty war;” she writes women's voice and the voice of dictatorship. In Alicia Kozameh's texts, the female body is women's language challenging the regime. Dialogism, therefore, is one of the lenses through which I read Alicia Kozameh's texts as representative of the female body and mode of resistance.

Discourse is power and dialogue is the interaction of a variety of discourses. Dialogism, therefore, implies a certain power relationship. Maria Teresa Medeiros-Lichem develops her understanding of Bakhtin's concept of language communication and explains utterance is placed in a “horizontal plane of active exchange.” Moreover, utterance is the point where speaker and social surroundings converge, and therefore, the feminine voice is communication that expresses women's participation in society. She writes: “In Latin America, a continent marked by ethnic heterogeneity, Bakhtin's dialogism permits the inclusion of plural cultures and ideologies in discourse” (Medeiros-Lichem 16). Dialogism, as I read it, is empowerment. It is the constructed “wild zone,” or space for the silenced voices.

After describing the relationship between discursive voices and the dialogue, in 1940 Mikhail Bakhtin writes the essay Rabelais and His World in which he describes the concept of carnival as a feast that challenges hierarchy; carnival, as I read from Bakhtin’s
text, is locus for relationships between voices and for empowerment. In the Middle Ages, he argues, there were official feasts sponsored by the state, however, those were controlled, normalized, and “sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it” (Bakhtin 45). Official feasts were “monolithically serious,” as opposed to carnival that meant liberation from the dominant truth and the traditional order. Carnival is the popular feast where there is no hierarchy; different speeches from different origins cohabit in one discourse in a relationship not based on dominance. Bakhtin explains:

Carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. [...] feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. [...] hostile to all that is immortalized and completed. [...] The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival (Bakhtin 45).

While Bakhtin opposes official feast and carnival, he refers to the dominant discourse and rules established upon hierarchy. Carnival, on the other hand, represents the acknowledgment of other discourses. By conceptualizing carnival, Bakhtin creates a metaphor representative of the canon, or dominant discourse, opposed to the discourse that breaks the immortalized and imposed norms because carnival is a feast during which the contact between individuals is established, and in these true human relations (true because they are experienced and not imaginary) people are reborn. Utopia and reality merge in carnivalesque experiences (Bakhtin 46). Carnival is a collective discourse in which the official and the silenced voices co-exist.
According to Michel Foucault, while studying discourses, power relations rather than relations of meaning must be the point of reference. He argues that “the history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning” (Rabinow 56), thus the importance of understanding struggles, tactics, and strategies in order to understand facts. Foucault argues that power should not only be defined as repression, or as “purely juridical,” such as a law that says no. Power is more than prohibition, it is effective and accepted because it “produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (61); power is productive.

In his text *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault proposes that the study of power relations must follow some steps. First, one must acknowledge that punishment is not solely repressive; it is “a complex social function.” Secondly, punishment must be regarded as “political tactic.” The third step he proposes is that while analyzing power, one must understand it as the technology of the humanization of the penal system and of the knowledge of man. Finally, he proposes punitive methods are to be studied as a political technology of the body in which power relations and object relations are regarded (23-24). In this relationship of power, punishment is therefore present in either violent or “lenient” methods; this Foucault names “political economy of the body” (25). In his arguments, the bodies are always discussed in terms of docility, utility and submission. Consequently, the body is present in political fields and power is practiced on it. The investment on the body is political, but also economic and it is reciprocal.
When power and domination is invested on the body, it is intentional and with the purpose of producing something (26). Foucault proposes that:

Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (27)

Conclusion

Language is power (Barthes), discourse is power (Bakhtin), and power generates knowledge (Foucault). L'écriture féminine is women's power.

Discourses that previously sought a female truth through male language were compromised by men’s attempts to imitate the female experience. L'écriture féminine, or female writing, is a discourse produced by women who feel, see, and talk about women. I expand this by adding that in the context of the “dirty war,” when women were silenced by state oppression (in addition to the patriarchal dominant discourse), they found in their bodies the means of empowering their discourse. By presenting excerpts from Kozameh's texts, I describe in Chapter Three how the incarcerated women found means of empowering their body/language and developing a dialogue with the system; dialogue that represents the power relationship between the women and those who controlled them while they were in prison. In addition, I argue that in their bodies, Alicia Kozameh and her compañeras wrote texts that Elaine Showalter describes as “double-voiced discourse
that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant” (Showalter 201). Because, as Bakhtin writes:

> [h]eteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse (40)...

When Latin American women writers recreate language by populating the dominant discourse with their own intentions, they recreate themselves as women, and consequently they redefine women in society. While writing their stories as diegesis, women will not imitate and be led by the phallogocentric discourse that dominates them. Through the construction of an autonomous female discourse a social dialogue is created, and therefore space for diverse discourses is established and the positions of subject and object will be constantly moving, for they will not be fixed by a relationship of dominance.

Women's literature, in general, is the expression of an oppressed voice; it is women's language used to talk about women. In Latin America, women's literature is an important body of texts that breaks the canon established by the male language, and places women as autonomous subjects in the patriarchal society they live. Moreover, the female discourse speaks about their oppressed, violated, and domesticated bodies. Women's voice records the past, recreates the present, and prepares a liberatory future.
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“... in the early hours of the morning she was taken to another room where she was tied to a bed with wooden slats... She was stripped of her clothes, tied to the bed and interrogated with the application of the electric prod and blows to her body. The interrogation concerned her school companions... One night a man came to her cell. He tied her up and beat her, then raped her amid threats, forbidding her to tell anybody what happened. After that he took her to a bathroom to get cleaned up. She records that when the above occurred she was seventeen years old, as were her three companions. They were all students [her friends disappeared]...”

CHAPTER 3 – THE FEMALE BODY WRITING RESISTANCE

This chapter focuses on representations of the female body in Alicia Kozameh's writing. The theories of power relation, écriture féminine, and discourse are the lenses through which I read the literary narratives. Kozameh's texts reflects how power relations, as described by Michel Foucault, are used to normalize and control the female body, and that this control over the body is justified by the social order: the patriarchal system. In addition, her writing deploys an embodied female language, a form of écriture féminine, as theorized by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. While narrating life in prison, the author writes a subtext in which the female body, as language, finds itself threatened. The state exercises power by imposing its own language, upon the female body. The relationship between state and individual is characterized by a vertical distribution of power. I argue Kozameh's texts construct a horizontal relationship, which in this context is the dialogue in which the imprisoned women's individual voices, the voice of the “mass” of imprisoned women, and military discourse interact, and that in this exchange the incarcerated women are empowered through their embodied language.
The Author, the Woman Alicia

“Alicia Kozameh is a striking woman with abundant, curly auburn hair that crowns her slender figure. Her large, wide eyes reflect both seriousness and vulnerability. She is a dual soul: a woman of great strength and conviction, and a woman wounded by the turmoil she still carries within. Alicia is frank, outspoken, and sincerely interested in others” (Díaz 307).

