

## **Claudia Salamanca\***

### **THE VISUAL TRANSGRESSION IN THE IMAGE OF MS. WEIGEL\*\***

#### **Abstract**

This article is the analysis of a photograph released by the ELN guerrillas as proof that two of the seven foreign hostages, kidnapped at the Indian ruins "The Lost City" in the Sierra Nevada mountains (Colombia) on September 12, 2003, were alive. In this image, the German hostage Ms. Reinhilt Weigel is smiling, carrying an assault rifle AK-47, turning itself in what the author calls a transitory and transgressive image. This characterization is not only made by the content of the image but also by the disruption that it conceals in the apparent constituted sense of the femininity. The discussion that the author develops is the convergence of visual studies and gender issues, showing the different connections between image and body in the Colombian context in which different institutional forms use femininity as a significant. The article assumes the image not as a mere apparition or representation but as performance of identity looking through the image-body to establish an explanation that can go beyond a mere controversy of opinions to therefore enlighten the taboo of this entity.

**Keywords:** Femininity, Gender, Visuality, Taboo, Transgression, Performance, Identity, Body.

#### **Resumen**

El presente artículo es un análisis de la fotografía presentada por el grupo guerrillero ELN como prueba de supervivencia de dos de los siete extranjeros secuestrados en las montañas de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta en

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Colombia, en septiembre 12 de 2003. En esta imagen, la Señorita Alemana Reinhilt Weigel, sonríe y carga un rifle de asalto AK-47 convirtiéndose en una imagen que el autor clasifica como transitoria y subversiva; no sólo por su contenido sino por la disrupción que presenta en lo que es entendido por ciertos contextos como lo femenino. La discusión que el autor desarrolla es el entrecruzamiento de estudios visuales y cuestiones de género, mostrando las diferentes conexiones que existen entre cuerpo e imagen en el contexto Colombiano donde diferentes formas institucionales hacen uso de lo femenino como signifiante. En el artículo, se parte del supuesto de que la imagen no es una mera aparición o representación sino que esta se enmarca dentro del sentido de la performance e identidad. Este artículo busca ahondar en la imagen-cuerpo y sus usos para así establecer una explicación de su caracterización, a través de la imagen de la Srta. Weigel, que vaya más allá de lo aparentemente impropio de la esta.

**Palabras Clave:** Femenino, género, visualidad, tabú, transgresión, performance, identidad, cuerpo.

### **Ms. Weigel and her moment of Reality**

On November 26, 2003, I read in the website of one of the most important newspapers in Colombia the description of a controversial photograph regarding two foreign hostages of the ELN (*Ejercito de Liberación Nacional-Left wing guerrilla group in Colombia*) guerrillas. As I said, I "read." I read a description of a blonde German hostage, Ms. Weigel, smiling and carrying an AK47 assault rifle, posing with four ELN guerrillas and the Spaniard hostage Mr. Asier Huegun. I search in vain for the materiality of such a description. The German newspaper *Bild Zeitung* published the photograph with the headline: "Excuse me, who's the hostage here?" But at the moment of searching for the image on their website, it was already removed.

Many people collect stamps, others collect coins; I collect transitory images, images that either by vertical (official) or horizontal (socially or self imposed) censorship are taken away from our imagery and whose distributed and published duration is absolutely short. For example, the images of the US contractors whose bodies were burnt and hung from the bridge in Fallujah fall into this categorization. The transitory image is considered extremely hard for us to bear or even painful to see, reminding us the power of those moments

captured by the camera not only by its iconic value but also by its bodily contact. The image does not carry merely its instant of life; it is the constitutive of our ways of seeing ourselves. I am interested mainly in images where women carry the burden of representation and in this theoretical frame they create visual transgression by expressing a certain disruption in the apparently constituted sense of femininity. My approach in this paper, taking as my excuse the image of Ms. Weigel, is to converge visual studies and gender issues where representation takes us to the sacred violence remaining in the politics of the feminine pose.<sup>1</sup>

What makes an image unbearable? In some images the answer will be the taboo of the corpse and the violence inflicted upon it.<sup>2</sup> Here, I want to discuss what is taboo about a picture of a foreign hostage smiling to a camera carrying an AK47. Many people will answer that evidently her gesture was not politically correct. But even that political correctness needs to be explored. I want to stretch the question of representation of women in the Colombian war conflict as much as possible using the image of Ms Weigel that until this point of my discussion you haven't seen. Many images of women guerrillas have been circulating during the last couple years, however there are specificities in this image (Ms. Weigel) that make it a visual transgression and therefore transitory image as well. Where is the transgression here? What is the focal point of the image? Is this image a visual transgression for specific social groups in Colombia? What is the silence violence that this image presents, if it does so?

