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## The Feminist Anti-Monumentas, Renaming of Those Hidden by the State. The Consolidation of Mexico City's La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan

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## **The Feminist Anti-*Monumentas*, Renaming of Those Hidden by the State. The Consolidation of Mexico City’s La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan**

**Abstract.** This article examines the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan*, a feminist urban intervention in Mexico City, to inquire if it acts as a permanent act of feminist activism supporting and accompanying the feminist protests and demonstrations. Inaugurated on 25 September 2021, for the last two years, it has remained a site of mourning, protest, and resistance for feminists from all over. I argue that the *Glorieta* is a form of new genre public art which serves as a continuation of the ongoing transfeminist struggle against the patriarchal system. Meanwhile, it also fulfils the same role anti-monuments have played in different locations across Mexico. To understand the *Glorieta*, I provided a broad history of other anti-*monumentas* and key moments of feminism to contextualise this ‘anti-monumental’ site. Drawing on Suzanne Lacy’s new genre of public art and Sayak Valencia’s transfeminism, I argue that the *Glorieta* has the potential to constantly remind Mexico about its colonial past, the ongoing intersectional challenges faced by women and a permanent demand for the government to guarantee all women access justice and a life free of violence.

**Keywords:** feminist activism, new genre public art, transfeminist discourse

**Resumen.** Este artículo examina la *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan*, una intervención urbana feminista en la Ciudad de México, para comprobar si funciona como un permanente activismo que apoya y acompaña las protestas feministas. La *Glorieta* fue inaugurada el 25 de septiembre de 2021, y durante los

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últimos dos años ha permanecido como un sitio para llorar por las asesinadas, protestar y resistir por parte de feministas de todo el territorio. Argumento que es un tipo de un nuevo género de arte público que le da continuidad a la actual lucha transfeminista en contra del sistema patriarcal. Mientras tanto, también cumple las funciones que han cumplido las anti-monumentas a lo largo del territorio nacional. Para entender la *Glorieta*, presento un resumen de la historia del feminismo y otras anti-monumentas para contextualizar el sitio ‘anti-monumental’. Al explorar los conceptos de nuevo género de arte público de Suzanne Lacy y el transfeminismo de Sayak Valencia, sostengo que la *Glorieta* tiene el potencial de ser un constante recordatorio para los mexicanos sobre su pasado colonial, los continuos retos interseccionales que enfrentan las mujeres y es una demanda permanente para que el gobierno garantice el acceso de las mujeres a la justicia y a una vida libre de violence.

**Palabras clave:** activismo feminista, nuevo género de arte público, discurso transfeminista

## Introduction

This article will examine the site the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* (The Roundabout of Women Who Fight) in Mexico City, which was established, defended, and promoted by feminist groups in Mexico City. The *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* (from now on referred to as *Glorieta*) was inaugurated on 25th September 2021 and has since served as a meeting point during feminist demonstrations. Simultaneously, it is a lasting symbol of feminist demands and the urgent need for authorities to implement relevant changes. The *Glorieta* includes an anti-monument, a garden displaying mosaics with the names of the victims of femicide and enforced disappearance, and a clothesline where women can report acts of violence. Its installation occurred at a significant moment for feminists, decolonialists, and indigenous groups. The installation of the anti-monument coincided with a significant period for feminists across Latin America. The year 2019 will be remembered in Latin American history as the year of women (PortavozTV 2019). Feminists took to the streets to protest against gender-based violence and advocate for sexual rights (Apolinar Navarro, Aguilar Balderas, y Moreno Velador 2022). From the *marea verde* in Argentina to powerful performances like *El violador eres tú*<sup>2</sup> by the Chilean collective LasTesis, which resonated globally (Colectiva Registro Callejero 2020), women came together to demand effective solutions. Despite all the demonstrations,

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<sup>2</sup> This was a performance by the collective LasTesis. The performance invites participants to dance to lyrics inspired by Laura Rita Segato’s theory about the culture of rape.

violence against women has increased, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As violence continued to rise, according to the National Survey on the Dynamics of Relations inside Homes, 70.1% of women in Mexico have experienced some form of gender-based violence (INEGI 2022), and demonstrations were prohibited due to lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus. Women created the *Glorieta* as a continuation of the protests. However, its permanence in the public realm is still pending as women continue to defend the site.

The analysis presented here examines the *Glorieta* as an ongoing act of activism that advances the feminist struggle. Notably, it functions as an anti-monument, and, therefore, I will analyse the *Glorieta* in relation to previous anti-monuments, taking into account the features observed by Ovalle and Díaz Tovar (2019), which are commonly shared by the majority of anti-monuments. Simultaneously, by categorising it using Suzanne Lacy's concept of *new genre public art*, it is possible to discern what sets it apart from other anti-monuments and traditional public art. Furthermore, this article delves into the history of the *Glorieta* as a constitutive element of what makes the project so significant and characteristic for Mexican feminists. Meanwhile, I will also highlight some moments of the Mexican feminist genealogy and the placement of other feminist anti-monuments that are relevant to understand the *Glorieta*.

I argue that the *Glorieta* exhibits similar qualities to other anti-monuments. However, the entire installation encompasses various elements: an anti-monument, the *Jardín somos memoria* [*Garden We Are Memory*], a gender-based denunciation clothesline and a pink cross, each serving a distinct function as part of feminist endeavours against violence. Therefore, I observe that aside from considering the discussion about anti-monuments in Latin America, other perspectives and theoretical approaches may clarify what distinguishes this project. It functions as an open canvas for women wishing to denounce gender-based violence, a permanent transfeminist demonstration, and a statement against enduring colonial structures in Mexico. Through a brief exploration of the history of feminist anti-monuments and the specific one at the *Glorieta*, an analysis of the terms *new genre public art* and transfeminism, and an examination of each of the elements incorporated in the *Glorieta*, I demonstrate that, overall, it is an actively contested site, not merely a symbol of the feminist movement.



