



## CHAPTER 11

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# Feminist Storytellers Imagining New Stories to Tell

*Rosa de Nooijer and Lillian Sol Cueva*

### INTRODUCTION

Feminists use a variety of methodologies<sup>1</sup> to make women's lives and experiences epistemologically, socially and politically relevant. One of these methodologies is storytelling, which allows for the inclusion of life histories and personal accounts in research, giving academics the chance to experiment with different ways of gathering and communicating data. Storytelling is a customary practice of transmitting histories, knowledges and cosmologies and has historically been done in various ways. Stories can be told through dance, drawn on rocks with different colored stones, told around a fire, written down in books, recorded in podcasts, shown

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in film or shared in comics where text and drawings tend to accompany each other (Pikola Estés, 2001: 31–39).

For feminist researchers, storytelling is a way to challenge dominant narratives which erase, oversimplify and universalize women’s voices and experiences. It is an unconventional way to explore women’s stories and to expand their possibilities as women tell their own stories in their own words (Woodiwiss et al., 2017).

It is our purpose to contribute to the discussion about the use of feminist storytelling. This chapter will take us, its writers and readers, to a dinner, inspired by the creative writing of Lillian, Rosa and other feminist authors who tell stories. It involves reading, quoting, conspiring, studying and supporting each other while summoning other feminists to do the same (Toupin & Spideralex, 2018).

To do this we use creative writing and drawing, which help us to “speak and inquire differently, [to] provide a different set of data and voices, and [to] let go of some rigid notions of truth” (Moezzi et al., 2017: 7). For this chapter, we have chosen the devices of stories and storytelling, not just because of their scientific value but also because of their artistic, political and activist capacity to connect people through their tales. The chapter starts by guiding you through our methodological process, in which we elaborate how we first envisioned this chapter and its contents, as well as locating ourselves and sharing from where we write. Then the chapter continues in the shape of an illustrated story, in an attempt to search for different intellectual and emotional frameworks. In “Appetite for Change” we will show you around the dinner and define how we understand stories. We will also discuss feminist storytelling and its potential in research and in practice. In “Ultraviolet Woman-Bee”, we will attempt to see the world we live in and how it is organized from another perspective. In the conclusion, we will finish the chapter by reflecting on the characteristics of feminist storytelling and by asking some questions to keep exploring this methodology in the future.

We hope that this chapter will inspire you to dream of bees dancing in the sky and sea turtles called by the moon; to imagine worlds in which women are as free as flying birds. Also, we hope this chapter will trigger a desire to meet with friends and find connections with strangers, to write creatively and think of other ways to do “academic work”. Finally, while doing this we hope you have fun—a lot of fun—and feel excited to stay with the trouble because *¡Se va a caer, porque lo vamos a tirar!* (“It is going to fall because we are going to tear it down!”).



## METHODOLOGY: IMAGINING

Imagining a chapter together about feminist storytelling started next to a lake in Italy, in a small village called Bolsena. Here, we were part of a feminist methodologies summer school in which this book was first envisioned. We were staying at a convent surrounded by nature where we enjoyed communal spaces, told each other stories, shared food and participated in a variety of workshops. Its spirit has not changed, however, the space in which we have been creating this chapter has been quite different from where it originally sprouted. We are now in the middle of a worldwide pandemic which requires us to stay inside our homes as much as possible.

### *The Steps*

We took different steps to agree on the content of this chapter. First, we met three times in which we came together to draw, craft, talk, be in silence and to connect our ideas. We trusted each other to organize the meetings, their location and the activities that would help us to develop our ideas and working schedule. We explored what we understand as stories and storytelling from a feminist perspective. Doing this, we documented our work and archived it as a way to inform the final writing stage of crafting this chapter.

During our meetings we agreed that we wanted to write this chapter together, to prioritize women authors' voices and to do feminist storytelling by using a combination of words and more than words. We committed to take care of each other during the working process, meaning that we shared and contributed equally, based on the activities we enjoyed the most. Also, we acknowledged that we are different in various ways, but just like nature needs biodiversity for the ecosystem to be healthy, we needed to nurture our differences to work and learn together.

We soon learned that both of us have been interested in storytelling, from a young age as a way of getting to know the world and as art form, additionally we were both using it as research methodology. Moreover, we realized that we were at different stages of our research, which allowed us to learn from each other by engaging in a dialogue about our knowledges and experiences of using storytelling as a methodology. Rosa already used

storytelling in “The Dinner of Relations”<sup>2</sup> and Lillian is currently creating stories with vendors at traditional marketplaces in Mexico City.

### *The Writing and the Drawing*

This chapter is written based on creative writing, real-life dialogues between us, the authors, as well as the work of feminist thinkers, activists and artists. It is co-written and co-edited which implied close listening to one another, to voice our own opinions and to show mutual respect and understanding. We decided to use this approach inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin who said “that every story must make its own rules and obey them” (Books aren’t just commodities 2018: min. 02:32–02:52). We applied her advice, not just to the content of our work but also to our collaboration while making this chapter.

