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TWITTER RESISTANCE AND DIGITAL TESTIMONIO(S) IN 140 CHARACTERS:
RESTORING THE COMPLEXITY OF MEXICO'S HASHTAG FEMINISM

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COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Abstract

Largely due to the popularization of hashtags on Twitter; which later disseminated to other social media platforms— hashtag activism is now an emerging concept, with hashtag feminism developing as an important branch; capturing media attention and resulting in a new body of literature. Despite the conceptual recognition and initial developments; the analysis of hashtag activism remains largely unproductive; focusing primarily on premature blanket conclusions about its effect on social change or lack thereof, often examining trends and quantitative data. In this new field, there exist many gaps which beg for attention and more focused research; primarily rooted in i) underexplored narrative approaches to a topic that in its very essence creates easily searchable narratives and ii) western-centrism still dominating the field.

Hashtag feminism(s) of India, Latin America and surely many other spaces in the “Global South” where (primarily) women politicize and revolutionize the way online spaces are used still live in the shadow of western-based movements and receive very little attention in academia and lots of misrepresentation in the mainstream media. In this thesis, I will argue that hashtag activism responds to and needs to be restored within its sociopolitical context. Thus, narrative studies offer a promising approach into restoring the complexity of country-specific cultural and legal contexts and the ruptures hashtag activism creates in response to their specific dysfunctionalities. Using Twitter data; I engage in a deeper analysis with hashtag feminism in Mexico; in the process urging for more similar approaches to the topic restored within distinct realities.

Keywords: Twitter, hashtag activism, hashtag feminism, #SiMeMatan, #MeTooMX, #VivasNosQueremos, #MiPrimerAcoso, resistance

Introduction

From the Arab Spring to #BlackLivesMatter campaign—social media has proven to be one of the crucial platforms for rapid information sharing, civic engagement and exchange of ideas. How useful it is in creating social change remains highly contested. Whether it is because of a general tendency to reduce “social change” from *process-based* to *product-based* definitions— thus seeking measurable results over tracing the processes which underly social change in becoming, or primarily because traditional activism is all we have known for so long— many are quick to dismiss the potential digital activism as a whole, and hashtag activism specifically, holds and the importance it has in the current fights for social change.

Chapter 1, then—largely consisting of a Literature Review—looks deeper into the aforementioned tension between traditional and digital activism with a focus on hashtag activism and social media resistance; in the process identifying two large gaps in the literature concerning i) the overwhelming western-centrism in this relatively new field as well as the ii) fragmented and unproductive approaches to the topic. The unproductive approaches are mainly a result of the overwhelming focus on whether or not hashtag activism can produce meaningful change before exploring the narratives forming in more depth. I argue that we need to begin validating multiple forms of resistance and move past this initial question; in order to scratch the surface of analyzing the content—a narrative—produced around different hashtags, its function and behavior. A combination of the advances made in resistance and narrative studies provides a strong basis for new frameworks that can shift the focus away from oversimplified questions. The final section of my literature review thus focuses on creating the basis for this framework; followed by a section outlining the methodology used in more detail.

From Latin America, over South Africa to India—women in the developing world have been creating bottom-up networks of resistance largely ignored by both mainstream media and the current literature on hashtag activism. The existing discussions on hashtag activism tend to be centered on the English-speaking western world; often failing to consider how hashtag activism is performed in different sociopolitical contexts. Although regional connections, shared experiences and shared realities do exist—especially so in Latin America—hashtag activism still responds largely to country-specific circumstances and is constrained by country-level laws and policies. Although restoring the complexity of the online activism on a regional level is important, looking into micro-level movements can help tackle out important, largely neglected variations by country and work toward forming a clearer picture of what constitutes Latin American hashtag activism.

In Chapter 2 I illustrate the western-centrism through examining #MeToo and its visibility in the media, as well as the influence of the sociopolitical reality on the creation and use of the hashtagged narrative in Mexico. When used by Twitter users in Mexico, the #MeTooMX narrative develops differently than in the United States; creating a narrative highly dependent on and responsive to the sociopolitical reality women struggle with. #MeToo in Mexico relies on confidentiality and anonymity when reporting abuse and engaging with hashtag's reckoning nature. Many have judged this approach without fully understanding the motivation of its participants. The second part of Chapter 2 works to restore this sociopolitical and sociolegal reality—introducing the cultural and legal existence, persistence and implications of Mexico's femicides and institutionalized patriarchy, and the counter-culture developing within and beyond hashtag activism; at times working to replace the mechanisms

absent due to systemic failures. This counter-culture is loud and breaks through the culture of silence surrounding the topic of sexual violence and gender-based murders. In this context, visibility itself is a form of resistance, creating a rupture in status quo.

Hashtag activism does not stop at only making injustice visible. I argue that the narrative produced around different hashtags is created with a different functionality embedded into the shared understanding of what each hashtag aims to address. Instead of simply assessing a hashtag around its “lifespan” which tends to reach its peak and then die out – we need to understand the life of a hashtag contextually. Just like #MeToo is widely understood and used as a vehicle to report and publicly speak about specific abusers, hashtags forming in Latin America have their stories of origin and their purpose, too. #MiPrimerAcoso [MyFirstAssault], for example, “died out” not because it failed, but because it fulfilled its purpose and created visibility around the issue of silence around sexual violence a day before #VivasNosQueremos march in Mexico.¹ It had a dramatic effect; Twitter users have narrated an argument for the need for the protests happening the next day and made a rupture in the culture of silence surrounding the topic of sexual abuse.

In Chapter 3, I focus on restoring the contextual complexity of Mexico’s hashtagged realities—shedding light on three important hashtags all serving a different purpose. Restoring the complexity of hashtagged narratives within Mexico’s context opens the door for further research in the area of hashtag feminism in Latin America—a loosely connected but ever-evolving network with multiple branches that are in communication with each other, but all

¹ Acosta, F. and Maldonado A. (2018). “An Agenda in Motion: Women’s Issues in Latin American Higher Education” *International Higher Education*, 94, 2-4. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.0.10552>.

respond to targeted systemic dysfunctionalities. #VivasNosQueremos marches are replicated all over the continent, #NiUnaMenos echoes in each and every sub-topic analyzed, #MiPrimerAcoso learns from and engages with Brazil's movement under the same name in Portuguese— #MeuPrimeiroAssedio. Chapter 3 is followed by a brief conclusion and some implications for future studies.

We must challenge traditional notions of activism and social change and think beyond the existing frameworks, in order to make space for and invent new language to talk about different forms of activism and resistance responding to sociopolitical realities in real time. In Latin America; the narratives created around specific hashtags are urgent and each have their own trigger and purpose; they build personal into collective and political and bridge experiences—and as such, I propose we analyze them as an expression of *digital testimonios*. These voices deserve to be heard and recognized within and beyond the trends they contribute to, the volume and numbers they produce and can reveal emerging discourses we have previously failed to acknowledge. Twitter narratives remain an understudied and largely undermined cultural pocket of resistance which beg for their complexity and multifaceted functionality to be restored. In this paper, I turn to Mexico, land of both femicides and women's resilience, to shed light on one piece of this puzzle.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

From Traditional to Digital Activism: Navigating a Contested Field

Activism can be loosely defined as any attempt of like-minded individuals to challenge the status quo and bring about social, political, or economic change – in the process advocating for a cause, whether local or global.² As such, activism is said to encompass both *moments of collective action* and *social movements*. Charles Tilly defined collective action as “joint action in pursuit of common ends”³—and it is important to note that collective action can be a one-time event or be embedded into and employed as part of a social movement. Although not a social movement per se, even when perceived as a one-time occurrence such as a riot or a mob—moments of collective action signal social solidarity and reveal hints of a common purpose.⁴ Hence, according to Tarrow⁵ they can be an indication that a movement is in the process of formation.

Conversely, following this line of thought; social movements involve a prolonged contestation of authority as they try to incite social change, and Tarrow further argues that it is “*only* by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement.”⁶ The main issue with this critique is its conception that “social structure and

² Cammaerts, B. (2007). “Introduction: Activism and media”. In B. Cammaerts & N. Carpentier (Eds.), *Reclaiming the media: Communication rights and democratic media roles* (pp. 217–224).

³ Tilly, Charles. (1978). *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. pp. 84.

⁴ This is very important for digital activism, as—for example—hashtag feminism this text will grapple with is often composed of moments of collective action not yet a social movement, but arguably in the process of becoming one as (Tarrow, 1998) articulates.

⁵ Tarrow, S. (1988). *Power in movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp 12.

power stand before and apart from the resistant practices that oppose them”⁷, hence individual resistance and everyday challenges to power tend to get overlooked and undermined. This issue is often tackled in the emerging scholarship on resistance; and the focus is slowly shifting to the importance of “everyday” resistance.⁸

Traditional conceptualizations of activism have first emerged and gained traction in offline communities and within this dichotomic view on power and resistance and as such are linked with “interdependent groups mobilizing through tangible resources, including space, to organize protests, rallies, and boycotts.”⁹ As a large portion of our daily activities has now moved to an online, virtual space—the study of digital activism is becoming increasingly relevant yet skeptical views on its effectiveness are emerging. In the early 2000s; the term Web 2.0 was coined to designate the new emerging mentality of the web, based on information sharing, collaboration, participation, co-creation, interoperability and a higher level of digital communications.¹⁰ Ever since, online social movement research has grown to examine the role of digital networks in informing activists¹¹, diffusing political frameworks¹², decentralizing leadership¹³, and potentially decreasing the costs of participation.¹⁴

⁷ Ewick P. and Silbey S. (2003). “Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority.” *AJS Volume 8*. Number 6. 1378-92.

⁸ See, for example: Scott, 1985; Ewick and Silbey, 2003; Wilson, 2006.

⁹ Glenn, Cerise L. (2015) “Activism or “Slacktivism?”: Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change.” *Communication Teacher*, 29:2, 81-85, DOI: 10.1080/17404622.2014.1003310.

¹⁰ O'Reilly, T. and Batelle J. (2009). “Web squared: Web 2.0 five years on”. Retrieved July 21st, 2019. http://assets.en.oreilly.com/1/event/28/web2009_websquaredwhitepaper.pdf.

¹¹ Gerbaudo, Paolo. (2012). *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. New York, NY.

¹² Castells, Manuel. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. London: Polity Press.

¹³ González-Bailón, Sandra. (2014). “Online Social Networks and Bottom-up Politics.” in *Society and the Internet. How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives*.

¹⁴ Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. (2011). *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Although arguments centering on how digital activism can create new forms of activism and resistance are not fully absent¹⁵, it is worth pointing out that in the existing literature digital activism is still viewed primarily as a resource to be mobilized for the political action offline; rather than being political in itself, mainly because political action offline is taught to have more of a potential to impact the social structure in visible ways.¹⁶ In fact, when not viewed as a useful resource for offline mobilization, digital activism tends to be reduced to terms with negative connotation, such as “slacktivism” – emerging as a combination of the words “slacker” and “activism”. Knibbs¹⁷ characterizes slacktivism as “feel-good back patting” through watching or “liking” commentary of social issues without taking any action. Activism, in both the offline and newly emerging online context, is still largely assessed and analyzed as “merely a response to power known only in the imprint it leaves on social structure.”¹⁸

Hashtag Activism and Hashtag Feminism

Digital activism encompasses diverse tactics and uses of digital spaces— from the way Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico used e-mails and computer networks to enhance their organization in the 1990s¹⁹ over blogging, to countless online petitions we now see on our social media timelines. However, in studying activists around the world Brodock, Joyce and Zaack found in 2009 that social networks are now the preferred point of entry or gateway of

¹⁵ See, for example: Cardoso and Pereira Neto, 2004; Rolfe, 2005; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009.

¹⁶ There is some pushback against this political/cultural binary in rising hashtag activism research. See, for example: Clark, Rosemary (2016): “Hope in a hashtag”: the discursive activism of #WhyIStayed” *Feminist Media Studies*. I will build on her approach and argue that hashtag activism can be political in itself later in the text.

¹⁷ Knibbs, K. (2013). “Slactivists, unite! Social media campaigns aren't just feel-good back patting”.

¹⁸ Ewick P. and Silbey S. (2003). “Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority.” *AJS* Volume 8. Number 6. 1378-92.

¹⁹ Cleaver, Harry. (1998). “The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric.” *Journal of International Affairs*.

digital activism.²⁰ This social media-based digital activism has surely been gaining traction over the past few years; with an emerging body of literature examining its potential and limitations.

It comes as no surprise that what we now refer to as “hashtag activism”²¹ has been in the center of this discussion; largely because of its continued presence in variety of sociopolitical contexts, accessible searchability and its “trending” status on social media sites—reaching Instagram Facebook and other platforms, but still predominantly used on Twitter. A Communication and Sociology scholar, Guobin Yang, explains in his descriptive take on hashtag activism explains that “it [hashtag activism] takes place when large numbers of comments and retweets appear on social media in response to a hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence.”²² As anthropologists Bonilla and Rosa further explain; “hashtags have the intertextual potential to link a broad range of tweets on a given topic or disparate topics as part of an intertextual chain.”²³

Conceptually, hashtag activism can be defined as a “discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase or sentence.”²⁴ Some early literature on the phenomenon is very skeptical—if not dismissive—of the role (Twitter) hashtag activism plays in sociopolitical realities and the disruption of power.²⁵ The literature on hashtag activism over

²⁰ Brodock, K., Joyce, M. and Zaeck, T. (2009). “Digital activism survey: report 2009”. DigiActive Research Series, July.

²¹ The term was first used by *The Guardian* to refer to the #OccupyWallStreet movement in 2011, and has since been used frequently in literature. See, for example: Gunn, 2015.

²² Yang, G. (2016). “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter”. *Media and Communication*, 4 (4), 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.692>.

²³ Bonilla, Y. and Rosa, J. (2015). “#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States.” *American Ethnologist Journal*.

²⁴ Yang, G. (2016).

²⁵ See, for example: Heacock, 2009; Forte, 2009.

the years has, to an extent, kept its skepticism—but has also slowly begun to diversify and penetrate a multitude of fields—from its ethnographic potential in anthropology²⁶ to the exploration of discursive strategies—such as strategic speech act— highlighted in communication studies.²⁷

The existing literature has touched on the importance of hashtag feminism for marginalized and oppressed communities²⁸ mainly through re-centering race and gender with a focus on women’s experience; through the lens of hashtag movements such as #BlackLivesMatter²⁹ and #WhyIStayed.³⁰ In fact; cases concerning gender equity have grown to be known as **hashtag feminism**; a practice that has become so widespread it now also exists within its own digital archive: *hashtagfeminism.com*, curated by digital media analyst and commentator Tara L. Conley. Notably, some work has been done on an intersectional level where gender and race are brought together—primarily among women of color and the layers of oppression they face.³¹

Identifying the Gaps: Western-Centrism and Fragmented Approaches

The evident shortcomings of the literature concern the overwhelmingly western-centered narratives—resulting in numerous understudied geographical areas where women are politicizing and revolutionizing the use of social media and creating grassroot movements. We

²⁶ as is the case with Bonilla and Rosa (2015)

²⁷ Giglietto, F., & Lee, Y. (2017). “A Hashtag Worth a Thousand Words: Discursive Strategies Around #JeNeSuisPasCharlie After the 2015 Charlie Hebdo Shooting”. *Social Media + Society*.

²⁸ Loza, Susana. (2014). “Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the Other #FemFuture”. *Ada, Journal of New Media and Technology*.

²⁹ For example: Yang, 2016; Carney, 2016—among others.

³⁰ Clark, Rosemary (2016): “Hope in a hashtag”: the discursive activism of #WhyIStayed” *Feminist Media Studies*.

³¹ See, for example: Asoka & Chatelain, 2015; Garza, 2014.

also witness oversimplified and arguably premature negative conclusions regarding the “effectiveness” of hashtag feminism; stemming from an oversimplified understanding of disruptions to power. It is worth noting that in most of the existing intersectional works in the field referenced in the section above, the question of social class is rarely ever dealt with. As briefly mentioned earlier—there has been some work done on potential cost effectiveness of digital activism, in terms of lower participation costs³², which could render collective action and resource mobilization theories—as resources were believed to be “necessary for engagement in social conflict”³³— less relevant in favor of newer theories of mobilization in the digital era. However, Jen Schradie challenges this assumption and finds that “groups with middle/upper-class members have much higher levels of digital engagement than those with working-class members.”³⁴ Other than Schradie’s initial contribution, we are yet to see scholars grapple with how different social classes interact with online activism. I will offer some initial insights on this issue in Chapter 3; the section “On (In)Visibility: The Importance of Physical Space, Social Class and Resources”.

