

Haunting the stage: reclaiming women's agency through María Velasco's *Primera Sangre*

*Acechando el escenario: reclamando la agencia de las
mujeres a través de Primera Sangre de María Velasco*

María Herrera Cárdenas

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RESUMEN

Con la irrupción del movimiento #MeToo/#YoTambién, experiencias traumáticas de violencia contra mujeres y niñas fueron legitimadas públicamente, si bien de manera desigual y en un contexto de reacciones adversas. El movimiento amplió las voces de autoras que, de forma progresiva, han revelado experiencias que durante mucho tiempo habían sido silenciadas y borradas. En este contexto, la condición espectral del teatro permite la articulación, visualización y legitimación de lo invisibilizado. El espectro de la otredad se convierte así en un elemento constitutivo de la subjetividad de las mujeres y niñas, de modo que la alteridad funciona como una categoría central para pensar las condiciones de su supervivencia. La obra teatral *Primera Sangre* (2023), de María Velasco, plantea una reflexión sobre la evolución del movimiento #MeToo en los últimos años al relatar la historia real de una niña que fue secuestrada y asesinada en la década de 1990, un caso que fue archivado sin justicia. A través de estrategias líricas y performativas, Velasco reclama la memoria de mujeres y niñas cuyas vidas fueron arrebatadas y cuyas identidades quedaron relegadas al olvido. Al trasladar a escena la figura de la niña desaparecida, la autora convoca al fantasma del pasado, posibilitando la

María Herrera Cárdenas Postdoctoral Researcher at Bielefeld Universität (Germany) specialised in Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). I hold an International Double PhD in Languages and Cultures (Summa Cum Laude, Univ. of Jaén & Univ. degli Studi di Siena, with international distinction at Univ. Bordeaux-Montaigne). ORCID: 0000-0001-8591-2559.

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reclamación simbólica de la agencia de las mujeres y niñas. Asimismo, la obra evoca la figura menguante de la mujer, sugiriendo cómo el borrado sistémico opera mediante el silenciamiento y la reducción de la identidad femenina. De este modo, Velasco recupera formas de agencia deliberadamente eliminadas al desplazar la otredad desde los márgenes hacia el centro. Todo ello transmite un mensaje claro: perteneces, siempre perteneciste y no te olvidaremos. Así, el teatro funciona como un espacio de resistencia feminista y reparación, donde la memoria y la corporalidad se entrelazan para devolver presencia a las mujeres y niñas que fueron borradas de la historia.

Palabras clave: *Trauma, agencia, representación, memoria, violencia de género*

ABSTRACT

With the emergence of the #MeToo movement, women's experiences of trauma caused by violence against women and girls (VAWG) were publicly legitimized, though unevenly and amid backlash. In this context, the spectral condition of theatre allows for the articulation and visualization of what was previously rendered invisible. The spectre of otherness thus becomes a constitutive element of subjectivity itself. María Velasco's play *Primera Sangre* (2023) offers an account of how the #MeToo movement has evolved in recent years by recounting the real story of a girl who was kidnapped and murdered in the 1990s, a case that was archived without resolution or justice. Through lyrical and performative strategies, Velasco reclaims the memory of women and girls whose lives were taken and whose identities were relegated to oblivion. By bringing to the stage the figure of the missing girl, Velasco summons the ghosts of the past, enabling a symbolic recovery of agency. The ghost also evokes the diminishing figure of the woman, suggesting how systemic patriarchal erasure operates through the silencing and shrinking of women's and girls' identities. In this way, Velasco not only reclaims deliberately erased forms of agency but also amplifies the voices of the oppressed, bringing otherness from the margins to the center. Ultimately, the play conveys a clear message: you belong, you always did, and we did not forget you. Hence, theatre becomes a space of feminist resistance and reparation, where memory and embodiment intertwine to restore presence to women and girls who were once erased.

Keywords: *Trauma, agency, representation, memory, violence against women and girls*

1. CONTEXTUALISING THEATRICAL HAUNTING AND FEMINIST REPARATION

Emergent feminist reckonings in the wake of the #MeToo movement have rendered women's accounts of violence against women and girls (VAWG) publicly legible, altering the cultural conditions under which trauma can be spoken, believed, and legitimized. Yet, visibility alone does not guarantee justice. Many cases remain institutionally archived without resolution or quietly forgotten, neutralised into a collective amnesia that reproduces the very violence it claims to acknowledge. Theatre offers a particularly powerful medium for staging what has been systematically erased. In response to the "*tremendously increased*" reports of VAWG, feminist theatremakers have urged the industry to take responsibility by platforming stories that confront what they describe as an increasingly "*overshadowed*" issue (Luckhurst, 2024). It is within this framework that *Primera Sangre* (2023), by María Velasco, engages with the real story of a girl who was kidnapped and murdered in Spain in the 1990s, a case that was archived without resolution or justice.

Unlike juridical or media narratives that demand resolution, theatre can sustain uncertainty, repetition, and unresolved absence as ethical positions. This article argues that *Primera Sangre* (2023), written and directed by María Velasco — a Burgos-born playwright and theatre director who holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication from the Complutense University of Madrid and a Degree in Dramaturgy from the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (RESAD), and whose work was awarded both the XXXI SGAE Jardiel Poncela Theatre Prize and the Spanish National Prize for Dramatic Literature in September 2024. The jury particularly praised the play's capacity to convey "with exquisite delicacy, the terror caused by the abuse and deaths of women and girls" (MAKMA, 2024), which mobilises theatrical haunting as a strategy for reclaiming women's agency through symbolic reparation. Positioned midway between memorial and

document, thriller and ghost story, *Primera Sangre* is an autofiction structured in nineteen titled sections whose headings alone constitute a symbolic map of girlhood under patriarchal violence: from *No echéis vuestras margaritas a los cerdos* – a subversion of Matthew 7:6 that reclaims the dehumanising logic applied to girls' bodies – through *Quien no se haya escondido tiempo ha tenido*, *Primera sangre*, *Necesidades especiales*, *Las penas saben nadar*, *Los 40 criminales*, 'In Heaven', *La prueba del pañuelo*, *rosas y luceros*, *Chicho me toca*, *Rueda de prensa*, *Primera comunión*, 'Who is afraid of the big bad wolf', *Día de muertos o Halloween*, *Cultura de la violación*, 'Collige, virgo, rosas', *Dejad que las niñas se acerquen*, *Flores de un día*, 'Delirium tremens', to 'Where have all the flowers gone?'. *Desierto florido*. Together, these titles weave a lexical and intertextual network that spans children's games, Catholic ritual, popular song, classical Latin poetry, medical terminology, and mass culture: each one encoding a distinct mechanism through which girls' bodies are regulated, shrunk, silenced, or consumed. This formal organisation stages the systemic nature of VAWG as an accumulation of cultural scripts rather than a sequence of isolated events, making dramaturgy itself the vehicle through which theory is articulated.

