

CRISIS Y CONFESIÓN: UNA LECTURA ZAMBRANIANA DE FLORES EN LA BASURA (2022) DE VIOLETA SERRANO

CRISIS AND CONFESSION: A ZAMBRANIAN READING OF FLORES EN LA BASURA (2022) BY VIOLETA SERRANO

Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7877-2065>

Universiteit Utrecht, Países Bajos.

E-mail: e.m.h.houvenaghel@uu.nl

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Resumen: Este estudio examina la narrativa personal de Violeta Serrano, que retrata sus experiencias como joven migrante durante la crisis económica de España en 2008, desde la perspectiva del concepto zambraniano de “crisis”. Sin embargo, esta premisa no es sencilla. Disparidades y una brecha temporal separan las crisis enfrentadas por Serrano y Zambrano, así como los flujos migratorios con los que están asociadas. Esto plantea la pregunta: ¿pueden dichos conceptos de Zambrano servir como un marco unificador para comprender la literatura autobiográfica escrita por diferentes tipos de migrantes, trascendiendo las barreras tradicionales entre movimientos migratorios?

Palabras clave: crisis, María Zambrano, exilio, migración, confesión

Abstract: This study examines Violeta Serrano’s narrative, which depicts her experiences as a young migrant during Spain’s 2008 economic crisis, through the lens of Maria Zambrano’s concept of “crisis”. However, this proposition is not straightforward. Disparities and a temporal gap separate the crises faced by Serrano and Zambrano, as well as the migration flows they are associated with. This raises the question: can Zambrano’s concepts serve as a unifying framework for understanding autobiographical literature authored by different types of migrants, transcending traditional barriers between migration movements?”

Keywords: crisis, Maria Zambrano, exile, migration, confession

1. THE SPANISH 2008 CRISIS AND SPANISH OUTWARD MIGRATION

This study delves into the representation of the 2008 crisis in contemporary Spanish autobiographical and memorial literature, focusing especially on the narrative *Flores en la basura. Un relato personal de la generación perdida*¹ by Violeta Serrano (León, 1988)². This “generación perdida” or “lost generation”, born in the late eighties, seemed to have it all: a consolidated democracy, assured welfare, and education. However, this apparently promising life was shattered by the economic crisis that unfolded in Spain at the beginning of the 21st century, undermining the certainties that the generation believed it possessed. The crisis forced many young people to emigrate from Spain in search of job opportunities. Violeta Serrano was one of them. As a consequence of the Spanish economic crisis, she saw no future for herself in Spain and made the decision to emigrate to Argentina. The narrative of her crisis experience is closely intertwined with her journey as an economic migrant. Currently, Violeta Serrano divides her time and professional activities between Argentina and Spain³.

¹ Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura. Un relato personal de la generación perdida*, Barcelona, Ariel, 2022. The critical reception of the book *Flores en la basura*, see Macías (2022) and Montfort (2023). The translations into English of fragments from Serrano’s book included in this article are by my hand.

² Prior to this book, Serrano authored the collection of essays *Migrant Power*, published in 2020 (Barcelona, Ariel). In this work, she advocates the central thesis: “people who have been compelled to leave everything behind, or who have done so to improve their living conditions, are not adversaries to be feared, but rather educators from whom to glean lessons in a world in perpetual crisis” (my translation, p. 16). For critical assessments of “Migrant Power”, refer to Burés (2020), García Ortega (2020), Peytibi (2021), and Avelino (2022). The original Spanish versión of this hypothesis is as follows: “las personas que se han visto obligadas a dejar todo atrás, o que lo han hecho para mejorar sus condiciones de vida, no son enemigos a temer, sino maestros de los que aprender en un mundo en constante crisis” (p. 16).

³ In Spain, she is responsible for courses in the Master’s in Creative Writing and in the Expert Course in Writing, Style, and Creativity at the Universidad Internacional de Valencia (VIU), and coordinates the Master’s in Publishing and Editorial Management. In Argentina, she works for the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO-Argentina) as the director of two postgraduate programs: “Writings: Human

The economic migration undertaken by the generation affected by the 2008 crisis represents a new form of emigration for Spain and presents significant distinctions when compared to historical emigration flows from Spain in the 20th century. For instance, it differs significantly from the economic migration that took place during the economic crisis of the 1960s, which saw individuals moving to countries such as Germany or Switzerland in search of employment opportunities and better living conditions. Additionally, it contrasts with the political exile that occurred after the military conflict in 1939, which led Spanish individuals to countries across Latin America, the US, and Europe due to political persecution and ideological differences.

One of the most notable differences among these groups of migrants lies in their educational background and occupational status. In the 1960s crisis, many Spanish émigrés who left Francoist Spain, lacked formal education and primarily worked as manual laborers in industries like construction, manufacturing, or agriculture. In contrast, the economic migrants of the 2008 crisis were often skilled professionals with higher education qualifications in sectors such as finance, technology, or healthcare. This set them apart from the laborers of the 1960s, who mostly engaged in low-skilled work, and aligned them more closely with the skilled and educated political exiles of the 1939 crisis. Upon arriving in their new countries, these exiles often found employment in the cultural and professional sectors and became involved in the intellectual circles of their host nations.

