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Al Glitter de Guerra: *cyborg movidas*, Instagram and feminist protest in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Latin American feminists have theorised the intersection between women's bodies and the territories they inhabit via *cuero-territorio*. Adding a new layer of complexity, this article turns to the way Instagram has become another space where women navigate this relationship. I use the August 2019 feminist protests against the government and police in Mexico accompanied by the hashtags #NoMeCuidanMeViolan (they don't take care of me, they rape me), #NoNosCuidanNosViolan (they don't take care of us, they rape us), #MeCuidanMisAmigasNoLaPolicia (my friends take care of me not the police) and #ExigirJusticiaNoEsProvocacion (demanding justice is not a provocation) to show how women reclaim their bodies in both material and virtual spaces. Based on Donna Haraway's and Chela Sandoval's work I use the term *cyborg movidas* to examine how Mexican feminist activists engaged in protest as a technology of resistance. *Cyborg movidas* are the collective embodiment of political manoeuvres influenced by emotions such as rage and love, which defy rigid boundaries of human–non-human, digital–physical, body–space and individual–collective relations. Such *movidas* allow us to imagine activism as a collective possibility of socio-political change.

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Introduction

This article analyses the connection between *cuero-territorio* and political activism against gender-based violence (GBV) by examining how Mexican feminist activists reclaimed public spaces on social media and the streets during the 2019 August protests. On 12 August 2019, activists gathered outside the Ministry of Public Security in Mexico City to demand justice after news broke that some policemen had raped a minor and later leaked, illegally, her information. The protest ended in front of the General Attorney's office. During the march, the then head of the capital's Ministry of Citizen Security had pink glitter thrown at him. Simultaneously, some activists smashed windows and graffitied inside the Ministry's office. In response, Claudia Sheinbaum (then Head of Government in Mexico City and recently elected Mexican president) said the protest was a provocation. Within a few hours the hashtags #NoMeCuidanMeViolan

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(they don't take care of me, they rape me), #NoNosCuidanNosViolan (they don't take care of us, they rape us), #MeCuidanMisAmigasNoLaPolicia (my friends take care of me not the police) and #ExigirJusticiaNoEsProvocacion (demanding justice is not a provocation) went viral. The hashtags were used to organise a national protest on 16 August 2019. During this march, important national monuments such as the *Ángel de la Independencia* (Angel of Independence) were graffitied in response to the lack of government urgency to tackle GBV. This caused a range of reactions, from those who condemned the protesters to those who supported such actions. More importantly, these protests merged and exceeded both the virtual and physical world. Examining how feminist activists in Mexico moved between physical (the streets) and virtual (Instagram) spaces allows me to analyse 'the body' beyond its individual physical presentation. I depart from the idea that the corporeal is part of a dynamic and symbiotic relationship between its material and digital form and move from the individual to the collective in a fluid way. *Cuerpo-territorio* becomes a powerful epistemological tool to advance this idea as it opens possibilities to examine how violence and collective *rabia* (rage) was embodied by Mexican feminist activists during the August 2019 protests.

Cuerpo-territorio (body-territory)

Cuerpo-territorio was developed by Indigenous and feminist collectives in Latin America to examine the link between state violence, extractivism and GBV (Cabnal 2010; Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2017). This framework argues the body and the territory it inhabits are in a co-dependent relationship (Zaragocin and Caretta 2021). In other words, when the places we live in are violated, our bodies are affected; when our bodies are violated, the places we occupy are harmed (Lopes Heimer 2021). I use *cuerpo-territorio* to examine the images produced on artists' and activists' Instagram accounts during the August 2019 protests. Most of the images centre on the female body and/or statues which have been brought to life and marked by metaphorical and literal violence. While *cuerpo-territorio* has been used to evaluate the relation between women's bodies and the territories they inhabit, less attention has been given to how such theory can be applied to the digital landscape. This study adds to the growing literature on *cuerpo-territorio* to include social media platforms, particularly Instagram, as part of the corporeal-territory relationship. I depart by questioning the neutrality of space in both the physical (streets where protests took place) and digital (Instagram) terrain. Feminist geographers have argued that space is articulated through power relations, gender being central to such dynamics (Nelson and Seager 2005). Hence, understanding how space is (re)produced and experienced at diverse scales (individual, local, national) and in different contexts (physical and digital) helps examine how women¹ in Mexico are fighting a patriarchal system that continues to perpetuate violence against them.

