

VILLEDA

The Story of a Cry

In Mexico the *telenovelas*¹ on my television, the radio broadcasting, right- or left-wing newspapers, friends' social media, my telephone, our texts and emails are always talking about violence—people found dead, missing people, people getting killed. The lyrical phrase, “They were taken alive, we want them back alive” (“Vivo se lo llevaron, vivo lo queremos”) is commonplace in Mexico. The channels of communication send out a flood of this cry. People talk about it all the time. And, unfortunately, I won't be the exception. I am talking about this undeniable fact, too.

We are living by numbers. The official ones say: “Eleven people go missing every day in Mexico” or “25,955 people have gone missing in Mexico since the launch of Drug War in 2006.”² This data is inaccurate, since a large number of cases are not reported, and law enforcement maintains a delusion of utopia. Therefore, we have unofficial numbers. Eleven people is the number of my family members. These 25,955 disappeared people could fill up a stadium to watch the final soccer match. How many have been found? Nobody is saying. And we have other missing numbers which are so painful for us. For example, approximately 60 million indigenous peoples died during the conquest of Mexico. That is extermination. Or, being politically correct: a genocide. “Oh, but that was a long time ago,” insists the government while implementing intercultural bilingual schools for children who are actually dying from hunger. Let's talk about recent massacres: The Dirty War (an internal conflict in Mexico between the Mexican government and left-wing student and guerrilla groups in the 1960s and 1970s), Tlatelolco (the massacre of students in 1968, the same year of the World Cup and Olympic Games in Mexico), The Corpus Christi Massacre, (the massacre of students in 1971), Aguas Blancas (the massacre of farmers in 1995), Acteal (a massacre of indigenous people), Tlatlaya (a killing of civilians), Ciudad Juárez and Ecatepec (female homicides, but wait—as women, we do not matter in a country where misogyny and machismo is a celebrated and chronic social disease).

I can keep on counting, but we do not know the numbers. But I have the words. Words with different meanings now. The most painful for me is *cachitos*.³ I find this word untranslatable in English. *Cachitos* in my country, where you can be walking above a clandestine grave, could stand for “fragments of bones,” “small amount of flesh,” “bit of death.” A *cachito* could be a fingernail or the stirrup bone. But when someone delivers you the smallest bone in the human body, not from your beloved one but anyone else, how can you grieve a *cachito* of a mistaken body as a result of negligent investigations? How can we make remembrances of victims that are under the category of “unclaimed dead bodies?” And also, when will you have time for mourning when you have to do the work of the police, who never presume the death of missing persons?

This is *la Chingada*! Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* explains: “Who is the Chingada? Above all, she is the Mother. Not a Mother of flesh and blood but a mythical figure. The Chingada is one of the Mexican representations of Maternity, like La Llorona or the “long-suffering Mexican mother” we celebrate on the tenth of May. The Chingada is the mother who has suffered—metaphorically or actually—the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her name.”

¹ Similar to the soap operas.

² Only 2 percent of the open missing-person cases are thought to be connected with organized crime.

³ “Really small pieces.”

How hard is it to mourn a missing person? When there is no body as physical proof of death, you can hope that the missing are still alive. When there is no body, who are you burying? Nowadays, I am working on a short story for children about this “ambiguous” loss with an illustrator. The title is “Ma” (the word for “Mommy” in Spanish), and it is about *cachitos*.

Mommy

They even took my teeth.

They didn’t even leave my mommy a *cachito* to bury me.

My mommy doesn’t know, but my little brother ain’t teething at all. He’s got all his teeth, but they chopped me into *cachitos*.

Cachitos for the Bigwig.

They took my last molar, crushed it into *cachitos*, and sold it to the Bigwig.

They took my fangs, crushed them into *cachitos*, and sold them to the Bigwig.

They took out all of my teeth, crushed them into *cachitos*, and sold them to the Bigwig.

My brother sold me for a handful of chicken livers. He has snorted me, almost entirely, and now dances a *norteña*.⁴

In the desert, our tongues carry the dust and the remaining *cachito* of me sticks to my mommy’s eyes. She wipes the tears away with a braid so long it reaches her ankles.

“This braid is as long as my guts,” says Mommy.

She will keep this *cachito*, but none of her children, anymore.

Original in Spanish:

Ma

Se llevaron hasta mis dientes.

No le dejaron ni un cachito a mi Ma pa’ enterrarme.

Mi Ma no lo sabe pero mi hermano, el menor, llora de dientes para afuera. Él tiene todos los dientes y a mí me hicieron cachitos.

Cachitos que llevaron al Pez Gordo.

Me sacaron mi última muela y la hicieron cachitos pa’ vendérsela al Pez Gordo.

Me sacaron los colmillos y los hicieron cachitos para vendérselos al Pez Gordo.

Me sacaron toditos los dientes y los hicieron cachitos para vendérselos al Pez Gordo.

Mi hermano me vendió por un puñado de higaditos de pollo. Él me esnifo casi por completo y ahora baila una norteña.

En el Desierto, el polvo lo traemos la lengua y el cachito que quedó de mí se pegotea a los ojos de mi Ma.

Ella se limpia las lágrimas con su trenza que le llega hasta los tobillos.

“Esta trenza es tan larga como mis tripas,” dice.

Ella tendrá a este cachito pero a sus hijos nunca más.

⁴ Genre of Mexican music related to polka and corridos.