Another distinction lies in the factors motivating displacement. The migration pattern of the 1960s was predominantly fueled by economic necessity, as Spain faced economic hardship and limited employment opportunities during this period of Francoist rule, although political factors also exerted significant influence. Many descendants of Republicans, opposed to the Francoist regime, chose to emigrate during the Francoist dictatorship due to social exclusion. Hence, their emigration arises from both economic and political factors. In contrast, the economic migrants of 2008, living in a democratic Spain, were driven by underemployment stemming from the economic downturn. This compelled them to seek better prospects, a dignified life, and career

Creativity and Communication” and “Literature and Political Discourse”.

advancement abroad. This change in motivation is associated with the migrants' higher level of education and reflects an evolution in migration drivers. Factors such as career advancement, dignity, and quality of life now play significant roles alongside traditional economic factors of survival. In contrast, the decision of the 1939 exiles, who were intellectually advanced or possessed advanced knowledge in certain fields, to leave Spain was primarily driven by political and ideological factors.

This brief overview of three successive waves of outward migration from Spain demonstrates that the distinction between economic migration and political exile, resulting from either economic or political crises, is not always clear due to several overlapping factors and the complexities inherent in each period and crisis. Individuals may face multifaceted challenges that encompass both economic and political dimensions, making it difficult to neatly categorize their reasons for migration. Economic hardships often intersect with political factors and economic instability can be exacerbated or directly caused by political issues such as corruption, conflict, or oppressive regimes. In such cases, individuals may perceive their personal experience of migration as driven by economic necessity, yet the underlying causes may be deeply rooted in political turmoil. People's decisions to migrate are often influenced by a combination of factors, including economic prospects, personal safety, political freedoms, dignity, and social conditions. These motivations are intertwined and can vary greatly among individuals, making it challenging to categorize migrations. In this context, contemporary scholars such as Sassen⁴ have highlighted the interconnectedness of different structures and mixed conditions in shaping new types of crisis and migration patterns.

2. A CRISIS-CENTERED APPROACH TO VIOLETA SERRANO'S ACCOUNT

Going back to the discussion about Violeta Serrano's testimonial story, it is important to consider the ever-changing idea of "crisis". Understanding this concept is essential in grasping her experience during the 2008 Spanish crisis and her choice to emigrate during that time. Since the late 18th century, "crisis" has denoted a significant break

from previous patterns and current events⁵. This break makes it impossible to imagine a future characterized by the continuation of established structures. A crisis requires consideration of an alternative future that radically departs from the old. In this regard, according to Rousseau ([1762] 1969), a crisis suddenly and distinctly reveals the ambivalence and fundamental uncertainty of the future.

The term "crisis" denotes other meanings in its various applications across historical, medical, theological, legal, economic, political, social, and other contexts. To simplify, we can delineate three primary interpretations of the concept: crisis as a bodily or mental disorder (biomedical crisis), crisis as catharsis (therapeutic crisis), and crisis as an expression of economic, social, and political transformations (symptomatic crisis). To effectively engage with Serrano's book, the last two interpretations of the term are pertinent. The interplay between them unfolds throughout the entire testimony, commencing with a depiction of her generation's experiences with an economic downturn in her country and gradually progressing to the disclosure of her personal catharsis.

I propose analyzing Serrano's testimony through María Zambrano's⁶ reflections on crisis, confession, and intrahistory⁷. This suggestion is not

⁵ Koselleck, Reinhart, "Crisis", *Crítica y Crisis*, Madrid, Trotta, 2007.

⁶ María Zambrano (1904-1991) was a leading Spanish philosopher in the 20th century. Forced into exile during the Republican diaspora, she spent 45 years in various countries including Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Italy, and France before returning to Spain in 1984. Trained by Ortega y Gasset, Zambrano soon developed her own philosophical ideas, interpreting Ortega's vital reason as a "knowledge of the soul". She was known for her original and unorthodox approach, viewing herself as an agent for ethical change. Zambrano's most significant contribution was her concept of "poetic reason", which aimed to merge philosophy and poetry and transcend the boundaries of Enlightenment rationality. Despite gaining recognition in Spain starting in the 1980s, Zambrano remains relatively unknown outside the Spanish-speaking world.

⁷ To accomplish this, I have correlated various reflections of the philosopher addressing the concepts of crisis, confession, and intrahistory in the following books, among others: *Horizonte del liberalismo*, 1930, *Filosofía y Poesía*, 1940, *La confesión, género literario y método*, 1943, *La agonía de Europa*, 1945, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, 1950, *Persona y democracia*, 1958.

