

Visual and Embodied Politics: Activism and the Contemporary Feminist Movement in Peru

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I, Phoebe Sarah Martin confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract:

This thesis uses visual and embodied politics as a novel way of understanding the contemporary feminist movement in Peru, and the renewal of feminist activism in the country since 2016. In so doing, it provides original insights into the role of contemporary creative activist interventions broadly conceived to include practices ranging from performance to digital media, to quotidian actions. It argues that through these contemporary feminist activism in Peru targets cultural and societal change and moves away from strategies specifically targeting the state and legal change. This 'visual and embodied' turn reflects disillusionment with the institutional approaches of feminism in the 1990s and 2000s.

This is not a new phenomenon. Rather the ways that these strategies are used by young activists suggests a distinct generational shift for feminism today. In the digital age, the visual politics of feminism are essential for transmitting ideas across boundaries between the online and the offline, the transnational and the local. Although the digital seems to dominate current discussions around activism, the body remains central to contemporary activism. It operates as both an activist site for bodily autonomy but also as a tool for activism, with activists putting their bodies on the line in order to make their claims. The intersection of embodied and visual politics raises important questions of representation. If the body is both a site and tool of activism, then we must consider issues of race, ethnicity, gender identity and disability when asking which bodies are on the line in this new activist environment? Further, what role does the digital play in shaping visual and embodied politics?

Studies of visual and embodied forms of activism have tended to prioritise either visual studies or social movement studies perspectives, rarely combining the two. By taking an

interdisciplinary approach that draws on in-person and digital ethnography, interviews, and visual methods, this thesis provides a new approach to the study of activism as feminist activism. Combining approaches through interdisciplinarity is essential to fully understand this issue as it straddles both the online and the offline; the local and the transnational; the visual and the embodied. In doing so, this thesis complicates our perspectives on feminist activism in Peru, and new feminisms across Latin America by providing novel analysis of the ways that activists are able to negotiate the shifts between physical and digital, and create new spaces of activism, through visual and embodied politics.

Impact Statement:

This thesis has the potential to have an impact both inside and outside of academia. In terms of its scholarly contribution this is twofold: the methodological contribution to the study of social movements in the digital age, and to the scholarship on Latin American feminism and contemporary Peru. Outside of academia, this work was developed with NGOs and activists, and its contributions can be used to guide such groups looking to fund creative forms of activism.

I take a novel approach to the study of feminist activism in the digital age, by combining methods for studying in-person and online activism. By understanding that it is not possible to study one without the other, and rather, scholars should consider the spaces 'in-between' the digital and the physical. This is particularly relevant to the study of social movements during COVID-19 when the digital still spilled into the streets, for example the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, even when countries were under quarantine measures. The methodological innovations in this thesis also contribute to the development of digital ethnography and underlines the importance of taking into account the embodied dimensions of the digital.

Secondly, this thesis contributes to the literature on Latin American feminism, as it experiences a resurgence in activism and achievements. The Peruvian case complicates the literature by providing an example of a situation in which feminist activists are present and visible, but struggle to achieve legal and societal change due to the power of the societal right and rising tides of conservatism. Additionally, this work also contributes to the field of Peruvian studies, in which the contemporary feminist movement has not received as much

attention as the historical movement or the popular women's movement. In analysing contemporary feminism and its relationship to the state we can also see how these lessons can be applied to other social movements in Peru.

Outside of academic impact, this work was developed by working with activists and feminist NGOs. Many organisations and charities are looking to fund artistic and creative interventions, particularly after the success of actions like 'A Rapist in Your Path' (Las Tesis, 2019). However, such actions also need to be developed in collaboration with communities and activists to have a meaningful impact, and most importantly, not to perpetuate patterns of exclusion. This thesis demonstrates that Organisations should take a critical approach to the use of art as a political strategy, and not carry out what has sometimes been termed 'art washing'. Artistic and creative strategies can have serious and lasting impacts as spaces to explore contentious, emotional, and traumatic issues, but only if they are conceived and carried out with care.

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This work is dedicated to all the feminists in Peru, those who I met, those who I marched alongside, and those who continue to struggle even when change feels impossible.

This thesis would have been impossible to write without the support and encouragement of my supervisors, who pushed me to continue with this project in its many iterations. They were the ones who suggested I visit Peru in the first place back in 2016 to investigate feminist poetry and activism. Without that first visit, I would not have seen the possibilities and strength of the feminist movement in Peru.

Many versions of this thesis and the ideas within were discussed with my wonderful research group, whose enthusiasm and feminist power knows no bounds. I would also like to dedicate it to my wonderful family, friends, and partner, who have always been proud of me, even when I have not been.

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Figure 1.1 A bundle of numbered red balloons used in the performance ‘¿Cuántas más?’

(Photo: author’s own)

This bundle of red balloons with white numbers, formed part of a performance called ‘¿*Cuántas más?*’ (How many more?) carried out by feminist activists in Lima. The title implicitly asks ‘how many more victims of feminicide will there be in Peru this year?’. When the performance took place in August 2019 there had already been 100 cases so far that year. A total of 148 women would go on to die by feminicide in 2019¹. Peru has only collected data on feminicide since 2015, and it became a specific crime in 2018 when the Peruvian

¹ Comité Estadístico Interinstitucional de la Criminalidad, *Perú: Feminicidio y Violencia Contra La Mujer 2015-2020*, 20.

Penal Code was modified to include femicide as a specific crime². However, femicide is just one part of the spectrum of gender violence in Peru, ranging from the most extreme, to pervasive street harassment and other quotidian forms of violence. According to official statistics from the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP), in 2021, there were 10,251 reported cases of rape; a significant majority of victims (67.6%) were under the age of 18³. 67.6% of women report experiencing some kind of violence – psychological, physical or sexual – at some point in their lives⁴. The real figures are probably significantly higher⁵. Crimes are generally underreported in Peru; 68% of victims of crimes did not make a report, and this is likely to be even higher in cases of gender-based violence⁶. In this way, gender-based violence is in many ways part of the daily reality of Peru.

In the above photo the red balloons are held together in one bundle, but some are more clearly visible than others, some are hidden entirely, and others seem to be trying to escape the group. This can be seen as a metaphor for the ways that victims of femicide are seen or more often *not* seen by the public. High-profile, shocking cases appear on the front pages of tabloids which exploit them as scandals or tales of ‘love gone wrong’. Yet, the majority of cases appear only as statistics or police reports, when the violence perpetrated against the victims is not deemed shocking enough for the mass-mediatic gaze.

Within this context, how do feminists try to represent the gender violence that seeps into all aspects of daily life in Peru? How might activists transform the statistics, such as those cited

² Ley N° 30819: Ley que modifica el Código Penal y el Código de los niños y adolescentes.

³ Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables, ‘Estadísticas Del MIMP’.

⁴ ‘Encuesta Nacional sobre Relaciones Sociales (ENARES) – Observatorio Nacional de la Violencia contra las Mujeres y los Integrantes del Grupo Familiar’.

⁵ Hernández Breña, Raguz, and Morales, ‘¿Es Posible Construir Una Cifra Real de Tentativas de Femicidio En El Perú?’

⁶ Mujica, ‘Violaciones Sexuales en el Perú 2000-2009, un informe sobre el estado de la situación’, 41–43.

above, into a complex message that might resonate with the public? It is hard to tie together all cases of violence without obscuring the factors that affect some women more than others, especially in Peru, a country marked by deep racial and economic inequalities. Writing about the work of Peruvian artist and activist Natalia Iguiniz, the critic Miguel López asks ‘what does it mean to produce images in the land of misogyny? What does it mean to make art in a place that reports the daily horror of many raped, disappeared or murdered women?’⁷. We can also ask this question of feminist activists, what does it mean to be an activist in the ‘land of misogyny’? And how might art contribute to the struggle for equality?

In the face of widespread systemic gender violence, Peru has seen a resurgence in feminist activism since 2016. In August 2016 two high-profile cases of gender-based violence sparked a national mobilisation. On the 14th of July of that year, a court in Ayacucho handed Adriano Pozo Arias a year suspended sentence for brutally beating his partner Arlette Contreras, resulting in his immediate release from prison⁸. Days after a Lima court gave Rony García a four-year suspended sentence for a brutal assault on Lizeth Rosario Socia (Lady) Guillén⁹, once again leading to his immediate release from prison¹⁰. In both cases, video and photo evidence circulated widely on social media, which contrasted with the lenient sentences handed to the perpetrators. The frustration with the lack of justice led these two cases to go viral, and a group of women decided to organise a national march in response. In this march women and men across Peru took to the streets to decry high levels of gender-based violence in the country. These protests were under the banner of ‘Ni Una Menos’ (Not one [woman])

⁷ López, ‘Natalia Iguiniz’, 49.

⁸ Caballero Rojas, ‘Redes Sociales y Feminismos’, 16.

⁹ Lady Guillén is a nickname she is widely referred to by.

¹⁰ Caballero Rojas, ‘Redes Sociales y Feminismos’, 16.

less)¹¹, the protest movement that originally started in Argentina. This renewal in feminist activism in Peru is part of a new tide across Latin America, that includes campaigns against gender violence, and the struggle for abortion rights, as well as feminist perspectives on the environment, justice, and capitalism.

As part of this new tide, there has been an increasing use of artistic, visual and embodied strategies, sometimes referred to as ‘artivism’, by feminist activists. The best-known recent example of this is the performance ‘A Rapist in Your Path’ by the Chilean collective *Las tesis*, in which thousands of women in Chile, and around the world, danced and chanted in unison to decry sexual violence and feminicide. This turn towards artistic and creative strategies, and a feminism ‘of the streets’ reflects disillusionment with the institutional approaches of feminism in the 1990s and 2000s and the opportunities afforded by new technologies and social media. In Peru, where avenues for legal or political change are frustrated by instability, corruption and right-wing backlash, activists target cultural and societal change, that is to say changes in everyday relationships and understandings of violence and reproductive autonomy, rather than legal changes. In Peru, there have been various gender-sensitive legal and policy reforms since the 1990s, including a gender quota law and the inclusion of feminicide as a specific crime, but without societal and cultural change, these laws will not be effectively implemented. Visual and embodied politics offer a way to target cultural change through cultural forms of activism.

¹¹ The name ‘Ni Una Menos’ originates from a 1995 poem by Mexican poet Susana Chavez which included the phrase ‘Ni una muerta más’ (Not one more dead woman). When the mobilisation in Argentina started, the phrase evolved. One of the organisers, the writer Agustina Paz Frontera, recalls saying ‘we don’t want one less woman [ni una mujer menos], we want to be all that we are together’ The Peruvian movement, as well as others in Latin America and elsewhere, uses the same name. See Paz Frontera, ‘Ni Una Menos es Todas Más’. (Although, in Mexico, activists use the name ‘Ni Una Más’ (Not one [woman] more) in campaigns against feminicide.)

This is not a new phenomenon. Feminist activists have long used art and visual politics as part of their repertoire. Instead, its usage by young activists suggests a distinct generational shift for feminism today. In the digital age, the visual politics of feminism is essential for transmitting ideas across boundaries between the online and the offline, the transnational and the local, the individual and the collective. The 'digital age' is a visual one: as screens increasingly dominate communication, we are moving into an era in which the image is more significant than the written word¹², and in the sphere of activism, the visual politics of social movements are becoming increasingly important in communicating meaning online¹³, through the impact of shared images and videos. Despite the ubiquity of the digital, feminist politics is still embodied. The body remains central to contemporary activism. It operates as both a site of activism for bodily autonomy but also as a tool for activism. Activists put their bodies on the line in order to make their claims. In this way, feminist activism denotes an intersection of embodied and visual politics. This raises important questions of representation. If the body is both a site and tool of activism, then we must consider issues of race and ethnicity when asking which bodies are on the line in this new activist environment?

Therefore, this thesis asks the following research questions:

- What does the shift towards visual and embodied politics reveal about the contemporary feminist movement in Peru?
- How do activists use these approaches to address issues of violence and reproductive rights?

¹² Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age*.

¹³ Whittier, 'Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising, and Visibility Politics', 390.

- How does this alter what we know about the impact of the digital on feminist activism?
- How does the visual and embodied affect the relationship between feminist activism and the state?

In answering these questions this thesis makes a significant contribution to the literature on Peruvian feminism by providing an account of the contemporary movement. It does so by placing it in transnational and historical context, but it does not just use the Peruvian movement as a case study of Latin American feminism. Instead, I focus on the Peruvian movement as an important case in itself, that shows the challenges for contemporary feminist movements in the face of conservative backlash, and how through the use of digital, performative and artistic strategies they are negotiating this context.

The literature on art and activism has tended to analyse the use of art either as a framing device or as political art. However, more recently there has been a shift in the literature towards taking into account the role of emotions in activism, and to take an interdisciplinary approach that builds not only on social movement theory and cultural studies, but also theories of affect and performativity. Approaching activism through the lens of visual and embodied politics allows us to see it through the lens of the ‘in-between’. Paula Serafini defines activism as an ‘in-between practice’ that ‘thrives on the idea of transgressing boundaries’¹⁴. By approaching it from this perspective, we can better understand how activism can exist both online and offline, and be both digital and embodied, local and transnational, individual and collective.

¹⁴ Serafini, *Performance Action*, 19, 175.

1.1 Methods

I took a flexible and interdisciplinary approach to this research. Feminist activism is also interdisciplinary in its nature, drawing not only on traditional activist practices like marching, but also art, theatre, poetry, law, and psychology. In order to address my research questions, I needed to be able to fully understand the role of visual and embodied forms of activism, which required a creative and flexible approach. Not only that, but my ‘field’ of study exists both offline, in Peru, but also online on social media sites, requiring the use of different methods to capture this.

Before travelling to the field, I had planned on using a case-study approach, studying four different activist groups. However, on arriving in Peru, and meeting people involved in the feminist movement, I found that the shape of the movement was very different from what I had anticipated. Therefore, I revised the methodological approach I had planned on before starting in-person fieldwork, and instead took a more ethnographic and holistic approach to the feminist movement. I decided to look at it as a whole, rather than through pre-selected case studies. This is not to say, however, that the movement is a unified one; rather through my research I found it to be diverse, and fragmented in many ways.

Before travelling to Peru, I had carried out initial research online. This was the beginning of the digital part of the ethnography. I engaged with the feminist movement by engaging with social media: by following the accounts of different collectives and organisations and

documenting these in an attempt to ‘map’ the movement as a network¹⁵. My experiences in the field showed me that the movement is diverse and diffuse, and there are significant differences between how it appears online and offline. Many pages with large online followings are not connected with ‘in-person’ feminism, and similarly, I met activists who did not engage with aspects of ‘online’ feminism.

The case studies I had previously identified in my preliminary research, did not directly correspond to my experiences in person. Although they did form part of the research itself. When studying social movements, especially women’s movements, case studies are suitable especially given that these movements are often made up of disparate groups whose connections shift and change¹⁶. As Nancy Whittier observes in relation to the women’s movement in the United States, these movement are traditionally ‘grassroots, loosely organized groups’ rather than cohesive and centrally organised, therefore ‘any study of radical feminism is thus, by necessity, a local case study’¹⁷. This perspective drove my approach to the movement in the field.

The disconnect between the online and offline dimensions became a central challenge in my research design. Although the in-person fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in 2019, it was not my first time in Peru. I first spent a month in Lima in 2016 to carry out interviews as part of the fieldwork for my master’s degree, and I also visited in July 2018 for a conference. This means that although I found limitations in my initial digital fieldwork, I was not completely new to the field. These previous visits also meant that I had a pre-existing network to draw on when starting fieldwork in April 2019.

¹⁵ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.

¹⁶ Maddison and Shaw, ‘Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis’.

¹⁷ Whittier, *Feminist Generations*, 5.

While I was writing up my master's thesis in August 2016, the first Ni Una Menos marches swept Peru (see Chapter 4), inspiring the initial ideas that grew into this thesis. I saw the explosion of feminist and women's rights activism in Peru since 2016 happen online, as by the time the August 2016 marches happened, I had already returned to London. The disparity between online and offline was something I had already started to notice at that time. In my interviews with feminist poets, all but one lamented the lack of feminist activism in Peru at the time¹⁸. Yet, a few weeks after arriving home, I saw social media explode and hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets calling for an end to gender violence. When carrying out the research for this thesis I was reminded of this disparity. This is not to say that my interviewees were intentionally misleading me: based on their experiences and networks, at that time there was not a mass women's movement in Peru. Indeed, much work has been dedicated to examining this¹⁹. All of this underlines the impossibility of creating a definitive, objective account of the feminist movement in Peru.

The women I interviewed in my master's thesis belonged to previous generations of feminists, and as such were not as connected to the younger generation who make up the majority of the current movement. In interviewing these educated, urban, white women, I did not see the work of young activists in collectives and *asambleas*. In the same way, in mapping out feminist collectives through Facebook and Instagram, I was only able to see what appeared online. Taking a less rigid approach to the feminist movement allowed me to be more open and flexible rather than sticking to rigid case studies. It allowed me to see what

¹⁸ Martin, "'A Woman Who Writes Has Power': Writing and Activism among Politically Committed Peruvian Women Writers.'

¹⁹ Boesten, 'Ni Una Menos Stares Down Conservative Reaction/ Ni Una Menos Enfrenta Una Reacción Conservadora'; Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos'.

existed in the cracks between these groups, and analyse these tensions – tensions which are ongoing and enduring. Feminist movements across Latin America are diverse and fragmented, therefore, approaching the movement as a whole, rather than taking a case study approach, makes it more generalisable.

This is not to say that here I am aiming to provide a definitive account of the feminist movement in Peru, this would be impossible to do. Other accounts of the feminist movement have acknowledged this. Vargas’ model of ‘three streams’ covered much of the movement at the time, but it did not include the work of women who fell outside of the three categories²⁰. Focusing on the role of artistic and creative strategies brings new perspectives on the movement. These strategies are an understudied aspect of the movement, but one that appears on multiple levels: in protests, performances, online, and in theatres. This can also reveal new perspectives on aspects like digital activism, protest, and divisions within the movement.

Therefore, this section on methods discusses how I approached studying the movement, bearing in mind the difficulties mentioned here. I used a combination of ethnography, participant observation, ethnographic interviews, visual methods, and archival research. Taking this approach allowed me the flexibility to approach this topic from different angles. The next sections lay out in greater detail how I used each of these methods.

1.1.1 Ethnography

²⁰ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’; Rousseau, *Women’s Citizenship in Peru*.

I decided to take an ethnographic approach in my research design, as a way of understanding the role of activism within the feminist movement by actually taking part in these actions. Ethnography involves long-term observation of people's lives. It allowed me to follow the phenomenon of activism in its travels and to understand it in different contexts, through the perspectives of my informants but also as a participant. One of the main challenges of my research was the tension between online and offline contexts. In order to address this, I chose to use both in-person and digital ethnography. Ethnography is defined as 'in-depth analyses of social worlds from the members' perspectives'²¹. This has traditionally entailed spending time with participants in physical locations. Digital ethnography uses ethnographic methods to problematise 'the status of the Internet as a way of communicating, as an object within people's lives and as a site for community-like formations'²². As I found in the process of my research, the internet is not a space with fixed boundaries, but rather it is part of people's lives and should not be analysed in isolation. As many scholars have noted, it is not useful to draw a hard distinction between online and offline²³. Further, the topic of this research is a social movement that exists simultaneously online and offline. Digital ethnography is a key method for studying contemporary social movements, as Barassi notes: 'we need to develop a digital ethnographic approach that simultaneously challenges deterministic understandings of technological impacts while taking into consideration how technological structures matter in the everyday life of social movements'²⁴.

Digital ethnography allowed me to be 'in the field' before and after I was physically in Peru, as well as being a central part of my in-person fieldwork. Digital technologies are key part of

²¹ Adler and Adler, 'The Past and the Future of Ethnography'.

²² Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

²³ Hine, 'From Virtual Ethnography to the Embedded, Embodied, Everyday Internet'; Postill and Pink, 'Social Media Ethnography'.

²⁴ Barassi, 'Ethnography Beyond and Within Digital Structures and the Study of Social Media Activism', 406.

contemporary activism, from social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to messaging services, particularly WhatsApp. Entering the digital field allowed me to identify key groups and issues that were happening within the movement. However, carrying out in person fieldwork made it clear to me that I could not have analysed this phenomenon through digital ethnography alone. Without being in the field to carry out participant observation and interviews, my perspectives on who or what was important would have been skewed. Often things that appear important online, have less importance offline, and vice versa. For example, Facebook pages with large follower counts are often detached from on the ground organising, or inversely, community organisations may have a minimal social media presence, even if they do decisive work ‘offline’. Further, the digital sphere is ephemeral, when collecting a list of organisations and collectives, I noticed that often these pages were only posting for a few years before falling inactive, leaving behind a “graveyard” of activist pages online.

In person research allowed me to deepen my online research. Digital ethnographers have mentioned the challenges in gaining access to groups online, when it is difficult to vouch for one’s identity²⁵. By meeting people in person, I was able to prove I was a ‘real person’, and more importantly not a conversative or anti-genderist troll. Many feminist Facebook groups have been hacked or trolled by anti-feminist users, so they are understandably fearful of unknown members being added. I was able to access a few groups before travelling to Peru, by being vouched for by trusted contacts. After meeting activists and exchanging numbers or ‘adding’ each other on Facebook or Instagram, I became part of a number of Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Through these groups, I found out about further feminist actions and

²⁵ Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*.

meetings and was able to vouch for myself at those events too. In this way the digital should be seen as part of people's everyday reality, and ethnography is about understanding peoples reality from their perspectives. Therefore, it was essential to include the digital as a fundamental aspect of this ethnography.

There were many things I would have missed if I did not also spend time physically present in the field. Not only did I carry out interviews (section 1.3.3) and participant observation (section 1.3.2) but I also spent time with activists travelling to and from events, in rehearsals and after protests. The conversations that took place during these times were essential to understanding the role of activism and feminism for these activists and the movement more broadly.

One example in particular underlines the understanding I would have lacked without in-person research methods. After a feminist performance decrying femicide we went to a nearby bar to celebrate and de-brief. This bar was in a fairly touristic area of Lima, and at the same time the 2019 Pan-American Games were taking place in Lima, so we were surrounded by people who had travelled to the city. We occupied an upstairs area so we could all chat and relax after the intense day. The specific moment that stands out in my mind was being in a circle of feminist activists as they all danced to reggaetón music. Reggaetón is not known for being a feminist genre (although there are a few artists making 'feminist reggaetón'), it is often criticised for being misogynist and violent in its lyrics. Nevertheless, it is a popular musical genre among young people in Latin America. There is a specific dance style that goes with reggaetón, called 'perreo', similar to twerking. This is a style of dance that is sometimes criticised for being overtly sexual, and degrading to women. Yet, in this group, made up exclusively of women and non-binary people, many of whom are queer, there was a

sense of liberation in dancing perreo. I did not take part, being awkward and English, but it made me reflect on the tensions between feminist activism, and living a free and feminist life. This was not the only example of feminist perreo I encountered: there were many events in the alternative nightlife scene that advertised feminist and queer perreo nights. I would never have understood the nuance of this tension by carrying out only online research, and this underlined to me the importance of being there, in the midst of the action.

However, this – and other examples – underlined my role as an ‘outsider’. My unfamiliarity with the music and dance styles is a reflection of my positionality. I constantly reflected on the impact of my presence in the field. One key example of this is a performance discussed in Chapters Five and Six. I discovered the performance via the organisers’ Instagram, announcing an open call for those wanting to participate in an artistic action. I spoke with the organisers before taking part, explaining what my research was about to obtain their permission. I also wanted to address this issue with all the participants: at the first rehearsal, I introduced myself, my research and remained open to questions. The group accepted my presence, but the process of introducing myself prompted me to reflect on my position as an outsider. Although I use in this thesis ‘we’ to refer to the performers as a group, our experiences are different: I come from a country where accessing abortion is comparatively straightforward, particularly as a middle-class person from London, but I was joining a group of activists in a country where abortion remains inaccessible for the majority. In this case, my position as an outsider could have made getting access more difficult, although in other cases – getting interviews with elite, middle-class women – it made it easier.

This example also illustrates the issue of access and ethnography in a digital world. The boundary between digital and in-person ethnography is a blurry one. Activists would often

mention things that had happened online in ‘offline’ interviews. They talked about trolling, memes, or even disagreements with other feminists that took place on social media. They also asked me if I was a member of different Facebook groups, and would ‘add’ me then and there. This also highlighted how the ‘field’ in my research exists both offline and online. Digital ethnography has also allowed me to stay in the field to a certain extent, as I can still see what is happening in these groups, and on public pages, or what those participants who I have as ‘friends’ on Facebook and Instagram are doing – while I am not there physically. It also allows me to stay in contact with some of my interviewees, sharing feminist memes and reacting to each other’s posts online.

I had planned to return to the field and carry out further interviews in July 2020, but I was unable to do so due to the ongoing pandemic. Although I was able to remain in the field in some ways, I had initially intended to reinforce this with in-person research. However, staying in the field during 2020 meant watching from afar as Peru was ravaged by COVID-19, with the worst death rate per capita in the world²⁶. The pandemic and the government response has had a marked impact on women. There was a sharp increase in gender violence during lockdowns, the so-called ‘double pandemic’ (*doble pandemia*). It is yet to be seen how this will impact the wider feminist movement, but its effect will no doubt be substantial.

1.1.2 Participant observation

Participant observation involves ‘being embedded in the action and context of a social setting’²⁷. It involves being in the location of the object of study. During my time in the field

²⁶ Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, ‘Mortality Analyses’.

²⁷ Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, ‘Participant Observation’, 3.

I took part in different feminist actions: marches, performances, rehearsals, and meetings.

Participant observation also involves building rapport; by participating in these actions I built relationships with activists, and attempted to create a level of trust. I chose this method to understand the experience of taking part in activism, as part of the phenomenon itself.

In order to identify events to participate in, I used social media. I followed different feminist collectives and joined open calls for participants in feminist performances. This also opened up more connections which enabled me to find out about other actions, and to open doors to groups that were more closed off to ‘outsiders’. When I took part in feminist actions and meetings, I would make my presence as a researcher known. During rehearsals and meetings there was often a round of introductions, when I would announce who I was and what I was researching. This was also a useful way of reaching out to possible interviewees.

I tried to take part in all the possible activist interventions that took place during the time that I was in the field. However, some events would be planned but not take place due to logistical or practical issues. Another challenge was the period of time I was able to be in the field for. I arrived in April 2019 and left at the end of September. This meant that I missed two key feminist dates: the 8th of March (International Women’s Day) and the 25th of November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women). These are times when many feminist actions take place, coalescing around these emblematic dates, and taking advantage of the increased media coverage. I had thought that there would be a resurgence in activism in August around the anniversary of the Ni Una Menos marches, however, this was not the case, as discussed in Chapter 4.

While in the field I took part in various actions as detailed below:

May 2019	<i>28th May</i> Intervention for International Day of Women's Health: performance about abortion that took outside Ministry of Health and Hospital Nacional Edgardo Rebagliati Martins. Pañuelazo and protest outside Argentinian Embassy
June 2019	<i>1st June</i> 'Marcha para Eyvi' – march to mark one year since the femicide of Eyvi Agreda
July 2019	<i>6th July</i> Rehearsal for <i>Somos 2074 y muchas más</i> 'Antimonumento' at the DEMUS office
25 th August 2019	<i>3rd August</i> 'Antimonumento' action with <i>Somos 2074</i> <i>8th, 10th August</i> Rehearsals for '¿Cuántas más?' <i>11th August</i> Performance of '¿Cuántas más?' <i>25th August</i> Meeting of 'Asamblea feminista', a group that brings together different feminist collectives as well as individual activists to discuss the organisation of marches, or important events.

September 2019 5th September

‘Que se vayan todos’ marches with *Somos 2074*

1.1.3 Interviews

The other method I used in my research was interviews. Ethnographic interviewing involves interviews where ‘researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees [in order for] for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds’²⁸. I chose ethnographic interviews as I wanted to use interviews to understand the reasons activists had to taking part in activism and what they felt about activism as part of this. This is also in line with a feminist approach to interviewing that takes into account a duty of care towards participants²⁹.

I identified my interviewees in various ways. The majority of interviewees were activists who had taken part in feminist interventions that I had also been a part of. I felt that I would be better able to talk to my interviewees if I had shared experiences with them. At rehearsals when announcing my presence, I also mentioned that I would like to speak to anyone who would be interested in taking part in an interview. I also followed this up by posting in shared WhatsApp groups. I combined this with a ‘snowball’ approach to identify further interviewees by asking participants if they knew anyone else who would be interested, or following their suggestions³⁰. Other interviewees were organisers of feminist collectives and

²⁸ Heyl, ‘Ethnographic Interviewing’, 370.

²⁹ Ellis, ‘Compassionate Research’.

³⁰ Browne, ‘Snowball Sampling’.

long-term feminist activists. When I carried out interviews outside of Lima, I built on the networks I had in the capital, but also used social media to reach out to possible interviewees.

The majority of my interviewees were young activists, aged between 18 and around 30 years old. I did also interview women who could be categorised as ‘elite’ – educated, urban-dwelling, with established careers in universities or institutions. However, the majority I spoke to said that they had never been interviewed before, and spoke of interviews as something that was reserved for more established activists. To me, this highlighted the importance of interviewing bottom-up, speaking to younger non ‘elite’ actors, as the perspectives of these activists would not have been included if I focused only on speaking to activists in NGOs or feminist leaders. These perspectives are also important, but a bottom-up approach allowed me to gather a wide range of viewpoints.

Semi-structured interviews are ‘a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions’³¹. I had a pre-prepared list of questions for my interviewees, but I did not necessarily ask these in a set order, and I allowed space for other topics to arise. With some interviewees, I asked questions specific to their roles, for example as organisers of performances. I also allowed interviewees to ask me any questions they had. Many of them wanted to know about my experiences as a feminist in the United Kingdom, which prompted me to reflect on the ways I had participated in activism at home compared with in the field, as well as the dynamics of these two feminist movements. They wanted to know why I had chosen Peru and not another Latin American country. Many of them seemed to think it would have made more sense to study the more

³¹ Given, ‘Semi-Structured Interview’.

established movements in Argentina or Chile. However, the Peruvian case is an important one, where feminists do not have the same support from established progressive movements, and in many ways face backlash from both the right and the left. Yet, there have been significant feminist mobilisations. Not only this, but feminists are key voices in other social movements, especially those against corruption and for environmental justice. Although I knew this before travelling to Peru, the experiences of interviewing and participation re-enforced the importance of studying lesser-known feminist movements in contexts of weaker civil society mobilisation, and adding the voices of these feminists to debates about contemporary activism in Latin America and beyond.

I carried out the majority of interviews in person, mostly in cafés or public spaces like parks. Often it was complicated for interviewees to travel around the city, as Lima is a huge city with endless traffic and sprawling neighbourhoods. Therefore, I did not feel it would be fair to ask interviewees to come to me. At the same time, many of them did not want me to travel to where they lived as they felt it could be dangerous for me as a white, non-Peruvian. Mostly, we met in the centre of the city as this was a useful halfway point. I tried where possible to combine interviews with rehearsals or other events so as not to take up too much of my participants' time. Because of the difficulties in travelling, I also carried out interviews over the phone or via WhatsApp when interviewees said this would be the easiest option for them.

I carried out thirty-four interviews in total, thirty individual interviews and four group interviews. The group interviews were with feminist collectives. This was partly for convenience – as it would be less of a time constraint for them, but also collectives are a key part of the feminist landscape in Peru. I did not consider these to be focus groups – as I was

interviewing pre-established groups, rather than gathering a group to discuss a particular topic. I recorded interviews on my phone, as this was easy to transport and a piece of technology I always have with me. I did once have issues where it failed to record part of an interview. I used an automated software to do the initial transcription of my interviews which I then corrected using the recordings. The software was not perfect, but it saved me time in transcription, but I still had to go through the recordings themselves. I made reflective notes after my interviews which also helped me to identify themes as I carried out fieldwork.

1.1.4 Visual Methods

It was important for me to incorporate visual methods into my research design as there is a strong visual element in contemporary activism. Visual methods involve a number of different techniques from photography and video, to drawing and map making. As Chapter 5 of this thesis argues, in analysing contemporary feminist movements, we need to consider the visual politics of these movements. Social media is a visual format; our feeds are filled with images and videos and these make up the landscape of digital activism. This also influences the strategies that activists use, as they consider how offline actions will translate to the online sphere. Therefore I needed to incorporate visual methods in order to be able to capture this phenomenon. I followed Rose's definition of visual methods: 'methods which use visual materials of some kind as part of the process of generating evidence in order to explore research questions'³².

³² Rose, 'On the Relation between "Visual Research Methods" and Contemporary Visual Culture', 25.

As I always had my phone with me, I used this to take the majority of photos for this thesis. After sifting through them, and separating them from photos that were not relevant to the thesis, such as those taken of friends or travels, I had a total of 457 photos. These were not necessarily photos of great artistic quality. Many of them were blurry or badly framed, but the number of photos meant that I was able to capture moments that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. It was also a way of capturing the essence of certain moments: the frenetic energy of a march, or the quiet in a rehearsal space before performing. My photos complemented my fieldnotes, serving as a sort of fieldnote in themselves. Using the metadata attached to photos I could see exactly when and where a photo was taken.

I also used a film camera to capture different perspectives. Film photography is slower and less instantaneous than digital photography, I had to wait weeks or months to develop rolls of film and be able to reflect on what I had captured. I wanted to explore this contrast between immediate and delayed ways of capturing images. It would have been risky and ineffective to exclusively use film as a visual method, but the photos I took using this camera are more considered and capture a different perspective than iPhone photography.

1.1.5 Archival research

As a starting point when I first got to Lima, I spent time in the archives of the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán, with the invaluable assistance of the librarian Hiromi Toguchi. I went through zines, magazines, flyers, posters, and other materials to put the current movement in context. Reading about festivals, poetry competitions, artists and illustrators and many creative forms of activism I was reminded that the use of artistic and creative strategies is not something new. Feminist activities from the 1970s to the 1990s are relatively

well documented, however I found it much harder to find archival materials from the 2000s. This highlighted the need for better digital archives of feminist activism, in order to be able to better understand the ways that generations of activists have evolved and interacted. At that time feminists were starting to use the internet to publish newsletters and magazines, but the majority of these websites are now lost. This is a reminder of digital ephemerality. Being in the archives was also a way of getting involved with the feminist field in Peru. I met other researchers and activists who were using the space. Many rehearsals took place in the garden of the Centro, which was offered as a space to put together public performances.

1.1.6 Digital methods

There are a number of established methods for studying social media and digital phenomena, ranging from data mining (using programmes to collect and analyse large sets of data online)³³ to virtual ethnography³⁴. Many studies already use mixed methods approaches, and scholars acknowledge that this is key in studying social media³⁵. However, there are few approaches that combine both in person and online methods. The Internet allows us to research ‘from afar’ but this means missing out on important insights ‘on the ground’.

Scholars have acknowledged that the digital and the real world cannot be separated:

Approaches ‘look at social media in the abstract, without due attention to their intervention in specific local geographies of action or to their embeddedness in the culture of the social

³³ Gundecha and Liu, ‘Mining Social Media’.

³⁴ Hine, ‘From Virtual Ethnography to the Embedded, Embodied, Everyday Internet’.

³⁵ Snelson, ‘Qualitative and Mixed Methods Social Media Research’.

movements adopting them'³⁶. But we should take this further – considering the ways that digital activism is *embodied*, not just *embedded*.

When analysing contemporary social movements, we must acknowledge that any form of digital activism also exists offline in one way or another. New feminisms and new activism harness digital and physical realms and use these to transform public spaces. There are a number of well-known examples of these online-offline interventions – i.e. Las Tesis – but we should also examine this in smaller protests, and in less established feminist movements. As scholars of digital phenomena know, they change at an extremely rapid pace, which continually provokes new methodological and ethical questions.

1.1.7 Ethics

There are a number of ethical considerations related to my research design to take into account, relating to informed consent, attribution of art and social media posts, and online ethics in general. In many ways offline ethical considerations are the same as online ones. In the case of interviews and participant observation, both online and offline, it is equally important to obtain informed consent from participants, and to allow them to choose to remain anonymous and remove consent at any time. One participant did choose to be anonymised, and is therefore referred to by a pseudonym to maintain their privacy.

The largest and most complex area of consideration in terms of ethics, is the ethics of the Internet. People posting online in nominally public spaces, may still see those conversations

³⁶ Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 5.

as private, which ‘has significant consequences for the ways in which research is conducted and participants are protected or cited’³⁷. This is particularly important when dealing with sensitive topics, for example, in a 1994 study, Finn and Lavitt analysed conversations from a self-help group for survivors of sexual abuse that were ‘public’, in the sense that the forum that hosted it could be found online through search engines. However, they did not anonymise the data or obtain informed consent such that participants could be identified, or identify themselves in the study³⁸. Commenting on the controversy, King argues that ‘the ethically responsible researcher will disguise the source of his data in such a way that, if a member of a group identifies his or her own words in the results, he or she will know that the exact identity and location of the group have been protected’³⁹. However, it can be difficult to get informed consent from all participants in a public group ‘because online groups often have fluctuating populations; new members, including researchers, can join a public group without the group’s knowledge or consent’⁴⁰. This is pertinent in the case of feminist activism, in which people may post online about experiences of abuse or violence in forums that are ‘public’, but without consenting to their being used in research. Another online issue is the question of attribution of artworks. Often images and illustrations are ‘reposted’ across platforms without attribution to the original artist. This both makes it difficult to trace the impact of the illustration to an individual activist, but also raises the issue of copyright and intellectual property.

³⁷ Barnes, ‘Issues of Attribution and Identification’, 203.

³⁸ Finn and Lavitt, ‘Computer-Based Self-Help Groups for Sexual Abuse Survivors’.

³⁹ King, ‘Researching Internet Communities’.

⁴⁰ Kleinman, ‘Researching OURNET’, 55.

This highlighted the need for guidelines for internet researchers, although these need to be regularly updated given how fast the Internet evolves⁴¹. Issues of privacy are key for ethical decision making, particularly in issues of privacy ‘people may operate in public spaces but maintain strong perceptions or expectations of privacy’⁴². One of the closed Facebook groups I am part of illustrates this point pertinently: there are over 50,000 members, and while this cannot be considered an entirely private space, members were outraged to have their posts reported in the media without their consent. Issues of consent and privacy online are complex, and I follow Markham and Buchanan’s suggestion that researchers take ‘a case based approach, which attends to the specific needs of each case’⁴³.

Ethics are a core part of any research project, but especially one moving between online and offline spaces where issues of privacy are confused. In the case of my research, it is best to err on the side of caution, given that perceptions of privacy online vary between individuals. For example, I saw many ‘public’ posts on social media, but chose not to include these without consent when they were made by individuals. I did include posts by organisations or collectives as these entailed less of a risk of harm to individuals. Further, often cases of violence are posted about publicly online, but I chose not to include these unless they had also been reported in news media. Experiences that appear under feminist hashtags from #niunamenos, or #primeiroassedio in Latin America, or #metoo in the rest of the world, while they are public, the posters have not given consent for their use in other contexts. In a especially egregious violation, artist Andrea Bower included images and text detailing a

⁴¹ For example, compare Ess and AoIR ethics working committee, ‘Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee’. and Markham and Buchanan, ‘Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)’.

⁴² Markham and Buchanan, ‘Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)’ , 6.

⁴³ Markham and Buchanan, 12.

violent attack in an exhibition drawn from posts under the hashtag #metoo, however the victim had not been informed or asked for consent⁴⁴. While the victim was not identified by name, her face did appear in the images of her assault. This case illustrates the harm that can be perpetrated against victims who post about experiences of violence online, if these cases are re-utilised without their consent or knowledge.

1.2 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter Two, analyses the literature on art and activism, visual and embodied politics and feminist activism. This thesis has an interdisciplinary approach to the contemporary feminist movement in Peru, and as such it is necessary to take a similar approach to the literature review. The main aim of this chapter is to position this thesis in relation to these varied bodies of literature and to clarify what is meant by ‘visual and embodied politics’, especially in relation to feminist activism. This thesis has an interdisciplinary perspective on the contemporary feminist movement in Peru, and as such it is necessary to take a similar approach to the literature review.

Chapter Three and Four work together to provide context for Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Chapter Three provides an overview of the feminist movement in Peru from the 1970s to the early 2000s. In order to understand the current movement and the challenges facing it, it is important to recognise its origins, and to place it in the context of the movement that came before. Building on the context provided by Chapter Three, Chapter Four examines the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. It analyses whether the recent resurgence of

⁴⁴ Gush, ‘Using a Woman’s Bruised #metoo Selfie without Consent Takes “Appropriation Art” Too Far’.

feminist activism in Peru represents a new ‘wave’ of feminist activism, and to what extent it is helpful to consider it a new “wave” at all. There is a resurgence of feminist activism that is distinct from previous generations: it is younger and more diverse, and social media plays a central role. However, it is not entirely separate from previous generations, it draws on pre-existing feminist traditions, including those outlined in Chapter Three. Feminist activists face a difficult context. There is a sense of disillusionment with ‘mainstream’ politics in Peru due to ongoing instability and corruption, but at the same time, feminists are confronted with a violent ‘anti-genderist’ backlash against feminism.

Chapter Five analyses the role of the visual in contemporary feminist activism in Peru. Visual politics is important in an increasingly visual world, in part due to social media, but it is not an entirely ‘online’ phenomenon. This chapter argues that visual politics allows feminists to straddle the offline and the online. An analysis based on visual politics also reveals how feminist symbols move across borders, both national borders as well as those between the digital and the physical. Feminist visual politics also includes the construction of a feminist gaze, which we can see in visual media produced by activists that counters mainstream representations.

Chapter Six focuses on embodied politics and the role of the body in activism. It does this by reflecting on the idea of ‘*poner la cuerpa*’ (to put one’s body on the line); asking What does it mean to put one’s body on the line as a part of activism? This embodied politics highlights a duality of the body in activism: it is both a tool used by activists but also a site of oppression. By reclaiming the body and placing in back into public space activists construct new meanings of embodied politics.

Chapter Seven looks at the politics of representation in contemporary activism. It uses the example of the campaign '*Somos 2074 y muchas más*' as an example to question what it means to do visual and embodied politics in Peruvian context. It examines who gets represented and how, considering the intersections of gender, race, and class in Peru. In doing so it shows how the politics of activism reflects the wider political context of the country. This shows why visual and embodied politics, including activism, must be intersectional and reflexive.

The conclusion draws together the themes explored in the empirical chapters: visibility, embodiment and representation. Having reflected on the role these play in the contemporary feminist movement in Peru, it argues that visual and embodied politics are both an activist method – a strategy for taking up space in the street and online – as well as a way of understanding the world, and creating new feminist theory. In Peru, where space for feminism is limited politically, discursively and physically, this way of approaching activism is essential for maintaining the movement and allowing it to continue to grow and evolve.

In addressing the role of visual and embodied politics within the feminist movement in Peru there are distinct and diverse areas of scholarship to draw on. This is one of the challenges in approaching my research questions. The role of these strategies in social movements has been discussed from various angles, but there is not a definitive literature on visual and embodied politics. This literature review examines relevant scholarship on social movements, art and activism, and performance protest, as well as feminist movements. In drawing on these bodies of literature, it highlights the ways that interdisciplinary approaches, that focus on the ‘in-between’ areas are essential for understanding contemporary activism, due to its use of creative, artistic and embodied strategies. These strategies are key to negotiating the relationships between radical social movements, activists, institutions and the state, but also for expressing the personal, the emotional and the embodied in activism. This thesis considers the role of these strategies within the feminist movement specifically, and therefore we must think about what the ‘visual’ and ‘embodied’ are in relation to feminism.

2.1 Art, culture, and activism

This thesis uses the lens of visual and embodied politics as a way of understanding the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. Broadly conceived, visual and embodied politics include artistic and cultural strategies. This section discusses how social movement scholars have approached the questions of what are ‘art’ and ‘culture’ in relation to social movements. In doing so I address the problems with defining these concepts, particularly in the context of activism. This section starts by focusing on the literature on culture and social movements, particularly the concept of ‘cultural politics’. The second half focuses on the question of art

and activism, or ‘artivism’, and the debates that have surrounded this slippery term.

Understanding approaches to art and culture in activism allows this thesis to then distinguish a visual and embodied politics approach from a ‘artivism’ approach.

