Women's struggles against patriarchal violence.

Debates on women's safety in Latin American cities during the 1970s and 1980s.

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Abstract

Struggles to end violence against women were at the core of activity of Latin American feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s. In the rapidly transforming cities facing the process of hyper-urbanisation, the problem of street harassment, sexual abuse, and other forms of violence against women in public spaces escalated. Increasing social segregation and isolation, enhanced by new spatial planning and architectural typologies, adversely affected safety. In those enormous cities, women found opportunities to denounce the shared experience of violence through new forms of protest, organised and united. Since 1981, feminists from Latin America were building solidarity in the struggles to end violence against women at the regular meetings, *Encuentros*. One of the most relevant outcomes of those meetings was the novel idea of establishing the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1981, which was later recognized by countries around the world. Demonstrations on the 25th of November, which followed that event, united masses of people in public protests. Through these and other demonstrations, women continued to gradually appropriate public space - following the way which was earlier marked by a movement from the 1970s, *Las Madres*. With the evolution of their presence in the city, feminists were able to reach out to the public. The multifaceted activism of women in the cities through protests, gatherings, performances, and press publications was significant for influencing the legislation and the social mentality.

This research traces from a historical perspective how women denounced violence and fought for their safety in the Latin American cities in the 1970s and 1980s. It recognizes how women discussed, condemned, and opposed patriarchal violence, looking at the feminist press articles and illustrations, photographs and audio-visual materials from the strikes and gatherings, interviews with the protagonists of the demonstrations, as well as previous research on the history of Latin American feminist movements and their fight for the right to the city. The study tackles the question of the role of the urban context in those struggles. Which were the threads of hyper-urbanisation and how did they affect women? What role has the appropriation of public space played for the feminist movements in creating new forms of protest, gaining exposure, and establishing social significance? My claim is that the new reality of rapidly transforming cities had a significant and complex influence on the struggles to end violence against women. On one hand, the patriarchal modes of hyper-urbanisation exacerbated the problem, while on the other, cities created the opportunity to act on a larger scale, in an organised way and made women's struggles to end violence visible to the public.

Latin American feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s shifted global understanding of violence against women and girls. They mobilized a strong and diverse network that was pioneering in the large-scale, international mobilization in the fight for human rights. Through multi-form activism against patriarchal violence, they not only inspired changes locally but also influenced women in other parts of the world.

Keywords: violence against women, feminist movements in Latin America, public space and gender inequalities

Introduction

The history of struggles against crime affecting women has been and remains a topic of a major societal impact in Latin America. Following data from the UN, Latin American countries are characterized by the highest rates of sexual violence in the world[1] and almost 5,000 femicide cases are reported there annually.[2] In this part of the world, devastated by armed conflicts, colonial invasions, civil wars and organised crime, security was one of the most frequently addressed topics by women's groups. During the first Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting in 1981, participants established the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on the 25th of November in commemoration of the Mirabal sisters, assassinated in the Dominican Republic in 1960. The Latin American movement inspired others worldwide and, in 2000, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women received an official resolution from the United Nations. The UN General Assembly invited governments, institutions, and civil society all over the world to join Latin American women in raising awareness and acting against patriarchal forms of violence.[3] The 25th of November remains until now an important symbolic day when people around the world gather in protests.[4]

While the organization and political activity of feminists in the 1970s and 1980s have been documented,[5] the significance of the fight against violence for these movements has not received enough attention. The topic united not only politicians, activists, scholars, and feminists – but also wide diversity of social groups.[6] Latin American feminists pioneered the shift in the global understanding of gender-based violence, as a researcher Elisabeth Jay Friedman recognised in 2014:

> The mobilization of mutual solidarity among Latin American feminists did not begin because of the Internet. It did not get underway due to the 1975-1985 UN Decade on Women. Nor is it an offshoot of U.S. or Western European models. (…) There is no more inspirational place to find the vibrancy and diversity of the movement than in its most tangible manifestation, the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings, or *Encuentros*. (…) In the late 1980s, Latin American feminists were among the founders of the most successful and widely known global movement for women. (…) Feminists organized across the region to influence the drafting of, and then insist that their governments sign on to, the first international law on violence against women, the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Elimination of Violence against Women.[7]

The organized political activity of women's groups, as well as the marches on the 25th of November, could only happen in a new spatial context of large cities, which offered unique possibilities for the exchange of information, cooperation, and expression of ideas in the public space. Women living in interconnected, heterogeneous, and densely populated areas were able to reach out to the public with critical discourses, through protests, slogans, or other forms of presence in the public space. Gradually, the organised activism in the cities allowed them to gain political influence in the fight for women's human rights. However, the rapid transformation of the cities at that time exacerbated social injustice.