Additionally, this chapter uses drawings. They are not tools to visualize what we are writing but to complement it, they are stories in and of themselves. We do not intend to attach more value to one or the other; both are equally important for communicating our thoughts and processes, for making art as well as science and for expressing creatively what words are unable to express. Illustrations create dimensions and movement, provide an atmosphere and give a face and emotions to the characters. Through this graphic form, we hope to offer a creative experience, to trigger different stimuli and therefore to open up your imagination and to attract your attention (Sandoval, 2020).

### *The Positioning*

Finally, we write this chapter from a place which cannot be pinpointed on a map as it is informed by and connected to a variety of places, spaces, territories and lands in which we are rooted: The Netherlands, Mexico,

<sup>2</sup>“The Dinner of Relations” is the inspiration for the dinner in this chapter. It was an imaginary setting created by Rosa for her master’s research. At this dinner, farmers, loved ones, writers and academics were invited to have a dialogue about food, eating and relationality at a Dutch farm in a province called de Flevopolder. We (Lillian and Rosa) were dining there and having a conversation. For this chapter we imagined a similar setting in which we could share food and our thoughts with each other. We imagine that, as we nourish ourselves with food, our words and minds are also nourished by the company and dialogues, making eating together into something that connects us with each other and our surroundings.

our bodies and our imagination. We want to occupy the specific geographies of the imaginary to have a dinner and tell stories together, while refusing the fortification of the rational ground, the certitude of already “knowing” where to go with our narratives and the practice of silencing our voices to hear the “wise” man that rules in Patriarchyland.

Similar to the impossibility to pinpoint one location from which we write, our thinking is not singular either but the result of many women’s thoughts (Rowe, 2005: 15). Who we are and what we do is shaped by women who we love, respect and admire. It is also shaped by the women whose books, poetry and stories we have read, movies we have watched and art we have seen. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005) argues, “[t]he meaning of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection” (3). In this piece in particular, we are shedding light upon our connection to the words and work of Octavia E. Butler, Brenda Navarro, Donna Haraway, Ursula K. Le Guin, Gabriela Cabezón, Gloria Anzaldúa, women farmers’ voices, the women in our families, our *ancestras*, *compañeras* and friends, who root us and teach us. You can see some of them sitting with us at our imaginary dinner table in one of our drawings.

We know that storytelling is not particular or exclusive to feminism, rather it is one of the many ways in which phenomena and theories about the world are described. However, we focus on the work of feminists because we find ourselves in it. It welds us together in alliances “to transform and narrate [us] who go unrecognized and whose existence is considered impossible” (Toupin & Spideralex, 2018).

### *Appetite for Change*

Below, we will shift to storytelling to present our own short story. We will explore what feminist storytelling means to us and illustrate what it might look like. Now, dear reader, we invite you to come with us to have dinner and to be part of the conversation. We hope this will be a space to open the scope of imagination when it comes to seeing possibilities, of actively engaging with each other in the struggle of challenging the systems we are all entangled in. *Eet smakelijk!* (“enjoy your meal!”).

ROSA AND LILLIAN ARRIVE TO THE DINNER APPETITE FOR CHANGE. THEY WALK TO ONE OF THE STORAGE TABLES AND START CONTRIBUTING TO THE PINNER BY GATHERING BRIGHTLY COLOURED TABLECLOTHS, GLASSES, PLATES AND CUTLERY TO SET THE TABLES. THE GLASSES, PLATES AND CUPS SEEM HANDMADE BECAUSE NOT TWO OF THEM ARE EXACTLY THE SAME. THEN THEY TAKE A SEAT AT ONE OF THE TABLES, TAKE OFF THEIR FACEMASKS AND SMILE AT EACH OTHER; THE PLACE IS RELAXING AND THERE IS A WARM BREEZE WHICH MOVES THE PLANTS THAT SURROUND THE TABLE. SOME HAVE FLOWERS, WHICH ARE BEING VISITED BY BUMBLEBEES AND A BIRD SITS DOWN BRIEFLY ON ONE OF THE BRANCHES ABOVE THEIR HEAD, SINGING ITS SONG BEFORE IT FLIES OFF TO SEARCH THE SOIL FOR WORMS.

IT IS THE END OF THE DAY AND THE SUN IS APPROACHING THE HORIZON, COLOURING THE SKY INTO DIFFERENT SHAPES OF ORANGE, PINK AND YELLOW. A FEW SMALL CLOUDS FLOAT HIGH ABOVE THEM AND REFLECT BITS OF PINK, MAKING THEM LOOK LIKE COTTON CANDY. THE SCENT OF FRESH VEGETABLES THAT ARE BEING COOKED BY THE ONES WHO ARE IN CHARGE OF THIS WEEK'S FOOD MAKES LILLIAN AND ROSA LOOK AT EACH OTHER, EXCITED, BECAUSE ALL THE FOOD IS LOCALLY GROWN. THEN THEY HEAR VOICES; A GROUP OF WOMEN ARE APPROACHING THE NEXT TABLE AND SIT DOWN 1.5 METERS AWAY FROM EACH OTHER, AFTER WHICH THEY TAKE OFF THEIR FACEMASKS AND SMILE WHILE LOOKING AROUND. MORE PEOPLE ARE ARRIVING, LOOKING HAPPY BUT ALSO A LITTLE NERVOUS BECAUSE THE COVID19 PANDEMIC IS STILL LINGERING WORLDWIDE. A CHATTER STARTS TO FILL THE ROOM AND ROSA AND LILLIAN KNOW THAT THIS WILL NOT BE A REGULAR DINNER.