Escobar and Alvarez offer a useful definition of social movements as ‘organized collective actors who engage in sustained political or cultural contestation through recourse to institutional and extrainstitutional forms of action’¹. The nature and role of social movements have evolved over time. During the 1980s, the emergence of so-called ‘New Social Movements’, that focused on new ways of doing politics outside of traditional political arenas, instead these new groups of activists linked by a common identity or cause focused more on cultural and symbolic change rather than concrete political goals². Feminism and women’s movements are key examples of New Social Movements. In their examination of social movements in Latin America, Escobar and Alvarez and the contributors ‘view social movements not only as “survival struggles” or struggles over “basic needs” but also as cultural struggles over the production of meaning and as collective forms of cultural production’³. Scholars working on new social movements in particular began to argue that both cultural studies and social movement scholars have neglected the role of ‘social movements as a vital aspect of cultural production’⁴. This focus on culture mirrored the cultural turn in other social sciences.

The role of culture in social movements refers to both the culture that movements exist in, but also the efforts of movements to change that culture⁵. This can be referred to as the ‘cultural

¹ Escobar and Alvarez, *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, 322.

² Melucci, ‘The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements’.

³ Escobar and Alvarez, *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, 320.

⁴ Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures*, 3.

⁵ Escobar, ‘Culture, Economics and Politics in Latin American Social Movements Theory and Research’, 73.

politics' of social movements: 'disembodied struggles over meanings and representations, the political stakes of which for concrete social actors are sometimes difficult to discern'⁶. The ability to control or shape meaning is key for social movements; if the cultural understandings of an issue do not change, neither will material conditions. As Franco points out, although these struggles may seem 'irrelevant to 'real' struggles. Yet the power to interpret, and the active appropriation and invention of language, are crucial tools'⁷. This is important for feminist movements that seek to challenge meanings of categories like 'woman'⁸ or understandings of the body and reproduction.

Another approach to the role of culture in social movements is the importance of cultural production within social movements. This can include artistic and creative strategies by activists. Swidler looks at cultural politics as 'a "tool kit" of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems'⁹. This includes art forms and other strategies that draw on cultural artefacts.

Although art and culture are not the same, there are overlaps between the role of culture and art. Some scholars have approached the role of art in social movements as a question of framing: 'communicating ideas and emotions to those outside the movement, including potential supporters and the public at large'¹⁰. Framing processes are a key part of what social movements do. As Zald argues, looking at framing 'has served to reemphasize the central importance of ideas and cultural elements in understanding the mobilization of participation

⁶ Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures*, 5.

⁷ Franco, 'Defrocking the Vatican: Feminism's Secular Project', 278.

⁸ Whittier, 'Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising, and Visibility Politics', 383.

⁹ Swidler, 'Culture in Action', 273.

¹⁰ Eyerman, 'The Art of Social Movement', 551.

in social movements'¹¹. Framing can also refer to what Whittier refers to as 'visibility politics': the ways that activists seek to make their collective identity and viewpoints visible to a wider public¹². Art is a key form of this particularly within the women's movement and human rights movements¹³.

However, framing strategies are also tied up with dominant cultural discourses. Naples argues that this is a challenge for feminist movements, who in order 'to gain wide acceptance, [...] need to resonate with prevailing cultural constructions'¹⁴. Not only this, but 'even when movements do successfully produce oppositional frames, other groups can take up these frames and use them for different ends'¹⁵. We have seen this in the case of feminist framings of autonomy being appropriated by anti-gender groups in Latin America, for example reframing autonomy as a question of parental 'autonomy' to decide about their children's exposure to comprehensive sex education. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many anti-vaccine and anti-mask groups also re-appropriated the feminist frame of 'my body my choice'.¹⁶

As the cultural politics of social movements has become more established within the field, scholars have argued that there are other aspects that have gone understudied. Just as social science experienced a 'cultural turn', there now seems to be a 'visual turn'. Arguing for an analysis of social movements as visual phenomena, Doerr, Mattoni and Teune suggest that 'clothing and bodily gestures, images and symbols, posters and videos are not only crucial

¹¹ Zald, 'Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing', 261.

¹² Whittier, 'Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising, and Visibility Politics', 383.

¹³ Collins, 'Activists Who Yearn for Art That Transforms'; Adams, *Art against Dictatorship : Making and Exporting Arpilleras under Pinochet / Jacqueline Adams*.

¹⁴ Naples, 'Materialist Feminist Discourse Analysis', 244.

¹⁵ Naples, 244.

¹⁶ Crawford, 'White Skin, No Masks'.

forms of movements' representation but also potentially rich materials to answer central research questions in social movement studies'¹⁷. However, they go beyond simply approaching visual elements as framing devices. Mirroring a growing focus on affect and emotion in other fields, they propose that 'visual analysis provides potent tools to study the performance of emotions in movements'¹⁸. Ryan, examining the role of art in particular, argues that social movement studies has not sufficiently taken into account the role or emotions and the affective response generated by movement art¹⁹. As the next section of this review will show, looking at scholarship in other areas – visual studies, performance studies – can deepen our understanding of the role of art and culture in social movements.

In addition to the literature on culture in activism, there is a significant body of work dealing with the role of art. Just as ideas about activism are contested, so are those surrounding art and activism, often referred to as 'artivism'. Yet the arts have made significant contributions to activism, particularly *feminist* activism: art, music, literature, poetry, and theatre, among others, continue to shape questions of representation and identity. Yet, artivism is not always seen as a significant form of activism, compared with more traditional activities such as mass mobilisations, or lobbying²⁰. However, as we move into an era in which images rather than words dominate communication²¹, artivism takes on particular significance. Therefore, it is important to analyse debates around art and activism, particularly the questions of what constitutes artivism, how it can be effective, and what the implications for feminist activism are. Artivism is a slippery term. Art-based activism is referred to by a number of different

¹⁷ Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune, 'Toward a Visual Analysis of Social Movements, Conflict, and Political Mobilization', 557.

¹⁸ Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune, 559.

¹⁹ Ryan, 'Affect's Effects'.

²⁰ Nance, *Can Literature Promote Justice?: Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*.

²¹ Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age*.

terms: cultural activism, cultural politics, art activism, activist art, political art, and activism. Often these terms overlap in their definitions, but they also differ in key ways. To establish a definition of activism, reviewing these various terms gives us an idea of the ways that scholars have approached activism that incorporates artistic practices.

Firstly, let us examine the definitions that refer to ‘culture’ rather than art. In some cases, the term ‘culture’ and ‘art’ are practically interchangeable: Pietrzyk defines cultural activism as ‘arts-oriented activities occurring outside of state-sponsorship and beyond the boundaries of formally structured organizations’²². Others link culture and activism in a broader sense: Álvarez, Dagnino and Escobar argue that the ‘cultural politics’ of social movements should work to change ‘dominant cultural conceptions’²³. However, it could be argued that cultural politics or cultural activism are not useful terms when looking at the impact of activism on culture, given that ‘culture’ already refers to everything and nothing²⁴. Therefore, for the sake of clarity we can use ‘art’ to refer to cultural aspects of social movements: such as art, performance, writing, poetry, filmmaking. This also avoids confusion between the terms ‘cultural feminism’ and ‘women’s movement culture’. When examining the potential for art to effect cultural change, it is important to be able to distinguish between culture as in artistic, literary, and expressive forms, and culture as in beliefs and norms that are constructed within a particular group or society.

Leaving aside ‘cultural’ definitions, we now turn to definitions using ‘art’. There are a number of issues here, firstly, what counts as art, and secondly, is the activist or the art more significant. Looking at the first issue, scholars differ on the limitations of the term ‘art’.

²² Pietrzyk, ‘For Our Rights/We Will Rise’, 393.

²³ Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures*, 13.

²⁴ Williams, *Keywords*.

When Eyerman argues that art is ‘an established part of social movement repertoire’ he includes such diverse practices as visual images, music, literature, theatre and film within that definition²⁵. Similarly, Whittier groups a number of practices under the umbrella of women’s activist art: ‘poetry, writing, and visual art published in newsletters, online, and through independent presses; musical or theatrical performances at conferences or in local communities; and visual expression’²⁶. In contrast, Adams argues that only *visual* art should be considered activism: ‘a piece of visual artwork can be a powerful and effective icon, whereas music cannot to such an extent’²⁷. In the case of feminist activism, a more expansive definition of art is more useful, such as the one proposed by Bell, who frames art as ‘a critical and collective engagement with the political arrangements of life’²⁸.

In the case of the activist versus the art, while some focus on the art, for example, the Centre for Artistic Activism, which defines activism as ‘a form of activism which uses art forms as its medium of expression and action’²⁹, others focus on the activists themselves, for Lippard, ‘activist artists are ... trying to combine social action, social theory, and the fine arts tradition’³⁰. Sommer reminds us that political art is not necessarily progressive, and making art in itself is not an inherently political action³¹. A definition that bridges the two can be found in the work of Sandoval and LaTorre who define ‘the term activism [as] a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism’³². The majority of research has been done on visual art as activism, as a

²⁵ Eyerman, ‘The Art of Social Movement’, 549.

²⁶ Whittier, ‘Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising, and Visibility Politics’, 9.

²⁷ Adams, ‘Art in Social Movements’.

²⁸ Bell, *The Art of Post-Dictatorship*, 3.

²⁹ The Center for Artistic Activism, ‘Assessing the Impact of Artistic Activism’, 6.

³⁰ Lippard, ‘Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power’, 2.

³¹ Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World*, 6–10.

³² Sandoval and Latorre, ‘Chicana/o Activism: Judy Baca’s Digital Work with Youth of Color’, 82.

result of the long tradition of activist art within social movements, particularly the feminist and black arts movements³³. Others differentiate between ‘artivism’ and ‘art activism’, for example Serafini defines the latter as ‘practices that employ artistic forms with the objective of achieving social and/or political change, and which emerge from or are directly linked to social movements and struggles’ in order to separate it from discussions of activism taking place within the cultural sector³⁴.

A working definition of artivism must include both the individuals and their practices. Artivism can therefore be defined as: activist practices carried out by individuals or groups that draws on the arts (in the broadest sense) with the objective of furthering social movement goals. This contributes to, but is distinct from, the visual and embodied politics of movements, using images and performance to raise awareness and visibility of particular issues, as this section will go on to discuss.

Artivism has been studied from a number of perspectives. Those looking at artivism from a social movement viewpoint have highlighted its importance in framing processes and collective identity formation. Whereas, art critics have highlighted how the dynamics of the relationship between culture, the creator and politics shape artivism. Social movement scholars looking at artivism have argued that art is important to internal and external movement dynamics. Art can be used both to frame and communicate movement goals to external audiences, and to create a sense of collective identity within a movement.

³³ Collins, ‘Activists Who Yearn for Art That Transforms’.

³⁴ Serafini, *Performance Action*, 3.

Framing processes are ‘the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’³⁵. They are one of the areas in which activism has made significant contributions. Art ‘helps with framing, convincing buyers, viewers, and makers of the validity of the movement’s cause ... it is a vehicle whereby a movement can transmit information about its ethos and *modus operandi*’³⁶. Adams argues that visual art is the most effective way that cultural productions can contribute to framing processes. In her analysis of the role of *arpilleras*³⁷ in Pinochet’s Chile she maintains that the framing literature has focused too much on written and verbal aspects and ‘that it says little about nonverbal mechanisms of framing work’³⁸, ignoring the ways in which ‘art can communicate to the public the nature of a movement’s ethos and *modus operandi*’³⁹. The *arpilleras* were able to visually communicate information about life in Chile, on an emotional as well as a cognitive level. Further, as a physical object, activists could sell *arpilleras* in order to raise money for their cause – something that oral media cannot. Finally, Adams argues that visual arts provide activists with more anonymity than performed forms of activism, such as music, spoken word, or performance art, cannot. This makes them particularly effective in repressive regimes.

Yet, one of the challenges that any framing device must confront is the difficulty of accessing mass media agendas. In order to do so, activists must ‘frame social problems and injustices in a way that convinces a wide and diverse audience of the necessity for and utility of collective

³⁵ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, 6.

³⁶ Adams, ‘Art in Social Movements’, 45.

³⁷ ‘Arpilleras are applique pictures in cloth, usually depicting the hunger, lack of jobs, and political repression in the shantytowns. A typical arpillera would show a soup kitchen, a shantytown raid by soldiers, unsuccessful job hunting, and protests.’ Adams, 30.

³⁸ Adams, 24.

³⁹ Adams, 40.

attempts to redress them'⁴⁰. Media agendas can be hard for social movements to access, as they often have pre-conceived notions of what their audience will want to see. Sobieraj shows that even when social movement actors attempt to engage with media, by being more 'media-friendly' and professional, this can undermine them, as journalists want activists to seem 'authentic' and 'personal'⁴¹. Activism can help activists to circumvent these limitations. Some scholars have drawn on Szasz's idea of the 'political icon' to demonstrate this. He argues that 'political messages are carried by images rather than words, so that meaning, or signification takes place more through nonverbal spectacle than through narrative'⁴². As such 'political icons' use *visual* elements, which can include art, performance or other aspects of visual culture, to communicate movement goals⁴³. Returning to Adams' discussion of *arpilleras*, we can see how they functioned as a political icon, enabling activists to communicate with a transnational audience in a nonverbal way⁴⁴.

Of course, it is important to note that the way that social movements access media agendas has been disrupted by the advent of the social media age. The effectiveness of framing mechanisms, regardless of form, is limited by the number of people who are exposed to them; ultimately, cultural activism must be accessible to be successful⁴⁵. Social media allows activists to communicate with audiences directly and without having to shape their narratives to fit media agendas. It can allow cultural activism to be accessible and widely seen. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that social media provides a different set of

⁴⁰ McCarthy, Smith, and Zald, 'Accessing Public, Media, Electoral, and Governmental Agendas'.

⁴¹ Sobieraj, 'Reporting Conventions'.

⁴² Szasz, *EcoPopulism*, 62.

⁴³ Szasz, *EcoPopulism*.

⁴⁴ Adams, 'Art in Social Movements'.

⁴⁵ Collins, 'Activists Who Yearn for Art That Transforms', 734.

challenges for activists, particularly feminist activists whose posts are targeted by internet ‘trolls’ or censored for breaching content guidelines⁴⁶.

Art is not just key to communicating with external actors, it also has a central role to play *within* a movement. Art is ‘important to internal movement dynamics such as recruitment, mobilizing solidarity, and forming collective identity’⁴⁷. It carries protest traditions and helps ‘embed and disperse movement ideas and practices’⁴⁸. These processes are particularly important for abeyance: the ‘holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another’⁴⁹. Rupp and Taylor showed how feminist cultural events – music festivals, poetry readings etc – allowed feminists to maintain a community even within a hostile wider society. Art, therefore, enables activists to feel a sense of connection with one another, and there is a difference between arts used within movements and outside of them.

As we have seen, social movement scholars have demonstrated the importance of activism for communicating goals and messages as well as maintaining internal solidarity. Yet, it is not only social movement scholars who have looked at activism. Scholars in art history and cultural studies have provided important alternative perspectives that start from the artistic practices themselves, rather than the social movement. Where social movement scholars take the creative merits of activism as given, others have highlighted how the actual artefacts of activism are created and formed in specific social and political contexts. These scholars have

⁴⁶ Olszanowski, ‘Feminist Self-Imaging and Instagram’. Rúðólfssdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, ‘Fuck Patriarchy!’

⁴⁷ Eyerman, ‘The Art of Social Movement’, 549.

⁴⁸ Eyerman, 552.

⁴⁹ Taylor, ‘Social Movement Continuity’, 761.

revealed the importance of the creative aspects of activism, in a way that was not clear from a social movement perspective.

Art critics in particular have considered the complex relationship between art, processes of artistic creation, activism and politics. Lippard distinguishes between *political* and *activist* art. She reasons that “‘political’ art tends to be socially concerned and ‘activist’ art tends to be socially involved”⁵⁰. That is to say where political art simply comments on social issues, activist art actively involves communities in the artistic process. For Lippard, ‘the degree to which an activist art is integrated with the artist’s beliefs is crucial to its effectiveness’⁵¹, art that merely comments without being involved in the communities it purports to represent cannot claim to be ‘activist art’. Artwork that simply represents a problem, and draws attention to its political implications, without any involvement, is an example of political art. However, given the importance of art to many different activist processes, as shown by social movement scholars, Lippard’s distinction may exclude forms of activism that contribute to framing processes or internal movement dynamics.

Another challenge to activism, is the attitude of many critics towards activist art; there are many who believe that art should not be political⁵². Edelman, for example, argues that overtly political art is ‘kitsch’ and not of substantial artistic merit, therefore it is unlikely to have a long-lasting effect⁵³. Mullin claims that art can be both of artistic merit and politically significant⁵⁴. However, she cautions those who would make claims for the political power of *all* art, arguing that overly optimistic arguments ‘[obscure] the distinctive contribution that

⁵⁰ Lippard, ‘Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power’, 349.

⁵¹ Lippard, 355.

⁵² Mullin, ‘Feminist Art and the Political Imagination’, 192.

⁵³ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*.

⁵⁴ Mullin, ‘Feminist Art and the Political Imagination’, 189.

political and activist artworks can make'⁵⁵. It is simplistic to assume that all forms of politically involved culture are activism. These arguments highlight the importance of artists being *active*.

In addition to the distinction between activist and political art, other scholars have compared how 'high' and 'low' art relate to politics. Some see high art as restrictive 'since understanding 'high' art requires a grounding in the ideas and traditions behind it, its primary audiences remain limited to elite art-going publics'⁵⁶. Comparing the Black Arts and feminist art movements, Collins shows that for both movements, art that was not easily accessed or understood by all, such as elite or 'high' art, could not contribute to the struggle for liberation⁵⁷. Whereas 'low' art has a significant role to play in struggles over meaning and interpretation⁵⁸, as well as in 'dispers[ing] movement ideas and practices'⁵⁹. This is particularly true in the case of street art, Chaffee argues that it 'is structured to simplify the message, synthesize thoughts and ideas, and project concise messages and clichés'⁶⁰. Outsider art often comes closer to Lippard's definition of activist art than 'insider' art, especially when artists 'assum[e] that their work is done once an art piece goes public'⁶¹. This is particularly important for activist art working with marginalised communities, where established spaces like galleries, theatres, and museums may not be as easily accessed.

More recently scholars looking at the role of art in activism have called for an interdisciplinary approach that draws on both social movement theory and visual studies. As

⁵⁵ Mullin, 208.

⁵⁶ Flanagan et al., 'Feminist Activist Art, a Roundtable Forum', 11.

⁵⁷ Collins, 'Activists Who Yearn for Art That Transforms', 734.

⁵⁸ Howell, 'Beauty, Beasts, and Burls'.

⁵⁹ Eyerman, 'The Art of Social Movement', 552.

⁶⁰ Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art*, 9.

⁶¹ Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World*, 51.

Mullin argues, these two ‘camps’ of analyses miss crucial aspects by not engaging with each other⁶². Gomez-Barris’s work on ‘artistic and political undercurrents in the Americas’ demonstrates how a combined approach allows us to deepen our understanding of both art and politics. She argues that this ‘helps us organize new forms otherwise according to innovative and embodied models of change, rather than defaulting to well-oiled political machines’⁶³. In her book *Performance Action*, Serafini puts forward a framework for studying art activism, which ‘will prepare the ground for an understanding of art activism’s organisational politics, and the ways in which it is defined by its relation to wider social and political movements’⁶⁴.

Art has been a tool for feminist activism in particular. Although feminist art has been dismissed by many for either being too political or not artistic enough⁶⁵, it has long been a key part of movement. Collins describes the feminist art movement of the 1970s as a ‘cultural corollary’ of the women’s liberation movement, she argues participants in this movement were more likely to follow ‘ideologies that embrace the creative construction of alternative or oppositional cultures of resistance’⁶⁶. Feminist artists, embracing the idea of the personal as political, replaced the ‘modernist ideal of art for art’s sake with an activist ideal of art for people’s sake’⁶⁷. Moreover, Pollock demonstrates how feminist art has also provoked debates within feminism: ‘the identification of artists with the political movement has forced feminists to confront new and complex issues, even contradictions, which have generated diverse actions and important debates within feminist art practice’⁶⁸. Feminist art also

⁶² Mullin, ‘Feminist Art and the Political Imagination’, 192.

⁶³ Gómez-Barris, *Beyond the Pink Tide*, 2.

⁶⁴ Serafini, *Performance Action*, 9.

⁶⁵ Mullin, ‘Feminist Art and the Political Imagination’.

⁶⁶ Collins, ‘Activists Who Yearn for Art That Transforms’, 729–32.

⁶⁷ Collins, 735.

⁶⁸ Parker and Pollock, ‘Fifteen Years of Feminist Action: From Practical Strategies to Strategic Practices’, 3.

provokes reflections about key feminist issues: particularly the divide between private and public, and the body. Jones argues that in the work of feminist collective the Guerrilla Girls ‘their bodies in the public sphere are crucial activators of the text/image posters that explicitly call for action’⁶⁹.

This section has analysed the various approaches to the relationship between art, culture and activism. The problem with the term ‘activism’, is that despite efforts to define it (as I have done here) it remains slippery. ‘Art’ and ‘culture’ both pose problems of definition, particularly in relation to activism, making activism an even more tricky term to define. This raises the question of whether activism is a useful term. The rest of this review will analyse distinct approaches to the role of creative strategies in activism in order to answer this question. The next section will address the theme of ‘visual politics’, one that is different from activism but also deals with related questions of images, visuality, and representation.

2.2 Visual politics

The role of images, screens, and symbols is increasingly important in today’s world. As Nicholas Mirzoeff neatly summarises it: ‘like it or not, the emerging global society is visual’⁷⁰. This has a direct impact on activism. Social movement scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of the visual⁷¹. Activists must negotiate this visually dominated landscape as they attempt to not only make their voices heard, but also *seen*. Looking at the feminist movement through the lens of visual politics gives us insights into how feminist

⁶⁹ Flanagan et al., ‘Feminist Activist Art, a Roundtable Forum’, 7.

⁷⁰ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More*, 6.

⁷¹ Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*; Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune, ‘Toward a Visual Analysis of Social Movements, Conflict, and Political Mobilization’; McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*.

activists view their world and construct their politics in relation to it, as well as how they are shaped by the world around them. This perspective is also crucial to understanding the ways that social media is shaping contemporary activism. However, in order to fully understand the role of the visual, we should take an interdisciplinary approach drawing on social movement theory, and visual and performance studies.

Starting in the mid-twentieth century, the role of the visual in western society took on new importance in what has been referred to as the ‘aesthetic turn’⁷² or the ‘visual turn’⁷³. As visual culture became more and more a part of daily existence, through the influence of photography, film, television and other media, scholars questioned the ways that images shape our interactions with and perceptions of the world. In the age of social media, visual culture is more influential in ways that both echo and go beyond the predictions of the mid-century. Whereas images might have once reached audiences primarily through forms like television or film, the rise of social media means that the relationship between cultural producers and audiences has fundamentally shifted.

As new forms of visual media emerge and shape society, visual culture, defined by Rose as ‘the plethora of ways in which the visual is part of social life’ has become increasingly significant⁷⁴. In the 1960s and 1970s, writers like John Berger, Guy Debord and Susan Sontag contemplated the ways that expanding visual media production were shaping the world⁷⁵. By the 1990s visual culture had become a central part of social life, at least in

⁷² Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*.

⁷³ Grayson and Mawdsley, ‘Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations: Seeing World Politics through the Drone’.

⁷⁴ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 4.

⁷⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*; Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*; Sontag, *On Photography*.

western societies, something that Martin Jay defined as ‘ocularcentrism’⁷⁶. Now, this is truer than ever. Social media is an inherently visual format, broadcasting through screens on smartphones, tablets, and computers. The visual design of websites is key to the user experience, not just the images shared. It dominates our lives in ways that reflect the predictions made by writers in the mid-century. Debord’s ‘Society of the Spectacle’ argues that ‘the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images’⁷⁷. Society is now more visually mediated than it has ever been, which has a number of implications for activism.

The use of images and visual elements in activism, or visual politics, is a topic that has been referred to by a number of different terms in the literature. Images might include art, but also photographs, posters, graffiti, digital media posts and many other elements. Further, visual politics have been analysed by social movement studies, cultural and visual studies scholars, as well as feminist and political theorists. It is challenging but important to review these definitions and approaches in order to clarify what we are referring to by ‘visual politics’.

Some have approached visual politics as politics embedded in visual *culture*. It is therefore important to distinguish between visual *culture* and visual *politics*. In 1972 Svetlana Alpers defined it as how vision, image-making devices and visual skills are ‘cultural resources related to the practice of painting’⁷⁸. As digital technologies have become more and more dominant definitions have shifted to include that. Mirzoeff proposes a definition reflecting this: ‘visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in

⁷⁶ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

⁷⁷ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 7.

⁷⁸ Alpers et al., ‘Visual Culture Questionnaire’, 26.

an interface with visual technology'⁷⁹. Of course, visual technologies are not digital ones, but also include paintings, television and 'any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at'⁸⁰. However, visual culture is not just about what is seen: 'It also involves what is invisible or kept out of sight'⁸¹. As such, Rose's broad definition is perhaps the most helpful here: visual culture is the wider context of ways that the visual influences society⁸².

We are surrounded by visual images and technologies, both digital and otherwise. However, as Rose argues, there is a difference 'between vision and visuality'⁸³. If vision is what we are capable of seeing physiologically (although this capability is not universal), then visuality is the cultural construction of vision: 'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein'⁸⁴. As feminist scholars have demonstrated, vision itself is gendered⁸⁵. Hawkesworth highlights this point in an analysis of feminist *visibility* politics, which is concerned with rendering visible 'the naturalness of white male supremacy and unmask its brutal mechanics'⁸⁶.

In the case of social media, this concept is key: we do not just 'see' things neutrally online, images are shown to us by algorithms that are politically, racially, and otherwise biased⁸⁷. The visual regimes of online media, shaped by algorithms and murky community guidelines replicate systemic racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. When making things

⁷⁹ Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*, 3.

⁸⁰ Mirzoeff, 3.

⁸¹ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More*, 11.

⁸² Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

⁸³ Rose.

⁸⁴ Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, ix.

⁸⁵ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'; Haraway, 'The Persistence of Vision'.

⁸⁶ Hawkesworth, 'Visibility Politics: Theorizing Racialized Gendering, Homosociality, and the Feminicidal State', 317.

⁸⁷ Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*.

visible, activists do not always have control over how their actions are framed as they rely on the media to make collective action visible to a wider audience⁸⁸. Certain bodies are prioritised online. Feminist and queer images often face greater censorship than mainstream images⁸⁹.

As well as visual culture, others have used the term ‘visual activism’. Borrowing from artist and activist Zanele Muholi who defines her practice as ‘visual activism’, Wilson, González and Willsdon see this as an expansive term, that moves away from discussions about socially-engaged art to ‘better highlight the complex and ever-shifting relationships between visual cultures, artistic practices, and polemical strategies in their most capacious definition’⁹⁰. Their definitions take an approach based in visual studies and the literature on art and politics. One of the challenges in defining visual politics is that it can be an ambiguous concept. This is something that Sliwinska highlights in her analysis of visual activism; it is something that underlines the spaces between visual culture, arts-based and social movement approaches. Her definition of a specifically *feminist* visual activism is particularly useful: ‘a collective, performative and embodied enactment of social justice’⁹¹. Feminist approaches to visual activism and politics remind us of the role of the body in visual politics.

In attempting to define visual politics, we should also take into consideration the literature on political aesthetics. While the visual is concerned with how we see, aesthetics focuses on ‘what “art” is and what it can do’⁹². However, as Sartwell points out ‘not all art is political, but all politics is aesthetic; at their heart political ideologies, systems, and constitutions are

⁸⁸ Corrigan-Brown and Wilkes, ‘Picturing Protest’, 238.

⁸⁹ Salty, ‘An Investigation into Algorithmic Bias in Content Policing on Instagram’.

⁹⁰ Bryan-Wilson, González, and Willsdon, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, 9.

⁹¹ Sliwinska, *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body*, 4.

⁹² de León, *Another Aesthetics Is Possible: Arts of Rebellion in the Fourth World War*, 3.

aesthetic systems, multimedia artistic environments'⁹³. Therefore, political aesthetics is not just about political art but all of the 'non-discursive features' of political systems and groups⁹⁴. Drawing on Sartwell's definition, Werbner et al. examine the role of political aesthetics in relation to protest and activism specifically, arguing that protests are aesthetic performances of embodied presence⁹⁵. As the last section of this chapter argues, we cannot understand visual politics without considering the role of embodiment. Political aesthetics, as Ponce de Leon argues, is about struggles over ways of "feeling and seeing reality"⁹⁶.

Following the literature on political aesthetics, another approach draws on aesthetics in order to analyse the role of visual elements in protest. Various scholars refer to the 'aesthetics of protest'⁹⁷. McGarry et al. understand this to include: 'the visual and performative elements of protest, such as images, symbols, graffiti, art, as well as the choreography of protest actions in public spaces'⁹⁸. This approach focuses more on protestors themselves and how they use aesthetics to produce and document protest. It also allows us to see how these visual elements move across borders: both between states, but also between the online and the offline, the local and the transnational.

Returning to the idea of visual politics specifically, having considered the literature on political aesthetics. Visual politics is a term that has been used particularly by feminist scholars⁹⁹. Politics necessitates a focus on power, as Pollock asks: 'what are the politics of

⁹³ Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*, 1.

⁹⁴ Sartwell, 4.

⁹⁵ Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 9.

⁹⁶ de León, *Another Aesthetics Is Possible: Arts of Rebellion in the Fourth World War*, 6.

⁹⁷ Olesen, 'Dramatic Diffusion and Meaning Adaptation: The Case of Neda'; Veneti, 'Aesthetics of Protest'; NicGhabhann, 'City Walls, Bathroom Stalls and Tweeting the Taoiseach'; McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*.

⁹⁸ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 19.

⁹⁹ hooks, 'Art on My Mind: Visual Politics'; Pollock, *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and the Image in Post-Traumatic Cultures*.

what is seen and what is not, what is shown and what is not, what is registered and how it is used?’¹⁰⁰. Visual politics exists within visual culture; the ways that the visual (in all its forms) are used in political action by different kinds of actors. Visual politics also aims to persuade, represent movement identity, build social and political imaginaries attractive to an ever-broadening audience. Visual politics is a set of beliefs communicated through images, the use of images to challenge (or maintain) power and status.

As many have recognised, the role of the visual is increasingly important in the digital age. We experience online platforms through screens, and social media are deeply visual technologies. Visual politics is therefore of utmost importance in this context. Politics moves across physical borders as well as the borders between online and offline. Visual politics is key for allowing activists to do this. Not only this, but analysing visual politics ‘can collapse more rigid distinctions between what is considered to be ‘online’ (material) and what is considered to be ‘offline’ (digital) or not’¹⁰¹. Symbols are also key for protest movements: ‘Movement symbols may help to conceptualize verbal arguments of the issue at hand in ways that words cannot’¹⁰².

The study of visual politics has been particularly important for studies of feminist movements and ideas. Consider Petchesky’s ‘Fetal Images’, a landmark study of the visual in relation to abortion politics. She reminds us that visual politics can also be conservative, giving the example of the use of images of dead fetuses by anti-abortion activists¹⁰³. In the visual politics of anti-abortion activism, we ‘see’ the foetus but ‘we do not ‘see’ the woman

¹⁰⁰ Pollock, *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and the Image in Post-Traumatic Cultures*, 7.

¹⁰¹ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 25.

¹⁰² Goodnow, ‘On Black Panthers, Blue Ribbons, & Peace Signs’, 173.

¹⁰³ Petchesky, ‘Fetal Images’, 263.

carrying the foetus. However, as she argues, feminist activists can also use visual politics to ‘recontextualize the fetus’ and make the ‘real women’ visible in discussion of abortion rights¹⁰⁴. As Sutton and Vacarezza demonstrate, this is something that the abortion rights movement in Argentina has done successfully: ‘[it] has developed powerful symbols of struggle as well as a compelling visual repertoire to convey its claims’ and these can ‘articulate broader democratic agendas that include sexual and reproductive rights as part of expansive human rights’¹⁰⁵.

Yet, as many scholars have noted, visual politics is also not neutral, and can reinforce pre-existing hierarchies. Ginsburg argues that ‘even as alternative ways of visibility are presented, normative and gendered frameworks of interpretation are nonetheless in place’¹⁰⁶. Our pre-existing notions of visibility can interfere with efforts to challenge the politics of that visibility. Through the idea of ‘bearing witness’ through art in post-traumatic societies, Husanović underlines that our own thoughts and memories ‘[provide] a patchwork of recollection, affirmation and transformation’¹⁰⁷. When analysing images, rather than seeing them as positive or negative representations, we should instead ‘engag[e] with its effectivity; with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination, and dependence that constructs the Colonial subject (both coloniser, and colonised)’¹⁰⁸. Visual politics is as much about visibility as it is about invisibility: as Minh-Ha argues: ‘invisibility is built into each instance of visibility’¹⁰⁹. Considering this, visual politics should take into account ‘the seen,

¹⁰⁴ Petchesky, 287.

¹⁰⁵ Sutton and Vacarezza, ‘Abortion Rights in Images’, 752.

¹⁰⁶ Ginsburg, ‘Armed with a Camera: Gender, Human Rights, and Visual Documentation in Israel/Palestine’, 622.

¹⁰⁷ Husanović, ‘The Politics of Gender, Witnessing, Postcoloniality and Trauma’, 110.

¹⁰⁸ Bhabha, ‘The Other Question...’.

¹⁰⁹ Minh-ha, ‘The Image and the Void’, 132.

the barely seen, and the unseen; in the between, the margins, and the borders of visible reality'¹¹⁰.

Feminism has long acknowledged that visibility (the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see) is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed in Western culture¹¹¹. What, therefore, is a visual politics of contemporary feminism? Feminists have long considered the function of visual culture in shaping gender roles¹¹². Feminist activists often aim to render visible problems that were previously invisible to the public gaze, reflected in language like 'raising awareness' or 'drawing attention to'. This mirrors the ways that feminist writing has tried to define unnamed problems (as in 'the problem that has no name'). Instead, feminist politics addresses the invisible problem. Feminist visual politics also applies to how we see¹¹³.

Feminist visual politics is not just about adding women to visual politics but taking an explicitly feminist stance at all levels of visual politics. This means, in the words of Griselda Pollock, '[demanding] recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction'¹¹⁴. This also involves examining how vision is constructed. While vision is sometime constructed as objective – 'photographs don't lie' – Haraway argues that vision is embodied and partial, and therefore 'vision is *always* a question of the power to see'¹¹⁵. Answering the question of not only what we see, but how we

¹¹⁰ Minh-ha, 132.

¹¹¹ Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 2.

¹¹² Pollock, *Vision and Difference*.

¹¹³ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

¹¹⁴ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 192.

see is key to the study of social media. Analyses of visual social media must take into account the power dynamics behind the screen; social networking sites are owned by large corporations and feature heavy use of censorship and surveillance to shape users' experience, largely to the detriment of women and LGBT+ communities¹¹⁶.

Feminist visual politics also questions how we see, either by highlighting the male gaze or creating visuals from different perspective, using the 'female gaze'. Practices like selfies, portraits, illustrations, and memes can all serve as examples of a visual politics representing a feminist perspective on the world¹¹⁷. Despite the fact that feminist activists try to centre a female gaze, the male gaze still dominates online. Images that feminists create exist side by side with images that are decidedly unfeminist. The algorithms that create social media feeds might place a feminist selfie next to a sexualised image of a young woman. This creates a sense of dissonance. When feminists try to express their own sexuality, it is within a space that is still shaped by the male gaze. Feminist images exist alongside a canon of images created by men. These images, either taken by themselves or other women, go against what Jansen describes as the fallacy of female visibility: 'we see photographs of women every day, but we are used to looking at them in a few specific contexts: on products and billboards, in shop windows and magazine covers, in erotica and pornography'¹¹⁸. When women create images it is assumed that they are creating them *as women*, whereas when men do so, it is assumed to be from a 'neutral' position. Yet, as Hustvedt demonstrates, men looking at women are still looking *as men*¹¹⁹. By presenting an alternative gaze towards themselves not only as women, but also as feminists, activists push back against the canon.

¹¹⁶ Salty, 'An Investigation into Algorithmic Bias in Content Policing on Instagram'.

¹¹⁷ Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz, 'Selfies, Image and the Re-Making of the Body'.

¹¹⁸ Jansen, *Girl on Girl*.

¹¹⁹ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*.

Feminists have harnessed the power of viral images to put issues of violence and bodily autonomy on the agenda. Spectacular images of violence help to show what goes on ‘behind closed doors’ and renders visible a private issue. These images of bodies that have had violence inflicted on them circulate on social media creating a storm of outrage. Activists have been able to harness these storms of outrage in movements like Ni Una Menos and #MeToo.

Visual politics is an important framework for understanding contemporary activism, given that we live in a world where our experiences and realities are constantly mediated through the visual. Analysing the concept of the visual also sparks questions about visibility, the gaze, and the politics of seeing. This section has used these debates as a way of exploring the possibilities and challenges of visual politics as a lens through which to approach feminist strategies, particularly in the visual age. However, we do still live in the ‘real’ world, through the embodied and tangible. As such, the next section looks at the concept of ‘embodied politics’.

2.3 Embodied politics

In addition to studies of social movements focusing on the visual, scholars have also started to turn their attention to the role of the body and embodiment in activism. This mirrors an increase in interest in the body in a number of disciplines¹²⁰. Within the social movement

¹²⁰ Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*.

literature, there are two strands of analysis: one focusing on the role of the physical body in protest, and another drawing on ideas of performance and embodiment.

Sutton argues that social movement theory has not sufficiently taken into account the role of bodies. Activism is performed through the body, and in doing so activists use their bodies as a political text¹²¹. Similarly, McDonald argues that scholars should focus on the embodied experience rather than collective identity, given that contemporary movements do not exclusively focus on processes of collective identity formation¹²². That is to say, we should place the body back into understandings of social movement both as a political text, but also a site of experience and emotion.

This approach is particularly applicable in the case of feminist activism, given the ways that women's bodies have been controlled and their access to public space limited. As such, much of the feminist literature on protest focuses on the impact of women's bodies in public space. Gale argues that 'women's activist gestures have often operated through a theatrical strategy of incongruity and juxtaposition: the female body is placed where it does not belong or is not permitted in an act of rebellious and resolute presence'¹²³. In an unequal society, when women's bodies are present where they are not supposed to be, their presence becomes a political act.

When it comes to the role of the body in protest, it can have an impact as an individual body or a collective of bodies. Sliwinska argues that in the case of feminist activism a collective approach is more effective: 'not a single body but a plurality of bodies emerge together and

¹²¹ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 162.

¹²² McDonald, *Global Movements*.

¹²³ Gale, 'Resolute Presence, Fugitive Moments, and the Body in Women's Protest Performance', 325.

become a precondition of political demands'¹²⁴. On the other hand, individual bodily protest can be equally powerful. For example, Emma Sulkowicz' 'Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)' in which she carried a mattress with her for nearly a year, in protest of Columbia University's refusal to expel her (alleged) rapist. The sight of her carrying the mattress, including to her graduation, underlined how a lack of justice forces victims to shoulder the burden of sexual violence on their own.

Among instances of bodily protest, naked protest is a key tactic. Abonga et al. argue that 'naked protest is a strategy used by marginalised – or 'muted' – populations who lack access to dominant modes of communication to express their grievances'¹²⁵. For feminists, exposing the naked female body is a common strategy, one that is discussed in Chapter Six. Tied into debates about the role of the female nude in art, the presence of naked bodies in public space has a particular power¹²⁶. However, some scholars argue that feminist naked protest fails 'to (re)appropriate patriarchal signifiers' and ends up reinforcing them instead¹²⁷.

Athanasiou and Butler invite us to think of the body as 'a turbulent performative occasion' in which gathered bodies 'enact a performativity of embodied agency'¹²⁸. When bodies gather in public space, they challenge how the body relates to space. This does not have to be a physical space, it could also be a virtual one¹²⁹. As Butler argues, by exercising the 'right to appear', they '[deliver] a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions'¹³⁰. The tensions inherent in the use of the body for activism provide

¹²⁴ Sliwinska, *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body*, 7.

¹²⁵ Abonga et al., 'Naked Bodies and Collective Action', 19.

¹²⁶ Nead, 'The Female Nude'.

¹²⁷ O'keefe, 'My Body Is My Manifesto! SlutWalk, FEMEN and Femmenist Protest', 4.

¹²⁸ Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, 177–79.

¹²⁹ Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 11.

¹³⁰ Butler, 11.

important theoretical insights for performance protest. Serafini argues that the body is ‘not only a means for expression, but also a ‘tool’ for occupation’¹³¹.

Another approach to the embodied in activism is through the study of performance protest, or performance activism. Performance activism includes a wide range of practices, that aim ‘simultaneously to attract and hold attention and [challenge] understandings and expectations’¹³². Performance studies has been particularly important in the Latin American context, as the work of Diana Taylor demonstrates. Before focusing on ‘performance’, she looked at the role of theatre in Latin America. In ‘Theatre of Crisis’ she sets out how pre-conquest indigenous societies were “‘theatre states” [...] in which spectacle provided the vital link between the social and cosmic orders’¹³³ as opposed to the written culture of the colonising forces¹³⁴. This, she argues, impacted the development of theatre in Latin America to the present, as it has been dominated by colonising cultures, first the Spanish and later the impact of commercially successful foreign works that displaced local theatrical activity¹³⁵. Nevertheless, theatre came to occupy an important role in resistance to oppression: ‘theatre is live; live actors affect live audiences in unforeseeable ways; each performance would have to be policed in order to ensure that the actors did not deliver a line or make a gesture that would communicate a politically prohibited message to its audience’¹³⁶. Here she uses the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo as an example of how ‘the oppressed can take up public spectacle to rally support, sympathy, and legitimacy for their position’¹³⁷. She develops this

¹³¹ Serafini, ‘Subversion through Performance: Performance Activism in London’, 334.

¹³² Kutz-Flamenbaum, ‘Code Pink, Raging Grannies, and the Missile Dick Chicks: Feminist Performance Activism in the Contemporary Anti-War Movement’, 91.

¹³³ Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 2.

¹³⁴ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire : Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 17.

¹³⁵ Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 13.

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 5.

¹³⁷ Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 5.

idea in further depth in ‘Disappearing Acts’, using the Debordian idea of ‘spectacle’ to examine the political spectacles of the Dirty War in Argentina: both the spectacles of oppression (such as torture and disappearances) but also the spectacles of resistance through theatre, demonstrations, *escraches* and other performance-based actions¹³⁸.

In ‘The Archive and the Repertoire’, Taylor more explicitly brings together performance studies and Latin/o American studies. Her proposal to use ‘performed, embodied behaviors’ as a lens through which to study ‘social memory and cultural identity in the Americas’ directly relates to the work of this thesis¹³⁹. While this was written in 2003, she is already aware of the relevance of this to digital activism, and how we can analyse it as an ‘embodied practice’¹⁴⁰. Drawing on her earlier work on theatre and spectacle in Latin America, here she uses performance studies to destabilise Latin American studies as a field, especially in the United States by de-centring the role of the written form¹⁴¹. The argument that ‘embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge’ is critical for understanding contemporary feminist activism not just as a way of challenging oppressive forces, but also creating knowledge¹⁴².

In ‘Performance’ she develops this idea further, not only looking at the embodied but bringing the body itself into the centre of this idea. She defines performance as ‘a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body’¹⁴³. However, we must also think about how that ‘body’ or those ‘bodies’ are constructed by systems of oppression¹⁴⁴. In her most recent

¹³⁸ Taylor, *Disappearing Acts : Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War.”*

¹³⁹ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, xviii.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, xix.

¹⁴¹ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 17.

¹⁴² Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

¹⁴³ Taylor, *Performance*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, *Performance*, 96.

work, ‘¡Presente!’ Taylor moves from performance to presence as an organising concept¹⁴⁵.

This study examines the role of performative political interventions in contexts where ‘it seems that nothing can be done and doing nothing is not an option’¹⁴⁶. This supports the argument of this thesis that feminist activists in Peru have turned to visual and embodied politics – including performance – in the face of protracted political crisis and social opposition.

In Taylor’s work the body is a key theme that cannot be understood solely by looking at language¹⁴⁷. Through theatre, performance, and presence, activists ‘have used their bodies to challenge regimes of power and social norms’¹⁴⁸. In order to understand this, Taylor uses performance as an analytic lens to focus on the centrality of the body: both as an agent of change, and source of knowledge transmission¹⁴⁹. This is particularly important for analysing the body as both the subject and object of capitalism and colonialism. In the digital age, the body is still present even as it challenges the notion of embodiment itself¹⁵⁰.

As this section has shown the body is an essential part of activism, whether that takes place in person or online. However, the body can also act as a sort of ‘image’ through performances in the public space, as it is ‘seen’ by the intended or unintended audience. The next section of this review address this overlap by comparing approaches to visual *and* embodied politics.