Figure 1. Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan y Antimonumenta\_vivas nos queremos. (2023). Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan. Digital photograph. Retrieved from: Antimonumenta\_vivasnosqueremos [Instagram Account]. Permission to reproduce by the author

## The Feminists' Traditions and Anti-Monumentas

### *Feminicides in Ciudad Juárez*

The first Mexican feminist anti-monumentas<sup>3</sup>, the history of feminicides in Mexico, and the battle against gender-based violence are closely intertwined and share the exact geographical origin in Ciudad Juárez. Since comprehensive

<sup>3</sup> When analysing the anti-monuments included in the *Glorieta*, I will discuss why keeping it in the feminine genre in Spanish is relevant.

genealogies of violence against women, feminicides, and anti-*monumentas* in Mexico have already been conducted, I will only present the pertinent information for understanding the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan*.

In 1993, women began to be murdered in the border region between Mexico and the United States. It was only later, after the families of the victims exhausted all available means to seek justice, that these cases were officially classified as feminicides. First, I will provide a broad examination of the trial of *Campo Algodonero* as a pivotal one that had a transformative impact on women's lives in Mexico. Secondly, I will describe the placement of anti-*monumentas* by the mothers.

On 6 March 2002, three mothers filed a complaint against the Mexican government with the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. They had encountered negligence, discrimination, and institutional violence when trying to report the murders of their daughters. The bodies of Claudia Ivette González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal, and Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez, along with five other victims, were discovered abandoned in a cotton field, leading to the case being named *Campo Algodonero [Cotton Field]*. Following the trial, the Inter-American Court found the Mexican government guilty and determined that the government was aware of the violent conditions that endangered women and girls in Ciudad Juárez but failed to take appropriate action to prevent violence, punish the perpetrators, or investigate the cases. Furthermore, the Court also held the government responsible for the deaths and disappearances of women due to negligence (Vázquez Camacho 2019). This case exposed the sexist, chauvinistic, and patriarchal political structure that perpetuates violence against women.

Moreover, Campo Algodonero has empowered and facilitated further feminist actions against feminicides. However, despite the actions required from the government, I believe that a cultural shift has yet to occur. Additionally, I see the ruling by the Inter-American Court as a warning that without profound changes, similar contexts of violence are likely to emerge throughout the country. In these challenging circumstances, the mothers, often accompanied by feminist activists, have moved beyond the confines of the private sphere to confront the government and the violence. Anti-*monumentas* have become a recurring method these mothers use to express their protests against the prevailing conditions.

In Ciudad Juárez, several anti-*monumentas* function as reminders of the victims, denounce crimes against women and challenge the official narrative. It is common in Mexico to come across small crosses or tiny altars at locations where someone has died, such as along highways, marking the spots of tragic car accidents. Therefore, the practice of placing crosses at the sites where women's

bodies have been found is not unexpected. However, the relatives of femicide victims have been erecting large pink crosses at these locations. These crosses serve not only as memorials but also as symbols against gender-based violence and provide a counter-narrative to that presented by the government. Nevertheless, this latter characteristic becomes evident only when one learns how families responded to the memorial of femicide victims coordinated by Chihuahua's government.

In 2011, as part of the government's restorative efforts, Chihuahua's government inaugurated a memorial called the *Memorial Campo Algodonero*. However, from its inauguration, which lacked the presence of high-profile politicians, the memorial was destined to fade into obscurity (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2020). The relatives of the victims felt that the location, Verónica Leiton's sculpture of a woman emerging from a flower, and the lack of involvement with the victims rendered the memorial an unsuitable public art project. Consequently, the families of the victims have established anti-monumentas at various locations in Ciudad Juárez. The families have chosen locations that are significant to them; as mentioned earlier, some are placed where women's bodies have been found, while other anti-monumentas have been installed where their protests will at least be acknowledged by those who have in some way contribute to the existence of femicides, whether through negligence, complicity or a lack of empathy.

### *The Anti-monumenta in Ciudad Juárez*

A significant example of Ciudad Juárez' anti-monumentas is the sizeable pink board with a black cross surrounded by large nails. While the tradition of placing crosses to invite others to pray for the souls of the deceased is common in Mexico, I observe some distinctions with the crosses used for femicides. In the Catholic Mexican context, the presence of pink crosses prompts a discussion about how innocent women are being sacrificed. The cross, representing Christ's sacrifice, is now employed to commemorate involuntarily sacrificed women. The first pink crosses appeared with the first cases of femicides, and it is precisely due to those first cases that women are protected today as they were seen as a justification to approve a law that exclusively protects women, even if the law is not enforced. However, unlike Christ, these victims of femicide did not choose to become victims, and it is essential to understand that women are not responsible for their murders. At the same time, all women and feminist activists need to recognise that the legal framework owes a permanent debt to those first cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

The pink colour of crosses placed where women's bodies are found holds dual connotations, associating it with the female gender and clearly stating that

the sole reason for their sacrifice is that they were women. Additionally, there are deliberate departures from certain religious symbols. Firstly, it deviates from the typical depiction of the male god often found on crosses. Secondly, instead of the traditional INRI (Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews), it bears the inscription *NiUnaMás* [*NotOneMore*], referring to the Latin American movement against feminicides and underscoring the collective nature of the victims. Thirdly, the nails are positioned outside the cross, serving as tools for hanging cards displaying the names and pictures of murdered women. These nails are not a form of punishment but rather a means of remembrance and activism. This was the first anti-*monumenta* dedicated to the victims of feminicide («Antimonumento. Espacio público», 2018). The government removed the original one; the second was stolen, apparently by organised crime. The third one was placed in Plaza Hidalgo in front of Chihuahua's government, and this last version included the Pieta from Guernica.