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[1] Sebastián Essayag. *From Commitment to Action: Policies to End Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Panama: UNDP and UN Women (2017).

[2] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. "ECLAC: The Persistence of Violence against Women and Girls in the Region and Femicide, Its Maximum Expression, Is Troubling." Press Release | *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. CEPAL* (January 4, 2021). https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-persistence-violence-against-women-and-girls-region-and-femicide-its-maximum.

[3] "Background - United Nations," 2013, https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day/background.

[4] See for example: "Protestan mujeres en CDMX contra la Violencia de Género." 24 Horas, November 26, 2021. https://www.24-horas.mx/2021/11/25/protestan-mujeres-en-cdmx-contra-la-violencia-de-genero/.
"Miles Se Movilizaron En Distintas Ciudades Del Mundo En El Día Contra La Violencia Machista." La Izquierda Diario - Red internacional, November 29, 2021. https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Miles-se-movilizaron-en-distintas-ciudades-del-mundo-en-el-dia-contra-la-violencia-machista.

[5] See for example: Francesca Gargallo, *Ideas feministas latinoamericanas* (México, D.F.: UACM, 2014).; Elisabeth Jay Friedman. "Feminism Under Construction". *NACLA Report on the Americas* 47, no. 4 (2014): 20–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2014.11721807.; Lola G. Luna, "Para una historia política con actores reales," *Historia crítica*, no. 12 (1996): pp. 69-76, https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit12.1996.05.

[6] Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991).

[7] Elisabeth Jay Friedman. "Feminism Under Construction". *NACLA Report on the Americas* 47, no. 4 (2014): 20–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2014.11721807.

The years 1950-1980 were Latin America's period of the most rapid urbanization to date.[8] In the second half of the 20th century, they faced a state of imbalance between the growth of the urban population and the slower pace of economic development, which in the context of the so-called Global South is referred to as hyper-urbanisation.[9] Through hyper-urbanisation, the enormous cities of the 1980s became a framework for indifference, anonymity, and acceptance of violence. Feminist authors of that period criticized urban planning and architectural patterns, particularly the ones imported from the U.S., like guarded housing estates, shopping malls and amusement parks. Segregation and social isolation experienced in these new typologies negatively impacted women's safety[10]. Even though women in Latin America advocated for addressing this issue already in the 1970s and 1980s,[11] few contemporary cities incorporated a gender-based perspective into their planning and laws rarely consider the complexity of the issue still today.[12]

This research traces the history of discourse on women's safety in Latin American urban spaces during the 1970s and 1980s. The first chapter explains how patriarchal modes of hyper-urbanisation have exacerbated the problem of violence and describes how feminists recognised these issues. The two following chapters focus on the beneficial effect that urban life had on women's struggles against patriarchal violence through the appropriation of the public sphere. It explains how cities created opportunities for women to organize, express themselves publicly and receive attention. The second chapter shows the beginnings of women's mass demonstrations in public space in the 1970s, based on a case study of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,* which strongly influenced the forms and symbolism of later protests. The third chapter describes one of the most relevant events in the evolution of struggles for women's safety in the 1980s, the demonstrations following the establishment of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1981. This qualitative research is based on primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources include feminist magazines and zines such as *fem, Cihuat, La Boletina, La Revuelta, Brujas* and *Cuéntame Tu Vida* as well as interviews, photographs and videos from strikes and gatherings retrieved from the Archivos Históricos del Feminismo, Archivo Histórico Vamos Mujer, Archivo Nacional de Chile, and the Repositorio Insitucional UN. The most important secondary source is the comprehensive historical study of Latin American feminist movements *Latin American women and the search for social justice* by Francesca Miller. Most of the primary sources come from Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Peru. Voices from other countries are underrepresented in this study, particularly those from non-Spanish speaking territories. Considering differences between Latin American countries would be a valuable addition to further research.

The research demonstrates that feminist movements in Latin America throughout history led to important shifts in understanding and combating gender-based violence at a global level. They pioneered in the establishment of international events and the organisation of large-scale anti-violence demonstrations. They also had a significant impact on theorising the issue of violence against women. Latin American feminists drew attention to the links between hyper-urbanisation and the intensification of patriarchal violence, at the same time noticing and grasping the new opportunities offered by the rapidly growing cities. By gradually marking their place in public space, they took an important step toward becoming a political power.

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[8] "Cities and Urbanization." Encyclopaedia of Latin American History and Culture. Encyclopedia.com. (January 24, 2022). https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/cities-and-urbanization

[9] See for example: José Marcos da Cunha and Jorge Rodríguez Vignoli, "Crecimiento urbano y movilidad en América Latina," *Revista Latinoamericana De Población* 3, no. 4-5 (2009): pp. 27-64, https://doi.org/10.31406/relap2009.v3.i1.n4-5.1.