⁴ Sassen, Saskia, "Three emergent migrations: an epochal change", *The Sur file on migration and Human Rights*, 13/23 (2022), pp. 29-41.

straightforward: there is a temporal gap between Serrano's and Zambrano's contexts, as well as disparities in the crises they faced—Serrano's being economic and labor-related, while Zambrano's was political and ideological. While both Zambrano and Serrano experienced forced displacement, Zambrano's identity as a political exile and Serrano's as an economic migrant categorize them into distinctly different and separate groups in today's perspective.

Despite these complexities, I propose that Serrano's testimony on the 2008 crisis benefits from an interpretation through the lens of Zambrano's thought. My aim in this study is twofold. On a micro level, it is to explore the possibility of interpreting *Flores en la basura*, a contemporary work stemming from the 2008 Spanish economic crisis, relying on Zambrano's concept of crisis and confession, which embodies philosophical exile thought of the 20th century. On a broader level, the question arises: can Maria Zambrano's concept of crisis serve as a connecting link between the realms of different and rapidly changing waves of forced migration, spanning the past, present, and future? In summary, this study examines whether and how Zambrano's concept of confession as a literary genre and method can transcend conventional migration categories and provide a framework for analyzing testimonial literature authored by various types of migrants.

3. "FLOWERS IN THE DUSTBIN" AND "THE LOST GENERATION": CRISIS AS A RECURRING PHENOMENON

Zambrano emphasized how crises have recurred throughout history, forming a sequence where each one holds a pivotal role in its respective period⁸. The author examined how, in its moment, each crisis was seen as the most significant, shaping the future trajectory. However, with time, it became evident that each crisis was part of a larger pattern of disruptive events in history. Zambrano stressed that while each crisis had its unique characteristics and immediate impacts, they all contributed to an ongoing cycle of critical situations across time. These ideas are reflected in her studies on models of thinkers in times of

crisis: Seneca, Saint Augustine, and Rousseau⁹. Zambrano, herself a thinker in times of crisis, sees Seneca, Saint Augustine, and Rousseau as eminent figures who overcame power impositions during turbulent times. She considers them enlightening examples for the severe crisis that afflicted the world in the forties, invoking their guidance for tumultuous times.

This idea of crisis as a recurrent phenomenon is prominently and consistently present in Serrano's personal account, beginning with its very title. The primary title of the book *Flores en la basura* originates from the iconic punk song 'God Save the Queen' by The Sex Pistols, released in 1977. Thus, Punk music, considered the epitome of crisis, sets the backdrop for the book's exploration¹⁰. "We're the Flowers in the Dustbin" is sung by the youth in England with The Sex Pistols, expressing their emotions towards the crisis and their experience of it.

The backstory to this song of crisis unfolds as follows. In the 1960s, London found itself immersed in a hippie milieu where fashion and music intertwined with alternative lifestyles, creating a potentially revolutionary blend of liberation. However, as the early 1970s dawned, it became evident that the aspirations of this movement would remain unfulfilled. The utopian hippie vision of "peace, love, and music" had dimmed in the UK, giving way to social unrest, political upheaval, and poverty. Britain was in decline, with litter strewn across its streets and widespread unemployment. In 1973, the nation grappled with power shortages, an oil crisis, a miners' strike, and a faltering economy, plunging it into a state of complete crisis. While the punk music explosion is commonly associated with 1976, its roots can be traced back to the tumultuous conditions of those earlier bleak years.

Arising from this atmosphere of crisis, the punk music of the Sex Pistols can be seen as the stark opposite of the hippie era. During this period, British society presented young people with unemployment and social deprivation, wrapped in an ideological guise of past imperial glories. This national hypocrisy was underscored during the celebrations of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. As the country approached its infamous

⁸ Zambrano, María, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, Madrid, Alianza, 2007, pp. 99, 126; Also, consult, in this context, María Zambrano's books *Horizonte del liberalismo*, Madrid, Morata, 1996 and *La agonía de Europa*, Madrid, Trotta, 2000.

⁹ Zambrano, María, *La Confesión: género literario y método*, Madrid, Siruela, 1995 and *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2010.

¹⁰ Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture. The Meaning of Style*, London and New York, Routledge, 1983, p. 29.

“Winter of Discontent” (1978-79), there was a call for street parties to celebrate Britain’s purported greatness. Punk music emerged as a response to various issues: rebellion against the establishment, alienation, the search for solidarity, and the economic crisis confronting Britain, which instilled a message of radical non-conformity. Punk music served as a means of expressing the realities of a time of crisis. The teenagers who engaged in punk culture were indeed experiencing an economic crisis, and their music reflected this reality.

The release of the song “God Save the Queen” in 1977 sparked a backlash from conservatives, leading to its ban on most radio stations. Considered blasphemous and offensive by many, it was removed from store shelves as a single. Despite this, it reached the number one spot on popular music charts, where a black bar obscured the song title. “God Save the Queen” critiques the Queen and her hollow promises of prosperity that amplify the youth’s feelings of uncertainty about the future. The theme of “No Future” resonates strongly in the song and within punk music as a whole, with the phrase repeated up to nine times in its final verses. It’s worth noting that this song lyric is revisited in Serrano’s book, specifically in Chapter 2, aptly titled “No Future.” The concept of an uncertain future is consistently present in discussions about crisis, which typically allude to a future whose conditions cannot be adequately clarified or foreseen¹¹.