The initial placement of this anti-*monumenta*, situated on the border between the United States and Mexico, holds great significance. The emergence of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez was a direct result of the forced industrialisation agreed upon by these two countries, coupled with the lack of security in a borderland city that facilitated the transportation of goods, both legal and illegal. As pointed out by Sayak Valencia, many of the problems faced by Ciudad Juárez stem from its geographical location: 'Así, bajo las demandas del hiperconsumo, la precariedad y la constricción estatal surgen en las fronteras nuevas formas de socialización y autoridad que se recombinan a sí mismas y reconfiguran el concepto de periferia, alojando y configurando subjetividades endriagas que a su vez conforman verdaderos ejércitos sin Estado' (Valencia 2010, 125). The disparities at the border between Mexico and the USA, a boundary between developed and underdeveloped countries, became more evident after the NAFTA signature, although few dared to acknowledge them.

The mothers of the first victims of feminicides were among the first collectives to highlight the shared responsibilities of both countries regarding the violence. It is evident that these mothers have taught us various legal, activist, protest, and artistic methods to demand justice. Recent feminist efforts replicate many of these methods and build upon the legacy left by these courageous mothers.

### *Defining Violence Against Women and Feminicide*



Even after *Campo Algodonero* and the signing of international treaties such as CEDAW and Belem Do Pará, Mexico still ranks as the third most dangerous country in America for women. The Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 reveals that Mexico is placed 88<sup>th</sup> among 170 assessed countries. In terms of access to justice, Mexico ranks 43<sup>rd</sup>; however, when it comes to the security dimension, it falls to the 160<sup>th</sup> position (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security y Peace Research Institute Oslo Washington, DC). Beyond the statistics, these figures reflect that women in Mexico do not feel safe.

In this context, it is safe to assert that there is no single, uniform approach to addressing gender-based violence. However, certain definitions have had significant social and political impacts. Notably, Marcela Lagarde has made noteworthy contributions by providing a classification and the legal language that protects women from gender-based violence. Lagarde argues that gender-based violence encompasses any act that harms a woman due to prevailing socio-cultural constructs that position women as inferior to men or as objects to be possessed (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2015). Acknowledging the impossibility of identifying a single cause for all instances of violence against women, she has come up with a classification based on where it occurs, the type of harm inflicted and the aggressor. Regarding the context, violence can be domestic, institutional, political, “feminicidal”, workplace violence, and community-based violence. Meanwhile, according to the type of harm suffered by the victims, it can be psychological, physical, sexual, economic, or patrimonial (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2012). Furthermore, she has defined and conceptualised the term *feminicidio* as the murder of a woman because of her gender (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2006). Lagarde adapted Russell and Radford’s concept of femicide (Russell and Radford 1992) to the Mexican case. Claiming it is because of her gender encompasses all situations in which a woman is regarded as inferior simply because she is a woman or when she is reduced to a sexual object, for example.

Lagarde’s diagnosis of the issue of feminicides has been valuable. Still, the lack of commitment on the part of authorities, the complicity between men and certain institutions (referred to as the patriarchal pact), and the systemic violence against women that is both symbolically and physically perpetuated are some of the reasons behind the feminist anger that led to actions such as the installation of the *Glorieta*. While Lagarde’s conceptualisation of violence against women is insightful, I prefer to approach the phenomenon from an intersectional and transfeminist perspective.

Approaching violence from an intersectional lens acknowledges that gender, race, ethnicity, social strata, nationality, religion, gender identity, age, education, and other factors collectively shape women’s experiences of violence. Besides advocating for an intersectional perspective because it is more inclusive

and comprehensive, it is better suited to examine the *Glorieta* when considering the diverse identities involved in installing the anti-*monumenta*.

### **The Implications of Calling it a Transfeminist New Genre of Public Art Anti-Monument**

The *Glorieta*'s installation, maintenance, and defence represent an ongoing decolonial and transfeminist act. Classifying it as a new public art genre aligns it with other projects that share characteristics with projects borrowing elements from activism, art, and public interventions. The *Glorieta* now stands on what used to be the *Glorieta de Colón* [*Columbus Roundabout*]. Its significance as a transfeminist and decolonial statement goes beyond simply replacing a statue of a coloniser. It is important because it challenges popular representations of women, questions the government's intentions with this public space, rejects a heteropatriarchal imposition of how to portray the feminist struggle and confronts the symbolic violence perpetuated through the historical urban narrative in Mexico City.

Moreover, it serves as a permanent activist act, designating a specific space to be updated as often as women feel the need, and by merely existing, it represents a feminist triumph over the system. Before delving further into the analysis, it is essential to provide key conceptualisations of transfeminism, new genre public art, and anti-monuments.

Transfeminism advocates for women, understanding this category as a political label transcending biological essentialism. By doing so, the transfeminist proposal I explore offers an intersectional perspective which is not as clear in Lagarde's project. As Valencia points out, when violence serves as a 'herramienta para el enriquecimiento puede identificarse de forma creciente en distintos espacios geopolíticamente lejanos y que sus consecuencias recaen reiteradamente sobre los cuerpos y los sujetos feminizados' (Valencia 2018). From my perspective, gender-based violence is a perpetuation of a binary order that enables and supports neoliberal capitalist production systems. In this context, the killing of women becomes a manifestation of male power and control over women, an assertion of ownership, or the mistreatment of perceived property. Therefore, I consider the actions of mothers who refuse to let society forget their daughters and transfeminist activists as genuine acts of resistance against a global system. They challenge and reject the acceptance of reality as a norm.