Velasco's play unfolds through five characters whose interactions trace a multidirectional critique of rape culture. Three of them are girls: Laura, the murdered girl who returns as a *revenant*, able to articulate her story *post mortem*; María, the author's own childhood self, bound to Laura by an indissoluble affective tie; and Zaira, a neighbour who confronts the same trauma with a vital, defiant resilience. The two adult characters, the police commissioner in charge of the unresolved case, who undergoes a profound transformation throughout the play, and a Franciscan nun-educator, embody the institutional and pedagogical structures through which fear and obedience are normalized in rape culture. Laura's spectral return actively interpellates each of these figures, challenging the commissioner's procedural detachment, the educator's disciplinary silencing, and her peers' ongoing negotiation of danger and freedom (MAKMA, 2024).

Through lyrical and postdramatic strategies that combine dialogue, monologue, poetic text, choreography, and scenic installation, including the sculptural work of artist Enrique Marty, whose osario-altar extends the play's ritual logic into the scenic space, Velasco constructs a dramaturgy in which the ghost is not a metaphor but a political grammar, one through which the erasure of women and girls is staged, contested, and refused.

Through her spectral address, the character of Laura confronts figures that condense key social roles: the community of her peers, the institutional authority that archived the case, and the pedagogical structures through which fear and obedience are normalised. In this sense, Laura's posthumous voice is staged as an address to social positioning, or to positions of power and exclusion. By summoning the figure of Laura, who in reality was Velasco's contemporary: "Tenía la misma edad que Laura, la niña desaparecida (luego asesinada) y estaba aprendiendo a distinguir lo conocido de lo desconocido y el temor de la temeridad" (MAKMA, 2024), the play foregrounds a shared temporal and generational proximity. This argument structures the article's engagement with theatre, spectrality, archive, and feminist politics.

The distinction between institutional forgetting and ethical remembrance is articulated with particular force in the play, where the character of María recalls having forgotten "cómo hacer la raíz cuadrada," as well as "las oraciones que me enseñaba una vieja con visones muertos alrededor del cuello," and even "los afluentes del Duero y algunas capitales del mundo." However, these forms of traditionally learned, disciplinary knowledge are explicitly contrasted with the persistence of affective memory: "los detalles de tu desaparición permanecen indelebles en un lugar de la memoria donde juegan a la rayuela los primeros recuerdos" (Velasco, 2023, pp. 22–23). Memory here is not organised according to institutional hierarchies of value, yet according to ethical attachment. This distinction resonates with Marianne Hirsch's theorisation of *postmemory*, the deep

affective relationship to traumatic experiences that precede one's own birth yet are transmitted so powerfully as to constitute memories in their own right (Hirsch, 2012). Similarly, Raphael Samuel's reinforces this idea by providing an understanding of memory as a living, culturally embedded practice that actively resists the ordering logic of official history (Samuel, 1994). In this sense, in *Primera Sangre*, memory operates precisely in this register: as affective and political commitment that refuses closure. Hence, Velasco resists oblivion by configuring memory as an affective and political commitment that refuses closure and, in doing so, resists oblivion.

The global "movement against sexual harassment and violence" #MeToo¹ has changed the way women's testimonies circulate (Tambe, 2018, p. 198). Within the Hispanic theatrical context, this shift has generated a significant body of documentary and verbatim theatre that stages sexual violence as a collective and political matter. A paradigmatic example is the play *Jauría* (2019), devised by Jordi Casanovas and directed by Miguel del Arco, which reconstructs the trial transcripts of La Manada case, in which a woman was gang-raped during the San Fermín festival in Pamplona in 2016, staging the judicial language itself as a site of institutional violence against the victim. Like *Primera Sangre*, *Jauría* insists that the theatrical frame can expose what legal and media narratives systematically obscure: the structural conditions that enable sexual violence and the mechanisms through which victims are discredited, delegitimized, silenced, or blamed.

¹ The multiple temporalities of the #MeToo movement become evident in national contexts. In France, renewed momentum followed the publication of *Le Consentement* (2020) by Vanessa Springora, entered a period of relative dormancy, and has recently resurfaced with widespread public support around the Pelicot case. Similarly, in Spain, the case of *La Manada* is cited as a peak moment within the country's #MeToo reckoning: "El #MeToo o el caso de 'la manada' han propiciado una ruptura histórica del silencio de las mujeres sobre la violencia sexual que mueve la cuarta ola feminista" (Requena Aguilar & Borraz, 2018). Nonetheless, the subsequent emergence of many more cases demonstrates that such moments do not mark final resolution but shed light on VAWG as a systemic issue. These repetitions expose rape culture as a global issue, ingrained in daily practices and social norms.

As Tambe notes, digital platforms have played a crucial role in enabling collective disclosure, exemplified by the three-million-strong Facebook group *Pantsuit Nation*, where hundreds of thousands of women shared experiences of misogyny. Such spaces illustrate how digital environments can function as comparatively safer arenas for women's testimonies regarding VAWG, particularly when institutional channels remain inaccessible or hostile. Nevertheless, silence continues to protect perpetrators. As Jana Leo observes, "the victim is punished twice: first by the rapist, and then by society. Pushing a rape survivor into silence is complicity with the perpetrator" (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. iii). From this perspective, cultural forgetting is not passive but actively sustained through juridical-institutional dismissal and social normalization. It is precisely against this enforced silence that Velasco's theatrical haunting becomes operative. In the play, Laura—also staged as a ghost—operates simultaneously as an aesthetic device and a political grammar. On the one hand, she materialises systemic erasure, the ways in which female identities are silenced, reduced, and made to disappear within patriarchal structures. On the other, she enables a recuperation of agency through memory, voice, and embodied return. Spectrality thus becomes not a sign of passivity or victimhood, but a mode of insistence that refuses their disappearance.