I have not met Alicia Kozameh in person, however, in e-mail correspondence and phone calls this striking woman always expressed her thoughts with direct and strong language. An activist for justice and equality, involved with Amnesty International as well as with other human-rights organizations, Kozameh presently lives in California and she is an active writer.

Alicia Kozameh was born in the city of Rosario, Argentina. In that time, 1953, Argentina was extremely anti-Semitic, therefore, despite her Jewish background, she was reared Catholic. Higher education was available and Alicia had this opportunity, as well as the chance to express her political beliefs in student demonstrations. In the late 1960s and in the 1970s, time of political instability in Argentina, while government and leftists were constantly in disagreement, Kozameh became politicized; she joined the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores), the Workers Revolutionary Party. In 1975, she was arrested, sent to the basement of the Rosario Police Station, and then transferred to Villa Devoto prison in Buenos Aires. In 1978, with the help of Amnesty International, Alicia was released from prison.

Kozameh went into exile in Mexico, and then in California where she published, in 1987, her first novel Pasos bajo el agua (Steps under Water). This text is a narrative of her three years of incarceration; nevertheless, it is a form of testimonial that represents
change in the usual genre of prison narrative. Alicia Kozameh, unlike other Latin American writers who wrote about their experiences under the dictatorship, wrote a fictional story, yet a true story about her life and other women's life in the wards of the Argentine military dictatorship. Zulema Moret points out that Kozameh's narratives are testimonials of the lives of thousands of people who were oppressed, and died on the hands of the regime. And Kozameh says: “lo que escribo es una forma de ficcionalización de una realidad que no es solamente la mía, sino una realidad conjunta” (Kozameh in Andradi 172). After publishing two more novels, in 2003 she published an anthology of short stories, Ofrenda de propia piel. Some of the stories were previously published in journals and anthologies, as well as translated into German and English. Her most recent texts are Basse dance (2007) and Cantata (2008).

Alicia Kozameh's Writing of Resistance

The Facts

The object of the following analysis is the novel Pasos bajo el agua and the short story Bosquejo de alturas (Impression of Heights), published in the anthology Ofrenda de propia piel. I address these texts together because Kozameh herself said in an interview published by Gwendolyn Díaz that the short story could have been “another chapter of [the] novel [Steps under Water]” (Díaz 318). In this interview, Kozameh suggests that in 17 In one of the e-mails Alicia Kozameh wrote me, she explains why her accounts are written as fiction and poetry. Kozameh expresses the difference between her texts and the majority of the other writers' accounts about their experiences during the “dirty war” lies on the fact that they were mostly former militants or former political prisoners who decided to write. She is a writer since she was a child and then she became an activist. Therefore, prison came after she was already a writer, whereas other writers produced their texts only after their experiences under the dictatorship. 18 “What I write is a form of fictionalizing not only my reality but a collective reality.”
the two texts the female prisoners share a political cause: the “cause to bring justice to
[their] country and to create a better world, [which translates] into the power of
conviction and the strength to endure in the face of danger” (319). Both texts also
underscore the reciprocity of power relations; the female prisoners are at once oppressed
and empowered in their relationship with the state. Kozameh explains that this sense of
power results from the human spirit, and their shared political convictions. Kozameh felt
that the women had a reason to be there other than just trying to survive, and a worthy
cause; they wanted to protest, they “had great ideological convictions [and] were willing
to give [their] lives for others and for the future of [their] country” (319).

Kozameh's texts illustrate how women are empowered once the contract in the
"patriarchal bargain" is broken. Women acquiesce to “set rules and scripts regulating
gender relations” (Kandiyoti 1988) in exchange for protection, nurture, and stability; they
accept the patriarchal bargain, and therefore legitimate the power above them. When a
dictatorship or some other form of illegitimate or abusive authority promotes violence
against the individual, the system breaks the contract. At this moment the violated female
bodies empower themselves; it is a turning point where subordinated bodies legitimate
their own power. Kozameh’s character, Sara, lives in patriarchy. The military breaks into
her house, and she is put into a basement with other female prisoners: “en [espacio]
donde el aire es oscuro ... [together with] por lo menos treinta cabezas”19 (Bosquejo de
alturas 14). Here, these women find the necessary power to stand up for their convictions.

Pasos bajo el agua begins with Sara coming back home after being released from
prison – further in this chapter, I analyze the circularity of the novel – and in the second

19 “In spaces where the air is dark ... thirty heads, at least” (Impressions of Heights 323).
chapter we are presented to the facts that lead her to prison. She is home, her husband, Hugo, had left. The military breaks in; “como desde un pozo de sombras escuchó los golpes. Hugo no es: tiene llave. Quién. [...] La puerta cedió. Entraron y le preguntaron por Hugo. Se rieron. No contestó. Nosotros sí sabemos. Lo tuvimos que matar20 (Pasos bajo el agua 21). This action interrupts the bargain between Sara and the paternal system, as the government begins to control her body through violence and fear. “Se lo imaginó muerto. Veía a su alrededor una escena de payasos rabiosos [...] el flaquito le daba el primer puñetazo en el estómago y los demás golpeaban el suelo y las paredes buscando. Vio lo que nadie podía ver [...] enterraran los puños hasta la espalda21 (Pasos bajo el agua 22). The military coerce Sara to think her husband is dead; the “rabid clowns” impose their control over life and make her fear their power. His absence rectifies their words and because they allude to torture, she pictures him suffering it. In Sara's thoughts, she can see him dead; punched to death by the angry clowns. What she could see, “nadie podía ver.”22

When in prison, Sara and her compañeras could see a lot no one else could: that is, all the violence. The thirty women in the wards regulated by the military regime represent all those women who suffered the torture that controlled their bodies. The

20 “[...] a pounding that seemed to come out of a pit of shadow. It's not Hugo: he has a key. Who then? [...] The door caved in. They forced their way in and asked for Hugo. They laughed. She didn't answer. We know. We had to kill him” (Steps Under Water 10).

21 “She imagined him dead. She was seeing a scene of rabid clowns unfold around her: [...] when the skinny little one landed the first punch in her stomach and the rest of them pounded on the floor and the walls, searching. She saw what nobody else could see [...] [they buried] their fists clear through to her back” (Steps Under Water 10).

22 No one could see.
women in Kozameh's story live collectively a desire for freedom to live their selves, speak their voices, perpetuate their beliefs, and have lives of their own.

_The Moving Library of Babel_

In patriarchy, female discourse is limited by the assumption of its subordination. Female language is marginalized and power relations are established through a male/female dichotomy that privileges the male as the master who imposes laws and values. In order to take part in this system, women have to deliberately affirm their subordination; in order to challenge this system, the female must switch from object to subject. Therefore, women must own their discourse instead of repeating male language. Thus being necessary to recover the place that is exploited (Irigaray 1977), the female body, place in which their words become the womanly speech. In the “dirty war,” women's bodies were exploited and their discourse suppressed by the dictatorial regime as means of controlling ideas. To repossess their discourse and impose their voice, the incarcerated women, as Irigaray suggests, “recover the place of [their] exploitation by discourse, without allowing [themselves] to be reduced to it” (368). Sara and her compañeras do not allow the system to reduce their existence to merely prisoners' bodies; they will use their bodies as means of perpetuating history.