By highlighting the struggles and resistance of these individuals, we gain a better understanding of the deep-seated inequalities and oppressive structures

that underlie gender-based violence. An excellent example of these acts and an understanding of gender can be found in the artistic and theoretical work of the artists, as mentioned above, LasTesis. They point out that the violent effects of the alliance between patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism are ‘felt most deeply by women and those with counter-hegemonic bodies’ (LasTesis 2023, 13). There are no different forms of patriarchy oppressing diverse identities in distinct ways. It is crucial to understand that discrimination against women, their relegation to the private sphere, feminicides, transfeminicides, and all forms of gender-based violence are rooted in the same system. Therefore, it is logical that LasTesis continue: ‘As long as we continue to live at the intersection of neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy, we will only see sporadic “improvements,” quick-fix solutions that, though much needed, are far from enough’ (LasTesis 2023, 15). The demands promoted by the feminists in the *Glorieta* will only be realised after the disarticulation of the patriarchal system. However, unlike LasTesis’ performance, which was easily replicated worldwide, the significance of the *Glorieta* is partly due to its location. This is why I consider it to be new genre public art and an anti-monumenta.

Anti-monuments and anti-monumentas function as urban scars and memorial devices for the victims, serving as a constant reminder to those responsible for their actions. Liliana Ovalle and Díaz Tovar, based on extensive ethnographic research with relatives of feminicide and enforced disappearance victims, have conceptualised anti-monuments as complex and context-specific creations (Ovalle and Díaz Tovar 2019). They are not defined by their opposition to existing monuments but rather by their challenge to the government’s statements and official narratives surrounding specific events. Since they are collective in nature, anti-monuments must address many demands and needs, resulting in a collage-like aesthetic. Their purpose is not to endure indefinitely but to exist until justice is served and the victims are recognised. Anti-monuments are typically placed in locations that hold significance for the victims, often where the crimes occurred (Ovalle and Díaz Tovar 2019, 6-7). The *Glorieta* exhibits several characteristics of an anti-monument, particularly considering the victims’ relatives. However, instead of conceiving the entire installation as an anti-monument, it is more accurate to state that it includes one anti-monument while offering a much more complex composition, which justifies the exploration of Lacy’s conceptualisation.

Suzanne Lacy introduced the concept of new genre public art in 1994 in her book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Lacy 1995). She aimed to provide analytical and discussion tools while clarifying what she and others had been doing since the 1970s. She defined public art as “visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives” (Lacy 1995,

19). However, Lacy identified new qualities that set some projects apart from traditional public art; their source is “not exclusively visual or political information but rather an internal necessity perceived by the artists in collaboration with his or her audience” (Lacy 1995, 19). This means that instead of an artist conceiving an artwork publicly displayed with a political message, the conception of the artwork emerges from the interaction with an audience. For this to be successful, engagement is essential (Lacy 1995), since otherwise, the audience may perceive the artwork as an ideological imposition. Artists become involved with communities and create due to a critical investigation rather than a proposal derived from “artistic media-specific concerns” (Lacy 1995, 25). Above all, what distinguishes some projects as new genre public art is that they are “not built on a typology of materials, spaces or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention” (Lacy 1995). While I find this category helpful in understanding the *Glorieta*, it is essential to note that, unlike the projects analysed in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, the Mexican case did not have a Mexican artist coordinating or leading the installation of the *Glorieta*. Instead, artists joined the actions and followed the audience’s requests.

### **A Historical Overview of the *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan***

The location of the *Glorieta* is not accidental, nor was it intended to strengthen the country’s centralisation. Mexico City has been the site of some of the most significant feminist demonstrations, drawing men from all over the country who travel to the capital from various states to participate in these protests. While women in all 32 states of Mexico, as well as across Latin America, support movements such as *NiUnaMenos* or *MeToo*, when they have demands or petitions that require the intervention of federal authorities, they need to travel to the capital, because all federal institutions are located there. Initially, the installation of the *Glorieta* in this location could be seen as a centralist action, which might contradict the idea of calling it transfeminist. However, the *Glorieta* offers a permanent space for all Mexican women to protest and gain a spotlight when demanding federal intervention. Furthermore, the permanent element ensures that those demonstrations for which women from all over the country gather are perpetuated. I am not undermining the importance of protests on special dates (March 8<sup>th</sup>, September 28<sup>th</sup>, and November 25<sup>th</sup>, for example); instead, I would argue that together, the site and the protests offer two powerful platforms where multiple voices can be heard.

Transfeminism advocates for deconstructing the notion of “altern” and “subaltern” voices. On the one hand, I believe that when asserting that all identities oppressed by the heteropatriarchal system deserve to be heard, there is an underlying statement affirming that all perspectives are necessary to understand how this oppression operates. Otherwise, transfeminism would risk becoming like other feminist movements, which privilege only a few voices. On the other hand, those who have been considered as “subaltern” voices have learned the language of the hegemonic power (Barrera 2023). Furthermore, many “subaltern” women are actively deconstructing multiple spheres to expose patriarchy and suggest alternative ways of expression (Curiel 2016). It is not that the subaltern cannot speak or be understood; it is more likely that those privileged by the hegemonic power do not want to listen. The awareness of this issue is another reason why feminists are so angry, frustrated, and disappointed in the system. This sentiment has been expressed during the negotiations and meetings around the *Glorieta* and in some of the iconoclastic expressions associated with the movement.



Figure 2. Shoshana Turkia. (2023). Women burning their posters after a demonstration in Mexico City. Photography. Reproduced with Turkia’s permission.

The *Glorieta* shares some similarities with how feminist iconoclasm has been defined. Feminists engage in the intervention of monuments, statues, and buildings that represent patriarchal oppression. Iconoclasm has been defined as the ‘la destrucción del arte como una crítica social, política, religiosa o estética. Dichos monumentos son considerados iconos y su destrucción tiene un fondo político, que no necesariamente se puede entender como un acto de vandalismo o mera destrucción.’ (Apolinar Navarro, Aguilar Balderas, y Moreno Velador 2022). While I agree with some aspects of this definition, I would avoid using the noun “destruction” to prevent any possibility of criminalising the protests. Instead, words like “intervention” or “resignification” seem more appropriate, considering the objectives behind iconoclasm. Sometimes, this is done to draw attention to their demands, such as “Nos están matando” (They are killing us). At other times, feminists challenge the patriarchal historical narrative supported by monuments and statues, which predominantly depict male heroes. When a statue portrays a woman, it often symbolises abstract concepts like justice.