This article adopts an intersectional feminist analytical framework grounded in girls and women's lived experience and feminist critiques of rape culture. Concepts and definitions associated with *rape culture* are therefore not employed as neutral analytical tools, but rather as a critical baseline from which to expose and contest the misogyny embedded in the trivialization of VAWG. The terminology surrounding sexual violence is key since it actively shapes what can be named, visibilised, and ultimately legitimized. For this reason, I rely on the work of feminist scholars, such as Susan Sontag, Sarah Ahmed, Laura Mulvey, and Adrienne Rich, who have persistently committed to revising and correcting a language that perpetuates structural VAWG.

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey (1975) introduces the concept of the male gaze and sketches the possibility of a feminist counter-gaze; this provides a key point of departure for my reading. This framework is particularly pertinent when considered alongside the staging of *Primera Sangre* as directed by Velasco herself; a deliberate authorial choice that extends the feminist counter-gaze from the page to the scene. The production, co-produced by the Centro Dramático Nacional (CDN), the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and Pecado de Hybris, premiered at the Sala Francisco Nieva of the Teatro Valle-Inclán in Madrid in April 2024. Velasco's dual role as playwright and director ensures that the spectral and political logic of the text is not mediated through an external interpretive gaze but embodied and controlled by the same feminist vision that wrote it. The CDN has documented this dimension of the work extensively through its own YouTube channel, where interviews with Velasco offer insight into her dramaturgical and directorial decisions. Furthermore, on 1 April 2024, the CDN organised a colloquium at the Sala El Mirlo Blanco of the Teatro Valle-Inclán, coordinated by Velasco herself, under the title "*Ser niña en los 90. Vislumbres sobre el miedo y el deseo*" – a title that crystallises the generational and affective stakes of the play. Taken together, these para-theatrical materials – the production, the interviews, and the colloquium – constitute an expanded critical field that expands beyond the dramatic text itself, contextualising *Primera Sangre* as a feminist cultural event whose significance exceeds any single performance. I use here the female gaze as a reversal of power dynamics, as well as an epistemological stance that validates women's lived realities. By resisting patriarchal demands for women's narrative closure, I insist on ethical accountability in representation.

Within this framework, alterity is theorised as a structural condition produced through purposeful erasure, exclusion, and regimes of differential recognizability, positioned as "not yet" part of the masculine centre and "no longer" part of the feminine margin (Brinker-Gabler & Endres, 1992, p. 236). In

Primera Sangre, otherness is enacted through spectrality: the ghost represents those lives perceived as socially unintelligible, institutionally disposable, and affectively marginal within rape culture. The ghostly figure of Laura thus embodies a mode of subjectivity in which women's survival depends on the capacity to occupy spaces, remain, interrupt linearity, and demand visibility and recognition from the margins. Accordingly, alterity becomes a site of resistance through which women's erased narratives re-enter the social field as ethical demands. As Jana Leo notes, women writing autobiographically about rape consistently assert four fundamental claims: "1) I have been raped; 2) it was rape; 3) it was not my fault; and 4) it had an effect on me." To write – and to write about those who write – is therefore not merely testimonial but archival: "another step forward; another act of disobedience against patriarchal repression" (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. x). Thus, women's writing on rape culture operates at a metatextual level, transforming individual acts of documentation into a collective archive that expands the personal while gaining historical and political value.

As Leo further insists, this resistance begins with how women's narratives of sexual violence are received, resisted, or validated – not only within activist spaces, but within the institutional settings that most systematically silence them (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. xi). In the foreword to *Rape Narratives That Paved the Way for #MeToo: The Crack in the Wall*, Jana Leo frames feminist intervention as a practice of rupture, aimed at "processing and trying to break the cycle, thus preventing further violence" (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. xi). In this article, I take Leo's proposition as a methodological and ethical imperative, approaching interruption not as a metaphor but as a feminist strategy that actively resists narrative closure, institutional containment, and cultural forgetting.

Feminist scholars have exposed that the #MeToo movement disrupted the

unbearable conditions that historically enabled women's voices to be dismissed or ignored (Backe, 2018). Founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, #MeToo originally emerged as a survivor and victim-centred framework grounded in shared experience and recognition (Burke, 2018). As Mendes and Ringrose observe:

The difference with #MeToo as a networked movement across continents isn't that the silence has finally been broken, but that, due to the volume and mass of response, the wider public are beginning to listen and take seriously what (some) victims are saying. (Mendes & Ringrose, 2019, p. 41)

This change has reconfigured rape culture. The imperative to "believe women", which has begun to gain wider cultural legitimacy, is now understood as a refusal to presume dishonesty or fault. As Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kathryn Higgins argue, the economy of believability necessary for sexual justice:

Is not an economy that centers women as inherently believable subjects, but, rather, one that registers the ubiquity of sexual violence in the lives of women and feminized subjects – a demonstrable empirical fact – as the historical context for such struggles, and so an important context for women's believability. (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023, p. 76)

This paradigmatic shift challenges the *Cassandra effect*² within rape culture: the persistent structural tendency to discredit women's testimonies even when they are corroborated. This affective hierarchy of memory determines what is considered worth remembering and what is forgotten. Hence, this epistemic form of VAWG is precisely what *Primera Sangre* re-stages scenically as a feminist counter-archive.

2. AFFECTIVE POLITICS, ARCHIVES, AND IMPUNITY

Building on feminist accounts of rape culture as a network of everyday scripts,

² In *The Cassandra Complex* (1988), Laurie Layton Schapira referred to the systematic disbelief or dismissal of women's testimonies despite their accuracy or truthfulness, particularly in contexts of VAWG. The term draws on the mythological figure of Cassandra, who was condemned to foresee the truth but never be believed. Within rape culture, this effect operates by framing women's accounts as exaggerated, unreliable, or motivated by ulterior interests, thereby sustaining institutional and social impunity.

institutional habits, and affective norms, this article approaches *Primera Sangre* through the lens of affective politics and epistemic violence: the shared emotional conventions that organise credibility, distribute empathy, and regulate whose suffering becomes intelligible (Gilbert-Hickey, 2019, pp.1-2). From this perspective, bureaucratic dismissal rarely manifests as overt hostility; more often, it takes the form of procedural calm and skeptical neutrality. Victims are questioned, required to provide impossible proof in order to obtain institutional protection, and women's testimonies are treated as dubious or suspicious. As Tambe declares: "for victims of sexual trauma, it is already painful to watch perpetrators roam free because of how high the burdens of proof are in legal cases" (Tambe, 2018, p.198). As a result, sexual violence against women and girls (VAWG) is reproduced precisely because this cruelty is made to feel normal, digestible, and archivable, lacking impunity for the perpetrators.

