

# Sacred Flow

## Atonement

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### **Abstract**

To generate visibility, awareness and debate on the issue of violence against women in Colombia, has become crucial. The participation of women in all spheres of society has increased in recent decades, but they remain statistically marginalized from the most relevant positions, political and economical. It seems that in a patriarchal society, feminine attributes such as care and protection of life has become devalued. Violence against women may be linked to the physiological condition of menstruation, which, universally and throughout the ages has been encompassed by taboo and stigma. Recent historic Colombian emblematic men, dedicated to the causes of peace, were murdered for their efforts to extend inclusion and justice. This photo-anthropological essay seeks to generate critical thinking in regards to such enigmas and their possible interrelationships.

### **Antecedents**

In certainty, it is not an accident that a trickle of blood links the violence against women in Colombia, to that which Colombians have historically exercised against themselves. Since the conquest, through the mixing in the Colony, and throughout the class struggle and the battle of the sexes in modernity, women on our soil have been the subjects of exclusion, abuse and rape. Such acts, hidden, symbolic and explicit have caused damage to their physical, sexual and psychological integrity.

Although in recent decades women have gained more prominence in the social and cultural fields, while their sexual, reproductive and political rights have gained ground in public and private space, they remain marginalized or significantly eclipsed in relation to the most important economic processes and

political decisions of the country. Or it could be too, that they have internalized the demands of the male gaze and adopted their morale.

Women, especially, are the targets of intersectional oppression, put another way, they are discriminated from a sum of socially and culturally constructed categories such as gender, race, age, class, education, physical appearance, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and ability and disability, among others.

On the issue of human rights within the context of the Colombian armed conflict, women are subjected to forced recruitment, the loss and disappearance of their spouses and children, and to forced displacement. Hence, pushed into poverty and / or abused in acts of barbarism, horrors of war, many of the times silenced by shame. To be born a commoner woman in a patriarchal hegemonic world is difficult, but to be it in a macho country where physical and psychological violence is a structural and quotidian part of culture, is even more so.

We live in neglect of the inherent values of femininity, such as love for life, nutrition, renewal, self-giving, inclusion and solidarity, in addition to its unique ability to interpret and transform the world, crucial to the healthy development of societies. This anomaly and the large void it creates, is one of the factors behind the historical crossroads of a country, which is torn between tenderness and bloodshed.

But even more serious is the disregard and contempt of the reasons for the gender equality feminist struggle, which promotes a very dangerous attitude to women's integrity and to the survival of its spirit. To debase, curse or abuse the woman's vagina equals to advance against the source. Colombia cannot extend the culture of violence on women's body making out of it war territory, much less tolerate femicide, i.e., the avoidable murder of women for gender reasons.

In the atmosphere of ethical crisis currently suffocating the world, and as a result of a series of cogitations around the physical, emotional and sexual violence, a professional photographer, anthropologist, rebellious publicist and nonconformist

spiritual seeker, recourse to his vocation to produce a body of visual arts work, which aims to generate critical thinking and to reopen the debate:

What are these potential missing or punished feminine attributes within our society that, among many other factors, meant that the sacred blood of individuals committed to the cause of peace in Colombia was uselessly spilled?

### **Artist's Statement**

Menstruation in almost all world cultures has been the subject of taboo and stigma. Such blood flow "impure and polluted" flowing on the surface and depth of the "dark continent" (as Freud referred to female sexuality), segregates women during a period in which they are considered "impaired" due to a bodily and emotional condition. Even in the XXI century, some groups consider women during their period, untouchable.

In the other hand, menstrual rhythm has also been perceived as one of the physiological functions that gave rise to symbolic thinking. In the cultural realm created by Homo sapiens, the blood shed by women from an early age, raised itself as one of the great mysteries of life, reproduction and synchronicity. Menstruation may have given birth to ideas that were not rooted in the real world and that served to create a collection of rituals, objects and representations. The use of red ocher during the Upper Paleolithic, as vestiges may suggest, was associated with the period and with the Venus figurines. For over twenty thousand years, the vagina, as a symbol of fertility and protection, was the focus of sculptors.