Beyond the virtual absence of class analysis, the omnipresent question literature focuses on is whether hashtag activism produces immediate, tangible change—very few works go beyond and analyze the potential it holds and the narrative/ discourse it creates. In fact, in an attempt to derive quick conclusions on whether or not hashtag activism is effective as an aiding tool to

³² See: Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Earl and Kimport, 2011.

³³ McCarthy, John D and Zald Mayer N. (1977). “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory.” *American Journal of Sociology* 826:1212-41.

³⁴ Schradie, Jen. (2018). “The Digital Activism Gap: How Class and Costs Shape Online Collective Action.” *Social Problems*, Volume 65, Issue 1, Pages 51–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spx042>.

what is often intentionally referred to as “real” [traditional] activism³⁵—the continuity and processes underlying “social change” tend to be reduced to purely quantifiable, tangible results such as policy changes³⁶, often stripping the narrative forming around a hashtagged cause of its complexity.

The nature of hashtag activism on Twitter lends itself to creative quantitative analyses that can point to interesting trends—however; in the process of looking for these trends, we should not undermine the importance of ruptures or “pockets of resistance” hashtag activism creates in what Antonio Gramsci would define as “hegemonic” or dominant culture.³⁷ In order to tackle the oversimplification in the field and attempt to restore the complexity of hashtag feminism, I will argue that combining the insights from the resistance literature and narrative studies offers a promising approach to the study of hashtag feminism in Latin America, as it offers a window to rethink the relationship between power and opposition to it, validates various forms of producing social change and creates a space to discuss western-centrism in more depth.

Combating Western-Centrism in the Literature

Before attempting to combat negative premature conclusions stemming from a narrow understanding of power and social change and restore the complexity of hashtagged narratives

³⁵ Bonilla and Rosa, 2015.

³⁶ for example, Heacock (2009) concludes that: “none of the so-called “revolutions” in Iran, Moldova, Guatemala or Uganda have led to substantially different governments” –making this her primary (and only) assessment criteria for the “successes” of twitter-based organization.

³⁷ Gramsci defines hegemony as “the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (pp.145). As patriarchy has shaped and influenced both the collective mindsets and laws, making the depth and extent of gender-based violence visible in both the society and the state, and organizing against it created ruptures in the status quo.

through engaging with Resistance and Narrative Studies, it is important to first acknowledge that hashtag activism emerges within and needs to be restored within a specific sociopolitical context—before it can be related to other movements and rendered more global. This bleeds into a large shortcoming in the existing literature. In the realm of hashtag activism; especially hashtag feminism, the literature on the issue tends to be overly focused on western sociopolitical realities, primarily using English as *lingua franca* on the matter. For example, the #MeToo campaign has already been vastly researched³⁸ – mainly because it has also been globally publicized, in the center of media attention and accessible to many in the English-speaking academia. However, women all over the world are pioneering and “politicizing the use of technologies”³⁹ for quite a while now—within and in response to their own sociopolitical contexts. In India, for example, “following wide-spread protests in 2012 after the violent rape of a young woman in Delhi, young women have been leading campaigns such as the 2016 #IWillGoOut protest, calling for legal protections from sexual assault” yet this has not attracted nearly as much attention in part because of the omnipresent western-centrism⁴⁰ in the literature.⁴¹

³⁸ For perspective, a simple Google Scholar “#MeToo” search generated 48,500 results on July 25th, 2019—as is later mentioned.

³⁹ Alcaraz, Maria F. (2017). “#Niunamenos: Politicizing the Use of Technologies.” *Genderit.org*.

⁴⁰ To understand the underlying western-centrism and the fact that language barrier is not the only factor that accounts for under-exploration of hashtag activism in other sociopolitical realities, we can take as an example Indian hashtag feminism executed primarily in English, on Twitter—yet receiving little to no attention in the literature. I fully encourage and recognize the need for further exploration of movements outside of Europe and the United States, including the #aintnocindirella and #iwillgoout movements in India, that contribute to the multitude of voices impressively breaking through the culture of silence in highly repressive contexts. This could enhance globalized networks of regional movements and push for more dialogue and collaboration among the activists and academics, unifying hashtag feminism in different cultural settings.

⁴¹ Imogen Davies & Caroline Sweetman. (2018). “Introduction: Development and Young feminisms”. *Gender & Development*.

Latin American feminism—because of the geographical proximity to both Canada and the United States and a bit more publicity Argentinian #NiUnaMenos [NotOneLess] movement has had— is slightly more of a familiar field yet remains highly neglected, oversimplified and misunderstood. As I will argue in my focus on Mexico; there is a need for more nuanced literature taking into consideration the sociopolitical intricacies on a micro/country-level—in the process restoring the linguistic, cultural, historical and present-day complexity of Latin America; accounting for by-country variations and shedding light on the shape hashtag feminism takes in each of Latin American countries. There sure is both solidarity and collaboration between the movements in Argentina and Mexico, for example, yet they each fight their distinct struggles too—and these, often responsive to their immediate sociopolitical and cultural realities outside of the Anglo-American world, are still understudied, clumped together and overlooked in the literature.⁴²

Re-centering “the Other”: A Brief Overview of Latin American Hashtag Feminism

Feminism is often referred to and recognized as “the most important social movement in Latin America.”⁴³ In the last few years—in both Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries—women have been creating, nourishing and expanding a complex network of hashtag feminism, branching out and expanding within country-specific and regional-shared sociopolitical realities. The depth and complexity of hashtag feminism in Latin America remain unexplored in academia and the lack of visibility of Latin American hashtag activism as a whole in the current literature

⁴² As one example: while Argentina is pushing for legal abortion, with #AbortoLegalYa hashtag [legal abortion now], Mexican women worked on revealing the victim-blaming in the way government officials dealt with a specific femicide case with a hashtag #simematan [If they kill me].

⁴³ Palmeiro, C. (2018). “The Latin American Green Tide: Desire and Feminist Transversality.” *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 27:4, 561-564, DOI: 10.1080/13569325.2018.1561429

is evident. To put things into perspective; a simple Google Scholar search using just “#MeToo” as the search words generated 48,500 results.⁴⁴ In the meantime, #NiUnaMenos [not one woman less] movement arguing for gender equity which started in Argentina, spilled into offline protests across the borders and branched into a multitude of collective action moments both online and offline all over the region—generated only 850 results.⁴⁵ This ratio shows a profound lack of attention on the developments in Latin American hashtag feminism.

Conversely; once Mexican women started using #MeTooMX, the mainstream western media picked up on the story, yet they did so with headlines such as “Latin America needs its #MeToo”⁴⁶—briefly touching on the existence of online feminist resistance in Latin America yet undermining its importance, continuity and persistence.⁴⁷ Women in Latin America are the experts in their own lived realities; and while unifying movements such as #MeToo are surely welcome and can be transformative; we need to study, understand and empower the grassroots movements emerging from *el pueblo* first—and they are the ones that have the potential to make global digital connections.

Media is not the only source to blame for this approach. In terms of hashtag feminism in Latin America, as of now; #NiUnaMenos is studied either as “a thematically centralized

⁴⁴ Accessed on July 25th.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Stavans, Ilan. (2018). “América Latina necesita su #MeToo.” *The New York Times*.

⁴⁷ To illustrate the point, see the following quote from New York Times: “#MeTooMX is not the first attempt to highlight violence against women through a hashtag or a campaign on Twitter (#Niunamenos, #ropasucia, #SiMeMatan, #MiPrimerAcoso), but without a doubt it has been the most successful, with more than 424,000 denouncements by 230,578 users in two weeks and a heated public debate” (Morena, 2019). Clearly, what seems to be a measure of success is the number of tweets/denouncements—rather than the complexity of narrative and the movements.

movement” that “in and out of itself is not enough to create meaningful change”⁴⁸; in the context of larger trends it participates in—notably, as one of the case studies of data activism⁴⁹ or as an initial, broad attempt to reveal the complexity of marginalized women’s participation in feminist movements Latin America—both traditional and online.⁵⁰ Although #NiUnaMenos has spread beyond Argentina and exists both in the online context as well as massive street demonstrations in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay⁵¹— the literature still situates it almost exclusively in the Argentinian context; with a focus on Argentinian sociopolitical reality⁵² where the movement emerged. How it traveled across the borders remains yet to be explored.

Hashtag activism— as a whole— in other Latin American countries is still underexplored. In terms of Mexico, one of the only notable cases in the literature remains #yosoy132 movement⁵³; composed for the most part of Mexican private and public university students and formed in opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Enrique Peña Nieto and the Mexican media's biased coverage of the elections in 2012.⁵⁴ Mexican hashtag

⁴⁸ Fernández-García, N. et al. (2018). “La centralidad temática y la participación en Twitter de la movilización NiUnaMenos”. *El profesional de la información*

⁴⁹ Chenou, Jean-Marie and Carolina Cepeda-Másmela. (2019) “#NiUnaMenos: Data Activism from the Global South.” *Television and New Media* 1.245.

⁵⁰ Revilla, Marisa. (2019). “Ni una más! al #NiUnaMenos: movimientos de mujeres y feminismos en América Latina.” *Política y Sociedad*. 56(1):47-67.

⁵¹ Elsey, Brenda. (2018). “Fútbol Feminista: Energized by the #NiUnaMenos movement, women’s soccer teams take on the patriarchs of the beautiful game in Latin America”. *Journal NACLA Report on the Americas. Volume 50, 2018 - Issue 4: Women Rising in the Americas*.

⁵² See, as notable examples: Laudano, 2017; Luengo, 2017; Rosales, 2017.

⁵³ Rovetto (2015) analyzed the visual narratives on Facebook in #vivasnosqueremos in Mexico side by side with #niunamenos in Argentina, and this analysis remains one of the only works partially centering Mexico’s hashtag feminism.

⁵⁴ Treré, E. (2015) “Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: an examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms.” *Journal of Information, Communication & Society. Volume 18, 2015 - Issue 8: Social Media and Protest Identities*.

feminism, though, remains virtually untouched; studied primarily through separate trending cases resulting in fragmented approaches to the topic⁵⁵—and little to no efforts have been made so far to restore the complexity of Mexican hashtag feminism.

I will work on beginning to fill this gap; in an attempt to shed light on the way Mexican feminists mold their own version of socio-politically responsive hashtag feminism in conversation with—but not limited to— both #NiUnaMenos and more recently #MeToo. What is revealed in the process is the complexity, continuity as well as the limitations of the narrative existing among seemingly unrelated collective action moments, and social change as a continually unfolding process existing through increased visibility as well as often event-triggered collective action bringing tangible and measurable micro/local change. Latin American hashtag feminism, then, moves along the resistance continuum from being an everyday expression of resistance to a multifaceted collective action. A combination of insights from the resistance studies with narrative studies—testimonios in particular, can offer a great entry point into this discussion.

Toward a New Approach: Combining Resistance and Narrative Studies

Resistance Studies: Validating “Everyday” Resistance

“Resistance” is most often used to refer to social movements (and/or the literature on “protests”)⁵⁶, but the rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance has diversified and enhanced the value attributed to different ways of pushing for change— making significant

⁵⁵ See, for example: Roldán and Malak, 2019.

⁵⁶ Jasper, James. (1997). *The Art of Moral Protest CULTURE, BIOGRAPHY, AND CREATIVITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*. University of Chicago Press.

contributions that can be extended to the study resistance in the online spaces. The notion and importance of everyday resistance, a concept introduced by James Scott⁵⁷ has entered sociological, sociolegal and a myriad of other fields—with scholars applying the concept to actual social spaces such as the workplace⁵⁸ and the family (studies of resistance among women in violent relationships)⁵⁹, as well as exploring its importance in relationship with legalized authorities.⁶⁰ Although the field of resistance studies still appears hectic and contested, significant contributions have been made in defining and analyzing resistance as a concept⁶¹ as well as developing an initial typology which; acknowledging resistance as an *opposition to multiple layers of power*, the *visibility/recognition* of resistance and the *intent of resistant acts* outlines seven types of resistance: covert, overt, unwitting, target-defined, externally-defined, missed and attempted.⁶²

While Einwohner and Wollander's typology is useful for both descriptive and analytical purposes, following their aspiration for the field of resistance studies to move forward when we move past "the fruitless aspects of definitional disputes", I argue that we can engage in even more productive debates if we approach resistance as a continuum. I propose for this flexible theoretical framework to operate as a moving scale where "everyday resistance" is the very beginning of the continuum and has value, accepting Ewick and Silbey's claim that stories of

⁵⁷ Scott, James (1985). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press.

⁵⁸ Huzell, H. (2005). *Management and resistance: public sector in transformation - a case study*. Doctoral dissertation. Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies.

⁵⁹ Holmberg, Carin & Enander, Viveca. (2004). Varför går hon?: om misshandlade kvinnors uppbrottsprocesser. Ystad: Kabusa böcker. in Johansson and Vinthagen.

⁶⁰ Ewick P. and Silbey S. (2003). "Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority." *AJS* Volume 8. Number 6. 1378-92.

⁶¹ Baaz, M., et al. (2016). "Defining and Analyzing "Resistance": Possible Entrances to the Study of Subversive Practices." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*.

⁶² Einwohner, R. and Hollander, J. (2004) "Conceptualizing Resistance." *Sociological Forum* Vol. 19, Issue 4.

resistance and individual acts *are* resistance. The far-end of the continuum is a formed collective consciousness large masses act on and disrupt visible patterns of power, social structures and systems.

This continuum-approach to studying resistance can enhance the field significantly, as it suggests that the acts of resistance can move along this scale not necessarily confined to fitting a certain category. It also invites scholars to (re)imagine and (re)invent the language surrounding online forms of resistance. When “placing” any form of resistance on this continuum I suggest we should a) call attention to underexplored forms of resistance neglected in the literature and/or previously deemed “ineffective” (such as rapidly developing forms of resistance online) and b) consider and work within the sociopolitical context(s) surrounding the emerging online resistance; in the process (re)inventing the language used to refer to specific cases, revealing the continuity and complexity of narratives, as well as shedding light on emerging culturally responsive frameworks we can ground these cases in. In order to do so, especially within the Latin American context—I argue that narrative studies by and large, and testimonios in particular can be a great entry point.

A Case for Narrative Studies: Shedding Light on the Narrative Form of Hashtag Activism

The importance of narrative is gaining recognition across disciplines—from anthropology to media studies; politics to healthcare, and so forth. It is also gaining relevance in different epistemological positions including phenomenology, hermeneutics, constructivism,

feminism, critical theories, etc.⁶³ In fact, the increased appreciation for the use of lived experiences and stories have caused what social researchers refer to as “narrative turn” in social sciences.⁶⁴ Inquiring into life narratives combines “a modern interest in learning, understanding and a concern for agency and human action with postmodern concerns such as discourse and power, forcing the social sciences to develop new theories and new methods, and new ways of talking about the self and society.”⁶⁵

This new approach inevitably concerns itself with the question of (re)defining narrative, too. Some consensus has been reached among narratologists on the definition of narrative as a “representation of events”⁶⁶, yet—as newer literature argues—remaining in the realm of the representation of events is very limiting and offers a single conception of what narrative is and what it does.⁶⁷ Carr argues that “Narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves.”⁶⁸ Bruner similarly states that “a life as led is inseparable from a life as told.”⁶⁹ Narrative can be and often is—as is the case with hashtag activism— resistance in practice; not merely a representation of resistance.

⁶³ Goodson, Ivor and Gill, Scherto. (2011). “The Narrative Turn in Social Research.” *Counterpoints*, Vol. 386, NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY: LIFE HISTORY AND LEARNING, pp. 17-33.

⁶⁴ See, for example: Czarniawska, 2004; Herman et.al. 2005.

⁶⁵ Goodson, Ivor and Gill, Scherto. (2011).

⁶⁶ See, for example: Genette, Gerard. (1982). *Figures of Literary Discourse*. Translated by Marie-Rose Logan (New York: Columbia University), p. 127.; Abbott, Porter. (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 16.; Prince, Gerald. (1999). “Revisiting Narrativity.” In Walter Grunzweig and Andreas Solbach (eds.) *Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context* (Tubingen: Gunter Narr Verlag,) p. 45.

⁶⁷ Rundrum, David. (2005) “From Narrative Representation to Narrative Use: Towards the Limits of Definition.” *Narrative*. Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 195-204.

⁶⁸ Carr, D. (1986). “Narratives and the real world.” *History and Theory*, 25, 117-131.