Additionally, the installation of anti-monuments had become a common strategy. In this regard, I agree with Anne Rigney (Rigney 2022, 34) and advocate for preserving the statues to enhance historical memory. Rigney claims this when analysing the removal of Colston’s statue in Bristol (Rigney 2022). First, by the end, it was not an activist group knocking down Columbus; it was the government preventing iconoclasm. Secondly, Columbus was not a benefactor to Mexicans; he did not even set foot in Mexico, but he found for the colonisers of Mexico a land in which the population was slaughtered and dominated. Thirdly, feminists have resignified the site, but the remaining caste system guarantees that the colonisation is as relevant as it was while the Columbus statue was there. Nevertheless, I would promote the idea of keeping the statues once they have been ‘vandalised’, and their contradictory history is revealed. However, in the case of the *Glorieta*, activists did not remove Columbus’ statue; it was the government protecting the statue more than they protected some women.

Demanding the demolition of monuments or the preservation of anti-monuments is something that Suzanne Lacy noticed when defining new genre public art. Furthermore, she precisely observes how it is unfair to force Chicax or Latinx communities to respect the statues of Columbus, as these might reassert a notion of colonised identities as inferior. Thus, calling other anti-monuments in Mexico City as new genre public art would not be far-fetched. For example, the first anti-*monumenta* in Mexico City. On 8 March 2019, feminist collectives placed the first anti-*monumenta* (the term used for feminist anti-monuments is written in the feminine form) in downtown Mexico City, right in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, one of the most important cultural buildings and art

institutes. This anti-*monumenta* features a purple Venus symbol rejecting passivity, with a raised fist emerging from its centre. The message inscribed on it reads: “¡Ni una más! En México, 9 mujeres son asesinadas al día” (Not one more! In Mexico, 9 women are murdered every day). Despite attempts by authorities to remove it, the anti-monument has become a permanent fixture, often adorned by women who hang the names of new victims, serving as a constant reminder and ensuring no victim of femicide is forgotten. This last element, shared with other anti-monuments, is not only a significant remembrance act but a challenge to the statement that “One of the strengths of patriarchal states lies in the invisibility and historical denial of violence against women” (LasTesis 2023, 17). I, therefore, notice how there is a change when calling an anti-monument and anti-*monumenta*, in the feminine, even if it is considered a misspelt word. They are memory-triggering like other anti-monuments while also perpetually challenging the patriarchal system. Similar anti-*monumentas* have been placed in other cities like Guadalajara or Morelia, indicating that this form of resistance and memory preservation is not limited to a single location and is part of a broader movement.

Claiming that the *Glorieta* is a transfeminist new genre public art project implies that it involves a memory exercise. This aspect is also shared with other anti-monuments. Edgar Rodríguez López uses an interesting term to describe what these actions are challenging: “desmemoria” (Rodríguez López 2019, 196). While there is no direct English translation for “desmemoria,” it is similar in meaning to “forgetfulness,” it implies the deliberate destruction of memories. So, when Rodríguez López states that feminist iconoclastic actions are “batallas contra la desmemoria,” he is suggesting that they are actively combating the ongoing erasure of memory with the imposition of a false and official narrative of the facts.

The location of the *Glorieta* on Paseo de la Reforma, among other anti-monuments,<sup>4</sup> holds significant importance, as noted by Délano and Nienass, as it

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<sup>4</sup> There are five other anti-monuments in Reforma. *Guardería ABC*, installed by parents of the children who died in a fire inside a childcare centre due to negligence. The 65+ anti-monument to remind Mexicans about the tragedy inside the mine 8 in Coahuila which exploited as a result of the poor conditions and lack of maintenance. The *Guardián de las y los desaparecidos* [The Guardian of the Enforced Disappeared Women and Men] which is a try the relatives of victims of enforced disappearance appropriated. The *43 de Ayotzinapa*, dedicated to the 43 disappeared students by organised crime and the army in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. The *72*, dedicated to the 72 immigrants who were violently murdered by organised crime. *Rescatemos a David y Miguel* [Let's rescue David and Miguel], an anti-monument installed by David and Miguel's mother and sister, both were kidnapped when travelling to Guerrero. Nearby Reforma, one can also find the anti-

is the “most famous avenue in Mexico City” (2023, 16). These authors describe how the presence of anti-monuments challenges the official heroic and historical narrative while exposing the government’s involvement with criminal groups. However, it is essential to add a gender perspective when examining the *anti-monumentas*, which Déllano and Nienass missed. While I agree that the *Glorieta* fulfils many of the characteristics described by Déllano and Nienass, such as allowing us to reflect on the temporality of protests, being part of the agitated political register, and ensuring their own afterlife (2023, 20), due to its transfeminist nature, it also embodies other qualities.

Notably, the *Glorieta* confronts the sexist and violent urban narrative that has traditionally been perpetuated along Paseo de la Reforma. This narrative is reflected in the primarily male hero statues and the dedication of female statues to mythological and often half-naked figures. The *Glorieta* portrays women as they wish to be displayed, challenging the chauvinist historical narrative perpetuated by the statues along Reforma.

Meanwhile, the perpetuation of the neoliberal system that fuels patriarchy and gender-based violence has been a significant source of feminist anger, significantly because many believed they were on the verge of significant changes. Several factors, including dissatisfaction with the current government and high-profile cases of femicide and sexual assault, have fuelled the feminist unrest in Mexico.