I LOVE THIS PLACE! IT IS PERFECT TO HAVE PINNER LIKE THIS; HAVING SOCIAL PROXIMITY WHILE MAINTAINING PHYSICAL DISTANCE.

YES, I HAVE BEEN WANTING TO DO THIS AGAIN EVER SINCE THE LAST TIME WHEN WE WERE AT THE DINNER OF RELATIONS. BUT THE COVID19 PANDEMIC HAPPENED AND WE COULDN'T COME.



I THINK COVID19 IS NOT THE 'REAL' PANDEMIC. HISTORICAL INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES BROUGHT BY CAPITALISM, COLONIALISM, PATRIARCHY AND OTHER OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS ARE WHAT TURNED THIS VIRUS INTO A GLOBAL PANDEMIC, OTHER-THAN-HUMANS INTO RESOURCES, AND SOME HUMANS INTO DISPOSABLE-EXPLOITABLE BODIES (INDIGENOUS ACTION MEDIA 2020: 171-181). HOWEVER, AS OUR IMMUNE SYSTEMS CREATE ANTIBODIES TO FIGHT VIRUSES, OUR SOCIETIES AND COMMUNITIES ARE BUILDING ANTIBODIES TO RESIST AND SUBVERT (BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA ET AL. 2020).

FOR ME, COVID19 WORKS LIKE A MAGNIFYING GLASS THAT IS SHOWING AND AMPLIFYING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE FOOD WE EAT IS GROWN, DISTRIBUTED AND SOLD BY PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSTANTLY AT RISK OF GETTING THE VIRUS, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NOW CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO KEEP SOCIETY FUNCTIONING, THEIR LIVES AND WELLBEING SEEM TO BE NONESSENTIAL.



ALSO, I LIKE THE WAY YOU COMPARE ANTI-BODIES TO COMMUNITIES IN RESISTANCE, IT OPENS UP THE POSSIBILITY TO TALK ABOUT WAYS TO MOBILISE. I BELIEVE THAT IMAGINATION AND THE TELLING OF STORIES ARE KEY WHEN WE ARE BUILDING ANTI-BODIES. AS LE GUIN (2014) SAID "ANY HUMAN POWER CAN BE RESISTED AND CHANGED BY HUMAN BEINGS. RESISTANCE AND CHANGE OFTEN BEGIN IN ART , AND VERY OFTEN IN OUR ART, THE ART OF WORDS."



LILLIAN NODS AND AFTER TAKING A SIP OF MEZCAL, SHE CONTINUES.



IT IS TRUE THAT RESISTANCE AND CHANGE OFTEN BEGIN IN THE ART OF WORDS, FOR EXAMPLE BY TELLING STORIES. HOWEVER, NOW THAT I AM WORKING WITH STORIES FOR MY PHD, ONE OF THE FIRST CHALLENGES THAT I FACE IS THAT "STORYTELLING IN ACADEMIC WRITING IS LARGELY UNCONVENTIONAL AND CONFINED TO CERTAIN DISCIPLINES" (DICKINSON 2012: 60) WHICH MAKES IT HARD FOR ME TO KNOW WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT A STORY. FOR EXAMPLE, "[I]N COLLOQUIAL USAGE, 'STORY' CAN MEAN FANTASY, TRUTH, LIE, OR ALMOST ANYTHING IN BETWEEN" (HILFINGER MESSIAS AND DEJOSEPH 2004: 43).

YES, TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH IS USUALLY POSITIONED "WITHIN EMPIRICAL, OBJECTIVE, RATIONAL, AND EUROCENTRIC FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION" (DICKINSON 2012: 60). MAYBE IT WILL HELP IF YOU DEVELOP A WORKING DEFINITION OF STORY, BECAUSE HOW WE DEFINE STORY IS KEY TO THE WAY IN WHICH WE APPROACH BOTH THE COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATION OF STORIES AS DATA (HILFINGER MESSIAS AND DEJOSEPH 2004: 43).



MOEZZI ET AL. (2017) AFFIRMS THAT "[O]NE OF THE MOST COMMON DEFINITIONS OF STORY IS SOMETHING WITH A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE, AND END, [...]. DRAWING FROM THE FIELD OF FOLKLORISTS, IN TRADITIONAL ORAL STORIES, THERE IS GENERALLY ALSO A PROTAGONIST, USUALLY A HUMAN BUT POSSIBLY ANOTHER ANIMATE ACTOR, AND OBJECT, A PRACTICE, OR AN IDEA. THEN SOMETHING HAPPENS, SUCH AS A CONFLICT BETWEEN PROTAGONISTS AND ANTAGONISTS, OR A TRANSFORMATION [...]" (2).