This article adds to the existing literature which envisages the geography of physical and digital spaces as part of 'the body' (Elwood and Leszczynski 2018). Here, 'the body' is understood to be malleable, dynamic and fluid. It is produced and constructed by individuals' 'lived' experiences, the institutional discourses and practices that are inscribed on 'the body' and the (physical and virtual) space it occupies (Grosz 1994). Space is understood to be in a dynamic relation relationship between bodies, objects and others perception of it (Grosz 1999). With the increase of online technologies and interactions, I ask: What does it mean

'to be embodied in high-tech worlds' (Haraway 1991, 173)? and How useful is it to understand 'the body' within the continuum of virtual to physical terrain to comprehend the ways in which Mexican feminist activists mobilised in August 2019? The figure of the feminist cyborg is useful to address these questions.

Feminist cyborg movidas

Using Haraway's (1991, 1999) notion of the feminist cyborg – an erasure of rigid boundaries between male/female, physical/digital, human/non-human – I argue that Mexican feminist collectives have blurred the lines between social media, their corporeality, and public spaces as a response to the Mexican state where women are not seen as valuable to protect. According to feminist theorist Donna Haraway, a cyborg breaks binaries as part of a collective 'political kinship' (Haraway 1991, 156) to subvert the settler-colonial patriarchal state (Sandoval 1999). To engage in political resistance, the cyborg maps 'our social and bodily reality' (Haraway 1991, 150) by (dis)assembling both body and space in the digital and physical environment. Haraway (1999) argues that cyborgs move in between four regions: real space, outer space, inner space of the body and virtual space. These boundaries are moved to create 'monstruous' possibilities where they surpass the corporeal to see the body as 'a collective; it is an historical artifact constituted by human as well as organic and technological unhuman actors' (Haraway 1999, 334). In other words, technology becomes part of our individual and collective bodies which occupy multiple and often contradictory spaces (Sofia 1999). I use the feminist cyborg figure to (1) examine 'the body' within the continuum of virtual to physical spaces, thus expanding *cuerpo-territorio* theory; (2) comprehend how Mexican feminist activists mobilised on- and offline during the August 2019 protests; and (3) imagine activism as a collective possibility of socio-political change which dilutes diverse boundaries: digital–physical, public–private, corporeality–space.

This article also builds on Chela Sandoval's work (1999, 2000) as it pushes the figure of the feminist cyborg into the realm of social movements and as a technology of resistance used by marginalised communities. Sandoval (1999) argues the feminist cyborg 'reproaches, challenges, transforms and shocks' (251) to subvert colonial ruling. It does this through 'theoretical and political *movidas* – revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being' (Sandoval 2000, 141, emphasis in original). Taking from Haraway's and Sandoval's theories, I have developed the term *cyborg movidas* to examine how feminist activists engaged in protest as a technology of resistance. *Cyborg movidas* are the collective embodiment of political manoeuvres influenced by emotions such as rage and love, which defy rigid boundaries of human–non-human, digital–physical, body–space and individual–collective relations. Such political *movidas* can be seen through the images produced during the August 2019 protests, the viral hashtags, the number of protests across the country and graffiti on important national monuments. Using *cyborg movidas* as a theoretical framework allows me to (1) examine how feminist activists engaged in these *movidas* through acts of love and *rabia* (rage) expressed visually and textually in the digital and physical terrain as acts of resistance; and (2) understand everyday geopolitics and broader social inequalities in Mexico. This article first discusses the geopolitical context of activism against GBV and *femicidios* in Mexico and the Latin American hashtag feminism legacy. Next, the methodological steps taken to collect and analyse data are explained. This is followed by the findings from the data collected.

