

Testimonial Ecology in Gioconda Belli's *El país de las mujeres*

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The category of testimonial literature might seem like a poor fit for Gioconda Belli's most recent novel, *El país de las mujeres* ('The Country of Women,' 2010).¹ In fact, the novel fails the most basic litmus tests that testimonial novels require: it is not an account of a real-world situation and it lacks eyewitness reports. In spite of this, the novel functions as a sort of sequel to Belli's 1988 novel *La mujer habitada* (*The Inhabited Woman*) in many respects, which should give literary scholars a reason to pause and reflect on our conceptualization of testimonial. This study will examine the ways in which Belli utilizes ecological themes in *El país de las mujeres* to connect the novel to her earlier work and destabilize our definition of testimonial literature.

Much of the literary criticism of Gioconda Belli's first novel, *La mujer habitada*, has focused on two of the work's currents that run parallel to the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua: political and gender revolution, as represented by the protagonist Lavinia, and the ecological undercurrents that dominate much of the novel's tone and backdrop. Ileana Rodríguez addresses the first of these concerns by demonstrating the ways in which Belli attempts to rewrite the role of women in political change in Central America through her protagonist's involvement in guerrilla activity. Literary critics such as myself and Ruyard Alcocer have identified the ways in which Belli's protagonist connects to the landscape and history of Nicaragua. Arturo Arias focuses his interpretations of *La mujer habitada* on Belli's use of female eroticism as a way of undermining patriarchal authority.² These analyses point to the intersection of female political and revolutionary involvement, eroticism, and the natural world as the centers of *La mujer habitada*. In addition to these concerns, Linda Craft points out the novel's quasi-testimonial nature, demonstrating that Lavinia serves as a sort of fictional stand-in for Belli herself and that Faguas is an allegorical representation of Nicaragua. Craft asserts that the novel falls onto a spectrum of what should be considered testimonial literature, citing *La mujer habitada* as an example of fictional testimonial.³ After all, the novel's protagonist, Lavinia, struggles to upend a dictatorship in her fictional *patria*, Faguas, that very closely resembles Somoza-controlled Nicaragua of the 1970s. Lavinia and her cohorts, much like the Sandinistas, attempt a social project that hopes to create a nation of true gender equality and harmony between humanity and nature.

Recent Nicaraguan history has all but decimated these dreams, however. The Sandinistas' surprising loss in the 1990 elections, a mere two years after the publication of *La mujer habitada*, followed by Daniel Ortega's re-election and

flirtation with a Hugo Chávez-inspired “*dictablanda*” (‘soft dictatorship’) that has largely abandoned many of the ideals of the revolution that put him in power, have caused Belli to be an outspoken critic of Ortega’s government.⁴ Unsurprisingly, this criticism finds its way into *El país de las mujeres*, and Belli once again uses Faguas as a fictional stunt double for Nicaragua to criticize and reimagine her native country both ecologically and politically.

Belli’s use of feminist and ecological themes in *El país de las mujeres* closely parallels the ways in which she incorporated these themes in her earlier works and helps to establish the novel as a continuation of the history of Faguas that began in *La mujer habitada*. In the novel’s initial pages, the reader is presented with Viviana Sansón, president of Faguas and head of the Partido de la Izquierda Erótica (PIE) ‘Party of the Erotic Left.’ Following an assassination attempt in the first chapter that puts Sansón in a coma, the novel shifts between flashbacks and the present as we discover how PIE rose to power. But before turning our gaze toward the novel’s political and ecological themes, it is important to realize that, from the very onset, female sexuality is on center stage and becomes intertwined with both politics and ecology. In addition to the party’s name, which draws attention to the theme of sexuality, Sansón herself is presented in an erotic light. The initial physical descriptions of Sansón highlight her sexuality, although this should hardly be surprising to readers who are familiar with Belli’s earlier writings. As she speaks to the assembled masses at a rally, the president of Faguas, with her mop of “rizos africanos” ‘African curls’ and “labios anchos y sensuales” ‘full and sexy lips,’ wears a black t-shirt with a plunging neckline that shows off her “pechos abundantes” ‘plentiful breasts’ (14). In the event that this description didn’t draw enough attention to the politician’s sexuality, Belli continues describing her “famosas tetas” ‘famous boobs’ and how Sansón eventually decided to use them to her advantage:

Al final no le quedó más que abrazar sus generosas proporciones. Terminó pensando en que debía celebrarlas y convertirlas en sinónimo del compromiso de darle a la población de aquel país los ríos de leche y miel que el mal manejo de los hombres le había escatimado. No sería la primera ni la última mujer que descubría el hipnótico efecto de un físico voluptuoso. (15)

In the end there was nothing left but to embrace her generous proportions. She ended up thinking that she should celebrate them and change them into a synonym of the promise to give the people the rivers of milk and honey that the men’s bad management had withheld.