[10] See for example: Mercedes C. Charles. "La ciudad: espacio público y tiempo de ocio." f*em* 13, no. 78 (June 1989): 21–22.

[11] Aura López. "No más violencia contra la mujer. Entrevista a Flora Uribe y Clara Mazo." *Las Brujas* 1 (1982): 27.

[12] Sara Ortiz Escalante, "Espacio público, género e (in)seguridad," *in Jornadas urbanismo y género. Ciudades en construcción*., ed. Carmen Cortés Zaborras (Málaga, Spain: Perséfone., 2014), pp. 48-67.

Chapter 1: Threats of hyper-urbanisation and their consequences for women

Rapid urbanization in the 1970s and 1980s strongly affected Latin American societies. Enormous cities became a new reality, and despite the opportunities they created, they quickly became dispersed and full of social inequalities. Urban sprawl was an overwhelming phenomenon for many people, especially from marginalized groups. Representatives of women's groups published unfavourable descriptions of the cities, like the one by Mercedes Charles in *fem*, the first major Latin American feminist magazine: "the endless entities that expand its limits day by day, swallowing up and turning into part of itself a large number of rural communities and forests, (…) where sky gradually loses its stars, which are hidden behind a greyish and sickly mantle." [13] In her text, Mercedes Charles points out that inequality in urban areas tends to be higher than in rural areas.[14] She recognizes within the urban landscape the "signs of a contradictory, insecure, unequal society, full of social contrasts".[15] Increasing violence and insecurity affected all citizens but was experienced differently by men and women. As Ana Falú, architect, activist and researcher explained:

> This focus on violence and discrimination against women in the public space of cities reaffirms what has been stated since the 1980s in various articles: cities are not the same for women and men, and it would seem that they are much less so in today's cities, which are more inaccessible, more unknown, less legible and, therefore, a source of fears and differences that seem irreducible.[16]

Violence, which expressed itself in a variety of dimensions in the urban reality, was a clear sign of persistent asymmetries, based on the prevailing gender order of patriarchal violence against women and girls. The relevance of the struggles against violence for women of the 1970s and 1980s becomes clear through the frequency with which feminist authors addressed it in the press. Overall, of the total of 5,416 contributions to *fem* magazine, violence was the 7th most popular topic – it was mentioned 232 times.[17] In *Cihuat*, out of the 98 topics covered, it was the 8th most often referred to.[18] The last issue of *La Revuelta* was entirely devoted to health and violence.[19] The term *violencia*, in English "violence", is present in all six issues of *Las Brujas,* and in total appears 93 times, while for comparison the word *aborto,* in English "abortion", is used 33 times. A similar proportion repeats in the case of *Cuéntame tu vida,* with 260 uses of the word *violencia* in all 12 issues of the newspaper, and only 88 of the word *aborto.*[20]

Artists used visual language to amplify the message of the articles. A cover image of the fourth issue of *Cuéntame tu vida*, a newspaper from Cali issued between 1978 and 1987, depicts the problem of violence in public space. It shows men standing in the forefront, who are watching two women passing on the other side of the street (Figure 1). The postures of men show self-confidence while women, on the contrary, seem to express uncertainty and fear - keeping close to each other, with lowered heads, eyes fixed on the floor and shoulders hunched. Their clothing is ordinary, and the artist has not drawn their faces so that they have no characteristics. This is a deliberate effort to emphasise that the situation presented is an everyday reality that affects all, regardless of their appearance or situation. Light plays a significant role in the picture – there is a strong contrast, and while men are sunk in the shadow, women are exposed in a strong light. The illustration depicts a scene so popular in public

[13] Mercedes C. Charles "La ciudad"

[14] See for example: Martin Ravallion, Shaohua Chen, and Prem Sangraula. "New Evidence on the Urbanization of Global Poverty." *Population and Development Review 33*, no. 4 (2007): 667–701. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25487618.

[15] Jeffrey Williamson. "Latin American Inequality: Colonial Origins, Commodity Booms, or a Missed 20th Century Leveling?" *NBER Working Paper* 20915 (January 2015): 8 https://doi.org/10.3386/w20915.

[16] Ana Falú, "Violencias y discriminaciones en las ciudades," in *Mujeres en la ciudad: de violencias y derechos*, ed. Falú Ana (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones SUR, 2009), pp. 15-39.

[17] Martínez Barrientos, Félix. "Fem y el movimiento feminista en México." *CIEG-UNAM*, May 2017.

[18] Verónica Ortiz Zavala, and Diana Lara Brígid. "CIHUAT: Voz de la coalición de mujeres." *CIEG-UNAM*, June 2017.

