

# Alaide Foppa: Present after 10 Years Absence



Although I was lucky enough to meet Alaide only once, I feel a little like her daughter. Not only because in many ways I am close to Silvia, Laura, Juan Pablo, Mario and Julio Solórzano, her sons and daughters, but also because I inherited, along with many other women, those spaces which Alaide opened for the dissemination of feminism. The image I've had of Alaide has changed with time. I first knew of her existence when the magazine *FEM* appeared, in 1976. My friends of the paper *La Revuelta*, who were close to her children, spoke to me about Alaide as a generous mother and as a woman from the well-off classes. At *La Revuelta*, we considered Alaide and the other women who produced *FEM* to be a group of bourgeois ladies, and we thought the magazine was academic and elitist.

In our twenties, we were convinced that the marginal option of a small newspaper distributed by hand, was the only valid, revolutionary way. In those years we never read *FEM* or discussed its contents. Along with most youths, I was not interested in the words of older people; we needed to speak our own, to make our own original fantasies, absolutely different from those of other groups.

But one day, in 1978, I met Alaide. A new feminist group in Jalapa, Veracruz, invited us to a conference, and I immediately loved her intelligence, warmth and kindness.

She went off to bed early, but next day at dawn, I went out for a walk and something directed my steps to the main square. Alaide was there contemplating the landscape with some lemon tree flowers in her hand. I think that since that morning I have always followed her footsteps; just like that first clear morning, without wanting to, I have walked the paths she walked and I meet her. That day, Alaide gave me the smile that those who talk about her always mention. We didn't talk, we just stood there, watching the sky and the green mountains.

A year and a half later, when the Guatemalan Army killed her, I could not forgive myself for the questions I didn't ask her that morning, for the meetings I didn't propitiate, for the classes I didn't take with her. Then I became resigned, especially as I began meeting her again in her poetry and articles.

That occurred several years later when, freed from adolescent pride, I joined the editorial team of the magazine *FEM*. It was only then that I began to appreciate the value of the first issues of that publication. They are real treasures. Dozens of persons, even today, refer to them in their research, for their theses,

reports, or for their simple desire to learn about feminism.

Alaíde's first article there, titled "Anatomy is not Destiny", should be included in school text books. It is a synthesis of the origins and expressions of sexist discrimination, that would do a lot of good if everyone were to read it. The same can be said for many of her later articles, about the family, about women's writing and many other themes.

Besides her writings, Alaíde left open many spaces where women could express themselves. She never forget about other people, she never fell into the temptation of making an individual career for herself, she always shared everything: spirit, resources, knowledge.

This is manifested in the pain that her disappearance caused among so many people, and by the fact that most public spaces she opened for feminist debate are still functioning. We still have *FEM*, the

course on the condition of women is still given in the National University, and in some way we are carrying on her radio work - for eight years she had a weekly program on women, where she made known and gave voice to the problems and struggles of all women.

I am particularly close to this part of her legacy; with other women I have participated in radio series in Michoacán, Oaxaca and in Mexico City. We carried out a feminist project for eight years on Radio Education -a program that has been ended now because of the economic crisis and indifference on the part of the authorities. Now we have begun a new project, in our Center for Alternative Communication "Alaíde Foppa", with the aim of continuing the radiophonic labors which Alaíde began. In this way, we hope to acknowledge her legacy and render her homage.

Berta Hiriart

## ALAÍDE, A DEDICATED LIFE

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

For poets, university people, artists, human rights defenders and especially for women, last December was reason to listen once more to the voice of Alaíde Foppa, in those same spaces where she talked and walked up until ten years ago.

Her voice, of a Guatemalan woman deeply identified with the life and feeling of her people, was silenced by the cruelty and torture of her country's army. In 1980, on December 19, we heard that Alaíde had disappeared while on a trip to Guatemala.

Her family and friends received the news with extreme pain and anxiety, as that country was suffering the rigor of a military dictatorship where opponents of the regime were commonly executed soon after their arrest. The hope of finding her alive gave rise to an intense international campaign demanding her presentation by Guatemalan authorities. However, on January 10, 1982, it was confirmed that the army of that nation had killed a woman whose life was dedicated to poetry, to teaching in the university, to translation work, to art criticism, to feminism and to the defense of human rights.

The soft yet critical voice of Alaíde Foppa is not only simply remembered; in Mexico, her integrity is widely recognized, her integrity in creative and intellectual work, in her tireless defense of individual and collective dignity. Her work and influence are still alive today in literature, politics and in the university. She began the course on

Sociology of Women in the Political and Social Sciences Faculty of the National University, she opened radio programs on women, she founded the magazine *FEM*, pioneer of feminist publications in Mexico, and she was a militant in several groups defending human rights. It was recognized during the week's homage held in Mexico last December, that Alaíde was killed after three days of torture at the hands of the Guatemalan Army without having given away the whereabouts of her children Silvia and Mario. However, she was not killed for being the mother of guerrillas. The government of the then president, General Lucas García, knew Alaíde's plans and desires to become a representative of the Guatemalan people in Europe. It knew, therefore, that Alaíde would be an excellent ambassador of a Guatemalan Resistance.

Her fellow countryman and writer, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, has recognized that Alaíde was a woman with a profound knowledge of that painful hidden life of their nation, personified in the tens of thousands of disappeared and missing Guatemalans.

An extract of her poetry can indicate her deep feelings for life and freedom:

*When I have bled to death  
light and clear my life will be  
like a river, loud and transparent  
freely will flow the imprisoned song.*