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, *¡Presente! : The Politics of Presence*, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 245.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Taylor, *Performance*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *Performance*, 36, 96.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 4-5.

2.4 Visual and embodied politics

In this last section I consider the ways that the visual and embodied politics overlap. Seeing is a process that involves ‘the whole body, not just the eyes’¹⁵¹. Feminist scholars, such as Haraway, have highlighted how the visual is embodied, rather than a neutral scientific gaze¹⁵². Considering this, taking a visual and embodied approach to feminist activism reveals how the body and vision are involved in multiple ways.

Bodies can be hyper-visible, for example as in the case of naked protest discussed above. However, the body in public space can be a powerful method of communication in a world dominated by visual media¹⁵³. Individual bodies or groups of bodies can grab the attention of the media cycle in order to draw attention to a cause. For Korporeal, the transformative power of visual and embodied politics draws on ‘the tension between embodiment and disembodiment, visibility and opacity, presence and absence’¹⁵⁴. The area between these supposed binaries offers a way of understanding contemporary activism. Korporeal builds the concept of ‘intensional activism’ that exposes the inequalities between bodies and how certain bodies are more visible, in order to use these tensions within the performance itself¹⁵⁵.

Affect is key to understanding the intersections of the visual and embodied in activism¹⁵⁶.

Not only are emotions embodied¹⁵⁷, but art itself can evoke powerful emotions. Adams,

¹⁵¹ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More*, 14.

¹⁵² Haraway, ‘The Persistence of Vision’, 192.

¹⁵³ Bryan-Wilson, González, and Willsdon, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, 20.

¹⁵⁴ Korporeal, ‘Activist Intension - Mona Hatoum and Morehshin Allahyari’s Disruptive Bodies’, 32.

¹⁵⁵ Korporeal, 42.

¹⁵⁶ Jasper, ‘The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements’.

¹⁵⁷ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

writing about the role of arpilleras in Chile, argues that ‘emotions, aroused partly through art’ can have a number of impacts, including mobilising support but also building and strengthening a movement¹⁵⁸. Art is not just about framing processes, but also about emotions, empowerment, and reflection¹⁵⁹. As such, we cannot analyse political art or performance without considering the role of emotions. Taking to account the affects of political aesthetics can allow us to see how ‘visual, aural, and tactile encounters with objects, spaces or indeed other bodies can engage the senses in ways that produce (political) effects’¹⁶⁰.

This is not important simply for the analysis of activism, but also activism itself. As Husanović argues, the ‘synergies between culture, art, and politics’ that bring in ‘the politics of affect’ can create new political and activist possibilities¹⁶¹. For Serafini, performance in particular creates ‘temporary situations of freedom, transgression, reflection and mutual empowerment’¹⁶². Visual and embodied politics, therefore, offer new possibilities for activists, particularly when they face a growing backlash. This is particularly relevant for feminist activists in Peru who must navigate a rising tide of social conservatism and limited political opportunities.

Finally, an analysis of activism that takes into account the visual and the embodied as well as the role of affect deepens our understands of the relationship between different forms of activism. As Murphy argues in the case of mass political violence, given that this ‘is inextricably tethered to the human body’ we must ‘attend to the ways memory is performed

¹⁵⁸ Adams, ‘Art in Social Movements’, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Ryan, ‘Affect’s Effects’, 43.

¹⁶⁰ Ryan, ‘Political Street Art in Social Mobilization : A Tale of Two Protests in Argentina’, 106–7.

¹⁶¹ Husanović, ‘The Politics of Gender, Witnessing, Postcoloniality and Trauma’, 107.

¹⁶² Serafini, ‘Subversion through Performance: Performance Activism in London’, 337.

in visual and embodied ways'¹⁶³. Further, in the case of feminist activism, where oppression and patriarchal control target the body, such an approach is essential.

In order to take such an approach, we need an interdisciplinary framework that draws on concepts from fields including social movement theory, art, visual studies, performance studies and feminism. Serafini describes art activism as an 'in-between practice', one that challenges the ontological and methodological separation of the two in research¹⁶⁴. Bell also argues that art is a space for exploring the spaces in between the past and the future¹⁶⁵. We can use the idea of the 'in-between' as a guiding concept for understanding visual and embodied politics. These blurred boundaries and spaces between help us to see the utility of visual and embodied politics as a way of understanding contemporary feminist activism. Contemporary activism exists between many different spaces, and therefore the 'in-between' is an important analytical frame.

Returning to the work of Diana Taylor, the 'in-between' is a key theme in relation to performance. The idea of the in-between specifically first appears in *Performance*, where Taylor argues that it 'moves between the AS IF and the IS, between pretend and new constructions of the "real"'¹⁶⁶. The term 'performance' itself is 'tricky', as it can be used to refer number of different actions, yet Taylor argues that there are 'productive frictions among them'¹⁶⁷. These productive frictions include the tensions between past and present, the 'true' and the 'false', the real and virtual¹⁶⁸. In *¡Presente!* she builds on this idea to show how this

¹⁶³ Murphy, 'Introduction', 25.

¹⁶⁴ Serafini, *Performance Action*, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Bell, *The Art of Post-Dictatorship*, 14.

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, *Performance*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Taylor, *Performance*, 9, 41, 108.

in-between space is where politics takes place: in ‘the productive gaps across which we struggle to recognize each other’¹⁶⁹. The ‘in-between’ offers us a way of analysing from inside these gaps; taking the spaces in between as sources of knowledge in themselves.

In *The Anthropology of Performance* Victor Turner approaches the ‘in-between’ through his understanding of ‘liminality’, which is relevant to this current analysis. Drawing on the work of the folklorist Arnold van Gennep, Turner retakes ‘liminality’ as the ‘suspension of quotidian reality, occupying privileged spaces where people are allowed to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily life’¹⁷⁰. Liminal spaces are those in which we leave our everyday lives, and before we return to them. We can use this to analyse performance as a space to reflect on one’s experiences and understandings of the world outside of one’s daily reality. The liminal space of performance makes it a space for knowledge construction and transformation.

The idea of the in-between as a space of transformation also appears in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, drawing on her experiences as a Chicana lesbian growing up in the US-Mexico border region she theorises the borderland as ‘a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary’¹⁷¹. Originally a way of analysing the *mestiza* experiences of this specific area of the world, she built upon it through the concept of ‘*nepantla*’ from the Náhuatl for land in-between. *Nepantla* can be used to understand all kinds of liminal spaces: ‘transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in- transition space lacking clear

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 52.

¹⁷⁰ Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 102.

¹⁷¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 69.

boundaries'¹⁷². She suggests that this can be applied to feminist movements, who 'are attacked, called unnatural by the ruling powers when in fact they are ideas whose time has come', existing in an ideological borderland¹⁷³. For Anzaldúa, artists and activists are central to mediating these transitions as 'nepantleras' navigating the border crossings¹⁷⁴.

For scholars of activism and performance, the liminal, the in-between, and the borderland are essential concept for understanding the slippages implied by these methods for changing the world. This only becomes more important as we continue to make our way in the digital age. As section 2.5 will discuss, our lives exist online and offline, and in the borderlands between the digital and the physical. As such, we can use the 'in-between' to analyse the liminal spaces where activism now takes place.

Contemporary feminist activism in Peru exists on a slippery surface of political crisis, conservative backlash, and social media. As this thesis will argue, rather than examining this 'new' feminism from a singular disciplinary perspective, we need to consider what happens in the gaps between activism and art, the online and the offline, the institutional and the grassroots. As Diana Taylor reminds us: 'politics takes place in the space between, beside, and around us, the productive gaps across which we struggle to recognize each other'¹⁷⁵. By analysing the contemporary feminist movement in Peru from the perspective of that which crosses and blurs boundaries we can gain a deeper understanding of why activists use visual and embodied politics and how these are transforming the movement.

¹⁷² Anzaldúa and Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 243.

¹⁷³ Anzaldúa and Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 243.

¹⁷⁴ Anzaldúa and Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 310.

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, 52.

2.5 Feminist politics

So far this literature review has set out what this thesis understands visual and embodied politics to be. However, it is also important to review approaches to feminist politics in order to understand what a feminist visual and embodied politics might mean. While there is extensive scholarship on transnational and international feminist movements, it would be beyond the scope of this review to include them all. This section instead focuses on feminist movements in Latin America. Understanding the literature on Latin American movements, as well as the Peruvian movements, allows us to understand the challenges of analysing the contemporary feminist movement in Peru specifically. Although there is a new moment of activism, it has not emerged out of nowhere, and the influence of previous generations and transnational movements is significant.

Firstly, what is a feminist movement? Is it the same thing as a women's movement? The literature on the emergence of women's movements in the 1970s and 1980s differentiates between different kinds of women's movements. Generally speaking, there is a split in the literature between women's movements and feminist movements. For example, as previously mentioned, in the Peruvian case Vargas identifies three 'streams': the feminist movement, the popular women's movement and women in the political arena including elected officials or those campaigning for office¹⁷⁶. Molyneux also highlights a distinction between feminist movements and women's movements, seeing the latter as concerning 'the struggles of low-income women over consumption needs and their protests against social injustice'¹⁷⁷. Yet, as

¹⁷⁶ Vargas, 'The Women's Movement in Peru'.

¹⁷⁷ Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective*, 141.

she acknowledges, there is not a set definition of what counts as a women's movement, as these can include a range of practices, networks and organisations, whose boundaries are not clear cut¹⁷⁸. Women do not all have the same priorities and interests.

The question of what are 'women's interests' also appears in the literature. This began with Molyneux's examination of how these interests were affected by the Nicaragua revolution. She argues that just as women are not a monolith, neither are so-called "women's interests"; that is to say these are also differentiated by factors such as class and ethnicity. She then distinguishes between strategic and practical gender interests: strategic gender interests are those that are tied to ending women's subordination – e.g. 'the abolition of the sexual division of labor...the attainment of political equality'¹⁷⁹ and are seen similar to feminist goals. Practical gender interests on the other hand, are those that 'arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gendered division of labor', and 'are usually a response to an immediate perceived need'¹⁸⁰. She concludes by arguing that : 'it is a question therefore not just of what interests are represented in the state, but ultimately and critically of how they are represented'¹⁸¹. Responding to critiques of the 'interest paradigm' Molyneux argues that 'the distinction does differentiate between ways of reasoning about gender relations; in the formulation of practical interests there is the assumption that there is compliance with the existing gender order, while in the case of strategic interests there is an explicit questioning of that order and of the compliance of some women with it'¹⁸².

¹⁷⁸ Molyneux, 143.

¹⁷⁹ Molyneux, 'Mobilization without Emancipation?', 233.

¹⁸⁰ Molyneux, 233.

¹⁸¹ Molyneux, 251.

¹⁸² Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective*, 156.

Another paradigm in the literature on women's movements is the move from a 'needs-based' approach to a 'rights-based' approach. This has some overlap with the idea of strategic and practical interests: a needs-based approach is focused on material necessities, such as feeding children, or access to utilities. The shift to a rights-based approach in the 1990s is similar to strategic interests that seek to change women's position in society. This shift took place during the 1990s: A key development of the 1990s was the emphasis that governments placed on the rhetoric of rights and the 'recognition' of women's citizenship and the declaration at the 1995 Beijing conference that 'women's rights are human rights'. This 'played a fundamental role in making this dynamic evident, in widening women's horizons and increasing their levels of autonomy, and in consolidating the gains already made on the threshold of the new millennium'¹⁸³. Many of the gains made by women's movements in Latin America during the 1990s relied on rights-based frames: quota laws, changes to laws on gender violence, and more gender sensitive policy making¹⁸⁴.

However the 'rights-based approach' has been criticised for not problematising the notion of rights themselves. Some argued that human rights were a gender-blind instrument that did not apply to the private sphere, and thus did not take into account many of contexts in which women faced violence¹⁸⁵. This approach obscured the different axes along which women are marginalised; as Cornwall and Molyneux ask: 'which women? Whose rights?'¹⁸⁶. That is to say, how do right-based approaches obscure the multiple forms of oppression that women face, and how do they re-enforce these hegemonic ideas of womanhood. Further, while the rights-based approach was dominant in the women's movement, across Latin America

¹⁸³ Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms', 215.

¹⁸⁴ Molyneux and Craske, 'The Local, the Regional and the Global: Transforming the Politics of Rights', 25.

¹⁸⁵ Molyneux and Craske, 9.

¹⁸⁶ Cornwall and Molyneux, 'The Politics of Rights', 1187.

countries were suffering from the effects of structural adjustment. So, while governments were placing greater emphasis on women's rights, the new measures introduced under this framing 'made only a small contribution to alleviating the human cost of the adjustment policies'¹⁸⁷.

Not only did the rights-based approach not fully take into account the impact of gender, it was also limited in its ability to take into account 'the full diversity of voices, subjects, identities, ethnic groups and spaces where the dynamic of exclusion is still expressed in hidden ways'¹⁸⁸. This is key to expanding and consolidating the rights of all women, many of whom are impacted by other forms of inequality not necessarily enshrined in human rights paradigms¹⁸⁹. The limits of the rights-based approach are particularly notable in Peru, and reveal the risks contained within it¹⁹⁰. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, during the 1990s some parts of the feminist movement worked closely with the authoritarian Fujimori government, which used the language of women's rights to 'cloak' the regime in legitimacy, while committing mass human rights violations, particularly against indigenous women¹⁹¹. This will be analysed further later in this thesis, but it underlines the ways that governments and institutions used the discourse of rights, while often undermining those rights.

This also reflects two issues for feminist movements in Latin America: the relationship with the State, and the impact of institutionalisation. The relationship between Peruvian feminists and the government in the 1990s were 'contractual, clientelistic and personalised' and 'were

¹⁸⁷ Craske and Molyneux, *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms', 215.

¹⁸⁹ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*.

¹⁹⁰ Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms', 211.

¹⁹¹ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*.

not underpinned by the feminist organisations' own agenda'¹⁹². This led to both the depoliticisation of the feminist movement, and undermined its relationship to other parts of the women's movement¹⁹³. This underlines the importance of autonomy for feminist and women's movements, particularly in Latin America, where it is not possible for these organisations to completely separate themselves from political linkages¹⁹⁴.

More recently, scholars have also noted the role of the relationship with the state for feminist movements during the 'Pink Tide'. They argue that 'the countries of the Pink Tide made a significant difference in the lives of women and LGBT people in the region' including greater political representation, and more space for these movements¹⁹⁵. Despite this, Pink Tide governments tended to rely 'on heteropatriarchal relations of power [...] ignoring or rejecting the more challenging elements of a social agenda and engaging in strategic trade-offs among gender and sexual rights'¹⁹⁶. Blofield and Ewig argue that the impact of these governments differed according to 'the type of left party in power'¹⁹⁷. While Peru did not experience a Pink Tide government, it has recently elected a left-wing government (see Chapter 4.1.2), but it is not a progressive left. As this thesis will go on to explore, this government has so far not had a positive impact for the feminist movement. Feminist movements cannot always rely on the state to create gender-inclusive policy and legal changes.

¹⁹² Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms', 213.

¹⁹³ Alfaro, *Mundos de Renovación y Trabas Para La Acción Pública de La Mujer*.

¹⁹⁴ Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective*, 3.

¹⁹⁵ Friedman and Tabbush, 'Contesting the Pink Tide', 2.

¹⁹⁶ Friedman and Tabbush, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Blofield and Ewig, 'The Left Turn and Abortion Politics in Latin America', 482.

Another issue in the literature on feminist movements in Latin America is the impact of institutionalisation, or ‘how to maintain the transformational radicalism of feminist thought and action when entering public, political spaces to negotiate and define agendas that affect women’¹⁹⁸. This has also been termed NGOization: ‘the increased professionalization and specialization of significant sectors of feminist movements’¹⁹⁹. Criticisms of NGOization argue that the feminist movement became ‘excessively narrow [and] state-centric’ rather than putting forward ‘an alternative ‘feminist worldview’²⁰⁰. Even when ideas about gender and empowerment have been mainstreamed by various governments in Latin America, they have not addressed ‘the underlying structural issues driving discrimination and inequality – including violence against women and diminished sexual and reproductive rights’²⁰¹. This underlines the argument that feminist transformations must be pursued on multiple levels, not just through the state or institutions, but also at the level of culture.

At the same that gender has been ‘mainstreamed’²⁰², there has been a rising movement in Latin America opposed to all things ‘gender’. Initially gender was used by some activists as a way of subtly inserting feminist goals into policy and legislation²⁰³. However, gender is now taken to refer to feminism, LGBTQ+ movements and any number of progressive reforms, and faces an intense backlash. This movement has been termed ‘anti-genderism’²⁰⁴. After the ‘rise of rights’ and the Pink Tide, there has been a conservative backlash not only against feminist movements²⁰⁵ but also ‘queer, antiracist, indigenous, human rights, and

¹⁹⁸ Vargas, ‘The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms’, 206.

¹⁹⁹ Alvarez, ‘Latin American Feminisms “Go Global”’, 295.

²⁰⁰ Alvarez, 311.

²⁰¹ Cornwall and Rivas, ‘From ‘Gender Equality and ‘Women’s Empowerment’ to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda for Gender and Development’, 3.

²⁰² Moser, ‘Has Gender Mainstreaming Failed?’

²⁰³ Cornwall and Rivas, ‘From ‘Gender Equality and ‘Women’s Empowerment’ to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda for Gender and Development’, 9.

²⁰⁴ Corredor, ‘Unpacking “Gender Ideology” and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement’.

²⁰⁵ Cornwall and Molyneux, ‘The Politics of Rights’, 1178.

environmental movements'²⁰⁶. Alvarez called this U-turn, after the Pink Tide, a 'postneoliberal Right': one that still adheres to neoliberal economic principles but at the same time '[seeks] a return to righteous white, Western, Christian heterofamily values, it is a moralistic, often religiously fundamentalist [right]'²⁰⁷.

This is particularly clear in Peru, if we examine the character of *fujimorismo* in the 1990s and the 2010s: under Alberto Fujimori it was deeply neoliberal but (at least on the surface), pro-women and included reform on reproductive healthcare. However, in the 2010s and 2020s, under Keiko Fujimori *fujimorismo* is economically neoliberal and deeply socially conservative with close ties to evangelical fundamentalism²⁰⁸. This movement is fiercely opposed to so-called 'gender ideology'. In Peru this is illustrated by the group 'Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas', that opposes gender equality in the national curriculum, as well as 'gender ideology' in all forms (see page 137). However, as Molyneux points out: 'there is no coherent entity described by 'gender ideology''²⁰⁹. Instead, it is made up of a constellation of groups, movements, politicians, and cultural norms. Feminists have been one of the central groups opposing this rising conservative backlash, particularly as anti-gender movements directly attack gains made by feminists.

The influence that these factors – institutionalisation and a backlash against feminism – have had on the contemporary feminist movement is something that this thesis makes clear. The difficult relationship between grassroots feminist movements, feminist institutions and the state, in tandem with a powerful right-wing backlash has created a very challenging

²⁰⁶ Alvarez, 'Maneuvering the "U-Turn" Comparative Lessons from the Pink Tide and Forward-Looking Strategies for Feminist and Queer Activisms in the Americas', 305.

²⁰⁷ Alvarez, 305–6.

²⁰⁸ Motta, *La biología del odio*.

²⁰⁹ Molyneux, 'The Battle over "Gender Ideology"'.

landscape for new feminisms. Despite this, a new tide of feminism is emerging across Latin America, one that uses a variety of strategies to outwit conservative movements, ineffective and corrupt states, and deeply entrenched gender norms.

There has been a notable increase in feminist activity across Latin America, particularly since the mid-2010s. Mass mobilisations in Latin America started to spring up: starting with the Feminist Spring in Brazil in 2015²¹⁰, and the Ni Una Menos movement in Argentina²¹¹, followed by movements of the same name in other countries, including Peru²¹². These mobilisations have since coalesced into diverse feminist movements targeting gender violence and restrictive abortion legislation. After the feminist movements of the 1980s and 1990s, young activists are pushing against the limits of the achievements of previous generations²¹³. Not only this, but they are also confronting hostile governments that seek to erode their hard-won rights²¹⁴.

Does this renewal in feminist activism count as a new wave? Various scholars have referred to it as a new ‘wave’²¹⁵. For some, we are experiencing a fourth wave, characterised by the role of the internet and particularly social media²¹⁶. However, in the literature on the resurgence of feminist activism in Latin America, there is also a reflection on the utility of the wave model: ‘as a ‘travelling’ or transnational movement, feminist ideas and activism radiated across continents over time with widely differing effects, complicating attempts to

²¹⁰ Alvarez, ‘Maneuvering the “U-Turn” Comparative Lessons from the Pink Tide and Forward-Looking Strategies for Feminist and Queer Activisms in the Americas’.

²¹¹ Friedman and Tabbush, ‘#NiUnaMenos’.

²¹² Boesten, ‘Ni Una Menos Stares Down Conservative Reaction/ Ni Una Menos Enfrenta Una Reacción Conservadora’.

²¹³ Molyneux, ‘The Battle over “Gender Ideology”’.

²¹⁴ Molyneux et al., ‘Feminist Activism 25 Years after Beijing’.

²¹⁵ Friedman, *Seeking Rights from the Left: Gender, Sexuality, and the Latin American Pink Tide*; Molyneux et al., ‘Feminist Activism 25 Years after Beijing’.

²¹⁶ Baumgardner, *F ’em!*; Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’

define waves and their time horizons'²¹⁷. Molyneux et al argue for a 'generational approach' to new feminist activism, rather than focusing on waves²¹⁸.

Either way, there is certainly a renewal of feminism in Latin America, characterised by digital activism, transnational linkages, greater diversity and a return to the streets²¹⁹. The role of the digital in contemporary feminist activism has certainly not gone unnoticed. Digital technologies provide the opportunity for the articulation of ideas and for networking with other feminists in order to mobilize around agendas that can influence the public sphere around gender equality²²⁰. Another aspect that characterises contemporary feminisms is the increasing importance of decolonial feminisms that include an analysis of the colonial reality of Latin America within feminism²²¹. Decolonial feminism, according to Lugones, is about 'the possibility of overcoming the colonality of gender', by this she refers to how colonising systems of power imposed a colonial order of gender, class and race which are now the 'central constructs of the capitalist world system of power'²²². Decolonial feminisms developed alongside, and build upon other 'women of colour' feminisms, particularly black feminist thought in Latin America, especially in Brazil²²³. These are perspectives that challenge the dominance of feminist thought from the north, and but also pre-existing white feminisms in the region.

²¹⁷ Molyneux et al., 'Feminist Activism 25 Years after Beijing', 316.

²¹⁸ Molyneux et al., 316.

²¹⁹ Friedman and Tabbush, '#NiUnaMenos'; Alvarez, 'Maneuvering the "U-Turn" Comparative Lessons from the Pink Tide and Forward-Looking Strategies for Feminist and Queer Activisms in the Americas'.

²²⁰ Matos, 'New Brazilian Feminisms and Online Networks', 420.

²²¹ Segato, *La Guerra Contra Las Mujeres*.

²²² : Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', 746-747.

²²³ Rodrigues and Gonçalves Freitas, 'Black Feminist Activism in Brazil: Political Discourse in Three Times'.

One of the key issues for contemporary feminists is abortion. There have been gains for feminists, for example the legalisation of abortion in Argentina, but in other countries the right to abortion has been threatened. The focus on abortion is not new for Latin American feminists²²⁴. But as Chapter 6 of this thesis examines, it is a central part of contemporary activism. Now that women have access to education, work and decision-making spaces, it has become clear that true emancipation cannot be achieved if women cannot control their own sexual bodies and fertility. Abortion politics have become the symbolic and actual battle ground for women's rights.

As this thesis argues, contemporary feminist activism is also characterised by the use of visual and embodied politics: including art, performance, and other creative strategies. While this is particularly notable in the contemporary movement, it is not entirely new. The literature on feminist movements has noted the importance of 'cultural politics' for feminism. Boyle argues that this is particularly important for feminist as they seek to redefine the political, and this 'shift is founded in both the cultural and the political, [and] is given life in the cultural expression of a political experience'²²⁵. Further, Taylor and Rupp argue that 'cultural practices', '[play] a central role in recruiting women and raising their feminist consciousness'²²⁶. Not only this, but as Taylor argues, they can maintain women's movements during periods of abeyance²²⁷. Staggenborg et al. argue that cultural change can indeed lead to social change²²⁸.

²²⁴ Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective*, 61–62.

²²⁵ Boyle, 'Touching the Air: The Cultural Force of Women in Chile', 157.

²²⁶ Taylor and Rupp, 'Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism', 48.

²²⁷ Taylor, 'Social Movement Continuity'.

²²⁸ Staggenborg, Eder, and Sudderth, 'Women's Culture and Social Change', 44.

In discussions about contemporary activism of any kind, it is impossible to avoid the internet and its multiple social media platforms. This particularly true in the case of feminist activism, which has experienced notable movements that originated online: such as #MeToo and Ni Una Menos, among many others. The internet has shaped pre-existing forms of activism, as well as creating entirely new forms of activism. However, access to the internet is still unequal, and the politics of access must be considered in any argument for the potentiality of digital activism. There has been much debate about whether the internet can represent liberatory possibility for activists, and how it might be an effective form of activism. While the internet appears to be located outside of our immediate physical reality, it is still shaped by geographic, socio-economic, and affective factors. This section discusses the literature on digital activism, and its impact on feminist activism in particular.

When the internet first became accessible to users (still mostly located in the Global North) in the early 1990s, many thinkers and policy makers saw it as a panacea for many societal ills: education, employment, health²²⁹. Yet, the internet, like other technologies, it is not a neutral tool. As Light argued in 2001, in relation to the impact of computer access as part of social policy, such ‘technological determinist’ approaches, which propose that ‘closing gaps in access to computers will mitigate broad inequalities’, ignore other causes of inequality’²³⁰. Similarly, during the emergence of wide-spread access to social media, there were many optimist arguments that saw ‘new opportunities for self-expression, sociability, community engagement, creativity and new literacies’²³¹. While there are reasons to be optimistic about social media opening new avenues for activists, like the internet itself, social media is not constructed in a vacuum.

²²⁹ Light, ‘Digital Divide’.

²³⁰ Light.

²³¹ Livingstone, ‘Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation’.

Access to social media alone does not necessarily mean one will become politically active online. Scholars have argued that in not considering how offline factors shape online activities, or even overestimating the differences between the two²³², we miss key aspects of not only online activism's limitations, but also its potential. Cross cultural comparisons can demonstrate how geographical factors affect the way online activists use social media in their activism²³³. Some European and North American scholars have dismissed social media activism as 'slacktivism': 'where our digital efforts make us feel very useful and important but have zero social impact'²³⁴. However, others have argued that it should not be dismissed out of hand²³⁵. Enthusiasm for social media's potential impact varies geographically: Coe and Vandegrift highlight a more optimistic streak in Spanish-language scholarship compared to North American and European scholars²³⁶. The differing attitudes of scholars may suggest that the potential benefits highlighted by Livingstone are more important in third-wave democracies; Latin American scholars in particular have highlighted the potential for social media to 're-articulate' political participation, by allowing activists to create new organisational forms and sources of information²³⁷. Nevertheless as the world has seen in recent elections, corporate control of the internet and particularly social media has meant that it is easily manipulated and has become rife with misinformation. While once we saw the liberatory possibilities of the internet, approaches have become much more pessimistic.

²³² Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital*.

²³³ Harp, Bachmann, and Guo, 'The Whole Online World Is Watching'.

²³⁴ Morozov, 'From Slacktivism to Activism'.

²³⁵ Christensen, 'Political Activities on the Internet'.

²³⁶ Coe and Vandegrift, 'Youth Politics and Culture in Contemporary Latin America'.

²³⁷ Portillo et al., 'De La Generación X a La Generación @'.

The idea of a ‘digital divide’ encompasses many approaches to the offline factors shaping online activism. For some it is simply a binary distinction: those who have access to the internet, and those who do not. However, access to the internet is mediated by a variety of social factors. The idea of a binary digital divide has been criticised by scholars who approach the internet as a technology shaped by historical, social, and cultural factors rather than inherently unequal²³⁸. For example, Ortega and Ricaurre show that access to the internet in Mexico is mediated by many factors including age, education, occupation, socio-economic status, gender, infrastructure, places of access, uses, nature, and presence of technology²³⁹. For Ling and Horst, ‘focusing upon the dichotomies and ‘have’ and ‘have-not’ notions of access fails to capture the diverse ways in which people develop relationships with technologies’²⁴⁰. This is particularly important given the rapidly changing ways people access the internet: mobile internet usage surpassed desktop usage in 2016 and has continued to increase since then²⁴¹. Cheap smartphone access is complicating the digital divide, according to the World Bank ‘the poorest households are more likely to have access to mobile phones than to toilets or clean water’²⁴². Yet, internet users in the Global South are more likely to have low-speed connections, preventing them from fully benefiting from digital access, particularly video and image-centred platforms like Instagram or TikTok.

It is clear is that not everyone has equal access to the internet, and this determines who benefits from it, and which voices are most prevalent in online activism. While access to internet-connected devices and a stable internet connection are the clearest obstacles, scholars debate the impact of other social factors. These vary significantly from country to country. In

²³⁸ Light, ‘Digital Divide’.

²³⁹ Ortega and Ricaurre, ‘Nativos Digitales’.

²⁴⁰ Ling and Horst, ‘Mobile Communication in the Global South’.

²⁴¹ ‘Mobile and Tablet Internet Usage Exceeds Desktop for First Time Worldwide’.

²⁴² World Bank, ‘World Development Report 2016’, xiii.

Brazil, Schlegel argues that age and education are they key factors – with internet users more likely to be young and educated - while race, gender, and income do not have as significant an effect²⁴³. However, it seems naïve to suggest that there is not a financial barrier to internet access, which is directly linked to income. Factors like race, gender, income, and geographical location do mediate the ways that people access the internet: be it via home computer, internet café, smartphone or other points of access. In Peru, researchers found that according to the National Household Survey (ENAHU) women's online access was limited both by technical factors (i.e., not physically having access) but also social factors; women were more likely to be uninterested in or unfamiliar with the Internet, with 8% responding that 'I don't believe it is appropriate for me to use the Internet'²⁴⁴.

The importance of youth as a factor in internet access has been noted by many. Palfrey and Gasser characterise young people as 'digital natives' as opposed to early generations who are 'digital migrants'²⁴⁵. Nevertheless, simply being an internet user or a 'digital native' does not predict online activism. Various factors shape who decides to participate in online activism. Harp et al. found that in Latin America the typical online activist was male, middle-aged and educated at least to undergraduate level, compared to the United States, where activists were more likely to be young and female (although also college-educated)²⁴⁶. However, it is important to consider this may be as a result of more traditional definitions of who is an activist, as the researchers used web searches and media reports to identify activists to survey, whereas youth activists may not appear in these more traditional sources. If we broaden the definition of activism to include engaging in protest activities the opposite is

²⁴³ Schlegel, 'Internauta Brasileiro'.

²⁴⁴ León et al., 'Niñas y Medios Digitales', 283.

²⁴⁵ Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital*.

²⁴⁶ Harp, Bachmann, and Guo, 'The Whole Online World Is Watching'.

true: ‘at higher levels of social media use ... younger respondents have a higher probability than older ones of having engaged in protest activities in the past 12 months’²⁴⁷.

Online activism also contributes to collective identity formation. Diani argues that online spaces can help to form collective identities that lead to offline action²⁴⁸, echoing the role of culture in social movements. This contrasts with Morozov’s criticism of slacktivism as being merely part of an individual’s online presence, likening social causes to other aspects of individual identity like taste in music or film²⁴⁹. Moreover, Harlow demonstrates that movements born online can move offline. Her study of how Facebook groups were used to mobilise mass protests against violence and injustice in Guatemala highlights two key issues: the importance of a key ‘trigger’ event, and how online and offline spaces interact²⁵⁰. This mirrors the development of Ni Una Menos in Peru, an offline trigger event led to online discussions, which then moved back offline into mass protests. However, others have cautioned that it is yet to be established whether current theories of social movements apply to online activism²⁵¹. Despite its limitations, technology does have a causal effect on political participation and protest behaviour. There are many examples from Latin America that counteract Morozov’s allegations of ‘slacktivism’, showing how young activists in particular use social media as part of their activism. Valenzuela’s study of student protests in Chile highlights the importance of youth, socio-economic status and education in social media activism.²⁵² While social media had an important part to play, those who were able to use it were young, middle class and educated, which suggests a limitation to the potential impact of

²⁴⁷ Valenzuela et al., ‘Social Media in Latin America’.

²⁴⁸ Diani, ‘Social Movement Networks’.

²⁴⁹ Morozov, ‘From Slacktivism to Activism’.

²⁵⁰ Harlow, ‘Social Media and Social Movements’.

²⁵¹ Ayers, ‘Comparing Collective Identity in Online and Offline Feminist Activists’, 162.

²⁵² Valenzuela, ‘Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior’.

social media – or a challenge to be addressed if it is to be used to address broader social inequalities.

What does this mean for feminist activism specifically? Scholars have examined the impact of the internet on contemporary movements, with many noting that contemporary feminist activism is characterised by the use of the internet²⁵³. Although it is relatively recent development for feminism, it has been the subject of significant discussion. Feminist online activism, especially that of young feminists, requires us to ‘to expand understandings of “political” and “activism” beyond practices, protests and lobbying in the public eye’²⁵⁴.

Some argue that, for feminists, the internet can be a positive development. Baer argues that it offers ‘great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge’²⁵⁵. Feminists have made particular use of hashtag activism. Hashtags such as #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos have been used ‘to influence, challenge, and rewrite dominant public narratives about violence against women’²⁵⁶. While hashtags have faced criticisms of being ‘slacktivism’, the wide reach of these movements has meant that they have moved beyond simply being online hashtags.

The use of hashtags also underlines the importance of intersectional perspectives on online feminist activism. The ability to reshape narratives on violence against women is particularly important for those groups whose stories are ignored by mainstream media.

²⁵³ Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’

²⁵⁴ Jackson, ‘Young Feminists, Feminism and Digital Media’, 46.

²⁵⁵ Baer, ‘Redoing Feminism’, 18.

²⁵⁶ Jackson and Banaszczyk, ‘Digital Standpoints’.

Williams demonstrates how black feminists used social media to ‘bring attention to black women’s issues when traditional mainstream media newspaper articles and television stories ignore [them]’²⁵⁷. This is a reminder that when examining online activism, it is important to consider how social factors impact who participates. Those users with a high number of followers have more influence over conversations online, something Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira call ‘crowdsourced elites’²⁵⁸. In the case of feminism, this means that conversations are often led by those with most social capital offline.

In the age of social media real-life identities merge with our online ones. When taking part in online activism, those who are not white, male, and straight face a much harsher backlash. Scholars have shown how experiences of the Internet are gendered²⁵⁹ and racialised²⁶⁰. As Poland points out, ‘attitudes displayed online [...] do not occur in a vacuum nor do they exist only in online spaces’²⁶¹. She also argues that as the early internet was constructed as a largely male space, women are seen as ‘interlopers in what are perceived as male-only online spaces [...] even though men have not been the primary users of the Internet for more than two decades’²⁶². This means that women have faced a backlash from users who see their presence as an unwanted invasion. Herring argues that many male internet users frame women’s resistance to online harassment as ‘censorship’ and an attack on their online freedom²⁶³. Moreover, the internet has also enabled new forms of harassment to emerge, such

²⁵⁷ Williams, ‘Digital Defense’, 342.

²⁵⁸ Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, ‘Affective News and Networked Publics’.

²⁵⁹ Poland, *Haters*.

²⁶⁰ Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, *Race in Cyberspace*.

²⁶¹ Poland, *Haters*, 4–5.

²⁶² Poland, 19.

²⁶³ Herring, ‘Gender and Power in On-Line Communication’, 209.

as trolling²⁶⁴ or doxing²⁶⁵, which are often used to target women, particularly feminist activists²⁶⁶. Attacks on women are also racialised: according to a recent Amnesty International report examining tweets directed at journalists and politicians in the United Kingdom and United States ‘black women were [...] 84% more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets’²⁶⁷. While these data focus on a limited group of users, they are revealing about gendered and racialised experiences online.

Social media is constantly changing, and many new developments have been harnessed by activists. For example, Facebook Live and other forms of ‘media witnessing’ – ‘destabilises the boundaries of who is a participant’²⁶⁸. This has been used most notably in the United States by Black Lives Matter activists to record instances of police brutality²⁶⁹, recently activists in Peru used it in the same way during protests against the pardon of former president Alberto Fujimori in December 2018 to monitor police behaviour. This offers possibilities but also challenges for researchers, who must keep up to date with activist practices. For example, since 2020, TikTok has become a much more significant activist platform, including its use by the ‘generación del bicentenario’ in Peru.

On the other hand, where for a while social media activism was dominated by left-wing activists, recently right-wing and conservative movements have increasingly used social media. In Peru, the hashtag #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas were used to campaign against ‘gender

²⁶⁴ Originally defined as ‘making deliberately inflammatory racist, sexist, or otherwise derogatory remarks’ trolling has evolved to include more harmful and deliberately provocative actions. Poland, *Haters*, 17.

²⁶⁵ Doxing (also spelt doxxing) refers to ‘malicious hackers’ habit of collecting personal and private information, including home addresses and national identity numbers. The data are often released publicly against a person’s wishes’, see ‘What Doxxing Is, and Why It Matters’. This is often directed at women online, and combined with threats of violence, see Mantilla, ‘Gendertrolling’.

²⁶⁶ Vera-Gray, “‘Talk about a Cunt with Too Much Idle Time’”.

²⁶⁷ Amnesty International, ‘Troll Patrol Findings’.

²⁶⁸ Tang et al., ‘Perspectives on Live Streaming’.

²⁶⁹ For example: ‘Protests Erupt in Minnesota as Cop Who Killed Black Man on Facebook Live Is Acquitted’.

ideology' being taught in schools. Moreover, some conservative activists have tried to appropriate feminist hashtags, for example turning 'Ni *Una* Menos' into 'Ni *Uno* Menos' or 'Nadie Menos', in order to derail the focus on violence against women. As the right moves online, this presents new challenges for other online activists in what was once a youth-driven, largely leftist space. What makes online activism exciting and different is also what makes it difficult.

Another issue that online activists have to contend with is the fact that social media platforms are under corporate control. Activists have to negotiate the technological structures within which they operate: 'political activists whose values are rooted in anti-capitalist political cultures perceive the use of these platforms as challenges'²⁷⁰. Further, as is becoming increasingly clear: 'social media tools can simultaneously support grass-roots political mobilizations as well as government surveillance and human rights violations'²⁷¹. Feminist activists in particular have to weigh up the benefits of social media platforms for their activism, with their failure to effectively combat online harassment of women²⁷². As one scholar concisely summarises: 'so long as 'free' is paid for by surveillance the Internet will represent a Faustian bargain for radical social movements'²⁷³.

While initially scholars were optimistic about the possibilities of the internet, a number of limitations soon became clear: the internet is shaped by the same geographical and socio-economic factors that perpetuate inequality offline, and these shape the experiences of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and young people online. Nevertheless, the Internet has

²⁷⁰ Barassi, 'Ethnography Beyond and Within Digital Structures and the Study of Social Media Activism', 410.

²⁷¹ Coleman, 'Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media', 493.

²⁷² Amnesty International, 'Troll Patrol Findings'.

²⁷³ Saxon, 'The Price of Free'.

shaped activism, particularly feminist activism, by enabling activists to challenge cultural norms and preconceptions, raise awareness of issues, and build a sense of solidarity among activists. We should not consider the internet an entirely positive or negative phenomenon: it is now part of the fabric of daily life for large parts of the world, and therefore cannot be ignored in analyses of activism.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review has surveyed scholarship from a wide range of disciplines, as necessitated by the research questions I am seeking to answer. By way of conclusion to this chapter and to set out the terms used in the rest of the thesis, it is important to reflect on what a feminist visual and embodied politics signifies.

First, the question of the visual in relation to feminism raises two main issues: visibility and visibility. Visibility refers to how we see, and how we incorporate a feminist gaze, or way of seeing, in activism. Visibility is the question of what is seen, or *not* seen, and what is rendered (in)visible. This is imperative to the study of feminist activism, which aims to raise awareness, but also question how we see the world. Second, the body and the embodied have long been central themes for feminist activism and theory. As this review has shown, activism takes place in the body, both physically but also emotionally.

Combining visual and embodied approaches to feminist politics allows us to take in account how seeing is an embodied process, and how the body becomes a visual symbol in activism. Further, as an approach to activism, particularly the role of performance and art-based activism, a visual and embodied perspective is a more complex and expansive approach than

simply ‘artivism’, that allows us to analyse how these actions relate to the wider feminist movement. The next chapters will provide important context to the feminist movement in Peru, and how the role of the visual and embodied has changed over time.

Chapter 3 Background and context

Placing the relationship between feminist activism, art, and social media in contemporary Peru in context allows us to observe how these three have interacted over time. This chapter traces the evolution of the women's movement in Peru, while also looking at how art and activism have engaged with each other throughout this process. It also examines the more recent influence of the Internet and social media on activism. This will highlight, but also problematise, the relationship between feminist activism, art, and social media.

Many of the challenges that feminists faced historically are still relevant for contemporary activists: the diversity of the movement, and cultural resistance to dealing with issues of sexuality and bodily autonomy. Further, from the beginning of the feminist movement to the present day, activists have not limited themselves to specifically political actions. Cultural forms of activism have often opened much-needed spaces for discussions which were not happening elsewhere. This chapter starts by looking at the emergence of first-wave feminism, then the establishment and consolidation of the women's movement in the early 1970s; the challenges activists faced in the 1980s and 1990s; and the shifts in feminist activism post-2000. It concludes by highlighting some of the ways in which the contemporary feminist movement follows on from and differs from earlier generations.

3.1 Early feminist activism

Much of the research on feminist movements in Latin America starts from the 1970s onwards. Some see this as the moment feminism ‘emerged’¹, others see it as the ‘second wave’, preceded by a first wave in the early twentieth century². Nonetheless, there were a considerable number of women campaigning for their rights, and several groups were set up. Women artists and writers also started to engage with feminist ideas and practices. While there were many feminist writers, there were also artists, who while they ‘may not have called themselves feminists ... did create works that can now be interpreted’ through a feminist lens³.

In Peru, as in the rest of Latin America, most early feminists came from a position of privilege. They were ‘urban, educated upper-class women’⁴ who demanded the right to an equal education and to work, but also the freedom to express themselves artistically and creatively⁵. This included teachers, like Teresa Gonzalez de Fanning and Elvira García y García, who focused on educational rights⁶, as well as writers like Clorinda Matto de Turner and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera who used writing to express themselves and their ambitions for equality⁷. Between the early 1900s and the 1920s ‘the first two feminist groups emerged: Feminine Evolution, led by María Jesús Alvarado, and Peruvian Feminism, led by Zoila Aurora Cáceres’⁸. Alvarado argued for women’s right to an equal education, to public

¹ Sternbach et al., ‘Feminisms in Latin America’, 210.

² Stoltz Chinchilla, ‘Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy’, 39.

³ Antivilo Peña, Mayer, and Rosa, ‘Feminist Art and “Artivism” in Latin America’, 37.

⁴ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’, 16.

⁵ Lema, ‘Las Mujeres Del ’90’, 4.

⁶ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’, 16.

⁷ Vargas, 16.

⁸ Vargas, 17.

and professional employment, the same civil rights as men – including freeing women from the tutelage of their husbands or fathers – and the right to vote⁹. Caceres was a suffragist, and anti-fascist who led one of the first women's marches¹⁰.

Between the early feminist moment in Peru and the emergence of the second wave in the 1970s the movement fell into abeyance. When Peruvian women gained the right to vote it was given to them by President General Manuel Odría, 'motivated by the belief that they would vote for him' and not due to women's campaigning at the time. Left-wing parties argued against giving women the vote as they also assumed women would be more conservative in their political tendencies¹¹.

Few historians have yet to study this period in sufficient depth meaning that the period between the beginnings of the women's movement and the emergence of the second wave the movement is less well documented¹². Women continued to argue for their rights, particularly in cultural arenas. An example of this is the political activist and poet Magda Portal, whose work epitomises the importance of creative expressions in relation to activism: 'everyone knows that I evolved from a poet into a struggler for social justice, without abandoning poetry'¹³, her writing was central to her activism and vice versa. Women campaigned within other political movements, and through cultural interventions, which presented an opportunity for greater freedom of expression than other arenas. These early activists highlight that the movements that came after did not emerge out of nothing. Further, there has

⁹ Lema, 'Las Mujeres Del '90', 5.

¹⁰ Levano, 'Las Mujeres y El Poder'.