[19] Tonatiuh Meléndez Huerta. "El periódico La Revuelta… y las brujas conspiraron." *Estudios Latinoamericanos UNAM*, May 2007.

[20] Author's elaboration based on press issues retrieved from the historical archive *Repositorio Insitucional UN*

space, in which women become sex objects under the scrutiny of the male gaze which objectifies them, reasserting the power of men over the streets.

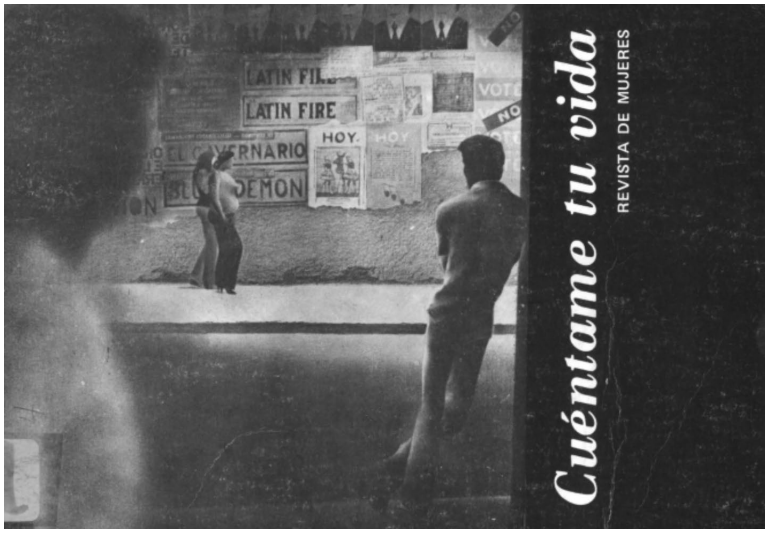

Figure 1. A cover image of *Cuéntame tu vida* magazine illustrating the problem of street harassment. Source: Astudillo, Ever. No title. 1980. Cover artwork. In *Cuéntame tu vida. Revista de mujeres* 4.

One of the most widespread forms of violence, which feminists were already denouncing in the 1980s, was harassment on the streets and in public spaces. An interesting observation from the article in *Las Brujas* is that this phenomenon affected previous generations to a lesser extent and that its increase was related to hyper-urbanisation and the changing place of women in cities:

> The streets are still men's domain, and they determine the management of their territory. I think that *el piropo*, in English "a flattering comment", that we know today is a recent modality; our grandmothers did not suffer this harassment because the streets were an exclusively masculine space. Nowadays, women have a little more access to the streets, to certain places and at certain times, and this "usurpation" of the territory is controlled through verbal, gestural and physical aggression. [21]

For many women in the 1980s a modern city became a symbol of systemic problems, with public spaces reassuring inequalities, as we can see in the vivid description of Sofía Rosales y Jaime, critically commenting on an exhibition about women in the cities which happened in San Francisco in 1983:

> All of us live in this monster city and we exist, and we are the most solid pillar on which rests the system of society - which oppresses, crushes, exploits and ignores us. Paradoxical, but real. It would take an infinite number of expositions to outline just the place we occupy in this city that exploits us like an immense extractor of life and takes away the best energy that could feed the most radical and effective change of course in human society: the conscious, free woman.[22]

In 1989, Mercedes Charles identified some of the ways in which the urban reality contributed to enhancing violence against women. The difficulties she enumerates concern not only social phenomena but also spatial ones. She mentions the distrust caused by public transport facilities and the fear of crossing a park or a vacant lot, particularly at night. She also criticizes new projects of gated communities, shopping malls and amusement parks – incorporated from the U.S.:

> Everything seems to be wrapped up in a simulacrum of happiness and fun and in an eagerness to copy similar parks in the United States. (…) Amusement parks, shopping centres and homes are replacing open and collective public spaces for leisure activities. Restricted spaces, which provide security only for their users, and which promote individualism, the lack of collective action and loneliness.[23]

[21] Aura López. "No más violencia contra la mujer. Entrevista a Flora Uribe y Clara Mazo." *Las Brujas* 1, (1982): 28-29
[22] Sofía Rosales y Jaime. "Artes plásticas: la mujer en la ciudad y la mujer en el arte." *fem* 8, n. 29 (September 1983): 58-59
[23] Mercedes C. Charles. "La ciudad: espacio público y tiempo de ocio." *fem* 13, no. 78 (June 1989): 21–22.

Street violence, according to her view "is becoming increasingly close and integrated into the everyday urban landscape".[24] She claims that the lack of spatial qualities "generates selfishness, individualism and loneliness"[25] women live in a state of permanent alertness, in which the other becomes a potential enemy, regardless of his actions.

