One of the ways to understand how we look and how we participate within the public space is through monuments. Their presence in the city embodies cultural, social, and even heritage complexities that contain more than meets the eye. This text elaborates a careful study on how the distribution of gender and ethnicity in the monuments of Santiago build a narrative of patriarchal and colonial models of femininity, and how certain interventions, such as that of the 8M of 2020, can be viewed as decolonizing and depatriarchalizing actions.

Francisca Pimentel
“I’M NOT YOUR MOMMY”

ABOUT THE
CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY IN PUBLIC MONUMENTS

Keywords: Gender Representation Heritage Essay Decolonize
Masculine and feminine sculptures in Santiago downtown.

Imagen elaborada por la autora / Drawing by the author.

Leyenda / Legend:
1. Escultura Polimnia
2. Fuentes Las Tres Gracias
3. Sin nombre
4. Fuente de Neptuno
5. Monumento de la Colonia Francesa al Centenario de Chile
6. Pileta Ministerio de Hacienda
7. Monumento Ángel de la Caridad
8. Monumento a la Libertad Americana
9. Monumento a Isabel Le Brun y Antonia Tarragó
10. Busto Javiera Carrera
11. Monumento "Glory and Victory" a los Mártires de Carabineros de Chile
During the 8M of 2020 in Santiago, Chile, the monument to Manuel Baquedano was temporarily repurposed as a Mapuche woman. This incident was replicated with the sculptures of Archbishop Crescente Errázuriz and priest Carlos Casanueva at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile main building, whose faces were replaced by those of Violeta Parra and Gladys Marín. Beyond questioning the representativeness of our public monuments today, these are also evidence of a deep gender disparity and a systematic omission of female figures in the city. However, focusing solely on this aspect seems to be a quantitative and not necessarily qualitative approach, failing to recognize which aspects of women are celebrated and legitimized through their monumentalization. Motivated by this premise, this text aims to question the representation of women in public sculpture by this premise, this text aims to question the recognition of women in the public sphere, the monumentalization of female figures has not had the same impact as that of their male counterparts. According to the cadaster of the National Monuments Council (2021:56-76), in Chile, only 4.7% of the monuments represent female figures. Of that total, approximately 23% are in the historic center of Santiago [Fig. 02].

Thus, there is an interrelation between socially constructed relationships and our environment (Morris, 2012:51). In this way, taking as a starting point what Vega (2016:216) has identified, the symbolization of women in the public sphere has historically been influenced by the social construction of femininity – whose androcentric bias is evident since these sculptures are also sculpted by men – and cemented under four categories: (i) as passive figures associated with motherhood, (2) as workers of the land and the domestic, (3) as an allegory of the nation-state and, I add, (4) as an inspiring muse.

The mother (i) personifies the values associated with protection and fertility. In front of the Basílica de la Merced, the Angel de la Caridad stands. The sculpture does not personify her, showing us four anonymous figures instead. Its center highlights a ‘mother’ figure who takes care of the rest and shelters them. Its location, as well as the virtues it personifies, build (and reaffirm) its Christian commitment and Marian character. It is also important to mention that the management of this monument responds to an initiative from her relatives and not from the political institution.

Working women (2) represent tasks historically linked to the female gender, such as agriculture and home care, and, like the previous case, do not represent specific women. Exceptionally, only the monument to Isabel Le Brun and Antonia Tarragó in Alameda Av. (1946), who fought for women’s admission to university education (1877), portrays two iconic women in Chilean history and represents values related to knowledge. However, the sculpture is barely visible due to wear; its pedestal only exhibits their names, not their work, demonstrating negligence and abandonment.

As an allegory of the nation-state (3) uses the female body to represent republican virtues and abstract concepts – such as freedom and hope – associated with commemorative and national events: the American Freedom Monument in Plaza de Armas (1936), the Glory and Victory Monument to the martyrs of Carabineros in front of Alameda Avenue (1989) and the Monument of the French Colony to the Centenary of Chile in Forestal Park (1910). Now, there is an apparent tension between this symbolization – which often projects empowerment – and its association as a submissive subject. Nonetheless, the metaphor of the nation expresses its protective, fertile, and strong

03 Espacialización de las esculturas femeninas. / Location of feminine sculptures. Imagen elaborada por la autora. / Drawing by the author.
04 Presentación cronológica de las esculturas estudiadas. 
Chronology of studied sculptures.