Mobilising against feminicidios and GBV

Since the 1990s, Mexican women and their loved ones have continuously demanded justice by holding authorities accountable for their lack of action to prevent GBV and *feminicidios* (Wright 2017). *Feminicidios* are the killing of women and girls because of their gender and are characterised by their extreme form of physical and sexual violence towards the victim and/or the public display of their body (Russell and Harmes 2001). Latin American academics and feminists argue that *feminicidios* are simultaneously public – where the state is complicit because of the impunity and lack of prosecution from the authorities – and private – as part of the everyday interpersonal GBV experienced (Fregoso 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; García-Del Moral 2020; Peláez López 2018). In more recent years, the concept of *feminicidio* has grown to be understood as ‘*racialized* gendered violence rooted in the ongoing material and discursive effects of colonial power relations’ (García-Del Moral 2018, 929, emphasis in original). In other words, patriarchy is but one of many intersectional axes which contribute to *feminicidios* occurring at alarming rates. It is systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, cultural and colonial inequalities in local and global contexts (Wright 2011).

Activism against *feminicidios* in Mexico began in 1993. The focus became Ciudad Juárez, where young female factory workers – mostly from low-income backgrounds – were being sexually assaulted and murdered at worrying rates (Juárez Rodríguez, Escobar, and Ramírez 2020; Wright 2014). Since the 1990s, activists and family members have devised multiple creative ways to humanise *feminicidio* victims by making their own lists of the disappeared and murdered, laying a pink cross in the place where the body was found and creating murals to commemorate victims (Bernardi 2018). These public acts disrupted the status quo to challenge local and national governments and the economic establishment who denied the disappearance and killing of women and their role in perpetuating these crimes. In 1995, activist Susana Chávez wrote a poem which included the phrase ‘*Ni una menos, Ni una muerta más*’ (Not one less, Not one more [women] dead) to protest what was happening in Ciudad Juárez. She was murdered in 2011. The hashtags #NiUnaMenos (not one less) and #NiUnaMas (not one more) went viral and gained international attention (Belotti, Comunello, and Corradi 2021). After this, *feminicidio* became recognised as a crime in the Mexican criminal justice system in 2012. Yet this recognition has not decreased the number of *feminicidios*, GBV or sexual assaults on women (García-Del Moral 2020; INEGI 2023). Currently, one in four murders of women in Mexico is classified as *feminicidio* (Índice de Paz México 2024).

Increasingly more activists are using digital platforms to mobilise for social causes such as GBV and *feminicidios*. Hashtag activism involves the use of the symbol # on social media, followed by a phrase or word intended to generate conversations, and build community and action towards a particular topic (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). Hashtags serve to ‘invoke a collective memory’ (Clark 2016, 792) and common struggles among many people across different geographies and socioeconomic backgrounds. Social media has allowed activists to expand their audience and rapidly raise awareness in ways traditional media cannot (Batmanghelichi and Mouri 2017; McLean, Maalsen, and Grech 2016; Nyabola 2018).

In Latin America, hashtag feminism has a rich lineage (Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela 2019; Ghigiu 2023; Suarez Estrada 2017), with two hashtags – #NiUnaMenos and #VivasNosQueremos (we want us alive) – originating in the region and then going viral worldwide (Nuñez Puente, Maceiras, and Romero 2021). Most studies have used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches to focus on #NiUnaMas #NiUnaMenos on X

(formerly known as Twitter), Facebook and, to a lesser degree, Instagram (Giraldo-Luque, Fernández-García, and Pérez-Arce 2018; Sued et al. 2022), signalling that the use of hashtags allows women to show the persistence of GBV and *feminicidios* (Rovira-Sancho and Morales-i-Gras 2022). Hashtag feminism first emerged in Mexico in 2015 with the appearance of #MiPrimerAcoso (my first harassment), #MeToo and #SiMeMatan (if they kill me) (Rovira Sancho 2019). The hashtag was a criticism of Mexican authorities after they blamed a student for her own death instead of the perpetrator. As a response to the authorities and media, women used the #SiMeMatan on X to signal what would be said if they were murdered (Piatti-Crocker 2021). Given the increased use of social media platforms by activists to support social justice causes, it is important to understand the impact of these actions within a wider geopolitical context and the body–territory relationship.