During a period in which tribes find sanctuaries to settle in, where plants and animals begin to be domesticated, the clans to become sedentary, to socialize, to hold on into the division and specialization of labor, in short, once community life began to predominate, quite possibly, the externality of male's sexual organs and their susceptibility to comparison, became problematic. At such time, the matriarchal structure trend, the crucial political importance of women in the previous egalitarian societies may have been degraded: men covered

themselves in permanence and forced women to do the same, thereby, creating a patriarchal morale.

As men base their renewed power in self-confidence, prestige and status rendered by private property, attire, political, religious and war activities, relegates his companion to the first of the above categories. A single patriarchal, heteronormative god (that obliges and favors heterosexual, monogamous relationships), replaced various multi gender deities to create an order of hegemonic male figures. In contrast, the female figures were attributed secondary or negative agencies, and in a similar dynamic, alternative sexual identities were devalued. It will be the children of patrilineal projection, thereafter, who will inherit the economic and symbolic treasured power.

The blood of menstruation, desecrated, dishonored in the recesses of the male mind, could have been perceived incarnated by that poured in war, in the assassination of important leaders, in the subjugation and violence against the women themselves. The tainted blood through the female sexual organs is opposed to that poured in the wounds of war heroes, to whom assorted monuments are erected.

In fact, an ideological supremacy that dismantles the creative, progressive, intuitive, ecological and emotional intelligence is braced-up. Nature, its abundance, will lose its soul to prey, and consequently, its invitation to share goods and welfare will weaken, impoverishing reasoning and social action.

Thus, nudity in this context is offered as a gaze that invokes transparency, political act that seeks to undermine the high wall separating the private and public realms; stronghold, from which patriarchal thought oppresses submissive citizens that work under the rules of the social contract. The mask, used as a protection and reconstruction ritual, levels as the nude, the division between social classes, hierarchical systems and genders. The hand gesture alludes to the inverted red triangle: in tantra, the primordial symbol of female energy, home of initiation, power and wisdom. The *mandorla* or *vesica piscis* indicates the step,

*avanti e indietro*, the liminal realm, the interaction and interdependence existing between two worlds that complement each other, one, lucid and intangible, and that of matter. The red square embodies menstruation, its revelation, meanings, challenges and narratives. Overall, this body of work constitutes an atonement ritual through which the artist symbolically exalts the consecrated values of justice and solidarity.

The faces of iconic men, memory of the country, who were sacrificed on account of their rooted beliefs about inclusion and equity (painted masks that represent them), and Colombian women's bodies empowered and proud of menstruation and its symbolic significance, are combined. The vitality of compassionate and transformative actions coming from well-formed human beings inspires the activist visual arts work presented here.

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1948)

Rodrigo Lara Bonilla (1984)

Guillermo Cano Isaza (1986)

Luis Carlos Galán (1989)

Carlos Pizarro Leongómez (1990)

Álvaro Gómez Hurtado (1995)

Jaime Garzón Forero (1999)

































**Concept and photography**

Camilo Gomez Duran

**Drawings and digital retouching**

Sergio Valencia Mejia

## Review

By Ginna Garcia-Aguilar

In the work of Camilo Gomez Duran the order of natural shapes bursts forth, full of questions. His previous work, *Divine nature*, represented an association between the sexual organs of plants and those of humans, reminding us of the impossible plan that man's law tries to impose. Patriarchal morals carries out an aseptic labour which, while alienating bodies from their natural erotic inclinations, generates voyeurism, an aesthetic centered around violence, cruelty and suffering. In Colombia, where the exuberant forces of life and death are in an intestinal dance, the body is erected as a battlefield of its own dissolution, including that of the iconic actors and their ideas. **Sacred Flow** alludes to the dynamic of gender, its binary model, to patriarchal praxis and emancipation. These photographs demand at least three readings: that of woman's restricted access to the political power and their inability to transform it; messianic figures' patriarchal and religious models as a paradigm of political participation; and, finally, when these historical figures incorporate feminine values to their ideologies, how normalizing forces are triggered to ensure the status quo's continuity.