MAPPING FEMINICIDE

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Abstract

Feminicide names the gender-related violent deaths of women, the tip of the iceberg in a continuum of violence that is "terrorising women" in the Americas (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). Latin America and the Caribbean has been named "the most violent [region] in the world for women" (UNDP and UN Women 2017) and feminist activists have been responding to this ongoing crisis by intensifying activism on the issue. As well as mass protests, performances, hashtag campaigns, community organising, and other actions, feminist activists across Latin America have been denouncing feminicide by creating digital cartographies of the violence, including my own project mapping feminicide in Uruguay (feminicidiouruguay.net).

In this short paper, I share an investigation where I put into dialogue affect and emotion theories, conceptualisations of feminicide, and scholarship that reclaims quantitative and geographic methods for feminist research and activism, to propose that digital maps of feminicide constitute *feminist affect amplifiers*: interactive digital artefacts through which data about cases of feminicide –modulated through feminist knowledges, emotions, and affects– are recirculated in/to the world. This practice of creating feminist data visualisations can be understood as part of an affective politics oriented to generating change in personal and political responses to feminicide. A politics hoping to end violence against women.

Feminicide: a landscape

Feminicide, or *femicide*, names gender-related murders of women: the killing or otherwise causing the violent death of women where their gender plays a role, a form of violence that is a violation of women's human rights (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2010). According to the UN, some countries have seen an increase in cases of femicide, despite an overall decrease in homicide rates worldwide (UN ECLAC 2019), and Latin America has been considered the most dangerous region for women (UNDP and UN Women 2017). Against this landscape, there have been increasingly visible feminist actions against this form of violence in the region. For example, the

#NiUnaMenos mass protests that have raged like a wildfire across the continent since 2015 (see Jay Friedman and Tabbush 2016; Revilla Blanco 2019), including actions that have combined "traditional forms of mobilization with those typical of data activism, such as self-organized data gathering" (Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela 2019, 397). In recent years, a series of maps, lists, and other digital records of feminicide have emerged in Latin America (and other parts of the world), either as new initiatives or as continuation of previous efforts to monitor or quantify this form of violence. Activists in Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay, and several other countries have created works of this type, individually or collectively (see, for example, ActivistasXSL n.d.; Centro Interdisciplinario 'Caminos' n.d.; Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador 2016; Feminicidio.net n.d.; Lan, Prado, and Vera 2019; Madrigal 2016; Moody n.d.; Ramírez Ramírez n.d.; Salguero 2016; Sovereign Bodies Institute n.d.; Yang 2018). This includes *Feminicidio Uruguay*, my own ongoing project geo-locating cases of feminicide in Uruguay on a Google Map layer, which I have been taking forward since 2015 (feminicidiouruguay.net).

Paraphrasing Stengers with Ralet (1997, 216–17), it could be said a "Feminicide event" is currently taking place in Latin America, as the category becomes further "inscribed in the political and ethical register," efforts are made to "pose the problem clearly," and arguments about the "type of experts recognized as legitimate spokespersons" articulate activists, scholars, the media, and law-makers. Feminicide is one of several concepts and categories created and mobilized by feminist academics and activists with the political aim of recognizing and making visible the discrimination, oppression, inequality, and systematic violence against women that, in its most extreme form, culminates in death (Bernal Sarmiento et al. 2014, 13). Debates are still live amongst and between academics, activists and law-makers, around the term's exact meanings and scope, its overlaps with *femicide* and other related categorical terms –for example, *femigenocide* (Segato 2019; 2006), *serial or systemic sexual feminicide* (Monárrez Fragoso 2009; 2018), or *travesticide/transfeminicide* (Bento 2014; Berkins 2015; Maffía 2016)–, and its translation to legal typologies (Toledo Vásquez 2009). Nevertheless, this "empowered term" (Bueno-Hansen 2010) has provided a collective frame for action, in particular it has provided a frame to make evident, and gather evidence against (Deus and González 2018, 12–13), this form of violence that is "terrorising women" (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010).