⁶⁹ Bruner, Jerome. (1987). “Life as Narrative.” *Social Research*, Vol. 54, No. 1, *Reflections on the Self (SPRING 1987)*, pp. 31.

Although hashtag activism has a distinctly narrative character and as such lends itself to a narrative-based analysis; likely because we are still debating its effectiveness and ability to produce change to begin with—very little has been done in an attempt to study its narrative form and agency. Both Yang (2016) and Clark (2016) have begun to scratch the surface and have made some of the significant initial contributions. Yang highlights the distinct *temporal form* of hashtagged tweets—or “mutually connected postings in a networked space”⁷⁰—and goes on to argue that “narrative agency in hashtag activism derives from its narrative form as well as from its contents and social context.”⁷¹ Yang’s (2016) work makes significant initial contributions in neglected narrative approach to hashtag activism by shedding light on its narrative agency and defining it “as the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public”⁷², in the process restoring its theoretical potential and complexity.

Similarly, Clark assumes hashtag activism’s narrative form, and in her focus on hashtag feminism, attempts to highlight “the process through which a feminist hashtag develops into a highly visible protest.”⁷³ In doing so, she draws on the concepts of social drama,⁷⁴ discursive activism,⁷⁵ and connective action⁷⁶ in order to reveal hashtag feminism’s dramatic features.

⁷⁰ Yang, G. (2016). “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter”. *Media and Communication*, 4 (4), 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.692>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Clark, (2016).

⁷⁴ Turner, Victor. (1982). *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ.

⁷⁵ See both Shaw, 2012 and Young, 1997.

⁷⁶ Bennett, W. L. and Segerberg A. (2013). *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Clark (2016) uses a Turner-inspired model⁷⁷ for analyzing the dramatic qualities of collective action where "breach, crisis, and reintegration—parallel the plot elements of beginning, middle, and end."⁷⁸ This model is particularly suited for studying online feminism "whose discursive tactics often call on participants to collectively build narratives of resistance."⁷⁹ Both Yang and Clark move past the skepticism in the literature regarding the oversimplified immediate effectiveness/impact-oriented questions and delve into exploring the content hashtag activism creates, thus highlighting some of its potential and providing new lenses we can begin to analyze this distinct form of activism through.

Expanding the "Narrative" Inquiry: Testimonio in 140 Characters

Because "hashtag activism happens in social and political context, its forms may vary when contexts change."⁸⁰ #MeTooMX, for example—as I will explore in Chapter 2—is performed differently than #MeToo in the United States; with women reporting and denouncing their abusers primarily through anonymous channels—in part because of the structural omnipresence of violence, fear and ever-growing femicide numbers and a multitude of other factors that mold their communal realities. Taking this into consideration; in order to do justice to restoring the complexity of Latin American hashtag feminism's narrative, not only within its distinct sociopolitical context, but also within the methodological approach which

⁷⁷ McFarland, Daniel A. 2004. "Resistance as a Social Drama: A Study of Change-Oriented Encounters." *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (6): 1249–1318.

⁷⁸ Yet again, a focus on temporal unfolding of the events.

⁷⁹ Clark, 2016.

⁸⁰ Yang, 2016.

emerged in this region—I propose a new lens to analyze it through: as a manifestation of *[digital] testimonial narrative*.

Testimonio [Spanish for “bear witness”] emerged in Latin America as a form of narrative inquiry; it implies transcending awareness and, in its core, “gravitates toward political intention, questions about institutional power, the need to speak for justice, the creation of stronger pockets of resistance, and the importance of solidarity and coalition as keys to building more equitable social frameworks.”⁸¹ Its definition, although still contested, relies on one of the two well-known articulations, both of which can apply to hashtag feminism on Twitter. The first one is John Beverley’s articulation of *testimonio*: “By *testimonio* I mean... a narrative...told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts... The word *testimonio* translates literally as testimony, as in the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense...”⁸² The second one is George Yúdice’s understanding of *testimonio* as: “an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.)”⁸³

These have been criticized by a historian, Sandra Henderson, who highlights that *testimonios* have primarily been the work of women and she explains how failing to include this

⁸¹ Mora, Raúl Alberto. (2015). “Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue: *Testimonio*.” *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, No. 45.

⁸² Beverley, John. (1999). “Our Rigoberta? L Rigoberta Menchá, Cultural Authority, and the Problem of Subaltern Agency,” in *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999): 65. 8.

⁸³ Yúdice, George. (1991). “*Testimonio* and Postmodernism: Whom Does Testimonial Writing Represent?” *Latin American Perspectives* 70 (Summer 1991): 18, 26.

note in the original definition is a significant oversight.⁸⁴ It appears, Henderson notes, that the genre of *testimonio* is well suited to women's experiences.⁸⁵ The intersection of personal and political themes of violation and silencing, and the emphasis on collective experience and communal voice is often central to testimonios— and surely is central to the way hashtag feminism is performed on Twitter in Latin America.

An especially relevant element present in hashtag feminism that Yúdice and Beverley both do touch on in their works involves “the **urgency to communicate**, a problem of repression...implicated in the act of narration itself”⁸⁶—it is the rising number of femicides in the region that molded #NiUnaMenos movement, the victim-blaming language used by the government officials that triggered #SiMeMatan [If they kill me] narratives, and the omnipresent violence and the need to bring visibility to its urgency that resulted in #MiPrimerAcoso [my first sexual assault] confessions.⁸⁷ Furthermore, testimonio can be a tool to help decolonize Latin American feminism; as it is by definition linked to the concept of the subaltern, Antonio Gramsci's term for subjects of colonialism.⁸⁸

Further drawing from Gramsci; testimonio seeks “organic intellectuals that help outsiders learn about the local history of the communities that have suffered

⁸⁴ Examples of testimonio include Carolina Maria de Jesus (1960), Elena Poniatowska (1969), Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1977), Doris Tijerino (1978), Rigoberta Menchú (1983), Claribel Alegria (1983), Hebe de Bonafini (1985), Alicia Partnoy (1986), Elvia Alvarado (1987), Esperanza Hernández (1993), and Benedita da Silva (1997).

⁸⁵ Henderson, Sandra. (2001). “Latin American Testimonio: Uncovering the Subaltern's Gender, Race, and Class.” *The History Journal Ex Post Facto* Spring 2001 Volume X.

⁸⁶ Yúdice, George. (1991). “Testimonio and Postmodernism: Whom Does Testimonial Writing Represent?” *Latin American Perspectives* 70 (Summer 1991): 18, 26.

⁸⁷ An important note: These narratives do not exist separately, they interact and co-produce other moments of collective action.

⁸⁸ Henderson, Sandra. (2001). “Latin American Testimonio: Uncovering the Subaltern's Gender, Race, and Class.” *The History Journal Ex Post Facto* Spring 2001 Volume X.

marginalization.”⁸⁹ In agreement with Clark’s (2016) argument that hashtag feminism is political in itself, *testimonio* further captures the inherently political nature of hashtag feminism in Latin America and invites the reader of the narrative(s) to be critical and active rather than passive observes, as “the position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom.”⁹⁰

Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) scholars have done amazing work using *testimonio* as methodology in education⁹¹; and it is Latin@ studies where the term *digital testimonio* emerged, combining “the *testimonio* tradition of urgent narratives and the creative multimedia languages of digital storytelling—text, voice, image, and sound.”⁹² LatCrit scholars are advocating the centrality of *testimonio* in digital spaces “because of its agentive effects on student identity that also contribute to community building.”⁹³ While acknowledging the crucial differences between the space where the term emerged and is creating important resistance within [re-centering Latino/a racial, linguistic, ethnic and other struggles in the classrooms in the United States] and the space I am applying it to; I do believe that re-centering women’s experiences in Latin America through their digital narratives on Twitter is both urgent and includes the crucial aspects of Benmayor’s characterization of “digital storytelling.”⁹⁴ Hashtag

⁸⁹ Mora, Raúl Alberto. (2015). “Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue: Testimonio.” *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, No. 45.

⁹⁰ Beverley, John. (1999). “Our Rigoberta? L Rigoberta Menchá, Cultural Authority, and the Problem of Subaltern Agency,” in *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999): 65. 8.

⁹¹ See Huber, 2009; 2010.

⁹² Benmayor, Rina. (2012). “Digital “Testimonio” as a Signature Pedagogy for Latin@ Studies”. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, v45 n3 p507-524 2012.

⁹³ Medina, Cruz. (2018). “Digital Latinx Storytelling: testimonio as Multimodal Resistance.” in *Racial Shorthand Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media*, edited by Cruz Medina and Octavio Pimentel.

⁹⁴ Benmayor, Rina. (2012).

feminism combines images⁹⁵; ranging from artwork highlighting violence against women and patriarchal stereotypes, over posters made to encourage march participation to photographs of missing/ murdered women's faces; hence humanizing and personalizing them, images and sound embedded in both Youtube video links of #niunamenos themed songs⁹⁶ and videos from the marches— in essence creating an online record of multimodal resistance.

Hashtag feminism in Latin America certainly “resists dominant narratives while providing a platform for making the personal into the collective”⁹⁷ by the nature of deeply personal yet interconnected hashtagged realities. In 140 characters – or more, if using “threads/multiple tweets”, Latin American women are tweeting their resistance — *testimonial*, thus, political in nature—and responsive to both local and regional layers of oppression. When placing hashtagged digital testimonios on the resistance continuum, the attribute of “making the personal into the collective” becomes incredibly important—as it distinguishes hashtag feminism from everyday resistance and moves this phenomenon along the continuum, without inherently suggesting everyday resistance is not valuable. This approach invites us to restore the complexity of the existent narrative agency in Latin American online circles and its multifaceted performance.

⁹⁵ (see the analysis about visual communication in #niunamenos and #vivasnosqueremos in: Rovetto, 2015)

⁹⁶ In the music industry, there is an increasing number of musical artists raising awareness and bringing attention to violence against women—with their lyrics either portraying violence or building empowerment, a lot of them from Argentina—using #niunamenos in their song title and making it a part of the movement. This trend in itself calls for further research.

⁹⁷ Medina, Cruz. (2018). “Digital Latinx Storytelling: testimonio as Multimodal Resistance.” in *Racial Shorthand Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media*, edited by Cruz Medina and Octavio Pimentel.

Methodology

Revealing complex narratives forming around different hashtags in Latin America with a focus on Mexico was done through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as extensive context-based analysis of news sources to reveal the major hashtag movements specifically pertaining to Mexico. Firstly, an open-source Python script was used to collect and data-mine a large public, open and accessible data set of tweets containing the following hashtags: #VivasNosQueremos [We Want Us Alive], #MiPrimerAcoso [My First Assault], #SiMeMatan [If They Kill Me]. Looking for differences in narratives forming around each hashtag through both data mining and extensive inductive coding helped make visible the specific ways the three hashtagged narratives were employed to create social change. This analysis shifted the conversation from an oversimplified product-based perception on social change and opened the doors for exploring different types of impact the narratives had, as well as different purpose and functionality they performed.⁹⁸

Three Excel sheets were then extracted containing tweets written with each of these hashtags treated as a separate data set and the quantitative analysis project included graph plotting in order to reveal how frequently the hashtag was used from its “creation” until a set date in the present [July 2019]; as well as text mining in order to map out the most common words and word-combinations used for each of the three data sets. The “creation” of each of these hashtags is traced to an event that triggered it, therefore, the data analysis for #VivasNosQueremos was run from January 2016-July 2019 resulting in 143, 651 tweets/data points, #MiPrimerAcoso dates back to April 2016 when it was tweeted for the first time and the

⁹⁸ See Figure 2 for a working framework.

data extraction resulted in a set of 24,243 tweets, #SiMeMatan is traced back to May 2017 when it was tweeted for the first time in response to victim-blaming in a specific femicide case in Mexico and the data set includes 39, 565 tweets. Text data mining of these samples revealed distinct narratives forming around each hashtag; and the most commonly used words for each separate sub-narrative varied a lot.

Because hashtag activism forms narratives; trend-searching is important but does not do justice to the complexity of emerging narratives if performed on its own, and often leads to incomplete and premature conclusions. Thus, after this initial data processing, what followed was an extensive inductive coding analysis of sampled data where the trends and patterns revealed were explored in more depth. Because the data sets were large; I chose to focus important dates and times (in the case of Vivas Nos Queremos, for example, the day before-during-and after the march in Mexico) for the extensive read-through and coding. Some straight-forward themes emerged based off the text data mining; but tropes also emerged and began revealing sub-narratives that might be “hidden” and underrepresented in the quantitative part of the analysis.

For example; an inductive coding process of #SiMeMatan set began revealing a narrative forming around LGBTQ community issues in words such as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender. I then searched the complete data set for these words in order to tackle out this fragmented narrative that might not be represented in the “most commonly used” words—simply because there are many words used to engage with this trope. Some of these emerging sub-narratives in each of the data sets are tackled and analyzed in Chapter 3. Separating and comparing the data sets by the hashtag that drives the narrative followed by an in-depth analysis of that narrative

and its components has shown to be very important; as the narratives forming around each hashtag began showing its distinct functionality and purpose—something that has been largely neglected in the literature so far. Validating and recognizing different forms of resistance as valuable rather than treating resistance as worth researching only when large mass mobilization followed by quantifiable forms of social change has been detected, in combination with a narrative, testimonio-based approach to hashtag activism in Latin America opens the door for more productive research and reveals and restores previously neglected complexity forming within a sociopolitical context the hashtagged narratives criticize.

Because Twitter is a dynamic platform whose users can choose to ‘go private’ and restrict open access to their content, delete their Tweets and accounts; one of the obstacles is the ever-changing narrative—the numbers might not reflect the real-time engagement. The samples are still large enough to make initial assumptions and hypotheses about the way narrative forms. Nonetheless, monitoring how samples change over time and how likely the users are to delete tweets/ go private could be important for future research. Moreover, although Twitter does allow for both tweet and account location to be shared publicly, a large number of users opt out of this; making it extremely hard to filter tweets by geographical metadata.

Considering the argument that hashtag activism develops in and needs to be restored within a sociopolitical context; context-based research is needed to determine where a certain hashtagged narrative began and how it developed over the course of its “life”. The sociopolitical context will significantly mold the way the narrative develops. As a next step,

then, it is incredibly useful to lay out this sociopolitical context and show how a transnational hashtag movement not organic/ native to Spanish speakers behaves within its constraints.

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Western-Centrism and Reconstructing the Sociopolitical/Sociolegal Context

#MeTooMX: Confidentiality and Institutionalized Fear

A rain of #MeTooMX tweets poured in full force in April, 2019—Mexico’s take on a Twitter-based movement— a hashtagged space where women are increasingly reporting and revealing names of their abusers; from publicly denouncing abuse by their university professors to anonymously reporting powerful writers, lawyers and politicians in the country.⁹⁹

Mainstream media sources picked up on #MeToo “crossing the border”, yet they did so with headlines such as “Latin America needs its #MeToo”¹⁰⁰; often just very briefly touching on the existence of Latin America’s #NiUnaMenos before diving into the importance of #MeTooMX. #MeToo has undoubtedly brought to light very important patterns of abuse and has exposed some powerful men all over the world, thus is often described as “reckoning.” However, we have to be critical of where it stems from and how it got distributed, as well as very careful before putting it in the spotlight of Mexico’s hashtag feminism.

#MeToo campaign was started by the activist Tarana Burke almost a decade ago, yet it “took off” on social media and gained popularity after a Hollywood actress; Alyssa Milano,

⁹⁹ Because the Twitter engagement has branched out, <http://www.metoowatch.mx/> page has been created to monitor the creation of new accounts which post public denounces on Twitter.

¹⁰⁰ Stavans, Ilan. (2018) “América Latina necesita su #MeToo.” New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/01/05/america-latina-necesita-su-metoo/>. Retrieved on October 5th, 2019.

called for her followers to write #MeToo if they have been sexually harassed or assaulted.¹⁰¹

Milano gave credit to Burke once she was made aware of the previous engagement with #MeToo yet in this specific case— both domestic and international visibility was gained because the public denouncing process started from within the powerful North American film industry; an example of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006) would call a *globalized localism*—or a process by which a localized phenomenon becomes globalized; through one or more of the hegemonic power channels.¹⁰² The fact that we are speaking of someone—with restricted access to power as a woman, true—but still located within a powerful film industry, using English as a lingua franca and speaking from a unique position of visibility should become an integral part of our critical perception and understanding of #MeToo and its expansion.