YES, I HAVE ALSO READ HER WORK BUT I WOULD LIKE TO CHALLENGE HER UNDERSTANDING OF STORIES HAVING A BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END. FOR EXAMPLE, THE END OF KINDREP (2004 EP), OCTAVIA BUTLER'S SCI-FI BOOK, HAS NO REAL END; WELL IT DOES, BUT THE END IS A JUMP IN TIME, LEAVING OPEN POSSIBILITIES FOR THE STORY TO CONTINUE.



I AGREE WITH YOU THAT NOT ALL STORIES ARE LINEAR, BUT SOMETHING THAT ALL STORIES HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT THEY "EVOLVE OUT OF THE ADJECTIVES, VERBS, AND ORDERING USED TO DESCRIBE PHENOMENA AT MANY LEVELS AND IN DIFFERENT FIELDS [...]" AS MOEZZI (2017: 3) AFFIRMS.



LIKING WHERE THE CONVERSATION IS GOING LILLIAN PUSHES THE DISCUSSION FURTHER.

I GET WHAT YOU MEAN, BUT DON'T YOU THINK THAT WHEN WE ARE TALKING ABOUT STORIES AND FOCUSING SO MUCH ON THEIR SHAPE AND STYLE, WE OBJECTIFY THEM AND MAKE THEM INTO THINGS?



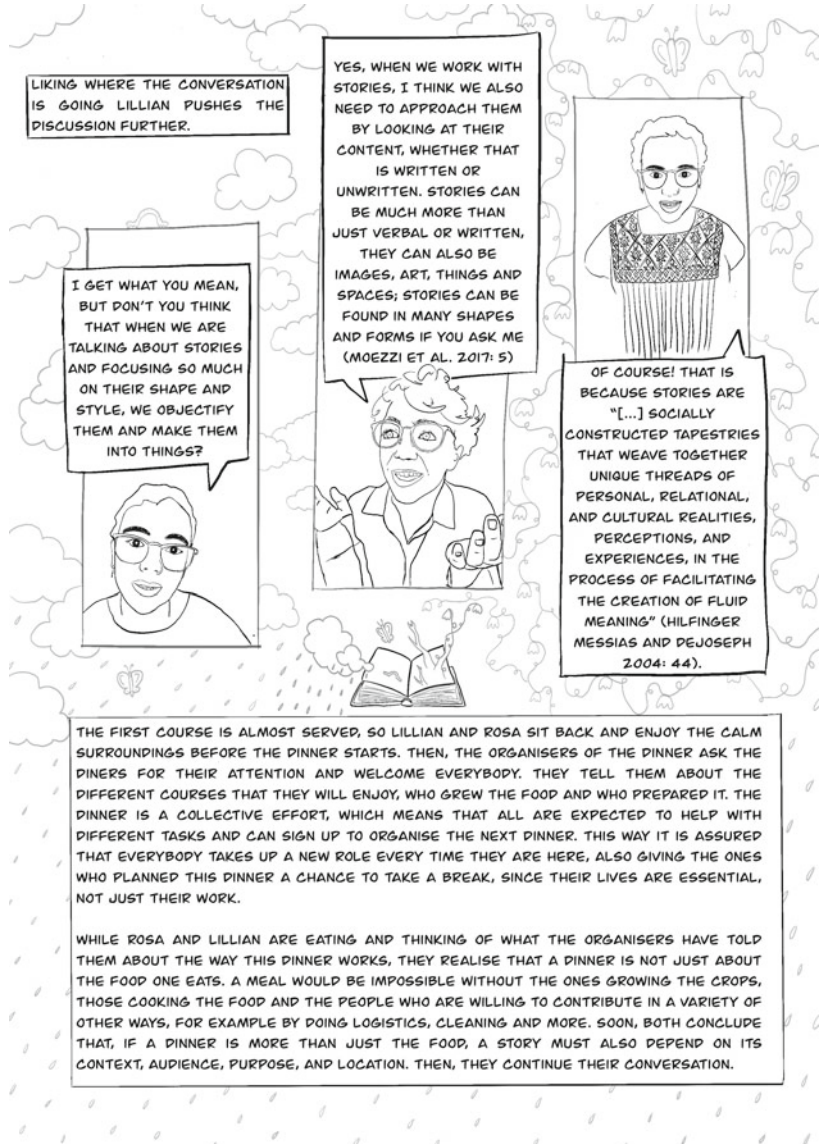
YES, WHEN WE WORK WITH STORIES, I THINK WE ALSO NEED TO APPROACH THEM BY LOOKING AT THEIR CONTENT, WHETHER THAT IS WRITTEN OR UNWRITTEN. STORIES CAN BE MUCH MORE THAN JUST VERBAL OR WRITTEN. THEY CAN ALSO BE IMAGES, ART, THINGS AND SPACES; STORIES CAN BE FOUND IN MANY SHAPES AND FORMS IF YOU ASK ME (MOEZZI ET AL. 2017: 5)



OF COURSE! THAT IS BECAUSE STORIES ARE "[...] SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED TAPESTRIES THAT WEAVE TOGETHER UNIQUE THREADS OF PERSONAL, RELATIONAL, AND CULTURAL REALITIES, PERCEPTIONS, AND EXPERIENCES, IN THE PROCESS OF FACILITATING THE CREATION OF FLUID MEANING" (HILFINGER MESSIAS AND DEJOSEPH 2004: 44).