Methodology

I have applied archival dusting methodology, based on Bernardi's (2018) work, to explore the ways in which Mexican feminists mobilised against GBV in the digital and physical terrain. As dust is scattered across the physical world, online traces of feminist organising can be found on virtual platforms. This digital dust allows for this type of activism to be 'indexed, available, and retrievable online' (Bernardi 2018, 8) to create a 'living, public archive for the victim that gains both temporal and long-lasting visibility' (Popescu 2021, 371). I also used Lindgren and Eriksson Krutrök's (2024) five principles of digital ethnography: *multiplicity* (facts about Instagram as a platform), *non-digital-centric-ness* (contextualising the research hashtags within Mexico's wider geopolitical context), *openness* (research as a collaborative and fluid process), *reflexivity* (one's position in relation to the field) and *unorthodox modes of communication* (explore where the hashtags take you in terms of diverse platforms) to select, collect and analyse the data retrieved (Bernardi 2018).

The main sources for data analysis were Instagram posts (visual imagery, captions), stories and comments accompanied by any of the four hashtags displayed in Table 1. This content was created by visual artists and feminist collectives on Instagram between 12 and 16 August, with data gathering until 6 September 2019. The examination of memes produced after the first protest on 12 August was also carried out as 'Memes add an additional level of discourse to an already active hashtag community' (Boling 2020, 970). The focus on Instagram was because of the reproduction of images initially created and uploaded on Instagram to other digital platforms (cross-posting content). Furthermore, the unique story function on Instagram was used to organise protests and give digital safety information in a way that other platforms were not. I also chose to focus on Instagram because of the platform's focus on visual text and its popularity among visual artists (Kang, Chen, and Kang 2019). Finally, Mexico has one of the highest numbers of Instagram users in the world – more than 36 million (Statista 2023) – and its use during the 2019 protests cannot be overestimated.

Table 1. Data collected from 12 August to 6 September 2019 on Instagram.

Hashtag	Posts
#MeCuidanMisAmigasNoLaPolicia	542
#ExigirJusticiaNoEsProvocacion	1104
#NoMeCuidanMeViolan	5023
#NoNosCuidanNosViolan	2776

I examined visual content alongside the caption used by the account that posted the image, as well as comments by other users. This process was prioritised to maintain context and interact in the way the content was created (Laestadius 2017). I employed discourse analysis (van Dijk 2023) and visual analysis (Lindgren and Eriksson Krutrök 2024) to evaluate social media content: images and their accompanying text as well as comments left by users. At the time of writing this article (late 2023), I reviewed each post again to determine whether the post was still available on Instagram, if it had been deleted, if there was an increase in the number of likes/comments, or if the account had been deleted or gone private.

There are diverse ethical issues unique to doing research on social media platforms. Alongside issues of data protection, anonymity, and the right to privacy, there has been significant debate about whether a public account user is giving implicit consent to have their content shared and analysed (Dumitrica and Hockin-Boyers 2023; Gerrard 2020; Laestadius and Witt 2022). I have chosen not to display most of the Instagram posts nor name the accounts even though all the posts are public. The only images shared are ones that have been reproduced with the artist's permission for public use and news outlets on YouTube. I have not included in the analysis any posts where the original post and/or account have been deleted or set to private. The most recent Instagram terms of use were consulted and respected.

Glitter as a technology of protest

The protests on 12 August 2019 ended in front of the General Attorney's office, where protesters glitter bombed – throwing glitter on someone in public as a form of protest – (Galli 2016) the then head of Mexico City's Ministry of Citizen Security (see Figure 1). Pink glitter had been used similarly for over a decade by José Luis Castillo Carreón, whose daughter disappeared in Ciudad Juárez in 2009 (Gándara 2019). Don José is known for carrying a large pink canvas with the image of his daughter and for throwing pink glitter at authorities as a visible reminder that his daughter is still missing. Such visible signs of protest to disrupt the status quo can be seen as technologies of protest which were incorporated by activists. Given the 12 August protest was initially only for women to participate, Don José stood in a corner and from there decided to throw pink glitter to commemorate his daughter. Protesters noticed him and asked if he could join the front of the march. Inspired by this *movida*, protesters quickly channelled their *rabia* (anger) at the officials by throwing pink



Figure 1. Screenshots from a video depicting glitter bombing of the head of Mexico City's Ministry of Citizen Security (12 August 2019).