Feminist researchers from Latin America theorized that the central issue behind violence against women is the patriarchal violence that men exercise over women.[26] Already during the 1970s and 1980s they identified that the city, as a social space, was profoundly related to gender inequalities, both in the public and private spheres, and it reproduced forms of patriarchal domination. They depicted the violent cities of their time as a source of fear, marked by strong inequalities, social segregation, and territorial fragmentation.

Chapter 2: Women's entry to public space in the battle to end violence

The fight against urban violence became one of the central themes around which women from Latin America united. Cities allowed women to start organising themselves, coordinating their activities and reaching out to more individuals. The gradual conquest and appropriation of public spaces through performances and mass protests were important in the process of increasing social significance. It allowed women to express themselves and their needs as a mass. Through public expression, they strengthened their position as a political force.

One of the most compelling images from the 1970s is that of *Las Madres*, or The Mothers of the "disappeared" – victims of the regime in Argentina (1976-1988), whose bodies were buried in mass graves, sunk in the sea, or dismembered to rid them of any distinguishing features. This practice was central to creating a culture of fear in many countries, but it had a particular impact in Argentina, where an estimated thirty thousand citizens "disappeared".[27] It was in this country that *Las Madres* movement first emerged.

A particularly interesting aspect of this movement was related to the forms of protests it developed, and the places *Las Madres* occupied each week in the city, with their presence establishing a public space for collective memory. Jean Franco, an academic and literary critic known for pioneering work on Latin American culture, explains the phenomenon of this women's movement:

> Terrified and not knowing, they did not retreat mourning into their homes; that private space held no more solace, no more life meaning for them. Nor did they go underground to join forces with the armed resistance and seek a violent overthrow of the criminals in office. They chose a yet more perilous path: They went forth into an unknown space, the public space. (…) The meaning of participating in a public demonstration goes beyond the violation of social norms previously accepted. It is literally to expose oneself, to be publicly identified by the forces opposed, a consideration that demands not only the courage to violate social norms but also the courage to face the very real possibility of violent retribution to yourself. [28]

Las Madres made use of public space in various forms of protest. One of the visual methods they used was to paint empty silhouettes on the walls, sidewalks, and streets of Buenos Aires. More than thirty thousand such silhouettes appeared in the city, strongly insisting on the consciousness of citizens through this symbolic action.[29] An even more significant gesture they made was to occupy the Plaza

[24] Charles C., "La ciudad"

[25] Charles C., "La ciudad"

[26] Ana Falú, Olga Segovia, and José Olavarría. "Comentarios." Essay. In Ciudades para convivir: sin violencias hacia las mujeres, 82–88. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones SUR, 2007.

[27] Ariel Dorfman. "Mother's Day." *New York Times*, 7 May 1977

[28] Jean Franco. "Gender, Death and Resistance; Facing the Ethical Vacuum." *Chicago Review* 35, no. 4 (1987): 59–79. https://doi.org/10.2307/25305378.

[29] Franco. "Gender, Death and Resistance"

de Mayo, a space charged with special significance, the seat of government in Argentina since the eighteenth century, associated with the Independence movement. The central element of the square, the Pyramid of May, was a monument to Argentine's independence. *Las Madres* marked their presence by gathering in a circle around it every Thursday to stress how betrayed this symbol of freedom had been by the violence performed against them and their children. As the dictatorial government banned static meetings, they created a *ronda* – a circulatory movement in pairs around the monument. A press photographer, Carlos Villoldo captured a moment when they gathered around it in a perfect circle, which gives the idea of continuous movement and unity (Figure 2). With a horizontal framing and a general shot that allows a wide and complete reading of the scene, the photograph gives an account of a large, impactful, peaceful, and orderly protest.

Figure 2. Press photograph of *Las Madres* surrounding a monument to Argentine independence on Plaza de Mayo.
Source: Villoldo, Carlos. Ronda de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Circle of The Mothers of May Square). 1981. Archive "Centro de la Imagen", Fotoseptiembre.

The presence of *Las Madres* in the main public square in Buenos Aires inspired women in other countries, "in Chile women chained themselves to the railings of the closed national legislature; in El Salvador, The Mothers demonstrated by staging sit-ins in the National Cathedral."[30] As Jean Franco rightly states, "in each case, the space itself conveys meanings that do not need to be spoken."[31] The importance of *Las Madres* can be justified by the fact that on May 1, 1881, the fourth anniversary of the first events, in defiance of decrees banning demonstrations, more than six thousand Argentinians went out to the streets to protest against the violation of human rights by the regime, and even the police stood by.[32] They managed to put the dictatorship in check while they dared to take to the public space as a mass. It was partly also because they occupied a highly symbolic place that they later acquired international fame as part of one of the most representative political rituals of the struggle for human rights in Latin America.