However, in the title of her book, Serrano refers to the phrase “we are the flowers in the dustbin” and hereby symbolizes, just as The Sex Pistols did fifty years earlier, the potential of their generation as individuals and how it was overlooked and discarded by a flawed system. The image included in this phrase, laden with discontent, serves as an oxymoron, encapsulating the stark disparity between the generation’s expectations and the disillusioning realities they encountered. The inclusive pronoun “we”, representing the entire youth generation, is consistently used throughout the song. “God Save the Queen” is a song devoid of the pronoun “I”. However, the use of “we” carries a similar self-centered connotation as “I”. As the song gains widespread

acceptance among the public and achieves immense success in the UK, singing or echoing its lyrics fosters a collective sense of empowerment for all involved.

Transitioning from the title to the subtitle of the book, *Un relato personal de la generación perdida* or *A Personal Account of the Lost Generation*, it becomes evident that this second line introduces, even at the outset of the book, yet another significant reference. The term “Lost Generation” applies to a group of writers, poets, and artists who migrated from the United States to Paris during the 1920s, including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. In their works, they discussed themes related to the disillusionment of the post-war society. The use of the term is twofold and refers both to an entire generation, born between 1883 and 1900, and to the small group of authors and artists already mentioned.

After the First World War, many young people in the United States did not recognize the society in which they once lived. The technological advancements that once seemed hopeful were used for violence during the war; the economic prosperity the country faced seemed to have been bought with the lives of soldiers; traditions that once seemed significant no longer held value. Many who reached adulthood during the First World War and survived the war emerged with deep physical and emotional wounds. Young people often had their career and family plans interrupted. During a stage of life when they should typically have experienced joyful rites of passage leading to a certain future, such as graduations, new jobs, weddings, or parenthood, many felt uncertain about how to envision a potential future. Some of these young Americans chose to flee, opting to travel and immigrate to Paris in the 1920s, or to seek solace in alcohol. The “Lost Generation”, as depicted by Ernest Hemingway in his novel *The Sun also Rises* (1926)¹² embodies the profound crisis of the societal norms and values of the post-World War I era. As the novel unfolds, Hemingway portrays optimism and highlights the potential for his generation to envision a brighter future.

The term “the lost generation” originated from Gertrude Stein. In his memoir *A Moveable Feast* (1964), recounting his experiences in 1920s Paris,

¹¹ Koselleck, Reinhart, “Some questions regarding the conceptual History of Crisis”, In Koselleck, Reinhart, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 236-247.

¹² Hemingway, Ernest, *The Sun also Rises*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926.

Ernest Hemingway recalls Stein's remark: "That's what you all are... All of you young people who served in the war. You are all a lost generation"¹³. In Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* Stein's quote serves as the epigraph. However, Hemingway contested Stein's characterization in his memoirs, portraying the "Lost Generation" as battered but not lost, resilient and strong, not decadent or dissolute¹⁴. Rejecting the label of being "lost," they maintained a sense of hope for the future. The literary contributions of the "Lost Generation" authors served as a reflection of the societal crisis brought about by war, offering profound insights into the moral and existential challenges faced by those who reached adulthood during the conflict.

In summary, an analysis of the title *Flores en la basura: Un relato personal de la generación perdida* reveals a clear message to the reader about the author's understanding of crisis. For Serrano, the 2008 crisis is not "the" crisis, as often referred to in Spain, but one among others. The title suggests an awareness that the crisis she experienced is just one among many crises that other generations in other countries have also endured. Significantly, Serrano defines her generation as a "lost generation" or the "punks of the 21st century", emphasizing the parallel between different crises¹⁵.

Let's recall, now, how Zambrano, during the crisis in Europe in the forties, connected her own philosophical work in times of crisis with the works of Seneca, Saint Augustine, and Rousseau. In doing so, she positioned herself among a group of philosophers grappling with similar issues. At the threshold of her testimonial book, Serrano appears to align herself with others who have expressed the experience of crisis through testimonial art, like *The Sex Pistols* through their protest songs, or Hemingway through his memoirs. Still, unlike Zambrano, Serrano chooses to make these references implicit, as she does not include explicit mentions of these artists in her work¹⁶.

¹³ Hemingway, Ernest, *A Moveable Feast*, New York, Scriber Classics, 1966, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura... op. cit.*, pp. 19, 34.

¹⁶ In an interview with Rosaura Varo Cobos (2022), Serrano elaborates on one of the two references embedded in the title: "[...] the title of the book, in fact, comes from a song by the Sex Pistols that references this and which I relate to the Thatcher era. Thatcher was someone who installed the idea that if you can't

Later in the book, Violeta Serrano also significantly presents a list of national crises, each of which profoundly transformed Spain. Her personal account recalls how crises have shaped Spain's history from the late 19th century to the final decades of the 20th century. These critical events, including the Disaster of 1898, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and the economic downturn of the 1960s and 70s¹⁷. Essentially, Serrano's title and narrative underscore the broader spectrum of crises and emphasize that crisis is a phenomenon experienced and expressed by many, in different forms, periods and locations.