The body is the most intimate home for the human being. In our body, dreams, thoughts and identity are kept and preserved (Buchanan 1998). Our language plays the role of perpetuating what we retain and nurture in our homes. Therefore, history is recorded in our body. And when oppressed, the body is our only possession, however it is
also “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 25). Discipline, which Foucault explains as “political anatomy” or “mechanics of power,” creates what he also described as being the “docile bodies.” If relations of power are invested in the body as force of production, the “dirty war” leaders invested their power to produce bodies in accordance to their system. Moreover, the regime used violence as a strategy to control the knowledge originating from those they considered subversive. Simultaneously, the power they imposed upon the incarcerated female bodies produced knowledge, as we will see further on.

“Power produces knowledge [and] ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 27). In the wards of the “dirty war” women discovered in their discourse their share of power. Moreover, through the vaginal insertion of their discourse – I am here referring to the passage in which women insert their writings into their vaginas – they recover the place in which they suffer exploitation (their bodies), and are thus empowered. While women reconstruct their cultural discourse, they transform the language imposed upon them by the state into a female language; the female body, empowered by discourse, becomes the female language through which they stand up for their lives. Kozameh's words in her narratives came from one notebook she was allowed in prison, however those words were guarded and censored and therefore cannot express the truth. Alicia and her compañeras found inside their body a safe place in which they could keep their reality.
In *Pasos bajo el agua* and also in *Bosquejo de alturas*, Alicia Kozameh transforms the space of torture and death into a safe zone for culture. To challenge the oppressors, Sara and the other characters had to create means to maintain their language in opposition to the state's attempts to silence and dominate them. In the wards they performed art that kept their words alive. Performing plays, gathering in workshops or lessons, knitting, and drawing the incarcerated women recreated, or relived their lives. But mainly, Sara and her compañeras created their “moving library” to retain their knowledge and their bodies, which is their own language. This library was created when they organized to insert their writings through the vagina into their bodies.

All that could nurture their bodies was prohibited, as opposed to things through which they could damage themselves. Cigarette papers were allowed in prison; they were not fed, but they could smoke. And that which could harm the body became the means of preserving what they once were. The group of women designated those who would keep the words they wrote on cigarette papers. One of the prisoners was the designated librarian who kept inside the collection catalog that indicated the book each carrier had inside. There, in prison, and with the only tools the military did not prohibit, Sara and her compañeras were born as writers and kept alive their language (Buchanan 1998).

*Pasos bajo el agua* reproduced the words that were authorized to be written on one notebook Kozameh was allowed in prison. However, the controlled words do not express what the language truly wants to. Saúl Sosnowski develops this idea in the introduction to the English translation:

Guarded words, however, could never account for a world that was to be kept from a knowing or suspicious public. Words that partake of the innermost
intimacy of truth had to be hidden in the sole place that wasn't searched by prison wardens. In death and in life, the compañeras bodies became safekeepers for memory and, for Alicia Kozameh, the renewed birthplace of writing. (Sosnowski 1996)

As Cixous expressed, women have this will: “a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood” (Cixous 1976). The women in the cells of the “dirty war” had this dream: to stand up for their nation, their culture, and the freedom of all. In Kozameh's story, the women living in the basement find their way through words and their bodies, place where they kept the words. And when they created their library, they did it because it represented culture, which in turn represents liberation (Buchanan 1998).

In Bosquejo de alturas, the process of creating the “moving library” was described:

Mañana le toca a Griselda reconstruir una novela leída en libertad, para las demás. Y Andrea, si la información que dé Griselda es suficiente, tiene que escribirla en cinco papelitos de armar cigarrillos con letra milimétrica, usando uno de los tanques de birome del tesoro. [...] Trabajo de Dora. Quedan menos y menos papelitos, pero la biblioteca crece.23 (Bosquejo de alturas 16)

From within prison Sara and her compañeras reconstruct life experience and share it. They reconstruct novels previously read, seizing the words by first writing them down. While they use the provided resources – tools that come from the world of freedom – they increase their own possessions. The words that come from outside become their

23 “Tomorrow it’s Griselda’s turn to reconstruct for the others a novel read in freedom. And, if Griselda’s information suffices, Andrea will then write it down on five little cigarette papers, in minuscule letters, using one of the treasured ballpoint-pen refills. [...] That’s Dora’s job. There are fewer and fewer cigarette papers left, but the library continues to grow” (Impressions of Height 325).
library once they appropriate them. By sharing their words, they begin to live their selves; in prison, they share their bodies, their lives.

The words that fill the body through vaginal insertion represent the embodiment of their knowledge. In the following passage from *Bosquejo de alturas*, Kozameh describes how the female body becomes a library:

Y Liliana, especializada, ya, después de tantos, armará el vaginal. Impermeable, envuelto en capas de polietileno de alguna bolsa entra en épocas en que todavía se les permitía depositarles alguna comida. Sellado con brasa de cigarrillo. Y adentro. Con o sin menstruación.24 (Bosquejo de alturas 16)

“The vaginal insert” inseminates them with words that build their selves and become their collective body. Protected in an infinite space, or the “broad body territory” women possess (Cixous 1975), the novels, poems, and words in general, compose the women's “Library of Babel.”25 The words, absorbed into the body, are written on their selves and become a womanly language, and their knowledge becomes their power because now they are reconstructing discourse, challenging the system and becoming subjects. Because the women in prison repossess their body, they become good fighters (Cixous 1975). In the oppressive system promoted by dictatorship the control of speech and thought, in addition to the control and punishment of the physical body, means

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24 “And Liliana, an expert by now after so many efforts, will make the vaginal insert. Impermeable, wrapped in layers of plastic from some bag dating from the time when they still let them receive food. Sealed with a burning cigarette. And in it goes, menstruating or not” (Ibid).

25 *Library of Babel* is a short story published in 1941, in *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, by the Argentine author and librarian Jorge Luis Borges. In the story, Borges is the narrator who describes his life in an infinite library that contains every possible subject books. The library, according to the narrator, must contain every published book and every book to be published. It is the writing about an infinite space and time. As the moving library in Kozameh, the Library of Babel is the discourse of the present and the future. And as she describes the role of the librarian – that who keeps in her body the record of the library's collection – he talks about a log that contains all the information comprised in the books. In addition, Borges describes the library of babel as the space where all languages meet and make reading possible in any context.
power. Information, memory, and ideas are perpetuated through the bodies, more specifically through the writing of resistance.