As Jana Leo emphasizes, sexual violence is rendered socially intelligible in ways that actively enable impunity. She identifies three mechanisms to redirect shame towards women:

With the hope that it can go unpunished, the aggression is passed off as something else. First, the construction of an alternate reality helps the perpetrator to feel guilt-free, so understanding rape as a form of sex allows a person to get away with rape. Second, social judgement will support one side or the other of the story (e.g., Gay in *Hunger* talks about how nobody will believe that her boyfriend and her friends had raped her). Third, the assault can easily go unpunished when power is involved and it happens within a bubble. For many, the relationship between victim and rapist (husband, boyfriend, or father) makes it unthinkable that hurt can take place. (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. xi)

Leo's formulation sheds light on the discursive distortion of rape culture as well as the affective infrastructure that sustains it. Silence functions here as a protective shield for perpetrators, while shame is displaced onto victims through skepticism, disbelief, and moral scrutiny. Breaking this silence reorients affective

responsibility by shifting attention from isolated testimonies to the structures that cause them. When women's lived experiences are articulated publicly and collectively, sexual violence is no longer seen as an individual misfortune but recognised as a systemic condition. It is precisely this shift – from the individual to the collective, from shame to accountability – that feminist movements such as #MeToo have opened up by transforming disconnected narratives into a shared political grammar. As Leo further notes, “one way to achieve accountability about sexual violence is through sharing and storytelling” (Leo, as cited in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. x). *Primera Sangre* extrapolates this logic to the theatrical sphere. By exposing Laura's unresolved case of VAWG, Velasco amplifies individual experience into collective witnessing, clarifying that what has been silenced cannot become forgettable.

Drawing on Lauren Berlant's theorisation of attachment, as developed by Ben Anderson, rape culture can be understood as an affective economy actively upheld by promissory attachments. Attachment is “a special type of relation, through which an ‘object’ becomes promissory”, creating a sense of optimism that positions subjects according to lifestyles that feel sustaining, even though they are damaging (Anderson, 2023, p. 209). This is seen with popular culture – and particularly the mediated myths of romantic love – which circulate such promises, offering continuity, belonging, and emotional legitimacy under hurtful situations. Within this affective economy, VAWG becomes misrecognised as intimacy, endurance as love, and misogynistic abuse as an unfortunate yet tolerable cost of attachment. As Anderson adds, attachment is always accompanied by detachment – an “absent-present” condition that makes subjects and institutions remain invested while withholding accountability. As he emphasises, “every attachment happens alongside willed and unwilled, habitual and intentional detachment,” maintaining attachment by tolerating emotional distancing, denial, and administrative closure (Anderson, 2023, p. 218).

Together, Berlant's and Anderson's accounts help explain how affective attachments normalise misogynistic abuse at an institutional and cultural level. In this respect, Ahmed's work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) further illuminates how such attachments are institutionalised and gendered. In addition, Ahmed clarifies that emotions are not merely internal states but forces that "do things," connecting bodies with social norms and institutional spaces through the intensity of their attachments (Ahmed, 2014, p. 85). From this perspective, the affective regimes that reproduce rape culture operate through emotional investment. As a result, these mechanisms regulate what can be endured, ignored, or silently absorbed regarding rape culture within institutional and social life.

Berlant's definition of detachment supports the affective resistance that emerges when conventional norms are questioned. Detaching, she argues, occurs when a once promissory object "loses the sense that it offers a 'satisfying something'" – when it no longer holds out meaning, value, or coherence for those invested in it (Berlant, 2012, p. 99). In the context of rape culture, feminist actions and survivor-centred discourses disrupt the affective promise that has historically perpetuated patriarchal norms, rendering them as sources of legitimacy, sanity, or stability. As these affective attachments begin to unravel, the response is experienced not as relief but as threat. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection helps illuminate this moment of affective crisis, in which what has sustained identity becomes intolerable:

There looms . . . one of the violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1)

When considering rape culture, such moments of detachment and abjection tend to be socially experienced not as liberation, but as loss. As familiar and patriarchal values are challenged, attachments to established scripts of identity,

intimacy, and authority become anxiety-inducing sites of backlash (de Maricourt & Burrell, 2021, p. 1). Institutional responses tend to manage what feels like an affective revolution by restoring neutrality, procedural calm, and closure – mechanisms that ultimately work toward the re-stabilisation of an order perceived as under threat due to its challenged previous familiarity. Rather than confronting structural violence, such responses redirect attention toward skepticism, doubt, and reputational anxiety. This pattern is reflected in Nutbeam & Mereish’ s qualitative research on attitudes toward the #MeToo movement, which identifies six main findings:

- (1) invalidating the accusations made as part of the #MeToo Movement; (2) insisting, and likely believing, that accusations made were false; (3) claiming that there were alternative motives for those accusations; (4) showing a concern for the harm that accusations may cause those accused; (5) exhibiting concerns about the effects of the Movement on male power, privilege, and status; and (6) questioning the integrity of the #MeToo Movement as a whole. (2022, Abstract)

These reactions function affectively to normalise VAWG by reframing accountability as exaggeration, disruption, or threat. Such affective normalisation is deeply ingrained within what Cipriano Argüello Pitt describes as the cruelty of the adult world: a social order reproduced through the refusal to assume responsibility for its own harm and through the systematic oppression of those rendered vulnerable within it (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, p. 9).

In *Primera Sangre*, the stage contests the archive. Rather than reproducing institutional modes of documentation, Velasco’s play enacts what I conceptualise as a *feminist affective counter-archive*: “a living, embodied phenomenon where affective experiences can be preserved, reactivated, and actualized”, thereby legitimizing women and girls’ experiences of VAWG (Schankweiler, 2025, p. 1). Unlike institutional archives, which neutralise violence through documentation, procedural closure, and evidentiary logic, the affective counter-archive preserves affect as political material. It reactivates what has been archived without

resolution, refusing closure while sustaining memory as an ongoing ethical demand. This feminist counter-archive thereby displaces juridical proof with embodied presence, reframing evidence not as documentation but as affective address.