4. INTRAHISTORY: "ALL PEOPLE FEEL IN THEIR OWN SKIN HOW THE CRISIS HAS IMPACTED THEIR DAILY LIVES"

In her work, María Zambrano gives profound attention to the people in the margin, those who belong to "intrahistory"¹⁸, the dimension which is not included in History with a capital letter¹⁹. The philosopher doesn't strictly adhere to Unamuno's ideas about "intrahistory". Instead, she expands on the notion by delving into the interaction between marginalized, "intrahistorical" individuals, and historical evolution²⁰. Zambrano

find work, if things aren't going well for you, it's your own fault. And yet, it's not true, if this happens to us, and it happens to everyone, it's a social problem, and many times they want us to believe it's an individual problem so that we don't band together to change it". Versión original en castellano: "[...] el título del libro, de hecho, lo saco de una canción de los Sex Pistols que hace referencia a eso y que relaciono con la época de Thatcher. Thatcher fue alguien que instaló la idea de que si no consigues trabajo, si no te va bien, es porque es culpa tuya. Y, sin embargo, no es así, si esto ocurre y nos ocurre a todos, es que es un problema social y muchas veces nos quieren hacer creer que es un problema individual para que no nos aliemos precisamente para cambiarlo".

¹⁷ Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura... op. cit.*, pp. 27, 101, 131.

¹⁸ See *En torno al casticismo* (1895). The concept of "intrahistory," was coined by Miguel de Unamuno refers to the often overlooked aspects of historical events, the hidden narratives that exist beneath the surface of more prominent historical accounts or the "real tradition". Through this concept, Unamuno proposes a philosophy of history that allows for the acknowledgment of personal experience of history. Unamuno foregrounds the human experience that is overshadowed by the grand narratives of history.

¹⁹ Zambrano, María, *La España de Galdós*, Madrid, Alianza, 2014.

²⁰ Zambrano, María, "Misericorida", In Zambrano, María, *Obras Completas, T. 3, Libros (1955-1973)*, 2a ed.,

introduces a new idea that serves as an update or reevaluation of the concept of intrahistory. She considers that man, as a historical subject, as an individual being, despite his minuscule reality, can be incorporated into History, and may step into the territories of the transcendent.

In this context, Sánchez Cuervo asserts that in contemporary times, the significance of individual memory cannot be denied²¹. This recognition stems from a new epistemological paradigm that values personal recollection, challenging biases that undermine it by alleging its supposed lack of disciplinary rigor in comparison to the broader narrative of History. This paradigm shift acknowledges the significance of individual memory, elevating it to a level of importance previously overlooked. Personal memories illuminate how individuals experienced events, rather than simply recounting the events themselves. In line with María Zambrano's ideas, it's not just about knowing what happened, but understanding how those events impacted the people involved. In this context, what's crucial is preserving the "intrahistory" of the crisis, fully addressing the significance of human subjectivity and emotional aspects in interpreting and understanding history. Emphasizing intrahistory highlights the importance not only of events but also of human subjectivity and how events affect individuals.

And this is also what Serrano explains: she doesn't perceive the crisis merely as the events of the crisis, but rather as the emotions provoked by it. As Serrano elucidates, although the generational group is vast and heterogeneous, and the circumstances and peculiarities of each member of her generation vary greatly, the emotion experienced is a reality for everyone: "todos sienten en su piel de qué manera la crisis ha impactado en su vida diaria"²². She presents her book both as an individual account and as a collective testimony of the effects of the crisis on herself and on her generation:

Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014, pp. 503-609.

²¹ Sánchez Cuervo, "Memoria del exilio y exilio de la memoria", *Arbor*, 735 (enero-febrero 2009), pp. 3-11; Sánchez Cuervo, "Pasado inconcluso. Las tensiones entre la historia y la memoria bajo el signo del exilio", *Isegoría*, 45 (julio-diciembre 2011), pp. 653-668.

²² Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura... op. cit.*, p. 27, "All people feel in their own skin how the crisis has impacted their daily lives".

"El presente libro contiene amplias trazas de experiencia personal que no terminan en mi historia sino que se expanden hacia la de esos jóvenes que siguen reclamando una cuota de dignidad, aquellos que vienen de un mundo antiguo que parece tocar a su fin"²³.

Serrano narrates the crisis from a subjective standpoint, presenting it as a personal account rather than an objective recollection, capturing the crisis as the author felt and experienced it. At the same time, she views her experience as a narrative worth sharing, as it reflects the truth of an entire generation affected by the crisis. "Mi historia es solo mía", the author explains in the preface, "pero es a la vez parte de un síntoma general"²⁴.

