

ENGLISH TITLE

Down the wrong way, testimonies of female bertsolaris

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Kontrako ezarririk

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INTRODUCTION

*How to arrive at verse
from the female body?*

ITZIAR OKARIZ

“How to arrive at verse from the female¹ body?”, Itziar Okariz asked me about five years ago, looking like a driver who’d lost her way. It was hard for me to react. The question reminded me of another my grandmother had asked me when I lived in Sweden: “Say, is it Sunday there too?”. They made me feel the distance. You have to go all the way to Stockholm; you have to arrive at verse.

The unauthorized body must reach the text, and the text must release the body if it is to function as an autonomous creation. This is what Virginia Woolf was talking about in her emblematic *A Room of One’s Own* when she spoke of the purity of Shakespeare, his free writing, without rage, without clamor, without a body. On the other hand, she cursed her inability to forget that she was a woman when she wrote, her need to move a pen transporting her suppressed body. The curiosity to investigate what this distance between woman and verse consists of has been knocking on my door ever since.

I had been thinking about authority for a few months, reflecting on how it is constructed and deconstructed in the world of verse but outside of verse – outside of text. The body the audience sees in front of the microphone, trying to gauge where the voice they hear is, where by self-perception, where through others’ eyes, where in relation to other bodies. How close it is to the agreed upon credibility, appearance, quality, grace, purity. How many parts

¹ I will use the terms “woman/female” and “man/male” in the social sense, to the extent that we are all named and read as women and men. Quotation marks, asterisks and dashes are left to the reader.

Shakespeare, how many parts Woolf. What mechanisms are in place for the bertsolari to doff or don authority. How the sex-gender system affects this. How the transfer of authority occurs or does not occur between generations, between colleagues, between men and women. What each bertsolari is authorized for at each moment, in each town square, in each exercise. Because bodies in different positions, though occupying the same space, occupy sniper positions, beaches, verse events.

Female bertsolaris are public bodies —looked at, judged, significant—and their representation is the result of constant semiotic negotiation. Although they are diverse —in size, in style, in meaning— the bodies of female bertsolaris dialogue with the generic *female body* (with its history and with its future) as much as with the real bodies around them. Making women’s bodies public has brought corporeality to the fore in bertsolaritza and, connected to the body, pleasure, pain, violence, eroticism, resistance... are incarnated.

In traditions and molds shaped by men, female bertsolaris (often in the minority in the event) create with men and among and next to masculine bodies, and inevitably cross paths with their opinions and assessments, their experience, their presence and their way of doing things. The bertsolari cannot be, like the writer Harkaitz Cano dreamed of, an artist *with a sloping roof*; (s) he is forced to share, or at least negotiate for, the car, the conversation, the community and the story. This action is both a difficulty and an opportunity: friction and training.

“We are all captive to men’s perceptions and feelings. Captive to men’s words.”

“Women’s war has its own colors, smells, lighting and spaces. Its own words.”

“Men... reluctantly let women enter their world, their territory.”

“Men were afraid that women would tell of another war, of another kind of war.”

Reading Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War* had an impact on my intention to start collecting the testimonies of female companions in verse. I spent half a year interviewing companions-in-verse in bars, on terraces, in the kitchens and living rooms of their houses and mine. After organizing their words and reflecting on what I had heard, I have gathered here the testimonies of 15 female bertsolaris who sing in town squares today. The oldest interviewee was born in 1977 and has been in town squares for over twenty-five years; the youngest was born in 1996, but has been singing in front of an audience for a dozen years. There are intermittent bertsolaris, who at some point in their career stopped performing in the town squares but returned a few years later, with a different awareness and a different cornerstone; Ainhoa Agirreazaldegí and Miren Artetxe, for example. There are also many bertsolaris who suddenly retired from frequent performances and have not (yet) returned: Estitxu Arozena, Alaitz Sarasola, Estitxu Eizagirre, Leire Ostolaza, Erika Lagoma, Estitxu Fernandez, Leire Bilbao, Oihane Enbeita... Gathering their testimonies would round out the situation of the female bertsolari and would add new subtleties to the picture. Likewise, it would be interesting to examine how male bertsolaris experience the issues that appear here.