Belli's insistence on the sensual nature of the president's body, specifically her ample chest, pushes us to recall the revolutionary exhibitionism that appears in *La mujer habitada* and Belli's early poetry, and the imagery of milk and honey flowing from the president's breasts to bless the nation is an image of the maternal nature of the government that Sansón projects.

Following the attempt on her life, President Sansón is trapped in a coma, but we travel with her to a hall in which she encounters all of the forgotten and lost objects from her life. As she contemplates individual objects, she experiences flashbacks that help inform the reader of her life before politics and her rise to power. We learn that following her election, the reporter-turned-politician evicted all men from government positions, although this is viewed as a temporary policy that will allow the members of the PIE to rule without male second-guessing and obstruction. Once the men are out of the equation, the Sansón government begins to effect meaningful social change. Schools are reinvented to give youth a better and more intellectually free education. The economy is rebuilt in an eco-friendly way. Violence against women is targeted and punished severely. In essence, Viviana's government attempts to realize the utopian dream in which the protagonist of *La mujer habitada* believed.

While the idealized, female-run society of *El país de las mujeres* provides a fertile realm for critics who choose to focus on feminist readings of the text, I would argue that we should also focus our critical attention on PIE's rise to power and its connections with ecological issues. While PIE begins as a wild idea pitched at a book club meeting by a reporter who is frustrated with the ineptitude and corruption of the current government, the political party's rise to power is driven by two important factors. The first of these factors is the frustration of the people with the country's current state, while the second results from an environmental event.

The discontent expressed by Faguas's population with its government helps establish a connection between the fictional country and Nicaragua, but the connection is less focused than in *La mujer habitada*. The novel's criticism of *narcotraficantes* 'drug traffickers,' violence, garbage-filled streets, and governmental corruption that encourages the embezzlement of international aid funds applies to Nicaragua, but also to many other countries, almost as if Belli were seeking to make Faguas more universal. While in her earlier novel Belli directly attacks the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, she is more cautious to distance her critique from the Sandinista government in *El país de las mujeres*.⁵

The meteoric rise to power of the Partido de la Izquierda Erótica is in part the result of a natural event. Sansón and her colleagues attribute a great portion of their success to a volcanic eruption that profoundly affects the country's men shortly before the election that Sansón eventually wins. The gases that cover the country following the eruption of the Mitre volcano temporarily lower male

testosterone levels. Belli summarizes the party's triumph as follows: "Y es que, entre la dulcificación de los hombres y las estupideces del gobierno, el Partido de la Izquierda Erótica se colocó a la cabeza de las encuestas" (39) 'And so, between the sweetening of the men and the stupid moves of the government, the Party of the Erotic Left found itself in the lead in the polls.' The volcano's eruption and subsequent aftermath are reminiscent of the narrative strategy of the orange tree that lies at the center of *La mujer habitada*. For Lavinia, the orange tree ties her to nature and an indigenous past that push her toward joining the guerrillas, while for Viviana, the volcano links nature, politics, and the female body. In both cases, Belli uses the natural world to advance her protagonists' causes.