Hasta ahora han logrado evitar que en las requisas les metan los dedos. Todo lo que se ha estado guardando vía vagina, se ha venido salvando. Y la biblioteca es indispensable. Contiene sus pensamientos. Su caudal intelectual. Su aprendizaje. La enseñanza de unas a otras. El intercambio. La justificación de resistir. La biblioteca confirma la existencia de todas. De cada una.26 (Bosquejo de alturas 16)

Their literary corpus is their selves; it becomes their reason for resisting. Their penetrated vagina reproduces and nurtures these embodied words: theirs is an essentially corporeal female language. They will find their lives through the words that are inside their bodies, and the body becomes the library where they keep their story to be read, and this story represents and perpetuates their fight. The women find means to reclaim language.

More than keeping the words, their bodies become means of “enseñanza de unas a otras,”27 the female body as a text exchanged between women. As Cixous argues, it is the language “from woman to woman.” Although under constant scrutiny, the female body becomes autonomous, and has the power to keep words in order to speak them in the future. As a library, the female body guards knowledge and thoughts: it is the “[l]ibratory female discourse of the future” (Jones 374). Although the system denies them ownership of their body, the incarcerated women find space where they are safe; they find in their bodies, the moving library of Babel, safety the system no longer offers.

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26 “Until now they’ve managed to avoid having fingers stuck in their crevices. Everything stored via vagina has been saved. And the library is indispensable. It contains their thoughts. Their intellectual wealth. Their apprenticeship. The teachings of one to another. The interchange. Their reason for resisting. The library confirms the existence of all of them. Of each one” (Impressions of Height 325).
27 “The teachings of one to another” (Ibid).
Dialogue, Discourse and the Body

There is a backlash against dictatorship when it attempts to silence women's voice. The violence, while breaking the social contract, opens space for dialogue, and when dialogue is established those who are othered are acknowledged by the system. Consequently, the different voices meet each other. And although dialogue implies mutual and equal participation, in this context, because of the reciprocity of power relations, coercion enables women's voices, as I argue earlier in this chapter. The novel and the short story alike represent the “diversity of social speech” (Bakhtin 1934). While the different discourses originate from prison, Kozemeh's texts represent the heteroglot characteristic of the world. In Bakhtin, we learn that one owns language when it is populated with intention, when one appropriates the words. When Sara and her compañeras create their library the words become their property in their body, and when they perform arts, they appropriate previous discourses as their own. In this subsection I will expose different moments when women attempt to establish a dialogic relationship with the system. The reading of passages such as the play performance in prison, the moment of Sara's arrest, and the night the prisoners had their children with them, represent their challenge towards the silence imposed followed by control and expropriation of their language. Further in this section I argue that while Sara is controlled by soldiers, she tries to keep control of herself and her body which is her only possession in prison.

In Bosquejo de alturas, as well as in Pasos bajo el agua, discourse is present through the description of women's possessions (their objects), their tortured bodies, the
conversations they hold reconstructing discourses such as movies previously watched or novels previously read, the news from the outside world, and the play they perform narrated in *Bosquejo de alturas* (Moret 1995). They appropriate the words as their own by either inserting them in their bodies or by acting them using their bodies. And they use their bodies as language and, again, objects that are allowed in their ward to deliver their discourse by appropriating the words in a play. Using sheets as costumes, and the words previously written, the women perform the life of Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, and Marc Anthony appropriating history as their own story. They play past, present, and future, and once again their body will be oppressed, because their play is a carnivalesque feast, and “carnival is representation of becoming, change, and renewal ... [and] suspension of all hierarchical precedence” (Bakhtin 1940). In *Bosquejo de alturas*, play (fiction) intertwines with reality, and while the characters from history interact among themselves, the women interact with them and the guards act in the attempt to silence their voice. In the following passage Kozameh's characters become Caesar, Cleopatra, and Marc Anthony:

Levantando las cejas y frunciendo el labio Cleopatra, mirando al público instalado a su alrededor y sentado con las piernas colgando de las cuchetas superiores, echándole esas miradas seguro muy similares a las que la faraona lanzaba, arrogante, sobre sus súbditos. Por supuesto. Y carcajadas. Y Julio César envuelto en otra sábana irrumpiendo a los gritos, llamando Cleo, Cleo, la luz de tus ojos violetas... *Bosquejos de alturas* 19)

The women look for Marc Anthony in the crowd, as if the past history were their present:

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28 “Arching her brows and curling her lip, Cleopatra, regarding her public seated all around her and dangling their legs from the upper bunks, shoots them a glance no doubt very much like those the Egyptian queen arrogantly directed at her subjects. Of course. And Julius Caesar, wrapped in another sheet, bursting onstage shouting, Cleo, Cleo, the light of your violet eyes” (*Impression of Heights* 327) ...
¿no tiene un Marco Antonio ahí atrás? Viva Marco, Marquito, y Marco Antonio emergiendo entre bambalinas, envuelto en otra sábana y con los brazos en alto hacia el pueblo que lo aclama, y las carcajadas incrustándose en los espacios que dejan entre unas y otras palabras. (Ibid 20)²⁹

The words once spoken become their own words in the present moment of protest: “Éste es mi pueblo, el pueblo por el que lucharé, el que me justifica”³⁰ (Bosquejo de alturas 20).

Once again, in Kozameh’s text the incarcerated women’s ideology meets their language and their discourse is delivered through their bodies. And because they are laughing, merging utopia with ideology, and challenging the hierarchy established by the regime, I argue their play is representative of the Bakhtinian carnival, as I describe in chapter two.

Moreover, it is discourse delivered through their bodies; once again, we read body and language as the same.

While the women acting in their play production challenge the silence imposed by the system, they are oppressed with violence, as we can read in the following passage:

Se abre, y tres fusiles automáticos livianos entran apuntando a la locuacidad de Cleopatra y Marco Antonio, en manos de tres policías uniformados, con dos celadoras como escoltas, todos ellos gritando Entreguen la sábana, y el silencio cortando el aire. Julio César preguntando ¿Cuál de las tres?, ¿la mía, la de Marco Antonio o la del telón? (Ibid 20)³¹

²⁹ “Isn’t Marc Anthony back there somewhere? Go, Marc, Marky! And Marc Anthony emerging from backstage, wrapped in yet another sheet, his arms raised toward the people acclaming him, and bursts of laughter lodging in the spaces left between them by the words (Ibid 327).

³⁰ “This is my people, the people I fight for, the ones who justify me (Ibid 327).

³¹ “It flings opens, and three light automatic weapons, held by three uniformed soldiers flanked by two female guards, invade the room, aiming at Cleopatra and Marc Anthony’s verbosity. Hand over the sheet, they yell, and silence pierces the air. Julius Caesar asks, Which one? Mine, Marc Anthony’s, or the curtain” (Impression of Height 327).
While the other women, the ones in the “audience,” laugh and question the police's actions, the guards remind them: “Señoras, no se olviden de que ustedes son presas. Y saben muy bien que está prohibido el teatro aquí abajo. Entreguen la sábana.”32 “Cleopatra” challenges: “Si la quieren sáquenla ustedes.”33 The guards enter the cell with their guns and act of violence; the police end the women's speech establishing silence once again.