It is worth noting that Las Madres situated their protest regarding the oppression of Latin American women as mothers as a whole. Whereas traditionally, motherhood in Latin America has been confined to the private sphere, *Las Madres* instead expressed their voice publicly. This allowed them to become visible and inspire other women even internationally, as Cecília Sardenberg, a professor in Anthropology at the University of Bahia, recognized:

> Prior to the disappearance of their children, these women had been traditional housewives and mothers, tending to the well-being of their families from the safety of their homes, the private sphere. In crossing the threshold of their homes to stage their protest and seek justice, the mothers politicised

[30] Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991).
[31] Franco. "Gender, Death and Resistance"
[32] Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991).

> the private, revolutionising motherhood as well as stretching maternal duties and concerns from the private into the public – even international – arenas. [33]

Latin American women in the 1970s brought up the issue of violence under military rule and armed conflicts. These contexts made them specifically concerned with state violence against women. While manifesting against violence as a whole, in many of its forms, they also protested against sexual abuse, as Conny Roggeband, a researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, mentioned in her study on Latin America:

> "Women's organizations pointed to torture and rape of political prisoners and the use of rape as a weapon of war and connected these forms of violence to deeper societal patterns of subordination and violence against women in both the private and public spheres. Processes of democratization in the region brought new opportunities to institutionalize norms to end violence against women, and in many countries, feminists managed to get the issue on the political agenda." [34]

The protests of *Las Madres* in the 1970s were relevant for the evolution of the women's demonstrations against violence in Latin America in the next decades. As the movement was international in scope, it demonstrated the power of solidarity and unity. *Las Madres* used public spaces to voice their suffering and demand justice in the face of state-sponsored violence and led the way for women in the next decades to use the city as the field and an instrument in the fight against patriarchal violence.

Chapter 3: The city as an arena for combating violence against women

In the 1980s, Latin American feminists forged solidarity through *Encuentros*, international meetings. *Encuentros* brought together tens of thousands of women of different ethnicities, races, classes, and generations. They reflected on their experiences, recognised common grievances, analysed diverse forms of oppression, and exchanged mobilization strategies.[35] At a time when it was still largely tolerated by the societies across the world, the participants of the *Encuentros* in Latin America began to denounce violence against women. In the process of making visible its recurrence, different expressions, and consequences in women's lives, during the 1st Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting held in Bogotá in 1981, they decided to declare the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. They chose the 25th of November as a date for the annual protests, in commemoration of the assassination of the sisters Patria, Minerva and María Teresa Mirabal, three activists in the resistance against the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in Santo Domingo, in 1960. This event was promoted by the women's movements and received a lot of attention in all the countries of the continent. Mirabal sisters became heroines in the fight against violence. Their pictures were reproduced on promotional materials, and a few years later even on official national post stamps and banknotes of the Dominican Republic (Figure 3). Later, in 1999, from the inspiration of Latin American women's movements, the UN proclaimed the 25th of November as an official International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

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[33] Cecília M. Sardenberg, "Negotiating Culture in the Promotion of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Latin America," *IDS Working Papers* 2012, no. 407 (2012): pp. 1-44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2012.00407.x.

[34] Conny Roggeband, "Ending Violence against Women in Latin America: Feminist Norm Setting in a Multilevel Context," *Politics & Gender* 12, no. 01 (2016): pp. 143-167, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x15000604.

[35] Alice Evans, "Why Is Feminist Activism Thriving in Latin America?" Dr Alice Evans (January 1, 2021), https://www.draliceevans.com/post/why-is-feminist-activism-thriving-in-latin-america.

Figure 3. Post stamp with Mirabal sisters from the Dominican Republic.
Source: Dávila, Nelson. December, 1985. Dirección General de Correos. https://sellosdominicanos.blogspot.com/1985/12/25-aniversario-de-la-muerte-de-las.html

In the 1980s, Latin American feminists began to call for marches and protests against violence. Rosalba Osorno, one of the participants of the first 25th of November demonstrations, in an interview "40 years of activism in the voice of its protagonists: 25 November, 1981-2021" recalls the beginning of the mobilization. Interestingly, she illustrates the position of women's groups at the time by describing their position in the public space:

> When the first 25 November arrived, we already had a process of education and training, so we simply organised the mobilisation. It was in the Botanical Garden since at that time we had not yet conquered the public squares of the city, so we had to find a more enclosed and isolated place where we could do it.[36]