2.1 Affect, erasure and counter-scenic archive

Institutional responses to sexual VAWG rely heavily on archival practices that transform harm into files, procedures, and closed cases. In fact, erasure functions as an active process through which rape culture is removed from the collective imaginary. Against this regime of archival closure, feminist methodologies have articulated alternative practices that foreground affect, everyday experience, and marginalised forms of knowledge. As Alice E. Finden explains, counter-mapping the archive creates a generative space in which new knowledge can emerge from marginalised subject positions, revealing the decolonial and feminist potential of such methods (E. Finden, 2023, pp. 462–463). This approach is feminist not only because it adopts an intersectional understanding of colonialism and colonality as intertwined technologies of race, gender, sexuality, and class, but also because it centres the everyday and the affective—domains through which power operates most intimately and persistently. Feminist scholarship has long examined these registers, exposing how hidden and private spaces are regulated as sites of domination as well as how they can function as key locations of feminist and decolonial resistance (Lugones, 2007, 2010).

As Jana Leo insists, “the main problem in sexual assault is still men raping women” (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. x)—a powerful statement that redirects attention away from individualised narratives of victimhood and toward the action of rape itself as a structural practice ingrained in broader social, institutional, and affective regimes. In *Primera Sangre*, theatrical haunting performs this counter-archival function scenically. The prologue of *Primera Sangre* insists that such acts of VAWG cannot be approached from neutral

positions. As Argüello Pitt explains, “hablar de abusos... exige afrontar el dolor de manera implacable desde una posición de divergencia con lo dado” (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, p. 9). This divergence can be extrapolated to feminist refusals of institutional detachment, which supports Velasco’s strategy of sustaining absence as an ethical demand. He also notes that “the adult world is complicit in violence; the world has naturalised violence [against women and girls]”. This complicity in rape culture works through habits of perception. Within such regimes, erasure does not occur through forgetting alone, but through over-exposure without affective consequence. This process echoes what Susan Sontag describes in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003): the risk that repeated exposure to images of suffering transforms violence into spectacle, producing not ethical engagement but affective numbness. In this sense, memory works as an ethical choice. As Arguello Pitt further explores, “memory can be a cemetery or a reservoir, an ecosystem—it depends on what we decide to do with it” (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, pp. 10–11). *Primera Sangre* aligns itself with the latter possibility. This non-linear understanding of theatre anticipates the play’s central strategy: to sustain the recognition of girls’ and women’s erasure as an ethical and affective demand. In the prologue of this play, theatre and childhood are conceived as spaces of tension between emergence and disappearance, as the prologue states: “el teatro y la infancia son territorios de constante tensión entre lo que emerge y lo que desaparece” [...] “el presente y el pasado se vuelven uno, y de ahí su condición espectral” (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, pp. 7-8). The theatrical lack of temporal linearity resonates with Velasco’s refusal of narrative closure and reinforces its function as a feminist affective counter-archive.

3. WITNESSING, COPRESENCE, AND THE ETHICS OF SPECTATORSHIP

Rebecca Schneider suggests that the past, when replayed, is not necessarily offered to sight but to experience. In acts of re-enactment, witnessing does not

rely on visual mastery; rather, it takes the form of an embodied attention shaped by affective proximity. Spectators are positioned in a state of “not-quite-seeing,” where what is witnessed is less an image than an encounter with others’ attempts to recuperate a past that no longer exists (Schneider, 2011, p. 33). Witnessing, in Velasco’s play, is determined by a lack of clarity and a persistence of what remains unresolved. As Argüello Pitt exposes, journalistic discourse “trata los asesinatos como casos, anestesiando nuestros sentidos,” transforming death into spectacle and eroding collective empathy (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, pp. 10–11). Against this anaesthetisation, *Primera Sangre* provides evidence for what institutional narratives seek to close by situating the spectator within a space of sustained exposure. The play’s refusal of resolution prevents spectators from occupying the safe position of those who “know what happened.” Instead, they are compelled to stay with what cannot be fully assimilated since the ethical force of *Primera Sangre* resides in duration. Scenes linger without progressing toward narrative payoff, producing a temporal experience that mirrors the unfinished nature of the VAWG being staged. In addition, Velasco stages testimony through the vulnerable exposure of the girls’ bodies on stage. As noted in the official presentation of the production, “*Laura reaparece como fantasía o fantasma para interpelar a las vecinas de su edad (redefinir su relación con el peligro y la libertad sexual) y para avivar la conciencia del policía encargado del caso*” (INAEM, 2024).

Breath, pauses, and silences become constitutive elements of the testimony itself, positioning the audience member not as detached observers of a narrative, but as active witnesses to an address unfolding in their presence. This sustained exposure resonates with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s account of testimony as an event that transcends narrative mastery. As they argue, “life testimony is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 2). Testimony, in this sense, is not the transmission of a completed story but the result of a performative act that emerges in relation to a listener who

becomes ethically implicated in its unfolding. In *Primera Sangre*, co-presence is constructed through a direct ethical address that transforms the spectator from a distant observer into an implicated witness. Velasco exposes the spectator's proximity to rape culture as a systemic condition that depends on silence, avoidance, and social habituation.

This interpellation is reinforced through the author's deliberate choice to stage the figure of a girl, Laura, rather than an adult woman, thereby suspending familiar narratives of victim-blaming. The child's innocence foregrounds vulnerability not as a consequence of risky behaviour, but as a condition imposed by structural VAWG. This is powerfully articulated through the unsettling metaphor, comparing girls and pigs, "las niñas se parecen más a los cerdos que a las flores", which strips away romanticised notions of purity and exposes the brutal logic through which women and girls' bodies are dehumanised (Velasco, 2023, p. 19). The image forces the audience member to confront the obscenity of a culture that demands purity while systematically failing to protect those deemed innocent. In doing so, Velasco re-centres responsibility away from the victim and toward the conditions that allow predation to occur in rape culture. The ethical demand of co-presence in *Primera Sangre* is registered cognitively and corporeally. While the child characters move through the world in play, jumping tiles "como si aquello fuera un campo de minas" (Velasco, 2023, p.19), the adult spectator occupies a radically different position; shaped by experience, anticipation, and knowledge of danger. This asymmetry generates a physical tension in the spectator's body, produced by the awareness of imminent harm coupled with the impossibility of intervention. Unlike the children on stage, the audience member recognizes that the threat of rape culture is encoded in everyday streets, routines, and gestures, yet remains immobilized by the conventions of spectatorship—and its purposefully imposed limits. The discomfort that emerges is symptomatic of structural failures within the system that persistently prevent the effective recognition, accountability, and plausible

prevention of VAWG (Ullman et al., 2025). As a result, Velasco creates a theatrical space in which the spectator is made to feel, in real time, the affective weight of systemic failure regarding misogynistic violence.