In order to respond to all those inquiries, I am going to make use of the arts of copy and representation as a visual artist. What you are going to see below belongs to the realm of the copy. Going back to the image of Ms. Weigel I have to say that finally I found it. The description of the image mentioned above also said that it was taken by a Reuters photographer. The image was displayed on Reuters Web site, again for a short period of time. It now rests on my hard drive and no matter how many times I email Reuters I have not found any response in regard of the permission for its publication. Finding the way to write and discuss an image whose presence is precisely absent I create a copy of Ms. Weigel moment of reality by making use of the sketchy pixel as the unit of my ideogram.



Fig. 1. "Copy of Nov. 26 2003" by Claudia Salamanca.<sup>3</sup>

And by presenting to you, my reader, this image, I want to inquire, is this copy a copy enough to be a visual transgression?<sup>4</sup> If we take as a starting point the idea of visual transgression bringing to our discussion the work of George Bataille in taboo and at the same time following the steps of argumentation developed by Michael Taussig in his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, I want to move between the

ambivalence developed by these authors; an ambivalence rooted in mutual dependence on taboo and transgression, copy and original, appearance and essence, and finally civilization and savagery.

### **Gendered Image: Transgression and Taboo**

Evidently any transgression starts from the premise of the existence of the taboo: if there is a taboo, there is a prohibition and hence the possibility of transgression. As I said before this image and its focal point signalled that the pose of Ms. Weigel is the center of my argumentation. If you as my reader go to any image search engine and type Ms. Weigel+hostages+ELN you will find instances of this image which are reframed. The frame over the initial picture remarks the direction of the gaze. The recomposed images that I have found of this already frame of the Colombian reality put a Ms. Weigel as the center of the photo, usually leaving out the far right guerrilla woman in the picture. It seems that all what can be feminine is absorbed here by the pose, the blonde hair and the assault rifle of Ms. Weigel. It is not strange this dynamic in the matters of representation. Taboos and representation revolve around the image of the corpse and the exposure of the sexualized female body.<sup>5</sup> However, if we try to unmask those taboos in the image of Ms. Wiegel they are not that obvious.

Women and their images in the Colombian conflict, as in many other war conflicts around the world, are typified under certain roles like the victim, the mother, and the free guerrilla fighter among others. I see that these proliferations of images are not fantasies or mechanical reproductions of ideal typologies of women in specific contexts. They are a plurality of subject positions that cohabit through circulation of meanings and sets of beliefs to which I have developed a certain interest. Those images play with fictions and realities; they have in common the deployed notions of women within discourses and institutions that fix women as certain actors and womanhood as an evident cohesive signifier for those specific institutional forms. Different images of women have captivating different sectors of the Colombian society. Just to remember some of them, it comes to my mind the investment in the economy of appearances<sup>6</sup> that took place in the 80's and 90's where many of

the drug lords were seeing accompanied by models, winners and participants of different pageants, from Miss Sugar Cane to Miss Colombia, as a sign of respect and high class status. Those imagery investments and perverse fascinations are continually renewed. They are not stagnant; to the contrary they are permanently in flow.

The image as an entity attests beyond its immediacy and moment of reality. I am not implying that there is some structure beyond its fluidity. For example we cannot say that the free guerrilla fighter-women is a development of the suffering mother implying certain patterns of continuity. Is the mother a pre-form of consciousness for the female warrior? Or is the top model a figure in between? No, they coexist in a field of power relations. They are not a temporal continuity of the internal transformation of the individual.<sup>7</sup> To examine these images, it requires, in the other way around, a spatial study of these power relations embedded in this set of images (images of mother, female warriors, and victims), not only the use of spatial metaphors. It is necessary to engage our inquiry in spatial relations between women, in which different discourses coexist and contest themselves. The mother, the independent woman, the model, the myth of the Colombian beauty (natural or not natural), the female guerrilla, the maid, and the female peasant are all present within an imaginary of woman in Colombia. They invent the imaginary and the imaginary creates them. As I said before, I do not take an approach from a tempo-continuity development of the subject; they coexist in dynamic relations of flow of meaning, which is not stable nor are their subjectivities. We cannot speak of the image of Ms. Wiegel as a particular and dismembered event of the Colombian female body. Her body is constructed through a mutual gaze even with the one of the guerrilla woman posing in the right part of the photograph.