THE FIRST COURSE IS ALMOST SERVED, SO LILLIAN AND ROSA SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE CALM SURROUNDINGS BEFORE THE DINNER STARTS. THEN, THE ORGANISERS OF THE DINNER ASK THE DINERS FOR THEIR ATTENTION AND WELCOME EVERYBODY. THEY TELL THEM ABOUT THE DIFFERENT COURSES THAT THEY WILL ENJOY, WHO GREW THE FOOD AND WHO PREPARED IT. THE DINNER IS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT, WHICH MEANS THAT ALL ARE EXPECTED TO HELP WITH DIFFERENT TASKS AND CAN SIGN UP TO ORGANISE THE NEXT DINNER. THIS WAY IT IS ASSURED THAT EVERYBODY TAKES UP A NEW ROLE EVERY TIME THEY ARE HERE, ALSO GIVING THE ONES WHO PLANNED THIS DINNER A CHANCE TO TAKE A BREAK, SINCE THEIR LIVES ARE ESSENTIAL, NOT JUST THEIR WORK.

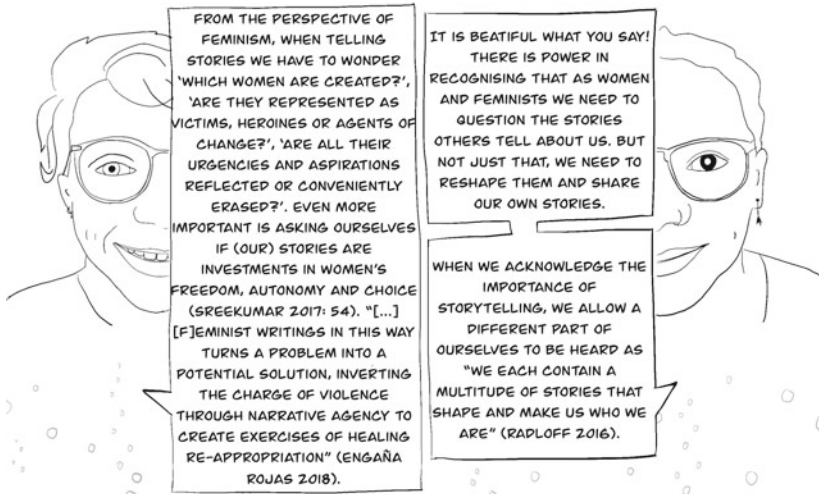
WHILE ROSA AND LILLIAN ARE EATING AND THINKING OF WHAT THE ORGANISERS HAVE TOLD THEM ABOUT THE WAY THIS DINNER WORKS, THEY REALISE THAT A DINNER IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE FOOD ONE EATS. A MEAL WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT THE ONES GROWING THE CROPS, THOSE COOKING THE FOOD AND THE PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO CONTRIBUTE IN A VARIETY OF OTHER WAYS, FOR EXAMPLE BY DOING LOGISTICS, CLEANING AND MORE. SOON, BOTH CONCLUDE THAT, IF A DINNER IS MORE THAN JUST THE FOOD, A STORY MUST ALSO DEPEND ON ITS CONTEXT, AUDIENCE, PURPOSE, AND LOCATION. THEN, THEY CONTINUE THEIR CONVERSATION.





Source: Background drawing inspired by Mimitasle (Instagram), August 5th 2020

ROSA AND LILLIAN REALISED THAT IN MANY OF THE STORIES ACCESSIBLE IN LITERATURE AND FILM, THE 'WE' AND THE 'US' ARE PORTRAYED AS TWO OPPOSITE TYPES OF WOMEN; WOMEN ARE VICTIMS OR VICTIMIZERS. THEN LILLIAN AND ROSA WONDER ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES THAT FEMINIST STORYTELLING PRESENTS IN THIS REGARD.



FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMINISM, WHEN TELLING STORIES WE HAVE TO WONDER 'WHICH WOMEN ARE CREATED?', 'ARE THEY REPRESENTED AS VICTIMS, HEROINES OR AGENTS OF CHANGE?', 'ARE ALL THEIR URGENCIES AND ASPIRATIONS REFLECTED OR CONVENIENTLY ERASED?'. EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IS ASKING OURSELVES IF (OUR) STORIES ARE INVESTMENTS IN WOMEN'S FREEDOM, AUTONOMY AND CHOICE (SREEKUMAR 2017: 54). "[...] [F]EMINIST WRITINGS IN THIS WAY TURNS A PROBLEM INTO A POTENTIAL SOLUTION, INVERTING THE CHARGE OF VIOLENCE THROUGH NARRATIVE AGENCY TO CREATE EXERCISES OF HEALING RE-APPROPRIATION" (ENGAÑA ROJAS 2018).