¹¹ Chaney, 'Women in Latin American Politics: The Case of Peru and Chile', 111.

¹² Necochea López, *A History of Family Planning*.

¹³ Unfinished manuscript cited in Wallace Fuentes, *Most Scandalous Woman*, 8.

always been a connection between cultural production and activism that reflects the contemporary role of visual and embodied politics.

3.2 1970s and 1980s

The ‘second wave’ of feminism in Latin America started in the early 1970s and included women from a diverse range of backgrounds. Many women still rejected the feminist label; therefore, it makes sense to refer to a ‘women’s movement’ to encompass the range of activists, rather than a feminist one. During this time many important feminist institutions were also established. Artists and writers also started to create more politically engaged work at this time that mirrored several of the issues important to the feminist movement. Analysing the emergence of the women’s movement is essential for understanding the contemporary feminist movement, and the challenges that it faces.

Major shifts in society from the 1960s onwards paved the way for the rise of a new tide of activism. These shifts affected women differently according to class, race, and political background. For example, increased availability of contraception and information on reproductive health shaped the emergence of the women’s movement¹⁴. While this helped to question the taboo of virginity¹⁵ and break with some of the roles women were expected to play, the nature of family planning policies in Peru were shaped by racist and classist ideas about the ‘well-constituted family’, meaning that married, white, middle, and upper-class women were most likely to benefit¹⁶. Increasing migration from rural to urban areas, particularly Lima¹⁷, had an impact on the development of popular women’s movement. Many

¹⁴ Barrig, *Cinturón de castidad*, 12.

¹⁵ Fuller Osore, *Dilemas de la femineidad*, 46.

¹⁶ Necochea López, *A History of Family Planning*.

¹⁷ Blondet and Montero, *La situación de la mujer en el Perú*.

of the women who became leaders in women's organisations from the *pueblos jóvenes* (shanty towns) had migrated to Lima from rural areas¹⁸. Similarly access to both secondary and higher education increased women's opportunities¹⁹, yet middle-class women benefited more from higher education²⁰. While these social factors contributed to ideological shifts, they clearly did not erase gender discrimination. What they did achieve was a broadening of women's horizons that enabled them to start speaking out about the injustices they faced.

One of the most significant developments that took place was the entrance of women into the workforce. Yet again, the benefits of this were not distributed evenly. Middle-class women could rely on domestic employees to balance their workload²¹, while working-class women were 'forced continually to seek sources of financial support on their own' predominantly when there were high levels of unemployment among men²². This went on to shape the terms of their activism: where feminists focused on destabilising the ideal of the wife and mother, popular women's activism mobilised this role to argue for their rights. As the previous chapter outlined, this mirrors Molyneux's distinction between strategic and practical gender interests²³. Nevertheless, this division does not accurately represent the entirety of the feminist or women's movement; many activists in the women's movement also considered themselves feminists.

Finally, many women gained important experience in political organising in left-wing and popular movements in the 1960s and 1970s but found that when they voiced concerns as

¹⁸ Blondet, *Las mujeres y el poder*.

¹⁹ Vargas, 'The Women's Movement in Peru', 18.

²⁰ Fuller Osorio, *Dilemas de la femineidad*, 15.

²¹ Fuller Osorio, 41.

²² Andreas, *When Women Rebel*, 12.

²³ Molyneux, 'Mobilization without Emancipation?'

women, these were not taken seriously. This was particularly the case within left wing movements, who ‘dismissed [feminists] as upper middle-class women who were concerned with issues that were irrelevant to the vast majority of women throughout the region’²⁴. Many feminists left left-wing movements to focus on feminist activism, where their concerns would be more central. Yet, their experiences in these movements did provide women with a foundation upon which to build women’s organisations.

These factors went on to affect the shape of the women’s movement as a whole: class, race, and political background influenced the ways in which activists approached the issue of women’s liberation. The women’s movement in Peru has been diverse since its inception. To distinguish between the various aspects of the women’s movement, scholars have differentiated between three ‘sectors’²⁵ or ‘streams’²⁶: the feminist movement, the popular women’s movement, and women in politics.

The feminist stream is that which explicitly refers to itself *as feminist* and works ‘towards identifying and denouncing the existence of a sex-gender system that patently and pervasively subordinates women’²⁷. During this period of time many of the most important feminist organisations in Peru were founded: Movimiento Manuela Ramos in 1978, Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán in 1978, and DEMUS in 1987. In the early days of the feminist movement some activists were still reluctant to use that label; in Peru organisations did not initially label themselves as feminist²⁸ due to the hostility towards explicitly feminist activism from the Left, but also from the Catholic Church and liberal and nationalist

²⁴ Sternbach et al., ‘Feminisms in Latin America’, 394.

²⁵ Rousseau, *Women’s Citizenship in Peru*.

²⁶ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’.

²⁷ Vargas, 9.

²⁸ Vargas, ‘Movimiento Feminista En El Perú’, 133.

politicians. Autonomy was a central issue for early feminists: for those who had excised themselves from left-wing groups, political autonomy was of upmost importance. Having a space to meet with other women and take part in consciousness-raising activities was central for feminists at this time²⁹.

The popular women's stream is 'principally composed of women who try to find ways of satisfying the needs and demands springing from their traditional roles ... as women'.

However, it is simplistic to argue that these women's aims were simply 'feeding their family and community'³⁰ through programmes like the '*comedores populares* (communal kitchens) [and] the *programa del vaso de leche* (the glass-of milk programme)'³¹, or that they were more traditional than the feminists. Women in the popular movement had to negotiate a distinct political environment from those in the feminist branch, due to their stronger links with the Catholic Church and popular left-wing movements. Many women adopted feminist beliefs and shaped them to their own reality³², despite opposition from male community leaders and religious leaders who saw feminist issues like 'abortion rights and the right to sexual self-determination ... as intrinsically bourgeois and likely to 'divide' the united struggle of the working class'³³.

Women in political parties and other traditional public arenas, who tried to change these from within³⁴ made up the third stream. These include women who stayed in left-wing movements, women from popular and feminist sectors who sought election, as well as women in politics

²⁹ Vargas, 129.

³⁰ Rousseau, *Women's Citizenship in Peru*, 98.

³¹ Vargas, 'The Women's Movement in Peru', 25.

³² Vargas, 27.

³³ Sternbach et al., 'Feminisms in Latin America'.

³⁴ Vargas, 'The Women's Movement in Peru', 9.

who were not explicitly feminist or pro-women. Women in politics often found themselves limited to ‘feminine’ or ‘domestic’ areas, but many fought against this restriction and focused on issues of national importance³⁵.

The utility of the ‘three streams’ approach is that it allows us to see not only how streams diverge, but also how they flow into each other. Feminist and popular women’s movements often worked together in ‘a two-way learning process that had a permanent impact on the feminist agenda’³⁶. Many women in the popular women’s movement were also feminists and produced their own feminist proposals³⁷. Similarly, there were also feminist activists and women from the popular movement who sought election to political office. This model also allows us to see where the diversity of the women’s movement resulted in tensions or ‘knots’³⁸ which reflect the ways that differences in class, race, and geography shape the women’s movement. The feminist movement, largely made up of middle-class women, faced the contradiction of activists having ‘other women at home tending to domestic work while they go out and fight for women rights’³⁹. At the same time, the popular women’s movement’s tendency to be more traditional or have closer links with the Church meant that to start with feminists avoided discussing topics like sexuality and sexual violence, instead focusing on economic concerns⁴⁰.

However, there are limitations to this model, which are particularly clear in the ‘pluricultural reality’ of Peru⁴¹. As Rousseau points out, none of the three streams includes rural women or

³⁵ Fuller Osoreo, *Dilemas de la femineidad*, 87–90.

³⁶ Vargas, ‘International Feminisms’, 200.

³⁷ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’, 27.

³⁸ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’.

³⁹ Vargas, 29.

⁴⁰ Vargas, ‘Movimiento Feminista En El Perú’, 136.

⁴¹ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’, 7.

women in the human rights movement⁴², even though women in rural areas have a long tradition of organisation, and many women were key to human rights activism. Bueno Hansen argues that rural women's 'rights are perceived as add-ons to the main demands of class-based and feminist movements,' nor do they readily identify as feminists⁴³. The lack of focus on women in the human rights movement is due to the tendency of scholars and activists to see the two movements as parallel, rather than linked together⁴⁴.

Feminists in Peru found themselves navigating complex political, social, and cultural landscapes, both inside and outside of the women's movement. This shaped the issues that they prioritised and the nature of their activism. Initially, they focused on issues of an economic nature⁴⁵ for two main reasons: severe economic crises⁴⁶ and not wanting to alienate poor and working-class women⁴⁷. This meant that they did not focus on the issues that were their first points of feminist awakening: sexuality, bodily autonomy, violence, maternity, and domestic work⁴⁸. This assumption would turn out to be misguided: they found that the topics they thought would alienate women in the popular sectors 'were interesting and important to working-class women [and] crucial to their survival'⁴⁹. Being able to name and develop categories of analysis for so-far unnamed issues, allowed activists to challenge the status quo and put 'them at the center of democratic debates'⁵⁰.

⁴² Rousseau, *Women's Citizenship in Peru*.

⁴³ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 27.

⁴⁴ Jelin, 'Engendering Human Rights', 65.

⁴⁵ Vargas, 'Movimiento Feminista En El Perú', 123.

⁴⁶ Stoltz Chinchilla, 'Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy', 38.

⁴⁷ Sternbach et al., 'Feminisms in Latin America', 402.

⁴⁸ Vargas, 'Movimiento Feminista En El Perú', 123.

⁴⁹ Sternbach et al., 'Feminisms in Latin America', 404.

⁵⁰ Vargas, 'International Feminisms', 146.

Feminist artists and writers also reflected many of the issues that were important to activists: particularly, sexuality and the body, but also health, education, and legal rights. From the late 1960s onwards, art and activism became more closely related. It was not until the second wave of feminism that ‘the possibility of combining feminist activism and artistic creation form[ed] part of the mental landscape of women creators’⁵¹. Artists like Cristina Portocarrero and Marisa Godínez, and writers like Carmen Ollé and Rocío Silva Santisteban dealt with issues relating to the body, gender, and sexuality in their work⁵², as well as taking part in feminist activism. The idea that cultural production and activism could be part of a singular practice did not appear to be a possibility: both Portocarrero and Godínez left the art world to carry out feminist militancy⁵³. Nevertheless, these women demonstrate how creative strategies have always been closely linked to the feminist movement, to address complex and emotional issues.

Feminists in the 1970s and 1980s focused on creating and consolidating the feminist movement. The impact of social and political factors meant that by the late 1980s, there was a well-established feminist movement in Peru and across Latin America. Many organisations established during this time are still active today and play an important role in supporting the movement. Activists also used creative strategies like art and writing to complement their activism. Many of the challenges of this period are still relevant for contemporary activists: autonomy, the diversity of the movement, and cultural resistance to dealing with issues of sexuality and bodily autonomy.

⁵¹ Antivilo Peña, Mayer, and Rosa, ‘Feminist Art and “Artivism” in Latin America’, 37.

⁵² Martin, ‘“A Woman Who Writes Has Power”: Writing and Activism among Politically Committed Peruvian Women Writers.’

⁵³ López, ‘Making Sense of Violence’, 286.

3.3 1990s

By the beginning of the 1990s the Peruvian women's movement was well established. This decade brought with it a new set of opportunities, but also challenges. Peruvian activists were influenced by factors that affected movements across Latin America: neoliberal economic reforms, the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing, and the institutionalisation of the women's movement. They also faced challenges specific to the Internal Armed Conflict that took place in the country from 1980 to 2000. This was a period marked by advances and setbacks; while feminists made important legislative gains, these also entailed challenges for the movement as it grew, while becoming more fragmented. These broader patterns affecting the feminist movement had particular significance in Peru. Activists did not agree on how to interact with states that were (at least on the surface) increasingly open to feminist ideas, while also keeping a critical distance that would allow them to highlight the negative impact of many policies.

The internal armed conflict, which started in 1980 lasting until 2000, shaped the feminist movement in a number of ways. However, in general, feminist organisations did not highlight the impact of the internal armed conflict on women, instead they 'prioritized making formal political inroads over building interclass alliances with popular women's organizations or focusing on the impact of the conflict on campesinas'⁵⁴. They also saw their policy gains on reproductive and domestic violence issues as fragile, particularly given the influence of the Church, which led to them taking a less forceful position. Feminists struggled with framing gender-based violence as a public problem 'while also accounting for the subjective

⁵⁴ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 35.

dimensions of violence, the need for women's self-determination and a respect for difference'⁵⁵. This is not to say that no feminists had engaged with the impact of the conflict: however, when 'in 1986 and 1987 small groups of about one hundred feminists staged marches protesting massacres in Andean communities ... both the Shining Path and the armed forces started to threaten them'⁵⁶, highlighting the high risks associated with condemning violence. In the most well-known example of the risks to feminists: the community organiser and popular feminist leader María Elena Moyano, was assassinated in public by the Shining Path in February 1992. In the late 1990s, feminists started to engage with the effects of the internal armed conflict in the pro-democracy movement *Mujeres por la Democracia* (Women for Democracy), which brought together the feminist and human rights movements⁵⁷.

In 1990 Alberto Fujimori became President of Peru, after a shock election in which he defeated Nobel Prize-winning author Mario Vargas Llosa. Despite running on a right-wing populist platform, and criticising Vargas Llosa's plans for neoliberal economic policies, after coming to power in 1990 Fujimori enacted a number of neoliberal economic reforms. This came to be known as the 'Fujishock' because of the devastating impact it had on society⁵⁸. During the 1980s Peru experienced hyperinflation, so in order to control this the 'Fujishock' involved structural adjustment policies and privatisation that restored macroeconomic stability but at a great cost to the poorest and most vulnerable in society, particularly women⁵⁹. As consequence of these economic reforms welfare supports practically disappeared, and prices of privatised goods grew rapidly. Poor women tried to fill the gaps

⁵⁵ Bueno-Hansen, 30.

⁵⁶ Bueno-Hansen, 36.

⁵⁷ Bueno-Hansen, 42.

⁵⁸ Holmes and De Piñeres, 'Sources of Fujimori's Popularity'.

⁵⁹ Tanski, 'The Impact of Crisis, Stabilization and Structural Adjustment on Women in Lima, Peru'.

left by the retreat of the state through popular grassroots organisations, particularly *comedores populares* and *comités del vaso de leche*. Many feminists criticised the gendered impact of these economic reforms and argued for alternatives that would mitigate these effects⁶⁰. The impact of these neoliberal adjustments continues to affect Peru's society and economy to this day.

The influence of the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing also decisively shaped feminist activism in the 1990s. Activists from around the world attended, built networks, and shared ideas. In particular, the Beijing declaration - 'women's rights are human rights' – enabled feminists to frame issues like violence against women as human rights issues on a local level⁶¹. The transnational legitimacy that it lent to feminists meant that it 'became essential for consolidating the gains that had been made over the preceding 25 years'⁶². This was especially important for feminists in Peru, as Fujimori was the only sitting president to attend the Beijing conference⁶³, and he took an exceptionally focused approach to women's rights, which provided an opening for feminists to push through important legislation on quotas and family planning laws, both major victories for feminists⁶⁴. The quota law strengthened the presence of women in politics. Although some 'women leaders from Lima's popular sectors became candidates in municipal or legislative elections'⁶⁵, the majority of those elected belonged to the middle- and upper-classes. Despite these gains, legal change did not come with cultural or societal changes that would allow women to exercise their newly won rights. Moreover, often these laws were not implemented effectively or at all⁶⁶. This

⁶⁰ Ewig, *Second-Wave Neoliberalism*, 1.

⁶¹ Alvarez, 'Translating the Global Effects of Transnational Organizing', 46.

⁶² Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms', 203.

⁶³ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 43.

⁶⁴ Rousseau, 'Women's Citizenship and Neopopulism', 123.

⁶⁵ Rousseau, 134.

⁶⁶ Marx, Borner, and Caminotti, 'Gender Quotas, Candidate Selection, and Electoral Campaigns'.

highlights the need for cultural change as well as policy change, something that was not a priority in the 1990s.

On the surface, Fujimori's administration had supposedly 'women-friendly' appearance, bolstered by the quota law and his appearance in Beijing in 1995. However, this was undermined by the revelations in 1997 and 1998 that many women were forcibly sterilized as part of the government's family planning programme. Many feminist organisations 'hesitated to condemn the regime forcefully for these abuses, partly because of the risk of losing all the gains made in family planning'⁶⁷. Feminists did not want to undermine 'the cause of reproductive rights in the public eye', nor did they want to appear to agree with the Catholic church⁶⁸. Further, those 'who did speak out against the government did so in an increasingly authoritarian political context'⁶⁹. Bueno Hansen argues that Fujimori used his attendance in Beijing and focus on women's issues to 'gender-wash' his government: 'to blanket himself with legitimacy under the cloak of modernity'⁷⁰. Certainly, he did not take the same approach to the popular women's movement, his government's strategy directly targeted women in the popular sectors 'to co-opt and destroy the autonomous popular sector women's organizations'⁷¹.

As will be examined in greater detail in chapter 7, the most egregious violation committed by the Fujimori government was the sterilisation of hundreds of thousands of poor, rural indigenous women (and men, although the vast majority of victims were women) without

⁶⁷ Rousseau, 'Women's Citizenship and Neopopulism', 133.

⁶⁸ Ewig, *Second-Wave Neoliberalism*, 157.

⁶⁹ Ewig, 160.

⁷⁰ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 43.

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Women's Citizenship in Peru*, 97.

informed consent as part of a national family planning regime⁷². Within this larger number of victims, thousands of women were forcibly sterilised, resulting in long-lasting physical and mental health complications and even death. When these sterilisations were brought to light in the late 1990s this created a challenge for feminist activists and institutions who had been working with the government. Some had even been involved with the implementation of other areas of the family planning programme, which had the feminist aim of increasing access to reproductive healthcare. Feminists, in order to achieve policy gains and legal change, had had to make ‘a deal with the devil’⁷³.

Some have argued that the compromised position of feminist activism was due to the limitations of the ‘discourse of rights’ they used in the 1990s to achieve policy reform. Vargas suggests that ‘the case of Peru reveals in a paradigmatic way the risks and ambiguities contained in the current feminist discourse of rights’⁷⁴. This is to say that the language of ‘women’s rights’ was easily co-opted by the state, and therefore became less useful as an activist strategy. However, later in the 1990s, feminists and human rights activists used the language of rights to campaign against Fujimori, in groups like MUDE (Mujeres por la Democracia). The ‘discourse of rights’ is a complex one, that clearly cannot work without being combined with other feminist strategies.

There was also a lack of collaboration between the human rights and feminist movements during this time, despite several women working in the former. The inability of feminists to forcefully criticise these abuses at the time, ‘further tarnished the feminist movement’s

⁷² Boesten, ‘Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?’; Ewig, ‘La Economía Política de Las Esterilizaciones Forzadas En El Perú’; Chaparro-Buitrago, ‘Masters of Their Own Destiny: Women’s Rights and Forced Sterilizations in Peru’.

⁷³ Blondet, ‘The “Devil’s Deal”: Women’s Political Participation and Authoritarianism In Peru’.

⁷⁴ Vargas, ‘The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms’, 211.

reputation in the eyes of the human rights movement'⁷⁵. The institutionalisation of the feminist movement 'contributed to the 'depoliticisation' of demands, the disappearance of the feminist agenda and the weakening of the relationship with other women's groupings and social movements'⁷⁶.

This institutionalisation, or 'NGOization' which Alvarez defines as: 'the increased specialization and professionalization of growing numbers of feminist NGOs dedicated to intervening in national and international policy processes', was a key process in the 1990s⁷⁷. Feminists prioritised actions directed at the public political sphere, rather than grassroots or cultural activities. While there were significant policy gains, this process had several drawbacks. It undermined the work that feminists had been carrying out with women in the popular sectors, and the diversion of resources away from these projects toward policy lobbying⁷⁸. This created tensions between the feminist and popular streams, even as the political and feminist streams worked more together. Another negative impact was the 'depoliticization of gender', and the deployment of 'a perspective that no longer requires a reorganization of power relations between men and women and that allows new, postfeminist actors to appropriate the discourse on gender'⁷⁹. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that feminists still carried out important 'movement work' by producing feminist books and data and undertaking consciousness raising activities⁸⁰. These processes 'side-streamed' feminist discourses into other spaces. Further, it is important to remember the complex path that

⁷⁵ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 44.

⁷⁶ Bueno-Hansen, 213.

⁷⁷ Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms "Go Global"', 306.

⁷⁸ Maier and Lebon, *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 11.

⁷⁹ Maier and Lebon, 19.

⁸⁰ Alvarez, 'Beyond NGO-ization?', 177–78.

‘institutional’ feminists were treading, balancing demands from the state, international funders, and the wider movement.

While many activists focused on lobbying, others started to combine activist and artistic practices. As the feminist movement became more established, spaces opened for new actors. However, at that time, it was not a core part of feminist activism. For activist-curator Karen Bernedo ‘I feel like activism is looked down on by the art world as something lesser’⁸¹. Politically committed art was often seen as not of significant artistic value. Traditional activists also came into conflict with art activists over their approaches. López highlights the importance of the communicative dimension in feminist art in the 1990s, as ‘a response to the role played by public representations in the preservation of the alienation, subordination and exploitation of women’⁸². Some NGOs actually supplied funding for art-based protests such as the rock-theatre production ‘Andamios’ criticising violence against women that was funded by DEMUS and the *Centro de Experimentación Escénica* (CEXES). Another key example of how artists directly confronted this is ‘Perrahabl@’ by collective Laperrera (Natalia Iguñiz and Sandro Ventura): which featured a series of posters with misogynistic sentences, and an email to which members of the public who walked by could send their responses⁸³. It had a strong media impact, but also caused conflict with institutional feminists who saw it ‘as a camouflaged form of intimidation and affirmation of the patriarchal ideology’⁸⁴. The use of email in this project is also an early example of digital activism. Garzón argues that this period marks a shift: ‘after two waves of feminist and women’s movements in Latin America, groups of activists are emerging for whom the problems to be

⁸¹ Karen Bernedo, interview.

⁸² López, ‘Natalia Iguñiz’, 53.

⁸³ López, 51.

⁸⁴ López, 52.

confronted and the strategies to be followed have changed radically'⁸⁵. In these actions, we can see some of the origins of contemporary feminist activism and the use of visual and embodied politics.

While the feminist movement was able to make some important legislative gains in the 1990s, these were undermined by the failure of feminist activists to properly oppose the violence perpetrated by the government against women, both in the form of sexual violence and forced sterilisations. This provoked debate about the importance of autonomy and the need for diverse forms of activism; not just state-focused lobbying. However, this was not the only kind of feminist activism taking place at this time: activists increasingly used the arts to denounce sexism in society and the state. This established the foundations for these forms of activism to take on more significance in the new millennium.

3.4 2000-2016, and onwards

There have been significant shifts in feminist activism in Peru since the beginning of the new millennium. There three main factors behind this: the fragmentation and diversification of the feminist movement; a move away from a policy-oriented approach; and the rise of social media as an activist platform. Others have noted the importance of generational shifts⁸⁶, while this is an important factor in shaping these changes, this section argues that these three other factors may be decisive. These elements have shaped what some have called a 'third

⁸⁵ Garzón, 'Perrahabl@', 161.

⁸⁶ Molyneux et al., 'Feminist Activism 25 Years after Beijing'.

wave' of feminist activism in Latin America⁸⁷. This new activist moment is also characterised by the renewed use of art and culture within feminist activist movement work.

Towards the end of the 1990s the movement started to 'fragment' as other actors – 'Afro-Latina, lesbian, indigenous, working-class, poor, and trade union women'⁸⁸ – became a larger presence within the movement. During the early 2000s many argued that the feminist movement had disappeared, yet for others it had simply diversified⁸⁹. This led to increased recognition of the importance of minority voices within the wider feminist movement and 'that multiple forms of struggle for justice and freedom are valid, and that their expression broadens the democratic base'⁹⁰. The increased circulation of ideas and culture due to globalisation and social media has also shaped activism in Latin America, with global events triggering discussions around formerly taboo topics like sexuality⁹¹. After the 1990s, feminists recognised that a diversified movement is a stronger one.

Another shift in the 2000s was the move away from the NGO-centred model of the 1990s, as feminists recognised some of the criticisms levied at the proliferation of NGOs⁹². Yet, it is simplistic to see NGOization as only bad for women; professionalised efforts are an important part of civil society pressure on states⁹³ and both local and transnational NGOs are part of wider 'movements working to change deeply embedded patriarchal power relations

⁸⁷ Alvarez, 'Beyond NGO-ization?'

⁸⁸ Maier and Lebon, *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3.

⁸⁹ Jaquette, *Feminist Agendas and Democracy in Latin America*, 208.

⁹⁰ Vargas, 'International Feminisms', 157.

⁹¹ Franco, 'From the Margins to the Center', 201.

⁹² Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms "Go Global"'.

⁹³ Jaquette, *Feminist Agendas and Democracy in Latin America*, 216.

and to resist and challenge myriad forms of gender inequalities'⁹⁴. Nevertheless, feminists recognised that policy change could not be effective without changes in public opinion.

High-profile cases of sexual violence have contributed to 'putting gender-based violence high on the agenda of movements'⁹⁵. For feminists addressing issues relating to bodily and sexual rights; there is an increasing recognition of the importance of culture for 'the right to have rights'⁹⁶ and there is now more of a focus on 'intervening in cultural representations and broader public debate'⁹⁷. Post-2000 feminists have also acknowledged that persistent societal norms, and the influence of the Catholic Church, 'have made it difficult to change laws regarding sexual preference or women's reproductive rights'⁹⁸. Even where laws have been implemented 'what has actually been put into practice is extremely limited'⁹⁹.

It is impossible to ignore the influence of social media on feminist activism in the last decade, above all since 2015. This is in part thanks to increased access to the internet: in 2009 there were 186.9 million internet users in Latin America, compared with 404.27 million in 2017¹⁰⁰. However, access to the internet is still not universal. As of 2017, the internet penetration rate in Peru was slightly below average for Latin America with 67.6% having access, compared with 93.1% in Argentina¹⁰¹. On top of this, access with the country is highly unequal, particularly between urban and rural areas. According to Peru's National Institute of Statistics and Information Technology, in 2016, 54.6% of people aged 6 years or older in urban areas

⁹⁴ Harcourt, 'Transnational Feminist Engagement with 2010+ Activisms', 623.

⁹⁵ Harcourt, 624.

⁹⁶ Alvarez, 'Beyond NGO-ization?', 181.

⁹⁷ Alvarez, 180.

⁹⁸ Jaquette, *Feminist Agendas and Democracy in Latin America*, 2.

⁹⁹ Vargas, 'Feminism and Democratic Struggles in Latin America', 542.

¹⁰⁰ 'Worldwide Internet Users by Region 2009-2017'.

¹⁰¹ 'South America Internet and Facebook Users'.

had some form of internet access, compared with only 14.2% of those living in rural areas¹⁰². This also differs by age: 74.9% of 17- to 24-year-olds in Peru have internet access, compared with 36.8% of those aged 25 and older¹⁰³. It is important to bear in mind how these factors shape who can take part in online activism, and place clear limitations on who these forms of activism can reach.

As the previous chapter discussed, social media has allowed for an increase in feminist activism. At the same time, it has also enabled the rise of a significant *backlash* against both feminism and other progressive movements. This is illustrated by the #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas ('Don't Mess with My Children') campaign against so-called 'gender ideology' being implemented into the school curriculum with a number of marches and a significant online 'hashtag' campaign. The increased conservative backlash is not limited to social media but also includes states and institutions. While we are no longer in a 'post-feminist' era, feminism still exists in a hostile environment.

Social media has also affected the diffusion of protest art. Movements and protests often have associated images that participants can add to their social media profiles, for example changing their profile picture to show solidarity. It also means that performance protests are recorded and shared online, both immediately through livestreaming, and subsequently by the sharing of images videos. This wider distribution increases the impact that these protests can have. However, the long-term effects of social media on activism (and vice versa) are yet to be determined. Feminism has already undergone significant changes since 2000, and the advent of the digital age has precipitated even faster transformations. While we are currently

¹⁰² Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 'Tecnologías de La Información y Comunicación'.

¹⁰³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática.

seeing an increase in the visibility of feminist activism, in part thanks to social media, the long-term impact this will have on legislation and cultural norms is yet to be determined.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive but not exhaustive overview of the feminist movement in Peru. Throughout the history of the movement, feminists have not only worked in organisations or in the street, but they have also been writers, artists and politicians. The next chapter focuses on the feminist movement post-2016, and the role of Ni Una Menos. These new feminisms have evolved out of those that came before it. Many of the factors that impacted feminists in previous decades continue to have an impact: the autonomy of the movement, its relationship with the state, and the role of social media. Further, debates about who the movement belongs to, and the diversity of the movement continue to be relevant. This chapter has provided an important overview of the evolution of the feminist movement in Peru, without which we could not understand the current movement.



Figure 4.1 Activists hold a banner reading ‘Peru, Feminicidal Country’ in front of the José de San Martín Monument in Plaza San Martín, Lima, 1st June 2019 (Photo: author’s own)

On the 1st of June 2019, feminist activists marched through the centre of Lima to mark a year since the death of Eyvi Agreda. While travelling home on a bus, 22-year-old Eyvi was set on fire by a stalker Carlos Hualpa who had been following her for two years. She died as a result of her injuries after 38 days in hospital.¹ This march, called ‘A Year Without Eyvi,’ marked not only the anniversary of her death, but also recognised the 60 victims who had died by femicide in the first half of 2019. In this photo activists from the *Asamblea de Mujeres y Diversidades* (Assembly of Women and Diversities²) hold up a banner that reads ‘Peru, Feminicidal Country’ on top of the Peruvian flag. They are also holding smaller banners

¹ Her murder was prosecuted as a femicide and Hualpa received 35 years in prison.

² Diversities refers to non-normative gender identities. The Asamblea is open to cis- and transgender women, as well as non-binary people.

bearing the names of individual victims, along with their age and the date and location of their deaths. They are standing in front of the monument to José de San Martín in the Plaza San Martín, both of which are named after the Argentine military general who also led Peru's struggle for independence. This action juxtaposes symbols of the nation – the monument and the flag – with the victims of feminicide in the country.

Feminicide and gender violence are some of the core issues in the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. The recent resurgence in feminist activism is in large part due to the huge 'Ni Una Menos' protests that took place across the country on the 13th of August 2016. These historic marches, some of the largest in Peruvian history, called for an end to feminicide: Ni Una Menos translates as 'not one less', that is society should not lose any more women to gender violence. The movement reflected widespread concern about the levels of violence and mobilised people across society, not just feminist activists. They created an opening for a revival in feminist activism in Peru. It is not possible to discuss the contemporary movement without acknowledging its influence. However, Ni Una Menos has undergone serious transformations in the years since, that reflect some of the challenges facing Peruvian feminists: class and generational divides, social media, and the stigma against feminism, and progressive politics in general.

The resurgence of feminism in Peru is not an isolated phenomenon. In the late 2010s and early 2020s the revival of Latin American feminisms has been hard to ignore. Mass mobilisations and significant legal changes have been seen across the region. Ni Una Menos Perú took its name from the Argentinian movement that emerged in 2015, and versions of Ni Una Menos also emerged in countries like Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay.

Violence is not the only issue feminists focus on. The ‘*marea verde*’ – the wave of protests calling for free, safe, and legal abortion sweeping Latin America – is arguably one of the most important social movements of recent years. Abortion has been partially legalised or decriminalised in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia underlining the significance of this movement. As this thesis will be examined, particularly in Chapter 6, abortion, reproductive rights and bodily autonomy are key issues for contemporary feminists.

At the same time, the rise of right-wing, conservative, and religious groups continues to undermine feminist and progressive movements. This is exemplified by the government of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, the 2019 ousting of Evo Morales in Bolivia and the interim rule of Jeanine Añez, and the role of conservative evangelical groups in opposing the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia. This movement, which has been labelled ‘anti-genderism’, is particularly strong in Peru³. The group ‘Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas’ (CMHNTM), which emerged in opposition to the incorporation of a gender perspective in the new national curriculum, epitomises this movement. They are particularly influential and have ties to right-wing political forces such as the *fujimorista* Popular Force party led by Keiko Fujimori, and Rafael López Aliga’s Popular Renewal. At the same time as feminism has become a dominant political force, so has anti-genderism. The contemporary Peruvian feminist movement sits at the intersection of these two contexts; on the one hand, the country has seen unprecedented feminist mobilisation in recent years. On the other hand, the anti-genderist movement equates all progress towards gender equality with ‘gender ideology’.

³ Rousseau, ‘Antigender Activism in Peru and Its Impact on State Policy’.

One common factor in the upsurge of both feminism and anti-genderism is social media. Its role in allowing the emergence of new forms of progressive social action has been celebrated, particularly in the case of feminism where events like #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos have been able to have a huge impact online and offline. It has also facilitated the rise of new online conservative movements, including CMHNTM. While there are a number of differences between left- and right-wing online activism, we should not take social media activism for granted, or to see it as an entirely positive development for social progress. While social media has opened up new spaces for feminism, those spaces have also enabled the rise of vitriolic backlash against feminism and other progressive movements.

How then can feminists intervene in public discussions and push their agendas to the fore? Creative, visual, and embodied forms of political expression are key at a time when feminists struggle to get issues of importance into the mainstream press. However, these actions are not simply about visibility, but also about creating new forms of activism that reflect shifts in feminist theory and practice. We cannot understand the role of visual and embodied politics without considering the local and transnational context of Peruvian feminist politics.

This thesis argues that the contemporary feminist movement is characterised by its diversity, use of activism, social media and a focus on issues related to the body, violence and the state. Activism creates new spaces that are accessible and reinforce solidarity within a fragmented movement. It also brings a sense of joy when the reality of being a feminist is often frustrating and disappointing. By examining the particular case of Peruvian feminism, it is possible to complicate current narratives about the renewal of Latin American feminisms. It starts by examining the characteristics of contemporary feminism, particularly the influence of the 2016 Ni Una Menos marches, and the use of social media. It then considers the hostile

context Peruvian feminism exists in. Drawing on the previous analysis it then argues that activism is a key avenue of activism for feminists in an age of visual media and structural backlash.

Feminism in Peru has experienced, and is experiencing a resurgence in prominence and visibility in recent years. Yet it is diverse and fragmented, which makes it hard to provide a definitive account of the movement as a whole. It is made up individuals and groups, participating in multiple collectives, NGOs, assemblies, and many other contexts. As the introduction to this thesis explored, the women's movement in Peru has historically been divided into three distinct but overlapping 'streams'⁴. However, in the current context, the division into the feminists, the women's movement, and women in politics is not as helpful as it once was because the movement has changed under the influence of three factors discussed above: diversification, social media, and the move away from policy.

This section will analyse the shape of the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. It starts by analysing the influence of Ni Una Menos in Peru, and how its emergence and legacy reflects some of the opportunities and challenges for feminists. It then examines the political context in Peru, and the challenges this presents to the movement, particularly the rise of anti-genderist politics. Building on this contextual discussion, it then provides a portrait of the contemporary movement and the role of visual and embodied politics within it, in order to argue there is not a singular Peruvian feminism, but rather multiple feminisms.

⁴ Vargas, 'The Women's Movement in Peru'.

4.1 Context

Before providing an analysis and description of the contemporary feminist movement in Peru, we must first consider a few essential contextual factors that shape it. First, the emergence of the Ni Una Menos protests in 2016 is a key moment in the recent history of feminism in Peru. Examining this process illuminates some of the main challenges facing the feminist movement including the role of social media but also the fragmentation of the movement. Second, the political context in Peru. Third, the rise of anti-genderism.

4.1.1 Ni Una Menos

Examining the emergence and aftermath of Ni Una Menos in Peru gives us important insights into the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. Ni Una Menos Perú took its name from the Argentinian movement of the same name⁵. In August 2016 two high profile cases of gender-based violence sparked a national mobilisation. On the 14th of July, a court in Ayacucho handed Adriano Pozo Arias a year's suspended sentence for brutally beating his partner Arlette Contreras, resulting in his immediate release from prison⁶. Days after a Lima court gave Rony García a four-year suspended sentence for the brutal assault on Lizeth Rosario Socia (Lady) Guillén⁷, once again leading to his immediate release from prison⁸. The

⁵ The name 'Ni Una Menos' originates from a 1995 poem by Mexican poet Susana Chavez which included the phrase 'Ni una muerta más' (Not one more dead woman). When the mobilisation in Argentina started, the phrase evolved. One of the organisers, the writer Agustina Paz Frontera, recalls saying 'we don't want one less woman [ni una mujer menos], we want to be all that we are together' The Peruvian movement, as well as others in Latin America and elsewhere, uses the same name. See Paz Frontera, 'Ni Una Menos es Todas Más'. (Although, in Mexico, some activists use the name 'Ni Una Más' (Not one [woman] more) in campaigns against femicide.)

⁶ Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos', 16.

⁷ Lady Guillén is a nickname she is widely referred to by.

⁸ Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos', 16.

lenient sentencing in both cases contrasted with the fact that video and photo evidence had been widely circulated on social media. After these two cases went viral online, a group of women decided to organise a national march in response. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across the country to decry high levels of gender violence. It is a movement characterised by the use of social media. The name is now synonymous with campaigns against gender-based violence across Latin America, with Ni Una Menos marches held across the Spanish-speaking world. It has also been cited as an inspiration to the 2017 Women's Strike⁹ (cite guardian article). Despite the success of the movement in translating online outrage into offline mobilisation, activists have not been able to recreate the success of the first march, and this is reflective of fragmentation within the feminist movement.

It is first important to clarify what 'Ni Una Menos' refers to, as many organisations and collectives use the name. The first Ni Una Menos march took place across Argentina on the 3rd of June 2015. In Peru Ni Una Menos refers to the mass mobilisations in 2016 (and subsequent editions in 2017, 2018 and 2019). There are the 'official' Ni Una Menos Peru¹⁰ social media pages under the banner 'Ni Una Menos Perú: Tocan a una, tocan a todas'. However, there are also locally specific groups that are organised autonomously around the country in Cusco, Arequipa, Huancayo, and within Lima to mention but a few examples. These often differ from the central page on key issues. For example, 'Ni Una Menos Somos Todas - Los Olivos' based in the Los Olivos district in Lima often publicly disagrees with Ni Una Menos Peru on how the movement is organised and which issues it prioritises. There is a difference between Ni Una Menos the march, and the ongoing organisation Ni Una Menos

⁹ The Guardian, 'Women of America: we're going on strike. Join us so Trump will see our power'.

¹⁰ In this section, Ni Una Menos Peru refers to the group and pages behind the original marches, and Ni Una Menos refers to the marches themselves and their impact. Other groups are referred to by their specific names.

Peru. The latter is not representative of the whole feminist movement in Peru, as illustrated by a Twitter interaction between the media-outlet VICE and Ni Una Menos Los Olivos from June 2019. VICE's Spanish language twitter account (VICE en Español) tweeted 'In Peru, #NiUnaMenos emerged on the 13th of August 2016. Currently it is the largest movement that brings together Peruvian feminist collectives'. In response, NUM Los Olivos stated 'FALSE. All the feminist collectives in Peru function AUTONOMOUSLY. There is no central organisation that groups or unifies the others. We reject any group that intends to take credit for the COLLECTIVE and NATIONAL achievements of the 2016 Ni Una Menos march' (emphasis in original)¹¹. These tensions reflect the question of who can and cannot claim Ni Una Menos as a movement in Peru.

Therefore, one of the main challenges for the recent feminist movement as a whole has been defining what Ni Una Menos is, and who it belongs to. One of its successes was achieving such a wide base of support, but this was in part due to keeping it separate from political groups, and at least in the first march not being explicitly feminist nor linking it to other, more controversial, feminist issues like abortion. This is in part because it was not organised by activists from the feminist movement itself, although many organisers did have links to it. According to Caballero Rojas, who carried out interviews with many of the organisers of Ni Una Menos in August 2017, the organisers took the decision not to address 'controversial issues', including abortion, despite the fact that it had been one of the core issues of the feminist movement since its inception¹². For feminists this was a betrayal, as they made a direct link between gender violence and abortion rights; making the point that many women

¹¹ VICE en Español [@VICEenEspanol], 'En Perú, #NiUnaMenos [@NiUnaMenosPeru] surgió el 13 de agosto de 2016. Actualmente es el movimiento más grande que unifica a los colectivos feministas peruanos. <https://t.co/kZA35g9ghh>'.

¹² Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos', 152.

also die as a result of dangerous clandestine abortions¹³. Although many of the organisers were personally in favour of abortion, they argued that feminism had alienated conservative and religious women who ‘need feminism the most’¹⁴. For the organisers, the priority was to include and reach the widest possible group of women.

This is in part due to the way that the Ni Una Menos march came about. The march had its origins in a closed Facebook group where women shared their personal experiences of violence. As one of the original organisers, Natalia Iguñiz recalled in an interview: it started with a small Facebook group message of a few women, that then moved to a private group¹⁵. Group members started to add others, and then women started sharing stories of their personal experiences of violence. This snowballed into a space where thousands of women recounted how their lives had been touched by violence. Subsequently a public facing page was created and used to organise the marches. As of January 2019, there are still 44,624 members in the closed group and 165,581 followers of the Facebook page, which still receives posts and private messages denouncing violence or asking for help¹⁶. For many victims it remains an important source of help in a country where societal and legal support is hard to come by. This reflects the idea expressed by Jimena Ledgard, that for the organisers it was important to have an accessible and ‘neutral’ space for victims of violence.

However, the fact that it was organised by a small group of elite (white, middle class) women was controversial for others in the feminist movement. The march was not organised by traditional feminist activists. That is to say those who had organised the longstanding

¹³ Taype-Rondan and Merino-Garcia, ‘Hospitalizaciones y muertes por aborto clandestino en Perú’.

¹⁴ interview with Jimena Ledgard in Caballero Rojas, ‘Redes Sociales y Feminismos’, 156.

¹⁵ Natalia Iguñiz, interview.

¹⁶ Natalia Iguñiz.

marches for International Women's Day or the International Day to End Violence Against Women, or those who had taken part in the abortion campaign 'Déjala Decidir' (Let her decide). They were artists, journalists, academics, who, in their own words, simply felt that they needed to 'do something'. This group was described by its critics as 'la cúpula'. Cúpula refers to the upper leadership, which implies a small group of elites controlling a wider movement. They saw this group as trying to control the march to the exclusion of the existing feminists networks and organisations, and not organising it in what they saw as the 'right' way, through open assemblies and collective decision making. Ni Una Menos did achieve mass support, albeit through unconventional means.

While the original Ni Una Menos march was being organised, feminist activists took the decision to organise a parallel process and create open forums, the 'women's assemblies'¹⁷. As Caballero Rojas documents these were an effort to make the organisational process more open and horizontal. However, it resulted in a division between the 'cúpula' and another group of 'asambleístas' who had links to left-wing political activism¹⁸. For the asambleístas the cúpula sought to control and dominate the process, whereas for the original organisers, they felt it was more important to create a wide-ranging march, that was not explicitly feminist, in order to help mobilise the largest number of women. The asambleas eventually lead to the creation of the Asamblea de Mujeres y Diversidades which was key in organising the Peruvian part of the International Women's Strike in 2017. This assembly continues to be an important part of the feminist movement in Peru, providing a space for activists from distinct collectives, as well as individuals, to come together and debate as well as organise.

¹⁷ Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos', 131.

¹⁸ Caballero Rojas, 133.

However, institutional and grassroots feminists are not as divided as social media tensions may imply. Many of the performances and actions analysed in this thesis were organised in collaboration with longstanding feminist NGOs. Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán provided financial and logistical support to the abortion rights protest analysed in Chapter 6, allowing us to rehearse at their offices. DEMUS is the main collaborator of the campaign group *Somos 2074 y muchas más*, analysed in Chapter 7, again providing material support and institutional backing. While for some younger activists, the aims of institutional feminism are not necessarily aligned with theirs, many feminist institutions have recognised the importance of visual and embodied politics for keeping feminist issues in the spotlight.

It is difficult to separate the success of the march in reaching a mass support base from the ways it was organised. Some feminist activists may feel that the two are not relevant, but the fact that it was presented as an ‘apolitical’ space meant it was able to be more inclusive, in a country where feminism is seen as extreme, an explicitly feminist march would arguably not have been as successful. The organisers of the march deliberately kept it separate from political groups in order to make it a space for everyone. Other activists note that this was part of its success. In an interview, one activist summarised this situation: ‘one of the achievements of Ni Una Menos was that it was able to bring together a lot of people, including more ‘mainstream’ women. It managed to achieve a massive support at the same time as [talking about violence]’¹⁹.