While the volcano's link to gender politics is fairly evident given the emasculating nature of its gas clouds, its link to female sexuality is slightly more opaque, but points back to earlier works by Belli. The volcano/breast metaphor appears in several places in Belli's prior works. This connection is present in her poem "¿Qué sos Nicaragua?" ('What are you Nicaragua?'), where she writes "¿Qué sos / sino pechos de mujer hechos de tierra, / lisos, puntudos y amenazantes?" (98) 'What are you but a woman's breasts of earth, / smooth, pointed, and threatening?' and again in "Soñar para despertar soñando" 'Dreaming to Wake up Dreaming,' "mis volcanes tendidos sobre el paisaje como una mujer / de pechos desordenados" (171) 'my volcanoes scattered over the landscape / like a woman with wild breasts.'⁶ The image is repeated in *La mujer habitada*, where Lavinia describes the landscape of Faguas as "Cuerpo abierto, ancho, sinuoso, pechos desordenados de mujer hechos de tierra" (19) 'Open, wide, sinuous body, wild earthen breasts of a woman,' and again in *Waslala* where twin volcanoes are described as "pechos gigantes" (88) 'giant breasts.'⁷ In *El país de las mujeres*, Viviana describes her own breasts as "volcancitos" (66) 'little volcanoes' as if to emphasize this connection. The link between the female body and landscape, while present in Belli's earlier works, becomes much more substantive in this novel. While in *La mujer habitada* the woman/nature construct forms part of the justification for the revolution, in *El país de las mujeres* the landscape actually pushes the revolution forward, and the landscape is decidedly feminine: "Jamás imaginaron que la madre naturaleza les haría el gran servicio de crear un fenómeno que, literalmente, les *lavó* el camino para pasar del sueño a la realidad" (34, emphasis in the original) 'They never imagined that Mother Nature would do them the favor of creating a phenomenon that, literally, *cleaned* them a path to make the dream a reality.'

The eruption of Mt. Mitre and the gasses that flow down onto the people of Faguas should remind the reader of Viviana's thoughts of milk and honey flowing from her own breasts to the country's population. Belli's almost playful use of "dulcificación de los hombres" (39) 'sweetening of the men' as a result of the emasculating gasses that flow from Mitre also seems to point back to

Viviana's language of milk and honey. The novelist here is establishing a connection between an erotic portrayal of the female body and the landscape that is very similar to the connection between her earlier protagonists and their landscapes.

In addition to the landscape's having ties to the female body and political change, it is also important to highlight the volcano as an autonomous agent that has a vested interest in regime change in Faguas. Early in the novel, Viviana remembers one of the legends of Faguas in which the volcano pushed the Spaniards out of the region: "Los cronistas de Indias dieron cuenta de la huída de los colonos españoles de los primeros asentamientos en el siglo XVI a consecuencia de la actividad del Mitre. Tras un éxodo desordenado en carretas y a caballo los colonizadores se instalaron en la orilla de la laguna y allí establecieron la capital del país" (36) 'The chroniclers of the Indies told of the flight of the Spanish colonists from the first settlements in the 16th century due to Mitre's activity. After a disorganized exodus on horses and wagons, the colonists settled on the shores of the lagoon and established the nation's capital there.' Here the volcano Mitre pushes back on the invading force, protecting Faguas from the outsiders. This connection between Faguas's past and present should remind readers of the presence of Itzá in *La mujer habitada* and her link between colonial and contemporary time periods. In addition, the legend of Mitre establishes another layer of connection with Nicaragua's history, recalling the eruption of Momotombo and subsequent earthquakes that led to the relocation of León to its present site.

The other female characters in *El país de las mujeres* also contribute to the development of themes of ecology and female sexuality. Perhaps the most obvious link to ecology is the name of Eva Salvatierra 'Eve Earthsaver,' the most important member of Viviana's inner circle, who eventually steps in to be president while Sansón is still in a coma. In addition to the obvious interpretation that Eve, the mother of humanity according to Biblical tradition, will save the earth, Eva also runs security for the government and begins a crackdown on violence against women. Another member of the president's cabinet, Rebeca de los Ríos, whose name also invokes environmental connections, pushes for the ecologically responsible economy that begins to blossom with the PIE in charge. Rebeca pushes the economy forward in two creative initiatives. The first is that she follows through on one of Viviana's ideas and creates a floral industry that exports flowers and provides employment for thousands of women, turning Faguas into what is somewhat jokingly called the "imperio del lirio" (54) 'empire of the lily.' Belli draws a subtle connection between this green industry and female sexuality through the use of flowers as a sexual metaphor in a bedroom scene, referring to "el anturio de su sexo" (146) 'the anthurium of her sex' as well as the women's use of "flores con connotaciones sexuales: anturios, orquídeas"

(115) ‘flowers with sexual connotations: anthurium, orchids’ as symbols for the PIE’s followers. The second way in which Rebeca establishes a more ecological economic model is through her sale of carbon credits to the industrialized world. This project allows Faguas to keep much of its remaining landscape intact while receiving enough income to create an environmental police force that is amusingly called the “Amabosques” (196) ‘Forestlovers.’ Once again, Belli’s women are saving the planet.