When Andrés Manuel López Obrador assumed the presidency in 2017, his victory was initially welcomed by feminists who hoped for a left-wing administration aligned with pacifist and feminist ideals. After more than a decade of the war on organised crime, more than 100,000 enforced disappearance victims, and nearly three decades of femicide, there was a strong desire for change. It is important to recognise that no government is entirely without merit, and any administration will have both positive and negative aspects. In Mexico, significant progress has been made in reducing gender gaps and implementing critical legal reforms, although it is worth noting that many of these reforms were motivated by victims of gender-based violence rather than being solely attributed to the government’s efforts. However, specific actions and statements by the president and his administration have raised concerns about their commitment to an agenda

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monument dedicated to the students murdered by the Government in 1968 (Déllano Alonso y Nienass 2023).



aimed at eradicating gender-based violence. These concerns have contributed to the growing feminist unrest and activism in the country.

López Obrador's security strategy and the establishment of the National Guard have been points of contention among critics. Many argue that his administration's approach to security is a continuation of the militarised strategies against organised crime initiated by previous presidents, Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto. Critics contend that despite leadership changes, the number of people who have disappeared or been killed continues to rise.

Feminists in Mexico have expressed particular concern about López Obrador's remarks regarding gender-based violence, especially during his daily morning TV briefings known as the *Mañaneras*. His comments dismissing feminist demands and minimising the severity of gender-based violence, such as suggesting that many emergency calls from women are false alarms or claiming that conservatives are manipulating feminists to undermine his administration, have ignited strong reactions.

While López Obrador has taken specific symbolic steps to acknowledge victims of violence, including issuing public apologies and opening archives, family organisations and civil society groups have been disappointed by his dismissal of claims about the ongoing violence and human rights abuses during his administration. Moreover, feminists have questioned how the authorities seem to focus on protecting buildings and monuments rather than addressing the concerns of the feminist community, which reflects a systemic issue where women's safety and rights are often neglected or dismissed. Instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the protesters, authorities sometimes view feminist actions as acts of violence, further victimising themselves. In response to the authorities' failure to address their concerns, feminists used direct action, such as tagging buildings and monuments, to draw attention to their demands for women's safety. These actions are part of the larger feminist movement in Mexico, which seeks to challenge the systemic issues that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality. Thus, the *Glorieta* stands with the feminist resistance while it highlights the urgent need for change and justice in the face of gender-based violence. It is a transfeminist proposal that recognises feminicides as a result of deep-rooted inequalities within the patriarchal binary system and is a call to address these issues at their core.

The *Glorieta* was the unexpected result of a campaign called *Lo vamos a derribar* [We are going to bring it down]. This campaign was initiated in October 2020 in response to the ongoing decolonisation discussions in Latin America. The campaign aimed to challenge and reconsider the celebration of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas on October 12, 1492. While the day is commemorated as *Día de la Hispanidad* in Spain and as *Columbus Day* in the

United States, it is called *Día de la Raza* [Race Day] in some Latin American countries, including Mexico.

The celebration of Columbus' arrival has faced increasing criticism for its association with racism, xenophobia, and colonialism, as historical accounts and the experiences of marginalised communities have shed light on the genocide and oppression perpetrated by Columbus and other colonial figures. As a result, many have called for a reevaluation of the holiday and the need to confront its problematic legacy. In this sense, *Lo vamos, a derribar*, advocated for removing statues and monuments celebrating Columbus. However, it was the government who removed the statue. While Sheinbaum's administration cited the need for restoration, activists questioned whether the removal was primarily intended to protect the statue or to address the social demands expressed by the public. That same day, at night, feminists 'conquered' the roundabout and installed the wooden figure of a girl or a young woman and named it *Glorieta de las mujeres que lucha*.

In response to the feminist conquest of the roundabout, the government announced its decision to replace the statue of Columbus with a representation of indigenous women with Olmec heritage, as designed by artist Pedro Reyes, claiming they aimed to contribute to the decolonial discussion. While the government's intention may have been to commemorate the International Day of Indigenous Women and symbolise Indigenous heritage, it appears that the proposal did not align with these communities' and stakeholders' expectations and desires. Instead of calming the activists, the announcement triggered various reactions from various groups, including women, indigenous communities, artists and historians. The adverse reactions and anger suggest that there may have been issues related to the design, the decision-making process, or a lack of genuine consultation with the affected groups, including the women who, by then, saw the permanence of the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* threatened. It is important to consider the perspectives and voices of indigenous communities, women, and other stakeholders when deciding on public art and commemorations, especially when addressing sensitive historical and cultural issues. This situation underscores the significance of engaging with communities and stakeholders to ensure that public art and commemorations are respectful and meaningful to the people they are meant to represent or honour.

The controversy surrounding the proposed replacement of the Columbus statue with a representation of indigenous women designed by Pedro Reyes reflects the complexities and sensitivities surrounding issues of indigenous representation, cultural appropriation and consultation. Therefore, the government came up with a second suggestion. This second project suggested placing a replica of the Joven de Amajac. On 1 January 2021, in Hidalgo de Amajac, archaeologists

found the figure of a young pre-Hispanic woman. Without a proper dialogue, the government announced that a magnified replica of an indigenous woman would substitute Columbus. Aside from the lack of consultation, I agree with Sandra Rozental when asserting that the act fails when assuming ‘que la apropiación y uso de un objeto prehispánico por el estado y su utilización como símbolo de la indigenidad de la nación es un acto neutro y políticamente correcto’ (Rozental 2021). Individuals did not answer this last proposal, but it was contested by the collective formed by women to defend the *Glorieta* called *Frente Amplio de las Mujeres que Luchan*.