Source: Video by Grupo Reforma, published with permission. Link: [Pintan de rosa a Jesús Orta \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

glitter at them. We can see how an individual action (Don José's throwing of pink glitter) turned into a collective *cyborg movida* (protesters glitter bombing authorities) as an embodied political action which blurred the lines between human (protesters)–non-human (glitter), body (activists)–space (glitter as an extension of the protesters' bodies) and individual (Don José)–collective (feminist activists) relations to protest GBV in Mexico.

The *cuerpo-territorio* framework is a useful tool to further understand the actions taken by activists. After the glitter bombing, several protesters entered the Attorney General's office and smashed windows and broke furniture to express their *rabia* towards the lack of empathy and action from the government. I argue that these collective actions were a way to visually mark, onto the territories our bodies occupy, the everyday GBV experienced by women in Mexico. That is, when our bodies are harmed the territories we occupy are violated, and vice versa (Zaragocin and Caretta 2021). This is an example of the continuum of body–territory beyond the individual context. The breaking of furniture, windows and doors by feminist activists encapsulates how the collective corporeal–territory relation is impacted by GBV and *feminicidios*. Such actions were deemed necessary not only by protesters but by many online, who used the hashtag #FuimosTodas (it was all of us) to express their solidarity. This was particularly important given certain authorities' reaction to the 12 August protest. Claudia Sheinbaum, and the then Head of Mexico City's Attorney General's Office, Ernestina Godoy Ramos, described the protests as 'provocations', into which 'they would not fall' (Gerth 2020) (own translation). Soon after these statements were made, memes and illustrations depicting the glitter bombing went viral on social media, particularly Instagram. Some of the most viral memes depicted the cartoon character Patrick holding an unconscious SpongeBob, who is covered in pink glitter; another shows Mickey Mouse crouched over a dead Pluto covered in glitter (see www.pandaancho.mx/noticias/memes-diamantina-rosario-robles-derrota-america-mas.html).

Memes recreating the glitter bombing were used to exercise humour (Hohenstein 2016) to point out the juxtaposition of feminine pink glitter on the Minister of Security (masculine), raise awareness (Boling 2020) and expose the violence women in Mexico encounter every single day. Outrage across social media grew as authorities cared more about the glitter bombing and broken windows than the extent of sexual violence and *feminicidios*. The combination of memes and hashtags to publicly shame people has been explored in Benjamin's (2019) work. She argues that viral memes and hashtags allows for 'the practice of "dragging" people through the virtual public square easier and swifter' (25). Benjamin (2019) suggests this collective action helps uncover – at multiple scales – the ongoing violence that marginalised communities, especially Black people, experience every day. Activists produced memes to 'drag' Mexican authorities and media who had (in their opinion) exaggerated the 'harm' they had caused by throwing pink glitter. The phrases used in memes and illustrations ranged from outrage to humour, with sentences such as 'it's only a little magic *desapendeador* [get your head out of your ass]² powder so you can get to work' (own translation). Comments mostly indicated laughter and used heart emojis to express that the commenter liked the post. Another popular post among visual artists was depicting activists who entered and threw objects in the Attorney General's Office as superheroes. These images centre 'feminist ideas such as female agency, equality' in the form of heroines' (Hohenstein 2016, 2). The captions which accompanied these images included the hashtags analysed in this article as well as #vivasnosqueremos and #NoEstamosParaPedirPermiso (we are not here to ask for permission), echoing what one of the activists said before smashing furniture. This phrase is important because it appeared in other posts on Instagram in the subsequent days.