It did have an overflow effect, increasing attendance at more established feminist marches. Comparing the size of the 2016 Ni Una Menos march, and the 2016 25th November march,

¹⁹ Flor Valles, interview.

the former had a significantly larger response. There was an increase in the number of people attending the November march compared to previous years. Gina Chacón, a long-standing activist, reflected ‘we used to go to the streets with 50, 40, 100 [people], but after the marches were 1000, 2000, 3000’²⁰. While nowhere near the hundreds of thousands who attend Ni Una Menos in August 2016, the increase is significant. This highlights that one of the challenges in creating a mass feminist movement in Peru, beyond what Ni Una Menos could build, is to win over women by offering more open understanding of what feminism is. Some argue that feminism is too political and as Gina put it ‘the majority of women don’t like to talk about politics’²¹. Although this is a generalisation, it reflects the feelings of feminists on their position in relation to wider society.

While the original march aimed to be apolitical, a challenge it faced were attempts at co-optation by political groups, especially those on the right. Ni Una Menos had to balance the demands from feminists on the one hand and political parties on the other. According to Natalia Iguñiz, in order to mitigate this, the decision was taken to register the name with the National Institute for the Defense of Competition and Intellectual Property (INDECOPI) to protect it from co-optation by right-wing groups who were trying to co-opt what NUM stood for²². However, this quickly backfired. The fact that the decision was taken by a small group rather than consulting the whole movement, and that the registration included ‘educational services’ reinforced the perception of the *cúpula* as elites and not ‘real feminists’. However, according to Iguñiz, this step was taken to protect NUM and was based on what the organisers of Ni Una Menos in Argentina had done for similar reasons²³.

²⁰ Gina Chacón, interview.

²¹ Gina Chacón.

²² Natalia Iguñiz, interview.

²³ Natalia Iguñiz.

Activists within the feminist movement felt betrayed or that they were being deliberately excluded from the most important women's mobilisation ever to happen in Peru. These divisions reflected divisions in Peruvian society and politics: many 'accused the *cúpula* of being authoritarian because they were white and middle class'²⁴. They have also criticised Ni Una Menos for not being more feminist. These criticisms largely came from activists living in less privileged areas of Lima, who are part of smaller, more radical feminist collectives. These tensions came to a head again in 2019. When a week before the planned 4th Ni Una Menos march a number of feminist collectives and individuals signed an open letter posted to their various social media platforms. The letter separated themselves from Ni Una Menos and outlining a number of criticisms dating back to the first march and its aftermath. This was referred to as a '*deslinde*' or clarification, as in to clarify the facts relating to Ni Una Menos. The letter opened:

'In Lima, the process of organisation of the march was born as a democratic, participatory, and inclusive process. However, various actions of a minority group fragmented it. Decisions taken in a unilateral manner, without respecting the consensual agreements made in *asambleas de participación masiva* (mass participation assemblies) resulted in the invisibilisation of the impact of different problems that affect women in their diversity'

This part of the statement highlighted the importance that those signing the letter placed on democratic and participatory decision making. It also places the blame on a small group:

²⁴ Flor Valles, interview.

those in the ‘cúpula’. Among the actions that they specifically criticised Ni Una Menos Perú for were: the registering of the name with INDECOPI; the ‘appropriation’ of social media, email accounts and databases (not providing others with the login credentials); representing Ni Una Menos Perú in front of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) without being democratically elected; receiving a human rights award on behalf of the movement and not distributing the prize money; and the publication of a list of collectives on their website with the suggestion that they were under the coordination of Ni Una Menos Peru. The statement went on to criticise the ‘minority group’ for deliberately coopting the wider movement:

‘These actions are evidence of the intent of a minority group to appropriate the collective and national effects that NUMP 13A represented, a group which until now continues to use this name for unrelated and questionable interests’

This statement also reflected long-standing tensions in the feminist movement between ‘elite’ feminists (white, middle-class, educated) and a more diverse movement. One of the challenges for contemporary feminism in Peru is becoming more representative of the country as whole. For many, the role of collectives and assemblies is to create a more inclusive feminist movement. In this part of the letter, the writers distinguish the ‘minority group’ from ‘all of us, women and diversities’, positioning Ni Una Menos’ organisers as a privileged elite:

‘This year, those who belong to this minority group called organisational meetings for the march NI UNA MENOS: MUJERES LIBRES DE VIOLENCIA 17A in a selective way from their privileged spaces, leaving out the collective and popular

participations of workers, students, Afro-Peruvian women, indigenous women, peasants (campesinas), lesbians, trans people, and all of us, women and diversities, who continue to organise in collectives, platforms, syndicates and assemblies’

It is interesting that both groups framed their intentions as trying to be inclusive of the widest range of society, but in very different ways. Those who signed this statement approached it from an activist feminist perspective, whereas the organisers decided the way to be inclusive was not to be as explicitly ‘feminist’ – that is to say not to use the label explicitly or make statements about controversial issues like abortion. On the one hand, it is true that feminism in Peru is heavily stigmatised, for its associations with left-wing politics (see section 4.1.2), which means that a feminist march possibly would have been much less attended. On the other hand, without taking an intersectional approach to gender violence, the way that violence affects minoritised women in Peru will not be fully addressed.

In the aftermath of this break between divisions, the 2019 march was very poorly attended. This reflected another challenge for the feminist movement: how to include those who are not involved in feminist spaces, particularly those online where the open letter was distributed. Many of those attending the march were friends and relatives of victims, for whom the march was an important occasion to remember their loved ones and call for justice. In the words of Micaela Távara, an influential activist (as one of the founders of feminist theatre and art collective *Trenzar* she is involved with different branches of the movement), although she signed the letter, she still attended: ‘I went to the march because I know that this goes further than just those who are organising it ... others were saying not to go to the march, because it would be giving points to those who were organising it, whether it is valid or not, but in the

end, we saw a very poor march. Horrible. Zero people'²⁵. She recalled that this was similar to divisions within the Left in Peru. As the feminist movement grows and changes in Peru, one of its major challenges is how to represent a diverse country that is still dealing with the effects of its recent past.

Comparing the changes in the visual politics of Ni Una Menos Peru from 2016 to 2019, we can see a clear shift towards a more political framing of the march. The first year uses blue and pink, and two hands as a symbol of feminine solidarity. The same colours were used in the second edition but with the addition of a raised fist, a symbol that is more recognisably feminist. The 2018 is even more feminist, explicitly citing 'a corrupt, machista, and feminicidal judiciary', and using the colour purple, historically associated with feminism. Finally, the 2019 march focused on the Peruvian state directly, reflected in the use in the branding of red and white, the colours of the national flag. This shift to a more feminist visual language is reflective of behind-the-scenes processes, including criticisms from the feminist movement, and a change in leadership.



²⁵ Micaela Távara, interview.

2016



2017



2018

2019

Figure 4.2: Ni Una Menos Peru Facebook posts calling for national marches between 2016-2019²⁶

This highlights the challenges that feminists face in creating an inclusive movement. On the one hand they want to be explicitly feminist and inclusive of diverse identities and experiences. Yet, for many women in Peru feminism is seen as extreme and political and not something they want to be involved with. It is a major challenge to create an inclusive movement within a context that is incredibly hostile to the most minimal feminist demands. Further, the people who were most harmed as a consequence of the divisions between Ni Una Menos and other feminists were the victims and relatives who were in general not aware of these internal movement conflicts and see the march as a time and place to seek justice and reparations. Feminists have to seek ways to be inclusive, without giving up on the wider political project of feminism.

²⁶ Facebook, 'Ni Una Menos PERÚ'.

The impact of Ni Una Menos has been wide-ranging and at times controversial. Feminists and activists describe it as manifesting in a number of ways, but its long-term legacy is yet to be decided. It is important when analysing this, not to conflate the impact of Ni Una Menos with the work of feminist and victims' rights activists both before and after the march.

Although many groups distance themselves from Ni Una Menos Peru, they emerged in the space that was opened up by its success. After the 13th of August, 'there was an explosion of women's collectives'²⁷ and feminism grew more outside of NGOs and institutions in return to the feminist of the 1970s and 1980s; one that is 'a bit more street-based, a bit more action-based'²⁸. For many of the young activists I interviewed, it was the first march they attended²⁹ or the most representative event in feminism for them³⁰. Feminists seem to have moved away from the NGO-led, institutional model that characterised the 1990s and 2000s.

We can also see the impact of Ni Una Menos in wider society and government policy. The march had a noted impact on societal opinions, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the mobilisation. Caballero Rojas, examining the effect of Ni Una Menos cites a comparison of surveys from 2012 and 2016 carried out by the Instituto de Opinión Pública, in which the percentage of respondents who thought that 'problems of violence between a couple should only be resolved between them' decreased from 66.1% to 56.9%, and those who thought that 'there are occasions when women deserve to be hit' decreased from 9.5% to 3.8%³¹. This suggests that the movement has contributed to a slight shift in public opinion. While there has so far been no legal change explicitly linked to Ni Una Menos, the build-up to the march in

²⁷ Gina Chacón, interview.

²⁸ Natalia Iguñiz, interview.

²⁹ Silvana Oblitas, interview.

³⁰ Maireth Dueñas, interview.

³¹ cited in Caballero Rojas, 'Redes Sociales y Feminismos', 191.

2016 increased awareness and discussion of violence against women. Three days before the march, the outgoing government of Ollanta Humala finally approved the Plan Nacional Contra la Violencia de Género 2016-2021, which replaced the 2009-2015 plan which had already been expired for months³².

The increased awareness of issues related to gender-based violence was taken more seriously by the government of Martín Vizcarra (2018-20). On the 7th January of 2020 he received activists who presented him with a list of demands. Among those activists were feminist groups including Feministas Abolicionistas del Perú, Asociación Agenda Mujeres, Bloque Universitario Feminista, and Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán, as well as victims' groups³³. On the 8th of January 2020, the government announced measures to offer financial support to the indirect victims of femicide, including children, disabled people and other dependents³⁴.

The case of Ni Una Menos reveals many of the challenges, but also possibilities for feminist activism in Peru. Social media has opened up new spaces for activism. These spaces mean that activists who previously did not have a platform to criticise other feminists, are now able to challenge the movement. This fragmentation within the movement is reflective of greater diversity in contemporary feminism. Feminists must also navigate the stigma associated with left-wing and progressive politics in Peru, while also not diluting the movement to make it more palatable. Nevertheless, the fact that hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Peru to denounce gender violence does represent a shift that has provided an opening for the expansion of feminist activism in Peru. Building on the impact of Ni Una Menos, the next

³² Caballero Rojas, 167.

³³ El Peruano, 'Presidente Recibe Propuestas Contra Violencia de Género'.

³⁴ El Peruano, 'Atención a víctimas indirectas'.

section examines the status of the contemporary movement and how it negotiates divisions and tensions.

4.1.2 Political context

While Ni Una Menos created an opening for feminist activism in Peru, there are still serious challenges facing activists. One of the main obstacles for feminists in Peru is the political context. This is twofold: on the one hand, the unstable political sphere in Peru, characterised by multiple crises in recent years, on the other hand, the rise of anti-genderism and conservative moments in direct opposition to feminists. These combined create a hostile climate for feminism. In both political and societal spheres, the space for debate and discussion of progressive social issues is limited. Peru is dominated by a powerful Right, which a weak and fractured Left is ineffective in opposing. The way that feminists express themselves, and the responses they receive are shaped by the wider context. This section will outline this wider context, and how it affects the character of contemporary feminism in Peru.

To say that Peru has undergone a number of political crises in recent years is an understatement. While it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed outline and explanation of all of these, there are key ways that these relate to the feminist movement that it is important to outline. Unlike other Latin American countries, Peru did not experience a ‘pink tide’ in the 2000s. Instead, since the end of the dictatorship in 2000 the dominant political force has been the Right. Since 2017 there have been several political crises, which, combined with a weak and fragmented Left, there have been limited opportunities for feminists to pursue legal changes. Feminists have few political allies, and therefore have turned to alternative avenues to seek societal changes.

The ongoing political crisis is generally understood as starting in 2017, however it is not isolated from the rest of Peru's political history. After narrowly beating Keiko Fujimori in the 2016 presidential elections, in December 2017 then President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski narrowly survived an impeachment attempt brought by congress over corruption allegations linked to the Odebrecht scandal. After passing the vote, largely thanks to the support of Kenji Fujimori (son of Alberto and sister of Keiko), on Christmas eve Kuczynski pardoned Alberto Fujimori on humanitarian grounds. This pardon was seen not only as an affront and an insult to the victims of Fujimori's regime, but also as a way for Kuczynski to thank Kenji for saving him from impeachment. This sparked mass protests across the country, calling for the pardon to be reversed. The pardon was also condemned by international human rights organisations. In March 2018, facing a second impeachment vote, Kuczynski resigned, meaning his vice-president Martín Vizcarra assumed the presidency. In October 2018, the pardon was annulled, and Alberto Fujimori was ordered back to prison.

At the same time, since the 2016 election Congress was dominated by Popular Force, the fujimorista party led by Keiko, which won 73 out of 130 seats giving it a solid majority. Despite not winning the presidency, fujimorismo was the dominant political force. After assuming the presidency, Vizcarra attempted to pass a number of anti-corruption and political reforms. This took place against a background of corruption allegations against numerous politicians and judges, including all then-living former Presidents, and Keiko Fujimori being sentenced to preliminary detention for her own links to the Odebrecht scandal. Congress continually blocked the reforms, which included measures to limit parliamentary immunity and reform campaign financing. In September 2019 Vizcarra proposed dissolving Congress, arguing that its actions counted as a second vote of no confidence in the government, allowing him to legally dissolve Congress. Protests took place throughout September in

support of dissolving Congress, a measure supported by 85% of Peruvians at the time³⁵.

Congress was dissolved on the 30th of September 2019, and interim elections were scheduled for January 2020, to elect an interim Congress until the next elections, scheduled for 2021.

Vizcarra remained president after the 2020 congressional elections, aiming to serve out the rest of his term, without seeking re-election in 2021. However, in September 2020, Congress moved to bring impeachment proceedings against him for ‘moral incapacity’. These were based on corruption allegations, which while serious, were relatively minor compared to the scandals engulfing other politicians. This, and the fact that the allegations were brought by a member of Congress who would face prosecution if he lost parliamentary immunity, meant that this was widely seen as a way of ousting Vizcarra and blocking anti-corruption reforms. Vizcarra was impeached on the 9th of November 2020, and the President of Congress Manuel Merino assumed the presidency. This action was seen by many as a coup and prompted mass protests across Peru, some of the largest ever seen. Merino called on the police and military to control the unrest. During the heavy-handed repression of the protests, many people were seriously injured, and two young protestors, Inti Sotelo and Brian Pintado were killed by the police on the 14th of November. This was widely condemned, including by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights³⁶. On the 15th of November Merino and his cabinet resigned. On the 17th of November Francisco Sagasti, of the centrist Purple Party, was elected as President by Congress.

In 2021, Peru faced a run-off election featuring Keiko Fujimori for the third time. The run-off was between Keiko, who is currently facing money laundering charges, and then relatively

³⁵ El Comercio, ‘El 85% aprueba la decisión de disolver el Congreso’.

³⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ‘IACHR Condemns Human Rights Violations in the Context of Social Protests in Peru.’

unknown outsider Pedro Castillo, who before advancing to the second round was best known for leading the 2017 teachers' strike. Castillo won the election by just 44,263 votes. Although exit polls gave the election to Keiko, as the votes were counted and it became clear she was on track to lose, she and her supporters started to make claims of fraud during the election. This was a reversal of her position during the election, when she vowed to respect the result either way. Observers noted that the looming threat of a 30 year prison sentence if convicted on charges of graft and corruption meant that Keiko was desperate to win the election³⁷. Although he won the election on 6th June 2021, Castillo was not signed in as President until the 19th of July, after a series of attempts to overturn the result.

The impact of the Internal Armed Conflict and the Fujimori regime in the 1990s on the feminist movement is discussed in detail later in this thesis (Chapter 7). However, it is important here to note some of the key political legacies of the violence that affected Peru in the 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand, the Left still faces the stigma of being associated with terrorism in political discourse, an association that the Fujimori government deliberately fomented to undermine the opposition³⁸. On the other hand, the defeat of Sendero Luminoso by Fujimori and the ending of hyperinflation through neoliberal reforms, created a strong base of support for *fujimorismo*. The two are linked in political discourse, as Vergara and Encinas put it, 'this narrative then allows for a discourse where the defence of the neoliberal model becomes the defence of a country free of terrorism'³⁹.

³⁷ Collyns, 'Peru Elections'.

³⁸ Muñoz, 'Political Violence and the Defeat of the Left', 220.

³⁹ Vergara and Encinas, 'From a Partisan Right to the Conservative Archipelago: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Right-Wing Spectrum in Contemporary Peru', 243.

At this point the Peruvian Left is well known for being weak and fractured. During the 1980s the Left was unable to put together a united opposition to the actions of SL, leading to its current struggles: ‘in failing to respond effectively to the crisis, the Left became divided and stigmatized’⁴⁰. Feminists often make reference to the experiences of the Left in the 1980s as a lesson for the movement to not spend all its time arguing with itself: ‘the Left also argues (with itself), but the Right never argues, and keeps getting very strong ... I think we need to learn from what happened to the Left in the 1980s’⁴¹. Considering the divisions over Ni Una Menos, as the feminist movement grows and evolves, it needs to find ways of remaining a cohesive movement in order to be a significant political force.

However, within the Left there is a difference between progressive and traditional wings, and their positions on social issues do not line up. This makes it hard for feminists to maintain ties with left-wing political movements. Having strong political allies is essential for feminist movements. As Gago argues in the case of Argentina, the fact that the feminist movement there was able to build alliances with established union left-wing political movements was key to its success as a political force that brought about the legalisation of abortion⁴².

Feminists in Peru have few mainstream political allies that would enable them to pass major legislation. These alone do not constitute a strong enough base to push for such a significant legislative change.

The absence of an established Left means that feminists are sceptical of forming alliances with political parties. In some ways the closest political groupings to the feminist movement have been the Frente Amplio, Juntos por el Perú coalition and the reformist party Nuevo

⁴⁰ Muñoz, ‘Political Violence and the Defeat of the Left’, 222.

⁴¹ Micaela Távara, interview.

⁴² Gago, *Feminist International*, 103.

Perú. Often feminists used the offices of Nuevo Peru in the Centre of Lima as rehearsal spaces for performances. However, these relationships have often been strained over social issues. In 2019 Nuevo Perú, led by former presidential candidate Veronika Mendoza collapsed over accusations of homophobia, misogyny and xenophobia⁴³.

In the 2021 elections, after Pedro Castillo moved to the second round on a socially-conservative, but left-wing populist platform, his Perú Libre party formed alliances with progressive leftist movements like Juntos por el Perú. This resulted in a moderation of his positions on certain social issues⁴⁴. After Castillo won the 2021 election, there was hope for an opening for feminist positions. The appointment of sociologist Anahí Durand as Minister for Women and Vulnerable Populations was seen by feminists as a positive development; however, Congress is still dominated by a right-wing opposition coalition, making legal change still challenging to achieve. In addition, in January 2022 a new cabinet was appointed with ever more right-wing ministers. Durand was replaced by Diana Miloslavić, an icon of feminist activism and leading member of the Movimiento Flora Tristan, but, as one of the very few women in an increasingly neoliberal cabinet it remains to be seen how much she can do for a feminist politics. Further, Castillo's presidency so far has been marked by instability—there have been four cabinets in six months—and corruption, and he has already faced two impeachment proceedings. Congress remains dominated by a right-wing opposition coalition seemingly preoccupied with ousting Castillo, rather than passing bills.⁴⁵

⁴³ La Izquierda Diario - Red internacional, 'Se rompe el partido neorreformista 'Nuevo Perú' de Verónica Mendoza'.

⁴⁴ Calderón, 'Pedro Castillo presentó parte de su nuevo plan de gobierno'.

⁴⁵ There have been many political developments in Peru in 2022, including attempts to oust Castillo. However, I had to stop updating this section in early 2022 as I finished writing. As of the time of finishing this thesis, Castillo remained precariously in power.

At a time when feminists are in dire need of political allies, they face stigmatisation and political instability. Given the fractured and unstable nature of Peru's political institutions, activists have turned to alternative strategies rather than seeking to effect change exclusively through the state. This also follows a turn towards more protest-based feminisms in Latin America, after activists became disillusioned with institutionalised and state-focused feminist activism in the 1990s and 2000s⁴⁶. Within this return to a feminism 'of the streets,' there has also been a shift toward performative and creative forms of feminist activism, which this thesis uses the lens of visual and embodied politics to understand.

4.1.3 Anti-genderism

In addition to political polarisation, another challenge facing feminists is the rise of 'anti-genderist' movements. These movements are global, and exist across the right-wing political spectrum, but what unites them is their opposition to feminism and gender equality⁴⁷.

Corredor defines these movements as transnational countermovements which utilise the fear 'of gender ideology as salient counterstrategies to feminist and LGBTQ+ social movements'⁴⁸. Anti-genderism is a backlash against the gains transnational feminist movements have made, particularly since the 1990s. Scholars have identified the roots of anti-gender movements 'and in direct response to, feminist and LGBTQ+ policy advancement at the UN World Conferences of the 1990s'⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms "Go Global"'.

⁴⁷ Graff, Kapur, and Walters, 'Introduction'.

⁴⁸ Corredor, 'Unpacking "Gender Ideology" and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement', 614.

⁴⁹ Corredor, 622.

Conservative movements are on the rise across Latin America. They are often linked to governments, for example the government of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, but often their strongest influence is in society. Anti-gender conservatism is a direct threat to feminist aims to is to change societal attitudes around gender, particularly in relation to violence and reproduction. What makes the Peruvian case different is the lack of coordination on the Left, meaning there is very little coordinated response to these movements. Even if they do not represent a majority view, they are some of the loudest voices. Vergara and Encinas make a useful distinction between political and institutional actors on the right, and the societal right⁵⁰. The societal right has grown stronger over the last two decades, strengthened by conservative and religious social movements. While both aspects of the right are dominant, they operate in different ways and impact the feminist movement differently.

Peru is the home of one of the most well-known conservative, anti-gender ideology groups in Latin America, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas. It is a group that now has outlets across Latin America but was founded in Peru in 2016. In 2008 the Peruvian Ministry of Education agreed to implement Integral Sex Education, and it became part of the new national curriculum in 2016. This was the event that triggered the formation of CMHNTM, which was organised to oppose ‘gender ideology’ in the curriculum. These anti-gender activists argue that these are private issues and should be addressed by families rather than the state (Rousseau, 2020, p. 26). The group also makes a direct link between abortion and sex education. In 2019 the group placed banners around Lima including the slogans ‘Gender perspective = anal sex’ and ‘Vizcarra, don’t promote sexual perversion and abortions’⁵¹. These played on parents’ fears,

⁵⁰ Vergara and Encinas, ‘From a Partisan Right to the Conservative Archipelago: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Right-Wing Spectrum in Contemporary Peru’, 229.

⁵¹ Perú21, ‘¡No dejan de tergiversar! Pancartas de “Con mis hijos no te metas” buscan desinformar’.

but also fixated on taboo sexual acts to undermine feminist arguments in favour of comprehensive sex education and legal abortion.

Anti-genderist movements are also linked to religious views. While the Catholic church has long been influential in Peru, as it is across Latin America, in recent decades it has become increasingly conservative and vocal. Muñoz attributes this to the Internal Armed Conflict which ‘played a major role in fostering a more conservative and politically active Catholic Church’⁵². However, recent conservative movements are more driven by Evangelical Christians⁵³, typified in Peru by CMHNTM whose members are predominantly Evangelical, with a smaller number of Catholics⁵⁴. CMHNTM also has links to conservative religious movements in the United States, its founder Christian Rosas studied at the conservative Liberty University in Virginia⁵⁵.

Differently to previous conservative movements, the global anti-gender movement has an ambiguous attitude towards democracy: they make use of mass mobilisation, social media campaigns and other citizens’ initiatives, but in order to maintain control over the family, reproduction, marriage. In doing so they also utilise discourses previously associated with the Left such as anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, framing gender as a cultural imposition⁵⁶. In Peru, CMHNTM has carried out a number of public actions similar to those carried out by progressive civil society groups. The banners placed around Lima mentioned above, is a strategy that feminists have also used. For example, on the 23rd of May 2019, feminists placed

⁵² Muñoz, ‘Political Violence and the Defeat of the Left’, 237.

⁵³ Freston, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America*.

⁵⁴ Meneses, ‘Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas’, 3.

⁵⁵ Wayka, ‘Líder de CMHNTM, Christian Rosas, asesor en la sombra de un poderoso minero’.

⁵⁶ Korolczuk and Graff, ‘Gender as “Ebola from Brussels”’.

banners around Lima reading ‘Gender perspective (enfoque de género) = no more feminicides’⁵⁷.

CMHNTM has also carried out marches. However, the treatment of anti-genderist campaigners compared with feminist or anti-corruption protestors is notably different. As the previous section outlined, Peru has seen numerous protests in recent years, many of which have been controlled violently by the police. However, right-wing groups do not face the same repression and violence from the police. On the 24th of May 2019 CMHNTM protestors were allowed to enter Plaza Bolívar, the square directly outside Congress which is normally off access to protestors⁵⁸. They were supposedly granted permission by the then-president of Congress, Daniel Salaverry, reflecting the support that anti-gender ideas have with the Peruvian state.

Feminists, on the other hand, have experienced violent repression: ‘One officer hit a friend, they bent back her arm and broke her headphones. They kicked me [...] All our [materials] were totally destroyed and we couldn’t continue with the performance’⁵⁹. Of course, it is not only feminist activists who experience violent backlash, but they do experience reactions from the public even when not protesting, but simply speaking about gender. Speaking to Jessenia, an organiser of PAZOS, an arts-based group in the district of Villa El Salvador, she recalled the reaction she faced when trying to set up a workshop on gender equality:

⁵⁷ Flora Tristán ■ #JuntasContraLaCovid19 [@CMPFloraTristan], ‘En este momentos banderolazo por el #EnfoqueDeGénero en las afueras del Hospital del Niño. Realizado por las compañera de la Asamblea de Mujeres y Diversidades. #EducacionConIgualdad <https://t.co/RvjbolOjo3>’.

⁵⁸ El Comercio Perú, ‘Controversia por ingreso de colectivo “Con mis Hijos no te Metas” a plaza del Congreso’.

⁵⁹ Isa Rivas Espinoza, interview.

We had signs which said, ‘what is gender inequality’ and images of feminist women like Maria Elena Moyano, and then when the neighbours saw this, they came in asking what we were doing, in a way that was a bit violent ... they only saw the word gender and then they started saying to us you are doing gender ideology (*haciendo ideología de género*)⁶⁰

While she identifies as a feminist, the group deliberately avoids using feminist language. Even the words ‘gender equality’ can trigger a violent response from the public. This is directly linked to the actions of groups like CMHNTM who frame ‘gender ideology’ as an existential threat to so-called traditional family values.

In the social and political context outlined above, feminists face a challenging climate. On the one hand, there are few political opportunities given the instability of Congress and the fact that most congresspeople are socially conservative. At the same time, feminists also face challenges from the societal right, typified by CMHNTM. The strong backlash shapes the structure of feminist movements and their activist tactics, given that there is very little political space for them to try to achieve their goals. In the social and political context described above, one of the main avenues open to feminists to communicate and challenge is the arts.

Public performance protest and creative activism is therefore a space for feminists to intervene and make their arguments heard. Taking action in public – both online and offline – directly challenges hostile audiences, but also engages those who are perhaps more open to

⁶⁰ Jessenia Tonquiri, interview.

feminist ideas. As this thesis shows, using creative strategies feminist activists can provide more nuanced portrayals of complex issues like abortion, and frame them in ways that policy-oriented approaches may not be able to. Nevertheless, the use of these strategies also reflect the challenges inside and outside of the contemporary movement, as the next section shows.

4.2 The contemporary feminist movement in Peru

Having outlined the hostile context the feminist movement faces in Peru; this section examines what characterises the contemporary movement. Political instability and strong conservative countermovements mean that feminists must be creative in finding openings. The movement is not a homogenous one, as this section will illustrate, and one of the major challenges is defining what it means to be a feminist in Peru. Despite these tensions, feminists have created new possibilities for activism.

The movement is a diverse one, and so we should really speak about feminisms rather than feminism. When asking activists what the most important feminist issues were for them, they gave wide-ranging answers: from teen pregnancy, human trafficking, legalisation of cannabis, LGBTQ+ equality to corruption and justice. Unsurprisingly, considering the recent political context ongoing corruption and injustice were frustrations for many, but particularly older interviewees who drew more connections between structural and social factors. Yet, there were issues that came up again and again, and are reflected in campaigning and activism: violence and abortion.

Violence was mentioned by nearly all interviewees, as something deeply affecting women and sexual minorities in Peru. Many cited experiences of physical and sexual violence at the

hands of family members, partners, and strangers as the motivation behind their feminism. Similarly, the right to legal abortion was repeatedly mentioned, although it was not always framed through personal experience, but also through connections to transnational feminist movements. Ni Una Menos and the ‘marea verde’ of abortion rights activism are two central transnational movements influencing feminists across Latin America. Feminists in Peru, while facing specifically local challenge, are also embedded in this transnational feminist ecosystem. Many of the strategies used by activists draw on narratives and repertoires from other countries.

This section will examine how the factors identified in the previous sections affect the contemporary movement: the role of social media, fragmentation within the movement, a move away from policy-focused activism and the growing anti-feminist backlash. It will also probe the issue of whether this is a new wave of feminist activism, a question that also reflects shifts within feminism itself – that challenges the concept of ‘waves’ in itself. It argues that these new feminisms have not emerged out of nowhere, they build on the work of previous generations, while also challenging them.

4.2.1 The role of social media

One of the factors that shapes almost all contemporary social movements, not just feminism, is the use of social media. As section 4.1.1 outlined, Ni Una Menos is a key example of the role social media has played in the recent history of feminism in Peru. It serves as important counterexamples to accusations of slacktivism⁶¹ facing online activists. Despite the often-

⁶¹ Morozov, ‘From Slacktivism to Activism’.

hostile environment of the internet, it offers ‘great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge’⁶². Ni Una Menos is not the only example of this. Social media plays a complicated role for feminists, one that is not entirely positive or negative. It is important to interrogate the role of digital media in contemporary forms of activism.

Social media activism includes many different practices, from hashtag campaigns, to recalling personal experiences, or flooding a platform with images. Each social media platform has its own characteristics. Manovich offers a categorisation of the uses of different platforms ‘Twitter is for news and links exchange, Facebook is for social communication, and Flickr is for image archiving, Instagram is for aesthetic visual communication.’⁶³ Leaver et al. argue that ‘Instagram should best be understood as a conduit for *communication* in the increasingly vast landscape of visual social media cultures’⁶⁴. Given that Instagram and Facebook are the most used platforms among young activists, this suggests that key attributes are visual and social communication.⁶⁵ Feminist online activism, especially that of young feminists, requires us to ‘to expand understandings of ‘political’ and ‘activism’ beyond practices, protests and lobbying in the public eye’⁶⁶.

As previously mentioned, internet access rates in Peru are below average for Latin America, which particularly affects women. In Peru, researchers analysing the National Household

⁶² Baer, ‘Redoing Feminism’, 18.

⁶³ Manovich, ‘Instagram and Contemporary Image’, 41.

⁶⁴ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*, 1.

⁶⁵ In the last year, the video sharing service TikTok has also become an important platform, particularly during the 2020 protests (see Arroyo and Fowks, ‘De TikTok a las calles’.) However, during the fieldwork for this thesis, it was not yet a significant platform for activism.

⁶⁶ Jackson, ‘Young Feminists, Feminism and Digital Media’, 46.

Survey (ENAH) found that women's access was limited both by technical factors (e.g., not physically having access) but also social factors; women were more likely to be uninterested in or unfamiliar with the Internet, with 8% responding that 'I don't believe it is appropriate for me to use the Internet'⁶⁷. Young, urban women are more likely to have internet access than older women living in rural areas. Social media is a factor shaping feminist activism, yet it is important to bear in mind that it is those who are able to participate shape the forms it takes. In an interview with Natalí, an activist based in Huancayo, she reflected that 'there are women who can't access this type of information, women who don't even have the internet, or a mobile phone'⁶⁸. Without a way of accessing the internet, these women are excluded from these new feminist discussions. This also reflects some of the tensions around Ni Una Menos, which – for the organisers – aimed to reach the widest cross-section of people possible. Although it started online, through Facebook groups, it was able to move offline through word of mouth, but also media coverage and interpersonal networks.

Activists must also contend with the fact that while they are using social media platforms, they are under corporate control. The apps most used by interviewees were Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp; all three have been owned by a single company, Facebook, since 2012 and 2014. Activists must negotiate the contradictions between corporate control of social media platforms, and their usefulness in reaching their communities⁶⁹. As has become increasingly clear since 2016, 'social media tools can simultaneously support grass-roots political mobilizations as well as government surveillance and human rights violations'⁷⁰. Not only this, but the increase in misinformation spreading through social media platforms,

⁶⁷ León et al., 'Niñas y Medios Digitales', 283.

⁶⁸ Natalí Córdova, interview.

⁶⁹ Barassi, 'Ethnography Beyond and Within Digital Structures and the Study of Social Media Activism', 410.

⁷⁰ Coleman, 'Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media', 493.

and the unwillingness of their owners to take meaningful action against this, makes social media a much more complex activist landscape than it once was considered⁷¹.

Feminist activists in particular have to weigh up the benefits of social media platforms for their activism, with their failure to effectively combat online harassment of women⁷².

Activists who use images of the body (theirs or others) in highlighting issues of bodily autonomy, sexual freedom, and violence are routinely censored on Instagram in particular under vague ‘community guidelines’⁷³. According to one study queer and non-white users are more likely to face censorship by Instagram than any other group⁷⁴. This highlights how a platform that prides itself on being ‘safe place for inspiration and expression’ is anything but⁷⁵. Activists face the dilemma of using mainstream platforms that their communities are more likely to use, but these are also spaces that will censor and police their content to appease advertisers. Activists carrying out *tetazos* (topless protests) in Peru and across Latin America have had to contend with this (see Chapter 6). journalistic images of bare chests are routinely censored, yet pornographic content continues to circulate on the rest of the platform. Further, tools provided to report inappropriate or harmful content are used to attack activists: ‘people who come under attack for their identity have been reported or banned instead of attackers’⁷⁶.

There is a clear tension for feminist activists in Peru: on the one hand many women have no access to the digital sphere at all, and on the other they must navigate the political

⁷¹ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*.

⁷² Amnesty International, ‘Troll Patrol Findings’.

⁷³ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*, 20.

⁷⁴ Salty, ‘An Investigation into Algorithmic Bias in Content Policing on Instagram’.

⁷⁵ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*, 20.

⁷⁶ Salty, ‘An Investigation into Algorithmic Bias in Content Policing on Instagram’.

complexities of these spaces. Despite these limitations, these platforms remain essential for activists and have a clear influence on their strategies. In a hostile media environment, where press reporting on gender-based violence and feminist activism is often sensationalised. Feminists see social media platforms as spaces where they can control their own narratives and messages.

One of the main challenges of studying contemporary activism, particularly that which takes place online, are rapidly shifting online practices. The majority of studies of online activism focus on Twitter which was central in the early 2010s in the Arab Spring, Occupy, and others⁷⁷. However, in my fieldwork, Twitter was hardly mentioned by activists. They prefer more private, intimate, creative online spheres: ‘what is most active is Facebook and Instagram’⁷⁸. Instagram is the most popular and most used platform, followed by Facebook. Social media practices also vary greatly across generations. For example, according to the Pew Research Center, in the United States, 71 % of those aged 18-29 use Instagram, compared with 29% of those aged 50-64, although Facebook usage is consistent across age groups⁷⁹. What is obscured by these statistics, is *how* different groups use social media platforms. Spending time carrying out digital ethnography allowed me to understand that activists in Peru tended to use Facebook and WhatsApp for organisational purposes, such as coordinating marches or performances, as well as sharing longer opinion posts. Whereas on Instagram, activists share visual posts, both also parts of their everyday lives. Activist social media practices are as diverse as activists themselves, and reflect the reality of their own lives, as researchers we should take this into account.

⁷⁷ Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia, ‘Towards Cyberactivism 2.0?’

⁷⁸ Emilia Salazar, interview.

⁷⁹ Pew Research Center, ‘Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States’.

Instagram is comparatively understudied compared to Facebook and Twitter, with the first full length monograph on the platform only being published in 2020⁸⁰. Yet for young feminists it is the preferred platform. The use of Instagram's stories feature is a characteristic of some young feminisms. It offers an interesting counter point to more public facing activist practices. Instagram offers a 'close friends' function – in which stories are only shown to a determined list, rather than strangers. This is particularly useful for those with public accounts, or those who would like to hide things from some family and friends. However, this does not mean that feminists are speaking to an echo chamber, but they may fear negative responses from people. As well as speaking to the wider public, it is also important for feminists to speak to each other directly without interference from trolls or right-wing activists. However, these platforms are often used more for in-group conversations. It is a challenge for activists to use social media to reach outside of this. One of the main challenges is the algorithm. 'With our social network [pages] we can't reach many people, when social networks have an algorithm that [decides]'⁸¹. Those with the social and digital capital to reach a wider audience are more able to participate in digital activism. Further, while social media has allowed for an increase in *feminist* activism, it has also enabled the rise of a significant backlash against both feminism and other progressive movements, as section 4.1.3 examined.

Feminist activism relies on an online feminist ecosystem of WhatsApp and Facebook groups, as well as Instagram and Twitter accounts. However, one of the most important spaces is the *Asamblea de Mujeres y Diversidades*. The assembly focuses on a horizontal model of feminism or *asambleísmo*: 'everyone has the same voice; everything is decided in the

⁸⁰ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*.

⁸¹ Jessenia Tonquiri, interview.

assembly'⁸². This is a counterpoint to the idea that all new activism takes places online, rather the assembly is centred around offline decision-making: 'The assembly is the space for decisions, you've got to be present. There is also a [WhatsApp] chat, but this is for exchanging information and the idea is that you don't make decisions there, but instead always in the assembly'⁸³. So, while social media is an important characteristic of contemporary activism, it is not the only defining feature.

Social media is an integral part of the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. As the daily lives of people globally become more integrated with the digital world, so do activist practices. The digital sphere can also be a hostile space for feminists, meaning that feminist activists must also negotiate harassment and backlash, particularly from anti-gender movements. However, we should not assume that activism is only taking place online. As this thesis examines, activists are returning to the streets, through embodied forms of activism.

4.2.2 Generational differences and feminist institutions

As has been noted about most feminist movements⁸⁴, the contemporary movement in Peru has a number of differences across generations. This is not to say that there are not coalitions between generations of feminists, but there is a perceived difference between the approaches, demands and worldviews of younger feminists and older feminists. Younger activists are seen as more radical and vocal, and less involved with institutions, which are associated with

⁸² Flor Valles, interview.

⁸³ Flor Valles.

⁸⁴ Molyneux et al., 'Feminist Activism 25 Years after Beijing'; Whittier, *Feminist Generations*.

the older generation. Yet, as this section will explore, these divisions are not as stark as they are perceived to be.

Activists from different generations have different perceptions of feminist issues. When an employee of the NGO PROMSEX was publicly accused of sexual harassment, several feminists signed an open letter denouncing him, but as one interviewee noted, ‘this is a document that shows a generational divide, because those who signed it were only young collectives, no historic feminist institution signed up’. She went on to note that, for young feminists ‘the subject of harassment and violence is zero tolerance ... this is an intergenerational difference, where something that young feminists see as a violence, older women don’t see as serious, it is more normalised for them’⁸⁵. The extreme stance taken is often criticised, but for many it is seen as the only form of justice available.

The well-known Peruvian feminist Maruja Barrig, one of the founders of Movimiento Manuela Ramos, was interviewed in *La República*, which encapsulates some of the divisions between generations. When asked ‘who is feminism addressing nowadays: the state? The media? Perpetrators of violent crime?’ she responded:

I don’t know. This vigorous feminism that is out in the streets protesting, I don’t know who it is talking to. In my time, we were boring feminists in suits, pressuring the state through normative change. [We helped pass] the Law against violence in the 90s, among others. And we also spoke at the United Nations. I think that for feminists in my time, having an international dimension was key to guarantee rights. If your

⁸⁵ Flor Valles, interview.

country failed you, you could appeal in the anti-discrimination commission. The normative dimension, on a national and international level, was key. Nowadays, I am not surprised to read various theories, from outside Peru, that don't want to have anything to do with the United Nations or the State. Because, they say, the state is patriarchal, and the United Nations is not concerned with these issues. I don't really understand it. You'd have to ask a young feminist⁸⁶

This quote reflects the division between how feminists see the role of institutions. In Peru the feminism 'of the street' in the 1970s and 1980s became institutionalised in the 1990s. This meant that while feminists were still active in institutions or within the state, in terms of activism in the streets: 'zero', as one interviewee put it⁸⁷. This is not entirely accurate, other activists I spoke to who were active in the 1990s mentioned attending protests at the time, however this quote reflects the general impression feminists currently have of that decade. It is also interesting that Barrig sees the rejection of institutions like the UN or the state as foreign to Peruvian feminism.

Contemporary feminisms have moved away from institutions and back towards a feminism of the street, and one based around collectives and consciousness-raising. Looking further back, young feminists now see the movement of 1970s as an important antecedent, but they do have their critiques: 'I feel like the feminism of the 70s and 80s was very white [bien blanco]'⁸⁸. Yet, if feminism has gone back to the streets, which streets are they? Feminists across the country have distinct experiences of activism. While many feminists acknowledge the need to diversify and be more inclusive in their feminism, it often plays out in a different

⁸⁶ Barrig, "No sé con quién está dialogando este feminismo vigoroso".

⁸⁷ Flor Valles, interview.

⁸⁸ Farrah Escobar, interview.

way. For one activist who works in the district of Villa El Salvador, there is an irony in activists who come from the centre to the barrios to ‘empower’ women⁸⁹.

However, these critiques are not entirely new. Boesten argues that during the 1990s, there were tensions between the feminists and the popular women’s movement. The ‘*populares*’ criticised feminists who employed poor women in their own homes and offices, enabling them to go out and campaign⁹⁰. These divisions mirror the earlier divisions between strategic and practical interests⁹¹. At this time, feminists who had been part of the autonomous feminist movement moved into NGOs⁹². They still attempted to bridge the class divide: feminist from Flora Tristán and Manuela Ramos would travel to the ‘*barrios*’ to provide workshops. Yet there were tensions between the goals of grassroots feminism and international funding agencies. Even when there are criticisms of NGOs, they have important resources that are vital to the wider movement – they are the ones who have access to international financing. These tensions are reflected in the contemporary movement: in order to reach a wider audience, and to maintain the movement, smaller groups and more radical activists are still reliant on the social and financial capital of NGOs, even when they disagree with their goals.

Another shift in feminism in Peru, is how young activists relate to feminist theory. Many new feminist activists come to feminism through personal, embodied experiences rather than reading theory. For them there is a division between the theoretical and the practical. Some mentioned previously being embarrassed not having read a lot of feminist theory; ‘a friend

⁸⁹ Jessenia Tonquiri, interview.

⁹⁰ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 27.

⁹¹ Molyneux, ‘Mobilization without Emancipation?’

⁹² Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 30.

explained to me that being a feminist is not necessarily about knowing theory or the main figures in feminism⁹³. As mentioned above, several interviewees explicitly cited experiences of violence as the main reason behind their activism, highlighting the experiential rather than the theoretical. For many young feminists, ‘it is a political position to live [feminism] from experience and not from theory’⁹⁴. This is reflected in the ways young feminists communicate their goals from the streets rather than solely from institutions. However, there has been a shift away from elitism in Latin American feminist theory⁹⁵. We could therefore argue that these young feminists are creating their own theoretical perspectives from their own, new experiences.

4.2.3 A new wave of feminism?

The resurgence in feminist activism has provoked the question: is this a new wave of feminist activism? The term ‘wave’ is associated with the wave model of feminist mobilisations that divides the history of feminism into a first wave, associated with the suffrage movement, a second wave, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s when feminism experienced a ‘boom’ in theorising and activism, and a third wave in the 1990s, which according to some is associated with an increased diversity. Recent feminist mobilisations, particularly those of the late 2010s and early 2020s, such as Ni Una Menos, #MeToo and the Women’s March, have been described as some as a ‘fourth wave’ of feminist activism. However, others have argued that this model obscures women’s movements that fall outside of the main waves, particularly those of black and indigenous women⁹⁶. Further, the wave model suggests that feminism

⁹³ Jacqueline Arade, interview.