Imagen elaborada por la autora. / Drawing by the author.

1874
Escultura
La Musa Polimnia
Autor: Fundidora Francesa
Robado el 2014

1875
Fuente: Las Tres Gracias
Autor: Fundidora Francesa Ducel et Fils en base a diseño de Germain Pilon

sin fecha
Sin nombre
Autor: sin información

1910
Monumento de la Colonia Francesa al Centenario de Chile
Autores: Guillermo Córdoba, Henry Grossin
role, which also responds to the narrative of motherhood (Morris, 2012:52). Finally, although not an allegory and installed late (1985), the bust of Javiera Carrera in the northern access of the Santa Lucía hill celebrates her role in the independence of Chile.

Almost always naked or with an evocative appearance, the role of women as an inspiring muse (4) is mainly ornamental. These works are located in public squares and green areas of the city, accentuating, but also perpetuating, the generalized (di/a)association of the female gender with nature. As in the previous cases, this does not represent a specific individual and even characterizes models alien to the local culture: such is the case of Salacia, wife of Neptune, and Polynia, daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, who adorn the Santa Lucía hill. On the other hand, it becomes evident that not all bodies have a place in this representation since they are generally limited to those of hegemonic beauty and figure.

If we sort the installation of the sculptures in chronological order [Fig. 04] it would be possible to indicate that the monumentalization of women beginning in the nineteenth century until the centenary was projected with a contemplative and ornamental purpose while, with the turn of the century, it was abstracted to embody republican values. In the mid-twentieth century, although the representation begins to be individualized (first through homages), it decreases in number. In this context, even if the gradual insertion of women in politics occurs at the same time as the incorporation of the sculptures to Le Brun, Tarragó and Carrera – the few exceptions that stand out and find points of friction with the categorization presented –, this is not constant or consistent. An example of this is the Gloria y Victoria Monument: a recent reproduction yet timeless and abstract.

In the verification of the almost absolute lack of statues of notable women in the history of Chile, one can notice that most of these representations allude to a generic and stereotypical woman who often emphasizes gender stereotypes. It is not just any woman, nor any type of body: while those individualized belong to an aristocratic Chile or mythological deities, others project an idealized figure. It is through this inventory that the abandonment and complete invisibility of racialized women are also noticeable.

In the political center of the city, these inconsistencies and absences are key to making visible the androcentric bias in heritage practice. Therefore, thinking of monumentalization as a mere commemorative process of history fails to recognize its potential as an instrument of power. As Smith (2008:160) indicates, patrimonial practice is an active process of negotiation between memory, identity, and place, since it includes an act of selection, remembrance, omission, and commemoration. Considering this burden, I propose to analyze the simplification of the role and potential of women in female sculpture as a possible reflection of the colonial matrix bequeathed in the region.

The Symbolic Representation of the Feminine as a Colonial Strategy

To understand the intersections between the categories of oppression that could be extrapolated to the model of femininity embodied by the sculptures of women, I believe it is necessary to establish a political-epistemological clarification related to the decolonial studies of Aníbal Quijano and María Lugones.

Quijano (1992:11-20) proposes the concept of “coloniality of power” to describe the hegemonic model of power, control, and domination imposed on the native population of Abya Yala during colonial times3 – founded on an intersubjective superiority later codified as racial, ethnic, or national4 – that continues to operate in independent countries. This logic of power operates internally through the “colonization of the imaginary of the dominated” (Quijano, 1992:12), introducing a Western canon as a synonym of hegemonic beauty, prestige, and power, which compromises our personal and cultural production (Ohyantcabal, 2020). Consequently, coloniality not only represses and excludes subaltern forms of subjectivity but also reproduces new patterns that replace them.

Quijano laid the foundations for what María Lugones (2016) later defined as “gender coloniality,” which, together with detecting the existence of a hegemonic patriarchy and, heir to a pattern of inequalities installed by colonial origin, incorporates the intersectionality of race and ethnicity to explain the theoretical and practical systematic exclusion of non-white, colonized, and indigenous women. The representation of women as fragile, owners of the domestic and sexually passive is a construction that silhouettes white women but does not integrate or understand the multiple and situated realities of other women. According to Lugones (2005:62-63), the same characteristics of femininity are not attributed to them. The categorical conception intrinsic to coloniality determines a network of oppressions that transcend the evolution of the role of women since it has been developed within this intersection (Lugones, 2005:69). Thanks to this reading, it is possible to understand how – and despite the multiplicity and transcendence of their primitive roles as custodians of the traditions, identity, and memory of their people – the Mapuche women have been made invisible from official history (Olea, 2010:7).