The women's play is dialogue, carnivalisation in which their body is their language. Zulema Moret explains the Bakhtinian carnival system introduces dialogue that allows the prisoners expression of their fears and fantasies, and allows them to controvert history from inside history (Moret 83). While they have fun with their production, they are forcing the rupture with the “hierarchical precedence” because they know they are not allowed any means of expression. And they are, as well, forcing “change and renewal” while they challenge the soldiers with their words and break inequality, because “all [are] considered equal during carnival” (Bakhtin 1949 45). But the soldiers come to once again impose the system's order: silence.

Following this stream of thought, I argue that the attempt to establish dialogue with the system is constantly present in the narratives. Sara attempts to communicate; however, violence is always present as means of breaking any relation she tries to establish. Authority and silence are imposed. When the military takes Sara to the police station, there is a dialogue in which violence is intrinsic; the different voices are made

32 “Ladies, don't forget you're prisoners. And you know very well that theater productions are not allowed down here. Hand over the sheet” (Ibid 328).

33 “If you want it, come and get it yourselves” (Ibid 328)
clear through the verbs that establish the relationship between torturer and tortured woman. Sara's body is under the control of the man who took her. She asks:

Dónde me llevan. Me hace doler el cuello. Parece que paran. Los de adelante se bajan. “¿Quieren algo del kiosco? Comprame Colorados, dice el que me aprieta la cabeza, o el otro. Y comprare caramelos a la nena. Nena, ¿los querés de chocolate?, y me arranca un mechón de pelos. Qué harán si les contesto de qué los quiero. Mejor me callo bien la boca” (Pasos bajo el agua 25)34.

They control her, by controlling her body. They hurt her neck, pull her hair and hold her head down limiting what she can see, and consequently, what she is allowed to know. Her body under control is her language domesticated. And Sara acknowledges that she shall keep her mouth shut, so what she thinks does not come out.

Dictatorship speaks through the military language and constantly tries to expropriate the other's language, in this scenario women's language, in order to cease any potential dialogue and establish their monologue35. Bakhtin argues that discourse is “populated” by intention, context, and knowledge (Bakhtin 1934), by applying this theory to Pasos bajo el agua I argue Sara's discourse is all that comprises her context; in addition, her language is her experience, her life, and her knowledge. The words Sara chooses to speak come from her context, and in order to submit her to the military's intentions, the soldiers expropriate her language. This way, when the military imposes control over her, they steal from her what she is. This is represented in the objects they

34 “Where are they taking me? My neck hurts. Looks like they're stopping. The ones in front get out. You want anything from the store? Get me some Marlboros, says the one who's holding my head down, or maybe it's the other. And get some candy for the sweetie. Hey baby, want some chocolate? and he jerks heir out. I wonder what they'd do if I told them what kind of candy I wanted? I'd better keep my mouth shut” (Steps under Water 15).

35 I here refer to the Baktinian terminology that opposes Dialogism (a plurality of voices cohabiting a given context) and Monologism (only one voice imposing only one version of the facts; it disregards the plurality of voices).
appropriate or damage. As Moret argues, the objects play as discourse in Kozameh's narratives (Moret 1995); therefore I argue the female discourse is interrupted when women's objects are taken from them. When Sara is arrested, her husband's jacket, her typewriter, and a box no longer belong to her.

“Y la campera. La mejor campera de Hugo calzada en el cuerpo del flaco [...] Y la máquina de escribir, colgando de la mano del gordo. [...] Habló: Esa caja, esa caja que no abrieron, no la destruyan. Adentro guardo ropas de mi hermana. ¿Dónde está tu herman, infeliz? Puños contra la espalda. Muerta. Hace años. La arrastraron. La metieron en un auto, de tres que había estacionados en la puerta. De los policías unos se fueron con ella, otros se quedaron. Tomando posesión, pensó Sara” (Pasos bajo el agua 24) 36.

The jacket her husband used to wear is now a military property, together with her means of perpetuating discourse: her typewriter. In this passage, Sara is worried about preserving life, discourse, and memories represented in the jacket, the typewriter, and a box with her sister's clothes, respectively.

In this context of oppression, in addition to the female bodies being domesticated as means of control of their discourse, their children's bodies suffer control as means of avoiding the perpetuation of the “libratory female discourse of the future.” The children who visit their mothers are allowed a short period of time with them because they cannot get used to their subversive mothers and learn their ideology. Referring back to the “swollen belly” as women's reproduction, and tying it up with the mouth that speaks the word, it is possible to read another passage as example of control over their bodies. This time, the fear of being watched makes women silence themselves; now, they do it

36 “And the jacket. Hugo's best jacket worn by the skinny one [...] And the typewriter hanging from the fat one's hand. She spoke: That box, that one you didn't open, leave it alone. I keep my sister's clothes in it. Where's your sister, you sorryassed bitch? Fists against her back” (Steps under water 13).
through their children. Women are silencing the perpetuation of their voice, because they are coerced to do so; they fear the gaze of those who control them.


On the other hand, the silence is made through feeding their children with themselves. Given the fact that their body is their language, and in this passage, in a dream the children consume their prisoner mothers (the mothers in striped uniforms), once again discourse is being kept in the body, now the children's bodies, which is future history. The mothers are the discourse of the future, and in their children's mouths the women become tongue, which in turn is organ of speech and means of communication. However, if the female body is silenced, the children will be left without a tongue, without the inherited language of their own.

While Mikhail Bakhtin theorizes discourse, he argues that words only exist in people's mouths; they are not neutral and impersonal. In fact, as I previously argue in this chapter, the female language comes from within women's bodies; they repossess it and construct their library. Therefore, I read in Bakhtin's theory the mouth as metonym of the body. And in Alicia Kozameh's texts, words exist and carry intention inside the bodies of

the incarcerated women; the language of resistance is the female body. Since while imprisoned one's only possession is the body, the struggle within Sara and her compañeras is to retain what they have left. After Sara is tortured, she feels the acid taste of her stomach burning her throat after being punched and she wants to maintain that sensation because it is her only possession: “Sara mantenía esa acidez que ahora se le derramaba en el alma, la mojaba entera. Trataba de conservarla como si fuera lo único suyo, propio y personal en medio de tanta novedad sucesiva” (Pasos bajo el agua 31).

A Collective Reality

Kozameh writes collective reality in her narratives. There are different discourses in both narratives and different voices that speak the languages. As Kozameh points out, Pasos bajo el agua jumps “from first to third person or [reflects] a mass point of view” (Kozameh, in Diaz 321); the non-linearity and fragmentation, she explains, is a result of her feelings, as well as her relationship with her memories. Women in prison lived mass experience; they were individuals, nevertheless they all lived together the bad conditions of the wards, as well as the same pains and fears. Ultimately, they were all one, and also many different ones. According to Luce Irigaray, a woman “is indefinitely other in herself” (Irigaray 366).

The following passage in Pasos bajo el agua is one of the various examples of the swing between voices.