While these economic developments certainly push forward the ecofeminist narrative, Viviana also establishes programs that contribute to better custodianship of the environment. She creates programs that reward neighborhoods who keep their streets (and children) clean in exchange for free water and electricity (155). This idea of cleaning the country is presented as the initial comment that gets the cabinet members dreaming of the PIE’s formation. At a book club meeting with her friends, Viviana states that “le gustaría lavar el país” (100) ‘she would like to clean the country.’ It should come as no surprise that the setting for this gathering has environmental connections as well. The women meet at the house of Ifigenia Porta, who is described as having “dedos verdes” ‘green fingers’ (100). The two fig trees that grow in Ifigenia’s garden remind us of the fig trees in Belli’s 2008 novel *El infinito en la palma de la mano* (*Infinity in the Palm of Her Hand*). In this earlier novel, Belli uses two different pairs of fig trees. The first pair is located inside the Garden of Eden—the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are fig trees—while outside Eden, Adán and Eva are given fig trees to shade the entrance to their cave and give them sustenance. Of these four trees, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil provides an interesting insight into Belli’s choice of fig trees as the prominent features in Ifigenia’s garden. Shortly after eating the figs from the Tree of Knowledge, Adán and Eva take notice of each other’s bodies for the first time and run off for their first sexual encounter. Soon after this episode, the lovers wonder whether their newfound sexual awareness was the knowledge this tree imparted (51). This would certainly shed light on Ifigenia’s garden as a place of genesis for the Partido de la Izquierda Erótica, once again underscoring the connections between the female body and the natural world.

While the trees in Ifigenia’s garden and the flower imagery should remind the reader of the ways in which Belli has established connections between sexuality and the plant world in her earlier works, she also expands on Viviana Sansón’s manipulation of her own look to draw attention to her body. Sansón’s colleagues dress in a similar fashion. The description of their dress code at a conference reinforces the fact that Belli’s women are showing off their bodies.

...vestidas todas muy sexis, con estilo de motociclistas o rockeras para llamar la atención de los jóvenes. Ifigenia temió sentirse incómoda vestida

en una forma que les era más familiar a las otras que a ella. Pero cuando se vio al espejo, pensó que era una idiota por no sacarle antes más partido a la genética que talló sus largas piernas, la cintura pequeña, los pechos altos y redondos. La ropa le ayudó a encarnar el rol sensual, desafiante e inteligente que se proponían a proyectar. (112)

...all dressed very sexy, like bikers or rock stars to draw the attention of the young men. Ifigenia feared she would feel uncomfortable dressed in a way that was more familiar to the others than to herself. But when she saw herself in the mirror, she felt like an idiot for not previously making the best of the genes that shaped her long legs, small waistline, high and round breasts. The clothes helped her embody the sensual, defiant and intelligent role that they worked to project.

Like their leader, the members of Viviana's inner circle take command of their sexuality and use it both to gain political advantage and become more confident.

But this connection between the erotic and the environment that Belli carefully constructs might be less subversive than it first seems. Because Belli herself has pointed out the ways in which she utilizes the scandal of female sexuality as a weapon of revolution, we might be quick to assume that the same process is at play here, but that would be only a partial understanding of the text.⁸ In the party's manifesto, the founding members clarify the use of the word "erótica" as follows: "Somos eróticas porque *Eros* quiere decir VIDA, que es lo más importante que tenemos y porque las mujeres no solo hemos estado desde siempre encargadas de darla, sino también de conservarla y cuidarla" (110) 'We are erotic because Eros means LIFE, which is the most important thing that we have and why we women have not only been entrusted with giving it, but also with conserving and taking care of it.' In this respect, environment and sexuality become linked with life itself. The emphasis shifts from merely an attack on patriarchy to the birth of something new.

The presentation of the erotic theme as a creative and generative endeavor is important in the text in that it draws our focus to the ways in which Belli establishes her "Country of Women" as a future utopia based on the present. The creation of the Party of the Erotic Left points to a new way of conceptualizing government, but in her interview with Carlos F. Chamorro about the novel, Belli is quick to point out that Sansón's political party is a remnant of Belli's personal past: "[La] novela nació hace muchísimos años en mi cabeza, porque durante la revolución hubo un grupo de mujeres que formamos lo que llamábamos el PIE, que era el Partido de la Izquierda Erótica" (Belli "El país" n.pag.) '[The] novel was born in my mind many years ago, because during the revolution there was a group of women who formed what we called the PIE, which was the Party of the

Erotic Left.’ As in *La mujer habitada*, where the protagonist Lavinia is a fictionalized version of Belli, the PIE in *El país de las mujeres* is an element from Belli’s past that has informed and shaped her text.