Coloniality and cultural Europeanization engaged in the production of images, symbols, and modes of meaning that served as a means of social and cultural control (Quijano, 1992:12). In this context, the monument as a heritage instrument has been oriented to sustain dominant, Western, androcentric, and colonizing strategies that shape our perception of gender, sex, and power (Rozas-Krause, 2020:354; Arrieta, 2017:23). The applicability of the revised concepts to the field of monumentalization...
05. Inauguración de la Plaza Baquedano (Originalmente Plaza Italia) y monumento Genio de la Libertad. / Opening of Plaza Baquedano (Originally Plaza Italia) and the Genio de la Libertad monument. 
Fuente: Revista Sucesos Nº 421, 29 de septiembre, 1910 (p. 121). / Memoria Chilena.

06. Inauguración del Monumento al General Baquedano. / Inauguration ceremony of the monument to the General Baquedano. 
Fuente: Diario La Nación del 19 de septiembre 1928 (p. 13). Empresa Periodística La Nación / Cultura Digital UDP.

07. Celebración del Triunfo del NO. / Chileans celebrating the victory of the option NO in the 1988 plebiscite. 
could explain that, in addition to the gender disparity, there are relations of oppression among the women represented because some belong to a dominant group. As there are degrees of intersectional hierarchies, the problematization of female sculpture reaches, then, certain nuances. In this juxtaposition, working-class, racialized, indigenous, migrant, and non-heterosexual women have been subjected to various forms of control, violence, segregation, and marginalization from heritage practice and the public sphere.

So, while it is possible to read the reproduction of a stereotypical pattern of femininity in the monumentalization of women as defined by the colonial origin of Chilean society (which highlights its primitive role linked to the narrative of motherhood), this pattern is also expressed in the biased construction of these monuments, capable of reducing the ‘use’ of women to a concept or simply excluding them. This exclusion is not absolute, but its selection, as Lugones (2005:67) indicates, responds to the series of intersectional hierarchies that determine the prevalence of one type of woman over others.

The Desapatriarchalization of Baquedano

In contemporary cities with a colonial past, public monuments articulate an “aesthetic of domination” that provokes distancing, conflict, and social segregation (Preciado, 2020). This conflict has been expressed insistently through the alteration of public art as a means to reject and resignify the expression of the hegemonic power that they personify (Preciado, 2020).

The monument to the army general Manuel Baquedano, sculpted by Virgilio Arias in homage to his participation in the Pacific War, portrays a monumental man mounted on a horse and a life-size woman at his feet, who gives him a garland of flowers with the inscription “from the Chilean people to General Baquedano.” The piece was allocated in the square of the same name in 1928, replacing the Monument to the Genius of Freedom [Figs. 05-06], reaffirming the recognition of the institutional man in our public spaces.

From its origins, Plaza Baquedano was established as the hotspot of celebrations and demonstrations of the city, using its monument as a platform and blank canvas [Figs. 07-08] to illustrate the deep tension and resistance regarding official history. Thus, within the framework of the commemoration of the 8M of 2020 and to make Indigenous women visible, Baquedano temporarily became a Mapuche woman.

Unlike the iconoclastic phenomenon that has affected a large number of sculptures in the country, this one intervenes the sculpture of a man, turning him into a woman. While it is evident that this action takes advantage of the strategic location and importance of the monument in the city, the fact that this performance aimed to modify gender and ethnicity became the starting point to question the materialization, tension, and friction of being and gender coloniality in the city.

Figure 9 shows a particular moment, disseminated in social media and the press under the headline “Goddess of Dignity” (González, 2020), in which the intervention intersected with the protest of a feminist activist. Here, it is possible to recognize a series of layers superimposed on the original sculpture:

- A palimpsest of painting, graffiti, and social inscriptions, permanent on the original surface until restoration. It is a dissident patina that extends over the entire bronze figure and the plinth and an expression that is constantly changing.
- A series of random decorative elements of transitory nature (mask for the horse and a necklace of flowers), arranged on Baquedano as part of the protest.
- Materials that emulate the clothes of the Mapuche woman: a multicolored pezkëñ on her forehead, whose ribbons unfold to the crowd at her feet, and a black ukullà (cloak) on her shoulders. This intervention was deployed on the monument only under the 8M context and was withdrawn after that day.
- An adult woman with a bare torso, a hidden face, and a black flag on her lap, standing on Baquedano’s horse raising her arms. Her presence has a performative character and, therefore, momentary.