After the government's response to the 12 August protest, feminists across the country organised a march on 16 August using the hashtags #ExigirJusticiaNoEsProvocacion, #MeCuidanMisAmigasNoLaPolicia, #NoMeCuidanMeViolan, #NoNosCuidanNosViolan (Signal_Lab 2019). Instagram, especially its story function, was used to share information on digital security, protest rights, and times and places of marches in over 16 cities. A sticker with the phrase *Exigir Justicia No es Provocación* was created by activists to accompany the stories on Instagram. The Instagram story function was also used to share recipes for biodegradable pink glitter— for those who wished to throw glitter during the march (Barrera 2019; Cooking 2019). Interviewed by *Teen Vogue*, feminist illustrator Mariana 'Maremoto' Lorenzo Contreras explains why pink glitter was used in the 16 August march: 'We wanted to leave a pink stain on the street. We want the violence that we experience as women in this country to be like glitter: impossible to ignore' (Maremoto in Cooking 2019, n/p). This coincides with art installations created by feminist activists in Argentina, where the purpose is 'to bring intense visibility to the crimes against women while also disrupting legislators' path to work' (Popescu 2021, 368). We see the fluidity of physical and digital boundaries through glitter as a technology of resistance, first when it was used on 12 August (see Figure 1), then appropriated in the digital terrain through memes and illustrations (see Figure 2) and, finally, back again in the material context by using pink glitter in the 16 August march. These cyborg (dis)assemblages (Haraway 1991, 1999) and political *movidas* (Sandoval 1999, 2000) change our understanding of geopolitics. Using pink glitter to mark the collective territory (streets and public Instagram



Figure 2. Representation of the Virgen de Guadalupe on Instagram. 'Saint *Provocadora* (provocateur), patron saint of raped, murdered and missing women' [own translation, original title: *Santa Provocadora, patrona de las mujeres violadas, asesinadas y desaparecidas*]. Source: Illustration by Yanin Ruibal. Published with permission.

posts) of the everyday violence women encounter signals what feminist political geographers call the politics of scale (Hyndman 2004) – that is, the interconnection between the body (individual experience), local (12 August protests), national (16 August protest against GBV) and international (#NiUnaMas #NiUnaMenos movement). We see these politics of scale reflected in some of the images created by artists during the August 2019 protests.

For example, Maremoto drew a series of illustrations (Cocking 2019) that people could download for free to take them to the march on 16 August. The original post had five images displayed as a slide show – where the person swipes from right to left to see the next image – on Instagram. In the first image the person is holding a sign reading *'me cuidan mis amigas'* (my friends take care of me). Her body is also marked with the words *'yo soy mía'* (I am mine) in a different shade of pink. We see a continuation of the pink theme alongside green, which has been associated with bodily autonomy and to protest conservatives and the state (Medina 2023). In the third image we see the *'pañuelo verde'* (green scarf) which is a symbol for reproductive rights in Latin America (Moncada Guevara 2023). The collection of images can be understood as slideshow activism, defined as 'PowerPoint-style presentations on a given issue or cause [...] that include short texts and visual elements made available via social media accounts' (Dumitrica and Hockin-Boyers 2023, 3318). Other feminist collectives took advantage of the app's format to also create slide activism-style posts, with one account having a succession of slides with phrases such as *'somos malas, Podemos ser peores'* (we are bad, but we can be worse). The use of Maremoto's illustrations at the march on 16 August is another example of how *cyborg movidas* were deployed by feminist activists in Mexico. It demonstrates activism as a collective possibility of socio-political transformation which erases diverse boundaries: digital (Instagram)–physical (street demonstrations) and public (protesters)–private (artist's drawing). The following section explores in more detail the connections between *cyborg movidas* and *cuerpo-territorio* by analysing the way in which women were depicted in the illustrations that circulated online in support of the August 2019 protests.

Warriors, virgins and angels: the many depictions of *cyborg movidas*

Latin American feminist activists have long argued that violence against women is a state crime and 'a new form of war' imprinted on women's bodies (Segato 2016, 62). Melissa Wright (2011) argues *femicidios* are a gendered form of necropolitics – where states determine who gets to live and who gets to die, and under what conditions – given the government's inability and unwillingness to prosecute perpetrators and prevent violence towards women. Furthermore, Wright (2011) contextualises such necropolitics within the wider war on drugs in Mexico, an ongoing federal policy to combat drug cartels which includes an increase of military presence on the streets. Such policies have increased overall violence (homicide and kidnappings) in the country since the 2000s. Within this context, the Mexican state can be understood to be a war machine – a crucial element of necropolitics – (Mbembe 2019) in which elites rule with terror, the threat of violence and death.