3.1 The ghost as a figure of diminished female identity

In *Primera Sangre*, the figure of the ghost can be read as symbolizing those women and girls who were once present and are no longer here: those whose lives were violently taken, and whose absence, although socially obscured, endures through repetition. Velasco challenges the logic through which rape culture erases its victims, particularly in what Jana Leo defines as “active torture” or “non-violent rapes”, which are forms of sexual violence enacted through coercion rather than overt physical force:

in active torture (non-violent rape), the rapist uses coercive power rather than force. The victim must force herself to do something that is radically against her nature. She is active and the rapist is passive-aggressive. While passive torture involves physical damage, active torture involves latent and long-lasting humiliation. Active torture relieves the tormentor from guilt and imposes feelings of self-betrayal and humiliation on the victim. Active torture is perverse because it creates the illusion that nothing is actually happening against the victim's will. (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, pp. x-xi)

In cases of “active torture” in rape culture, VAWG is systematically minimised, reframed, or denied, producing the fiction that no consequence remains. The woman—in this case, the girl—is reduced to nothing after the assault. Against this erasure, Velasco presents Laura embodied as a ghost, actively insisting on presence. She has had, and continues to have, her own narrative of events.

At a deeper level, the play suggests that the recuperation of Laura's agency is made possible through other women—specifically, through the woman who writes, who refuses to ignore VAWG, and who insists on identifying and naming the mechanisms of rape culture despite the social pressures that seek to render them invisible. Feminist writing and feminist sorority work as counterforces to

the normalisation of VAWG (Radina, 2017, p. 126). For this reason, the figure of the ghost appears *now* because sufficient temporal distance has allowed patterns to become visible. The tragedies of girls abducted, raped, and murdered in Spain during the 1990s and early 2000s—such as the girls Alcàsser³, Susana Ruiz Llorente⁴, Laura Domingo⁵, the protagonist of *Primera Sangre*, and many others⁶—have come to signify systemic failures. However, the present is marked by a fundamental difference: the action of feminist networks of support that name abuse, legitimise women's and girls' voices, and refuse the silence and isolation that once surrounded these atrocities (della Porta & Bonu Rosenkranz, 2025, p.2). Through the figure of the ghost, those taken in the past are brought into the present, not as closed cases, but as part of an ongoing collective memory sustained by those who remain. Velasco's message, articulated through this spectral comeback, is therefore unequivocal: *you are not alone* (Clavijo &

³ The “girls of Alcàsser” refers to the widely publicised 1992 case involving the kidnap, rape, and murder of three teenage girls—Miriam García, Toñi Gómez, and Desirée Hernández—in Alcàsser, Spain. The case became a national media spectacle and is now widely recognised as a turning point in Spanish public discourse on VAWG. The investigation was marked by procedural irregularities, unresolved questions, and intense public controversy, rendering the case emblematic of institutional failure regarding the persistence of impunity in VAWG (Rada, 2016)

⁴ Susana Ruiz Llorente was a sixteen-year-old girl from Burgos who disappeared in Madrid in January 1993. She was found semiexposed and partly buried in a wasteland. Although an initial autopsy attributed her death to natural causes, her family has long contested that finding and pursued further examination. Subsequent reports suggested signs of violent injury, leading to repeated re-openings and closures of the investigation over many years. The mystery surrounding her death, unresolved three decades later, has been cited as another institutional failure in the investigation of VAWG (Pérez Barredo, 2023).

⁵ Laura Domingo was a nine-year-old girl who disappeared in Burgos on 8 April 1991. After leaving school, she was kidnapped while playing near her home in the Capiscot neighbourhood. Witnesses reported that she left with an adult man who persuaded her to accompany him. The case was later archived without resolution and remains another example of the institutional failures surrounding the murder of girls in Spain during the 1990s (César Rico, 2023).

⁶ Throughout the 1990s in Spain, numerous girls and young women went missing, were sexually assaulted, or were murdered under circumstances that were left unresolved. Despite their geographic dispersion, these incidents revealed a recurring pattern rather than a series of unrelated tragedies: institutional failures within the judicial system systematically transformed VAWG into administratively closed cases, neutralising public accountability. What was initially framed as localised crime—whether in Burgos, Alcàsser, or elsewhere—has since been re-read, in the wake of #MeToo, as part of a global structure of rape culture. Feminist mobilisation has made visible that such violence was not confined to specific regions or decades, but constitutes a transnational and ongoing problem. Contemporary cases continue to expose this continuity; see, for instance, the case of Gisèle Pelicot, which has generated widespread international attention and demonstrates that VAWG was neither exceptional nor historically contained. Pelicot endured sustained abuse during years in which more women and girls were disappearing and being erased from public memory, yet it is only now, through feminist networks of support and recognition, that such violence has been collectively acknowledged (Gozzi, 2025).

Mandalaki, 2024). As a result, Laura becomes the figure through which absence is transformed into presence, isolation into collective remembrance, and loss into an ethical demand that connects past and present together.