In describing how the crisis affected her, Serrano recognizes her role and position in what María Zambrano terms as the territories of transcendence. She understands that her personal narrative, though seemingly small, contributes to shaping the broader general history: "la historia es nuestra, la hacen los pueblos"²⁵. Serrano is driven to share her story because many others who have experienced the crisis lack the ability to articulate their own narratives. She aims to voice their experiences so that they too can identify with the story. Serrano includes similar voices of her own generation, referencing journalists Noemí López Trujillo and Estefanía Vasconcellos, who compile an oral memory of those who left during the crisis, expressing emotions that, in her view, many members of her generation feel but cannot articulate²⁶.

5. CONFESSION AS A METHOD

María Zambrano's philosophy establishes a profound link between literary genres and the es-

²³ Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura... op. cit.*, p. 19, "The present book contains extensive traces of personal experience that do not end with my story but rather extend towards those young people who continue to demand a share of dignity, those who come from an ancient world that seems to be coming to an end".

²⁴ Id., "My story is mine alone", the author explains in the preface, "but it is also part of a general symptom".

²⁵ Ibid., p. 27. "History is ours, it is made by the people".

²⁶ Serrano refers to these journalists' compilation of interviews: López Trujillo, Noemí y Vasconcellos, Estefanía, *Volveremos. Memoria oral de los que se fueron durante la crisis*, Madrid, Libros del K.O., 2016.

sence of existence. According to Zambrano, the differentiation among literary genres arises from the fundamental necessity of life that has given rise to them. She posits that individuals do not write out of a mere literary impulse, but rather in response to life's demand for expression²⁷. Zambrano asserts that confession emerges as a literary genre when individuals experience feelings of abandonment or failure during critical moments of rupture.

The term "crisis" derives from the Greek verb "krinein," meaning "to separate" or "to decide". This etymological origin connects the concept to notions of separation, rupture, or breakage, which can stem from various catalysts but consistently demand addressing and resolving the damage by reuniting the divided elements, thereby restoring unity. Zambrano identifies the literary genre of confession as the means of re-integrating what has been divided. Confession emerges as a pathway to rediscovering the self and reconciling fragmented pieces into a new inner unity. For Zambrano, confession serves as a method for seeking truth amid crisis. Writing a confession becomes an act of transformation for the author. The narrator of a confession undergoes a departure from the self, a symbolic death, followed by subsequent rebirth. The act of confession implies the writer's belief in the potential for renewal through confession. Hence, Zambrano perceives adversities, challenging circumstances, and crises as opportunities for self-discovery, transformation, and a deeper comprehension of the human condition.

In summary, Zambrano suggests that a crisis presents a cathartic opportunity, as those who experience it, including herself, are privileged because they gain a clearer perspective on life. For Zambrano, the crisis exposes the depths of human existence, portraying the vulnerability of individuals left without guidance, future or purpose. Amidst this turmoil, those experiencing crisis may gain a unique insight, through self-revelation and a profound encounter with the essence of life²⁸.

For Serrano, the crisis also brings about an effect of returning to the essence. In an environment where everything can be volatile and subject to unforeseen changes, the ultimate security lies in the connection with oneself, in understanding

and holding onto our essence, values, and fundamental principles. This inner connection becomes a refuge, a point of stability within external instability, offering a solid foundation to confront and endure the uncertainties and crises that may arise in life:

"En semejante circunstancia de variable como sistema de vida, lo único que no pueden arrebatarse a alguien es lo que se es. Ser, entonces, es lo único seguro y lo que depende exclusivamente de la persona en su intimidad: cada cual es propietario de su cuerpo, sí, y de su cerebro y de su corazón"²⁹.

According to Serrano's perspective, the crisis experienced by her generation stems partly from an overemphasis on "possessing" rather than "being", coupled with a lack of awareness about the inherent uncertainty of existence and the absence of absolute guarantees. The generation to which Violeta Serrano belongs had expectations based on a promised material future, financial and professional stability, something they felt entitled to after studying and adequately preparing their careers. However, they faced the harsh reality that this promise turned out to be unattainable. "Nos habían educado para poseer, pero no podíamos hacerlo"³⁰, synthesizes Serrano.

Violeta Serrano employs imagery of rupture and breakage, such as the awakening from a dream or shattering glass, to convey the essence of the deception experienced by her generation. "Pero algo se rompió", she explains, "las certezas volaron por el aire y de aquellos escombros nacieron estas frustraciones"³¹. Serrano's generation, desperate to obtain the material promises that had been offered to them, finds themselves in a situation akin to the myth of Sisyphus. They are immersed in continuous and exhausting efforts to attain the promised possessions and status,

²⁹ Serrano, Violeta, *Flores en la basura... op. cit.*, p. 37, "In the ever-changing landscape of life, the one constant is one's essence, which cannot be stripped away. Being, therefore, emerges as the sole certainty, entirely reliant on the individual in their private realm: each person possesses ownership of their body, their mind, and their heart".

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15, "We had been educated to possess, but we couldn't do it".