Diane Nelson in her study of Guatemala<sup>8</sup> presents the relational terms in which body politics are developed. She chose to call this process "Bodies that splatter." These relational terms of identification obey to mutual gazes and power differentials that overlap and are developed by the pose of the other. Their identifications splatter onto each other. Nelson explains the body politics that rest under the image of *mujer maya* as a representational marker for the concept of the nation in the quincentennial Guatemala. While the

ruling class in Guatemala invests in the notion of *mestizaje*, “un solo pueblo” ‘one single people’ meaning no Indians, and reiterates the process of blood cleansing, the image of *mujer maya* remains as a semantic mark in the construction of the nation. This ambivalence is the one that I am particularly interested. Images of *mujeres mayas* develop identities that rest beyond their bodies; they are marked through what Nelson calls *ethnostalgia* in which the Indian body is a particular site of possibility (just remember Rigoberta Menchu) but also for discipline and violence (rape and sexual abuse as part of the whitening of the race). The mother, the victim, and the woman guerrilla carry relational markers embedded in body politics. They are not isolated from each other. The ambivalence that the work of Nelson presents does not respond to an external figure of power. When the image of Ms. Weigel was released to the public, the first and easy explanation for her posture was that she was pressured and forced to pose by her captors. Newspapers like *Tagesspiegel* suggested that “*maybe*, she was forced by her captors to pose in such a way” (my emphasis). That *maybe* haunts us. These type of explanations move into that external figure of power, however these body politics that I use in this paper also adhere to pleasure and pain<sup>9</sup> that arouse (using a sexual figure) also within. The process of identification, or performance of the self is as painful as it is pleasurable.

Walter Benjamin saw the revolutionary power that lies in images and objects that are close to the “mass culture.” He envisioned in them not the corrupt power of capitalism but the potentiality of desire, and transformation in which “there could not be revolutionary will without a pictorial representation.”<sup>10</sup> Benjamin explains that there is a representational contestation that as Marxist is embedded in a class–conflict. He sees in those instances of struggle an image that is developing through a dialectical moment unfolding meanings that can overwhelm the masses, not in a transparent way (emitter–receiver) but in a latent, psychoanalytical, incomplete and powerful way. I am interested in the connection that Benjamin established between the imaginary, the dream, the myth, and the moment of its materialization through the awakening rooted in the body. The dream is significant, not only as a path for the unconscious but as part of an awakening body moment, as performance. It is in the body where the awareness of the dream–image takes place.

The relationship between the body and the dream objects/images acquires in Benjamin a collective materiality in the most Marxist tradition. If the body is the materiality of those images, in regard to violence inflicted through the image, what collective body is this visual feminine pose creating?

Every appearance or disappearance, momentary disruption, evokes itself and its other. Benjamin clearly explored the power of the image and its awakening in the body. This Benjamin body, this materiality of the revolutionary power, runs over Judith Butler's theory of gender, in which the construction of the gendered body occurs by repetition and reiteration. For Judith Butler, gender is constructed from discontinuous repetitions of acts constituting a constructed identity through a series of performative accomplishments that for the social field and even for the actors themselves are embraced as a mode of belief.<sup>11</sup> But those gendered bodies are being constructed and at the same time are also being undone. They flow as an effect of power, a power not central or vertical; power understood as a productive effect. If we consider on one side the materiality of the revolutionary power of Benjamin's theory that is rooted in the body through performance and on the other hand, following Butler's constructivist argument, in which gender is an impersonation and that becoming gendered is an impersonation of an ideal that nobody inhabits,<sup>12</sup> can we say that those gender-image transgressions might be read as Benjamin's awakening of instances of subversive performativity of gender? Is the taboo and transgression of Ms. Weigel a disruption in that repetition-reiteration of the Colombian gender construct? And if that is so, should we ask now what is the Colombian gender construct?