What is collected in this work, *Kontrako ezarririk*, is not intended to be a story. It is intended to be, as Joanna Russ puts it in her essay *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, "a sketch of an analytic tool" that will reveal the patterns that are repeated in the mechanisms of subjugating women's bertsolaritza. At the same time, it is intended to expand and complete the traditional definition of bertsolaritza, because the definitions to date do not fit various aspects of verse-making, the bertsolari's body or the experience, which are highlighted by female improvisers.

I have identified and named twenty-two recurring patterns and limiting mechanisms in the narratives of female companions in verse; they are not isolated patterns that happen to touch each other, but rather they cross paths and overlap. The mechanisms, in fact, do not affect female bertsolaris solely or in particular: to a greater or lesser degree, and whatever the particularities, they are repeated in every system of subordination.

THE TWENTY-TWO

1.

INTERNALIZING THE ERROR (THE FEELING OF NOT FUNCTIONING)

“The intellectual woman always tries to behave like a man,” Rousseau is said to have written. “The good writer would actually like to be a man,” Katixa Agirre tells us in her novel *Mothers Don’t*. Joanna Russ quotes novelist Chelsea Quinn Yarbro in her book *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*: “The shrink told me that [by writing] I was denying my femininity... and that I was envying the male penis, what I needed to do was get laid and pregnant and I’d be fine.”

Not functioning as a bertsolari and not functioning as a woman are two burdens for female bertsolaris, two burdens that are often contradictory: what is valued in the bertsolari is punished in the woman; what is valued in the woman, is punished in the bertsolari. These identities thwart each other, as they are constructed in opposition to each other.

AMAIA AGIRRE:

“When I first started singing verses, they highlighted and praised the values that today lead me to pain and doubt: lewd humor, boldness and shamelessness. Nerve, not getting the jitters. What was useful to me to advance in the town squares has come back to haunt me off the stage. I feel a boomerang effect. I don’t see much admiration now in others’ eyes, and that affects me terribly.

“Going outside the canon has been bad for me in verse. But I never felt *inadequate*. I have, however, in recent years. Out of place, often, like I can’t figure it out, can’t get there.

“What I (supposedly) used to do well is what I (supposedly) now do wrong. I don’t know if the reading has changed, but the assessment of the reading has changed.

“I’ve been told a thousand times that I’m disagreeable and rude, and I must have been like that many times, but even when I think I’ve changed and I think I’m more easy-going and nicer, I still hear the same thing. I’ve often felt pigeonholed and labeled.

“It hurts when I hear people say that I’m not feminine at all.”

JONE URIA:

“I don’t seem to fit the stereotype of the sweet, sensitive woman and I think that’s confused some people. I think I’m a little *odd* in that I don’t completely *fit* either the feminine stereotype or the masculine one, and this *disorients* people a little: they mostly give me humorous topics, they don’t consider me sensitive, I don’t sing sweetly enough...

“They say I’m serious, cold, sullen... But just between you and me, I’m funny and sensitive.”

ELI PAGOLA:

“I think being a hit as a bertsolari is worth it and it works, especially when you’re young. When you start at age 16 and you get called to sing at the local festival, and you’re up there with all the big names, you go out there and people see you: ‘Look! She’s not even nervous!’ That gets results at first, but then you can’t completely depend on it, be subject to it every time; verse isn’t just about that. But when you’ve worked on that and it’s given you results, you’ve repeated it so many times it’s hard to move away from it. If you want to give a performance and try not to do that, because you want to sing more gently or you don’t want to make fun of anyone, I felt like the audience wouldn’t accept me doing it any other way. Especially in the rural areas. You perform after the weightlifting competition, before the woodchoppers and the oxen... if you don’t give it your all and people have that image of you, they’d tell me “you were slacking off today,” and things like that. I think I sometimes felt like a puppet: a young girl who goes out and gives it to them. And when I didn’t do that, they

didn't want me, and that affected me because I'm a shy person by nature, and even though I'm funny, ironic, when I don't want to take shots at anyone, I get no interest. They consider me a failure.”