Part of a genealogy of marches, performances, hashtag campaigns, and other past and current feminist actions (digital and not) against gender-related violence, activist cartographic practices centred on feminicide reclaim geographic information systems (GIS) for feminist research and activism (Kwan 2002) and integrate various aspects of feminist data visualisation practices (D'Ignazio and Klein 2016) to create digital artefacts, "imperfect tools" (Suárez Val n.d.; see also Alvarado García, Young, and Dombrowski 2017) mobilised to denounce and make visible feminicide in the region (Goldsman 2018). The research presented here proposes an original theoretical approach to form a deeper understanding of this form of activism, wrought out from my own implication and in dialogue with other activist cartographers (Suárez Val 2017). In section below, I put forward the notion of *feminist affect amplifiers,* developed by exploring feminist maps of gender-related murders of women through theories of affect and emotions and

feminist literature on the use of quantitative and geographic methods. In closing, I outline some avenues for future research.

Feminist Affect Amplifiers

In Uruguay, on 10 November 2014, the media reported the separated body and head of missing 15-year-old Yamila Rodríguez had been found buried amongst construction debris (Observador n.d.). Her sister's partner, who had been sexually abusing Yamila, had murdered her and discarded her body. Yet, during the days before and after Yamila was found, the media had endlessly scrutinised her behaviour, her clothes, her lifestyle. The day the news came was the last of a feminist meeting in Montevideo that had gathered over 400 participants. As the news pinged on our mobile phones at the closing assembly, sadness and outrage turned into spontaneous protest, and participants decided to head to Montevideo's main square, to make a noisy demonstration against feminicide, denouncing the media's misogynist portrayal of women as provoking their own murders, social indifference, and government inaction (see Cotelo 2014). These street protests continued into 2015, after each gender-related murder, and the register of cases created by the group coordinating the protests, of which I was a member, became the basis for *Feminicidio Uruguay,* first published as a map in November 2015.

After Yamila's case, I wrote about violence against women in Uruguay for *No te Olvides*, a Uruguayan magazine focused on human rights and memory, and described the feminist movement as "indignant, sad and fierce" (Suárez Val 2014). More recently, Argentinian journalist and activist Marta Dillon (2019), wrote, about the mobilisations for March 8 in Argentina: we are moved by desire, as we are also moved by rage. These statements make explicit some of the emotions orienting feminist towards/against violence against women (Ahmed 2006; Jaggar 1989; Lorde [1984] 2007), activist emotions that are transmutated (following Hochschild [1983] 2012) into online and offline actions, denouncing and protesting the indifference of society, the erroneous and sexist treatment of the issue in the media, and the inaction in the political sphere. The stark contrast between feminist effervescing with emotions and the indifferent and apathetic spheres of society, the media, and politics, reveals the emotional and affective struggles at play.

The "affective atmosphere" (Anderson 2009) around feminicide emerges in the interaction of multiple discourses: media and political voices, on the one hand, and the voices of a transnational feminist counter-public on the other (see Fraser 1990; Rasmussen 2014). The political atmosphere around feminicide in Uruguay at the time of this investigation (2016-17) could be described as apathetic –delays in debating bills, failures at the judicial and police level. As feminist campaigner Haydeé Gallego –who recorded cases of feminicide in Uruguay between 2001-2014– exclaimed in one of our dialogues: They are so lukewarm here! (Gallego 2017). In contrast, the media atmosphere overflowed sensationalism, each case a hot story, as exemplified in Yamila's case. Although charged with different emotions (sensationalism and apathy), the atmospheres of politics, law and the media were attuned, at least, with regard to denial and indifference towards the *systemic* nature of violence for reasons of gender.