### **The Mirror**

There is no image without its mirror. Once, while I was fixing my hair in a hot afternoon waiting for the metro, a black old woman seating beside me told me, "we look like if we had a mirror in front of us all the time." The performance of being seen in which we contemplate ourselves from outside but developed from within is what Walter Benjamin called mimesis: that compulsion to become *Other*.<sup>13</sup> This capacity of *Othering* is the one that Taussig situates in the colonial frame of power relations.<sup>14</sup>



There is no pose without the previous assertion and intention of identification, moments in which you look at me in the way that I want to be seen. The pose, more than an awareness of the mirror in you, my other, is a constant performance of the theatre of the pose. I work my pose, my modes of identification through the eyes of the other in which I reflect myself. But this process of seeing myself through your eyes occurs by my continuous impersonations that are actually modes of belief.

The pose is not only a matter of depiction detached from the body as just a momentary appearance. The performance is rooted in the body with its transgressions and inflictions. Feldman states that the infliction of violence is also an iconic capture made by weaponry, mimetic machinery and by discourses as well. He argues that violence creates its aesthetics. They intersect in a realm of ambivalence where image and its depictions not only portray violence but are also the source of it.

The first time I saw a customs declaration for videotapes, I was struck by the possibility of pain and threat that official documents attribute to imagery. The declaration read: "I/We declare that the film(s)/video(s) contain no obscene or immoral matter advocating or urging treason or insurrection against the United States, nor any threat to take life or inflict bodily harm upon any person in the United States." The video declaration testifies to the possibility of harm that the image carries not only by its iconic value but also by its bodily contact. But embedded on and living in what has been giving to ourselves as a world only to be read as a picture-spectacle,<sup>15</sup> and in which any possibilities for dreaming and awakening are undermined under the position of a detached observer, he face the necessity to set other plots out of that top-bottom gaze upon the objects, out of that vertical gaze over the world, referred to by Martin Jay as "the Cartesian perspectivalism." This apparent contradiction between a Benjamin who confers to mass culture images and objects the possibility for revolution and a Heidegger for which the world has turned into this detached realm in which man puts himself against nature seems irreconcilable. But thinking of the image of Ms. Weigel as a visual transgression rooted in her body, I want to present her image as that precise moment in which by the mimetic faculty, through mimetic machines, the distance from body and

image is broken. It opens that moment of contact in which the eye is turned also into a sense of tactility, bringing the unconscious into consciousness. This moment of awakening of the body turn itself into a transgression, a transitory image. The image of Ms. Weigel cannot be spectacle; it needs to be removed. The perfect mirror is water; a mirror that is both image and reflection can come closer and closer, crossing the boundary of the screen resulting in bodily contact. But again what were the objects of contact?

### **The Pose**

Allen Feldman in his study of aesthetics of terror in Northern Ireland points out that the pose is a moment that "is frequently a gendered and politicized event."<sup>16</sup> Drawing from Mary Ann Doane,<sup>17</sup> he points out that the camera entails relations of power. It is the authority of the distant gazer that directs, observes, and fragments the scene. It is a vision constructed in the Cartesian dichotomy of body and mind where the mind is cleaned, and purified while the body is refashioned in the form of corpse, machine, worker, robot: the abandonment of the body in an alienated form. Weaponry, image, and its technologies testify to a certain scopic regime of violence. The intermix in which the image is indistinguishable from violence preserves a social landscape, a body in pain. Those moments attest for political agendas of representation and visualization.

The distant observer commands the construction of the scene, the framing, molding the object of representation. "Move to the left, yes that's right, now smile." Feldman calls this process of disciplining the body the politics of the pose. These sets of practices and relations of power have taken as their subject the female body, even when the subject is a man, the process is constituted through the feminization of the body.

This process of feminization, this moment of posing is a pre representational effort at the moment of infliction. There are aesthetics of violence that are performative acts of infliction. What we see in the media, videos, and photographs corresponds to a second representation in which the hostages, the bombarded town, and the bodies assaulted are embedded in stories; in this case they are made as visual narratives. They are recreations of the moment

of infliction. Ms. Weigel and her photo is not precisely the type of image that we expect from a hostage in the middle of the jungle. With this assertion it is implied the existence of a predetermined posture, a pre discursive form from the perspective of the subject position: hostage. Ms. Weigel evidently entered into a much broader female imaginary. Her pose undermines two instances of the institutional discursive apparatus. First, she is presented at the same time as the Other in the picture and one of us.