ANE LABAKA:

“I'm afraid of losing the *young girl* category, even though it's annoying to be treated like one. But I'm getting older, and what will I be when I stop being a *young girl*? The people who assign the topics have read me like that and the topics they've given me have been consistent with that. I've sung a lot about sex, about erotic relationships, mostly with young guys. I've also been asked about feminism a lot in recent years; but beyond that, I don't think other registers are recognized.”

MIREN ARTETXE:

“It seems like women have a sell-by date: a male bertsolari can be old, but up to now, it seems like women can't. As far as we can remember, women who sing in town squares have always been young, and as they get older, they give it up. They've always been valued for their freshness, youth, beauty... which are the reasons why they give it up as they get older... Maybe they give it up because they don't get called, because they lose interest when they lose their *fuckability*. I don't know. The opposite happened to me: age gave me legitimacy. I'm a lot more comfortable now. I can see myself in the town square at forty more easily than at twenty-two. But at sixty... I don't know. I don't know how to project. I don't know what it's like to have sixty-five-year-old knees, sixty-five-year-old strength, responsibilities, enthusiasm, context... But I think we need to get at least some of the girls in the squares to keep going for a long time so the figure of the mature female bertsolari will be normalized.”

ONINTZA ENBEITA:

«When I cry on stage, I punish myself because I'm presenting an image I don't want to present. Because I can't control myself.».

OIHANA BARTRA:

“As a woman from Bilbao, I’ve felt neither understood nor valued in some of the town squares and some rural areas of Gipuzkoa. I’ve felt like, *you’re not one of us, you’re not a real bertsolari*. I remember the Championship in Leitza in 2017 so well: the place was about to explode, it was a great atmosphere, but when I sang, I could feel the applause cooling down. It was upsetting. And it was not directly related only to my being a woman, but to my whole being as a bertsolari.”

1.1. VOICE

*(...) but I’m still small and
I have a weak voice,
when I grow up I want to sing
like those in the back.*

ARANTZAZU LOIDI, 1990,
Ordizia verse festival

The people in the back were men. We consider the *uneasiness* caused by Loidi’s fine voice to be a long-standing issue. Today, no one would automatically consider the female voice to be wrong for verse, but looking at the testimonies, there’s still something going on that is close to this error. Reading the voice is reading the body, and it informs us about authorized and unauthorized bodies. Correct voices or correct ways of using the voice are those that represent hegemonic masculinity or appropriate femininity, but, in the latter case, the feminine voice may be limited by being appropriate, since various registers, uses or functions may fall outside the boundaries of appropriateness.

OIHANA IGUARAN:

“At verse school, I was always the one who couldn’t sing a set of verses. They were all boys except for Amaia Agirre and me, and Amaia had a deep voice

too. They started in their own range and I couldn't sing. I used to destroy my voice by singing too low or too high. I felt like I was out of the neutral zone and I was frying my voice trying to fit in with the others.