⁹⁴ Flor Valles, interview.

⁹⁵ Martin and Shaw, ‘Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience’.

⁹⁶ Nicholson, ‘Feminism in “Waves”’.

‘disappears’ between waves⁹⁷. This section argues that recent feminist activism is new, but not a new wave.

Some scholars have attempted to set out what a feminist fourth wave might consist of. One definition frame it as defined by the use of social media as a space for debates and activism, as well as a focus on building a more intersectional and inclusive feminism⁹⁸. Similarly, some activists have described these movements as part of a fourth wave. Cecilia Palmeiro, one of the co-founders of Ni Una Menos in Argentina, argues that the movement is part of a fourth wave, ‘by connecting perspectives such as indigenous feminism with black feminism, migrant feminism, queer feminism, and popular feminism, we made alliances and enlightened the intersection of violences as well as featured possible strategies of resistance’⁹⁹. They see it as one that brings together voices that previously had been sidelined or ignored by the feminist mainstream.

However, despite claims their voices are being ‘connected’ with other perspectives through fourth-wave feminism, many indigenous feminists reject the wave model. For them, it is not a useful way to look at feminisms outside of North America and Europe. Given the claims of some feminists of a more inclusive fourth wave, including such perspectives is crucial. This is illustrated by a post by Mexican collective *Coatlicue Siempre Viva*. This post, which was shared by a number of Peruvian collectives in July 2019 across Facebook and Instagram, features an illustration of an indigenous Mexican woman carrying a child on her back with the text ‘we are a feminism without waves’. The caption of the post reads ‘we are the

⁹⁷ Rupp, *Survival in the Doldrums*.

⁹⁸ Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 23.

⁹⁹ Yang, ‘A Women’s Strike Organizer on Feminism for the 99 Percent’.

feminism that has been historically denied! We are women of colour (mujeres de colores)’ and features the hashtag ‘decolonise your feminism’. They make the case that a wave model ignores the contributions of indigenous women before and after the emergence of first-wave feminism. This is affirmed by one commenter on the post who argues ‘enough with talking about waves or generations, imitating white discourse!’. When reposting this image, Peruvian collectives echoed the idea that the wave model of feminism did not apply to their movement.



Figure 4.3: Facebook post and comments from Coatlicue Siempre Viva¹⁰⁰

In an interview with Geraldine, a member of feminist audiovisual collective Chola Contravisual, she described the idea of waves as coming from a Eurocentric, white way of thinking; one that ignores the perspectives of indigenous women whose experiences of liberation are different¹⁰¹. This reflects the criticism made by decolonial feminist scholar

¹⁰⁰ Coatlicue Siempre Civa, ‘Coatlicue Siempre Viva - Photos’.

¹⁰¹ Geraldine Zuasnabar, interview.

Françoise Vergès that the wave model creates division between feminists and their elders that goes against a decolonial politics (11). Similarly, feminist activist Gina Chacón, who has been active since the 1990s, underlined the idea that mainstream feminism in Peru still struggles to include indigenous and peasant women¹⁰². There is a perceived tension between including indigenous perspectives on issues like land and community – things that are not in the feminist mainstream - and also talking openly about controversial issues like abortion.

Yet, this is not always the case. The feminist movement in Peru is undergoing a transformation and expansion, becoming a movement that more diverse. There are new links between indigenous and afro-descendent Peruvians and feminists, that go beyond NGO-based solutions addressing immediate needs. In September 2020, the audio-visual collective '*Chola Contravisual*' created a video with the indigenous *rapera* Nina Lu, titled '*¿Quién aborta?*'. In the video we see Nina wearing indigenous dress and rapping about the right to legal abortion in both Spanish and Quechua¹⁰³. This represents the emergence of a decolonial feminism in Peru led by younger activists, that makes explicit the links between coloniality, race and gender. As chapter 7 will examine, this is key in the campaign to seek redress for the victims of forced sterilisations. By building stronger connections with indigenous women, feminist activists can make these voices heard at a national level.

Another reason to move away from the wave model in the Peruvian case is the lack of an effective 'third wave'. Many interviewees I spoke to who came of age in the 1990s stated that there was effectively no feminist movement at that time¹⁰⁴. This is not say that feminists were not active, but Peruvian feminists in the 1990s were more institutionalised and focused more

¹⁰² Gina Chacón, interview.

¹⁰³ Chola Contravisual, '*¿Quién Aborta? - Nina Lu*'.

¹⁰⁴ Gina Chacón, interview; Flor Valles, interview.

on work with NGOs and the State¹⁰⁵. Until the end of the 1990s there was minimal street-based activism, and even then, when women took to the streets it was part of a pro-democracy movement rather than ‘traditional’ feminist goals, as protesting was an increasingly dangerous activity to carry out under constant political threats. Given the absence of a ‘third wave’, it is not useful to analyse the contemporary Peruvian movement as a ‘fourth wave’.

Nevertheless, there has been a renewal of feminist activism in the late 2010s, one that has been building since the earlier part of the decade. As section 2.3 examined, there have been important developments in Latin American feminist theory in recent years, that are influenced by and influence the feminist movement itself. In this way feminist thinking from Latin America is reversing the ‘traditional’ flow of ideas from North to South.

In Peru, particularly among young feminists, there has been a noticeable turn against so-called ‘white feminism’. This is admittedly a slippery term, that is generally used to refer to versions of feminism that do not take into account the ways that race, class and other factors intersect to affect different women’s experiences, but instead collapses women into a singular category, based on the experiences of white women. However, in Peru the label of ‘white feminism’ also interacts with the idea of whiteness in Peru. In Peru the category of ‘white’ refers to a small, but influential, part of society, mostly well off and based in Lima. Among the young, left-wing population active online, there is a type of ‘anti-white’ sentiment, directed at the wealthy limeño elite – or ‘*pitucos*’. A (now-deleted) twitter account ‘@pitucos_txt’ was dedicated to reposting examples of wealthy, white Peruvians being either

¹⁰⁵ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 29.

ignorantly or explicitly racist. This perception of white people overlaps with the idea of white feminism in Peru, which is perceived as out of touch and elitist.

An illustrative example of ‘peak white feminism’ was a viral marketing campaign by a Peruvian swimwear brand. On the 9th of March 2020, the day after the annual International Women’s Day march, the brand ‘Nuna’ brought together a number of influencers to put their own ‘manifestation’ in Barranco¹⁰⁶. In the action, the participants – all white, thin women – wore red bikinis while holding signs relating primarily to street harassment (a significant issue in Peru). This action was then promoted via their Instagram accounts. This was faced with a huge online backlash from feminist activists who saw this as insulting and degrading of their message and ongoing struggle. While the influencers may support the feminist movement, their participation as part of a marketing strategy was not welcomed. Further, these signs were not explicitly feminist, although they did draw on feminist framings. This encapsulated the ideas that feminist activists have about white feminists, that they are happy to take the bits of the movement that benefit them, rather than thinking beyond that.

Therefore, the idea of a ‘fourth wave’ of feminism in Peru is not a helpful model. While there has been an increase in feminist mobilisation, to position it with the model of waves obscures a number of factors that have shaped the movement historically, and the character of the contemporary movement. This section has identified key four factors: social media, the fragmentation of the movement, a move away from policy and a reactionary conservative movement. These factors shape the opportunities that are open to the movement. The final

¹⁰⁶ Mano Alzada, ‘Se vende FEMINISMO’.

section of this chapter focuses on how feminists are using visual and embodied politics to address these.

4.3 Conclusion

As this chapter has set out, feminist activism in Peru faces a number of challenges: anti-gender movements, a weak Left and fragmentation within the movement itself. Within this context, feminists seek out alternative paths. This thesis argues that visual and embodied politics are key within the contemporary feminist movement in Peru. They offer alternative paths for feminism, where political and legal routes are limited. They also create new spaces for expression of complex ideas.

This chapter has provided an overview of contemporary feminisms in Peru, providing an outline of the key factors shaping the current movement: social media, right wing backlash, a fragmented movement and a move away from policy. These factors create a context in which there are limited spaces for feminists to challenge dominant ideas and push for societal or legislative change. In doing so, it has placed the use of activism in wider context, providing a basis for further analysis of this in the next three chapters. It has argued that feminist activism is a creative, visual form of protest that is shaped by the rise of social media. However, the aesthetic components of activism are not its only characteristic; it is also an avenue for feminists to build solidarity within a fragmented but dynamic movement.

As this thesis will show, visual and embodied politics are not just about countering hegemonic ideas, but also about demonstrating and creating spaces of feminist joy in a hostile society. For younger activists, visual and embodied forms of activism, that combine artistic

strategies with protest, are an exciting possibility. They expressed a sense of frustration with traditional avenues, and a sense of excitement at combining art and activism: ‘I hadn’t ever thought about the possibility of doing activism through art. When I was young, I always connected with art, but I never, never thought about connecting art with activism’¹⁰⁷. Others see it as more effective than marches: ‘I decided to participate in the performance because it seems like a route for social complaint (*denuncia social*) that has a much more powerful effect that makes an impression on people. Perhaps because of the artistic or expressive techniques that performance implies, it has a much more effective message’¹⁰⁸.

Building on the context set out in this chapter the next three chapters in this thesis will analyse the role of visual and embodied politics in greater depth. In contemporary feminist politics, the role of social media – a highly visual format – means that the visual politics of feminism is key. As a result, artistic strategies that are visually striking are key. Visual politics is used to render visible that which has been hidden. Similarly, as Chapter 6 examines, there is also a turn towards embodied forms of activism like performance protest. The embodied turn in activism mirrors a turn towards the body in Latin American feminist theory. In a context in which bodily autonomy is often not protected, or even actively threatened by the state through sexual violence or reproductive rights violations such as forced sterilisations, scholars have noted the importance of the body to Latin American feminisms¹⁰⁹. Embodied activism is a reflection and interpretation of theory. It is also a move towards interpreting theory directly through the body.

¹⁰⁷ Lu Lemar, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Maireth Dueñas, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*; Souza, ‘When the Body Speaks (to) the Political’; Gago, *Feminist International*.

Visual and embodied politics are not totally new phenomena. However, actions in the 1990s and 2000s often went unrecorded or unnoticed by society in general. In the 1990s, activists calling for an end to the program of forced sterilisations under the Fujimori government (see chapter 7), were present every Thursday outside the Palacio de Justicia in what is for all intents and purposes a performance:

As well as meeting on Mondays, every Thursday we would be outside the Palacio de Justicia dressed in black and we were getting more and more attention from the press, but also from other women and other organisations ... we would talk to the drivers going by and the people passing, and we would show our posters calling for democracy and justice for women. If the press wasn't there, it wouldn't have been recorded¹¹⁰

If we compare this case of a weekly protest that finally got the attention of the media after repeated actions, with contemporary performances that are immediately translated to social media without having to go through the press, we can clearly see the importance of social media in shaping the role of contemporary feminist visual and embodied politics. We should see this as something that builds on previous actions, but that is shaped by contemporary factors. The next three chapters will analyse in depth the role of the visual and the embodied in relation to specific feminist actions, in connection to the context set out in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Gina Chacón, interview.



Figure 5.1 28th May 2019 – An activist recording a video of ‘panuelazo’ on her phone, Argentinian Embassy, Lima (Photo: author’s own)

In this photo, an activist records a protest outside the Argentinian embassy in Lima. In the centre of the image, we can see how she is using her phone to frame and capture her perspective of the event in a vertical video, most likely to post on social media later. The blue in her hair is lit up by the flashes of the many other cameras filming the protest. I took this photo on the 28th of May 2019, the International Day of Action for Women’s Health, along with Peruvian and Argentinian activists, when I attended a protest outside the Argentinian embassy in Lima, calling for free, safe, and legal abortion. The Argentinian embassy was being targeted as a month before, the senate in Buenos Aires had just rejected a bill that

would have legalised abortion in the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy¹. At the time this was a devastating defeat not only for activists in Argentina, but across Latin America, as the bill could have opened doors for legalisation campaigns in other countries – as the eventual legalisation in 2020 did.

The event took place in a park across from the embassy building, where we spent a few hours talking and singing before the main action took place. We were there to do a '*pañuelazo*', an action that involves a group of activists holding up their *pañuelos verdes* (green scarves)² as a visual statement of support for legal abortion. The *pañuelazo* took place at the end of the protest, when around 100 people had gathered in the park. Gathered in a large group, we all held our scarves taut above our heads so that the message written on it was clearly visible. Together, the scarves created a sea of green. During my time in the field, I took part in many *pañuelazos* of varying sizes, as it is a common part of the contemporary activist repertoire in Latin America.

At this protest, I started to notice the role of the cameras watching, as the above photo encapsulates. The attendees were all constantly taking photos and videos of the protest to put on social media, either on their personal pages or those of collectives they belong to, as is normal among young activists who are more likely to be digital natives. Although there were only around 100 activists taking part, there were also up to 50 people witnessing the action through their lenses. Photographers and bystanders with professional SLRs and video cameras as well as smartphone cameras, lighting up the protesters with their flashes and lights. This seemed to symbolise the ways that activism is shaped by the process of being

¹ 'Argentina Abortion'.

² The *pañuelo verde* is the symbol of the National Campaign for Free, Safe and Legal Abortion in Argentina. The emergence and significance of this will be discussed in greater detail later on in the chapter.

seen, by what we can call the visual politics of feminism. Like other contemporary forms of protest, the *pañuelazo* is an action that is done in order to be captured, witnessed, and retransmitted. It makes a visual statement that translates almost seamlessly to social media. Images of the protest almost immediately appeared on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram under the hashtags *#abortolegal* (legal abortion) and *#seráley* (it will become law), connecting it to the wider transnational movement. It is not done solely to intervene in offline public space, but also online space.

These photos and videos did not capture the quieter, less visually dynamic moments of the day, the sitting around talking about personal experiences, making placards, singing feminist songs, and sharing ideas between activists from different countries. This is also a key part of contemporary activism. One Argentinian in attendance talked candidly about how her mother was only seventeen when she was born, and how she wished that hadn't been the case. It is in these moments that nuance around feminist issues like abortion is teased out, in ways that visual representations do not capture. There are certain elements that the visual politics of feminism renders invisible.

The predominance of the visual online shapes our offline experiences: 'Images play an important role in how we experience being in the world and increasingly, due to the ubiquity of online interaction, how we 'shape' our world.'³ This chapter will examine these elements of contemporary feminist activism, with particular reference to issues of violence and bodily autonomy. These issues are central to the current movement and are recurring themes in this

³ Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz, 'Selfies, Image and the Re-Making of the Body', 79.

thesis. As the photo at the beginning of this chapter reflects, in the era of social media platforms the visual takes on an essential function.

5.1 Approaches to visual politics

In chapter two I set out the definition of visual politics that this chapter draws on: as a set of beliefs communicated through images, the use of images to challenge (or maintain) power and status. The role of images, screens, and symbols is increasingly important in today's world. This has a direct impact on activism. Social movement scholars like have increasingly recognised the importance of the visual. Activists must negotiate this visually dominated landscape as they attempt to not only make their voices heard, but also *seen*.

It is not possible to analyse the visual politics of contemporary feminism without evaluating the role of social media. Social media is the main factor shaping visual politics in the 2010s. Social media is also a gendered⁴ and racialised⁵ space, which shapes the experiences of users and the spaces that these images exist in. Certain bodies are prioritised online: white, cis, able bodies⁶. Whereas images might have once reached audiences primarily through forms like television or film, the rise of social media means that the relationship between cultural producers and audiences has fundamentally shifted.

An analysis of visual politics must also take into account the role of the spectacle in social media. The way that Ni Una Menos was sparked in Peru provides an important example of

⁴ Poland, *Haters*.

⁵ Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, *Race in Cyberspace*.

⁶ Salty, 'An Investigation into Algorithmic Bias in Content Policing on Instagram'.

how a visual spectacle can trigger a wider movement. The two cases that sparked the protests reached public consciousness through images. In the case of Arlette Contreras, it was CCTV footage of her being dragged by the hair through a hotel lobby by the Adriano Pozo. In the case of Lady Guillén it was a photo of her face post-attack, covered in blood. These two images were shocking but also resonated with thousands of women who saw their experiences mirrored in these images. One of them was a CCTV video, although it was transformed into one iconic still from that video. These images initially circulated on social media (Twitter and Facebook) and then appeared on the covers and pages of national newspapers, both online and offline. This provoked a stream of women sharing their experiences in the private Facebook group, often accompanied by images, of their injuries, or often of the perpetrator.

However, the role of viral images continues to evolve. Attitudes to the repetition of violent images as part of online political activism have shifted in recent years, during the resurgence of Black Lives Matter in the United States in 2020, activists asked social media users not to repost violent images of instances of police brutality: ‘because the images of police violence are so pervasive, they inflict a unique harm on viewers, particularly African Americans, who see themselves and those they love in these fatal encounters’⁷. Although viral images and videos spark political mobilisation, they do not necessarily lead to justice for victims. For Arlette Contreras, despite the fact that images of her attack went viral, the court dismissed the charge of attempted rape⁸. In a tweet she stated, ‘if a NAKED man attacking a woman in a

⁷ Gregory, ‘How Videos of Police Brutality Traumatize African Americans and Undermine the Search for Justice’.

⁸ Adriano Pozo was charged with attempted feminicide, but not attempted rape. Contreras publically condemned the sentence and has appealed it. BBC News Mundo, ‘Condenan a 11 años a la expareja de Arlette Contreras, la mujer agredida brutalmente por su novio en un hotel y cuyo caso se convirtió en un emblema de la violencia de género en Perú’.

hotel (caught on video) isn't proof enough to understand the context of the crime of rape [violación sexual], then WHAT?' (Emphasis in original)⁹. Despite the viral video evidence, she did not receive justice.

A feminist visual politics uses the visual as a space in which to explore and present understandings of the world from a feminist standpoint. This can encompass a number of different, and at times conflicting images. What these have in common is their transformative aims. Sharing images of violence experienced by women in the case of Ni Una Menos is different to a pañuelazo, but they both share a feminist gaze. By looking at different visual strategies used by activists in Peru, we can see the ways that as the visual is shaped by societal and technological factors it presents a feminist worldview.

5.2 Feminist visual politics in Peru

In the context of the above theoretical perspectives on visual politics, this section will analyse three different aspects of visual politics in relation contemporary Peruvian feminist activism: production, digital, transnational. In doing so it will analyse what visual politics *is* and what it *does* in Peru. Visual politics encompasses a number of aspects of activism, not just photographs, but also, 'slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes, and objects that comprise a material and performative culture'¹⁰. The visual is used to communicate ideas and identities in different contexts (both online and offline, in relation to other feminists or in opposition to anti-feminism), and to intervene in public spaces, both

⁹ Arlette Contreras.

¹⁰ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 18.

digital and physical. This is all facilitated and shaped by increased access to audio-visual digital technologies.

In Peru feminist visual politics can counter sexism in the media. A 2019 survey by the national organisation CONCERTV (Consultative Council on Radio and Television) found that 56% of Peruvians think that women are portrayed negatively on national television¹¹. Feminists see the press as part of the patriarchy; a post by the collective ‘Ruge Hermana’ marking the ‘Latin American day of the image of women in the media’¹² on the 14th of September highlights a number of examples of misogynist media¹³. Using headlines from websites it denounces four elements: judgement over women’s private lives, the ways that content exposes women to cyber-harassment, the portrayal of victims of femicide compared to perpetrators, and the hyper-sexualisation of underage girls. These examples used by the collective reflect the issues that feminist collectives have with the press. Feminist visual politics is therefore constructed in opposition to this media landscape.

This section will look at three examples. Firstly, the feminist gaze in the production of audio-visual media, showing how feminist visual politics is created in this process, and how it is part of visual politics. The second example looks at an example of a single feminist performance and how it straddles the space between online and offline, and how performances are constructed for this in-between space. The last section looks at how visual politics moves across borders, and how it is shaped by local factors. Feminist visual politics looks not only at the visual elements, but how they are constructed. These three examples highlight these different aspects of feminist visual politics.

¹¹ ConCERTV, ‘2019 - Estudio sobre Consumo Televisivo y Radial’.

¹² ‘Día Latinoamericano de La Imagen de La Mujer En Los Medios’.

¹³ Ruge Hermana, ‘Los Medios de Comunicación Son Machistas’.

5.2.1 Feminist audio-visual production in a performance calling for legal abortion

Another key aspect of feminist visual politics is the production of visuals themselves. Pollock describes cultural practices as ‘practices of *representation*... They produce meanings and positions from which those meanings are consumed’¹⁴, in this way the production of meaning through visual media is central to feminist visual politics. The production of visuals is a production of meanings and feminist ideas. This section will look at the role of feminist audio-visual media production in Peru, and how they shape the presentation of feminist ideas.

A number of feminist audio-visual collectives have emerged in Peru in the last five years, the two most well-known of these being *Mujer Dispara* and *Chola Contravisual*, with 7,800 and 10,100 followers respectively at the time of writing. These collectives produce their own visuals as well as collaborating with other feminist groups to produce photos and videos of protests, performances and other interventions. This increase has been thanks to increased access to technology, particularly mobile smart phones – in Peru the percentage of households with access to a mobile phone increased from 58% in 2008 to over 90% in 2018¹⁵. 97% of users access social media through smartphones¹⁶; whereas the percentage of households with wired internet access is only 29.8%¹⁷. This technology has massively shifted the landscape of who can access the internet. Although high-end audio-visual equipment is still comparatively expensive, by working in collectives, the cost of this technology is lowered. These collectives respond to the need to counter mainstream visual politics, but also

¹⁴ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*.

¹⁵ ‘PERU Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática INEI’.

¹⁶ We Are Social, ‘Digital 2020’.

¹⁷ ‘PERU Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática INEI’.

to create a space for feminist visual politics away from mainstream, that is not just in opposition to it but on its own terms. These collectives show how feminist visual politics can prioritise a feminist gaze, not just in terms of framing and editing, but the experience of filming itself.

The importance of this became clear in a performance I took part in on the 28th of May 2019, for the International Day of Action for Women's Health. It was organised by the activist collective *Trenzar*, in collaboration with the feminist NGO *Flora Tristán*, and the legal abortion campaign group '*Decidir nos hace libres*'. As part of a number of actions happening in Lima on the day, it called for free, safe, and legal abortion and highlighted the risks to women's health from illegal abortions. We did two versions of the performance, one outside the Ministry of Health and another outside the Edgardo Rebagliati Martins National Hospital (one of the largest and most important public hospitals in Peru). These are located near each other and on busy main roads, where pedestrians, cars and buses are constantly going by. Unlike other performances I took part in, on this occasion we were putting ourselves right in the middle of crowds and tackling an issue that is highly controversial in Peru. We were aware of the risks, and the organisers worked hard to integrate the safety of participants into the performance at all levels.

This did not just apply to protection from passers-by or the police, but to the filming of the performance. During rehearsals, the participants (all women and non-binary people¹⁸) were

¹⁸ The majority of feminist collectives I worked with use the terms *mujeres y disidencias* (women and those who differ from gender norms) or *mujeres y diversidades* (women and those belonging to the spectrum of gender diversity) to refer not just to women (both cis and trans) but also non-binary people. A number of the participants in this and other performances were non-binary.

asked how they felt about the video of the performance being taken by a man¹⁹. A number of participants spoke up and said they didn't feel comfortable, particularly given the subject matter, and that they would prefer it to be filmed by a woman or non-binary person. This required the organisers to find a new audio-visual team to record the video, and in the end Chola Contravisual, a feminist group made the video.

The performance started with one participant running into the centre of the space and throwing up pieces of paper with the phrase *atraso menstrual* (menstrual delay) printed on them²⁰. Then, the rest of the performers ran in, picked up these papers, and held them up to they were visible to the public going by. The next section involved a series of tableaux recreating common situations relating to abortion in Peru: castigation by the church and medical institutions, domestic abuse, rape, underage girls forced to carry pregnancies to term. Then in a line we bent over and pulled out red wool that we had hidden under jumpers or skirts, to represent the process of an illegal abortion, before lying 'dead' on the floor, while other performers covered us with the papers reading *atraso menstrual*. This evoked the risks posed by the estimated 371 420 clandestine abortions that take place each year in Peru. Taype-Rondan and Merino-Garcia calculate that these procedures could cause up to 28 652 hospitalisations and 58 deaths each year, which legalising abortion would almost entirely eliminate²¹. The performance finished with us holding a large banner reading *aborto legal para no morir* (legal abortion so as not to die) and chanting the slogan '*educación sexual*

¹⁹ The term used to describe him was 'aliado', or male ally, as the original videographer was linked to other activist groups. However, among some feminist groups the issue of where men can call themselves feminists or just allies is a controversial one.

²⁰ This is a common euphemism for an unwanted pregnancy and features on signs stuck to pavements and lampposts with phone numbers for services offering illegal abortions. These services are most often dangerous and exploitative, but these are seen everywhere in urban areas in Peru, highlighting the numbers of abortions carried out in a country where it is illegal except in case of a threat to the life or health of the woman.

²¹ Taype-Rondan and Merino-Garcia, 'Hospitalizaciones y muertes por aborto clandestino en Perú'.

para decidir, anticonceptivos para no abortar, aborto legal para no morir'. After we finished the performance, we left singing and shouting other feminist chants and revelling in the shared sense of solidarity and adrenaline.

The video does not just replicate the performance directly, but rather recreates the whole process. The performance was livestreamed, so there already exists a digital archive of how it happened in the moment. Instead, the video produced by Chola Contravizual shows the moments before and after the intervention itself. Before we held hands and recited a chant that Trenzar uses before each performance, and then walked together to the street outside the hospital. After we left chanting and dancing. By showing these aspects the video highlights the solidarity between the performers as a crucial part of the performance itself. The video also uses text to underline the reality of clandestine abortion in Peru: facts about this appear on screen throughout the video. This brings together three key elements: facts, awareness, and solidarity, the combination of these three demonstrates a feminist gaze.

The experience of this process highlighted the importance of a feminist gaze in activism. One that does not just prioritise awareness of feminist issues, but also a different way of looking at the world, guided by feminist principles. Extending the feminist gaze to the whole process of the performance from the filming to the rehearsals to the moment of performing itself transforms it from a process of awareness raising to an example of a feminist worldview. This is epitomised by the way that the video represents not just the performance, but the moments before and after, highlighting the experience of feminist solidarity and an 'ethics of care'²² for each other (within the group) but also for others, particularly those who need

²² Held, *The Ethics of Care*.

access to abortions. This is critical given the backlash faced by activists, especially in the case of abortion rights. The way that the performance reframes the issue of abortion as an issue affecting a wide range of people across society, while also emphasising solidarity, underlines a feminist worldview. Especially in the video, the contrast between feminist solidarity and the role of institutions (as represented by performers playing the roles of doctors, priests, teachers and the state) presents an alternative perspective on abortion: one that does not blame the person seeking an abortion but rather the system.

This process underlines the importance of alternative media. The video was posted on the Facebook and Instagram accounts of Chola Contravizual and Decidir Nos Hace Libres and covered by the website Mano Alzada²³. Activists are not just trying to seek coverage from the mainstream, but going directly to a sympathetic audience, trying to attract feminists and supporters rather than trying to change the minds of those who already disdain and attack them. The inclusion of a feminist perspective at all levels of audiovisual production allows feminists to centre their own views rather than seeking approval. This gives a more complex perspective, which is important in the case of abortion as it is often simplified by the media. They are creating their own meanings and taking control of the sites of interpretation of these meanings

5.2.2 Online and offline visual politics in ‘¿Cuántas más?’

The ability of visual politics to both move between online and offline spaces and also exist in both at the same time makes it increasingly significant for contemporary feminist activism.

²³ An alternative news site that prioritises coverage of feminist and LGBT+ activism.

Protests, for example, often feature placards with handwritten hashtags on them, despite the fact that their technical function (linking to related content) is removed, they demonstrate an implicit connection to the online world. This reflects how more people now exist in the world in ways that are neither fully online or offline, something that McGarry et Al. attribute to rising access to social media: ‘protest movements that straddle material and virtual spaces are on the rise across the world with people becoming increasingly able to engage with media technologies in order to be more visible and to ensure their voice is heard’²⁴. Internet access in Peru is still highly unequal. Internet usage is highest among young people in urban areas, with smartphones contributing greatly to the increase in use of social media²⁵. This section will look in more detail at how visual politics exists online, offline, and in the space ‘in-between’.

Visual politics is something that exists both online and offline, but it exists in different ways in physical spaces compared with digital spaces. Offline visual politics interacts with the physical space around it – buildings, passers-by, adverts, traffic – and online it interacts with the information around it – other social media posts, personal data, images and so on. It also exists in the public sphere, something that means something different online compared with offline. The online ‘public sphere’ has to contend with censorship, surveillance and corporate ownership.

The concept of context collapse, elaborated by danah boyd and Alice Marwick, demonstrates how online spaces do not just constitute one group of people, but rather multiple overlapping and conflicting audiences²⁶. Users have to negotiate these different contexts, often balancing

²⁴ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 21.

²⁵ We Are Social, ‘Digital 2020’.

²⁶ Marwick and boyd, ‘I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately’, 123.

their ‘online’ and ‘offline’ personas (for example considering the backlash from conservative family members on Facebook). This can also be applied to the ways that social media appears to collapse the contexts that protests happen in, a protest exists in a different context offline compared with online, yet in a social media post these contexts collapse into one. Activists must not only think about how movements can straddle the offline and the online but also negotiate the ways that a singular visual protest ‘identity’ might appear in collapsed contexts online.

Social media has forced a reconsideration of where the public sphere begins and ends, but it is clear that ‘public actions and public spaces are an important characteristic of this period, not just in Peru, but in at the international level’²⁷. Images move between the offline and online immediately and non-linearly. McGarry et al. highlight the importance of the slippage between these two spaces for democratic expression: ‘the performance of protest not only questions and subverts ideas of where politics is done but constitutes a rupture to the existing political order by its enactment. The question is not how much the material or digital space accounts for but what the interaction between online and offline spaces means for democratic expression, political voice, visibility and notions of solidarity.’²⁸

The slippage between online and offline also change the relationship between activist-performers and the audience: they must face not only those immediately present and viewing the action in the moment, but also the reactions of a wider, unpredictable (and possibly hostile) audience online. Where activists control the distribution of their visual media they have greater control over the audience, however the advent of smartphones means that

²⁷ Gina Chacón, interview.

²⁸ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 26.

members of the public can also film and distribute their own videos or images, to unknown audiences. This all means that the visual language of activism must be able to communicate across boundaries.

Across all interviews with activists, whether they were participants or organisers of protests, there is a consensus that the visual language of activism is central to its success: your message needs to be read in a second, if you're thinking about a photograph, then your photo needs to speak for itself, and you don't need to read a text'²⁹. The clarity of the message through image is influenced by the use of social media: '[it] is of vital importance. We've tried to make it that every action is recorded photographically [...] not just ones taken on mobile phone photos, but that the majority can be taken by *compañera/os* that are professional photographers ... [we do] everything to render visible the actions that we carry out, the things we are asking for'³⁰. This also shapes the ways that performances are planned: 'the videos of [the performances] are another important thing to carry [a message], to maximize. This has an impact in how you plan the performance; how is this going to be seen in the moment, but also in the video ... yes I think also about the video and photographs, because for me it is important also that things are maximised and expanded'³¹. For feminists the idea that something has to be visible to be seen, and to make change is a key one: '[the visible and the political] first you make it visible and then from this you enter into wider political debate, bringing together our [feminists'] issues and showing them to the people – listen, our issues don't just affect us women'³².

²⁹ Karen Bernedo, interview.

³⁰ Emilia Salazar, interview.

³¹ Emilia Salazar.

³² Flor Valles, interview.

Another key factor is how it builds solidarity among activists, both through participating, but also through sharing images. McGarry et al underscore the importance of activism in supporting opposition movements ‘as protestors document and photograph and record protest activities they communicate information and help foster a counterpublic, meaning that protest images have the potential to contribute to a vibrant public sphere’³³. In all the performances I took part in, the aspect I most remembered was the sense of solidarity against a hostile public, and how important it was to have those connections. There is also the sense of excitement of sharing photos and videos afterwards through social media, reinforcing that bond of solidarity.

In order to see how visual politics exists and acts as it moves between different contexts, I will use the example of a feminist performance titled *¿Cuántas más?* (How many more [women]?). By tracing a performance as it moves from online to offline (and vice versa), this allows us to see the ways that visual politics exists in the blurry space between physical and digital and shows how visual culture is fluid and adaptable. This is one of the benefits of an ethnographic method, as I was able to experience both the online and offline aspects of this performance from the perspective of the activists themselves.

Cuántas más was a performance organised by the collective Trenzar, that took place in Lima on the 11th of August 2019. The performance was created ‘for public space [...] with the aim of visibilising the gendered violence that we women live every day’ and ‘to question passers-by about feminicides and the lack of justice’³⁴. It took place in Barranco, a middle-class district of Lima that is popular with tourists. It had originally been planned for the city centre,

³³ McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 25.

³⁴ Trenzar, ‘Instagram’; Trenzar.

but one of the organisers had a warrant out with the *serenazgo*³⁵ of the central district as a result of a previous performance³⁶. This meant that rather than taking place in the centre, like most protests and interventions do to be closer to the symbols of the state, it took place in an area with a possibly more receptive, or at least less hostile audience.

Before the performance itself there were two days of rehearsals. These rehearsals were partly about preparing for the performance but also about building connections between performers. Part of the process of rehearsals was building solidarity within the group and sharing our experiences and motivations for taking part, echoing feminist techniques from consciousness raising groups. Many of the performers from this group had previously taken part in the performance discussed in section 5.2.1 so we already had a sense of connection and shared experience. In one exercise we had to maintain eye contact with another person for two minutes before sharing something we liked about each other. Another exercise involved free movement dancing where all the performers formed a single mass. These exercises created a strong sense of solidarity among the group. At the same time these rehearsals were filmed and photographed for social media, so they were also about demonstrating this aspect of solidarity to an external audience, as well as promoting the performance itself.

Before the performance the participants were asked to post about it to their social media and share the videos of the rehearsals that the organising collective had created. The performance not only had a team of performers but also a team of dedicated audio-visual volunteers who would photograph and video the process. This meant that there were professional quality images of the whole process, communicating the idea that this should be taken seriously, and

³⁵ The local security force organised by district in Lima. They have less authority than the police but are often used in matters of civil disturbances.

³⁶ Micaela Távara, interview.

wasn't 'just angry feminists shouting'. Here, the visual recording of activism functioned to legitimise political intervention. Unlike in the performance discussed in section 5.2.1, this team was recruited at the same time as the performers, rather than using an external team. Further, the team was not restricted by gender, although the performers were all women and non-binary people, reflecting the differences between the ways that violence and abortion are approached in feminist activism. Issues relating to bodily autonomy (abortion and reproductive justice) evoke a different set of emotions and vulnerabilities, the impact of this will be discussed in further depth in chapter 6.



Figure 5.2 Performance of 'Cuántas Más', Lima August 2019 (Photo: Eloy Cortés)³⁷

³⁷ Trenzar, 'Facebook'.

The performance on the day involved thirty-five performers, as well as a team of volunteers helping with security, coordination, and audio-visual production. The performance was also coordinated with Amnesty International Peru who asked observers to sign a petition calling for government action. Each performer held a balloon with a number from one to thirty-five, each representing a victim of femicide. The aim was to have 100 performers, as there had been just over 100 victims of femicide at that point in the year but finding over 100 volunteers with the time and ability to attend two days of rehearsals in central Lima as well as the performance itself was logistically difficult. The majority of volunteers were young, students, working part time, so were able to participate. This kind of performance was not as accessible to those working full-time or to parents. However, it is important to note that many of the group live in the ‘conos’³⁸ of Lima and spent upwards of two hours one way travelling on buses and *colectivos*³⁹ to rehearsals and the performance.

We were all dressed in red, symbolically representing violence. In order to achieve this the organisers asked us all to bring as much red clothing as we could to create a collective wardrobe that that whole group would use, reinforcing the idea of solidarity within the group, but also creating a sense of horizontality between the performers who came from a variety of backgrounds. This also created a strong visual impact and linked us together as we spread out. Red is symbolically associated with violence, but it is also one of the colours of the Peruvian flag – a duality that activists often play on. Red also separates it visually from protests for legal abortion, although the performance featured many participants who I had met and worked with on a pro-abortion intervention a few months beforehand.

³⁸ The ‘conos’ (north, east, and south) refer locally to the peripheral districts of Lima, populated by migrants from the interior of the country, many of whom were displaced during the internal armed conflict. They are now mostly lower- and middle-class areas.

³⁹ The informal buses that make up a large part of Lima’s transport infrastructure.

The performance started with the performers in a triangle formation, holding our balloons, doing a series of slow movements, signifying the collective of victims, before filing out into the streets in the order of the balloons. We then stood about four metres apart in a line from the centre of Barranco out towards the neighbouring district of Miraflores. We read out a poem (pictured below) to members of the public passing by – interrogating them about gender violence and trying to involve them in the conversation. The poem reflects the idea behind the performance of capturing the reality behind shocking statistics. It shifts from counting deaths ‘how many more...’ to rejecting the statistics ‘I am not a number’. It then goes on to focus on the sense of solidarity that feminist activism builds ‘we are the love that wraps around the world’. We were also to answer their questions and explain the performance to those who asked. Then at the end we all filed back into the square and came back together as a group to finish the performance.

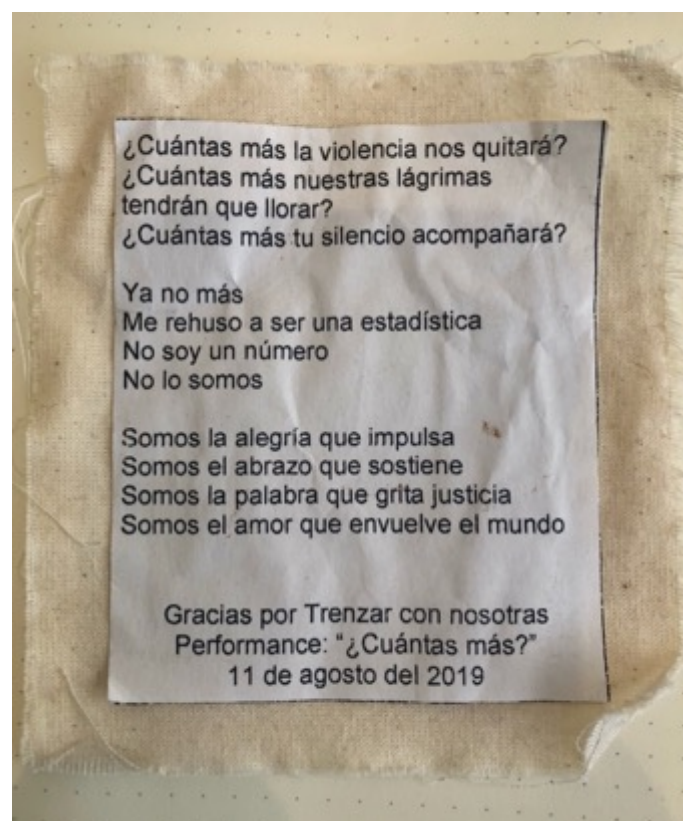


Figure 5.3 ‘¿Cuántas Más?’ – a memento given to participants after the performance (Photo: author’s own)⁴⁰

The experience during the performance was both inspiring and anxiety-inducing. In the first half, we were all together as one unit, yet as an outsider I felt self-conscious reading out the poem alone in the second half and trying to explain it to strangers without making grammatical mistakes. I also felt physically vulnerable when we were more separated. It was a cold August day, and we were not wearing a lot of layers while standing on a busy main road. Yet, as we all returned to the square to applause (and also confused looks) there was a sense of exhilaration. Afterwards, we talked about our experiences of the performance – both positive and negative – including angry reactions from the public and commiserated about these. There was a strange sense of joy and frustration; in many ways the performance was cathartic and inspiring, yet we received a lot of negative reactions from the public. Several participants recalled being asked why they were not protesting *all* deaths, and one was even spat at. This duality of joy and frustration is at the heart of feminist interventions. In the face of the backlash against feminism, solidarity is a way of strengthening the movement, and providing an image of strength to those looking in.

⁴⁰ How many more will violence take away from us?
How many more will our tears have to cry?
How many more will your silence accompany?

No longer
I refuse to be a statistic
I am not a number
We are not

We are the happiness that pushes
We are the embrace that supports
We are the word that shouts justice
We are the love that wraps around the world
(Author’s translation)

The performance was streamed live and filmed for a video to be posted on social media. As volunteers, we were encouraged to post about the performance on our social media profiles. The video combined the footage of the performance with further information. Social media was a key part of the conception of the performance, it was designed both for the moment, but also with the aesthetics of video and photography. There were several volunteers tasked with filming and taking photos of the performance. In this way it took on a second life online.

The video starts with a grim statistic: that there were 102 feminicides between January and August 2019⁴¹. It then fades into the performance itself, with clips from the different parts of it. The poem is read first with individual performers reading each line, then chanted as a collective. This part reflects the way that the performance played with the ideas of individual versus structural experiences of discrimination and violence. The video uses a number of camera angles, including drone footage. These show how the performance interacted with the physical space around it, for example the red of the costumes ties into the Peruvian flags that sit on top of the buildings. It does not just tie in visually but also through sound: the noise of traffic and cars honking fades in and out of the video. After the credits there is a clip of us singing feminist chants in a big group – similar to the video of the abortion performance. The fact that both of these put this at the end, reflects two things: how this is often an action at the end of feminist interventions, and two that this is important enough to put in the video underlines its role in feminist activism, underlining solidarity.

The strong visual identity of the performance as demonstrated by the video, but also the photos posted to Facebook and Instagram enable it to stand out both in offline and online

⁴¹ INEI, 'En el año 2019 se registraron 148 feminicidios a nivel nacional'

public space. Offline we stood out and attracted attention, making it clear that we were doing something out of the ordinary. This translates well to the online space; it is eye-catching in the endless scrolling feed of social media sites. It also allows the message to cross the online-offline boundary; the performance encourages observers to look up what is happening online, shifting from one space to another.

As a participant, the experience of being filmed, and knowing that the visual parts of the performance were central, shaped my experience of the performance itself as I was hyper-aware of the visual. There is also a tension between experiencing the physical ‘reality’ of the performance, compared with watching the video. The video does not capture the slightly awkward experience of standing on a random street talking to strangers, or the negative reactions we received. The video presents a more polished version of reality, one that acknowledges the need to engage with social media algorithms that prioritise more professional-appearing content.

Although the performance was affecting as a participant and to the public around us, based on their reactions, I was reminded of the ways that victims of femicide are and, in many cases, are not made visible. The majority of high-profile cases of femicide are those of younger, whiter women, where the cases of indigenous women get less visibility. There was a tension between the group visually representing victims and the victims themselves. This is not to say that young women are not murdered: Solsiret Rodriguez, a 23-year-old active in the feminist movement disappeared on the 23rd of August 2016 days after having taken part in the Ni Una Menos march. Her remains were not found for three and a half years after her disappearance. During my fieldwork, at which time there was still no police progress on the case, her case was like a spectre haunting activists, many of those who I interviewed were

friends with her. The lack of action served as a stark reminder of the failures of the state to provide justice for victims of gender violence, and the sense of hopelessness that this provokes. When the police finally took action on her case, her parents directly thanked the feminist movement for continuing to pursue the case when no one else would. Feminist visual politics must bring visibility to all, not just the most visible cases.

This performance is a key example of the ways that contemporary feminist protest exists in both offline and online spaces. The use of visual politics is central in this. The use of a strong visual identity allows it to occupy the space between online and offline and thereby negotiate context collapse. Social media is integral to the whole process of the performance, from conception to execution, rather than secondary or spontaneous. The experience of this process also highlighted to me the tensions between physical and digital space.

5.2.3 Transnational visual politics

One of the defining features of contemporary feminism in Latin America, particularly in Peru, is the influence of transnational feminism. Movements spread from country to country via social media and feminist networks. This allows countries with comparatively smaller feminist movements, like Peru, to draw on the repertoires of larger movements, like those in Argentina or Mexico. In 2016 Ni Una Menos in Peru took its name and inspiration from the 2015 Argentinian movement, which also spread to several other countries around Latin America. The transnational aspect of contemporary activism is fundamental to its visual politics. Visual politics constitutes ‘a material and performative culture with a high capacity to be replicated digitally and shared across social media networks, ideological terrain, state

borders, and linguistic frontiers.⁴² As McGarry et al. make clear, the importance of these elements is their ability to move across a number of different ‘frontiers’: both literal borders between countries, but also between the online and the offline. However, movements do not just take on transnational strategies unilaterally, but rather adapt them to local specificities.