All this is not to say that #MeToo was not powerfully used by so many women involved in what we now deem a movement, nor that #MeTooMX has not created yet another important rupture in the patriarchal silence; this is to say that we need to be more critical of Mexico's hashtag feminism network which exists way beyond and has made significant advances long before #MeTooMX. It is produced and nurtured bottom-up, often measuring significant engagement on social media but very little media and academic coverage. Mexican hashtag activism is both locally responsive and transnationally organized resistance network;

¹⁰¹ Langone, Alix. (2018). “#MeToo and Time's Up Founders Explain the Difference Between the 2 Movements” *Time*. <https://time.com/5189945/whats-the-difference-between-the-metoo-and-times-up-movements/> Retrieved on October 6th, 2019.

¹⁰² Muñoz-Saavedra, J. (2019). “Una nueva ola de feminista... más allá de #MeToo. Irrupción, legado y desafíos.” En P. Rivera-Vargas, J. Muñoz-Saavedra, R. Morales Olivares y S. Butendieck-Hijerra (Ed.). *Políticas Públicas para la Equidad vol II. [Preprint]*. Santiago de Chile: Colección Políticas Públicas.

with some hashtags being disseminated and used regionally in Latin America, and others working to create micro-change within country-specific reality.

When used as vehicle for hashtag feminism, hashtags are created with a certain purpose and perform a certain functionality. The story of how they were created and disseminated matters and the narrative is largely organized around a shared understanding of what the purpose of a certain hashtag is. Mexican women have denounced their first sexual assaults and archived their trauma on Twitter way before #MeToo came around; under #MiPrimerAcoso [My First Assault]. The primary goal of this hashtag was to reveal patterns of abuse and speak about the first sexual harassment women have experienced in their lives—in an overwhelming number of cases happening in their childhood. Archiving trauma of #MiPrimerAcoso was both personal and political as this narrative has worked to reveal the need for the #VivasNosQueremos protest happening the next day.

However; #MeToo's primary function has been different and has carried the banner of exposing gender-based violence in combination with sexual abuse allegations ever since Milano's Twitter engagement. This function has been preserved as #MeToo crossed the border and reached Mexico, but it has been performed differently in Mexican sociopolitical context. This does not come as much of a surprise; because it is expected for narrative agency to be responsive to the social conditions.¹⁰³ In one of the initial and only narrative approaches to the topic of hashtag activism, Yang made an important point that begs for further research: "Because hashtag activism happens in social and political context, its forms may vary when

¹⁰³ Yang, 2016.

contexts change.”¹⁰⁴ In the case of #MeToo, they certainly do—as the social and political contexts of Mexico have shown to significantly mold the engagement with this hashtag.

In Mexico, women have been denouncing their abusers too, but they did so with a layer of confidentiality—submitting their allegations and experiences to one of the Twitter/Facebook based accounts or the emails they put out, in place of direct name-calling and reporting. 2019 has seen a surge of Twitter accounts such as @MeTooAbogados [MeTooLawyers] and @MeTooEscritores [MeTooWriters] that receive confidential reports and then tweet them while protecting the identities of those reporting—so much so that there is a website called Me Too Watch Mexico dedicated to tracking and listing these Twitter accounts in one space so they are easily found.¹⁰⁵ This trend has often been referred to as “anonymous reporting” in the face of institutional failures¹⁰⁶ and has faced a backlash in the Twitter narrative forming around #MeTooMX: *“I respect and support #MeToo USA; actresses showed their faces, gymnasts showed their faces. Instead, #MeTooMX I do not agree with the anonymous aspect. It’s cowardly. [...]”*¹⁰⁷

Except it is not that simple. Women in Mexico have challenged this language of anonymity, stating that the reports are confidential; not simply anonymous.¹⁰⁸ In order to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The website is: <http://www.metoowatch.mx/>

¹⁰⁶ Walls, Marisol García. (2019). “Mexico’s #MeToo Movement Needs Anonymity in the Face of Institutional Failures”. *Remezcla*. <https://remezcla.com/features/music/me-too-mexico-armando-vega-gil-anonymity/>. Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Démonaich. @demoniaich. “Yo respeto y apoyo metoo usa, actrices dieron la cara, gimnastas dieron la cara. En cambio #MeTooMx no estoy de acuerdo lo anónimo, es cobarde, veo mujeres k son parciales. existen mujeres buenas y malas. descalifico lo anónimo de metoomx.” Twitter. April 7, 2019. Retrieved on October 30th, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Paredes, Sofia. (2019). “Los testimonios de #MeTooMx son legítimos, aunque sean confidenciales: especialistas.” *Forbes Mexico*. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/los-testimonios-de-metoomx-son-legitimos-aunque-sean-confidenciales-foro-metoomx/>. Retrieved on October 15th, 2019.

understand why this confidentiality is a country-wide trend, we need to understand Mexico's sociolegal context and the history of gender-based violence. Women live with an institutionalized fear, collective trauma of Juárez femi(ni)cides, femicide cases that get dismissed and poorly investigated (this will be portrayed through #SiMeMatan [If They Kill Me] story in the next chapter), layers of oppression that makes it hard to trust the authorities and publicly denounce the names of professors, writers, singers who abused them. What follows is a brief but much needed contextualization of Mexico's historical and legal reality of gender-based violence; in order to understand why the wide-spread backlash and the accusation of cowardice is very unfair and why anonymity/ confidentiality makes a whole lot of sense as #MeToo got adapted and rewritten into Mexican reality, by Mexican women.

Demystifying Femicide in Latin America: A Colonial Legacy

Although often spoken about in the Latin American context; It is important to note that the term or the phenomenon of femicide as such are not “native” to Latin America, one of the term's early pioneers was Diana Russel—a South African feminist writer.¹⁰⁹ The term has been used all over the world to describe the brutal realities of women tragically losing their lives as a result of gendered power inequalities—and typologies have been developed to intimate partner violence, stranger murder, so called “honor” killings, dowry marriage murders, and more.¹¹⁰ In short, then, femicide is widely understood as the act of killing women solely because

¹⁰⁹ Russell, Diana and Jill Radford. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. Twayne Publishers, New York. (1992).

¹¹⁰ Kouta, Christiana and Weil, Shalva. “Femicide: A Glance through Qualitative Lenses”. *Qualitative Sociology Review*. Volume XIII Issue 3. 2017.

they are women. More specifically, it is “the misogynous killing of women by men” to be investigated “in the context of the overall oppression of women in a patriarchal society.”¹¹¹

Perceiving this form of misogynous killing of women as the final expression of gender-based violence enriches and expands our understanding of the concept and reminds us to connect it back to the physical and emotional abuse women suffer throughout the course of their lives. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women offered the first official definition of gender-based violence in 1993, describing the term as: “Any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”¹¹²

In Latin America, the patriarchic structure is very much alive and the duality of *machismo/marianismo* dominates the cultural context where femicides I will examine hereinafter occur. There is a religious tone to the discourse of marianismo rooted in the image of Virgin Mary and other saints and brought to the continent through colonization. Behavioral attributes comprising the ideal woman within the framework of this stereotype include humility, serenity, tolerance and submissiveness.¹¹³ In opposition to the ideal femininity which is both semi-sacred and submissive, men are perceived as “strong, virile, valiente, stubborn and fuerte.”¹¹⁴ Men control both violence and death, are in constant competition with each other and often perceive women as objects of their desire. Although resistance to these norms

¹¹¹ Russell, Diana and Jill Radford. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. Twayne Publishers, New York. (1992).

¹¹² United Nations. (1993). General Assembly Resolution 48/104. “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.” A/RES/48/104.

¹¹³ Stevens E.P. “Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America.” (1973).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

existed and as we will see, still exists—machismo is nonetheless very much alive in semi-patriarchal societies across Latin America and the world. It lives through pop culture, persists in work-places, and is documented through a myriad of femicides and sexual assaults.

While femicides exist in this cultural context— violent history of modern Mexico (and Latin America) is a symptom of colonial legacy and cannot be separated from it. Not only is the colonial presence in Latin America defined by violence and attempts of subordination—and violence during the fights for independence; Western liberalism too, at its core “is based on an implicit sexual contract requiring the subordination of women and regulating men's sexual access to women.”¹¹⁵ Even the superficial steps “forward”; such as liberal legislation criminalizing domestic violence in nineteenth century Mexico—“can be part and parcel of new forms of constituting their [women’s] subordination to men.”¹¹⁶ It is essentially men as agents of state that regulated the abusive behavior of men in the household, which had as one its effects the “construction of domestic violence as a practice of deviant men, deflecting potential criticism of the inequities of marriage as a whole, and of the ways in which women's subjectivities and subjection were constituted through legal means.”¹¹⁷

Although the legislative advances were, and still are, an important resource for women negotiating their empowerment and rights; it is important to keep in mind their construction as an extension of the patriarchal system when discussing femicides. One of the big challenges for majority of the region, then, remains the lack of dedication to exterminating the systemic

¹¹⁵ Lazarus-Black, M. (2003). “The (Heterosexual) Regendering of a Modern State: Criminalizing and Implementing Domestic Violence Law in Trinidad.” *Law & Social Inquiry*, 28(4), 979-1008. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1215793>. Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

violence on the state level; the lack of official statistical reports to a great extent because the mechanisms introduced are still largely dysfunctional, underfunded and lacking resources. It is true that countries in Latin America have implemented a range of mechanisms at the national levels to tackle specific forms of violence: such as domestic violence and femicide laws, the creation of gender observatories as well as programs for building safer cities for women.¹¹⁸ Let's take a closer look at this legal map and the largely dysfunctional mechanisms currently in place in Mexico.

Understanding Femicide in Legal Terms: Navigating Mexico's Complex Reality

One of the biggest recent advances in Mexican women's legal protection is The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia) which came into force on 2 February 2007.¹¹⁹ This is a federal law adopted by Mexico's Congress. The Law identifies six types of violence: psychological, physical, economic, sexual, violence against property (violencia patrimonial), and violence against the woman's dignity, integrity or freedom.¹²⁰ From the very beginning, this law has shown to be slowly rolled out, as the implementing regulations for the federal law were published in 2008; thirteen months after the law itself came into force thus violating the law's second transitional article. Not only that, Rocío García Gaytán, the president of National Institute for Women [INMUJERES], has warned that the federal law will hardly have any effect because of a lack of

¹¹⁸ Oropeza J., Perron M. & Tolledo C. (2014). "Tackling Gender Violence in Latin America." *Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA)*. http://imumi.org/attachments/2014/violencia_genero.pdf.

¹¹⁹ Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión. (2007). *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Article 6.

resources and a lack of consensus among the various public entities concerned regarding their roles and their understanding of the problem of violence against women.

She was not wrong. Gaytán's warning was confirmed repeatedly in Mexico's reality. The *Case González et.al. (Campo Algodonero) vs. México (2009)*¹²¹ submitted to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in November of 2009 revealed the existence of a deep systemic dysfunctionality. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights analyzes the contextual violence against women prevalent in Ciudad Juárez since the 1990s and points out the lack of state action over the past years and government's inefficiency in dealing with specific cases. Claudia Ivette González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal and Laura Berenice Ramos Monarrez disappeared in October 2001 and were found murdered in November of the same year, in the part of Ciudad Juárez called "Campo Algodonero" along with five other unidentified victims. Their case was treated as any other homicide and the necropsy was done describing the general state of the bodies. Identification of the victims was based solely on confessions, time of disappearance and the traces found on the crime scene. Two suspects; Víctor J. García Uribe (El Cerillo) and Gustavo González Meza (La Foca) were detained, yet González Meza died in prison shortly after—in 2002, and although Uribe was charged and convicted to 50 years in prison the case was reopened in 2005 due to the alleged lack of evidence.¹²² The case was taken to the Inter-American Court of Human rights where Mexico's governmental inefficiency in dealing with the cases of femicides was discussed. Fast forward to one of the femicide cases discussed later in this paper—that of Lesvy Berlin Osorio—we see a femicide case where the ruling took two

¹²¹ Lovera, Sara. (2008). "México: Primer caso de feminicidio ante la Corte Interamericana". *Regional Latinoamericana de UITA*.

¹²² Ibid.

years (2017-2019) and a network of the victim's family's dedication to justice, activism (both offline and online) and extensive work by the defense team.

Pressured, in part, by the international norms, laws and a dominant focus on human rights in the Interamerican Court whose jurisdiction Mexico voluntarily accepted—in 2011, the government of the United Mexican States passed a Constitutional Reform which changed both the language and the focus of the Article I of the Constitution. What was previously called *Individual Guarantees* was, under this reform, reworded to *Human Rights and its Guarantees*; signaling Mexico's changed focus on the centrality of human rights in the Constitution in the process reflecting the western conception of human rights as inherent to humanity being and recognized, rather than granted (otorgados) by the state. The first article under the Individual Guarantees used to read: "Every person in the United Mexican States shall enjoy the guarantees granted by this Constitution, which cannot be restricted or suspended except in such cases and under such conditions as are herein provided."¹²³ Under the Human Rights and its Guarantees, Article I was changed to reflect this altered focus and now reads: "In the United Mexican States, all individuals shall be entitled to the human rights granted by this Constitution and the international treaties signed by the Mexican State, as well as to the guarantees for the protection of these rights."¹²⁴

That very same year, the Supreme Court of Justice (SJC) issued an Opinion of the Court (tribunal en pleno), which; despite being non-binding has had a strong impact on Mexican

¹²³ Constituteproject.org. "Mexico's Constitution of 1917 with Amendments through 2007." *Oxford University Press*. (Mexico 1917. rev. 2007).

¹²⁴ Constituteproject.org. "Mexico's Constitution of 1917 with Amendments through 2015." *Oxford University Press*. (Mexico 1917. rev. 2015).

judges. It states that every public authority in Mexico, including the entire judicial system, shall always opt for the most favorable interpretation of the human right under consideration, be it a human right established in the Constitution or in a treaty in force in Mexico. A few months later, the SCJN reiterated this criterion, adding that there is an obligation to analyze content and scope of norms related to human rights according to the pro persona principle: “a hermeneutical criterion which informs the whole international law of human rights, and according to which the widest norm or the most extensive interpretation has to be applied.”¹²⁵

In part because of these advances in 2007 and 2011; one year later, in 2012, Mexico codified the crime of femicide in the Federal Penal Code under the Article 325. The act of femicide, the article 325 states, is committed when “gender reasons” for murder can be established. The cases listed include: “the victim shows signs of violence of any kind; the victim was inflicted infamous or degrading injuries or mutilations; there is a history of any type of violence in the family, school or work against the victim; sentimental, affective or trusting relationship between the perpetrator and the victim; prior threats related to the crime, harassment or injury; the victim was isolated; the body of the victim is exposed or displayed in a public space.”¹²⁶

Although femicide has been codified in the Federal Penal Code and the punishment is specified to be from 40-70 years in prison—it is the investigation protocols, the systematization of information, ensuring the crime scene is handled properly, both conscious and subconscious

¹²⁵ Rodiles, Alejandro. “The Law and Politics of the Pro Persona Principle” in Helmut P. Aust & Georg Nolte (eds.). *The Interpretation of International Law by Domestic Courts – Unity, Diversity, Convergence*. (2015).

¹²⁶ Vílchez, Ana Isabel G. “La regulación del delito de Femicidio/Feminicidio en America Latina y el Caribe.” *Campaña del Secretario General de las Naciones Unidas “ÚNETE”*.

victim-blaming and so many other aspects of implementation of this reform that still have not shown much improvement. Mexico also introduced a unique mechanism called *Alerta de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres* (Gender Violence Alerts) known as simply “alertas” or AVGM— implemented to review the existing investigation protocols, prevention methods and more.¹²⁷

However, many have repeatedly pointed out that simply codifying the crime and introducing mechanisms does little without strong political will to implement changes.¹²⁸ In fact, states make it hard to prove a case to be femicide—in Tamaulipas, for example, there needs to be evidence proving existing recurring physical violence to the victim; which tends to be hard to present even in cases where families have the means to hire lawyers.¹²⁹ Critics then point out that the State often participates in making femicide invisible (in Spanish: invisibilizar) and minimizes the actual problem. It comes as no surprise, then, that women who engage with the #MeTooMX sexual allegations do so with a deep understanding that the system has failed them continuously and act with an extra layer of precaution visible in the confidentiality trend when reporting and revealing sexual abuse. It is not to be disregarded, however, that (online) activism in Mexico has done an incredible job in making this layered implementation-issue visible and has engaged in creating alternative mechanisms of accountability and detailed monitoring of systemic violence.