“I've generally had a good response to my voice in the town squares. But my voice is weak, I get tired. I run out of voice if people are smoking or if I'm in a large space. Beautiful but weak: lovely for singing, but weak when it comes to keeping up with the flow of verses. A performance without a microphone leaves me wiped out and I've wondered, if I'd been born many years earlier, back before megaphones, whether I would have been able to be a bertsolari, like Otaño and the rest of them, because I wouldn't have reached that level of power. Otherwise, they always recognize it as something good about me, but sometimes that emphasis makes me angry because it seems like they're *taking away* from the content, they're *taking away* from my creative work. They put a lot of emphasis on my voice, and I haven't heard much of the same being said about men who sing well, not in the same sense. I don't try to hide my voice, I don't use a deeper voice to disguise it; I try to stretch my range. In the salutations, in solos, when I'm having fun, I take time to let it shine, I let myself enjoy the song, I let my voice be heard and I give it some breath while I listen. In humor, in the eight-line verses, four-line verses, rhyming verses... I tend to cut out or break off; I've noticed that my voice works better if I use a more serious, deeper, sweeter tone... In humor, the voices of some of the singers — guys mostly— are valued more, they're funny as soon as they open their mouths, especially the ones who have a certain timbre to their voices. There's a type of timbre that's associated with a type of body, with a specific geography and a specific construct of Basqueness that's especially well-suited to humor because it comes out of a tradition that's been thoroughly decoded. In those specific geographies I mentioned, in the return of that specific construct of Basqueness, I've felt more inferior in speech than in verse. In speech, it's hard for my voice to be heard. In meetings, with friends... A speech therapist told me that I speak in a range lower than my natural one and that this has fatigued my voice and fried my throat. I've listened to a lot of women. In my case, it's clear that I was making my voice deeper to gain authority and voice.”

MIREN ARTETXE:

“I’m from the Northern Basque Country and at our games, people used to sing, especially people who lived inland, and they sang very well. I admired them, I loved how they sang. I didn’t know how to do the backing vocals as well as they did. I also realized that I didn’t really know how to sing, what we were doing for the verses wasn’t really singing. They were two different things. When I’m doing verses, even now I don’t sing. I’d like to be able to sing, but that’s not what I do in verse and I don’t want to *sing* verses anyway. And I want to keep on not singing. In my opinion, if a verse is too *sung*, it can lose its power. I like a verse that’s half recited, half sung. It has its own punch. It’s a different register, but it’s still a register, after all. I don’t want to sing more lyrically for it to be nicer or more sung. I like that option too, but it’s not what I do. It has to do with positioning: what do you want to make shine? I want a nice voice, well centered, that will serve the verse, like my body posture and facial expression. A calm *here I am*, rather than I’m coming to eat you up, a need to show strength—I couldn’t do it if I tried—... I have two ways of singing verse: one, a verse that shows strength, as if I didn’t have a microphone; and the other, which is more comfortable for me but I can’t perform like this yet because I think it’s a misread from a gender perspective as well, like *since we have microphones, why make a fuss*. I’m much more comfortable singing softly. If they have to turn up the volume on the microphone, the technician can do it. A singer once told me I *dropped* the verse, and on the one hand, I understand that a verse, because of its format, needs self-affirmation, especially in terms of tone and rhythm, it needs a person who will hold onto it, and not drop it. Fine. But, at the same time, it seems to me that there are a thousand different ways of singing to explore. We have microphones, we can sing however we like, and we don’t have to force ourselves to show strength even in our voices. When I choose to sing like this, people see it as a lack of desire or a lack of passion. ‘You didn’t want to win, did you?’ they said to me after I sang in the Xilaba competition; ‘You don’t believe that you do well in verse.’ That interpretation makes me angry because I think it has to do with my physical presence on stage and the way I use my voice. My choice has nothing to do with desire or ambition. For me, it’s an exercise in self-

affirmation to sing the way I feel comfortable instead of singing the way people expect me to.”

JONE URIA:

“I think I have too deep a voice for a woman, but I wouldn’t say I have a masculine singing voice either. Outside the world of verse, I’ve been told in research that I speak in too much of a monotone.”

ONINTZA ENBEITA:

“I don’t have a girly voice, I don’t sing sweetly or prettily, I just sing as well as I can. I don’t have a good voice, and I’ve lost range over the years as well. In some tunes, I don’t have the strength to finish the verse. They’ve said everything about me: I sing out of tune, I have no rhythm, I don’t sing well, I should do something other than verse... I think I have a fragile voice, and that plus the fact that I cry easily make me too *sensitive* to be a bertsolari.”