Primera Sangre repeatedly poses the question regarding why the dead return and what forms of forgetting make such return necessary:

MARÍA. — LAURA, ¿ERES TÚ UN FANTASMA?
¿POR QUÉ SIGUES AQUÍ, ENTRE NOSOTRAS, TREINTA AÑOS MÁS
TARDE?
¿TU PADRE TE OLVIDÓ?, ¿TU MADRE?, ¿HICIERON TERAPIA PARA
OLVIDARTE?
¿LLAMARON AL RECUERDO “INSOMNIO”?
¿LLAMARON AL OLVIDO “BENZODIACEPINAS”?
¿TE OLVIDÓ LA JUSTICIA SIN NECESIDAD DE BENZODIACEPINAS?
(Velasco, 2023, pp. 19–20)

Rather than resolving the ghost's status, this litany of questions exposes forgetting itself as an institutional practice. As psychologist and victimology scholar Jessica Taylor (VictimFocus⁷) critiques in a public post, women and girls “don't benefit from this system of pathologising them, but everyone else does. Everyone. Systems. Families. The abuser. Governments. Professionals. Employers. Partners.” Within this reality, “if she's ‘mentally ill’ then her trauma can be ignored or downplayed whilst she is forced to ‘get better’ from an illness she doesn't even have. It's a sleight of hand” (Taylor, 2024). Memory is medicalised, grief is pathologised, and justice is imagined as capable of erasing VAWG without residue, as women and girls are encouraged to disclose violence only to be redirected into psychiatric diagnoses and therapeutic compliance,

⁷ VictimFocus is a UK-based organisation specialising in research, professional training, and consultancy on trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practice. Its work specialises on challenging victim-blaming frameworks and the pathologisation of women and girls subjected to VAWG, supporting institutional change across policing, justice, health, education, and third-sector contexts. See: <https://www.victimfocus.com/>

while perpetrators remain structurally unchallenged. In the play, the ghost, Laura, persists precisely because the mechanisms meant to protect women – both medically and legally – systematically fail. This is not an isolated national failure; comparable patterns appear across contexts. As an independent state watchdog recently concluded, the UK Home Office has “not led an effective whole-system response” to the rising incidence of rape and sexual assault recorded by police (National Audit Office, as cited in Walker, 2025). These findings expose a condition of structural unprotection affecting women and girls, not only in the UK but across multiple national contexts (Scotto di Carlo, 2025). Therefore, Laura’s return marks the impossibility of closure within a system that names forgetting as care and silence as resolution.

3.2 Pain, residue, and the limits of institutional closure

In *Primera Sangre*, pain is not introduced through graphic representation or narrative exposition, but through gestures of invitation. When María asks Laura, “¿QUIERES JUGAR CON NOSOTRAS? EL TEATRO ES UN LUGAR DONDE LOS MUERTOS JUEGAN CON LOS VIVOS” (Velasco, 2023, p. 20), pain is displaced from the domain of explanation to that of participation. The invitation to play—a symbol for collective and participatory agency—does not soften violence; rather, it situates the spectator within a shared temporal and affective space where the dead remain present. Theatre is thus configured as a space in which pain circulates relationally, beyond archival capture, which can be observed when María confesses: “Me encuentro al principio de una historia que no quiero conocer” (Velasco, 2023, p. 20). Her revealing words name pain not as something that can be progressively understood or assimilated, but as an experience that resists anticipation and comprehension. To be at the “beginning” of the story is already to be exposed to what cannot be faced, endured, narrated, or completed, as if time had frozen the moment the tragedy took place.

Jana Leo sharpens this understanding of pain as irreducible to institutional

closure by insisting that “rape is not just another sexual practice. Rape is a form of torture” (Foreword by Leo, in Fernández-Morales, 2025, p. x). This formulation decisively breaks with any residual framing of sexual violence as exaggeration, deviance, or miscommunication. Velasco has described Laura as a revenant whose posthumous presence facilitates the articulation and circulation of her story beyond death, allowing her to address neighbours, institutional figures, and educators as part of a process of unlearning inherited stigma (Velasco, as cited in MAKMA, 2024). *Primera Sangre* renders erasure perceptible through images that exceed institutional closure, which can be felt when María verbalizes: “Tu nombre, Laura, es como una gotera abierta” (Velasco, 2023, p. 22). This metaphor crystallises the logic of spectralisation at work in the play. Laura's name does not remain confined to the past or stabilised through memorialisation; rather, it intrudes persistently into the present, marking a residue that resists sealing, repair, or resolution. As Adrienne Rich has exposed, the continuous association of domination and submission, bodily objectification, and the conversion of persons into things constitutes a patriarchal value system that equates vitality with physical torment and detaches the body from emotion (Rich, 1981/2024, pp. 155–156). In rape culture, what remains – the consequences⁸ – is expected to evaporate. Nonetheless, Laura's name “leaks” beyond this logic, suggesting futures that remain tainted – rather than sealed off – by VAWG.

The prologue frames the spectral not only as absence but as a revelation of embodied truth: “Los muertos siempre señalan una verdad que los vivos escondemos,” Argüello Pitt writes, underscoring how the dead expose what remains systematically unspoken within the living (Foreword, in Velasco, 2023, p. 11). In *Primera Sangre*, this exposure is articulated through the perverse logic of play: “la rayuela”. When the rule is announced – “Quien no se haya escondido,

⁸ The consequences experienced by victims of sexual VAWG are extensively documented across psychological, social, and health-related research, demonstrating the urgent need to generate and consolidate knowledge capable of addressing this problem efficiently and effectively (see, for example, Krahé & Berger, 2017; Ullman et al., 2025).

tiempo ha tenido” (Velasco, 2023, p. 21)—the language of children’s games is repurposed to mirror the moral economy through which VAWG is normalised. The phrase implies warning, time, and choice: you were told, you had time, you should have known better. On the surface, the language returns us to childhood and to the innocence of play — much like Velasco’s earlier unsettling comparison between girls and pigs, which strips away sentimental idealisations of purity in order to expose radical vulnerability. Yet this return to innocence is inseparable from a much darker logic. Transposed onto the register of VAWG, the rule of the game in Velasco’s play mirrors the grammar of rape culture, where responsibility is displaced onto victims through familiar reproaches: *you should have known better, you should have escaped earlier, you had time to avoid it*. The game thus becomes a rehearsal of victim-blaming, “telling a woman she was ‘asking for it” (Radina, 2017, p.126), in which forewarning substitutes protection and survival is framed as a matter of individual foresight rather than structural failure. As the children count from one to ten, marking time aloud while playing hopscotch in the street, it becomes clear that the clock is ticking not only within the game, but for all girls. The countdown stages an unequal distribution of risk, which means that while the rules apply to everyone, one of them is already marked to lose. This temporal asymmetry exposes the cruelty of rape culture, which presents danger as avoidable while ensuring that someone, a woman or a girl, will inevitably be destroyed. Thus, the ghost’s return interrupts both the fantasy of innocence and the lie of choice, revealing how rape culture naturalises this destruction by disguising it as a personal failure, blaming women, to play the game correctly.