¹²⁷ Montalvo, Tania L. (18 de abril de 2016). «La alerta de género, una herramienta ineficaz para detener los asesinatos de mujeres». Animal Político. Consultado el 28 de mayo de 2016.

¹²⁸ Voces feministas. (2019) “México: Femicidios no se investigan por omisión de las autoridades”. Vocesfeministas.mx. <https://vocesfeministas.mx/mexico-femicidios-investigacion-omision-autoridades/>.

¹²⁹ <http://cmdpdh.org/publicaciones-pdf/cmdpdh-femicidio-e-impunidad-en-mexico-un-contexto-de-violencia-estructural-y-generalizada.pdf>

When the System Fails Us: Ciudad Juárez, Counter-Culture and (Digital) Activism

It is virtually impossible to talk about femicides and (hashtag) activism resisting patriarchy in Mexico—and Latin America as a whole— without talking about Ciudad Juárez. This is not only the case because of its devastating history with maquiladora industry workers, but also because of the *Camp Algodonero Case* that made a breakthrough and reveal the dysfunctionality of Mexico’s legal system as well as the incredibly strong and regionally important—often silenced by murder—women’s voices. A border town and factory city that became home to *maquiladoras* (large foreign-owned manufacturing plants) also became home to thousands of migrants; both from the surrounding towns and the rest of the country (as well as Central American region) looking for employment. In the early 2000s, violence in this border city was rampant and since 1993, hundreds of young women and girls have been murdered and thousands reported missing in the cities of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua - at least a third suffering sexual violence.¹³⁰ Although femicide is rampant all around Mexico; Ciudad Juárez remains “the epicenter of pain”¹³¹, an open wound surrounding the topic of violence.

The story of Ciudad Juárez is one of commodified and exploited lives. It is as a clear example of how neoliberalism works to advance marginality and increase inequality in an urban space. The increased number of maquiladora factories is a phenomenon closely tied to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1994, where “the US capitalism was

¹³⁰ Amnesty International. (2005). "Mexico: Justice fails in Ciudad Juárez and the city of Chihuahua". *Amnesty International*.

¹³¹ Javier Sicilia, a Mexican poet, coined this phrase in 2011. See: Urrutia, Alonso and Villalpando Ruben. (2011). “Genera algarabía la llegada del poeta a Ciudad Juárez, el epicentro del dolor”. *Jornada.com*. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2011/06/10/politica/003n1pol>.

given free access to the cheap non-unionized labor of its southern neighbor.”¹³² When talking about the rise of femicides contextually—colonial legacy, a strong patriarchal grip and harmful neoliberal policies all play their part in this puzzle. The physical proximity to the United States makes Mexico a particularly interesting and unique case study—and while regional correlation between resistance movements exists, in no way should we consider Mexico’s hashtag feminism a representative of the rest of Latin American voices and realities.

Surely, much has been written on the pain, femicides and systemic violence in Juárez¹³³, and some—but not nearly enough— on the powerful voices of resistance coming from within this epicenter of pain.¹³⁴ Mothers and local activists engaged in layers of artistic expression and developed a strong resistance to the violent history in Ciudad Juárez; and “by sharing their stories, memorializing the dead, and seeking the truth, those women challenged historical amnesia; in solidifying collective memory, they strove to prevent the dead from being rendered anonymous and insignificant.”¹³⁵

In fact, the hashtag that has turned into a movement in Argentina, gained traction and became the face of hashtag feminism in the region—#NiUnaMenos [Not One Less]— was coined by Susana Chávez, a poet and human rights activist from Ciudad Juárez credited with the *Ni Una Menos, Ni una muerta más* [“Not One Woman Less, Not One More Death”] phrase.

¹³² Squires, Peter. (2012). “Neoliberal, brutish and short: Cities, Inequalities and Violences” in Squires Peter and Lea John. *Criminalisation and Advanced Marginality: Critically Exploring the Work of Loic Wacquant*. Bristol University Press.

¹³³ See, for example: Rodriguez, Teresa et al. (2008). *The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border*. New York.

¹³⁴ See, for example: Patterson, Bailey Ryan. (2016). “Resistance and Resilience: Politicized Art and Anti-Femicide Activism in Ciudad Juárez and Abroad.” <https://historicalreview.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Patterson.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The other highly popularized hashtag in the region; #VivasNosQueremos [We Want Us Alive] also stems from Mexican artists¹³⁶, as will be detailed in the #VivasNosQueremos section of the next chapter. This semantic connection reveals a deeply intertwined nature of Latin American resistance to patriarchy—feminist movements in Latin America learn from each other and are rooted in artistic expression and a creation of counter-culture; creating a regional cry for change.¹³⁷

Mexico has not only been on the forefront of the artistic resistance to the culture of violence; it has also developed mechanisms to keep the authorities accountable—as is the case with monitoring and calling out the patterns of victim-blaming in cases of femicide; which will be explored in the #SiMeMatan section of the next chapter. Even further than that, Mexican journalists and activists have nearly replaced the state in reporting on femicides, taking into consideration the lack of efficient reporting and documenting of the crimes. A clear example of data activism in this realm is María Salguero’s effort to build a map tracking cases of femicide in Mexico; an important source contrasting the official data.¹³⁸

For example, below are the numbers from the official, government-issued report on gender-based violence in Mexico, showing the total of 407 femicides in 2015, 585 in 2016, 736 in 2017 and a total of 706 cases in 2018:

¹³⁶ See the Vivas Nos Queremos Collective’s official page: <https://justseeds.org/product/vivas-nos-queremos/>

¹³⁷ Salvatierra, Carmen Diez. (2016) “Feminismos activistas en el rap latinoamericano: Mare (Advertencia Lírika) y Caye Cayejera.” Núm. 3: Alteridad, Literatura, Lingüística y Traducción: Creación y recepción.

¹³⁸ Bérengère, Sim. (2018). “How one woman is mapping femicides in Mexico.” *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/how-one-woman-is-mapping-femicides-in-mexico/>

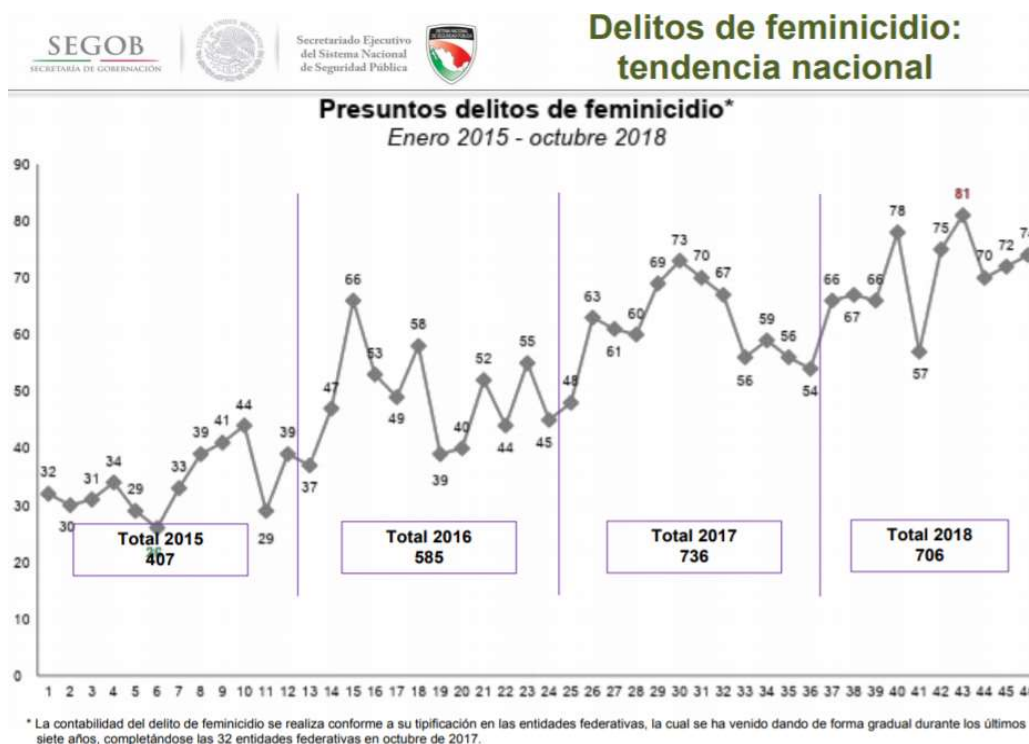


Figure 1: Alleged Crimes of Femicide, January 2015- October 2018¹³⁹

In contrast; Salguero's map shows 2095 femicides in 2016, 2256 in 2017 and 2158 recorded cases in 2018.¹⁴⁰ Her work also provides an abundance of information on the age range of the victims, transfemicides in Mexico, as well as confirmed identity/anonymity of the victims. Data produced by projects like Salguero's, Carolina Torreblanca—the director of Data Analisis at Data Civica— explains are based mainly on news reports and do not reflect the exact number of femicides, but rather “the probability that a femicide is reported in the press.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Centro Nacional de Información. (2018). *Información delictiva y de emergencias con perspectiva de género*. [Información con corte al 31 de octubre de 2018].

https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/415019/Info_delict_persp_g_nero_OCT_231118.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ For Salguero's interactive map, go to: <https://femicidiosmx.crowdmap.com/>. Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Bérengère, Sim. (2018). “How one woman is mapping femicides in Mexico.” *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/how-one-woman-is-mapping-femicides-in-mexico/>

However, she also warns that the data issued by the government is produced in an opaque way.

One thing is certain; Salguero's work has become an important counter-source to the official statistics and presents a frightening reality for many. Data activism is not Mexico's only forte; hashtag feminism creates an incredibly important mosaic of voices that continually break through the culture of fear and silence and deserve a platform of their own that exists beyond the media's and current literature's focus on #MeToo. Creating a platform to analyze these voices is the main objective of the next chapter; as it is a focused attempt to reveal and restore their complexity and importance, place them on the continuum of resistance and amplify the narrative(s) they develop. We've seen that molding a western hashtag activism movement to a different contextual reality required some modifications; but this modification in no way signals "cowardice." What happens when women create their own movements responsive to their needs, born from and into their sociopolitical context?

Chapter 3: At the Crossroad of Personal and Political: Understanding Mexico's Hashtagged Network of Resistance

Frequently taken approaches to the topic of hashtag activism—as discussed earlier—continue to avoid in-depth questions regarding the developing narrative(s) and over-focus on arguing for or against the impact specific hashtags have on tangible and measurable social change, often in the areas of policy and law. These conversations remain largely unproductive, as they rarely ever begin scratching the surface of how specific instances of hashtag activism are created and performed. In the context of Latin America; hashtag feminism exists at the crossroad of the personal and the political and communicates an urgent set of issues relating to violence against women. Triggered in part by #NiUnaMenos [Not One Woman Less] in Argentina; the notion of hashtag feminism traveled through the rest of the region and developed through different hashtags responsive to their micro-sociopolitical realities.

Thus, #NiUnaMenos is unsurprisingly present in, interwoven through and connected with the emerging sub-narratives. We need to examine hashtag feminism in Latin America as a loosely but nonetheless visibly connected movement with different hashtags each serving a different purpose. To look into #NiUnaMenos only (and dismiss it as “inefficient” early on) is to disregard the formation of a narrative that branches out and works toward deconstructing patriarchal structures in multiple spheres. Because different hashtag (sub)movements are created for different reasons, they have different functionalities and create different *types* of impact. Some remain localized and others travel around in waves—not because one is more effective than the other; but because they each serve a different purpose, and the purpose/functionality of some pertains more to a certain micro-reality than the others.

In order to flash these points out further; what follows is a more detailed examination of three different hashtags developed in Mexico. #MiPrimerAcoso [My First Assault] (2016) is on a more personal side of hashtag feminism; its primary purpose is to make the issue of sexual violence and harassment visible, and to use this visibility as a statement of urgency; showing just how needed the march scheduled to happen the next day was. As such, #MiPrimerAcoso was a “one-time engagement” with sharing personal trauma which explains why the hashtag spiked and became a trending topic and then “died out”—not necessarily because it was not “successful”—but because it fulfilled its purpose. It made violence visible. In the process, collective trauma is archived. After tweeting about the first time they were harassed—women then participated in further validating and archiving trauma; as they shared and retweeted other experiences and recognize and reveal patterns of abuse with their immediate organic communities, participating in creating “the networks of affect that stitched recollections of trauma into a political outcry.”¹⁴² This is why #MiPrimerAcoso is characterized by a large number of “retweets”—shares. As mentioned, it was a prelude to the first #VivasNosQueremos march in Mexico (2016)—another big successful mobilization offline after #NiUnaMenos.

#VivasNosQueremos largely works to build a digital archive of the offline resistance— it tells stories of marches and protests through words, calls for action, images and videos from the events. This explains why #VivasNosQueremos is evoked multiple times; as marches are led throughout Mexico, as well as countries like Ecuador and Bolivia later on. #VivasNosQueremos narrative is alive, constantly constructed in present tense, forward-looking and shared with the

¹⁴² Lewis, Rhyon. (2018). “Nuestro Primer Acoso: Digital Networks and Collective Action against Sexual Violence.” *Digital Humanities: Puentes/Bridge*. Mexico City.

rest of the region. However, the sole fact that #VivasNosQueremos is used more often and has sparked offline protests does not make it inherently more “successful” than #MiPrimerAcoso. The two co-exist and are intertwined. They form a network of resistance.

On top of archiving trauma and organizing/recording marches— there is a third functionality of hashtag feminism which is just as important: that of the direct response to a certain dysfunctionality in a local reality. This form of online engagement forms a more direct relationship between an individual and the state; at times pointing to a specific policy or an outdated legal structure that needs to be changed –as is the case with Argentina’s #AbortoLegalYa [Legal Abortion Now] movement, and at other times serving as a monitoring mechanism which holds the authorities accountable; as I will describe in detail in the #SiMeMatan (2017) [If they kill me] section. This third functionality of hashtag feminism combines archiving trauma with marches and offline mobilization, learns and takes from the other “hashtag movements” and engages them into its narrative.

<i>Hashtag</i>	<i>Primary Function & Purpose</i>
#VivasNosQueremos <i>[We Want Us Alive]</i>	organizing and archiving offline protests
#SiMeMatan <i>[If They Kill Me]</i>	the relationship between individual and state
#MiPrimerAcoso <i>[My First Assault/ Harrasment]</i>	archiving trauma, increasing visibility
#MeTooMX	“reckoning nature”

Figure 2: An at-a-glance summary of the hashtagged narratives to be explored

#MiPrimerAcoso: Archiving Collective Trauma and Breaking through the Culture of Silence

"When and how did your first harassment occur? Today, from 2 PM onward (Mexico) use the hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso. We all have a story, raise your voice!"¹⁴³

This post marked the creation of #MiPrimerAcoso – [My First Harassment] hashtag, tweeted by a Colombian activist and columnist living in Mexico; Catalina Ruiz-Navarro on April 23rd, 2016. The story of #MiPrimerAcoso is a testimony to the interconnectedness of Latin American feminism(s); as Ruiz-Navarro found her inspiration in a Brazilian Twitter movement carrying the same name in Portuguese: #MeuPrimeiroAssedio which—a year before it was replicated in Mexico—created a loud rupture in patriarchal silence and made sexual harassment visible among the Portuguese-speaking Twitter users. Similarly, the narrative forming around #MiPrimerAcoso reveals distinct patterns of abuse and the years; sometimes decades and lifetimes of silence and layers of normalization around this phenomenon.

¹⁴³ Ruiz-Navarro, Catalina. @catalinapordios. "¿Cuándo y cómo fue tu primer acoso? Hoy a partir de las 2pmMX usando el hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso. Todas tenemos una historia, ¡levanta la voz!". Twitter. April 23rd, 2016.

participants noting how: *“The men who are bothered by the hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso are in some way threatened by it.”*¹⁴⁵ However, the use of the phrase “all the men” is often a way to talk about collective participation in harassment: *“#MiPrimerAcoso happened when two men took a picture under my skirt; and all the other men on the bus laughed with pleasure.”*¹⁴⁶ as well as normalization of harassment and minimization of its effect on the victim:

*“#MiPrimerAcoso was when I was 13, when a 16 year-old cornered and groped me while dancing. All the men around thought it was not that bad.”*¹⁴⁷

As the #MiPrimerAcoso hashtag in its essence encourages to share the first time its participants were exposed to sexual harassment; it is everything but uncommon to read about child abuse. In fact, women wrote about their childhood sexual harassment happening in all types of spaces. It occurs in all types of public transport—from buses to metros, on the street, in their homes and their neighborhoods. The harm was done by strangers on the streets; but also, uncles, fathers and cousins; it was both covert and overt, both subtle and aggressive. A lot of women end their testimonios with an *I did not know what to do* or *I have not said anything*; because of shame, guilt or fear thus revealing some common and collective reasons for underreporting—at times followed with self-doubts and questioning of whether they “dreamt it” or it really happened, and at other times free of any doubt and archiving their experiences

¹⁴⁵ Orion, Soul. @orion_soul. “los weones que les molesta el HT #MiPrimerAcoso porque “no todos los hombres somos así”, es que de alguna forma se sienten amenazados por él.” Twitter. April 24th, 2016. https://twitter.com/Orion_Soul/status/724042701117755392.