EPILOGUE

“From antiquity to the present day there are countless examples of women [...] excluded from speaking out in public life” wrote Mary Beard in her article “The Public Voice of Women”. Public speaking has been —and remains— a defining characteristic of masculinity, she explains in a long string of arguments, and a woman who speaks publicly is, by definition, considered a non-woman. A woman’s voice is rarely given legitimacy and, when it is, it is usually as a victim or on behalf of herself and other women like her. There are very few women who are considered universal beings,² representatives and models of the whole community. Most of the time and at the most, in Enbeita’s words, “we have the authority to talk about *our area*”. This book would be a book about bertsolaritza —and not about *women and bertsolaritza*— if women were universal beings.

² Mari Luz Esteban mentioned in the Basque Summer University course *Bertsolaritza and gender* taught in Pamplona (June, 2018) that Maialen Lujanbio was read as a universal being, but she also warned that this reading could change.

I believe that it is essential to think about the authorized voice and its construction when we think about bertsoaritza. As Beard says, “it doesn’t much matter what line you take as a woman, if you venture into traditional male territory”, mechanisms of limitation will be activated automatically. This collection of testimonies is proof enough of that. This being the case, there are many public women who want to shoo away the word *woman* “as if it were a horsefly,” so they won’t be reduced to a lower wage because they’d rather be pure Shakespeare than mad Woolf.

The woman who speaks publicly is categorized as woman and hears the call to be non-woman simultaneously. “Everything Lujanbio has in verse, you should have in literature,” a well-known male writer once advised Eider Rodriguez. It’s a sophisticated underreading. Calls to act *above* our sex, *apart* from our sex, are relentless.

Many female bertsoaris have tried not to be read as women: automatic efforts to measure the body, cover it, neutralize it, keep it under control, are indicative of this. *Discretion* is what most are looking for. “If we are to be noticed, let it be because of the verses”, says Uria. We want to be free of categorization, subordination, partial readings... but we are marked bodies, called women and read as women. I don’t know if it would be too much to say that every time we speak in public, we try, somehow and more or less consciously, not to be a woman. As I learned from Danele Sarriugarte, as we are all *fighting the same dragons*, we should understand and position all strategies, those in favor of marking the female identity and those against it, as means of resistance.

Feminism is about to turn the categorization that belittles us into a field of liberation. Turn the subordinate identity into a transformative identity. Hence, the advice not to ally oneself with women is linked to the call not to be a woman. They will blame *provincialism*, *tricks*, *complacency* and even *privilege* on anyone who tries to collectively organize and liberate. “Feminists have harmed you”, “venture into the jungle”..., be *equal* even as you suffer inequality. Be a man, even if you’re not a man. It won’t be for lack of effort. However, it is often repeated in the testimonies that it is group action that empowers women;

again and again they mention the need for women's verse performances, verse schools, and shared spaces in general.

This collection of testimonies is a reflection on the marginal movement of women with a public voice, a reflection that transcends the realm of bertsolaritza. Women's difficulties in the public sphere are not textual, but rather they are linked to context. From Xabier Amuriza, we learned that a bertsolari is made, and from Beauvoir, that a woman is made. We need tools to think about how contexts and conditions for verses make and remake the bertsolari, woman and man. Placing Bourdieu's symbolic capital³ and symbolic violence⁴ on the gender axis and analyzing in detail how they are constructed and transmitted could help in this work.

Russ denounced the *automatic devaluation of women's experience*. The obstacles mentioned by the interviewed bertsolaris do not come from the inability to create the right text, the exact technique, the fitting discourse, the valid speech, but from the inability to find the vantage point and position from which to create and validate that speech. The bertsolari is a body, and the body is the first vantage point. "I noticed that the first thing I saw was not the bertsolari, but the girl," says Akizu; "the body is the first element we put in front of the audience, before the voice", says Bartra. The *what* and the *from where* cannot be separated. Speech belongs to the body, the body belongs to speech, and they are structured in power relationships.