In his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig presents the magic curing figurines of the Cuna called *nuchus*. These figurines are carved wooden sticks whose representation portrayed spirits for protecting and curing. However, Taussig, by addressing different ethnographic studies, points out that the image carved do not represent Indians, to the contrary, those figurines are the copy of European types possibly from the seventeenth and eighteenth century judging by the kind of clothes they are wearing. Taussig shows the connection between magic and mimesis. Magic depends on contact and copy, meaning that by copying the evil spirits one can protect oneself from them. The magician understands that he can produce whatever effect he desires by just imitating it. Having this in mind, again I want to stretch this argument to Ms. Weigel's image. Her photograph portrays the other, she, imitating us. Like civilization imitating savagery.<sup>18</sup> The transgression of the photo is the dissolution of boundaries well established in the Colombian war conflict. While the government denies the existence of the conflict, presenting Colombia as the longest democracy in the continent and the most stable economy in Latin America with its specific scopic regime, the guerrilla attempt to override that government stability by the same means expressed by the visualization of another stability, the one of the conflict, rooted in the female body.

The government of President Andrés Pastrana in Colombia (1998-2002) opened a space for peace construction in January 1999 creating a table for negotiations with the rebel groups. In this frame, the government yielded 42,000 kilometres of Colombian territory, where the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) was allowed to establish their troops without military operations as the place for peace negotiations. We saw for the first time the expression of the guerrilla authority and their approach to civilians

and to the international and national press. The town San Vicente del Caguán was the place where the curiosity of many people was satisfied. One of the biggest shocks was to see so many women in the FARC's army, seeing them as beautiful but at the same time as soldiers. I have found many descriptions of female guerrillas by journalists where they express their astonishment at seeing them with polished nails, makeup, and excellent hairdos. FARC commanders were questioned on this matter, leading to the public knowledge of certain statistics: 40% of FARC Forces are women,<sup>19</sup> occupying various roles including those of soldier, public relations, and facilitator. When the commander Andrés Parías, spokesperson for the FARC, was interviewed<sup>20</sup> about women and FARC he said: "We also have our marketing strategy," and he continued, "Everybody is expecting to find ugly guerillas at the checkpoints, however what you see are beautiful women welcoming you!" Even though his remarks may be sarcastic, it is important to point out two phenomena underneath his statement. The first one is that the FARC has found out that by incorporating women into their ranks is not only a form for increasing labour force in their armies, but also a way for flowing within humanitarian discourses where the female guerrilla is fitted into essentialisms about being naturally creative, caring, nurturing, and peaceful changing the international perception of the rebel struggle. This marketing that the commander Parías emphasizes takes place in the use of humanitarian and feminist discourses. Second, the fact that she is welcoming you implies entering to a new space, psychological and physical. The checkpoints that commander Parías refers to have two specific purposes, one is to look for possible candidates for enrolment in their ranks,<sup>21</sup> and second, is to find possible hostages for kidnapping that represent funding for the guerrilla. Many discourses interweave here. There is the logic of capitalism on the contestation of women in the war-political economy of Colombia, but is that all?

The image of Ms. Weigel overloads the female imaginary displayed by the guerrilla. She is not only a woman, she is blonde, German, the Other, the external observer that in the moment of posture and performance of the theatre of the pose suddenly became us.

### The Story of Ms. Weigel

The ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*), the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia kidnapped eight backpackers that were visiting the Indian ruins "The Lost City" in the Sierra Nevada mountains on September 12, 2003. The seven hostages were foreign tourists that "ignored travel warnings for Colombia, the most violent country in Latin America and world's kidnapping capital, with more than 1400 abductions so far this year."<sup>22</sup> The rebels released a video testimony of three of the hostages, British Mark Henderson, German Reinhilt Weigel and Spaniard Asier Huegun where they explained the conditions of the hostages and the ELN's demands in order to release them. In this video Ms. Weigel was the main voice who was also "seen in separate shoots seated on a donkey, sitting down in a bowl of rice, banana and beef."<sup>23</sup> Not only did she present the demands of the ELN, but also she justified them by her experience in the area during the abduction. The mountains in this part of Colombia were surrounded by paramilitaries who control all traffic leaving or entering the area, stopping all supply lines and confining not only the ELN but the indigenous people as well. As a consequence there was hunger and the lack of medical supplies. The ELN demanded an international commission to explore, hear the Indian community, confirm the human rights violation, and subsequently make the paramilitaries move.

After two months the rebels announced that Ms. Weigel and Mr. Huegun would be released on November 24. For this purpose, the ELN took a picture as proof that Ms. Weigel and Mr. Huegun were alive in order to proceed with the respective humanitarian mission. The picture was taken by a Reuters' photographer and was delivered to the Colombian Army and the press. The surprise was that in the photo Ms. Weigel, as we have seen, is carrying an assault rifle, in contrast to the other hostage who is unarmed.