IT IS BEAUTIFUL WHAT YOU SAY! THERE IS POWER IN RECOGNISING THAT AS WOMEN AND FEMINISTS WE NEED TO QUESTION THE STORIES OTHERS TELL ABOUT US. BUT NOT JUST THAT, WE NEED TO RESHAPE THEM AND SHARE OUR OWN STORIES.

WHEN WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING, WE ALLOW A DIFFERENT PART OF OURSELVES TO BE HEARD AS "WE EACH CONTAIN A MULTITUDE OF STORIES THAT SHAPE AND MAKE US WHO WE ARE" (RADLOFF 2016).

WHAT YOU SAID RESONATES WITH ME. WE CAN CREATE AND SHARE STORIES ABOUT OUR DREAMS OR VISIONS OF HOW WE IMAGINE A BETTER WORLD FOR OURSELVES, COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES. WE CAN SHARE "[...] OUR STORIES OF VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PAIN BUT ALSO OF OVERCOMING, SURVIVING, OF LOVE, OF FRIENDSHIP" (RADLOFF 2016). THIS MAKES THE TELLING OF STORIES A POLITICAL ACT THAT ALTERS THE MEANING AND VALUE OF OUR DIVERSE EXPERIENCES.

HOW POWERFUL! I IMAGINE US GATHERING "[...] IN SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS TO WITNESS, LISTEN, CELEBRATE, HOLD AND HONOUR EACH OTHER THROUGH OUR STORIES. AS WE LISTEN, WE TRY AND FIT OURSELVES INTO THE SKIN OF THE OTHER TO UNDERSTAND THE PLEASURE, PAIN AND THE JOURNEY OF ANOTHER" (RADLOFF 2016). SO, DEFINITELY THE RESHAPING AND TELLING OF OUR OWN STORIES AND LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF OTHER WOMEN ARE ESSENTIAL PARTS OF FEMINIST STORYTELLING.

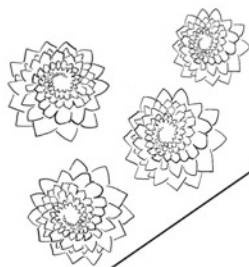




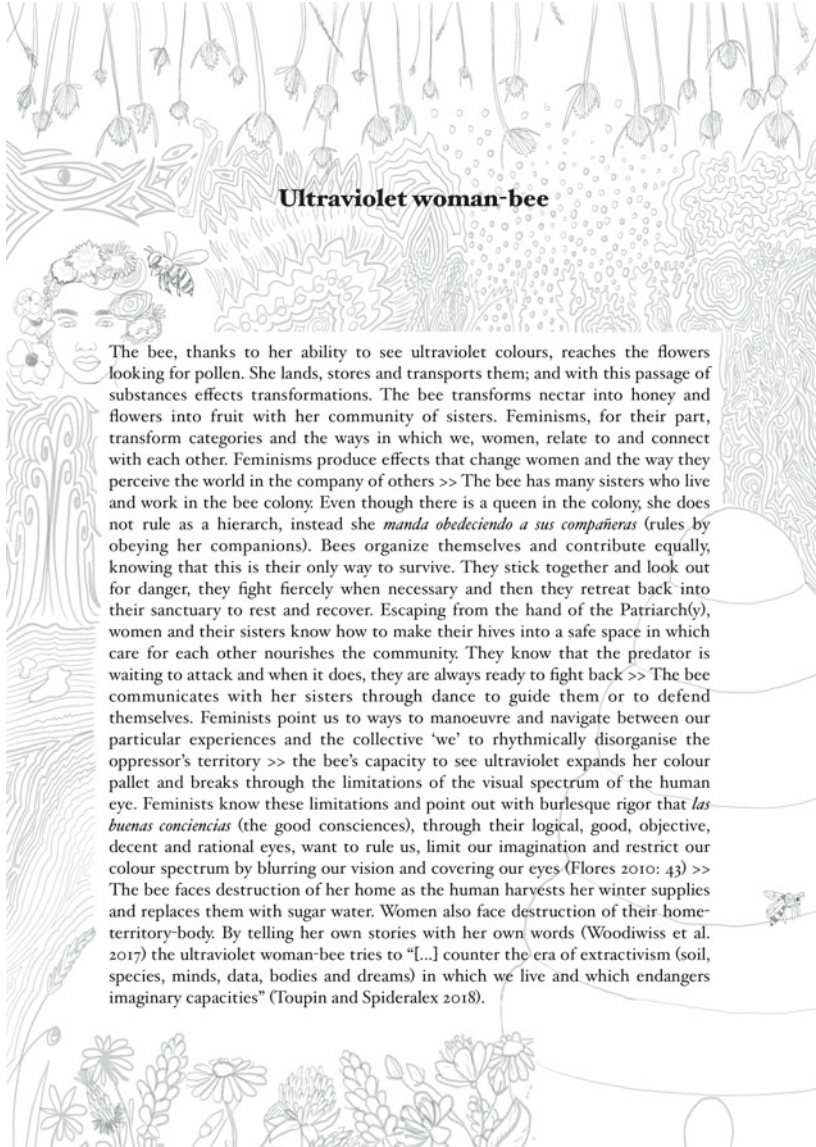
AS LILLIAN AND ROSA PROCEED WITH THE DINNER, THEY TASTE A COMBINATION OF FLAVOURS PRIOR UNKNOWN TO THEM. ONE OF THE DISHES IS ROMANESCO FROM THE OVEN, MARINATED IN GREEK OLIVE OIL WITH FRESH ROSEMARY AND SEA-SALT. IT IS DELICIOUS! LILLIAN IS SURPRISED BY ITS GEOMETRICAL SHAPE; SHE CANNOT STOP THINKING THAT THIS BEAUTIFUL VEGETABLE MUST BE FROM OUTER SPACE.