What those who are at a critical moment with their bodies have brought to the table is nothing new; specifically, they have brought the body to the stage, and with the body, countless verses about eroticism, pleasure, the degeneration of the body, physiology, vulnerability and violence. When women are talking

3 It consists of characteristics that seem to be inherent in a person: authority, prestige, good reputation, credibility, importance, honor, good taste, comprehensibility... Accumulated symbolic value.

4 Symbolic violence is the internalization of social dominance by agents that is tied to a social location. This domination is subconscious and is not based on intersubjective domination (one individual over another) but on structural domination (one location over another). The structuring is done according to the capital of the agents and is violent because the agents do not recognize it. This violence can be a source of feelings of inferiority or nothingness: it can be suffered, but not objectified in any way. Symbolic violence is based on the legitimization of classification schemes linked to the hierarchization of social groups.

about the body, about self-representation and its limits, they are talking about the battlefield and the field of pleasure. They have brought it to the front line.

For most female bertsolaris, impromptu verse writing seems like a difficult test of endurance, following the tradition created by men, learning from their example, singing among men and with men, in a field in which men's opinions and tastes have a high specific weight, in a competitive context, under intense exposure. The actions they organize together bring opportunity together with friction: they are *forced* into constant negotiation, and that negotiation often takes place in the context of shared pleasure. All bertsolaris, male and female, have a passion for verse, they have a close relationship, they have fun together, they joke together, they reflect together, in 10-8, 7-6 syllables.

The town square is also involved, in some measure. The division of labor, the market and money are delicate issues. Value and price. The tournament is the primary validation system, and almost the only one in bertsolaritza; outside it is a desert. Artetxe mentions the need to question the “winner's model”, which compares the career of the bertsolari to that of the athlete, which is based on getting to the top and staying there as long as possible, without youth or fall, until the younger ones withdraw. Ibarzabal admits that she feels she is “struggling in an extreme capitalist market.” “Apparently this 2019 tournament will be a *milestone*. If I don't do it now, I'll lose my youth classification”, worries Akizu at age 22. Most of them state that they're competing to *win their position* or to *hold onto their position*. In the testimonies, the “need to demonstrate” is mentioned thirteen times. Some female bertsolaris question whether they *deserve* a decent amount in prize money, whether they're good *enough*, whether they *can* do this activity. Being unable to turn things down and needing to be excellent can't be the only way; oases must be built in the desert. Extreme structural self-requirement can be destructive, leading bertsolaris to feel inadequate, fall silent, or charge less money for the same work. In the field of Basque creation, which is precarious by nature, gender can push female bertsolaris to greater precariousness. Experts talk about the *sexualization of money*. It would be helpful to gather the experiences of men and to examine the

differences between them. Argentinian psychologist Clara Coria wrote about the importance of *denaturalizing* the use and distribution of money in her book *El sexo oculto del dinero (The Hidden Sex of Money)*, which was published in 1986 and reprinted several times. It is a matter of priority to reflect on economic management in the field of culture, to think about the economic policies of *bertsolaritza*, to reflect collectively on money, and to place the issue on the gender axis.

On the other hand, relativizing the importance of the tournament and increasing analysis would move *bertsolaritza* away from sports and bring it closer to art (or it may be the other way around: moving it away from sports and closer to art would be a move away from scoring and closer to analysis). This would not exempt the activity from competition, the field of art is also competitive and often very individualistic —in contrast, community is very important in *bertsolaritza*—, but it would make different ways of being possible, and diversity the rating scales.