Rosalba Osorno further elaborates on the significance of the spatial dimension of the protests, explaining that, despite the many educational and awareness-raising campaigns, they remained "invisible, totally invisible. We realised that it was necessary to publicly express our own voice." [37] This observation was one of the reasons why they mobilized to reach as many women as possible and go out to the streets. The fight against violence had the potential to unite a large group of protesters because it was connected to the direct experience of many people. In archival video footage of the strikes that took place in 1987, it is apparent that the women's strikes already established their presence in public space. Hundreds of people marched through the central streets of Medellin and Cartagena, gathered in the main squares, and took over public transport by hanging banners on buses. A few years after gathering for the first time in the enclosed spaces of the botanical gardens, they were able to mark their presence in representative parts of the city.[38] As acknowledged by Francesca Miller:

> Since the proclamation of the International Day Against Violence Against Women, thousands of women have gathered in public squares across Latin America to show their solidarity on this issue. It is a quintessential expression of Latin American feminism as it has evolved: the creation of an official, international event to make a statement in the local arena, to gather a bit of political *sombra*. [39]

[36] Rosalba Osorno. 40 años de activismo en la voz de sus protagonistas: 25 de noviembre (40 years of activism in the voice of its protagonists: 25 November), 1981-2021. Interview. Archivo Histórico Vamos Mujer. November 2021. https://youtu.be/P9eoQZihaK4.

[37] Osorno. 40 años de activismo

[38] Camila Muñoz de los Ríos. Arqueología audiovisual del 25N. Realización: Producción: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Medellín, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvPI_1WDFuM&t=20s

[39] Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991).

In the photographs from the first strike against violence held on the 25th of November in Colombia in 1981, gathered in the historical archive *Vamos Mujer*, we can see that the scale of the first edition was already significant, as at least a few hundred people attended. These first massive protests against violence aroused anger and outrage in the participants, as is apparent in the photographs of women with determined gazes and postures, shouting and raising their fists in the air while protesting in the middle of the night. (Figure 4) The banners conveyed slogans: "When a woman is raped, we are all raped"; “We are not dolls"; "We are for utopia."; “No more violence against women”. Most of the photographs also show a big doll held by the protesters, representing the objectification of women. Citizens were watching the strike in surprise from the edge of the platforms or the comfort of their balconies (Figure 5). Some of the banners used during the protests on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women related directly to the spatial dimensions of the problem, like the one from a 1985 edition, demanding equal access to public space also after dusk: “At night the streets are also ours” (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Anger and outrage of the protesters on the 25th of November in 1981, in Medellín.
Source: Author unknown, Archive “Vamos Mujer”. https://cienciashumanasyeconomicas.medellin.unal.edu.co/laboratorios/fuentes-historicas/navegacion-vamos-mujer/209-protesta-publica-y-conmemoracion.html.

Figure 5. Meeting of Medellín women commemorating the first 25 November in 1981.
Source: Author unknown, Archive “Vamos Mujer”. https://cienciashumanasyeconomicas.medellin.unal.edu.co/laboratorios/fuentes-historicas/navegacion-vamos-mujer/209-protesta-publica-y-conmemoracion.html. Brightness and contrast adjusted by the author for better visibility.

Figure 6. Colectiva de Mujeres de Medellín.
(Women of Medellín collective) *A banner for a march "No more violence against women" in 1985*. Source: Archive "Vamos Mujer". https://cienciashumanasyeconomicas.medellin.unal.edu.co/laboratorios/fuentes-historicas/navegacion-vamos-mujer/209-protesta-publica-y-conmemoracion.html

The strikes were transformative events in the history of women's struggle against patriarchal violence, as they enabled them to organise themselves with a common purpose and gain exposure in the public sphere. The urban space, gradually taken over by women, not only illustrated their growing importance but also actively influenced the strengthening of their political and social power. As Ana Falú acknowledged in March 2022, this fight continues until the present times:

> For more than 35 years, feminist urban groups and activists have been demonstrating for Women's Right to the City, a category that refers to the use and enjoyment of the city, its spaces and public goods, services, and facilities; and that appeals to the desire and right to be able to inhabit it freely, both day and night, participating in what urban life has to offer.[40]

The role of the strikes on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women has not diminished over time, but on the contrary, grew significantly internationally. In 2021 and 2020, despite a Coronavirus pandemic that made it difficult to gather for mass events, thousands of people protested in the main streets and squares of Latin American cities on the 25th of November, and not only.[41] Other hundreds of thousands joined in cities around the world, drawing inspiration from the first Latin American marches. In 2019, the performance prepared for the protests on the 25th of November by a Chilean collective Latesis, *Un violador en tu camino*, became a viral and has been hailed as the anthem of feminists around the world.[42] Contemporary activists often underline their connection with the earlier feminist movements, like Cecilia Palmeiro, a member of *Ni Una Menos* collective, put explicitly in an interview: "We are the daughters of their disobedience. We are the *locas*, or crazy women, as *Las Madres* were called. We are the heirs of the *desaparecidas* and the feminist organizations that came before us".[43] The legacy of the forms of protests used in the 1970s by L*as Madres* continues to

[40] Ana Falú, "El derecho a la ciudad de las mujeres," *Crítica Urbana. Revista De Estudios Urbanos y Territoriales*. 5, no. 23 (2022): p. 12.