Additional connections between either Belli or Nicaragua and the PIE and Faguas are scattered throughout the novel as well. The original members of the PIE listed in *El país de las mujeres*, “Sofía Montenegro.... doña Yvonne, doña Olguita, doña Alba, la Poeta, doña Malena, doña Milú, doña Ana, doña Vilma, doña Lourdes y doña Rita” (178) closely match as a group the list of women whom Belli credits with forming the original PIE in the novel’s acknowledgements: “Sofía Montenegro, Milú Vargas, Malena De Montis, Ivonne Siu, Ana Criquillón, Vilma Castillo, Rita Arauz, Lourdes Bolaños, Alba Palacios y Olga Espinoza” (277). Additionally, Belli inserts herself into her narration as the poet who wrote the line that adorns Ifigenia’s t-shirt, “Yo bendigo mi sexo” (115) ‘I bless my sex.’ Belli carefully and deliberately infuses Faguas with her own history and the history of Nicaragua, but this raises a question as to how *El país de las mujeres* can be read.

On the one hand, while it does have a firm footing in Belli and Nicaragua’s reality, we cannot ignore the fact that *El país de las mujeres* is not an eyewitness account that documents reality. It is fiction that has sprouted from reality. At the same time, the field of testimonial criticism has moved increasingly toward recognizing authorial mediation as part of the territory. As we have already seen, Belli has manipulated her own past into a fictionalized testimonial before. *La mujer habitada* certainly fits this model as it intermixes Belli’s involvement in the Sandinista movement and Lavinia’s story, and in many ways Belli continues this trajectory in *El país de las mujeres*. In addition to the recent novel’s contact points with personal and national history, Belli mimics the feel of many testimonial narratives stylistically in *El país de las mujeres*. Belli looks over the shoulder of multiple characters throughout the texts, and some are given the chance to offer first-person accounts. At the same time, Belli incorporates fictional press releases, the PIE manifesto, interviews, and even an editorial from *The New York Times*. In essence, Belli makes an attempt to look like she is documenting history through various fictional eyewitness accounts, but the history she seems to be documenting is a future one. While this inclusion of falsified information that looks and feels like historic documentation is nothing new to postmodern narrative, the intensity with which Belli utilizes this technique and the points of contact with Nicaragua’s past and present allow us to recall Craft’s classification of “pseudo-testimony in which the novelist invents an eyewitness account that resembles testimony and incorporates testimonial function” (189). So while Belli’s novel might fail the basic textual requirements of the genre, it certainly makes an attempt at looking like testimonial.

The observation that Belli is attempting to mimic certain aspects of testimonial narrative should give us pause. In her analysis of Gaspar Pedro González's 2006 novel *El 13 B'aktun: La nueva era 2012 (13 B'aktun: Mayan Visions of 2012 and Beyond)*, Louise Detwiler argues that González's novel functions as a testimonial narrative if viewed from an ecocritical standpoint. For Detwiler, the key to this reading is understanding that González utilizes the Earth as the eyewitness whose account is documented, which frees the author to speak about past, present, and future ecological events. Detwiler's argument is bolstered by the novel's use of dreams and the spirit world as the place where Earth's testimony is revealed, and she concludes that "the ecotestimonio model to emerge from the pages of *13 B'aktun* challenges, therefore, many long-standing tenets of the classic testimonio narrative. Terra-trauma, rather than human trauma, takes the center stage" (234). And why shouldn't ecocritical readings challenge an axiomatic understanding of *testimonio*? Such readings allow for us to better understand the complex interplay between nature-centric narration and our established categories, such as testimonial literature.

Detwiler's reading should challenge ecocritics to rethink our understanding of the testimonial genre (or at a minimum what she terms "ecotestimonio" accounts). While González and Belli fail the most basic litmus test for identifying testimonial narrative in that they both lack a *human* eyewitness, both authors push back on that requirement. González's inclusion of the spirit world is a clever strategy that circumvents the human aspect of the witness, while Belli's strategy is more subtle. In addition to the testimonial feel that she establishes in her novel, Belli's use of the volcano that changes Faguas's testosterone level allows Earth to be the genesis of the narrative. In the case of *El 13 B'aktun: La nueva era 2012*, the Earth narrates through the spirit world, while in *El país de las mujeres*, the volcanic eruption is the author/creator of the entire storyline that follows. It is almost as if Earth were allowed to carve out of its own alternate reality, narrate its own utopian dream, and write its own testimonial of the future.