38 Sara still had that acid, which was now pouring into everything about her, soaking her completely through. She tried to preserve it as if it were the only thing that was her very own, private and personal among all the new changes (Steps under Water 21).
“Cuántas pisadas, se pregunta, en cuántos milímetros los pies de su madre han disminuido el espesor de las baldosas en esos tres años y medio. [...] Preguntar, preguntar qué; para qué computar estupideces: me cansan de sólo imaginar que se trata de una cifra”39 (my highlight, Pasos bajo el agua 13).

This example reflects collectivity in the swings from first to third person. This dialogue intrinsic in the text is that of two voices: the character speaking, and narrating together with the other feminine voice – the third person narrator – represents woman speaking to woman. The character living Alicia Kozameh's personal experience develops a dialogue with other women, thus representing communication between author and female readers. Yet at the same time, both voices are the author's, and they come from the inner space of the female body, the wide space that embraces the experiences of all women; therefore, one is all. Kozameh's words, as well as Griselda's, Liliana's, and other's come from inside their bodies, from their “moving library” where the experiences were kept. Sara speaks with her voice, as well as through other female bodies, thus writing women. Woman writes woman (Cixous 348). Alicia Kozameh writes herself while she writes women.

With this in mind, it is possible to read the difference in the narrative voices. “Y un odio tibio le corrió por los huesos. Quiero saber dónde estoy”40 (my emphasis, Pasos bajo el agua 29). When Kozameh writes the third person, she expresses an omniscient voice that views what women undergo in those conditions; moreover, it is the collective voice. On the other hand, the first person voice expresses personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. However, the collective is implicit in this swing from first to third person.

39 “How many footsteps, she asks herself? By how many millimeters had her mother's feet worn down the thickness of the floor tiles during those three and a half years? [...] To ask, but to ask what. Why bother computing stupidities? I get so sick of thinking about everything in terms of numbers” (Steps Under Water 2).
40 “And a mild hatred ran through her bones. I want to know where I am” (Steps Under Water 19).
Once Sara speaks to women and in turn, women speak to the reader – through the third person – there is exchange. In this exchange, Sara and her compañeras become one, “one mass of women undergoing extreme conditions” (Kozameh in Diaz 318). Therefore, the voices that speak in the novel, as well as in the short story, are speaking female discourse and challenging the system. Alicia Kozameh speaks herself while she speaks women.

*Fragmentation in Fourteen Vignettes*

*Pasos bajo el agua* is a fragmented yet circular narrative. While Kozameh writes her story, she does not follow linearity, nor has she chronological commitment; nevertheless, the novel follows a structure. It is a circular narrative that begins with “a way back,” and returns to that same way back. In the first chapter, "A modo de regreso," Sara returns to her parents' house; “sube las escaleras corriendo y desde el escalón más alto mira, hacia abajo, el patio de la casa de sus padres” *(Pasos bajo el agua* 13). Sara is up, out of the underground, the basement where she was kept for three and a half years, and emerges into life. It is “entre rígido y escurridizo”(ibid), because the story is yet to begin. Sara is out of the wards; after having repossessed her body through struggle and challenging the regime she will be able to speak her discourse. However, that struggle will persist, since the system she comes out to is that of repression.

41 A Way Back

42 “she climbs the stairs running and once at the very top she looks out, over the patio of her parents' house” *(Steps Under Water* 1).

43 “at once firm and slippery” (ibid).
In the last chapter, "A modo de regreso II" – notice the same title, except for the number indicating continuity – Sara finds herself able to speak. Kozameh, in Sara's body, finds herself dwelling “entre las ganas de escribir y las de orinar” (148). Now, out of prison, she finds herself in “[libertad] vigilada” (153). Sara, Kozameh, and all women have to live life and not end up in silence.

Because they are now out of prison, are those women really free? We have to understand what freedom means before we answer this question. Referring back to Bakhtin, words have to be populated in order to be a discourse. In this case, the incarcerated women of the “dirty war” populate the word “freedom” with the idea of expression. Freedom is for Sara and her compañeras the possibility of expressing themselves, as opposed to living the imposed life of the military regime. Their discourse should be free when they are free from the “repressive aspects having to do with phallocentric and colonial patterns of speech” (Cixous 202).

“Entonces no se encapriche. No se encapriche con y contra el silencio. Hable y no hable. Escuche y no dé pelota. Ríase y no se ría. Y no joda. Haga lo que se le antoje y no lo haga. Respire hondo. Vamos. Que el aire entre. Que entre” (154).

Between expressing thoughts through words (her writing) and living her expected life (urinating), Kozameh writes her female fragmented body. The author expresses her surveilled words in fragments, because she knows she is being watched, and she knows

44 “between the urge to write and the urge to urinate” (148).

45 Freedom under surveillance (my translation).

46 “So don't get all worked up. Don't get caught up in the silence, or against it. Speak and don't speak. Listen and blow off whatever it is you don't want to hear. Laugh and don't laugh. And don't screw around. Do whatever you feel like doing and don't do it. Take a deep breath. Come on. Let the air enter. Enter” (Steps Under Water 149).
that “los ruidos son para ser oídos pero sin exagerar⁴⁷” (152), because everywhere, when you pee, you can be heard; words that come out from your body are heard. Once again, Kozameh expresses the body as language; her words come from that inner space. They were kept to be written on these texts that embody her language. And they must write, because freedom is to be unique, distinct; in one’s self, in the place of intimacy, and writing the self one is free (Irigaray 1993).

The words presented to us were kept in, on, together with her body. The three, Sara, Kozameh, and women as a mass, constructed through their experience what became their library; they built their body. In the context which controlled their body, all women repossess it once they appropriate words and language. Since this body constructed in the wards of the dictatorship is one fragmented, the representation of their language is fragmented, as well.

The following is the citation of the vignettes that open each chapter of Pasos bajo el agua. When put together, they become verses of a poem that depicts the journey of those women surrounded by oppression, violence, fear, loneliness and death. In each metaphor we can read a different character, as well as their distinct interaction in the world.

“Me detengo. Camino, me detengo. / Otros caminan. / Los zapatos caminan solos. / Algunos pies bailan. Rotan. / Algunos pies se calman. / Algunos pies caminan. / Otros pies descansan. / Las camperas tiemblan. Se estremecen. Caminan. Se enfrentan a la muerte. / Las cartas vuelan. / Las ratas caminan y nadan. / La muerte marca el paso: camina. / Los ojos ven: caminan. / Las cartas vuelan. / Camino. Me detengo: camino” (Kozameh 2006).⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ “noises are for being heard, but [not exaggerating]” (146)

⁴⁸ “I stop. I walk, I stop. / Others walk. / The shoes walk by themselves. / Some feet dance. Pirouette. / Some feet rest. / Some feet walk. / Other feet rest. / The jackets tremble. They shake. They walk. / They
The kernel of the story can be read in these fourteen vignettes that represent through a variety of aesthetics and standpoints the fragmented subject Sara/Kozameh/women. The vignettes are the fragmented discourse and each fragment represents a step towards empowerment. In addition, each verse is a bit of the subject, who in turn is composed by objects, actions, and body; in summary, the subject is composed by memories. And because memories are time related, here there is a representation of the past, the present, and a forecast of the future.