The indigenous women part of the Frente Amplio de las Mujeres que Luchan, considered that the action perpetuated the colonialist scheme in which they are represented according to official interests, not adequately consulted and disregarding their intentions. Like the rest of the groups, the indigenous women support the idea of the roundabout as the site that recognises women fighting. Meanwhile, regarding the government’s projects, the ongoing disconnect and lack of genuine dialogue between the government and the indigenous women involved in the *Frente Amplio de Mujeres que Lucha* highlights the complexity of addressing such issues. The government’s false claim of having engaged in dialogue with the indigenous women, immediately contradicted by the FAML, is indicative of the need for transparency and genuine engagement when dealing with sensitive matters like public art and commemorations.

The indigenous women have expressed their desire for the roundabout to remain a place for women to denounce, gather, and organise their fight against the systemic issues they face. While they remain open to the idea of integrating a monument recognising Mexico’s indigenous women, the government’s actions, such as dismantling the *Glorieta* and neglecting to present a project during discussion tables, have eroded trust and hindered the possibilities of negotiation or agreement (Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos 2021). The situation underscores the importance of approaching public art and commemorative projects with a deep respect for the perspectives and experiences of the communities involved, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their concerns addressed. The ongoing struggle over the *Glorieta* serves as a reminder of the need for more inclusive, transparent and respectful processes in these endeavours.

Guaranteeing that the *Glorieta* acts as a platform for voices to be amplified is a clear transfeminist endeavour. Unlike other feminist efforts in which one feminist collected the voice of women, reinforcing a hierarchy, in the *Glorieta* there is a recognition that every woman already has a voice. In some cases, these voices have been ignored or silenced, therefore, the activist involved with the Frente Amplio de las Mujeres que Luchan guarantee that as many channels as possible are used to listen to those who need to be heard. Aside from

the meetings and official publications, they also have an active Instagram account. Their posts include photographic register, denunciations of when the government has dismantled parts of the *Glorieta* and testimonies of women showing the multiple backgrounds and fights that are behind the installation of the *Glorieta*.

The night-time installation of the purple silhouette of a girl served as a quiet yet powerful act of reclaiming public space and reshaping its narrative. However, the ongoing challenges and controversies related to the protection and maintenance of the *Glorieta* demonstrate the complexities of engaging in such aggressive and transformative acts within the public space.

### **The Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan as a Transfeminist New Genre Public Art Installation**



Figure 3. Chicatanas. (2023). Encuentro de Resistencias en la Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan. Photography. Reproduced for this article with permission from Antimonumenta\_VivasNosQueremos

The *Glorieta* indeed exhibits several characteristics of an anti-monument, which is evident in its approach to addressing gender-based violence, femicide, and enforced disappearances. Like anti-monuments, it challenges the official narratives and statements of the government concerning these issues. The installation creates a collective space that acknowledges the multifaceted demands and needs of the feminist movement, resulting in a diverse and collage-like aesthetic that captures the complexity of these issues. By embodying the characteristics of anti-monuments, the *Glorieta* serves as a powerful symbol of

resistance against the prevailing systems of oppression and violence. It strives to keep the memory of the victims alive and to demand justice while challenging official narratives and policies regarding gender-based violence and femicide.

The installation of the wooden silhouette of a young woman at the *Glorieta* is indeed a powerful and symbolic statement within the collective effort to address gender-based violence and create a feminist anti-monument. This installation carries several significant elements that add to its meaning and impact. First, the colour choice; the use of purple, often associated with feminist protest against violence, highlights the feminist nature of the installation and its purpose in confronting the prevailing system of gender-based violence. Secondly, the matter of representation; a young girl or woman symbolises the commitment to working towards a better world for future generations. It sends a powerful message that the fight against gender-based violence and oppression is ongoing, and the installation serves as a beacon of hope for a fairer future. Thirdly, using a silhouette rather than a specific representation, inclusivity allows women from diverse backgrounds, contexts, and ethnicities to identify with the statue. This inclusivity underscores the idea that the struggle against gender-based violence is a collective effort that transcends individual identities. Fourthly, the defiant stance; the statue's posture, with one raised fist, communicates a sense of defiance and protest. It challenges the conventional depictions of women as either passive or heroic figures and asserts that women are fighting.

The anti-monuments' ultimate goal would be achieved through restoration, recognition, a national remembrance initiative, and the pursuit of justice for all these families. To amplify their struggle against a system that failed to deliver justice for their daughters, the mothers erected a pink cross reminiscent of those in Ciudad Juárez. However, a distinction can be drawn between this cross and the ones in Ciudad Juárez: while the latter is typically placed at the sites where women were murdered, this cross stands prominently in the heart of the country's capital. Thus, I interpret this cross as both a memorial and a protest symbol, conveying that regardless of location, being a woman in Mexico means being at constant risk. It serves as a reminder to the government that all women are potential victims until effective measures are taken to prevent femicides and enforced disappearances.

New genre public art includes artworks that use different media to offer a project that is 'alive'. Aside from mentioning gardens, being alive also means that they could constantly be updated or modified by those groups for whom it was created (Lippard 1996, 121). In that sense, the *Jardín somos memoria* [Garden, We are Memory], part of the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan*, offers a canvas to name all the victims of femicide and enforced disappearance. Its installation

was a form of resistance, with feminists and mothers of victims coming together to defend the anti-monument. Mothers of the victims created the *Jardín somos memoria* when feminists replaced the wooden statue with a metallic one and inscribed the names of some of the victims. For the garden, they adapted the existing monument garden surrounding the statue. In addition to seeking justice, the mothers have demanded that their daughters' names be remembered, that their stories serve as a deterrent for similar cases, and that the government be held accountable for its poor performance. For them, the anti-monuments are publicly grieving sites where they gather to mourn (Diéguez 2013). Women from different backgrounds, including those who recognised themselves as women, could intervene in the garden to ensure their daughters, sisters and friends are remembered. To ensure that these names are not erased, the mothers installed mosaics on metal structures affixed to the concrete, featuring the names of victims of femicide, enforced disappearance, and displacement by paramilitaries.