[41] See for example: "Protestan mujeres en CDMX contra la Violencia de Género." 24 Horas, November 26, 2021. https://www.24-horas.mx/2021/11/25/protestan-mujeres-en-cdmx-contra-la-violencia-de-genero/.
"Miles se movilizaron en distintas ciudades del mundo en el día contra la violencia machista." La Izquierda Diario - Red internacional, November 29, 2021. https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Miles-se-movilizaron-en-distintas-ciudades-del-mundo-en-el-dia-contra-la-violencia-machista.

[42] Clara Giménez Lorenzo, "El mapa que muestra el impacto global de 'Un violador en tu camino', el himno feminista que comenzó en Chile," El Diario, December 21, 2019, https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/muestra-pacto-global-violador-camino_1_1181637.html.

[43] Claire Branigan and Cecilia Palmeiro, "Women Strike in Latin America and Beyond," NACLA, March 8, 2018, https://nacla.org/news/2018/03/08/women-strike-latin-america-and-beyond.

last. The white headscarf is an international symbol of the struggle for human rights and the mobilisation of women in public spaces.[44] In 2015, young feminist groups in Buenos Aires formed *El Siluetazo,* the silhouettes of murdered women, alluding to the desaparecidos from the dictatorships.[45] Feminists of the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America gave the fight to end violence against women a political and cultural significance whose impact is still tangible today.

Final remarks

Latin American feminist movements during the 1970s and 1980s focused much of their core activity on the struggle to end violence against women. In the 1970s, women's groups were concerned with the role of the state as a perpetrator of violence against women in contexts of political repression. During the 1980s, Latin American and Caribbean feminist activists and groups organized regular meetings, *Encuentros*, to exchange experiences, perspectives, and mobilization strategies. During their first *Encuentro* in Bogotá, in 1981, they established the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on the 25th of November, which became one of the most important symbolic events in the battle for women's safety. Thousands of participants attended the strikes, learning from *Las Madres* who led the way in the 1970s by establishing new forms of protest and appropriating space. The symbolism that the urban space assigned to these events was crucial and necessary in the way to changing the legislation and the social mentality.

Booming Latin American cities provided a fertile ground for activism. United in the streets and squares, women became a new political power and were able to reach the consciousness and imagination of residents, influencing the social norms. Hyper-urbanisation played a dual role in those processes, on the one hand allowing women to fight against patriarchal violence in a more organised and effective way, while on the other intensifying the problem itself. Feminists in the 1980s drew attention to the problems posed by the new urban typologies, often inspired by solutions imported from the U.S. They pointed out that urban sprawl isolates people and causes a decrease in safety, which particularly affects women. They identified that the city is marked by strong inequalities and reproduces forms of patriarchal domination.

Parallel to what hegemonic historiography has conceptualized as feminist universal history, women in Latin America have been organizing and fighting from a different standpoint, experiencing their order of events. Latin American feminists shifted global understanding of gender-based violence. Through relentless mobilization, they created a strong and diverse regional network that was pioneering in the large-scale mobilization in the struggles against patriarchal violence. Just as *Las Madres the Plaza de Mayo* and the establishment of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women had an international impact, also contemporarily activists from Latin America continue to inspire the fight against patriarchal violence globally. New generations of feminists in Latin America draw on the experiences and knowledge of the genealogy of women's struggles and use them to interpret and confront the most contemporary social conflicts. There is an urgency for studies about the history of women's struggles against patriarchal violence, on which younger generations could build their knowledge. In the last years, this need began to be addressed by publication of online collections, like the *25 November 1981-2021: 40 Years of Building a Political and Cultural Agenda on Violence against Women in Colombia* prepared by the archive Vamos Mujer, or exhibitions like *Feminism. A Look from the 21st Century to the 20th Century* displayed in Chile in 2019. The topic deserves further attention, as there is still a lot to learn from Latin America about the struggle to end patriarchal violence.

[44] Marcela Perelman and Veronica Torras, "The Mothers of Plaza De Mayo," Open Democracy, October 3, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/mothers-plaza-de-mayo/.

[45] Alice Evans, "Why Is Feminist Activism Thriving in Latin America?" Dr Alice Evans (January 1, 2021), https://www.draliceevans.com/post/why-is-feminist-activism-thriving-in-latin-america.

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