Describing the alteration of satellite images to remove atmospheric elements that obscure the land or to add data lost due to technical glitches, Schuppli (2013, 18) calls these atmospheric corrections "an act of technical subterfuge [...] not aimed at sabotaging history. On the contrary, their motivation is recovery and repair." In the same way, as they dis/entangle various discourses to define criteria to collect, interpret, process, arrange, and circulate data on feminicide for a specific geographic location, activists recover and repair the map, hoping to "correct" the predominant affective atmosphere, that it be "'enhanced', 'transformed', 'intensified', [or] 'shaped'" (Anderson 2009, 80, following Böhme 2006). The resulting digital objects become memorials: each marker a public display of pain and anger over the loss. However, the purpose of this affective practice (Wetherell 2013) is not just to quantify feminicide or erect memorials. Feminist activists understand the "enormous political potential" of public displays of grief bound with "outrage in the face of injustice and indeed of unbearable loss" (Butler 2009, 39). In creating maps of gender-related murders of women, feminist activists attempt to "leverage affect in order to create an emotional bond with a story or issue, or to engage and impress" (D'Ignazio and Klein 2016, sec. 3.5).

Maps of feminicide can be read through Ash's (2012) notion of *affective amplification,* which he conceives as a two-fold process of augmentation and clarification. On the one hand, these maps, attempt to clarify feminicide, making it (more clearly) visible and showing each case as part of a systemic pattern. On the other hand, there is an attempt to augment and clarify affective and emotional responses to feminicide, to press against the affective atmosphere surrounding the issue, a process that "is not an attempt simply to increase affect, but rather a matter of attempting to generate and modulate between affective states […] intimately linked to the types of attention generated" (Ash 2012, 12). Thus, these digital objects can be conceived as *feminist affect amplifiers*: interactive visual artefacts through which data on cases of feminicide –modulated through feminist emotions and affects and arranged through particular understandings of the category– are recirculated in/to the world to modulate attention and alter the atmosphere that surrounds feminicide. Artefacts of an affective politics (Anderson 2006) that hopes to move the media, the political arena, and society as a whole from indifference to action, in order to provoke social change.

Have there been any changes? In response to the increased visibility of feminicide promoted by feminist activism, the atmospheres of Uruguayan politics and media have altered slightly. For example, through the media monitoring carried out to make the map, I found that by 2016 the media had started taking their cue from feminist activists, with more news reports contextualising cases by referring to a total number and/or using the word *femicide*, a term that seems to have become more frequent since the introduction of a legal framework. Also in 2016, members of the Uruguayan parliament feminist caucus presented two bills to address the murders of women with a gender motivation: a proposal to classify *femicide* as an aggravating circumstance to homicide and a comprehensive law to guarantee women a life free of gender violence, approved in 2017 and 2018 respectively (Parlamento del Uruguay 2017; 2018). Nevertheless, the latter project was only approved with several "compromise" adjustments that were heavily criticized by human rights and feminist organisations ('Comunicado por Ley

Integral que Garantice a las Mujeres una Vida Libre de Violencia de Género' 2017), who even today continue to demand an adequate budget be allocated to implement the law.

Meanwhile, Uruguay still has one of the highest rates of feminicide in the region. And as I write this paper, I continue to place on the map cases of women murdered by men who think women's bodies as things to use and discard, to break and plunder (Ni Una Menos 2016, sec. III). There remains much to do.

Future research

While the notion of feminist affect amplifiers provides a useful theoretical lens to examine maps and other feminist data visualisations (D'Ignazio and Klein 2016), understanding the political and affective effects and potentials of activist methodologies and practices that address feminicide remains a clearly necessary next step for research. How do political affects reverberate (Kuntsman 2012) in/to the social and political spheres through maps and other digital visualizations of feminicide data? What is their role within the Latin American feminist movement? How do they relate to the political and media spheres, and to the general public? What methodologies have emerged among Latin American feminist activists who create these digital objects? How can these be further developed to end violence against women? These questions motivate my current doctoral research, whose objectives are to weave together feminist activists and other "oppositional cyborgs" (Haraway 1991, 170) to investigate the forms and effects of cartographic practices in feminist activism on feminicide; to locate this work in a broader field of activist cartography and critical cartography; and to specify what distinguishes *feminist* mapping approaches, in order to contribute to strengthening feminist strategies to end gender injustice and violence against women.

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