SUPPENLY, ROSA SPOTS A BEE. THE INSECT REMINDS HER OF A DREAM THAT LILLIAN HAD. IN HER DREAM, SHE WAS A HONEY BEE AND COULD SEE THE WORLD IN COLORS THAT ARE INVISIBLE TO THE HUMAN EYE. UNLIKE US, BEES ARE ABLE TO SEE IN THE ULTRA VIOLET SPECTRUM, WHICH MAKES FLOWERS LOOK VIBRANT AND ATTRACTIVE FOR THEM. FOR LILLIAN, FEMINISM ALLOWS WOMEN TO SEE A BIGGER COLOUR PALLET, MAKING THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN INVISIBLE, VISIBLE AND RADIANT FOR THE FEMINIST EYE.

ROSA SHARES HER MEMORY WITH LILLIAN, AND TOGETHER THEY WONDER WHAT SHAPES AND COLOURS THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE IF THEY HAD THE EYES OF BEES.



THEN, THE FOLLOWING STORY GERMINATED IN THEIR MINDS (KURTZ 2009: 95).



### Ultraviolet woman-bee

The bee, thanks to her ability to see ultraviolet colours, reaches the flowers looking for pollen. She lands, stores and transports them; and with this passage of substances effects transformations. The bee transforms nectar into honey and flowers into fruit with her community of sisters. Feminisms, for their part, transform categories and the ways in which we, women, relate to and connect with each other. Feminisms produce effects that change women and the way they perceive the world in the company of others >> The bee has many sisters who live and work in the bee colony. Even though there is a queen in the colony, she does not rule as a hierarch, instead she *manda obedeciendo a sus compañeras* (rules by obeying her companions). Bees organize themselves and contribute equally, knowing that this is their only way to survive. They stick together and look out for danger, they fight fiercely when necessary and then they retreat back into their sanctuary to rest and recover. Escaping from the hand of the Patriarchy(y), women and their sisters know how to make their hives into a safe space in which care for each other nourishes the community. They know that the predator is waiting to attack and when it does, they are always ready to fight back >> The bee communicates with her sisters through dance to guide them 'or to defend themselves. Feminists point us to ways to manoeuvre and navigate between our particular experiences and the collective 'we' to rhythmically disorganise the oppressor's territory >> the bee's capacity to see ultraviolet expands her colour pallet and breaks through the limitations of the visual spectrum of the human eye. Feminists know these limitations and point out with burlesque rigor that *las buenas conciencias* (the good consciences), through their logical, good, objective, decent and rational eyes, want to rule us, limit our imagination and restrict our colour spectrum by blurring our vision and covering our eyes (Flores 2010: 43) >> The bee faces destruction of her home as the human harvests her winter supplies and replaces them with sugar water. Women also face destruction of their home-territory-body. By telling her own stories with her own words (Woodiwiss et al. 2017) the ultraviolet woman-bee tries to "[...] counter the era of extractivism (soil, species, minds, data, bodies and dreams) in which we live and which endangers imaginary capacities" (Toupin and Spideralex 2018).

THE DINNER COMES TO AN END, BUT NOT THE DAYDREAMING OF ROSA AND LILLIAN. THEY LEAVE THE PLACE NOURISHED BY THE FOOD, THE CONVERSATIONS AND THE SHARED IMAGINATIONS. THEY HAVE CREATED THE ULTRAVIOLET WOMAN-BEE TOGETHER, NOT AS AN ATTEMPT TO HUMANISE THE INSECT, TO PICTURE THE HUMAN AS OTHER-THAN-HUMAN, OR TO SAY 'THEY ARE' AND 'WE ARE'. RATHER, THE WOMAN-BEE IS A FIGURATION, A PROVOCATION AND AN ALLEGORY TO SEE THE WORLD WE LIVE IN AND HOW IT IS ORGANIZED FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE. LILLIAN AND ROSA WISH THAT THE USE OF NEW WORDS CAN HELP THEM TO CREATE NEW WORLDS, BOTH REAL AND IMAGINARY, IN WHICH THEY CAN LEARN FROM OTHER HUMANS AND OTHER-THAN-HUMANS.