³¹ *Id.*, "But something broke", she explains, "certainties flew through the air, and from those ruins, these frustrations were born".

²⁷ Zambrano, María, *La confesión... op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁸ Zambrano, María, *Hacia un saber... op. cit.*, p. 102.

only to confront the impossibility of achieving that material fulfillment.

“La foto [del futuro material próspero prometido] estaba ahí, en el horizonte de nuestro campo visual. Así que caminábamos ilusionados hacia ella con la mochila llena de títulos, de credenciales [...]. Íbamos con la sonrisa amplia y el pecho descubierto hacia la promesa del futuro próspero. Pero cuanto más caminábamos, más estática era la margen. Estábamos pisando sobre una cinta automática que iba y venía sobre nosotros mismos en una burla coqueta. Al cabo del tiempo, nos dimos cuenta de que la imagen nunca cambió su tamaño por más que nuestros pies avanzasen hacia ella. Alargábamos la mano abierta y seguíamos manoteando el aire”³².

The crisis signals a pause in continuity, forcing Serrano’s generation to make sense of a time when the connection between what they expected and what they’ve actually experienced has been broken. There’s a clear gap between what they had expected and what they’ve actually encountered. So they start complaining, not understanding why this is happening, especially since they’ve done everything they were supposed to in order to achieve the future they were promised:

“La imagen [del futuro prometido] estaba ahí, pero nosotros éramos incapaces de hacerla nuestra. [...] nos mirábamos extrañados y no entendíamos dónde estaba el secreto, qué habíamos hecho mal para merecer aquello”³³.

³² Ibid., p. 13, “The picture [of the promised prosperous material future] was there, on the horizon of our field of vision. So we walked excitedly towards it with backpacks full of titles, credentials [...]. We went with wide smiles and uncovered chests towards the promise of a prosperous future. But the more we walked, the more static the image became. We were stepping on a conveyor belt that went back and forth over ourselves in a teasing mockery. Over time, we realized that the image never changed its size no matter how much our feet moved towards it. We reached out our open hand and continued to grasp at thin air”.

³³ Id., “The image [of the promised future] was there, but we were unable to make it ours. [...] we looked at each other bewildered, unable to understand where the secret lay, what we had done wrong to deserve that”.

The scenario described by Serrano prompts thoughts of María Zambrano’s contemplation on the correlation between despair amidst crisis and the act of complaint. The situation that Serrano describes brings to mind the reflection made by María Zambrano on the relationship between despair in the face of crisis and complaint. Zambrano turns to the story of Job, a pious man who, despite his righteousness, faces a series of extreme calamities. Job complains to God, questioning why such terrible things happen to him when he is faithful and just in the eyes of God. In this sense, both Job’s complaint and Serrano’s generation’s complaint point to a sense of injustice, where individuals who have followed what is considered the right path feel that circumstances do not correspond to what they expected or what they believe they deserved. Both situations demonstrate the frustration of dealing with difficult circumstances despite conforming to societal norms or fulfilling expected obligations. This raises questions about the fairness and logic behind the suffering experienced.

María Zambrano views complaint as an act imbued with hope, as it suggests an anticipation of being heard and a desire to find a solution amidst the despair caused by the crisis. She believes that the crisis not only presents challenges but also offers an opportunity for transformation. Drawing inspiration from the mindset of the generation of ‘14, descendants of those who endured the crisis at the turn of the century, Zambrano interprets failure not as a defeat but as a source of hope. For Zambrano, Unamuno’s concept of “agonía” or struggle is pivotal. She reframes failure as a radical form of hope and emphasizes the importance of confronting failure in her philosophy.

In *Flores en la basura*, right from its beginning, there’s a sense of hope, emphasizing the opportunity for transcendence that the crisis brings with it.

“En algún momento que no puedo identificar con exactitud, ese movimiento [la emigración económica de España a Argentina] dejó de ser una condena para convertirse en una posibilidad”³⁴.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9, “At some point that I can’t identify exactly, that movement [economic migration from Spain to Argentina] ceased to be a condemnation and instead became a possibility”.

The idea of change becomes crucial in defining her generation. Serrano's thoughts on her peers emphasize the importance of evolving rather than getting stuck in complaint and despair. Serrano encapsulates this idea in the following question addressed to her own generation: "¿Seremos capaces de ponernos en marcha para cambiar el rumbo o vamos a seguir llorando porque lo que nos contaron no existe más?"³⁵ And she adds:

"Tal vez tratando de comprender esta época bisagra global nos animemos a tomar impulso y salir a flote creando posibilidades que ni siquiera sabíamos que estaban en nuestras manos"³⁶.

In this sense, the transformation of the members of her generation, brought about by their experience of the crisis, becomes a catalyst for change:

"[Nuestra generación, nosotros] hemos desarrollado una capacidad de adaptación asombrosa. Sentimos que tenemos una suerte de identidad flotante que es incómoda, sí, pero que a la vez está llena de oportunidades. No solo somos la generación mejor formada de la historia de España, sino la primera que es perfectamente consciente del abismo, de las arrugas de nuestro traje y de la necesidad de cambiar de rumbo"³⁷.