One of the key ways in which these transnational strategies travel across borders is through visual politics. Symbols of feminism move through online feminist networks on social networking sites, as images are seen, shared, reposted and adapted. This section will look at how visual politics moves between the transnational and the local level. The *pañuelo verde* is an example of a transnational symbol that is shaped by local practices. It also moves through the internet and physically through activist networks. The transnational element can give more weight to local actions, but also creates a sense of wider solidarity and reassurance.



Figure 5.4 Author's pañuelo verde, July 2020 (Photo: author's own)

⁴² McGarry et al., *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, 18.

The *pañuelo verde* (green scarf) has become a defining symbol of contemporary Latin American feminism. Emerging in Argentina, a ‘green tide’ (*marea verde*) of reproductive rights activism has swept from there across the continent. The green tide is both figurative, in terms of the increase in activism, but also can literally be seen in photos of huge groups of activists all holding up their scarves to create a sea of green. The particular shade of deep, bright green is so associated with the campaign that the colour alone instantly evokes the theme of reproductive rights. This allows it to move easily across local, international, and digital borders, as this section will examine.

While it has become increasingly visible in the last three years, the *pañuelo verde* was born in Argentina in 2003 where it is the symbol of the ‘National Campaign for Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion’⁴³. It was at a national feminist *encuentro* in Rosario that the colour was chosen, specifically because of its lack of historical ties to other political movements; for example, purple being associated with feminism, and red with left-wing activism. This campaign explicitly links legal abortion to several other issues; the slogan on the scarf reads ‘sexual education to decide, contraception not to abort, legal abortion not to die’. It also ties this campaign to the history of women’s activism in Argentina, as it is directly inspired by the white scarves worn by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo⁴⁴. This symbolic link between mothers campaigning for the return of their children and the campaign for legal abortion has been controversial given that the Madres’ activism was explicitly tied to a politics of motherhood. However, abortion campaigners see motherhood as fundamentally a matter of

⁴³ ‘Campana Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito – Educación sexual para decidir, anticonceptivos para no abortar, aborto legal para no morir’.

⁴⁴ The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo are a group of mothers who campaign for answers and justice for their children who were ‘disappeared’ by the Argentine state during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

choice, summed up by the feminist slogan as ‘motherhood will be wanted, or it will not be at all’ (*la maternidad será deseada o no será*).

In the last few years, the *pañuelo* has also spread from Argentina to become a symbol of renewed feminist activism across Latin America⁴⁵. There was a brief moment in 2018 when countries came up with their own colours of *pañuelo* for nationally specific campaigns, such as lilac in Ecuador, white in Mexico, and beige in Peru⁴⁶. However, it quickly became clear that the green *pañuelo* was the symbol that feminists were going to use across all of Latin America. This was not a decision made at an international level, but rather organically activists realised that a symbol that could cross borders was visually and politically stronger.

The transnational dimension of the scarf gives it greater visual weight and allows activists to draw strength from movements in other countries. While activists in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile have had some success⁴⁷ in arguing for changes to abortion laws, in Peru support for legalising abortion is still much lower than its neighbours⁴⁸. As of 2020, abortion is illegal in Peru except in case of a threat to the life or health of the mother (and in practice it is extremely difficult to get a legal therapeutic abortion). In practice, clandestine abortion is rampant, while there are no official statistics measuring this, it is estimated that each year more than 300,000 women undergo illegal abortions according to calculations made by the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán and the Guttmacher Institute in the early 2000s⁴⁹. Legal progress in other Latin American countries shows that change is possible, as

⁴⁵ Vacarezza, ‘Orange Hands and Green Kerchiefs’.

⁴⁶ Revista Furias, ‘Proyecto de ley de Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo’.

⁴⁷ ‘Presidenta Bachelet Promulgó La Ley de Aborto En Tres Causales - Cooperativa.CL’; Staff, Forbes, ‘Entra en vigor ley que despenaliza el aborto en Oaxaca • Forbes México’; New York Times, ‘Argentina Moves to Guarantee Abortion Access in Rape Cases’.

⁴⁸ Statista, ‘Opinión sobre el aborto en América Latina 2018’.

⁴⁹ Cited in Taype-Rondan and Merino-Garcia, ‘Hospitalizaciones y muertes por aborto clandestino en Perú’.

epitomised by the campaign's hashtag '#SeráLey' (It will be law). This is a huge inspiration to Peruvian feminists who face harsh and at times violent opposition from the state and the public. Numerous incidents of police violence against feminists came up in interviews with activists, including police beating them up and ripping up signs⁵⁰.



Figure 5.5 Alternative *pañuelos* hanging in an activist's house, Cuzco, Peru, September 2019

(Photo: author's own)

The physical movement of the *pañuelo verde* across borders shows the ways that feminist movements are interconnected both internationally and locally. Obtaining a *pañuelo verde* has become a sort of feminist rite of passage. Activists obtain *pañuelos* through feminist networks and use them to mark their belonging to a transnational movement. Some activists sell them as a way of raising money, for example in Peru, activists sell *pañuelos* bought in bulk from Argentina on the e-commerce site Mercado Libre and advertise their sale through

⁵⁰ Isa Rivas Espinoza, interview.

WhatsApp, Twitter, or Instagram. Others make DIY *pañuelos* from green fabric cut into a large triangle, writing on their own slogans using permanent marker. In the image above, two alternative *pañuelos* are hanging in an activist's house. The left one combines a green half and a purple half, stitching together abortion rights activism and feminist activism. The right hand *pañuelo* is from a Chilean abortion march; it features the hashtag *#nobastan3causales* (three causal factors are not enough), referring to the partial legalisation of abortion in Chile in 2017, in only three cases (foetal inviability, danger to the life of the mother, and rape). This house often welcomed feminist visitors travelling through Cusco, so this *pañuelo* shows the ways that it moves physically as well as figuratively.

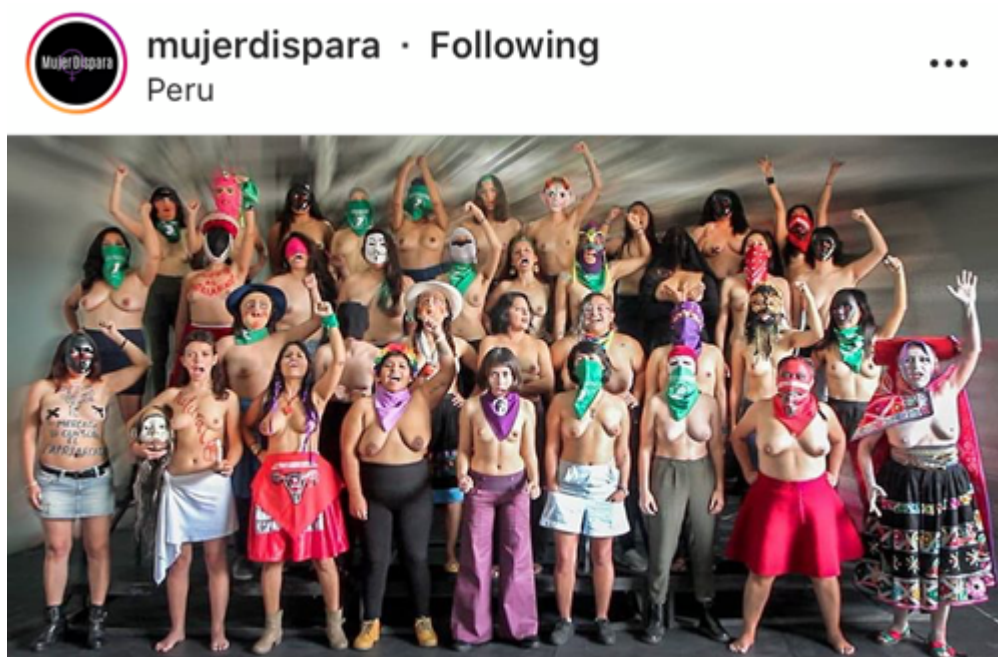


Figure 5.6 Activists performing a topless protest, December 2018 (Photo: Mujer Dispara)⁵¹

⁵¹ Mujer Dispara, 'NUESTRAS CUERPAS UNIDAS SON LA RESISTENCIA'.

In its travels around Latin America, the *pañuelo* is shaped and transformed by local practices but remains a symbol of transnational feminist activism. The above image shows a *tetazo* or topless protests carried out by activists in Peru, a clear example of embodied activist practices that will be discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis. Here, the *pañuelo verde* exists alongside other feminist signifiers specific to Peru. Some activists are wearing purple feminist *pañuelos*, others have red ones created by the campaign group *Somos 2074 y muchas más*⁵². Some of the activists (bottom right, and top left) are dressed in traditional dress (hats and skirts). Some are using their *pañuelos* to cover their faces, as activists will do this to avoid backlash or protect their identities. These practices all transform the *pañuelo verde* from a symbol of the Argentinian abortion campaign to one visually linked to a number of specifically Peruvian feminist practices.



⁵² This group campaigns for the victims of forced sterilisations carried out in Peru in the 1990s by the Fujimori administration.

Figure 5.7 ‘President Martín Vizcarra receives relatives of victims of gender violence, feminist activists and women’s rights’ defenders demanding that violence against women be declared a national emergency’, January 2020 (Photo: Mano Alzada)⁵³

As well as being a symbol, the *pañuelo* is also a tangible object that exists in physical space, one that travels with feminists around cities and across borders. On a daily basis, the decision to wear a *pañuelo* outwardly expresses a visual feminist identity, communicating with other activists but also exposing oneself to backlash from the public. It is an embodied visual politics; the position of the *pañuelo* on the body communicates different messages. On marches, particularly those linked to abortion rights, activists wear it in the ‘traditional’ way, tied around the neck, so that the logo and slogan are visible, centring the issue of abortion and reproductive rights. In performances, marches that are not explicitly feminist, or just in their everyday life, feminists may wear it tied around the wrist. This a way of communicating a particular identity in a more subtle way. For example, when feminist activists met with Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra in January 2020, they wore their *pañuelos* around their wrists, rather than around their necks. When it is tied around the wrist, the slogan disappears, but the green is still visible and communicates the message to those who understand. However, wearing the *pañuelo* in public, the wearer must deal with the potential responses of people around them⁵⁴.

⁵³ Mano Alzada, ‘Presidente Martín Vizcarra Recibe a Familiares, Activistas Feministas, Defensoras de Los Derechos de Las Mujeres Que Reclaman Declarar La Violencia Contra La Mujer En Emergencia Nacional’.

⁵⁴ ‘Córdoba’.



Figure 5.8 Instagram posts by ‘emmayoperu’ and ‘stop_progres’, June 2020⁵⁵

It is so associated with feminism that it has become a shorthand way of identifying feminists even outside of the context of reproductive rights, as these two images show. The first image, posted by Peruvian cartoonist ‘Emma y Yo’, as part of actions during LGBT Pride, shows a number of activists calling for ‘equality, not approval’. The bottom left figure is holding her arm up in a fist with a pañuelo verde tied around the wrist, while also wearing a lesbian pride flag tied around her shoulders. This places the issue of abortion in the context of wider activist goals, both as part of the feminist and LGBT movements. In the second image, from an Argentine anti-feminist account, the pañuelo verde is used as a way of signifying that the negatively presented cartoon figure is a feminist, in addition to having dyed purple hair and being presented as stereotypically unattractive. Again, the post makes no reference to abortion in the caption, instead sarcastically saying ‘how are you going to tell me that I don’t know anything about feminism when I’ve already read three twitter threads, the patriarchy

⁵⁵ Emma y Yo Peru, ‘Demandos Igualdad, No Tu Aprobación’; stop_progres, ‘Ideología de Cartón’.

will fall, you are an oppressive macho who loves the church and Trump'. These two examples show how the pañuelo verde has moved outside of the context of simply referring to abortion activism to become a signifier for feminism in general.

When analysing the role of the pañuelo verde, it is still important to take into account the different contexts it exists in. Peruvian activists cannot directly apply the same political tactics as their Argentine siblings, as they exist in distinct political realms. Activism on abortion in Peru must also deal with the difficult history of reproductive rights in the country, above all the legacy of the policies of the Fujimori administration (see Chapter 7).

As a visual symbol it is easy for the pañuelo verde to move across physical and digital borders. The pañuelo verde is a key symbol of feminism in Latin America and part of the new activist's toolkit; it features in a variety of feminist protests, not just those campaigning for legal abortion. This demonstrates how abortion is linked to other issues, particularly those of violence, class, and exploitation. It also shows the ways that feminism in Latin America operates on transnational and local levels; Peruvian feminists using the pañuelo give it new meanings in a different context, while still retaining its importance as a transnational symbol.

5.3 Invisibility in visual politics

There is a tension between representing statistics through performance and the lives behind those numbers. This reminds us of Debord's concept of the spectacle as 'a social relation between people that is mediated by images'⁵⁶. Not everything can be communicated through

⁵⁶ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 7.

images. In some cases, nuance is missing in the visual language used. For example, the performances of *Somos 2074* have faced critiques for using the visual identities of victims of forced sterilisations (largely indigenous women) without always letting them speak for themselves (as Chapter 7 will examine in greater detail). Those who don't have access to the social internet are often visible as symbols, but not on their own terms, they do not control their own narratives. This new feminist visual politics centres a particular kind of activist, one who has access to and is literate in digital media, creating a hierarchy grounded in existing inequalities along lines of class and race.

Prioritising an exclusively feminist gaze may exclude non-feminists. Many of those who participate in activism for the cases of forced sterilisations do not consider themselves feminists and found the 'feminist' representation to be offensive and exclusionary⁵⁷. A deliberately feminist gaze excludes those who are anti-feminist, which in Peru is a lot of people. This is a complicated issue to negotiate, particularly when feminists are campaign on behalf of others, who are not feminists. Further, the algorithmic bias of sites like Instagram in particular mean that feminist visual politics generally only reaches other feminists, as social media algorithms tend to show content similar that which you already engage⁵⁸. Feminist activists are more likely to be young, students, urban, which overlaps with the majority of social media users in Peru. Therefore, the media produced by these activists reflects their own lived realities, but not necessarily those of all women in Peru. Additionally, feminist visual politics not only connects with feminist activists in Peru but also a transnational audience. Strengthening these international ties allows activists to draw on each other's repertoires and learn from each other.

⁵⁷ Diana Rivas Gutiérrez, interview.

⁵⁸ Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin, *Instagram*.

Feminist visual politics must make sure that it also turns its gaze to those who are not normally seen. Groups like *Mujer Dispara* and *Chola Contravisual* do this through audio-visual media. As mentioned on page 158 For the International Day of the Right to Abortion on the 28th of September, *Chola Contravisual* released a music video with indigenous ‘rapera’ NinaLu performing the song *¿Quién aborta?*. The video brings together indigenous and feminist visual politics in a way that does not reduce or appropriate. The group behind *Chola* are based between Lima and Huancayo (a large city in the central Peruvian Andes) and use these geographical connections to shape their perspective. They demonstrate that a feminist gaze is, and should be, inclusive and transformative.

Visual politics is a core part of contemporary activism, but it is not without its limitations. Activists must acknowledge the problems inherent in social media platforms: algorithms, surveillance, and censorship. It must also question the biases in a feminist gaze and make sure that it is an inclusive one, that does not render invisible the struggles of marginalised women.

5.4 Conclusion

Returning to the photograph at the beginning of this chapter, it encapsulates many of the themes explored: the centrality of the visual, the importance of increased access to technology, the feminist gaze, the ‘audience’, and the use of visual symbols. The activist in the photo uses her phone camera to capture her perspective on the event and translate that to a digital medium to both known and unknown audiences. Throughout this chapter we have seen the ways that feminist visual politics is an essential part of contemporary activism. This

is in large part due to the influence of social media as internet technologies become more and more accessible in Peru. Social media activism is not an entirely new phenomenon, but the visual aspects of it have become more important in the last 5 years. We have seen a move from the use of hashtags and Twitter as a central platform, to forms of activism that are more aimed at visual platforms: Instagram and Facebook. These visual strategies communicate identity, solidarity and awareness.

Feminist visual politics prioritises a *feminist* view on the world, one that aims to draw attention to issues of gender violence and bodily autonomy in particular, at the same time as underlining the importance of solidarity and bonds between activists. This draws on an ethics of care and safety that is built into the ways that feminist visual politics is conceived: who films, who appears, who posts. The use of images allows visual politics to move between physical and digital spaces, as well as existing in the ‘in-between’. However, we must also consider what is rendered invisible through these strategies and the politics of representation. Through this chapter I have also started to explore the tensions between the experiential and the visual. Visual politics are not only representational, but also embodied, which we will explore in the next chapter.



Figure 6.1 Activists lie on the ground outside the Edgardo Rebagliati Martins National Hospital as part of a feminist performance that took place on 28th May 2019 (Photo: Trenzar)¹

In this photo, activists lie ‘dead’ on the ground covered in pieces of paper reading ‘*atraso menstrual*’ (menstrual delay)². The visual politics of this performance were discussed in Chapter 5 (see page 168), here I am using it to analyse embodied politics and activism. It was one of my first experiences of taking part in an action like this. As performers, we literally placed our bodies on the line, lying on the pavement between a busy main road and one of the largest public hospitals in Lima. Our bodies represented the many women who die because of

¹ Trenzar, ‘#AbortoLegal “Por Nuestra Salud Física y Mental, Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito En El Hospital”’.

² This performance is discussed in greater detail and in relation to visual politics in chapter 5

the lack of access to abortion in Peru. I remember feeling vulnerable as we were yelled at by drivers and pedestrians whose route we were blocking. This photo also reminds me of the physical experience of this moment: the feeling of exposure as we all collapsed to the cold surface of the pavement by a main road while passers-by looked on confused and at times angry, the adrenaline from the performance, and the sense of connection with the group. Not only were we using our bodies, but we were also making the issue of bodily autonomy and reproductive justice visible in the streets. The body is central to these new feminisms, both as a tool for activism and a subject of this activism. This duality characterises contemporary feminist activism and the tensions that arise from it, as this chapter explores.

In the last decade transnational movements that draw on the body have marked feminist activism in Latin America: particularly the *Ni Una Menos* and the ‘*marea verde*’ (green tide) of abortion rights protests that started in Argentina. They reflect the two central issues for contemporary feminism: violence and bodily autonomy. The body is a central issue in feminist theory and activism. Sexual and reproductive rights, access to abortion, and the right to make decisions about one’s own body are all core feminist principles. These issues are particularly prescient in contemporary Latin America, where abortion continues to be nearly or totally illegal in many countries and is extremely difficult to access even in those countries where it is legal. As part of new feminisms characterised by a return to the streets, the physical presence of protesting bodies is central to attempts to make these issues visible. These bodies are increasingly visible in traditional marches and also in interventions, performances, and everyday actions. At the same time, as the previous chapter examined, this activism is also shaped by the digital sphere. Feminist actions offline move online through images and videos. Through digital visuals of bodies in protest, the body is also a key part of the online activist repertoire, as a symbol of the site of violence and resistance. At the same

time, these bodies are directly affected by this violence and attacks on bodily and reproductive autonomy.

These ideas about the body are fundamental to current feminisms: attitudes to the body are communicated by activists in chants, protest strategies, and styles of dress. While these form part of a wider transnational context, they take on locally specific characteristics in the Peruvian context. For example, the *mareja verde*, as this chapter will explore, has a different meaning in Peru, where abortion remains illegal in most cases and where there is little public support for legalisation. Activists in Peru draw on transnational repertoires, both in terms of activist strategies, but also by situating themselves within the wider struggle for abortion rights. They then transform these repertoires to fit their own lived realities. By examining these activist repertoires, we can see the ways that feminist activists in Peru understand and experience the centrality of the body.

The body exists at the intersection of key feminist issues such as campaigns for abortion rights and bodily autonomy and the repertoire of contemporary feminist activism through interventions in the public sphere. These interventions centre the body physically, symbolically and emotionally, making it both a site of protest and a tool for activism. This chapter will explore the overlap between the body as a subject of feminism and as an object used for activism. However, this overlap also produces tensions between the bodies present and the issues they are representing. It argues that in putting their bodies on the line as part of feminist interventions in public space, activists reframe mainstream understandings of bodily autonomy. By analysing the role of the body in contemporary feminist activism, we can see how activists' embodied strategies reflect the wider feminist context, and the ways that new activists engage with theory. This chapter will start by outlining the current status of abortion

access in Peru and the wider transnational context of abortion activism in Latin America. The second section discusses how feminists put their bodies on the line as a methodology of action. The third section looks at three different feminist tactics from the perspective of the body: *arengas* (chants), aesthetics, and *tetazos* (topless protests). The last section calls into question which bodies are on the line in these forms of activism.

6.1 Abortion politics and the *marea verde*

This chapter started with a photo from a feminist performance calling for access to abortion for women in Peru. The action took place on the 28th of May 2019, on the International Day of Action for Women's Health. It was part of a number of actions that took place in Lima that day, including a sit-in and *pañuelazo* outside of the Argentinian embassy. This performance called for free, safe, and legal abortion and highlighted the risks to women's health from illegal abortions. For women in Peru, access to abortion is a matter of urgency: as previously mentioned, it is estimated that over 300,000 Peruvian women undergo clandestine abortion procedures each year.³ It is a core theme of contemporary feminist activism. This is not just the case in Peru, the *marea verde* – which started in Argentina in 2003 – has swept Latin America, with activists calling for free, safe, and legal abortion. This section will examine abortion rights activism in Peru in relation to the *marea verde* and the local context, and what this tells us about the role of the body in feminist activism.

The renewed struggle for abortion rights places the body at the heart of Latin American feminisms. Starting with the Argentine National Campaign for Legal, Safe, and Free

³ Taype-Rondan and Merino-Garcia, 'Hospitalizaciones y muertes por aborto clandestino en Perú'.

Abortion, the *marea verde* has made abortion and bodily autonomy one of the key topics of feminist activism. In recent years, Ni Una Menos has taken on a more explicitly pro-abortion position, but when it initially emerged it did not take a stance. It has a wide base of support, in part due to keeping it separate from political groups and (in the first march) not being an explicitly feminist movement, and not making statements about abortion. This is in part because it was not organised by activists from the feminist movement itself.⁴ Outside of Ni Una Menos, feminist collectives and campaigns have pushed the issue to the national agenda. Since 2017 ‘Decidir Nos Hace Libres’ (To decide makes us free) has functioned as an umbrella campaign for the legalisation of abortion more broadly, organising protests and interventions, and through sharing materials on Facebook.⁵ Of course, these issues are not new to feminism in Latin America; activists have been pushing for legal change on abortion since the 1970s. Yet, there has been a renewed urgency in the last decade which has created a momentum that has led, in some cases, to significant legal changes.

Abortion rights activism exists in a polarised context, so while the successes of campaigns like that in Argentina offer reasons for hope, the context for activists across Latin America varies hugely. Access to abortion is heavily restricted across Latin America. It is only available on request in Cuba, Uruguay, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia. Apart from Cuba, where it was fully legalised in 1979⁶, only within the last fifteen years did these states legalise or decriminalise abortion. At the other end of the scale, in El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras abortion is illegal without exceptions, leading to women

⁴ Caballero Rojas, ‘Redes Sociales y Feminismos’.

⁵ ‘Decidir Nos Hace Libres | Facebook’.

⁶ Women seeking abortions in Cuba still face limitations: abortion is available without restrictions in the first trimester, however from the second trimester onwards women ‘must petition for an abortion on the grounds of fetal malformation or risk to their own physical or psychological well- being’ Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba*, 70.

being imprisoned for miscarrying.⁷ In Peru abortion is legal in the case of a threat to the life or health of the mother. Yet the implementation of these exceptions renders a legal abortion inaccessible for most women seeking one. Despite a new protocol being set out in 2014 outlining the circumstances in which women have the right to a therapeutic abortion⁸ many doctors are hesitant to perform these procedures.

There are a number of factors shaping the legal status of abortion across Latin America, which should be taken into account when analysing the possibilities and challenges facing abortion rights activism in Peru. Abortion in Latin America is closely linked to religious beliefs, particularly among followers of the Catholic Church, and increasingly, Evangelical branches of Christianity. The symbolic significance of the recent legalisation of abortion in Argentina, birthplace of the current Pope has not gone unnoticed⁹. A popular chant among feminist is ‘if the Pope were a woman, abortion would be legal’ demonstrating the understanding that restricting access to abortion is also about patriarchal control of women. Alongside the pañuelo verde, activists also created an orange pañuelo for the campaign for separation of Church and state in Argentina.¹⁰ There is a notable overlap between the religious attitudes of the population and attitudes to feminist issues, particularly abortion. For example, Uruguay, which decriminalised abortion in 2012, is one of the least religious countries in Latin America, with 43% of the population not declaring a religious affiliation.¹¹

On the other hand, Peru has one of the most religious populations in the region, with 76% identifying as Catholic, and 17% as Protestant – representing the increasing influence of

⁷ Hatfield, ‘Emerging Issues’.

⁸ Ministerio de Salud, Resolución Ministerial No. 284-2014 MINSA.

⁹ ‘Bill Legalizing Abortion Passed in Pope’s Native Argentina’.

¹⁰ Infobae, ‘Qué significan y qué piden los pañuelos naranjas que pueblan la movilización por el aborto legal’.

¹¹ Pew Research Center, ‘Religion in Latin America’.

Evangelical Christianity.¹² According to the Pew Research Center, Peru has the highest percentage of Protestants outside of Central America and Brazil. Notably, this research shows that those who identify as Protestant are more likely to oppose abortion, contraception and homosexuality.¹³ Therefore we can see this a contributing factor to the high levels of opposition to the legalisation of abortion in Peru, something that feminist activists observe through chants like ‘take your rosaries off my ovaries!’. However, the feminist movement is not an entirely secular one. A group present at many marches in Lima was the Peruvian branch of ‘Catholics for the right to decide’, a group, originally established in Argentina, which campaigns for abortion rights from a religious perspective.¹⁴ It is necessary to take into account the religious context of the abortion debate, but also consider its nuances. Given the large numbers of abortions that happen each year in Peru, it is reasonable to assume that many religious women get abortions.

Abortion rights activism also relates to the relationship between the body and the state. For example, in Chile under Pinochet abortion rights were tied to the 1980 constitution. While it does not entail a total constitutional ban on abortion, it does establish in the constitution that ‘the law protects the life of the unborn’, positioning gestating bodies as secondary.¹⁵ In 1989 the military dictatorship instituted a ban on therapeutic abortion, meaning that between 1989 and 2017 Chile had one of the most restrictive abortion policies in the world. As a counter example, in authoritarian Cuba abortion has been legalised since 1979.¹⁶ Cuba has one of the highest legal abortion rates in the world, at around 50% of all live births. According to Elise Andaya, Cuban women frame this as ‘in large part a consequence of the state’s inability to

¹² Pew Research Center.

¹³ Pew Research Center.

¹⁴ Católicas Por El Derecho a Decidir - Perú.

¹⁵ Constitución Política de la República de Chile.

¹⁶ Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era*.

deliver on its promises of material prosperity’, that is to say they feel unable to provide for their children.¹⁷ Bodily autonomy is tied not only to the state in terms of the legality of abortion and access to contraception, but also in terms of women’s material conditions. In countries where abortion is fully legalised, women of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to undergo abortions.¹⁸ Of course, this is due to a number of factors affecting each individual decision, but ‘these factors are constrained and produced by larger structural inequities, including racism and poverty, and by a legacy of coercive reproductive health policies.’¹⁹ This is particularly important in the Peruvian context, where hundreds of thousands of women were forcibly sterilised, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Abortion rights activism, therefore, links to wider questions of bodily autonomy and reproductive justice in relation to state policy.

The slogan that appears on the pañuelo verde calls not only for legal abortion, but also ‘sex education to decide, contraception not to abort, legal abortion not to die’. Access to abortion is framed holistically, rather than as a single solution: the aim is for all women to have the autonomy to decide what to do with their own bodies. Sex education is an essential part of this. In 2008 the Peruvian Ministry of Education (MINEDU) agreed to implement Integral Sex Education (ISE) in the new curriculum, and it became part of the new national curriculum in 2016, however its implementation has been weak and inconsistent as a result of a lack of political will and opposition from Catholic and Evangelical groups.²⁰ Conservative and religious groups deeply oppose comprehensive sex education, they see it as part of a nefarious ‘gender ideology’ that the state wants to implement as part of a so-called ‘gender

¹⁷ Andaya, 70.

¹⁸ Dehlendorf, Harris, and Weitz, ‘Disparities in Abortion Rates’.

¹⁹ Dehlendorf, Harris, and Weitz.

²⁰ Motta et al., ‘De La Normativa a La Práctica’.

perspective’ in education.²¹ This new curriculum was the event that triggered the formation of CMHNTM, which was organised to oppose ‘gender ideology’ in the curriculum. They argue that these are private issues that should be addressed by families rather than the state.²² Moreover, as sex education is delivered by teachers, many of whom are religious, there is a long way to go until students receive a comprehensive sex education that will allow them to decide for themselves.

The next part of the slogan focuses on contraception. In theory, all Peruvians have access to various methods, according to the Ministry of Health (MINSA) webpage, these are: condoms, IUD, hormone injection, the pill, tubal ligation, abstinence, the rhythm method or vasectomy, these are in principle available to adolescents as well as adults.²³ According to the national *Encuesta Demográfica y de Salud Familiar* (Demographic and Family Health Survey, ENDES), of women currently in relationships, 76% use contraception, 55% of those using ‘modern’ methods and 21.3% using ‘traditional’ methods (such as abstinence, withdrawal or breastfeeding).²⁴ However, these data focus on family planning and women currently in relationships (*‘actualmente unidas’*), they obscure not only men’s contraceptive choices but also the usage of those having sex outside of relationships. Even though a variety of contraceptive methods are available through the public sector, among the women interviewed for this survey 51.5% of births were unwanted at the time of conception (either because the parents did not want children or would have preferred to delay them).²⁵ While there is a lack

²¹ A new curriculum that would introduce gender equality and respect of all sexual orientations from 2017, these are actually widely supported by 82% of the population: Ministerio de Educación ‘Sobre el Enfoque de Igualdad de Género y el Currículo Nacional de la Educación Básica’

²² Rousseau, ‘Antigender Activism in Peru and Its Impact on State Policy’, 26.

²³ ‘Planificación Familiar compromiso de todos’.

²⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, ‘ENDES’.

²⁵ Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática.

of awareness of what is available, women must also have the time and resources to seek these out from health centres.

While the Peruvian government promotes contraception as part of ‘responsible family planning’²⁶ (see chapter 7), emergency contraception or the ‘morning after pill’ is far more controversial. It has been available in Peru since 2001, but only through the private sector.²⁷ In 2009 Catholic groups brought legal action to attempt to prevent its distribution as they see emergency contraception as a form of abortion²⁸. The Constitutional Court of Peru ruled in favour of this action and ordered the public healthcare system to stop distributing the morning after pill. In 2016 a judge in Lima gave an injunction against this ruling, allowing women to access the pill for free and for it to form part of rape emergency kits.²⁹ The Constitutional Court is due to rule on this again in 2021, in a ruling that will have implications for the fight for legal abortion, as the 2009 ruling argued that life begins at conception (what is called ‘fertilisation theory’) and therefore the morning after pill counted as an abortion.³⁰ This means that free access to the pill hangs by a thread. This reflects the precarious state of Peruvian women’s access to reproductive health care that does not fall under the umbrella of ‘responsible family planning’. Further, it also makes clear the connection between neoliberalism and reproductive injustice: the pill is still available to those who can pay for it, but often those who need it the most, such as teen mothers, cannot afford it. Similarly, safe abortion is available to those who have the resources to pay for a private clinic.

²⁶ The idea of ‘responsible family planning’ in Peru goes back to the National Program for Reproductive Health and Family Planning of the Fujimori administration, part of which resulted in the forcible sterilisation of thousands of women. This will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 7.

²⁷ Borràs and Álvarez, ‘The History of Universal Access to Emergency Contraception in Peru’.

²⁸ Borràs and Álvarez.

²⁹ Gestión, ‘La “píldora del día después” ante su último recurso para ser gratuita en Perú | PERU’.

³⁰ La Ley, ‘Esta es la sentencia que ordena la distribución gratuita de la píldora del día siguiente’.

The third part of the slogan is ‘legal abortion not to die’, which highlights the dangers of clandestine abortion. A common phrase on placards at abortion rights protests was ‘surviving an abortion is a class privilege’, which underlines the fact that in countries where abortion is effectively illegal, it still happens all the time. Clandestine abortion is common in Peru, according to an estimate elaborated in the early 2000s by the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán and Pathfinder, each year more than 300,000 women undergo illegal abortions, about 5% of all women of childbearing age have had an abortion³¹. These statistics are likely to have increased since then, as greater restrictions were placed on adolescents accessing contraception³². The term ‘clandestine abortion’ encompasses a number of realities that depend on how much money one has. A woman who can pay for a safer, more hygienic private clinic, is less likely to experience dangerous complications than a poorer woman who cannot pay for this kind of treatment, especially if she lives in rural areas³³. Many of these complications require professional medical care, but women are afraid to ask for it since carrying out an abortion is prohibited by law³⁴.

In light of this, activists have focused on raising awareness of safer ways to perform a clandestine abortion. In contexts where abortion is illegal, the use of misoprostol – a medication used to treat stomach ulcers that is available over the counter – to induce an abortion is common. The use of misoprostol and other prostaglandins has increased since the early 2000s, as women became aware of its abortive properties, something that initially spread by word of mouth³⁵ and more recently through social media³⁶. Feminist groups, most

³¹ Ferrando, ‘El Aborto Clandestino En El Perú’, 29.

³² Taype-Rondan and Merino-García, ‘Hospitalizaciones y muertes por aborto clandestino en Perú’.

³³ Ferrando, 19–20.

³⁴ Ferrando, 20.

³⁵ Ferrando, 17.

³⁶ Serena Morena, ‘Información para abortar’.

notably the collective Serena Morena³⁷, publish information online about how to safely carry out an abortion with misoprostol. Others also practice ‘acompañamiento feminista’ where they will support those going through the procedure.³⁸ This creates an environment that is safer both physically and emotionally for women with unwanted pregnancies. All of this is only necessary because abortion is still illegal except in certain circumstances, and yet thousands of Peruvian women continue to have unwanted pregnancies every year³⁹.

The framing of campaigns for legal abortion in Peru draws on the repertoire built by the Argentine Campaña Nacional, however it also targets the local context. While support for legalising abortion is extremely low in Peru, there is some support for changing the law in the case of rape, and particularly the rape of minors. A poll carried out by IPSOS in Latin America in September 2021 found that only 15% of respondents supported the full legalisation of abortion in all cases, compared with a global average of 43%. Peru had the second lowest level of support out of the 27 countries surveyed and the lowest of the Latin American countries in the study (although this research did not cover all Latin American countries).⁴⁰ From 2012 to around 2017 the NGO DEMUS and other civil society groups coordinated the campaign ‘*Déjala Decidir*’ (Let her decide) specifically to fight for the legalisation of abortion in the case of victims of rape.⁴¹ This supported a proposed law legalising abortion in cases of rape, however it never reached a debate in Congress, after it was shelved in 2016.⁴²

³⁷ Serena Morena, ‘Acerca de’.

³⁸ Serena Morena, ‘Información para abortar’.

³⁹ Ferrando, ‘El Aborto Clandestino En El Perú’, 29.

⁴⁰ IPSOS, ‘Puntos de Vista Globales Sobre El Aborto En El 2021: Favorabilidad Hacia La Legalización Del Aborto En 28 Países’.

⁴¹ DEMUS, ‘*Déjala Decidir*’.

⁴² El Comercio Perú ‘Congreso Ya No Debatirá Sobre Aborto En Casos de Violación’.

In 2020 the Ministry of Justice proposed a new law to legalise abortion in the case of victims of rape younger than 14 years old.⁴³ This came after campaigning from feminist and human rights organisations in Peru under the banner of ‘Girls not mothers’. This highlighted the serious issue of sexual violence against minors in the country. In 2020, at least 26 children under the age of ten gave birth, as well as 1,136 aged eleven to fourteen according to MINSA statistics.⁴⁴ As the age of consent is fourteen in Peru, all of these cases were as a result of statutory rape. This is mirrored by data on the numbers of victims attended by Centros de Emergencia Mujer (CEM). According to these records, in 2020, 2,862 girls under the age of eleven registered cases of sexual violence, as well as 6,007 aged between 12 and 17, making up 64% of the total number of registered cases (13,840).⁴⁵ However, so far, the law proposed in 2020 has not made it to Congress to be debated, in large part due to both disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the political instability that Peru has continued to experience.

Abortion in the case of rape is another key strand in the framing of the campaign. However, scholars have argued that frameworks used by legal abortion campaigns limit the possibilities for future change. For example, O’Shaughnessy argues that the ‘Repeal the 8th’ campaign in Ireland, while successful, constructed abortion ‘as a negative affective object and as morally permissible only in situations of dire need.’⁴⁶ Framing abortion as an emergency measure only available to avoid death or for victims of rape constructs an idealised victim, one who still embraces the dominant model of motherhood, and limits the possibilities for changing societal attitudes to reproduction and maternity. If, as Millar puts it, abortion is only ‘given’

⁴³ El Comercio Perú, ‘Minjurdh presentará proyecto de ley para legalizar el aborto en menores de 14 años víctimas de violación nnde’.

⁴⁴ Ministerio de Salud, ‘Sistema de Registro Del Certificado de Nacido Vivo En Línea’.

⁴⁵ Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables, ‘Estadísticas Del MIMP’.

⁴⁶ O’Shaughnessy, ‘Triumph and Concession?’, 13.

to ‘suffering’ women by the state, it remains a tool of patriarchal and racist powers.⁴⁷ Many of the young activists I met in Peru had experiences that do not fit this category of an ideal victim, but they should also have the right to decide over their bodies, including access to abortion. One of the challenges for activists will always be balancing strategic goals and radical ones.

The recent legalisation of abortion in Argentina offers a hope for feminist activists trying to change the law. In the aftermath of that milestone, activists across the region shared images with the slogan ‘today Argentina, tomorrow all of Latin America’. However, in Peru this is an uphill battle, made particularly difficult because of the weakness of the Left. Whereas in Argentina, feminists have been able to build links with a powerful and organised left-wing movement⁴⁸, in Peru the Left is fractured and stigmatised⁴⁹. As a consequence, feminists have few mainstream political allies that would enable them to pass major legislation, as mentioned in Chapter 4. In recent years, there have been feminist congresswomen (Tania Pariona, Indira Huilca, Rocío Silva Santisteban and others) and presidential candidates (Verónica Mendoza), but these alone do not constitute a strong enough base to push for such a significant and controversial legislative change as legalising abortion. Left-wing and by extension feminist politics are heavily stigmatised in Peru. After the conflict between the state and the Shining Path, progressive politicians are so often labelled ‘terrorists’ (terrucos) that there is a verb for it: ‘terruquear’. The term emerged originally to refer to armed groups during the Internal Armed Conflict, but its use expanded to ‘defenders of human rights, relatives of those detained and other victims of political violence, and in general persons of

⁴⁷ Millar, *Happy Abortions: Our Bodies in the Era of Choice*.

⁴⁸ Gago, *Feminist International*.

⁴⁹ Muñoz, ‘Political Violence and the Defeat of the Left’.

Indian origin.’⁵⁰ Its use in recent elections, targeting left-wing politicians reflects the polarised political context, which limits avenues to legalise abortion.

The transnational context of abortion politics offers some hope for progress, but also many challenges, particularly the changing religious landscape. It is not yet clear what the impact of recent progress, like that in Argentina, will be in more conservative contexts like Peru. It is therefore important to consider local factors in order to be able to fully understand the transnational context, it is not as simple as ‘today Argentina, tomorrow all of Latin America’. In Peru conservative and religious values, tied with the ongoing political situation create an extremely difficult context for feminist activists seeking legal changes. The legacies of the relationship between the state and reproductive health – as the following chapter will discuss – create additional challenges.

Feminists recognise the urgent importance of bodily autonomy and the embodied reality of the lack of access to abortion. They draw on transnational frames – the *pañuelo verde*, chants, and legal changes - to strengthen their message. In doing so they show how violence is not limited to IPV, but also the violence enacted by the lack of access to abortion: violent clandestine procedures, the violence of carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term, and the fear of prosecution for those who do abort. The urgency of the need for legal abortion, and the lack of progress through institutional avenues, leads feminists to the streets to demand rights and make their voices heard by putting their bodies on the line.

⁵⁰ Aguirre, ‘Terruco de m... Insulto y estigma en la guerra sucia peruana’, 104.

6.2 ‘*Poner la cuerpa*’: feminist bodies on the line

Using one’s body for activism is not just about the action, but it also becomes a way of seeing and interacting with the world. Actions like the one cited at the start of this chapter, whether protesting against gender-based violence or for reproductive rights, are summarised in the idea of putting one’s body on the line, or ‘*poner la cuerpa*.’ In an interview, one activist defined this as ‘the use of the body as a methodology, as a method of protest and being in the street, that is what it means to *poner la cuerpa*’⁵¹. The idea of the body as a methodology is key to understanding the strategies of contemporary feminist activism. The use of the body in protest is not just an action, but also a way of seeing the world, becoming a methodology that defines contemporary activism. This methodology includes a number of actions. As this interviewee put it: ‘protesting with the body, showing the body, doing *tetazos* for example. This is something that is very much of this moment’⁵².

This section will examine the concept of ‘*poner la cuerpa*’ as feminist methodology in order to understand what this tells us about the characteristics of contemporary feminist activism in Peru. I draw on the work of Barbara Sutton, who examines this idea as expressed by activists in her examination of women’s resistance in neoliberal Argentina.⁵³ Sutton looks at bodies in activism in two ways: its physical presence in social change efforts and the way that political activism contributes to women’s embodied subjectivity. Activism is performed through the body, enabling activists to use their bodies as a political text. At the same time, the material body cannot be separated from protest, and we must take into account the physical and

⁵¹ Flor Valles, interview.

⁵² Flor Valles.

⁵³ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 161–62.

embodied reality of protesting, not only the number of massed bodies present⁵⁴. *Poner la cuerpa* is not just about being at a protest, but also about what it means to be there as a feminist activist who faces specific risks and physically interacts with public space in a different way to other activists.

‘*Poner la cuerpa*’ as methodology reflects the ways that activists interact with academic feminist knowledge. The interviewee quoted in the introductory paragraph of this section is linked to academia, but she is also involved in activist circles. While most activists focus on their actions over knowledge of feminist theory, this phrasing demonstrates how they do indeed engage with theory. While many young activists do not have access to or the inclination to read feminist texts in their original format, they do absorb them through digital media and through taking part in feminist actions. One example of the ways feminists interact with theory is the use of the ideas of Argentine theorist Rita Segato in the viral performance ‘A Rapist in your Path’ by Chilean collective Las Tesis. Literally pointing the finger at the police, state and church, participants chant ‘the rapist is you’, summarising Segato’s argument that the rapist is a moralising figure that marks women as nothing more than their bodies⁵⁵. Segato frames the body as a site of violence, a violence that is communicative, sending a message about who has control over their bodies⁵⁶. In a context in which bodily autonomy is not protected, or even actively threatened by the state through sexual violence or reproductive rights violations such as forced sterilisations, scholars have noted the importance of the body to Latin American feminisms⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Peterson, *Contemporary Political Protest*.

⁵⁵ Segato, *La Guerra Contra Las Mujeres*.

⁵⁶ Segato, *La escritura en el cuerpo*, 20.

⁵⁷ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*; Souza, ‘When the Body Speaks (to) the Political’; Gago, *Feminist International*.

Analysing the usage of this phrase also shows activists' perspectives on the ways that bodies interact with patriarchal systems of gender. The phrase '*poner el cuerpo*' is commonly used by feminists and other activists, I often heard it modified to '*poner la cuerpa*', using the gendered patterns of the Spanish language to emphasise that the body being referred to is female. This refiguration of language is deliberately provocative, and it is a useful framework through which to analyse the role of bodies in contemporary activism.

The word '*cuerpa*' can refer to a hyper-feminine, sexualised body, for example a well-known Venezuelan fitness guru goes by the moniker of '*La Cuerpa*.'⁵⁸ However, feminist activists across Latin America have started to use the term as a way of referring to feminised and feminist bodies.⁵⁹ *La cuerpa* is not grammatically correct in Spanish, but the use of neologisms and the transformation of language is a common tactic among queer and feminist activists.⁶⁰ This is epitomised in the debates over 'inclusive language' between activists and the Real Academia Española, in which the RAE declared such linguistic modifications to be 'unnecessary'⁶¹. Activists, on the other hand, do not see the Spanish language as something sacred and immutable, but rather something that can be reworked to provoke change.