In each section the relationship between the different bodies in this system is told in first and third persons. The first person is Sara and women more generally, whereas the third refers to the other bodies that are mixed in this context of the “dirty war.” They are violent, indifferent, dirty, strong, trembling, active bodies. These are read in the words Kozameh chooses: The pronoun I opposed to the pronoun other; the object shoe as a metonym of the walk through life; the animal rat used to refer to the soldiers in the basements; death expressed through the noun and represented in the metaphor of the empty shoes; the verbs that express movement or stagnation. More than only presenting the characters in her journey, Kozameh describes how they interact.

First, Sara stops herself, walks and stops. She is being watched and therefore cannot walk freely. For that reason, Sara's steps, represented through the verb *caminar* (to walk) are surrounded by oppression, present in the verb *detener* (stop). This idea is in face death. / The letters fly. / The rats walk and swim. / Death marches to its own beat: it walks. / The eyes see: they walk. / The letters fly. / I walk. I stop: I walk” (Kozameh 1996).

49 The verb *caminar* was translated as to walk. While I agree with this translation, I think when *detener* was put into English, some meaning was lost. The translator used the English verb to stop. It can
the position of both verbs: The first one is preceded and then followed by the second. Whereas this expresses stagnation, the first person voice mentions that others walk. Therefore, in the patriarchal system, women are stagnated while others can walk.

Her self – women’s selves in general – or the inner part of her body, which determines who she is as an individual, does not exist. Only the shoes walk, they don't have the body inside. In other words, her language is kept and not spread; her words are not populated with her intentions. Shoes are the tools for our bodies to walk and interact; although Sara's shoes are active, they are empty because the essence was stolen. In these vignettes the control over the body as a language is represented through movement versus stagnation, or activism versus pacifism.

While the so called subversives are stopped by the regime, there are some feet still dancing and pirouetting. Although dance and pirouette connotes happiness, bailar is a verb that also implies oscillation, or swing. These verbs indicate a movement from one standpoint to another. It represents the bodies that must swing, or frequently change when negotiating with the patriarchal system. While some bodies bailan, some rest, and some walk, others can only rest, these ones shall be passive. In this context, to walk is to perpetuate, to stop is to be oppressed, or maybe to die.

In this oppression, since the self is lost, or alienated, individuals fear not only the death of the body as material, but also the death of what the body protects. Women have a lot to lose since their language is in their body. Consequently, the jackets fear, because

have that meaning, but it is important to understand that in this case, when a woman stops it is because something acted on her making her stop. Therefore, the translation that could better represent the essence of this dichotomy movement/stagnation is detain, or even arrest.
they are the skin and protection to the soul, and therefore tremble, but they challenge
death facing it.

Means of communication in the dictatorial regime are controlled; information gets
lost. The letters that fly don't bring the news; all that is allowed caminar are rats, death,
and the eyes that watch the women. If walking means perpetuation, nothing is allowed
this action except for the regime, but Sara finds her way. Although she, and consequently
all women she represents, can walk, they will still be watched and stop. At the end, the
verbs change position, now detener is surrounded by caminar. And there lies the
circularity of the novel; the control of patriarchy still exists, even after the perpetuation of
the narratives.

“¿Querés saber lo que estou sintiendo en este momento? Quisera volver a la
cárcel. Extraño a mis amigas. [...] Yo necesito ser libre. No puedo vivir así. [...] ésta no es la clase de libertad que necesito” (Pasos bajo el agua 58).

Conclusion

Through her alter-ego Sara, Alicia Kozameh gives voice to the women who
experienced agony in prison during the “dirty war.” Kozameh draws through fiction the
state sponsored violence that controlled the discourse considered as subversive in
Argentina during the dictatorship. Moreover, her texts represent a form of écriture
féminine depicting the power relationship between the female body and the patriarchal
discourse of the regime. Sara's tortured body is a metaphor to collective excruciating
experiences of women who suffered violence in the Argentine military prisons. In

50 Do you want to know what I feel right now? I want to go back to prison. I miss my friends. [...] You
know what? I need to feel free. I can't live this way. [...] Well, this is not the kind of freedom I had in
mind” (Steps Under Water 49).
addition, *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Bosquejo de alturas* deploy an embodied female language empowering the women subjugated by the system.
We are this basement, this tight knot of history. We are the strength and the ingenuity with which we lose ourselves. We are the weld and each and every spark. The body of all of us, we are. The great, complete body. The whole body. We are its blood and its bones. Its skin and breath. And the vagina of the world, we are. The great vagina. We are the urine produced by the entire human race. The urine of life. And we are the source of urine: food. And each peal of laughter. Different ways of dying and of exploding in laughter. We are the dismantling of the stage and the infinite ways of rebuilding it. We are the blank canvas. And that stillness in the air. We are the itch of psoriasis. The great psoriasis of the history of the world, we are. The nervous tic in the hours of deepest sleep. The body, we are. And that body's hunger. We are the soup in the pot. We are hunger and what can and cannot be done to assuage it. We are the cry in the middle of the night. We are the two missing teeth. And most of all, the two incisors remaining. A cry of pain, cavities. Painkillers. Ankles. We are the ankles of all our mothers, bearing their bodies, their exhaustion. Muscles, we are. We are that great blowtorch. That great spark. And we are the suit of armor. The comfortable scabbard. The sword. The clothing that covers us. Always ready.

(Alicia Kozameh, Impression of Heights)

CONCLUSION

There is a mode of writing named l'écriture féminine because it resembles female characteristics as in the male/female dichotomy. However, this writing is not exclusive to women; it is one of the languages in heteroglossia and this language reflects a specific point of view from within society. Any writer, regardless the sex, can write through l'écriture féminine. By accepting female characteristics in a discourse and by considering l'écriture féminine a legitimate language, one contributes to deconstruct the male/female dichotomy and to establish a horizontal and dialectic relationship between different discursive voices. Heteroglossia contributes to the reconstruction of gender relationships.
About my Research

My research is neither the study of Alicia Kozameh's texts nor does it account her experiences. This thesis is about the female body as language of resistance, record of violence against women, and inscription of history. This work argues that the female body is language, autonomy, and a challenge to the norm. The female body is women's safe space. This study is about women as autonomous sex and the female body as language and means of empowerment.

The "dirty war" is the backdrop in Alicia Kozameh's stories. Her experiences in the basement where she was kept strengthened the woman Alicia who had a cause and the will to fight against injustice. Thereafter the writer Kozameh found in her body the stories that needed to be carried on. Her experiences give her an important theme she cannot ignore. Kozameh herself expresses that her writing became a refuge where she elaborates the past, the present, the "pasts that are present," and multiple versions of the future (Andradi 172).