"Gen. Reinaldo Castellanos, commander of the Armed Forces joint operations division accused the rebels of trying to improve their image with the photograph, but said it backfired"<sup>24</sup> while on November 28, 2003, the ELN leader Dario Martinez in an interview by Reuters said that "this has been one of the *best political actions* we have carried out in years on the northern coast of Colombia," and he continued, "To the families of those who are still detained,

they should relax. The ELN is extremely responsible, *we respect human rights, and the moment we get the order, they will be freed*" (my emphasis).<sup>25</sup> The joy manifested by the ELN is portrayed in the video, the photographs, and the interviews. The ELN not only expanded the women imaginary with the image of the "motherish" female guerrilla caring for the hostages shown in the video; it also serves as a mythical and physical image related with a particular female form of redemption.<sup>26</sup> Ms. Weigel came to this Colombian female imaginary as a focal point of morality and as a messianic icon of apparent salvation but not for the morality of the mother, or the model, or the news anchor (major Colombian exportation), or the top Latin model or for the reality shows. She came and completed what the display of the female guerrilla had not achieved.

Even though I consider that the female figure in the guerrilla expresses a category of redemption, it is not in the religious sphere. Those usually accused of committing crimes against humanity are now being redeemed not only by the composure of female guerrilla in images noticed over the past four years, but now also by the image of the Other turned into a mirror: Ms. Weigel. Like the images of white saints and the Baby Jesus, Ms. Weigel is absorbed by the Colombian imaginary into a pretty dark war. She came to redeem the ELN, and they celebrated it. Possibly, by being the sole woman in the group, she was the only hostage, who received extra food, as seen explicitly on the video, and also the only one carried by a donkey during the exhausting walks through the mountains; they were like offerings. The internationalization of the conflict in Colombia has changed the images-spaces presented in the development of the conflict. Even though the conflict is still not fully internationalized,<sup>27</sup> images like the ones taken of Ms. Weigel amplify such condition.<sup>28</sup> This re-imagination of the discourse attempts to keep pace with an uncontrollable globalization, in which it becomes more difficult to create meaningful communities. Women become this imagery in the marketing of discourses transferring meaning in a world where a new space has developed in a delocalized world. The parts of the conflict in Colombia reorient their spaces through a new image market, women. In this disorienting space, the necessity of recognition by the reclamation of the imagination using the feminist discourse as a bridge for universality is manifested.

It is not unusual to find accounts against women in the guerrillas. Those accounts directly criticize their sexual behaviour. It is well known that the guerrilla does not encourage pregnancy in their ranks, and that it has a policy for contraception. In the article *The New Face Of The Arm Struggle, Guerrilla Women*, Karen Morón addresses the sexual role that women have in the guerrilla. She based her assertion on the necropsies practiced by *Medicina Legal* (The Colombian institution in charge of forensic medicine) on nine bodies of minors, ages 14 and 17 that died in combat between the Colombian army and the guerrilla. The necropsies revealed the presence of Inter-Uterine Devices in the bodies of these girls who were part of the mobile unit "Arturo Ruiz." She explains that they might have been subjected to sexual abuse due to the abnormal swollen genitals presented.

Here, sexuality interconnects the female body and war politics. The government (2002-2006) that appointed the first woman as Minister of Defense in the history of Colombia is the same one who is trying to demilitarize the feminine in the guerrilla through sexual politics. Through military actions against the guerrilla, the government of President Uribe captured "*Comandante Sonia*." She was the Chief commander of the FARC's Souther Unit in Caquetá. She is also accused of managing the FARC's finances as well as their narcotrafficking business. The military operation was issued at midnight. It was made up of eight helicopters, one hundred and twenty men from Armed forces, and personnel from the office of prosecution in Colombia (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*). What captures my attention about her, as portrayed by the press is not the exploration of her physical body but the presence of the State body and its means around her. I am not arguing that she is naturally innocent, pure, or that she should not be considered a threat, but it is interesting the shift of visibilities that sometimes hides or reinforces morality, and domination in the female Colombian body. The images of "*Comandante Sonia*" were paradoxically not focused on her body. The newspaper *El Tiempo* published a photograph in its website that presented her, but paradoxically she is precisely absent. What we see in this image is a truck, no windows and several policemen driving around her—the truck. Here the visibility that is marked is the one of the State instead of her body.