Increasing the similarities between the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* and the new genre public art projects, the *Glorieta* includes an artwork that was also included in one of Lacy's projects in 1977. The *Tendedero de denuncias* [Clothesline of Denounces] within the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* can be seen as an enduring symbol of protest, just like it was in *Three Weeks in May*. The feminist artist Mónica Mayer proposed the first *Tendedero* (Mónica Mayer 2016). Initially, Mayer used the Clothesline as a means for women to voice their grievances about their cities, deconstructing a symbol associated with the private sphere and offering a peaceful tool to bring personal matters into the political realm. In 1977, while pursuing her master's degree at CalArts Woman's Building, Mayer adapted the Clothesline as part of Suzanne Lacy's community artistic intervention titled *Three Weeks in May* (Lacy 2022). This project brought together various NGOs and artists to coordinate thirty events aimed at combating sexual violence and rape in California. The Clothesline served as a platform for women to denounce and share their testimonies within this context.

Since then, influenced by the MeToo movement, the Clothesline has taken on a life of its own (Monica Mayer y Noriega Vega 2021). Therefore, it is essential to follow Lacy when examining *El Tendedero*, so an analysis of these projects should not be limited to 'a typology of materials, spaces, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention' (Lacy 1995a, 28). Therefore, it should not be surprising that each clothesline answers to different objectives: denouncing or enouncing a problem, hanging the names of the perpetrators, etcetera. The one in the *Glorieta* allows women to answer to two questions: Why did I denounce? Or why didn't I denounce? Feminists were aiming to confront and reply to all of those claiming there are other proper ways to get justice. Women share their anecdotes of

revictimization, negligence on behalf of the authorities, social disbeliefs and other challenges around denouncing gender-based violence.

Unlike the projects examined in Lacy's publication, the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* was not solely the result of an artist's deep engagement with a specific community (although some artists were involved), but rather a manifestation of the collective protests of a community. However, if new genre public art is constantly evolving to satisfy the needs of a specific community, the fact that Mayer allowed her artwork to be adapted without her intervention confirms its nature as new genre public art. The *Tendedero de denuncias* and the barricades protecting the original monument's pedestal are active installations providing women a platform to express themselves. Multiple Clotheslines have been created without Mayer's direct involvement, allowing women to denounce their aggressors. However, in the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan*, where Mayer was actively involved, the Clothesline returned to its original purpose of condemning a specific situation rather than naming individuals. Women utilise the Clothesline in the *Glorieta* to share their reasons for not reporting incidents of violence, highlighting stories of intimidation, revictimisation, inadequate judicial mechanisms, and social and familial contexts that discourage women from denouncing gender-based violence crimes.

The *Glorieta* serves several purposes. As a new genre public art installation, it offers an opened site which can be intervened and modified by the activists involved to guarantee it is always relevant. Since it embraces transfeminism, it can also be adapted to include as diverse demands as profiles included in its defence and re-installations. The anti-*monumenta* perpetuates the fighting women who protests several times during the year. Meanwhile, the *Jardín somos memoria* is a memorial with two objectives. The main objective is that of the mothers who placed the names of the victims; it is their mourning site. However, by placing the memorial in a public site, they are also inviting others to name all the victims, to remember them or to realise the consequences of gender-based violence in Mexico. It is really hard to imagine someone would undermine the feminist cause when seeing all the names of the victims of feminicides. The barricades offer a permanent white canvas to write the names of new victims or demand justice, rights or measures to guarantee equality or the eradication of gender-based violence.

Finally, I would argue that the refusal of the Frente Amplio de las Mujeres que Luchan to relocate the elements of the *Glorieta* reflects a continuous transfeminist stance. Firstly, it aligns with the sentiments of many women in Mexico who may not fully embrace the idea of museums, memorials, or official sites of memory that authorities support. This is a perspective shared with many



women who have been part of memory efforts in Chile. Many cultural institutions do ‘not fully embrace the museum, the memorials, and most of the recovered sites of memory that the authorities have managed to support’ (Badilla Rajevic 2019, 738). These women may feel that such institutions are not genuinely committed to addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and creating a more equitable society.

Secondly, and more importantly, this refusal reflects the transfeminist identity of the *Glorieta*. The location on Paseo de la Reforma, amidst the other monuments and official space, serves as a platform for women to confront the system and make their voices heard. Moving to museums or other cultural institutions could be seen as a compromise that doesn’t align to dismantle the heteronormative, patriarchal system that perpetuates feminicides and gender-based violence. Being in the heart of the city and refusing to move represents a defiance and unapologetic stand against the oppressive system that needs to be challenged for real change to occur.

## Conclusion

Transfeminism is at the core of the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* as it was installed by women from diverse backgrounds who question gender-based violence as a natural male behaviour. The women took advantage of an empty site, conquered the public space and confronted violence in a way that, *per se*, opposes to the traditional gender roles. By including an anti-monumenta, a memory garden, a pink cross, a clothesline and taking advantage of the barricades, the *Glorieta* offers more possibilities for activists than other anti-monumentas. The involvement of committed artists, activists, mothers and relatives of victims of femicide victims and, feminists from diverse spheres, guarantees that whatever takes place as part of the *Glorieta* is the result of deep social commitment which outcome emerges as an artistic expression linking it with Lacy’s conceptualisation of *new genre public art*. Its history, preservation and use posit it as a permanent act of activism which reinforces the feminist and decolonial demonstrations and protest. The permanence of the *Glorieta* should be agreed by all the Mexican women looking for justice. As of today, the institutional recognition of the roundabout as the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* is only to guarantee its permanence because, even without this, for all the women defending the same ideals, it already is a place honouring women fighting and, a place to unit and look for alternative and non-violent ways of inhabiting in the country as a woman.

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