¹⁴⁶ Mish, Miranda. @mirandamish. “#MiPrimerAcoso fue un día que dos jóvenes me fotografiaron debajo de la falda y todos los hombres que integraban el autobús reían con gusto.” Twitter. April 23, 2016. <https://twitter.com/marielavarvi/status/724464457376620544>.

¹⁴⁷ Melaina. @yosoymelok. “#MiPrimerAcoso fue a los 13, cuando uno de 16 me arrinconó y manoseó en un baile. Y todos los hombres opinaron que “no era para tanto.” Twitter. April 23rd, 2016. <https://twitter.com/yosoymelok/status/724028306018975744>.

from back when they were extremely young: “#MiPrimerAcoso during our visits to my grandmother’s house, by someone very close, someone who shares my blood... when I was 5.”¹⁴⁸

This notion of *archiving trauma* and putting it into (written) words boldly breaks through the culture of silence and stigma and #MiPrimerAcoso reveals a painful narrative, one that cuts deep into childhood memories and is so often neglected.

Juxtaposed to this overwhelming wave of Twitter-documented realities is the almost non-existent research on childhood sexual abuse in the developing world.¹⁴⁹ In the context of—but not limited to Latin America—there tends to be a sexual double standard as “men experience social pressure to be (hetero)sexually active while common discourses on sexuality place a high value on virginity for women.”¹⁵⁰ In this polarized discourse, conversations about sexual abuse with children are not common and what is often reported in the #MiPrimerAcoso archive is the fear of speaking up because “[...] *I thought they would not believe me.*”¹⁵¹ and cases of abuse being dismissed and not taken seriously after the victims have come forward, signaling that underreporting is not the only problem to be considered: “#MiPrimerAcoso, I was 7 years old and my cousin threatened to tell my parents I was to be blamed, my dad still does not believe me.”

¹⁴⁸ Claudia. @ClaudiaPizzaP. “#MiPrimerAcoso en las visitas a casa fe mi abuela, de alguien muy cercano, alguien de mi sangre... a los 5 años.” Twitter. April 23rd, 2016. <https://twitter.com/ClaudiaPizzaP/status/724010552041738240>.

¹⁴⁹ For a qualitative study on childhood sexual abuse in Mexico, see: Marston, CA. “Child sexual abuse in Mexico: a descriptive, qualitative study”. [Conference or Workshop Item] <https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/12886>.

¹⁵⁰ Amuchástegui, A. M. G. “Virginity and sexual initiation in Mexico: The dialogic negotiation of meaning”. Unpublished. (1998). *Doctoral thesis, University of London, London*.

¹⁵¹ Villaseñor, Paola. @papalotl_v. “#MiPrimerAcoso fue cuando tenía 10 años y vino mi primo mayor. Tenía miedo de contarle a alguien porque pensaba que no me creerían.” Twitter. April 23rd, 2016. https://twitter.com/papalotl_v/status/724021700120051712.

“After the #MiPrimerAcoso [my first assault] I experienced many more, one very violent—when I was 19. That’s why I am marching tomorrow. #24A”¹⁵²

Ruiz-Navarro’s invitation to participate in constructing the narrative around #MiPrimerAcoso coincided with the march against the “machista violence” which was to be carried out just a day later. Under the umbrella-hashtag #VivasNosQueremos [We want us alive], women have indeed carried out protest(s) around Mexico on April 24th.

#VivasNosQueremos began as a Mexico-based graphic campaign started by the *Women Engraving Resistance* collective in 2014; with the intent to produce (street) art with a hashtag “We Want Us Alive” followed by a short slogan or a message as short as one effectively used word.¹⁵³

It is worth noting that as a graphic campaign and a narrative in the process of becoming; #VivasNosQueremos has begun as deeply intersectional, the movement often refers to and works on remembrance of complex identities of murdered women all over Latin America and works to restore their “presence” in the counter-culture. It “rends homage to Berta Cáceres, the Honduran indigenous peasant leader; Laura Iglesias, the social worker raped and murdered by the police and the prostitution survivor and abolitionist transvestite leader, Diana Sacayán.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Nava, Margarita. @margosnava. “Después de esa experiencia de #MiPrimerAcoso vinieron más, una muy violenta. A los 19 años. Por eso marcho mañana #24A”. Twitter. April 23, 2016. <https://twitter.com/MagosNava/status/723990428249288704>.

¹⁵³ Mujeres Grabando Resistencia. Convocatoria de Grabado #VivasNosQueremos. <https://mugre.ecpm68.org/?p=77>.

¹⁵⁴ Vivas Nos Queremos, Graphic Campaign. [Website]. <https://filia.org.uk/filia2018/2018/11/12/vivas-nos-queremos-nbspwe-women-want-us-alive>.

“today” makes this narrative continually constructed in present-tense; throughout different marches and protests.

#MiPrimerAcoso is deeply personal, it speaks pain into existence, centers around validating individual experiences and making the shared patterns of abuse visible. #VivasNosQueremos, however, is inherently collective –both semantically and pragmatically—it is a *grito* that calls for action and takes active steps in healing this shared pain and trauma previously exposed by #MiPrimerAcoso. It is hopeful; rooted in present and forward-looking. #VivasNosQueremos, then, forms a mosaic of images and videos recorded on the streets of Mexico, flyers and creative calls to action (see Figure 3 below), valuable statistics often hard to find elsewhere¹⁵⁵ and graphic art—it actively encourages participation in collective action and works toward building a counter-culture.



Figure 5: “National mobilization against the machista violence | More than 40 cities in

Mexico standing united because We Want Us Alive¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ For a visual report on women-journalists, see: Article 19, MX-CA. @article19mex. “#VivasNosQueremos: Agresiones a mujeres por ejercer su derecho a la libertad de expresión. <http://goo.gl/9z9NgN>”. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/article19mex/status/723983579277987841>. Accessed on October 18th, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ This flyer was frequently posted and retweeted, see for example: ONU Mujeres Mexico. @ONUMujeresMX. “Este domingo 24 une tu voz y tu acción contra las violencias machistas #Vivasnosqueremos

While hashtags such as #SiMeMatan analyzed hereinafter respond directly to Mexican authorities and remain largely localized and used to bring to light two femicide cases in Mexico—that of Lesvy Berlin Osorio and Mara Castilla; #VivasNosQueremos transcends borders and echoes in hashtag activism of women all over the region—such as Ecuador and Argentina (both forming a part of the narrative in Figure 2 above). The hashtag has been actively used to organize the logistics of marches and visualize the collective resistance as it is happening. Thus, we see a lot of numbers often referring to the days/dates when manifestations and protests were carried out forming the center of the narrative— notably #24A, the first large #VivasNosQueremos protest carried out in Mexico on April 24th; and #25N its replication in the region later that year on The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in November. 8M is another recognizable one; referring to marches carried out under the hashtag #8m in combination with #NiUnaMenos and #VivasNosQueremos in both 2018 and 2019 all over Latin America.¹⁵⁷ All these form sub-narratives of #VivasNosQueremos searchable and recognizable on their own, too.

#VivasNosQueremos: A Note About Complex Narratives and Fragmented Approaches

Because Twitter activism forms a narrative that—as Yang (2016) argued—possesses agency; although the protest is recognizable and was carried out under the #VivasNosQueremos slogan, the narrative —as mentioned before—also grew and expanded to include other recognizable hashtags; thus creating a community where the hashtagged

@unetelac". Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ONUMujeresMX/status/723732878358511621>. April 22, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ For the impact of this march in Chile, look into: Urzúa Martínez, Sergio. (2019). "Aportes a una etnografía de los movimientos feministas: recursos expresivos en las marchas #Ni una menos y #8M en Santiago de Chile". *Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología* 35: 115-124. <https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda35.2019.06>.

messages are mutually understood by the participants as forming a part of this overarching theme but can go unnoticed by a narrow and fragmented take on the movement. For future, research, it is worth examining whether the overly simplistic approach to the topic where only one hashtag is considered significantly aids premature negative conclusions about online participation in hashtag activism—as it does not paint a clear picture of virtual participation if we only focus on the total measurable engagement with one certain hashtag.

When growing and expanding, narratives are also becoming increasingly complex. In recent years, the idea of spin-offs has been popularized in the world of television shows. A spin-off often centers around a sub-narrative in the main show and “features a character popular in a secondary role.”¹⁵⁸ Those who enjoyed the original tv show are the primary audience of its spin-off; as they are already familiar with the characters and the main story-line. They form a *community by association*—as there is a mutual understanding between the producer and the viewer that the spin-off is a separate work yet also a sub-narrative of something larger.

Using this analogy can help portray how hashtag narratives develop. The hashtag frequently used alongside #VivasNosQueremos is #PrimaveraVioleta [the purple spring]. #PrimaveraVioleta is largely descriptive in nature and helps visualize and recognize both the protesters and the movement itself; giving it a distinct character. #VivasNosQueremos marches, for example, are largely purple-themed in terms of both the clothing of the participants and the signs they create and carry (see Figure 2), as well as the materials like flyers used to encourage participation online (see Figure 3). *The arrival of purple spring* is a statement often used to

¹⁵⁸ spin-off. 2019. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved October 30, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spin%20off>.

describe both the visual and symbolic messages of the #VivasNosQueremos marches and this hashtag has grown a sub-narrative of its own, often independently tweeted: *“Check out the hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso and count a thousand reasons to march tomorrow.*

*#PrimaveraVioleta”*¹⁵⁹; familiar to those who know the main narrative but potentially overlooked by those who over-focus on #VivasNosQueremos only in narrow purely quantitative terms.

¹⁵⁹ Girly Pants. “Chequen el hashtag de #MiPrimerAcoso y cuenten mil razones más para marchar mañana. #PrimaveraVioleta.” Twitter. April 23rd, 2016. <https://twitter.com/GirlyPantsMx/status/723958657109479424>.



Figure 6: Chihuahua-based protest; note the purple tones of both the clothing as well as signs



Figure 7: A flyer created by "Take back the tech", an online campaign working with grassroots movements

#PrimaveraVioleta –the movement’s descriptive/visual sub-narrative is not the only “spin-off” forming under the main umbrella hashtag. Some Twitter users—as noted before—referred to the march happening on April 24th, 2016 with a #24A hashtag. In fact, a numerically driven sub-narrative is developing under #VivasNosQueremos that focuses primarily on the logistical aspect of this movement. The scheduled marches have grown into their own tweeted realities, easily searchable by dates. Looking up #24A (24 April) and #8M (8 March) floods one’s twitter feed with flyers, images and videos of specific protests.

While visual and numerical sub-narratives complicate the analysis of #VivasNosQueremos virtual participation, a factor we should not disregard is that some users have simply reversed the word order of the original hashtag and used #NosQueremosVivas—resulting in these tweets not showing up in the data sets where #VivasNosQueremos is the common factor. There is also a group of participants that hashtagged the echoing #NiUnaMenos when referring to Mexico’s massive protests. All these Twitter users actively participated in forming the narrative and archiving the protest(s) that happened offline all over Mexico (and Latin America after 2016), yet if we solely look into #VivasNosQueremos not only is our approach fragmented and their voices can go unnoticed; we can also get a distorted idea of how many people have participated in forming and carrying out both the online and the offline action. Inductive narrative inquiry thus calls for and helps restore the complexity of the overarching narrative and its multiple branches.

#SiMeMatan: Urgent Local Narratives and the Individual/State Relationship

On May 3rd, 2017, Lesvy Berlín Osorio, a 22-year-old woman, was found dead on the campus of one of Mexico’s top universities—the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She was found strangled with a telephone cord from a payphone and her body was left in a public space. Before the body was identified, Lesvy’s boyfriend at the time—Jorge Luis Gonzalez— called Aracely Osorio; Lesvy’s mother, to say that he was worried about Lesvy as they drank the night before and she did not go home with him. They then identified the body together, after going to the police station.¹⁶⁰

The Attorney General’s Office (PGJCDMX) published a series of tweets about the case the next day; May the 4th— actively engaging in victim-blaming. The information the Office shared from their official Twitter account included statements about Lesvy living with her boyfriend and being “under the influence of alcohol and drugs”¹⁶¹ on UNAM’s campus the night of her death, as well as clear attempts to distance Lesvy from UNAM as an institution—as both “her mother and her boyfriend confirmed that she has not been an enrolled student since 2014”¹⁶², adding that she had dropped out of school. The tweets were deleted that same night; with the Attorney General’s Office posting a “public apology” at 10.38 PM, referring to this series of tweets as a “serious mistake.”¹⁶³ Rodolfo Ríos Garza – the Attorney General himself—

¹⁶⁰ For an investigative piece on Lesvy’s death, please refer to: Latino USA. (2019). “If They Kill Me”. *NPR*. May 10, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/09/721918572/if-they-kill-me>. Retrieved on October 30th, 2019.

¹⁶¹ Redaccion AN. (2017). “PGJCDMX se retracta por tuits sobre Lesvy Osorio.” Retrieved from: <https://aristeguinoticias.com/0405/mexico/pgjcdmx-se-retracta-por-tuits-sobre-lesby/> on October 30th, 2019.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Procuraduría CDMX. @PGJD_CDMX. (2017). “Efectivamente rebasaron principios de #PGJCDMX; Comunicación Social ofrece una disculpa ante grave error”. Twitter. https://twitter.com/PGJDF_CDMX/status/860337805762932736. Retrieved on: September 29th, 2019.

published a series of tweets from his personal account; acknowledging that his department of Media Communications engaged in inappropriate information-sharing, reiterating that the victim's private life should not affect the investigation.¹⁶⁴

On top of the tweets engaging in blatant victim-blaming, the information leaked to the media speculating that Lesvy's case is an alleged suicide as "there were no other injuries indicating any struggle"¹⁶⁵ other than the strangulation marks on the victim's neck. PGJCDMX made this suicide-hypothesis public in July 2017—and faced criticism from the country's Senate in September that same year; where the Senate demanded the prosecution to reconsider the suicide hypothesis and condemn their poor engagement and communication with Lesvy's family throughout the process.¹⁶⁶ Shortly after the suicide hypothesis was made public, the defense team made public their videos of staging the murder scene and upon recreating and reviewing multiple scenarios concluding that suicide was simply not a possibility.¹⁶⁷

Beyond the problematic interpretation of the situation on a very basic behavioral level—assuming that Lesvy took her own life in a public space with a payphone cord— the Attorney General's Office made the victim's partner's statements denying any connection with the crime public—thus reinforcing their perceived "truthfulness" and further victimizing and failing to take into consideration Lesvy's family's concerns and statements. This came on top of

¹⁶⁴ Redaccion AN. (2017) "PGJCDMX se retracta por tuits sobre Lesvy Osorio". Retrieved from:

<https://aristeguinoticias.com/0405/mexico/pgjcdmx-se-retracta-por-tuits-sobre-lesby/>.

¹⁶⁵ Latino USA. "If They Kill Me". NPR. May 10, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/09/721918572/if-they-kill-me>.

¹⁶⁶ Comisión Permanente del Congreso de la Unión. (2017, September 7th). *Proposición con Punto de Acuerdo por el que se exhorta respetuosamente a diferentes autoridades para que garanticen la perspectiva de género en el caso de Lesvy Berlín Rivera Osorio*. Retrieved from: https://infosen.senado.gob.mx/sgsp/gaceta/63/3/2017-09-12-1/assets/documentos/PA_PRD_Pe%3%b1a_Lesby_Rivera.pdf on October 20th, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Nava, Abraham. (2017). "Hipótesis de defensa concluye que muerte de Lesvy no fue suicidio." *Exelcior.com*. <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/comunidad/2017/08/03/1179555>. Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

the reported poor engagement with the victim's family throughout the course of investigation; despite the fact that multiple friends of Lesvy's came forward with history of abuse she suffered in her relationship. Fast forward to 2019— Lesvy's case has returned to the headlines as the defense team has officially confirmed the cause of her death was strangulation by a third party¹⁶⁸, adding to the videos from one of the cameras near campus where it is clear that Lesvy and her partner got into a fight, and he had hit her minutes before her death. These videos were found and released by the private investigators hired by Lesvy's family. In May, 2019— PGJCDMX has publicly apologized to Lesvy's family for numerous mistakes they have made along the way¹⁶⁹, and although the case is now on trial as a femicide; it took countless media headlines, tireless work of the legal defense team and the local NGOs just to get to the point where this crime is called by its name. The hashtagged narrative forming on social media, however, is a testimony to the severity and complexity of the issue at hand.