This idea of Earth's pushing a story forward is by no means a new technique for Gioconda Belli. The events in *La mujer habitada* are set into motion by the orange tree that serves as the conduit for the intertwining of Lavinia and Itzá. Similarly, in *El país de las mujeres*, the natural world drives the storyline, but there are several differences worth noting between the novels' use of nature. First, the volcano is not a living organism like the orange tree. The selection of a volcano as the agent from the natural world is intriguing. The volcano is both inanimate and alive. It is the embodiment of the physical Earth that Belli links to the female body and yet is also treated as a living entity. Second, while the orange tree in *La mujer habitada* has the indirect ability to narrate through Itzá, the volcano has no such privilege in *El país de las mujeres*. This is an important

distinction in light of Detwiler's understanding that Earth can be the eyewitness required in an ecotestimonial and would seem to indicate that Itzá's narration might fulfill that requirement. This observation would also problematize such a reading of *El país de las mujeres*. Lastly, in Belli's first novel, nature both pushes her female protagonist into motion and strengthens her, taking control of her thoughts and actions, as *habitada* 'inhabited' suggests in the novel's title. The events in *El país de las mujeres* are very different. Nature's role here is not to push the female characters into motion (they are already in full campaign mode when the volcano erupts), or to inhabit them in some way. Here Earth seems merely to level the playing field and allow Belli's women to take control of Faguas.

In conclusion, Gioconda Belli's appropriation of her previous narrative strategy that links ecological thought to the female body and political change in *El país de las mujeres*, as well as her utilization of testimonial narrative techniques, demonstrate her capacity to push against simple systems of literary classification and require flexibility in critical approaches to her work. While scholars have long contended that ecological literary criticism requires a re-working of how we read and understand texts, *El país de las mujeres* provides a clear example of how a novel's environmental themes can challenge our understanding of testimonial literature.

Notes

1. Translations of titles and quotes are mine.
2. Arias's assertion that female eroticism "plays a positive and liberating role" while undermining patriarchal authority picks up on a thread of investigation that is often present in the analysis of Belli's poetry (188). Kathleen March's article, "Gioconda Belli: The Erotic Politics of the Great Mother," interestingly moves beyond simple analysis of eroticism as a political and gender revolution and identifies connections between Belli's use of sexuality and its connection to landscape and nature.
3. Craft theorizes that the degree of mediation by the novelist should be viewed as a continuum. "Pure" testimony would stand on one side and "pseudo-testimony" would stand on the opposite. She argues that *La mujer habitada* would fit into various categories, such as "testimonial function combined with autobiographical elements," "testimonial function and narrative combined with poetry, myth, and/or the magically real" and "'pseudo-testimony' in which the novelist invents an eyewitness account that resembles testimony and incorporates testimonial

function” (189). It is important to note that Craft, in addition to pointing out the testimonial nature of the text, also focuses on the connections that are established between women and nature in the novel.

4. Belli’s criticism of Ortega and the current FSLN appears in many interviews, such as those with José Denis Cruz (2013) and Elizabeth Hoover (2011).

5. It merits commenting that several connections between the histories of Faguas and Nicaragua are present in the text. To my mind the clearest of them is the description of Eva’s father: “Había sido combatiente de la revolución, pero murió triste, sus sueños hechos añicos” (84) ‘He had been a revolutionary fighter, but he died sad, his dreams shattered.’ This seems to speak directly to the failures of the Sandinista government.

6. Although “¿Qué sos Nicaragua?” was first published in *Línea de fuego* (‘Line of Fire,’ 1978) and “Soñar para despertar soñando” originally appeared in *Truenos y arcoiris* (‘Thunder and Rainbows,’ 1982), the bibliographical information in this study is from Belli’s 1992 compilation *El ojo de la mujer* (‘The Woman’s Eye’).

7. This quote comes shortly after a description of the volcano Tago and its history through the dictatorship, solidifying the connection between “pechos desordenados” and the volcanoes of Faguas (18).

8. In her interview with Margaret Randall, Belli states, “I instinctively understood that what I was doing was rebelling” with respect to her portrayal of female sexuality in her poetry (145).

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