Within this set of these elements, two figures are juxtaposed: on the one hand, the construction of a Mapuche woman using Baquedano as a frame, whose monumentality allowed her to be placed as a central axis in a scenario of struggle, on the other, the protester as a representative of the almost two million Chilean women at the commemoration. By sharing a plinth, she rises above the crowd imposing her body as a sign of struggle but also as a celebration, rendering a colonized, not idealized, and systematically censored body visible.

In an interview with the author (González, 2020), what stands out is not necessarily the statutory need to tear down these imperialist symbols but rather to recognize Indigenous and colonized women as legitimate bodies. In this universe of diverse women, the notion of intersectionality was momentarily reflected to...
Performance Feminista sobre Baquedano / Feminist Performance over Baquedano
Imagen elaborada por la autora / Drawing by the author
temporarily change Baquedano’s patriarchal and hegemonic narrative as a republican icon. Although in the juxtaposition of these bodies, the Mapuche woman seems to be in the background, their recognition relieves the possibility of a polycentric multiculturalism capable of challenging the logics of coloniality (Lugones, 2005:73).

Baquedano materializes the intersection between women’s politics and hegemonic power. At this intersection, the performative dimension of the intervention relieves the role of the iconoclastic narrative as a catalyst for current cultural pathologies and the hegemonic narrative (Iniesta, 2017:147-148) as well as the tool to answer and resist them (Vega, 2016:224). Even though it is not possible to modify the events that our monuments seek to commemorate, it is possible to resignify them (Arrieta, 2017:15). In Baquedano’s case, while the alteration of the monument is transitory, this does not necessarily imply that the values that drive the intervention are likewise transitory: they are just temporarily shown in it. They remain in the culture of women who have historically fought for the recognition of their rights, who create meanings and transform them.

Epilogue

“In a democratic context, it is possible for several subjects who emit discordant memories to manifest simultaneously” (Iniesta, 2017:15). As Jiménez-Esquinas (2017:34) would note, in this intersection of stories, biographies, corporealities, socioeconomic and diverse political positions – always from non-dominant differences (Lugones, 2005:73) – it is possible to find common experiences capable of building polycentric coalitions to resist, ignore, and deconstruct the androcentric paternal bias. This construction could push women’s valorization – whose bodies have historically been named and shaped from ideologies, discourses, and beauty canons that have justified their oppression and exploitation – and claim them as a territory of resistance and transformation.

The performative iconoclasm on Baquedano opened a space for identification, reflection, and resignification of a subaltern, oppressed, and marginalized group. It is a doubly significant performance: firstly, because its depatriarchizing vocabulary questions the low representation of the female gender in the city and, secondly, because the proposed feminine archetype breaks with the colonial symbolization of women as Westerners. It is a starting point and opportunity to highlight the potential of decolonial criticism in public discourse.

Women’s politics should not be constructed in conflict with the patriarch; instead, it should build new signifiers whose culture is elsewhere and is not necessarily measured against those monuments or their creators. Therefore, understanding the effects of gender coloniality is essential to push the problem towards new challenges. If monumentalization is an essentially androcentric tool: is its resignification enough to really decolonize the public monuments of our city? I don’t think so. Decolonizing implies necessarily making visible – and situating – the multiple voices in the territory. Let’s leave the pedestals free for the people and make them an urban and democratic scenario. ARQ

NOTES

1. The title alludes to the sayings of the mayor of Santiago, Irací Hasler, on the TV show Macho gueto on November 11, 2021. In a way, this phrase evokes the simplification of our role in Chilean society and its prevalence over women as political subjects.

2. To enrich this reading, and since this article aims at a qualitative analysis of female representation, sources and decorative pieces present in the study area have been included. However, I exclude from this study the Memorial for the Women Victims of Political Repression for being an abstract representation.

3. Latin America.

4. The categorization was elaborated as an ahistorical, scientific, and objective construction that understands it as a natural phenomenon and not as a history of power. See Quijano (1990).

BIBLIOGRAFÍA / BIBLIOGRAPHY


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