3.3 Cruel optimism and the shrinking of female subjectivity

The ghost in *Primera Sangre* can also be read through Lauren Berlant’s concept of *cruel optimism*, which names an attachment to objects or relations that impede the very flourishing they promise (Berlant, 2011, p. 2). Cruel optimism describes a condition in which subjects remain bound to promissory forms of life not despite

their damaging effects, but because those attachments provide the affective and imaginative resources necessary to endure the present. As Anderson explains, “the ordinary and shattering activity of detaching is intensely difficult for subjects held in attachment where the promissory object feels ever further out of reach,” leading them to “hold on longer than they should” because existing attachments help them navigate precarious conditions (Anderson, 2023, pp. 216–217). This affective bind is condensed scenically in a brief but devastating exchange: “*Estamos solas.*” ... “*¿Tienes miedo?*” (Velasco, 2023, p. 23). María's statement does not merely register physical isolation, but names the affective condition through which women and girls' endurance becomes the only imaginable mode of survival within rape culture. To remain attached—to silence, or to be silenced, to the hope that nothing worse will happen—appears less threatening than detachment. Therefore, the girls' fear, in this context, is not simply an emotion but a structuring force that sustains attachment to abuse against women and girls.

Regarding the banalization of coercion⁹ within rape culture, Tambe poses a fundamental question:

⁹ The term *coercion* here carries a deliberate double meaning. The real case on which *Primera Sangre* is based involved a girl, Laura Domingo, who was approached by an adult man while she was playing in the street with other children (Rico, 2023). Her disappearance did not initially occur through overt physical force, but through coercive manipulation. This resonates with feminist analyses of sexual violence enacted “without violence,” in which women are subjected to abuse through sexual coercion rather than explicit force. In both cases, rape culture operates by stripping women and girls of choice—whether through manipulation or physical domination—revealing coercion as a central mechanism through which agency is systematically taken away.

This dynamic can be further understood through the metaphor of the *iceberg of VAWG*, which illustrates how visible and extreme forms of VAWG are sustained by less visible, normalized practices operating beneath the surface. Coercion, manipulation, and forms of abuse enacted without “overt” forms of violence constitute the submerged mass of the iceberg, enabling and legitimising more overt—or visible—forms of abuse. Although these practices may appear non-violent, they are structurally connected to its most visible and lethal manifestation: feminicide. In this sense, the cases discussed throughout this article share a common trajectory in which the erosion of agency—whether through coercion or force—forms part of a continuum of violence that culminates in the assassination of women and girls, or femicides (Coordinación para la Igualdad de Género, UNAM, 2026).

In many contexts — both within and outside marriage — sex is exchanged for security, affection, and money. So, a crucial point to keep in mind is that not all transactional sex is coerced. As sex positive feminists would argue, we need to guard against casting all transactions as coercion. The question is, how to discern coercion within contexts of transaction. (Tambe, 2019, p. 200)

Tambe's interrogation of how to differentiate coercion within contexts of transaction — an ambiguity that rape culture exploits to trivialise sexual coercion in women's testimonies of abuse — finds a spectral answer in *Primera Sangre*. Velasco herself conceptualises this return as an act of exhumation, stating that "exhumamos a las víctimas de la violencia de género, víctimas de un tipo de terrorismo, para que no se olviden" (INAEM, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION: THEATRE, FEMINIST RESISTANCE AND SYMBOLIC REPARATION

By bringing otherness from the margins to the center of the stage, María Velasco's *Primera Sangre* frames theatre as a site where memory and embodiment intertwine to restore presence to women and girls who have been erased. The recovery of women's agency enacted here is necessarily symbolic, yet politically consequential. By contesting the cultural conditions that enable their dismissal, Velasco insists that remembrance is itself a form of feminist resistance against rape culture. In Velasco's haunted stage, the past does not remain past; it returns as a claim. The play thus articulates an ethics of reparation grounded in co-presence, transmitting a message of collective belonging addressed to those women and girls, victims and survivors of VAWG: *you belong, you always did — and we did not forget you*.

Primera Sangre also resonates with what Lauren Berlant identifies as one of the central functions of minoritarian cultural forms: to tell those who are structurally unprivileged, "you are not alone"; a political assurance rather than a sentimental gesture. By transforming a girl's erased life into a shared scene of witnessing, Velasco's play counters the affective isolation that sustains silence and enables

rape culture to persist. Laura's spectral figure does not ask to be resolved; instead, it asks to be remembered. In doing so, the play connects with feminist movements such as #MeToo by converting solitary pain into collective address, legitimizing the women and girls who were rendered invisible. *Primera Sangre* does not offer resolution nor healing in conventional terms. What it stages instead is a refusal of institutional closure and a collective demand for ethical continuity. The persistence of Laura, presented as a ghost, exposes the limits of juridical justice and archival containment, insisting that what has been erased cannot be rendered neutral through forgetting. Theatre emerges here not as a substitute for justice, but as a feminist counter-archive and a space of ethical co-presence, where VAWG is neither spectacularized nor resolved, but held in common. In Velasco's haunted stage, this cruelty of erasure becomes difficult to forget.

At a time when renewed reactionary discourses seek to roll back hard-won feminist advances, normalize the trivialization of women's pain, and reintroduce forms of symbolic erasure, *Primera Sangre* functions both as a critical reminder and as an invitation for spectators to recognise their own capacity as agents of change. By rendering visible covert forms of VAWG, Velasco offers a practical framework for understanding this systemic issue as a lived, pervasive condition that permeates multiple domains of everyday life. In doing so, the play underscores the necessity of sustained dialogue, active listening, affective engagement, and shared reflection as key components of effective, evidence-based VAWG prevention. While theatre alone cannot enact structural change, *Primera Sangre* demonstrates how embodied witnessing and emotional resonance can contribute to broader cultural shifts by fostering awareness, responsibility, and the conditions for social transformation. As Velasco herself articulates, *Primera Sangre* is conceived as "un duelo diferido por todas las menores asesinadas en los 90 y por las niñas que salían a la calle pidiendo perdón, con la sensación de que el espacio público no era suyo" (Velasco, as cited in MAKMA,

p. 2024). This deferred mourning crystallises the political and affective labour performed by the play: to reclaim public space, memory, and presence for those women and girls whose disappearance was once silenced, and to insist that their absence remains a shared responsibility. By sustaining these disappearances as an ethical demand, *Primera Sangre* ultimately reframes women's and girls' agency as the capacity to remain, to be remembered, and to continue demanding recognition in the face of patriarchal erasure.

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