Changing course means changing the way of conceiving life:

"Decimos que hay que cambiar el rumbo, que deberíamos convertirnos en tejedoras insumisas. Podemos consensuar que tal vez

lo mejor fuese empezar por volver a poner lo humano en el centro de la cuestión"³⁸.

Thus, it becomes evident that, as Zambrano states, one who confesses takes action, an executive action through which the author not only transforms herself but also can and wants to transform. It's essential to remember that confession, for Zambrano, in the face of a crisis in life, is a method. The question of self-awareness (of the individual self, of the collective "we" of a generation) is paramount. The method of confession springs from this awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

In "Flores en la basura", Serrano subtly weaves implicit references and subtle observations regarding the concept of crisis, its historical backdrop, and strategies for navigating challenging times. However, she avoids explicitly acknowledging or deeply exploring the significance of these references on a meta-level. These allusions and observations take a backseat to her primary objective: providing a personal account of her crisis experience. This shift in focus clarifies why Serrano only hints at ideas about crisis while steering clear of dissecting the mechanics behind her personal transformation or labeling her experiences with specific terminology.

Zambrano's concepts and elaborate reflections on these topics add another layer of depth to Serrano's testimony. Examining *Flores en la basura* through the lens of Zambrano's ideas enriches the text with additional significance, providing a more comprehensive perspective. By incorporating Zambrano's concepts—such as the sequence of crises, intrahistory, confession, complaint, and transformation—a more structured and insightful analysis of Serrano's depiction of crisis becomes possible. By intertwining the Zambranian view on crisis and Serrano's narrative, we gain a deeper understanding of the human experience in times of upheaval. Zambrano's philosophical insights remarkably complement Serrano's personal narrative, seamlessly integrating and forming a cohesive whole with her account.

The alignment of their perspectives is particularly striking given the temporal and thematic distance between them: Zambrano's ideas emer-

³⁵ Ibid., p. 79, "Will we be able to get moving to change course, or will we continue to cry because what we were told no longer exists?"

³⁶ Ibid., p. 30, "Perhaps by trying to understand this pivotal global era, we will gather the courage to push forward and rise, creating possibilities that we didn't even know were within our reach".

³⁷ Ibid., p. 72, "[Our generation, we] have developed an astonishing capacity for adaptation. We feel that we have a sort of floating identity that is uncomfortable, yes, but also full of opportunities. Not only are we the best-educated generation in the history of Spain, but also the first one that is perfectly aware of the abyss, the wrinkles in our suit, and the need to change course".

³⁸ Ibid., p. 89, "We say that we need to change course, that we should become rebellious weavers. We can agree that perhaps it would be best to start by putting the human being back at the center of the issue".

ged during the moral and ideological tumult of the mid-20th century, while Serrano's account reflects the economic upheaval of the early 21st century. Despite the 2008 crisis initially appearing as primarily an economic and labor-related challenge, Serrano's narrative evolves into a profound existential exploration, akin to the type of crisis experienced by Zambrano. Remarkably, Serrano transcends mere material concerns, signaling a notable shift in her priorities. While her initial grievances may stem from unmet economic promises to her generation, her narrative ultimately delves into existential questions. This transformation underscores the broader theme of personal growth in the face of adversity: Serrano embarks on a journey of introspection and self-discovery, echoing the method proposed by Zambrano during her own period of crisis.

By analyzing *Flores en la basura* as a case study, it becomes apparent that Zambrano's concepts of crisis and confession have the potential to serve as a bridge between different forms of testimonial or autobiographical literature created during periods of crisis. Maria Zambrano's perspective on crisis emphasizes the commonalities among crises rather than focusing on the specific differences and circumstances that set them apart. This viewpoint may connect different crises instead of categorizing them into separate national or chronological contexts. By consolidating these experiences, patterns may emerge that are not readily apparent when each crisis is viewed in isolation. In conclusion, revalorizing Zambrano's thought on crisis and confession by extending it to a wider array of autobiographical works authored by migrants can enhance our understanding of migrants' testimonies.

I would like to wrap up by highlighting one of Zambrano's particularly insightful concepts: the relationship between crisis and the future. As we mentioned earlier, "crisis" signifies a significant departure from past norms, making it impossible to envision a future defined by the continuation of existing structures. Instead, a crisis demands consideration of an alternative future that breaks radically from the old. However, the challenge of envisioning the future inherent in the traditional understanding of crisis takes on a different significance in Zambrano's view of confession. In Zambrano's confessional method, it's quite the opposite; it is precisely from the anguish and despair inherent in crisis that hope and ideas for a better future can emerge. This aspect stands out as one of the most valuable

in Zambrano's reflections on crisis and its dynamics. It helps us understand the transformation depicted by Violeta Serrano, from the initial sentiment expressed by *The Sex Pistols* in their verse "No future", at the beginning of her narrative, to a sense of optimism towards the end.

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