Amongst the images used on Instagram in the August 2019 protest was the woman warrior preparing for battle, including women putting 'war paint' on their faces in the form of pink glitter. A phrase that accompanied many of these illustrations was *'Mexicanas, al glitter de guerra'* (Mexican women, to the glitter of war) as a play on the first line of the national anthem *'Mexicanos al grito de guerra'* (Mexicans, at the cry of war). *Mexicana* specifies the feminisation of the word by exchanging the original 'o' (male) for 'a' (female). These types of

images and phrases collectively call to rebel against the government over its inability to stop GBV. These political manoeuvres emerge as *cyborg movidas* motivated by a deep love and a sense of justice for the victims. They are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchy through the war on drugs and the unresolved cases of *feminicidios* since the 1990s in Mexico (Haraway 1991; Félix de Souza and Rodrigues Selis 2022). The call to war (*Mexicanas, al glitter de guerra*) becomes a collective conscious awakening of *cyborg movidas*, as a technology to resist the patriarchal colonial state (Sandoval 1999, 2000). We see a continuation of this theme in other images, which featured a fist in the air and/or a more confrontational pose representing 'a defiant attitude of struggle based on gesture attachment operations (fists raised, "fuckyou")' (Rovetto and Camusso 2020, 16) (own translation). Common elements among the images examined were the use of pink, green and purple (where the latter represents the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) representing 'an aesthetic of social protest' (Sued et al. 2022, 70).

Another recurrent figure during August 2019 was the depiction of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (Mexican version of the Virgin Mary) as a saint protecting women and girls from being sexually assaulted and murdered (see Figure 2). Through such images, we see a defiance towards Mexican elites and the patriarchal society who care more about glitter and graffiti than about GBV and *feminicidios*. Furthermore, the *Virgen* drawings evoke *rabia* (Sandoval 1999) for the thousands of victims taken by everyday violence.

La Virgen is one of the most venerated Catholic figures, intimately linked with notions of Mexicanness and femininity (Gutiérrez 2010). *La Virgen* has been resignified as a form of social protest and 'political resistance that aims to impact the dominant structures of meaning' (Bárceñas Barajas 2019, 101) (own translation). For example, one of the Instagram posts analysed depicted a hybrid of a vagina and the shadow of *la Virgen* with the phrase: '*por respeto, no violes*' (out of respect, don't rape). The phrase '*por respeto no pintes*' is frequently used in Mexico under *La Virgen's* image on public walls to deter people from graffitiing them. The artists took this phrase and repurposed it to try to allude that 'good' Catholics don't rape. This last image was downloaded and carried to marches on 16 August, further demonstrating the fluidity between diverse boundaries: digital (Instagram)–physical (street marches) and public (activists)–private (artist's illustration).

One image that really highlights the connection *cuerpo-territorio* in both the digital and physical terrain is when women were depicted as the *Ángel de la Independencia*, via personification – when an artist applies human-like attributes to an inanimate object. The *Ángel* is a famous monument on a roundabout in a major avenue in Mexico City, known for attracting large crowds during Independence Day and when the national football teams win. On 16 August, the monument was graffitied by several activists, as an outlet of the *rabia* and exhaustion of having to continuously protest GBV and *feminicidios* (see Figure 3).

There was a huge backlash in the media and public opinion was divided on whether these actions were justified (Lira Ortiz 2019; Signa_Lab 2019). Examining how feminist activists moved between physical spaces (the graffitied monuments) and virtual spaces (illustrations on Instagram depicting the *Ángel*, see Figure 4) allows me to analyse 'the body' beyond the individual. I see 'the body' in a fluid relationship between its material and digital form. This understanding of the corporeal helps extend the *cuerpo-territorio* framework to include digital spaces. In this case, we see how when women's bodies are violated (reflected in the number of GBV and *feminicidios* in Mexico), the places such bodies inhabit are affected and harmed (in this case via the graffitied monuments). Such visible markers of embodied

violence are a way to reclaim public spaces and remind the public ‘that violence against women is everywhere, scattered through the city, its buildings, its streets, its corners, not just the domestic homes surrounding those places. This tactic of memorialization uses public spaces to foster memory and urge for change’ (Popescu 2021, 375).

As a result of the graffiti and its depiction online, feminist collectives received a high volume of online misogyny (Ojeda de la Torre 2019). Such actions called into question the neutrality of virtual digital spaces as safe (Han 2018; Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016),



Figure 3. Detail of the Independence Monument with the paintings made during the march on 16 August 2019.