About the Context

That the dictatorial regimes in Latin America during the twentieth century were violent and oppressive is common sense. However, the tactics the military used to control and coerce individuals are not frequently addressed; the intimate yet collective agony is portrayed through the memories of those who suffered torture and survived to tell their stories. The CONADEP report is a record and quantitative study of the Argentine “dirty
war;” nevertheless, texts such as those written by Alicia Kozameh bring to light the voice of those women who are represented by numbers in the report. Kozameh’s texts not only give voice to the oppressed women, they also give life to the bodies that died in the hands of the Argentine state.

This study proposes that context shapes the “political tactics.” The dictatorial regimes used violence as a political tool with the intent to control “subversive” individuals. The regime sacrificed the individual body in favour of the social body; therefore, violence was tailored to the essence of each of the prisoners. Women suffered specific methods of torture designed to violate their bodies. Rape, for instance, was a common tool of coercion, and soldiers frequently would beat mothers and threaten the lives of their children. Women’s bodies were used against them, but their bodies also became their means of protection as they kept their experiences inside, either in their memories or in their “walking library,” as Kozameh narrates in *Impression of Heights*. The study about violence against women contributes to the contemporary struggle against physical abuse women still experience.

**Who are the Incarcerated Women?**

This thesis is about the women who lived and became the basements of the "dirty war," a knot that stops the flow of the dialogue that is part of language as social phenomenon. Kozameh and her compañeras kept inscribed on their bodies the violence that they suffered, and this violence will follow them merging past, present, and future. Their stories collided with the knots tied by the military regime; however, those women
found in themselves a means to escape the oppression and spoke up to their convictions. And when torture silenced them, interrupting the dialectic flow, they became the weld that put them together. Each of their bodies stood to create a large and strong female body that carries life and the necessary structure for the skin that protects the soul, which is their essence. Their womanly voice becomes the voice of all oppressed women that desire the wholeness of a strong body and autonomy in a broader discourse.

The once incarcerated women became the product of an oppressive regime. Women are products of patriarchal ideals and become the residue of life. Nevertheless, their bodies are the very food that nurtures humanity. Their voices, through their bodies, deconstruct the arena where they fight against oppression and continually reconstruct the space in which their empowered language can develop an equal dialectic relationship with the dominant discourse. Because those women fought even when subjugated to the worst tortures, they bothered the system with their resistance and became an "itch" on the social body constructed and controlled by a patriarchal discourse. The incarcerated women imprinted their strength, through their words, on the history of the world. As writers, women gave voice to those who were silenced, and they challenged the law that, through “political tactics,” attempted to create “docile bodies;” however, since power is productive, it produced “hungry bodies” searching for the food to feed their knowledge. In their own bodies, women found this knowledge and became autonomous.

Women are not one, they are an oxymoron. While they represent pain, they are the painkiller. Their bodies represent loss; nonetheless, while it lacks, it carries inside the tools to fight for their identities. And if they lose their teeth, they keep the incisors, the
ones that cut sharply feeding and protecting themselves. And as the ankles, those women are holding up women, and as muscles they are providing the necessary strength to struggle and maintain their standing. Through their body, women writers enlightened the path of women towards empowerment. All women together dress up with their armor, carry their tools, and are ready to endure the fight to preserve their bodies and voices as their own. Alicia Kozameh and her compañeras are individuals who suffered state-sponsored torture of their bodies. But mostly, the incarcerated women represent the mass of women who struggled and survived the atrocities of the dictatorship. They also represent the women who will continue struggling with the memories of their experiences. In addition, Kozameh and her compañeras give voice to all the silenced women who died in hands of the Argentine dictatorship and other regimes.

A Feminist Conclusion

Alicia Kozameh writes through her body from woman to women. Kozameh's écriture féminine fictionalizes women's reality in patriarchal systems. In her body, Kozameh appropriates the dominant discourse, develops her own language, and empowers herself. Alicia becomes an autonomous voice that creates her own metaphors that come from her safe zone, which is her body.

In Steps under Water and Bosquejo de alturas, I read Kozameh's response to the oppression she lived with along with other women in a small dark place where no one could either see or hear them. If women are silenced and designated to a dark zone, they must tell their stories through their own point of view by appropriating the dominant
language, reconstructing it as their own, and establishing a dialogue with the system, as opposed to merely imitating the dominant discourse. Women were made to believe their space is dark and cannot be explored. However, the “dark continent” is not too dark to be explored, so women must use their language and make themselves present in history and deconstruct the norm by telling, in their language, their story. While they deconstruct, women transgress the literary boundaries, “wreck partitions, and rhetorics,” and recreate themselves. Women must emerge, empower, and become discursive subjects.

About Language and its Meanings

As discursive subjects, individuals designate meaning to their words. Roland Barthes explains that in their respective contexts, speakers repeat previous enunciations and their discourse emerges, transforming each one of the signs in their own language. I propose this action is that of empowerment of women’s language. The prison, where Alicia Kozameh and the other women were kept, constantly scrutinized, and punished, is representative of the patriarchal society in which women’s body is constantly observed as the body of the other. Therefore, appropriating the dominant discourse and designating their own meanings, women will recreate themselves as women and reestablish their position within the system. Discourse will be redefined, women will loosen themselves from the knots of oppression, and they will become the knot tying together the differences, establishing a horizontal relationship between the discourses. While the different voices relate to each other without dominance upon each other, they are part of a broad social dialogue.
In a dialogue where dichotomies such as male/female, weak/strong, powerful/subjugated are not present, the idea of the “other” switches from marginalization to respect and establishes communication between the voices. Therefore, I propose we acknowledge there are differences between female and male discourses; in addition, these differences must be valued as a variety of voices that enriches language as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, I argue that the different voices must be respected as a reflection of a variety of socio-political and cultural contexts. As Bakhtin proposes, historical existence creates social stratification, which in turn is a result of intentionality. Social stratification is “autonomous and peculiar;” women as a social group is therefore peculiar and autonomous.

The variety of languages is “heteroglossia” and they become one’s own when populated with intentions. And because the novel is the organizational mode of heteroglossia, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, I argue Kozameh’s texts are creative organizations of speeches from within the “dirty war,” and while she writes women’s voice struggling with the voice of dictatorship she represents the female body resisting oppression. Women must populate the dominant discourse with their intentions and make their bodies respected as legitimate language within the social dialogue.

About Power and Patriarchy

Michel Foucault argues that power relations must be the focus when studying discourses. As he proposes we are determined through a history of war which is the history of relations of power, I read Kozameh’s characters, and herself, as products of the
system that oppressed and tortured them. Furthermore, I read the experiences during the “dirty war” as similar to experiences within any patriarchal system. The law not only denies and oppresses but has a social function and a “political tactic” achieved through power relationship. I expand his theory addressing it as the “patriarchal bargain” proposed by Deniz Kandiyote. I argue that Foucault’s theory explains how the genders interact and determine women’s subjectivity and gender ideology. Foucault also sheds light on the understanding of women’s active or passive resistance while facing oppression. And finally, relations of power and patriarchal bargain are similar because both are contextualized; in other words, the historical context changes or reconstructs the relationships that are mutable. Transformations open space for renegotiations, and in this constant move, power relations become reciprocal.
REFERENCES