The discourse surrounding Lesvy's death was made highly visible on Twitter and has branched into several incredibly important sub-discourses and urgent themes; as women started massively tweeting with a hashtag #SiMeMatan [IfTheyKillMe] on the day of Lesvy's death. A myriad of tweets poured in as women started conveying their thoughts on a question PGJCDMX's active victim-blaming posed: "if they kill me, what would the authorities say about me?" The idea behind the hashtag was to make visible criminalization and victim-blaming on

¹⁶⁸ Mendieta-Zamora, Hazel. (2019). "Lesvy Berlín no cometió suicidio, fue estrangulada, determina experto internacional." *Cimanoticias*. <https://cimanoticias.com.mx/2019/09/20/lesvy-berlin-no-cometio-suicidio-fue-estrangulada-determina-experto-internacional>. Retrieved on October 28th, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Altamirano, Claudia. (2019). "Procuraduría de CDMX pide disculpa pública a familia de Lesvy Berlín; su madre exige justiciar." *Animal Politico*. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/05/procuraduria-disculpa-publica-lesvy-berlin-feminicidio-unam/>. Retrieved on October 28th, 2019.

both societal and governmental level. As it was clear that #SiMeMatan stories were a direct response to the tweets posted by the Attorney General's Office; the mass wave of postings created pressure and arguably provoked the Attorney General Garza's quick response as well as the apologetic attitude of his office upon deleting the tweets. Furthermore, it was largely this pressure and social media resistance that resulted in public resignation of Elena Cárdenas Rodríguez, the director of Media Communications in the Office of Attorney General, five days after #SiMeMatan went viral.¹⁷⁰

In academia, the way hashtag activism aids this practice of focused pressure and accountability measures in response to real-time mistakes by individuals and governments remains virtually untouched; in and beyond the Mexican context. The only widely accessible academic article centering the case of #SiMeMatan judges this hashtag to be incredibly important in holding the State accountable for its actions; and defines this instance of social media engagement as a virtual collective action—directly affecting the immediate State responses to a complex issue of gender violence (González-García and Piña Rodríguez, 2018). In the case of #SiMeMatan in particular; Twitter users made sure to take screenshots of the PGJCDMX's tweets before they were deleted and circulate them on multiple (social) media sites; thus, helping in holding the authorities accountable and creating a digital footprint of their “mistakes” easily searchable with a recognizable hashtag linked to the case; later reshared and written about on Mexico's web portals and sparking conversations among the general

¹⁷⁰ Redacción AN. (2017). “Renuncia directora de Comunicación de Procuraduría capitalina.” *Ariastegui*. <https://aristeguinoticias.com/0805/mexico/renuncia-directora-de-comunicacion-de-procuraduria-capitalina/>.

public. The hashtag itself is virtually inseparable from holding the State accountable for its actions—it was born as a direct response to the mistakes made by the authorities.

While González-García and Piña Rodríguez (2018) rightfully label #SiMeMatan as a form of collective action; I would argue that analyzing this hashtagged narrative by conserving its deeply personal nature bridging personal into political and intertwined with “the urgency to communicate”—that is to say, labeling it as a testimonio serves one very unique and important purpose, among others. It implies that each of the tweets speaking deeply personal truth to power on its own —then— can be viewed as an instance of everyday, individual resistance; held together and transformed into an easily accessible narrative by the hashtag #SiMeMatan.

Composed of individual truths; this narrative is responsive to a contextual sociopolitical reality, it is reflective of complex and layered forms of oppression and stigmatization. It comes as no surprise that themes and tropes emerge as one reads through the hashtagged tweets—mirroring the reality they are speaking to. It is worth noting that a lot of the tweets contain multiple potential reasons to be blamed— like being both bisexual and indigenous, or being an investigative journalist and not choosing motherhood, or being diagnosed with a mental disorder and being divorced. Each 140 character-long statement is a mini-universe of its own—testifying to the complexity of women’s identities and their individual stories. It’s powerful to see themes emerge, but it’s also important to read each and every written expression of fear as a form resistance, too.

Mapping the Narrative: Understanding What Constitutes #SiMeMatan Discourse(s)

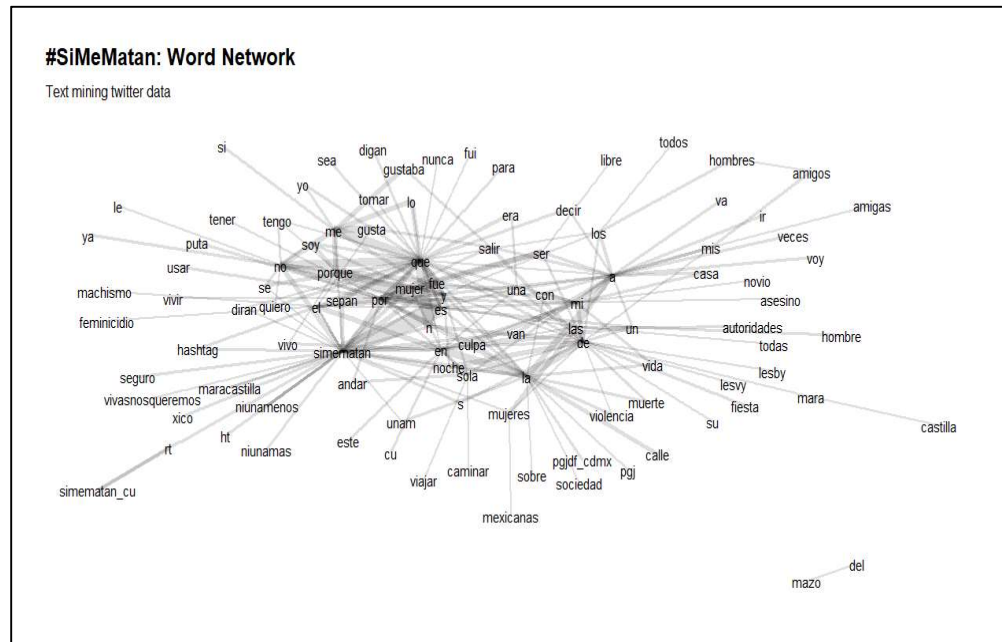


Figure 8: Text Mining ~40,000 Tweets to find the most commonly used words and word combinations

#SiMeMatan it's because I have male friends, I'm sarcastic, I joke about sex, I love roaming the streets of my city, I love going out to nightclubs, having fun and wearing short skirts.”¹⁷¹

When approaching the narrative forming around #SiMeMatan (see Fig. 1); one of the first things that grabs attention is the overwhelming use of verbs we use daily; like “being”,

¹⁷¹ Lavacude, Camila. @camila_lavacude. “#SiMeMatan es porque y tengo amigos hombres, soy sarcástica, bromeo sobre el sexo, me gusta caminar sola por las calles de mi ciudad, me gusta salir de noche e ir a bares nocturnos a divertirme y uso minifaldas.” Twitter. https://twitter.com/Camila_Lavacude/status/1091059579759267841. January 31st, 2019. Retrieved on October 25th, 2019.

“traveling”, “walking”, “drinking”, “having”, living”, “talking”. Words like “night”, “alone”, “guilt” also call for attention. Just like Lesvy’s case showed—women can be blamed for the simplest of actions within the suffocating patriarchal structures; certainly not unique to Latin America—like walking alone late at night, drinking and going out. Specific professions might also be at risk; women journalists are murdered at high rates. “Authorities” and “PGJDF_cdmx” making it to this list suggest frequent name-calling and the pressure put on the institutionalized power previously outlined and incredibly important for the creation of this hashtag itself and the development of the narrative.

“#SiMeMatan, is it because I rode in a taxi alone? #NiUnaMás #JusticiaParaMara #MaraCastilla”¹⁷²

Lesvy’s name is unsurprisingly brought to the surface in Figure 1 but right next to it is another important name; Mara Castillo. On September 8th, Mara Fernanda Castillo (19) went out with her friends and decided to take a Cabify car home around 5 AM—a ride-sharing platform popular in Latin America. She was sexually abused and—like Lesvy, strangled to death. Security video footage shows her driver, Ricardo Alexis “parked in front of Castilla’s home for several minutes without her exiting the car before heading to the motel. Her cellphone and clothes were also found at Alexis’ home in a small town in Tlaxcala.”¹⁷³ On May 5th, Mara joined the #SiMeMatan narrative and tweeted “#SiMeMatan it’s because I liked to go out at night and

¹⁷² Rendon, Eunice. @EuniceRendon. “#SiMeMatan ¿es porque iba sola en un taxi? #NiUnaMás #JusticiaParaMara #MaraCastilla.” Twitter. <https://twitter.com/EuniceRendon/status/909181075620016129> September 16, 2017. Retrieved on: October 5th, 2019 <https://twitter.com/EuniceRendon/status/909181075620016129>.

¹⁷³ Redaccion SN. "Fiscalía: Chofer violó a Mara y la estranguló; ¿Cabify indemnizará? La empresa enfrenta enojo social." *Sin Embargo*. September 16, 2017. <http://www.sinembargo.mx/16-09-2017/3309039>. Retrieved on October 17th, 2019.

drink a lot of beer...”¹⁷⁴ and her murder served as yet another testimonial to the truth and urgency behind the Twitter narrative triggered by Lesvy’s death. After her death, her tweet was retweeted over 3,000 times and quoted many more.

Subsequently, the hashtag came back to its trending status on Twitter— and a hashtag #JusticiaParaMara [JusticeforMara] was often tweeted along with #SiMeMatan and grew into its own protest.¹⁷⁵ Although mapping out the most frequently used words is incredibly useful; there are tropes and themes, however, that did not make it to the Word Network in Figure 1 in part because women used different ways to talk about pressing issues we can only discover if we read through their thoughts and restore their complexity.

“#SiMeMatan may it not be tomorrow, I have to make it to the march.”¹⁷⁶

Before diving into the sub-narratives forming around #SiMeMatan it is worth acknowledging that hashtag activism does not exist in a vacuum and cannot be separated from our physical, contextual reality. Skeptics tend to over-focus on how easy it is to tweet from our homes, write 140 characters and send them out to this cacophony of voices that pointlessly speak over each other. Except it’s not that simple, and certainly not pointless—especially in the developing world. Hashtag activism is in conversation with and often inseparable from protests and marches it helps form and make visible. In the case of #SiMeMatan; a day after Lesvy’s

¹⁷⁴ Castilla, Mara. “#SiMeMatan es porque me gustaba salir de noche y tomar mucha cerveza...” Twitter. <https://twitter.com/MaraMiranda25/status/860559096285720581>. May 5th, 2017. Retrieved on October 10th, 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Also tweeted along #NoFueTuCulpa (it was not your fault) hashtag.

¹⁷⁶ Escoto, Paloma. @palomaescoto. “#SiMeMatan que no sea mañana porque tengo que llegar a esta marcha. #VivasNosQueremos.” Twitter. <https://twitter.com/EscotoPaloma/status/860389474622205952>. May 4th, 2017. Retrieved on October 1st, 2019.

death, an organization Colectivo Feminista (The Feminist Collective) organized a march on UNAM's campus. Not only was the poster (re)shared on Twitter encouraging attendance; the pictures and videos from this event form a part of the hashtagged narrative and are largely symbolically relating back to it in physical spaces (see images below), as well as creating an online digital imprint and an interactive, accessible archive of resistance—*digital testimonios*.¹⁷⁷



Figure 9: Twitter images, the sign reads “#IfTheyKillMe, Authorities: Your responsibility is to investigate, not to justify.”¹⁷⁸

“#SiMeMatan they will say it was because I go to therapy and take antidepressants.”¹⁷⁹

The stigmatization of mental health in Mexico is one of the main issues brought to the forefront of the #SiMeMatan narrative. This comes at no surprise, considering that depressive disorders in Mexico “create a comparable disease burden to that of interpersonal violence,

¹⁷⁷ In fact, news sources often rely on the videos and photos directly from Twitter; see, for example the following article where most of the content is taken directly from Twitter: Redacción El Big Data. (2017). “Marchan contra violencia de género en CU.” *El Big Data*. <https://elbigdata.mx/justicia/video-marchan-contra-violencia-de-genero-en-cu/>.

¹⁷⁸ El Weso. @ElWesoMX. “La marcha de esta tarde en la @UNAM_MX (Vía Verónica Méndez) #SiMeMatan.” Twitter. May 5th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/elwesomx/status/860629447048908800>. Retrieved on: October 1st, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Nepantlera. @SpinozaNepantla. “#SiMeMatan dirán que fue porque voy a terapia psiquiátrica y tomo antidepressivos” Twitter. May 4th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/SpinozaNepantla/status>. Retrieved on: October 1st, 2019.

road injuries, or congenital anomalies, and a greater burden than that of cerebrovascular disease, and HIV/AIDS.”¹⁸⁰ Stigmatization of mental health feeds the culture of silence surrounding the conversation about domestic violence and sexual assaults and further fuels victim-blaming. Women do not simply underreport abuse with no explanation behind this culture of silence; they stay silent because of the institutionalized fear as well as the structural stigmatization and negation of the trauma they suffer.

The reason this is virtually undetectable and goes under the radar when examining the word network is the multitude of words and expressions women use to address the topic of mental health—such as therapy and antidepressants: *“#SiMeMatan—I am on antidepressants and go to therapy, they will surely say this is a proof of a suicide!”*¹⁸¹; mental health issues: *“SiMeMatan it is because I have mental health issues and I am too radical”*¹⁸²; depression/depressed and anxiety: *“SiMeMatan it is because I had depression, anxiety, paranoia and would probably harm myself at some point anyway”*¹⁸³.

¹⁸⁰ Alvarez-Monjaras, Mauricio & Gonzalez, Diana. (2016). “Depression in Mexico: stigma and its policy implications”. *The Yale Global Health Review*. 4. 13-16.

¹⁸¹ Rojas, Monik. @asiriRop. “#SiMeMatan ahora mismo tomo antidepressivos y voy a terapia psicológica, seguramente dirán que esto demuestra que fue un suicidio!!!” Twitter. May 5th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/asiriRop/status/860453587226382336>. Retrieved on: October 5th, 2019.

¹⁸² Christine. @latinxmsw. “#SiMeMatan es porque tengo problemas mentales y soy demasiado radical~” Twitter. May 11th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/latinxmsw/status/862878234282733569>. Retrieved on: October 5th, 2019.

¹⁸³ Escorpiona, Rosi. @rosiescorpiona. “#SiMeMatan es por qué tenía depresión, ansiedad, paranoia y probablemente me haría algo a mi misma en algún momento.” Twitter. May 5th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/rosaescorpiona/status/860525013325271042>. Retrieved on: October 5th, 2019

*#SiMeMatan it will happen because I am a woman, because I am a journalist, because I am lesbian, or for all of the above.*¹⁸⁴

Although not as frequently tackled as the shared fears of being blamed for choosing to go out, to walk home alone, to drink—it would be unfair to disregard the sub-narrative on heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy and homophobia forming within the #SiMeMatan discourse. Just like the conversation about mental health is revealed when we scratch beneath the surface; tweeting about non-hetero identities and struggles includes words like lesbian: “*#SiMeMatan seguramente diran que fue porque soy lesbiana y me visto como hombre...*”¹⁸⁵; LGBTQ (predominantly expressing support for the LGBTQ community—another reason to be blamed after death):

*“#SiMeMatan they will say it was because I was pro-choice, because I defended women’s rights, because I supported the LGBTQ community.”*¹⁸⁶; trans(gender): *“#SiMeMatan it’s gonna be because someone incredibly hates transgender people.”*¹⁸⁷ and bisexual: *“#SiMeMatan they will say I had sexual relations with more than one man, that I am bisexual and that I had an abortion at the age of 21.”*

¹⁸⁴ Baltazar, Elia. @eliabaltazar. “SiMeMatan será por ser mujer, por ser periodista, por ser lesbiana, o por todo lo anterior.” Twitter. May 4th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/eliabaltazar/status/860330623688478720>, Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Fernandowsky. @ferlhndz. “#SiMeMatan seguramente diran que fue porque soy lesbiana y me visto como hombre. Porque estoy desviada y no tengo un varón que me cuide.” Twitter. May 4th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/ferlhndz/status/860345177344544768>. Retrieved on Oct. 5th, 2019

¹⁸⁶ Valerie. @Valeria_IVM. “#SiMeMatan dirán que era pro-derecho a decidir, que defendía los derechos de las mujeres, que apoyaba a la comunidad LGBTTIQ.” Twitter. May 6, 2017. https://twitter.com/Valeria_IVM/status/861037520989171713. Retrieved on Oct. 5th, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Karime. @SoyFresaBarrio. “#SiMeMatan va a ser por qué alguien odia estúpidamente la gente transgénero.” Twitter. May 5th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/SoyFresaBarrio/status/860399221421342722>. Retrieved on October 6th, 2019.