I find the *temporary presumption* that many of the interviewed *bertsolaris* impose on themselves concerning; this presumption is not linked to the feeling of the *privilege* of working in the territory or their *replaceability*. That apprehensive feeling of being in *someone else's hands*. If the acceptance of temporality is related to existential humility and the natural law of life, so much the better, but I wonder if it is not a vaccination against self-affirmation. Female *bertsolaris*, in practice, have accepted their mutual substitutability. They rarely sing together, as they stand in for each other. On the other hand, introducing a new woman to the town square is enough of an event that the old people note it in their appointment books. Those who account for 50% of students in *bertsolaritza* schools have access to 25% of the market in the town squares. This is only making things worse. “I felt that the young girls were coming to take over my position”, “I felt in my bones that the verse system itself promotes competition and envy among women”... We have also heard from older male *bertsolaris* (I mean those in their 40s!) that they are certain they’ll be replaced. However, there are hardly any women above that age in the town squares. They’re

experiencing the feeling or reality that their cycle has ended. I personally find it distressing that the system produces such short-lived bertsolaris. I believe that we should rise to the goal of making the town squares livable for older bertsolaris –and especially for mature and older female bertsolaris– and to the challenge of generating audience interest in older bertsolaris. The effort would reveal for whom the conditions in the squares are livable, and for whom they are not.

Many female bertsolaris are working on collective mechanisms to deal with the competitiveness and precariousness caused by the system. The Ahalduntze verse school, Zilekoa, the *Ez da kasualitatea (It's No Coincidence)* sessions, the Txakur Gorria collective...; apart from individual meritocratic competition, they are becoming collective tools for working on text and context. *Festival, complicity, inspiration, quality, eroticism, serenity, enjoyment, safety, teamwork, courage, love, alternatives, enthusiasm, self-representation, physicality.....* many female bertsolaris have found them in these areas. The construction of a common ground (what Estitxu Eizagir called the united woman) and the creation of new language and registers are creative and essential spaces that encourage self-knowledge through mutual knowledge.

Thanks to this work, female bertsolaris, their discourses and their ways of creating verse have gained prestige in some areas. At the same time, people who were not fans of verse before have become fans and new venues have been created. The creative and activist work of female bertsolaris are both significant for a part of Basque society and, according to the latest sociological research on bertsolaritza, also for the future of bertsolaritza itself.

Most female bertsolaris consider their feminist identity liberating. Some (Agirreazaldegi, Akizu, Amuriza, Artetxe, Bartra, Enbeita, Ibarzabal...) distinguish between consciousness and pre-consciousness, because the feminist consciousness has completely changed their reading of themselves and the context for verses. Some of them have come to an awareness of violence as a result of their feminist awareness, while others have followed the opposite path: awareness of violence has led them to feminist awareness.

The fact that some female bertsolaris have felt that they were outside, or positioned themselves outside, the feminist collective is something to take into account and work on. It will be necessary in the future as well to improve bridges for communication, take into account the work done from various fields, make room for all kinds of experiences, delve into feminist thought, visualize and recognize structural subjugation mechanisms, deactivate mutual competition caused by the system, and emphasize the importance of collective work and tools.

Although collective self-affirmation exercises have been launched, it is worth highlighting that, for female bertsolaris, the need for the approval of their canonical companions in verse (almost all men) is also significant. Their opinions, recognition or condemnation (often given indirectly, through comments about peers) have a direct impact on the self-esteem, self-perception and performance of the interviewed bertsolaris. The high level of exposure and the permeability of opinions and comments caused by the system, whose structure is similar to the family structure, —“The symbolic order of violence is the father / the symbolic order of the mother is violence” (Goikoetxea, 2014)— make bertsolaris vulnerable, and female bertsolaris more vulnerable. In fact, women do not have the protection of Sisterhood. As we talk about alliances among women, we should also talk about those among men, the long-standing network of protection and mechanisms of complicity. How and on what basis the transfer of authority between generations and genders takes place —or does not take place— would be worth examining.

Likewise, the *pure bertsolari* and the *total bertsolari* appear to be two totems that need to be torn down, since they exclude all peripheral categories (generic, identity, territorial, linguistic, generational). *Natural/artificial, pure/impure, total/partial, flawless/clumsy, quipster/rhymer, personal/social...* these are the dichotomous faces of deep-rooted ideologies, which are hazardous to the health and survival of bertsolaris.

Here’s to energizing egalitarian verse-making, friends.