LOOKING BACK AT THEIR ADVENTURE, THEY KNOW THAT THE USE OF THEIR CREATIVITY IN THEIR REFLECTIONS WAS ESSENTIAL. HOWEVER, THEY ALSO KNOW THAT NOT ALL FEMINISTS WOULD HAVE WORKED IN THE SAME WAY TO ACHIEVE THE SAME GOAL. FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES ARE NOT LIKE A SMALL BOX WITHOUT ROOM TO MOVE, RATHER, THERE ARE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES. ONE OF THESE IS FEMINIST STORYTELLING, WHICH CAN OPEN OUR SCOPE OF IMAGINATION TO DO RESEARCH.

BUT... WE ARE AWARE DEAR READER THAT, WHEN DOING STORYTELLING, YOU HAVE TO BE CAUTIOUS OF MAKING YOUR TALE INTO SOMETHING STABLE, UNWILLING TO BE REVISED AND REVISITED. FEMINIST STORYTELLING CONTINUOUSLY NEEDS TO SHED LIGHT ON THE COMPLEXITIES THAT WE CHERISH IN ORDER NOT TO BECOME THE DOMINANT OR THE SINGLE STORY OF WOMEN'S LIVES AND HISTORIES (ILMONEN 2020: 356). KEEPING THIS IN MIND, THE AUTHORS UNDERSTAND STORIES AS PARTIAL TRUTHS THAT OFFER VISIONS OF AND INSIGHTS INTO THE SITUATED MOMENTS IN WHICH THEY WERE CRAFTED AND ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE TOLD (RICE ET AL. 2020: 2019). THEREFORE, AS FEMINISTS INTERESTED IN STORYTELLING WE HAVE TO KEEP ASKING; 'HOW CAN WE DO STORYTELLING WHILE PREVENTING TO CREATE JUST ONE ALTERNATIVE STORY OR COUNTER-NARRATIVE?' AND 'HOW CAN WE MULTIPLY VOICES AND MAKE SPACE FOR NUMEROUS WOMEN TO BE PRESENT IN STORIES?'. MAYBE WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS EASILY, BUT WITH OUR STORIES WE CAN START A CONVERSATION AND GIVE SOME HINTS OF WHAT IT IMPLIES TO CENTRE AND PROLIFERATE WOMEN'S VOICES IN STORYTELLING.

TO BE CONTINUED...





## CONCLUSION

As we see how storytelling is increasingly used as a methodology in social sciences research, it is important to deepen the discussion about what storytelling entails and how it can be done. In this chapter, we have attempted to reflect on feminist storytelling by looking into what it means but more importantly by exploring how we can put this methodology into practice. By attending dinner together, being in dialogue with each other and drawing, we discussed essential elements of feminist storytelling, how it can be a useful research tool for feminists to write differently, and which other ways of listening to and sharing of stories we can use in research. We also reflected on storytelling as a way to challenge hegemonic narratives which are written based on the idea of objectivity and universality in science. More so, we pointed out that feminist storytelling might help feminists to achieve change.

We conclude that storytelling, from a feminist perspective, is necessarily an active and interactive practice that usually includes diverse women being together. We also established that an essential element while writing stories, is leaving space for the imagination, which can result in the creation of new words and therefore new worlds. We found that interweaving a plurality of voices and knowledges can allow us to write our own stories based on our own terms and rules. In this process of creation, there are endless possibilities, which we have tried to illustrate in various ways in this chapter.

Due to its experimental nature, the chapter has put new questions on the table and opened new doors to keep exploring feminist storytelling. We wonder “why visuals are important in academic writing, especially now that we are constantly surrounded by images?” and “how we can prevent the over exposition of readers to visuals?”. Simultaneously, we invite researchers who want to use visual arts not to fall into the trap of treating readers as “incapable of understanding complex thoughts”. Rather, we hope that they are used to enhance the reflective process and communication of research findings.

In addition to the already mentioned questions, we would like to know “how feminist storytelling can be used as a methodology when working in larger groups?” and “how feminist storytelling can be done when we are unable to meet people in person?”. These questions are specifically informed by the current context in which Covid-19 is making it difficult to meet in person.

Finally, and needless to say, this chapter has been a learning process for its authors. What you, as a reader, see in this chapter is only a snapshot of all the conversations we have had while working on it. We wholeheartedly enjoyed the process of writing/drawing this chapter together. During this work, we asked questions, imagined, drew and challenged each other. While doing all of this, we learned about the complexities of feminist storytelling as a methodology and we explored how to use visual arts in research. In our experience, feminist storytelling entails more than just the act of creating stories and writing them down, it is an interactive, reflexive and deep process that requires creativity, vulnerability and a will to maintain a critical and collaborative praxis.

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