On (In)Visibility: The Importance of Physical Space, Social Class and Resources

Although #SiMeMatan is constructing an urgent narrative which is surely creating much needed pressure on the authorities in real time and revealing a shared reality woman suffer under patriarchy; in a country where thousands of women are murdered the cases that make it to the news and draw attention usually involve middle class and upper-middle class families that have enough resources to pursue legal action, and bodies found in public spaces of great importance. This is not to say that Mara Castillo's murder was any less horrific just because of her social status—but it is important to note that those who are the most marginalized are the least likely to be talked about in a quest for justice. However, the physical spaces where murders occur also matter and can open important conversations. The main reason behind the authorities coming out to tweet about the case of Lesvy Osorio was the fact that the murder was committed on one of Mexico's most prestigious universities—in fact, their initial tweets were an attempt to distance the victim from this institution and preserve its status.

Two years and five months after her death, Lesvy's case was finally ruled a femicide on October 16th, 2019. Jorge Luis Gonzalez was charged with 45 years in prison and some monetary compensation has been provided to Lesvy's family.¹⁸⁸ Not nearly enough—Twitter voices argue; as it is not including any compensation measure for “the moral damage to the

¹⁸⁸ Redacción Animal Político. (2019). “Sentencian a 45 años de prisión a Jorge Luis Gonzalez por el feminicidio de Lesvy Berlín”. *Animal Politico*. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/10/sentencia-prision-jorge-luis-lesvy-berlin/>.

victim's family.”¹⁸⁹ This case serves as a testament to the flaws in the legal system but also a reminder that femicides are often written off as suicides or homicides; and whether they happen in places women call home or on the streets, there is often no resources to push back against this ruling. In fact; this lack of consequences makes it even more likely for marginalized women, women living in poverty and secluded areas to be murdered. We are dealing with a deafening culture of silence, thousands of murdered women, a pressing institutionalized fear and the inability to speak up. There are also marginalized voices breaking through this silence, however—and acknowledging their presence is important.

*#SiMeMatan, tell them, I died proudly indigenous.*¹⁹⁰

The discourse about indigenous women and indigenous identities is present but—compared to previously discussed themes— not as prevalent in the #SiMeMatan narratives—pointing to a larger issue of classism and racism deeply rooted in post-colonial Latin America and certainly present in Mexico, where colonialism opened a platform for racialization processes and constructed lingering racism—and sexual violence against indigenous women dates back to the colonial period.¹⁹¹ It is also telling of the lack of conversations about indigeneity in a myriad of spaces.

¹⁸⁹ Zamora, Hazel. @Hazelzamora. “Sin embargo, no ha acreditó la indemnización por daño moral para la familia de la víctima como parte de las medidas de reparación del daño.” Twitter. October 18th, 2019.

<https://twitter.com/hazelzamm/status/1185307676814823424>. Retrieved on Oct. 23rd, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ Perla de Ultramar. @NictteeGM. “#SiMeMatan diga. Qué morí siendo orgullosamente indígena.” Twitter. May 6th, 2017. <https://twitter.com/NictteeGM/status/861039647526400000>. Retrieved on October 20th, 2019.

¹⁹¹ Vega, Rosalyn A. (2018). *No Alternative: Childbirth, Citizenship and Indigenous Culture in Mexico*, First Edition. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that this virtual absence is telling us a story reflective of Mexican sociopolitical reality—a story about selective visibility that invites us to acknowledge the shortcomings and limitations of the platform that #SiMeMatan created and the issues it made visible. However, in the #SiMeMatan context— indigenous voices do exist within the overall narrative; finding and placing this scattered sub-discourse on the resistance-continuum acknowledges its existence and opens the door for further conversations about strengthening these voices in place of neglecting them just because they do not constitute the major narrative.

Life of a Hashtag; Energy Transformed: A Quick Note

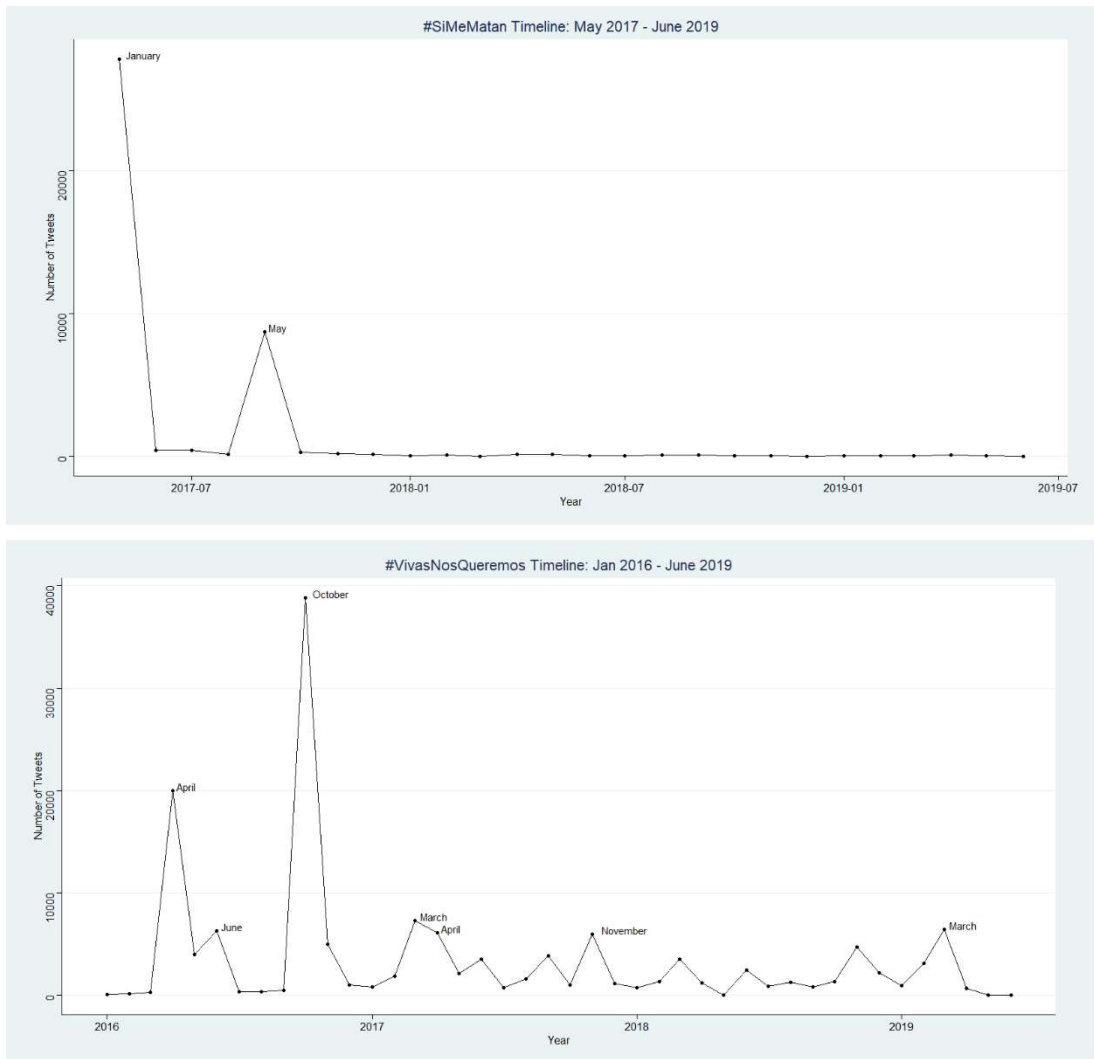


Figure 10: *Vivas Nos Queremos (VNQ)* and *Si Me Matan (SMM)*, frequency over time

Hashtag activism is quickly dismissed in part because of the general tendency of hashtags to “go viral” and become a trending topic; and then die out. However, different narratives produce different levels of engagement, and this is yet to be and examined in depth—but the initial findings suggest that the temporality of a hashtag directly relates to the functionality of its narrative. The two very different cases in the figure above are evidence of this reality. The two “peaks” of *Vivas Nos Queremos* relate to the April 24th march in Mexico

and the transnational march on the 25th of November. All throughout, we see the narrative that gets revived and engaged with over time in place of fully “dying out.” #SiMeMatan has a more focused agenda and is responding directly to a certain dysfunctionality; thus, reaching its peak in relation to two particular cases discussed earlier and traceable on this graph.

To assume that because a hashtag “dies out” it has not made an impact is very problematic, as certain narratives they form end up fulfilling their function—such is the case with #MiPrimerAcoso which made a pattern of violence visible and made an initial rupture in the silence around sexual abuse, right before the march occurred the next day. In place of “ending” the conversation around systemic violence; the focus simply gets re-shifted to a different urgent narrative as violence is tackled from multiple angles. These come in order of priority highly dependent on and responsive to the immediate sociopolitical reality. Recognizing that the activists are organic intellectuals and experts in their own reality is incredibly important; as we follow and validate what they deem to be urgent narratives from Mexico to Argentina.

Conclusion(s) and Implications

Hashtag activism produces searchable and accessible narratives forming around a key word or a phrase, which respond to and are shaped by the sociopolitical and sociolegal contexts they are performed in. As such, to be fully understood—these narratives beg to be restored contextually and researched beyond simply trend-based, quantitative approaches to what we deem to be their tangible and measurable effectiveness. Advances made in resistance studies combined with a narrative approach offer promising insights into the world of hashtag activism.

If we accept and reaffirm the literature validating everyday resistance and alter our narrow and limited definition of social change; we can begin to dissect the narratives forming around specific hashtags and restoring their complexity.

In doing so, it is important to acknowledge the omnipresence of western-centrism in the mainstream media and the literature combined with and to an extent influenced by the interplay between hashtag movements such as #MeToo and the hegemonic power structures; allowing for more visibility, attention and engagement. Although these movements create important spaces and conversations; there exist a whole network of hashtag activism in the Global South, narrated in English, Spanish, Portuguese and so many other languages creating complex narratives we are still largely failing to engage with. These narratives and movements emerge from within their local, country-level and regional sociolegal and sociopolitical realities and should be analyzed in these contexts. These analyses will require us to think of new ways of talking about the emerging movements, acknowledging their context-based creation and performance.

I have begun this quest with the case of Mexico; proposing to analyze the emerging narratives as digital testimonio— urgent, building personal into collective (often semantically too; “my” first assault, we want “us” alive, if they kill “me”), bearing witness to systems of injustice with pictures, videos, posters, flyers and words. It is important to note that Latin American hashtag feminism often transcends national borders and is a collective grito for change—however, there exist “local”, country-specific variations—such as #SiMeMatan in Mexico compared to #AbortoLegalYa in Argentina, or Brazil’s #deixaelatrabalhar (let her work); with female sports journalists combatting harassment by those they are interviewing on air.

We should by no means overlook these in our initial efforts to map out hashtag feminism networks and restore their complexity.

Furthermore, as is the case in #MiPrimerAcoso— the life of a hashtag and its stage of “dying out at a certain point” in the case of focused narratives is not a signal of their failure, it could simply mean the purpose driving the narrative has been substantially fulfilled, the focal “conflict” has been resolved. It is, then, suggested that specific hashtags serve as a foundational basis for the narrative forming around them, with each of those narratives having a distinct function and purpose. While hashtags keep their function and purpose when used in different sociopolitical contexts, the narratives are built and performed differently due to the micro-reality—as in the case of #MeToo that has a reckoning function, but the narrative shows significant levels of institutional fear in the context of Mexico.

My findings suggest initial typology of functions when it comes to individual hashtags in Mexico’s context: archiving trauma (MiPrimerAcoso), organizing logistics and archiving offline protests (VivasNosQueremos) and a direct relationship between the individual and the state— often addressing a certain dysfunction that hashtagged narratives aim to make visible (SiMeMatan). In place of assessing whether a hashtag movement is successful or not by simply looking at the numerical engagement with the hashtag; the field can be more productive if we explore the narratives forming—and look for the function each hashtag has in the mosaic of online resistance. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that narratives are fading away or are not effective enough. We need to change the way we perceive effectiveness of these movements as hashtag feminism is branching out into multiple narratives in Latin America, tackling the multifaceted and complex forms of systemic injustice both locally and regionally.

Implications for Future Studies: #AmINext and the Case of South Africa

A Cape Town University student, Uyinene Mrwetyana (19), was raped and murdered by a 42-year-old post office worker on August 24th, 2019.¹⁹² Her murder sparked the hashtag #AmINext, as thousands of South African women spoke about their fears on Twitter and Facebook and took it to the streets to express their grievances and bring visibility to and beyond Uyinene’s case. An ocean away, at the University of Oklahoma, three international student organizations—African Women’s League, InFocus Africa and African Student Association— came together to organize a *Femicide Panel* focusing on South African reality.¹⁹³ One student commented how following #AmINext has been incredibly helpful and healing; as she felt connected with home, followed events and discussions as they progressed and participated in unfolding and unpacking them online. It raised a very important point beyond the scope of my research but incredibly important to explore—the role of hashtag activism in keeping diaspora communities connected with their local realities and helping them understand the events as they unfold, participate in creating the narrative around resistance and having a quick access to a digital archive of resistance in a way that mainstream media is not equipped to.

How do the experiences of Mexican and South African hashtag feminists differ and what their shared characteristics are cannot be explored in depth before re-contextualizing different narratives within the spaces they emerge in and/or are performed in—this study being one of

¹⁹² Raborife, Mpho. (2019). “#IAmNene”. News 24. <https://aminext.news24.com/#group-lamNene-t99hcgU0RK>. Retrieved on October 30th, 2019.

¹⁹³ Johns, Catherine, A. Makina, E. Bezuidenhout. (2019). *Femicide Panel Discussion*. The University of Oklahoma, Norman.

the initial steps in doing so within Mexican sub-context. It was shown in the #MeTooMX example that certain hashtags, with the purpose they were created for in their original context cannot always get “translated to” different contexts in the same way.

One thing is certain, just like in the case of Mexico South Africa’s contextual reality is also shaped by institutionalized and everyday fear; however, the racial dynamic is formed as a part of a very distinct; apartheid-influenced reality. For example; in the South African case—the #MenAreTrash movement has been criticized for “camouflaging of race and class in ways that invisibilise the impact of structures and systems of racial and socio-economic inequalities for black men”¹⁹⁴— creating a sub-discourse where primarily black men are vilified. South Africa’s hashtag feminism, thus, has to be re-situated within this context. A similar pushback seen and discussed earlier in Mexico’s #MiPrimerAcoso narrative is seen in #MenAreTrash; with “not all men are monsters” sub-discourse formed around those who took this movement as a personal attack rather than an attempt to expose toxic masculinity. It would be interesting to explore why South African activists situated men as the subject of this hashtagged narrative, while Mexico’s movement happening in the same year talked about “my” first assault; thus, centralizing personal experiences of women who bear witness to injustice.

Could there be a reason for the testimonial nature of relating personal into collective was more at home in Latin America, while South Africa had more of a direct “call-out” way of engaging with online feminism? Why did the #AmINext hashtag change this focus? Did South African hashtag feminism change the focus because of the global exchange of ideas or simply

¹⁹⁴ Sanger, Nadia. (2019). “A matter of race and class: Notes on populist feminism in theorising from the South.” *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity. Volume 33*. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2019.1671773.

because the nature of this specific femicide case? This is not to imply that one is better than the other, but to call for contextualizing and understanding the reasons behind creation and formation of specific instances of resistance that could be deeply structural and/or (inter)cultural in nature? How could developing world benefit from the exchange of ideas and how can geographically distant spaces learn from similar movements in an attempt to work toward a globalized network of grassroots resistance remains to be seen and explored. Comparative narrative inquiries offer a promising window into this potential.

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