Source: Photograph by EneasMx, published under CC BY-SA 4.0 [Link here](#)



Figure 4. Personification of the Angel after it was graffitied on 16 August.

Note: Translation starting from the left to right clockwise:

Justice. Touch one of us, you touch all of us. Mexico feminicide. Violence. Not one less. Sheinbaum realise. You don't play with us. I believe you. A scratched monument bothers them more than the femicides, rapes and unpunished abuses caused by sexist [machista] violence.

Source: Illustration by Andrea 'Andonella' Arsuaga. Published with permission.

as they expose how such spaces are articulated through gendered power relations. This example also shows how women's bodies can be violated in the digital terrain in the form of offensive comments and threats under certain posts. Shortly after, the group '*Restauradoras de Glitter*' (Glitter Restorers) was formed to demand the government conserve the graffiti until an archive for future generations could be created (El Universal 2019). Other reasons given to conserve the graffiti were that it would serve as a daily reminder of GBV and the government's inability to address it. The government's response was to enclose the monument the next day. It remained like this for two years, until it was fully restored.

Conclusion

Through the 2019 feminist protests in Mexico, I examine the way digital platforms (particularly Instagram) transform the relationship between bodies, space and politics in nuanced

and contradictory ways (Ghigiù 2023). Utilising *cuervo-territorio* and *cyborg movidas* frameworks, I show how activists blur the lines between individual/collective, corporeality/space, digital/physical and private/public as a response to the ongoing state-sanctioned violence. For example, we see the permeability of physical and digital boundaries using pink glitter during the 12 August protests, then appropriated in the digital landscape through memes and illustrations and finally, back again in a material space by using it in the 16 August march. Such analysis allows us to understand space as being in a dynamic and symbiotic relationship with bodies and objects occupying said space. These *cyborg movidas* mobilise between diverse spaces, generating infinite connections between human and non-human actors to create moments of possible socio-political transformation and collective action (Haraway 1999). This is accomplished by producing 'monstrous' possibilities to rebel against a capitalist, racist patriarchal system across diverse geographies. Another important impact these mobilisations had was in the 'Un Violador En Tu Camino' [A rapist in your way] performance carried out on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November 2019) in Chile (Pérez-Arredondo and Cárdenas-Neira 2022) which went viral and was performed globally.

However, *cyborg movidas* are not always welcomed. As seen in this article, Mexican activists who enacted their *rabia* via smashing windows and furniture and graffitied public spaces divided the media and public. In subsequent years, the federal and local governments have covered up buildings and monuments in anticipation of 8 March (Women's Day) to prevent such actions happening again. Yet activists have found creative ways to protest. For example, in 2021 the government blocked off the National Palace where the president lives as a precaution in case protesters wanted to graffiti the building. Activists used the blocking wall to write the names of *feminicidio* victims and project the words 'Mexico feminicide' on the National Palace. We see the continued use of humour via memes, where a post went viral which used a character from the television show WandaVision wearing a *pañuelo verde* while winking under the tweet 'We aren't going to be able to intervene at the National Palace because of the fence sad emoji' (own translation). Protests against the government led by feminist activists have been a continuum since the 1990s. However, the incorporation of graffitiing national and local monuments as well as the increased use of digital platforms can be linked to the August 2019 protests. In this way, feminist activists represent an alternative to the Mexican government which relies heavily on state-sanctioned violence to implement 'law and order'. Within this context, the feminist cyborg emerges to rebel until there is *Ni Una Mas, Ni Una Menos*.

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Notes

1. I use women in the same way described by Alan Peláez López: 'By women, I am referring to those who are identified as women by Western society (not just self-identified women), which includes cisgender women, trans women, trans men experiencing intentional targeted violence from transphobic cultures, gender nonconforming people who have their nonconformity questioned and erased and identifies as "women," butch women who some families [...] will violently identify as "women who don't want to grow up," and third, fourth and fifth gendered NDNs [Native Indian] who the state will not recognize' (2018, n/p).
2. There is no literal translation in English for '*desapendejar*', as it is Mexican slang. The overall meaning of the phrase is to stop being stupid and get to work.

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