The same signifiers need to be corrected again, and the formula is by exploring their bodies. The political economy that initiates a visibility in the female body is the one who needs to veil it through a medical gaze (autopsies to female guerrillas) not for the pleasure of visibility but in the dissection of the corpse, or to hide it through the display of the state apparatus (capture of "comandante Sonia"). Ms. Weigel now has the Stockholm syndrome. It is how the government and the media have explained the photograph. For the State and the media she has to be sick under a mental condition. Her body can't be inspected or dissected. She is the sign of "the *Other* woman", the one outside of the country, the one who symbolizes the international humanitarian discourse that needs to be bought. On the video, she says, "Many people go hungry, as I recently experienced myself. It is cold they have no medicine and [...] the ELN is fighting to achieve some change," and her friend Asier Huegun echoes her "I call on the Colombian Government to give way a bit on the humanitarian issue, to allow the humanitarian commission to go in and show what's happening, the suffering in the Sierra Nevada."<sup>29</sup>

The process of beautification that the Colombian government and its institutions have undertaken by the display of Colombian female imaginary characterized by the perverse myth of fascination and explorations of the sexualize female bodies was extrapolated by the image of Ms. Weigel. The myth of the Colombian beauty that has reached the international imagery was copied by other trying to be us. The image of Ms. Weigel awakes my body, in that bodily contact pushing me to reclaim and questions my own impersonations in the middle of the apparent stability between civilization and savagery.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Allen Feldman, "Violence and Vision: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror." *Violence and Subjectivity*. ed. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> This image is part of the selected works for an exhibition called "The Odds." curated by Joe Ford at City Without Walls Gallery, Newark, New Jersey.



<sup>4</sup> Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of The Senses*. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting discussion on this topic see Salomon-Godou 2004.

<sup>6</sup> The term "economy of appearances" that I am using here does not have any relation with Anna Tsing's essay "Inside The Economy of Appearances." Her term refers to the use of spectacle in the global trade market. My use of economy implies evidently a trade and the word appearances is not implying a lesser degree of truth, but I need to emphasize that the concept of the appearances work in the way that the image is invoked. It is, it does not grow, it lives and it comes to being as magic.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 69.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound, Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and The Wild Man, A Study in Terror and Healing*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 200.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, Interview. "The body you want: An interview with Judith Butler by Liz Kotz." *Artforum* 31/3. (Nov. 1992) 82-89.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar." (Composed in Berlin early 1933). *New German Critique* 17 Spring (1979) 65-69.

<sup>14</sup> Taussig, *Shamanism*.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture." *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Feldman 61.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." *Yale French Studies* 60 Fall (1980) 33-50.

<sup>18</sup> Taussig, *Shamanism*.

<sup>19</sup> For this matter I referred to articles in newspapers and publications of International Red Cross.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Marón, "The New Face Of The Arm Struggle, Guerrilla Women." *International Red Cross* (2003) <[www.icrc.org/Web/spa/sitespa0.nsf/iwplist248/4E21432D9BD2F41EC1256D20031DA7](http://www.icrc.org/Web/spa/sitespa0.nsf/iwplist248/4E21432D9BD2F41EC1256D20031DA7)>.

<sup>21</sup> There are two versions of enrollment; one is that the FARC forces enrollment and the other is by voluntary decision.

<sup>22</sup> William Parra, "Tourist Hostages In Colombia Face Hunger, Fatigue." *Reuters Foundation AlertNet*. Nov. 22, 2003 <[www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)>.

<sup>23</sup> Parra, "Tourist Hostages."

<sup>24</sup> *News24.com*, Nov. 26, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Parra, "Marxist Rebels hail tourist kidnap success." *Reuters Foundation AlertNet*. Nov. 28, 2003 <<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N28166413.htm>>.

<sup>26</sup> Taussig, *Shamanism* 197.

<sup>27</sup> The conflict is calling the attention of the international community by touching the frontiers of the surrounding countries, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela, but also by the economical implications that the Colombian conflict pose to the Andean Community.

<sup>28</sup> Other example of images like Ms. Wiegel is the photograph of the three Americans hostages who were captured more than a year ago. The three Americans worked for an American Company hired to fumigate the coca fields in the south part of Colombia. During a fumigation campaign the rebels shot down their airplane and then they were taken hostage.

<sup>29</sup> *BBC Mundo*, Nov. 12, 2003.

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