We should also consider the impact of the internet as a site of activism and debate on forms of inclusive language. For example, the use of the letter -x to replace gendered -o or -a endings of words is more common in online contexts like social networking sites, where

⁵⁸ Ledesma, 'Quién Es "La Cuerpa", La Gurú Venezolana Del Fitness'.

⁵⁹ Feminarian, 'Cuerpas y úteras'; Juárez, 'Perreo feminista, genealogías y la cuerpa total'; Pérez, 'La cuerpa que resiste'.

⁶⁰ Díaz Calderón, 'De La Política Queer a La Performance Transfeminista Transfronteriza Guerrillera Andina. Conversación Con PachaQueer'.

⁶¹ Sarlo and Kalinowski, *La lengua en disputa*.

communication is *written* (e.g. *nosotrxs* (us), *latinxs*⁶²) whereas during ethnographic fieldwork I found that the use of the letter -e (e.g. *todes* (everyone, all)) was more common in *spoken* and offline contexts.⁶³ The use of inclusive language is widely accepted among younger activists but is seen as complicated or redundant by older generations. Before, the use of -x or -e, the use of the symbol '@' was common – as in '*tod@s*' – as a way of visually combining -o and -a endings into one form. Generational divisions over the use of language are not unique to a Spanish-speaking context; there have been debates in the English-speaking world over the singular they⁶⁴ or similar neologisms in French⁶⁵. These neologisms are also not that new: the use of -e as a form of non-sexist language actually dates back to the 1970s in Spain⁶⁶. One advantage that the -e has is that it is easy to pronounce (compared with -x or @) so functions in both oral and written contexts, and it is also inclusive of non-binary people. Where the @ collapses the masculine -o and feminine -a into a singular form, the -e (and -x) remove the gendered part of the word entirely.

The contemporary feminist movement is a diverse and inclusive one. In analysing the role and impact of trans* activists in the feminist movement in Argentina, Vidal-Ortiz underlines the importance of coalitional politics, and encourages us to expand the ways that we think about feminist activists putting their bodies on the line⁶⁷. This is something that I found to be evident in the field, participating in a feminist landscape made up of '*mujeres y disidencias*' – cis, trans*, and non-binary feminists. At activist events speakers address attendees with the

⁶² There is not space to go into the debates over 'latinx' as a category in this thesis, however it is important to note that this is more often used in a United States or anglophone context, than it is in Latin American ones. Indeed, many Latin Americans online joke about being lumped into the unpronounceable category.

⁶³ Gil, 'Las paradojas excluyentes del "lenguaje inclusivo"'.

⁶⁴ Clarke, 'They, Them, and Theirs'.

⁶⁵ alexatseawriter, 'Le langage neutre en français'.

⁶⁶ García Meseguer, 'Sexismo y Lenguaje'.

⁶⁷ Vidal-Ortiz, 'Vidal-Ortiz, S - Transgender Movements', 464.

triple form '*todos, todas, y todes*' as a way of marking that men, women and non-binary people are all welcome. *Cuerpa* refers to a coalition of feminised bodies, including all those perceived as female in the struggle. These debates and uses of language as a part of activism are a form of knowledge production that reflects the ways that the online sphere influences activist cultures, but that are still embedded in the offline world.

Both 'x' and 'a' are commonly used by feminists, but their usages shifts depending on the context. This is often a process of negotiation, especially considering the audience. For example, while creating placards for a march against gender violence I listened to activists debating whether to write '*justicia para todxs*' or '*todas*' (justice for all). On the one hand, they sought to be inclusive ('*todxs*'), but on the other, '*todas*' seemed important as this march was to mark a year since the high-profile feminicide of Eyvi Agreda (see p 76) and was also marking the feminicides that had taken place in the first six months of 2019. In the end they opted for '*todas y todxs*', but this moment of discussion and compromise highlights how activists' use of language is contextual and fluid.

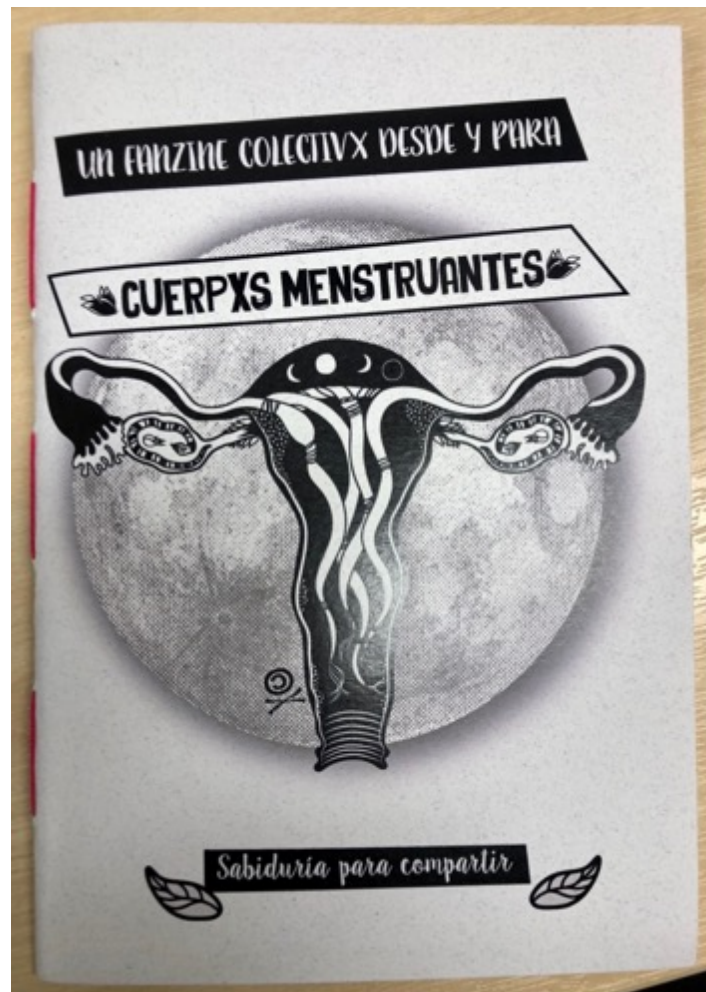


Figure 6.2 ‘Un fanzine colectivx desde y para cuerpxs menstruanes’ – a fanzine by and for menstruating bodies (Photo: author’s own)

‘*Cuerpx*’ is also commonly used by feminists and LGBT+ activists. Similarly, to the shift between *todas* and *todxs*, activists shift between *cuerpos*, *cuerpxs* and *cuerpas* depending on contexts. For example, in queer contexts, *cuerpx* appears more often, as an annihilation of the gendered marker. Reading over a Peruvian feminist fanzine entitled ‘*Cuerpxs menstruanes*’, the writers move fluidly between referring to *cuerpos*, *cuerpxs*, *compañeras* and *hermanxs*. This shift deliberately destabilises the gendered endings in the Spanish language. However, there is a difference between written and spoken language, and it was ‘*cuerpa*’ that I heard

more often in conversations, especially those relating to activism against gender violence or for abortion rights.

The use of *la cuerpa*, rather than a gender neutral or gender-less form (e.g., *cuerpx* or *cuerpe*) positions gender as a central factor in the structures and forms of violence these activists are focusing on. *Poner la cuerpa* says: I am putting my body on the line, and that body is perceived as female – because these bodies are the site of the violence that I am protesting against. As one interviewee put it ‘*poner la cuerpa* is something that is consistent with our ideals’⁶⁸. In other words, the phrase encapsulates the idea that politics is something embodied. The category of ‘cuerpa’ renders the body ‘a feminist site of agonistic struggle’, to use Butler’s description of the political usage of ‘women’⁶⁹. Similarly, to her argument, ‘*poner la cuerpa*’ reworks the category of the female body: ‘[invoking] the category and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest’⁷⁰. It also provokes a reconsideration of the ways that gendered language constructs bodies themselves and what that construction means⁷¹. It invokes a bodily identity while also making it a site of contest.

Analysing the concept of ‘*poner la cuerpa*’ brings new insights into the role of the body at the intersection of politics and culture⁷². This focus has been particularly driven by queer and feminist explorations of the body as a site of multiple oppressions, but also as a theoretical knot requiring the reshaping or blurring of boundaries between theoretical binaries (sex/gender, biology/society, male/female). In looking at feminist and queer perspectives on

⁶⁸ Lici Ramírez, interview.

⁶⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 168.

⁷⁰ Butler, 168.

⁷¹ Butler, x.

⁷² Turner, *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*, 162.

the body, an obvious starting point is Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*⁷³. Butler argues that violence produces bodies. When bodies do not count as 'bodies', they cease to exist. When bodies do not 'count' they cannot receive justice, in the case of gender violence, victims whose experiences fall outside of the accepted norms are less likely to receive justice⁷⁴. Building on Butler, Boesten has argued that this is particularly relevant to the Peruvian case, in which 'structural and normative violence provides the backdrop and condition for physical violence upon bodies, as well as for the tolerance for, or invisibility of, this violence and its victims.'⁷⁵ This is tragically illustrated in an example she cites of the gap of 35,000 between the initial estimated number of victims of the Internal Armed Conflict and the final total cited in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report in 2003: 'even in death half of those who died in the conflict, which disproportionately affected the indigenous population, do not deserve to be grieved, because, according to some, they never existed'⁷⁶.

Another important factor is the location of protesting bodies, in public, digital, and physical spaces. The relationships between bodies and spaces is a reciprocal one. Feminist 'cuerpas' affect and are affected by the space they are in, as Ahmed argues 'in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the "where" of that movement. It is through this movement that the surface of spaces as well as bodies takes shape.'⁷⁷ By '*poniendo la cuerpa*' in a square, or outside a hospital, that body is transformed into a protesting body, a threat to order. At the same time the presence of these bodies transforms plazas, streets and government buildings into unruly spaces in need of controlling⁷⁸, as seen in the violent

⁷³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

⁷⁴ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 156.

⁷⁵ Boesten, 'Inequality, Normative Violence, and Livable Life: Judith Butler and Peruvian Reality'.

⁷⁶ Boesten.

⁷⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 53.

⁷⁸ Gago, *Feminist International*, 107.

reaction of police to feminist protests. Feminist activists are often told to ‘go home’ when protesting, as a reminder that their duties and roles lie in the private sphere, not the public sphere.

Feminist activism has long concerned itself with destabilising and redetermining where the ‘line between public and private’ lies.⁷⁹ This line is further blurred by the rise of digital platforms as important spaces for activism, which force a reconsideration of how public space has been defined. Butler argues that rethinking this ‘compels us to reconsider the restrictive ways ‘the public sphere’ has been uncritically posited by those who assume full access and rights of appearance on a designated platform.’⁸⁰ This can be in terms of ability: most cities are still designed around the able-bodied, locking out people with disabilities, or in terms of geography: those living in the geographical periphery are moved to the periphery of public space through a lack of public transport or well-maintained roads.⁸¹ Virtual public spaces are not available to all, and for some protesting in public space is more accessible than protesting online. Placing the body in space forces us to reconsider the division between public and private.

Part of the power of ‘poner la cuerpa’ is the transformation of individual bodies into a collective. It is both an act of putting one’s own body on the line, but also connecting that body to a network of bodies. Abortion activism often relies on personal testimonies in order to emotionally affect the public. Taking the issue of abortion to the street changes this message, through the presence of a collective of bodies in public space. As Nancy, an artist and activist framed it in an interview: ‘it is in the street where we should try to change things

⁷⁹ Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition*, 115.

⁸⁰ Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 8.

⁸¹ Imrie, *Disability and the City*; Kern, *Feminist City*.

through the body ... with our bodies together, the message is much more powerful.’⁸² A group of bodies can be a protective strategy, but also a way of taking up more space. This is particularly important in the case of abortion, which is hidden away behind closed doors. In the performance pictured at the beginning of this chapter, we took up space outside symbols of power in the Peruvian healthcare system: the Ministry of Health and the Edgardo Rebagliati Martins National Hospital. Through the performance we brought the reality of clandestine abortion to the places where the right to abortion is denied. We disrupted the movements of passers-by with our bodies, who told us to go home or get out of the way. This disruption required there to be a group of volunteers dedicated to maintaining the safety of the performers; in one case we were performing outside the main entrance, where cars drive in and out of the hospital. The reaction of the public juxtaposed with our location served to me as a stark reminder of how many people would rather not think about the reality of abortion and keep it out of sight and out of mind.

Further, as this thesis discusses, contemporary feminist activism exists in both offline and online spaces, forcing a reconsideration of the public sphere. *Poner la cuerpa* is about presence, but that presence does not have to be physical. This performance, like others I took part in, was live streamed and recorded for a video (as discussed in chapter 5). Feminists who post pictures of their bodies as part of their activism put their bodies in a digital public sphere. Digital forms of participation allow some of those who might not otherwise be able to take part, to add their presence. The digital public sphere became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, activists started a social media campaign under the hashtags #EstamosHartas (We’re Tired) and #SeguimosEnPieDeLucha (We’re Still

⁸² Nancy Viza, interview.

Fighting). The virtual protest demanded that authorities take concrete actions to address the increase in gender-based violence during the first lockdown. As part of the intervention activists posted pictures of themselves with writing on their bodies, marking them with the phrase ‘harta de...’ (I am tired of...), combined with different concerns: misogyny, impunity, violence and more. In this war, they turned the body into a site of protest during a time when it was subject to surveillance and restrictions.

Using the body as a lens to study social movements provides important insights⁸³, and allows us to examine the overlap between the body as subject of activism (for example in the field of reproductive rights) and a tool for activists. In the case of feminist activism, most of these bodies are perceived as female. As Parkins reminds us, ‘bodies inhabit specific social, historical and discursive contexts which shape our experiences of embodiment and our capacities for political contestation’⁸⁴. When looking at bodies in protest, we should consider how they are gendered, but also racialised and classed. This is particularly important in the Peruvian case considering the ways that the history of the country and these protesting bodies are marked by colonialism and more recently the legacy of the Internal Armed Conflict (see Chapter 7). When thinking about which bodies are on the line, we also need to consider which bodies are being targeted by this violence. *Poner la cuerpa* means to put a feminised body on the line, one that is marked by history, race, colonialism, and human rights violations. The twisting of *cuerpo* into *cuerpa* underlines gender as a central factor in this. Focusing on these bodies highlights the ways that different bodies interact with the public sphere, both physically and digitally. *Cuerpa* as a category includes many different embodied realities, yet the physical reality of protest does not always include them. This section has

⁸³ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 161.

⁸⁴ Parkins, ‘Protesting like a Girl’, 73.

focused on *poner la cuerpa* as a concept, the following section will consider what it means in practice.

6.3 Embodied feminist strategies

Performance is a key feminist strategy, but there are many other tools in the feminist activist's kit. These repertoires are all embodied, and as this section explores, they show how feminists use their bodies while struggling for bodily autonomy. By analysing different feminist strategies, we can see what *poner la cuerpa* means in practice, as a methodology. Attitudes to the body are communicated in chants, protest strategies, and styles of dress. While these are shaped by the transnational context, they are also locally specific. This section will discuss these feminist body politics and ask what it tells us about new feminisms. The first part discusses *arengas* as embodied phenomena, it then moves onto discussing feminist aesthetics and how clothing and fashion are part of their toolkit. Finally, it discusses the phenomenon of the '*tetazo*' – topless protest – as a key example of the ways that activists put their bodies on the line. This section will consider which bodies are included and how and where there is room to challenge the exclusion of certain bodies from feminist activism.

6.3.1 Arengas

An essential part of feminist actions is the shouting of '*arengas*' (chants). Protest songs and chants are a key part of social movement repertoires and have been analysed in contexts varying from the 2017 Women's March, farm workers movements in the United States or the

Arab Spring⁸⁵. Their role in contemporary Latin American feminism has not yet been studied in detail. This section will analyse various *arengas* I heard and chanted during fieldwork. It argues that *arengas* demonstrate the interactions between theory and practice in contemporary feminism in Peru. Further, it considers *arengas* as embodied phenomena and analyses the role of the physical aspects of chanting.

Arengas underline how feminists use and understand concepts from feminist theory. At marches feminists are not just highlighting the high levels of gender violence but also questioning why that is the case. At a march marking a year since the murder of Eyvi Agreda (see chapter 4) they chanted ‘it wasn’t a crime of passion, it was a patriarchal macho’ (*no fue un crimen pasional, fue un macho patriarcal*), underlining the ways that her death was linked to patriarchy and misogynist violence – as opposed to the ways it was framed as a crime of passion in the media. While most feminists will not have spent years reading theory, they understand the concept of patriarchy through lived experience. For me, this was epitomised by the joy and rage with which they chanted that ‘the patriarchy will fall’. This line comes from one of the best-known feminist *arengas* that featured in every march I attended: ‘power, power/ popular power/ and now that we are together/ and now that you see us/ down with the patriarchy, it’s going to fall, it’s going to fall/ up with feminism, it’s going to win, it’s going to win’⁸⁶. The idea of a popular feminist power is elaborated by Verónica Gago in her concept of the ‘*potencia feminista*’.⁸⁷ She describes it as the desire to change everything, and

⁸⁵ Gasaway Hill, ‘Exploring the Protest Language of Chants “Everyday I’m Çapulling” and “Sí Se Puede”’; Manabe, ‘Chants of the Resistance’; Dessì, ‘Voicing Change. The Popular Subject of Protest Music in Revolutionary Cairo (2011-2013)’.

⁸⁶ *Poder, poder*

Poder popular,

Y ahora que estamos juntas

Y ahora que si nos ven

Abajo el patriarcado se va a caer, se va a caer

Arriba el feminismo que va a vencer, que va a vencer

⁸⁷ Gago, *Feminist International*.

in the chant ‘down with the patriarchy, it’s going to fall’ we hear the determination and desire to rid the world of patriarchal violence in the voices of feminist activists.

Other *arengas* show the ways that bodily autonomy is central to contemporary feminism in Peru. One that I heard again and again at marches was: ‘No is no, I told you no, no you asshole, my body is mine, and the decision is mine alone’⁸⁸ ‘The decision is mine alone’ refers to the right to decide about reproduction, and ‘no is no’ is linked to discourses around sexual autonomy and consent (no means no). The body ties together a range of issues that are central to contemporary feminist activism in Peru, hence it is not surprising that it should be a core theme in marches, chants, and performances. ‘My body is mine’ epitomises the feminist desire for freedom from violence, and the freedom to choose what one does with one’s body. One activist describes this attitude as ‘this is my body, and I do with my body what I want. I will also take to the streets to do what it takes to protest anyone who goes against my will.’⁸⁹ She situates her feminism both in her own body and in the streets. In this way, autonomy is both an individual state (I do with my body what I what), and a shared ideal (I will also take to the streets [to defend it]). The tension between the individual body and the shared ideal is reflected in the ways that feminists approach their activism. Chants are shouted as a group, but that group is made up of individuals whose personal experiences shape their relationship with the lyrics. This *arenga* brings together experiences that many feminists, and Peruvian women in general, share: a lack of reproductive justice, gender violence, and the frustration that this provokes.

⁸⁸ *No es no, te dije que no, pendejo no, mi cuerpo es mío y sola mía la decisión*

⁸⁹ Flor Valles, interview.

Arengas also show the transnational nature of contemporary feminist activism, as these chants move fluidly across borders. This can be through social media posts (photos, videos, illustrations), .pdf files compiling popular chants⁹⁰, or even through face-to-face meetings between activists. One theme in particular that they reflect is the importance of bodily autonomy. Attending a protest outside the Argentine embassy I remember activists from Argentina and Peru sharing songs and chants and talking about how they were different in each country. Some of the Argentinian activists had guitars and other instruments they used to accompany the songs as they taught local activists different songs that they had brought with them. Some songs were familiar but with slightly different lyrics, and activists would compare these differences that had emerged as these songs and chants moved around the feminist ecosystem in Latin America. At other protests activists would sometimes search for new or different chants online using smartphones, which could then be shouted through a megaphone and repeated by the crowd. The ways that chants move around is a clear example of the overlap between the online and the offline, activists can share them in person or through the internet, but neither sphere exists entirely separate from the other.

Arengas are also a way of taking up space in public: physically with bodies but also with the sound of voices chanting. This has a transformative potential, questioning what the public sphere is and who has access to it⁹¹. One chant in particular emphasises the physical presence of activists in the streets, in public space: ‘Warning! Warning! Feminist women marching through the streets of Lima!’⁹². The idea of a ‘warning’ suggests that the presence of these bodies is a threat to the patriarchal order of things. It also makes a specific claim to the spaces

⁹⁰ For example: ‘Cancionero / Arengas Comando Feminista’. There are regularly updated and disseminated files of *arengas*, that are easily searchable online, facilitating the transnational spread of these chants and the ideas contained within them.

⁹¹ de la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil*.

⁹² Alerta! Alerta! Alerta que caminan mujeres feministas por las calles de Lima!

in the city, inverting the idea that public spaces are dangerous for women. In this case women are a danger to public space. Feminist and women's rights activists have long been seen as a menace to public order, going back to the suffragettes.⁹³ It is not just activists who have been constructed as dangerous, the category of 'dangerous women' is applied to a number of groups whose actions or mere existence in public space threatens the status quo: merely walking in the street was enough for women to be accused of being prostitutes in Lima in 1916⁹⁴. The presence of feminists walking in the streets of Lima is tied to a longer history of women perceived as dangerous.

Arengas also serve as a reminder of the embodied aspects of protesting. They are more than their lyrics; feminists sing and shout until their voices are sore. After hours of marching and shouting, one's throat becomes sore, a physical after effect. Seeing protestors yelling and their voices cracking demonstrates the ways they are putting their body into their struggle, not just in terms of risk of repression, but also the physical toll of protesting. During fieldwork, I contracted laryngitis from spending hours in the cold chanting, the pain serving as a reminder of the struggle I was observing and participating in.

The chants' meaning is not just in the lyrics, but also in how they are located in the body, physically and emotionally. It can be a form of emotional release to shout and scream together⁹⁵, unleashing the anger that many of these activists feel about the injustice and violence they face. At times, chants are literally directed at their subjects, for example, 'police, police! Tell me what you would do if your daughter was beaten and there was no

⁹³ Gale, 'Resolute Presence, Fugitive Moments, and the Body in Women's Protest Performance'.

⁹⁴ Drinot, *The Sexual Question*, 313.

⁹⁵ McNEILL, *Keeping Together in Time*.

justice’⁹⁶ is yelled at officers patrolling feminist marches. The police in Peru have been notoriously slow to act in cases of femicide, gender violence or disappearances.⁹⁷ One well-known example of this is of the murder of feminist activist Solsiret Rodríguez Aybar in 2016, police took three years to even start investigating her disappearance. It was only after years of pressure from feminist collectives and her family that the investigation moved forward.⁹⁸ Targeting them directly through *arengas* is an important way for activists to have their voices literally heard by those in power, even if they are not listened to.

Feminist *arengas* are a core part of the contemporary movement, and an analysis of their content and the ways they are used shows how the body is both a subject of feminist theory and a tool for activism. *Arengas* show how feminists share theory and ideas, and how these flow through online and offline networks. They are also a clear example of what it means to *poner la cuerpa*: activists are physically present, shouting until their voices are sore, and at the same time embodying feminist theory.

6.3.2 Embodied aesthetics

Poner la cuerpa is not just about taking part in protests. It is also about using the body as a central tool of activism and being aware of the positionality of that body. Outside of protests, there are several other examples of ways in which feminists put their bodies on the line in their daily lives. The ways that activists present themselves, using their bodies as ‘canvases of representation’⁹⁹ also forms part of their activism. These activist bodies are formed via

⁹⁶ Policía, policía! Dime que es lo que tu harías, si tu hija es golpeada y la justicia no hace nada

⁹⁷ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 108.

⁹⁸ ‘Femicide of Peruvian Activist Solsiret Rodríguez Still Unsolved’.

⁹⁹ Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess*, 7.

contemporary visual culture using different kinds of femininity as a political tool¹⁰⁰.

Feminists also use beauty and glamour to negotiate power and marginality¹⁰¹. It is not a new phenomenon for activists to use clothes and outward forms of self-expression as a way of making a political statement. Particularly for feminists, following the idea that the personal is political; one's appearance becomes a canvas. During fieldwork, I started to notice a particular style associated with certain types of feminist activists. Yet, as I shall argue this is not possible for everyone; wearing your politics on your sleeve can have dangerous consequences.

It is hard to pin down exactly what characterises feminist style, but it is something I noticed by being in the field both online and offline. Online, through selfies and memes, feminists communicate a certain aesthetic. Offline, I started to notice particular choices in terms of clothing, hair, and appearance. Like all subculture aesthetics, there is a spectrum; not everyone chooses to dress in the most extreme forms. However, the main aspects include alternative hairstyles like mullets, or partially shaved heads, piercings, and tattoos. Clothing also communicates belonging to a group through a common aesthetic. Feminists differentiate themselves as 'outsiders' through fashion, as Simmel outlines: 'fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change.'¹⁰² The pañuelo verde can also serve as an example of this – a way for feminists to identify others within the group. The decision to commit to a feminist aesthetic is one that entails risks; by marking oneself as a feminist in public space, you are

¹⁰⁰ Hernandez, 11.

¹⁰¹ Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela*.

¹⁰² Simmel, 'Fashion', 133.

vulnerable to harassment and even violence. Those who choose to do this, therefore, are those who can bear the risk.

The politics of dressing as a feminist, or politicising one's outward appearance, is not new in feminism, but it is a return to a feminism focused on the personal as political. It centres the body as a site of activism. As one informant explained: 'my feminism is also very corporeal, it's not very activist. I feel like it's a form of rebellion But it's not easy'¹⁰³. This activist communicates the idea that the body is a key site of feminist activism and is seen as more significant than 'mainstream' forms of activism. However, she underlines that it is not straightforward to instrumentalise the body. She was one of the only activists I spoke to who had young children, and she mentioned the physical and emotional toll of this as both a motivation but also a limiting factor on her ability to take part in marches. Yet, in her daily life she appeared as a feminist: her purple hair and tattoos meant that while dropping her daughters off at nursery she was labelled 'la mamá feminista'.

These trends also show how feminist ideas cross borders, creating an aesthetics of Latin American feminism. Social media helps to perpetuate these visual elements of feminism that are communicated through memes, illustrations, and selfies. Dressing this way takes the online identity and makes it an offline one too. There is also the opportunity to 'dress up' for the internet and express oneself in a way that might not be possible (for reasons of safety) in 'real life'. However, I found that Peruvian feminists were less likely to dress as extremely as Argentinian feminists for example. While not every feminist from Argentina dresses the same, those who are deeply involved in activism tend to have a certain style. This was

¹⁰³ Natalí Córdova, interview.

particularly notable at a protest outside the Argentinian embassy in Lima, calling for the legalisation of abortion. Several activists from Argentina, who had been travelling in Peru, came to the protest, and they stood out visually from the rest of the crowd because of their haircuts, piercings, tattoos, clothing. Peruvians are generally more conservative in their style of dress than some of their neighbours. This is true also of feminists and reflects how it is more of a social risk for Peruvian feminists to express their activism through dress. As in the example of the activist mentioned in the previous paragraph, a different haircut or visible tattoos are enough for one to be ‘read’ as a feminist. This can entail a risk in the public sphere, both offline and online. While protesting feminists have been physically attacked by members of the public, and online they are often trolled by anti-feminists. It can also result in rejection or backlash from close friends, one interviewee mentioned receiving negative comments from a friend after posting about feminist issues on her Instagram story.¹⁰⁴

By examining who gets to dress like a feminist, we can see some of the social divisions between feminists. Not all feminists choose to dress in this particular style. Considering the fact that in some areas even mentioning the word gender can provoke a backlash, making oneself hypervisible as a feminist would be a dangerous choice to make. Those who live in the capital, in more upper or middle-class areas, or do not live with disapproving parents, appear to be more able to express themselves through dress. Lima is made up of many different districts where attitudes to feminism vary significantly. This division is also true between feminists in the capital compared to other cities. In interviews with activists in Huancayo, they mentioned that the reactions they get are much more vocal than those that feminists in the capital get. There is also a rejection of respectability politics and the idea that

¹⁰⁴ Silvana Oblitas, interview.

activists should present themselves well for their ideas to be heard by society. While not all feminists dress in the same way, and many do not agree with this idea, it is prevalent in young, radical feminism, and reinforced through social media. What it means to dress like a feminist varies in different places, where for some it might mean an extreme look, for others it can simply be having shorter hair¹⁰⁵. A lot of feminist style counters the idea of what it means to be attractive, at least to a western, male gaze. In anti-feminist memes, feminists are caricatured as hairy, ugly, fat, with piercings and dyed hair as a way to undermine their femininity and ‘worth’ as women. This is also underlined by statements by right-wing figures suggesting that activists are ‘too ugly to rape’, including Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and others. For feminists themselves, this merely underlines the importance of dressing for oneself and one’s community, not for the sake of attractiveness in a patriarchal world.

A specific element to contemporary Peruvian feminist fashion is the combination of ‘feminist’ aesthetics with traditional Andean dress: particularly braids and pollera skirts. Their significance is discussed in more detail in section 3, but in terms of fashion and aesthetics the combined effect is a powerful statement about identity. This is not exclusive to feminists, other high-profile women have worn polleras as a political strategy, for example Eliane Karp, the Jewish-French wife of Peru’s first indigenous President Alejandro Toledo, enthusiastically wore *polleras* during her husband’s presidency.¹⁰⁶ There is even a brand, Warmichic, that reimagines polleras with messages about empowering women. This brand was created by Qarla Quispe, daughter of indigenous of parents who migrated to Lima, as a way of reclaiming her identity after experiencing discrimination at school. These ‘urban polleras’ are marketed at urban progressives. As Quispe put it in an interview about the

¹⁰⁵ Feministas Interdisciplinarias Huancayo (Group Interview), interview.

¹⁰⁶ Lubow, ‘The Possessed’.

brand: ‘Let’s wear polleras to stop the discrimination against highland women’, ‘Let’s wear one of these and see if we’re discriminated! If we are, what would we say?’¹⁰⁷.

Quispe’s quest to reclaim her indigenous roots is something mirrored in conversations I had with activists born in Lima to indigenous and mixed-race parents whose connections to indigeneity have been transformed or erased through the process of migration¹⁰⁸. The role of polleras in Peruvian feminism exists in a different context to other Andean countries, particularly Ecuador and Bolivia, which have strong indigenous political movements that reclaim indigenous identities, whereas Peru does not¹⁰⁹. In the below Instagram post by cusqueña activist Claudia Aragonz, we can see the combination of feminist and indigenous aesthetics. She is wearing a traditional pollera (rather than an urban one in the style of Warmichic) with a black t-shirt and trainers. Her hair is short and partly shaved, but still worn in two plaits. Her tattoos and piercings are visible. This becomes a statement of reclamation of an indigenous identity on feminist terms. It is also important to note that Aragonz is from and based in Cusco, rather than Lima, giving her a different connection to her identity.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Qarla Quispe’.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Viza, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Madrid, ‘Ethnopolitism without Indigenous Parties in Peru’.



Figure 6.3 An Instagram post by activist Claudia Aragonz in which she is wearing a *pollera*, but also has visible tattoos and piercings (photo: Instagram @claudia.aragonz)¹¹⁰

The idea of reclaiming indigenous roots is a popular one among feminists. This can be seen through the reappropriation of the term ‘chola’. As Weismantel explains in her examination of the figure of the *chola*, it is an ambiguous term.¹¹¹ In common usage it means an indigenous woman living in an urban area but is often used as a way of denigrating women. The term has been used by contemporary feminists in different ways. The visual collective Chola Contravizual, a group of activists with roots in Huancayo, but also active in Lima, use the term as a way of reclaiming something that was used to belittle them, as they are mixed-race and indigenous activists from the *sierra*. On the other hand, the online magazine ‘Chola’ uses the term without any acknowledgement or interrogation. Their Instagram page is full of pictures of white models in t-shirts and hats reading ‘chola’, presenting it as merely a ‘trendy’

¹¹⁰ Aragonz, ‘Instagram Post’.

¹¹¹ Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos*, xxiv.

term. Reclaiming the category of chola and indigenous roots is a complex process. Feminist dress in Peru draws on a visual language of indigeneity in ways that raise questions about appropriation. This issue is also paralleled in wider dynamics of feminist and indigenous activism in Peru, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7. Feminists draw on Peruvian and transnational visual codes, to make a powerful statement in an often-hostile context.

Feminist activism carried out through dress and aesthetics could be accused of being performative and narcissistic tendencies, centring individual identity and the superficial over concrete actions. However, the actual risks associated with it suggest that it is not superficial, but a real contestation of entrenched norms. As another form of '*poner la cuerpa*', there is an embodied element to the use of aesthetics as part of feminist activism. Further, the use of aesthetics and fashion to communicate feminist ideas, particularly online, reflects the ways that young activists are being introduced to feminism. It also shows the ways that activists experience their bodies as sites of activism and seek to reclaim their bodies through aesthetics while exerting control over their own appearance.

6.3.3 Tetazos

The final example that this section will examine is the '*tetazo*' or topless protest. The term *tetazo* is derived from *tetas* (tits), a vulgar term for breasts, underlining the transgressive aspect of the protests. The protest is not just about being topless but about being topless and feminised, that is to say perceived as female in the context of the protest.¹¹² The *tetazo* builds

¹¹² At tetazos I witnessed, many of those participating were non-binary or trans*, hence the use of feminised to emphasise the role of perception by an audience, rather than identity.

on the history of naked protest. In feminist protests the overlap between the female body as a site of struggle and a political tool has sparked debate, particularly in the case of naked or semi-naked protest. Among Peruvian feminists the '*tetazo*' is a common intervention, in which protests occupy public space while bare-chested, often with words written on their bodies. Naked protest does not always focus on sexualisation but uses norms around dress and propriety as a communication strategy. Abonga et al. argue that 'it is a strategy used by marginalised – or 'muted' – populations who lack access to dominant modes of communication to express their grievances'¹¹³. In the Peruvian context, topless protest has also been used by 'muted' populations. In 1996 a street sweeper bared her chest during protests against the dissolution of the cleaning agency she worked for. Her nudity prevented the police from coming near her, as they felt the naked body of an older woman, a mother was an act of shame and desperation.¹¹⁴ Whereas feminists doing *tetazos* have been beaten by the police, as their actions are perceived as scandalous and deserving of punishment.

In feminist activism, there are those who argue for reclamation and re-appropriation of the female body through naked protest. On the other hand, some see these strategies as reinforcing the same norms that they are protesting against, rather than deconstructing them. Another way of analysing the *tetazo* is as a form of hypervisibility. In *Aesthetics of Excess* Jillian Hernandez argues that for Black and Latina women by presenting 'aesthetic excess' one makes oneself hypervisible¹¹⁵. This aesthetic excess can be in the form of clothing, jewellery, and accessories, as the previous section examined, but also through making oneself hypervisible *as a feminist* through topless protest.

¹¹³ Abonga et al., 'Naked Bodies and Collective Action', 19.

¹¹⁴ Gandolfo, 'The Street Sweeper and the Mayor: Transgression and Politics in Lima', 159.

¹¹⁵ Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess*, 11.

Not all feminists take part in *tetazos*, and it is a marker of generational differences. The use of the body as a site of protest is a site of contention between different activists. This is seen in debates about the *tetazo*. As one of my interviewees, Natalí explained to me during our conversation in her flat in Huancayo ‘the young girls are the ones who do the *tetazo*, the ladies don’t do it. Is this a double standard? No, we don’t think that they need to expose their bodies ... you have to understand the different bodily dynamics between generations’¹¹⁶. Natalí is one of the few activists I spoke to who is also a mother of two young girls, giving her a different perspective on intergenerational bodily dynamics as she sits between generations. On the one hand, anyone who is not comfortable with public nakedness has to take part, on the other hand there is a division over the correct way to ‘do feminism’, including the *tetazo*¹¹⁷. This also raises the issue of which bodies get to take part in topless protests. In Peruvian examples of topless protest there is a wide range of bodies present. The presence of bodily diversity is an important part of the *tetazo*, as it reflects the realities of feminised bodies.

Topless protests are not unique to contemporary Latin American feminism. Two key feminist protest movements of the 21st century have also used topless or semi-naked protest: SlutWalk and FEMEN. SlutWalk originated in Toronto in 2011 after a police officer suggested that ‘women should avoid dressing like sluts’ to prevent sexual assault¹¹⁸. In response, protestors dressed in revealing attire (although this was not a requirement to participate) marched through the streets of Toronto calling for an end to victim-blaming. The movement spread worldwide in 2011 and 2012, with versions happening across Latin America, including

¹¹⁶ Natalí Córdova, interview.

¹¹⁷ Barrig, “No sé con quién está dialogando este feminismo vigoroso”.

¹¹⁸ ‘Slutwalk London’.

Peru¹¹⁹. FEMEN is a feminist activist group, originally founded in Ukraine in 2008, but with branches around the world, that initially focused on campaigning against sex tourism and prostitution in Ukraine. FEMEN's activism is largely carried out through interventions in public space, in which activists (almost exclusively young, attractive women) protest topless with slogans written on their bodies.

There are two lines of debate in the literature on bodies in protest. For some scholars, these protests reinforce the same aesthetic or bodily ideals they are protesting against. O'Keefe finds that 'they fall short in their attempts to (re)appropriate patriarchal signifiers [and] they actually reinforce the original use of these signifiers and their associated norms'.¹²⁰

According to this line of argument Slutwalk and FEMEN do not present a legitimate critique of the norms they are protesting against, and their utilisation of sex and sexuality actually undermines their position. On the other hand, Gale makes the argument that we should look at the 'gestural potential' of these bodies in public space: the spectacle of the female body 'in public spaces in which those bodies are not socially, politically, or economically equal' has long been a tactic for feminist activists from the Suffragettes to Slutwalk.¹²¹ The *tetazo* is not simply about nudity in public, but rather about using the body as a provocation. In doing so it follows other feminist actions that juxtapose the activist body and public space. For example, the suffragettes' presence in public space, while not literally nude, functioned as a sort of political nudity, baring the inequalities they protested against. In the same way, the *tetazo* is not just about nudity but about incongruous bodies in public space, breaking norms of comportment to highlight gender violence in various forms.

¹¹⁹ Sulca, 'La marcha de las putas recorrió las calles de Lima'.

¹²⁰ O'keefe, 'My Body Is My Manifesto! SlutWalk, FEMEN and Femmenist Protest', 4.

¹²¹ Gale, 'Resolute Presence, Fugitive Moments, and the Body in Women's Protest Performance'.

Indeed, women's presence in public space can in itself be seen as a threat. As Drinot illustrates, in early twentieth-century Lima 'the street, of course, was beyond the private sphere and therefore a space where women were often considered out-of-place' and could risk 'being accused of being prostitutes' merely by walking at night.¹²² Further, by comparing contemporary tetazos to the figure of the 'mujeres tapadas' in seventeenth-century Lima, the idea of women's bodies as a threat to the social order becomes clear. During the 1500 and 1600s, women in colonial Lima (as well as in Spanish cities) covered themselves in veils, revealing only one eye. This practice was really only accessible to elite women, who 'used hiding themselves as a way to achieve freedom.'¹²³ By leaving the private sphere, and thus the control of their husbands, these women became menacing figures, that men feared 'once free of their husbands' domestic control, would become dangerous members of society.'¹²⁴ The 'tapada' became a popular figure in art and literature, one that was 'seductive, defiant, and disruptive of the social order.'¹²⁵ While we do not know exactly what these women's motivations for veiling themselves were, as a figure their covered bodies in the streets conveyed a sense of threat towards the patriarchal order that is mirrored by the tetazo.

¹²² Drinot, *The Sexual Question*, 113.

¹²³ Mannarelli, *Private Passions and Public Sins*, 101.

¹²⁴ Mannarelli, 102.

¹²⁵ Bass and Wunder, 'The Veiled Ladies of the Early Modern Spanish World', 99.



Figure 6.4: Activist Maricarmen Gutierrez during a march on 25th November 2018 (Photo: Mano Alzada)¹²⁶

In the above photo, taken during a march for the International Day to End Violence Against Women on the 25th of November 2018, activist Maricarmen Ferrer stands topless with a raised fist, her nipples painted to look like they are bleeding. Across her chest is written ‘death to the patriarchy’ and she has a pañuelo verde tied around her waist. She is also wearing elements of traditional dress: a red pollera and a hat (*montera*) – signifiers of indigenous femininity. Her face is covered, which serves to protect her identity as she has been violently attacked by police while carrying out this performance¹²⁷. Covering the face to

¹²⁶ Mano Alzada, ‘Represión en la marcha contra la violencia hacia las mujeres. La excusa’.

¹²⁷ Isa Rivas Espinoza, interview.

maintain anonymity is a strategy used by feminists across Latin America in order to avoid backlash¹²⁸, mirroring the techniques used by the *mujeres tapadas*. Through taking the risk of doing a *tetazo*, she is literally putting her body on the line, in a way that invokes the category of the ‘cuerpa’ and the political struggle that it evokes. Her bare chest also lays bare the feminist desire for a future free of patriarchy.

The aesthetics of this protest contrast with those of FEMEN which consciously use the strategy of utilising normatively attractive (slim, able-bodied, white) bodies in its protests as an attention-grabbing strategy, supposedly trying to subvert norms of attractiveness. In contrast with FEMEN, there are a variety of bodies present in contemporary Peruvian examples (indigenous, afro-descendent, trans, gender-nonconforming, fat) which presents an entirely different message, one that de-centres patriarchal hierarchies of attractiveness.

Further, in many topless protests in Peru activists wear indigenous clothing, particularly the *pollera* (skirt), to make a statement of identity. The juxtaposition of indigenous markers and bare chests with feminist slogans positions indigeneity as a key issue in feminism, something that has not always been the case in Peruvian feminism¹²⁹. Yet, as this chapter discusses, this is often performed by non-indigenous women, raising the question of who gets to speak for whom. Topless protest turns the body into what Athanasiou terms ‘a turbulent performative occasion’, creating possibilities for action but also constraining it.¹³⁰ It highlights vulnerabilities but also exploits them as a site of activism.

Tetazos are a highly visual strategy, and photos taken of these interventions are often posted to social media. This carries the risk of censorship, as the banning of female-presenting

¹²⁸ Girolamo, ‘30 Wild Photos of Chile’s Masked Feminists’.

¹²⁹ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*.

¹³⁰ Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession : The Performative in the Political*, 178.

nipples on social media is well-documented¹³¹. This creates visually striking tactics, where nipples are often blocked out with tape or other images, or blurred, to avoid censorship. The *tetazo* is also reclamation of the bare chest and a criticism of oversexualisation. A mural I saw in a feminist house summed it up perfectly: ‘nipples that aren’t sold on the market are censored by the patriarchy’.

Tetazos are a clear example of what it means to ‘*poner la cuerpa*’. They use a feminised body as a vessel for feminist activism in a manner that centres the ways that these bodies are feminised, and subject to violence. As a form of protest, the *tetazo* entails a critique of patriarchal structures but starting from the body as both a site of oppression and contestation. Yet, *poner la cuerpa* is also a perilous strategy that carries a real risk of violent backlash. Through *tetazos*, and other protests, as well as conversations with activists, the body emerged as a subject but also a tool. Through looking at feminist aesthetics and *tetazos* I have examined different ways that bodies are used in activism. However, these bodies are also marked by multiple forms of oppression, and these impact who can participate and how. Physical presence is key for young activists. Many activists in interviews and at marches highlighted the importance of ‘*poniendo la cuerpa*’ over reading theory. Nevertheless, the ways that the body is present remind us of the ways that they are marked by inequalities. The body represents key feminist issues: campaigns for abortion rights and bodily autonomy. But it is also a tool of feminist activism, through protests, interventions and the sharing of lived experiences. The next section will further explore the ways that different bodies do, or do not, get to ‘*poner la cuerpa*’.

¹³¹ Matich, Ashman, and Parsons, ‘#freethenipple – Digital Activism and Embodiment in the Contemporary Feminist Movement’.

6.4 Whose bodies?

This chapter has examined the different ways that feminist activists in Peru can ‘poner la cuerpa’. However, we must also consider which *cuerpas* are on the line. This section will interrogate who is protesting and which bodies are being represented in this activism.

Feminist activists are a diverse group, but those who take part in in person actions tend to be younger and based in urban areas. We cannot think about *poner la cuerpa* without considering these dynamics. On the one hand, activists draw on personal experiences in their activism. In many interviews activists cited their experiences of violence, abuse, and abortion as a reason for becoming a feminist. Going back to the idea of *poner la cuerpa* as something consistent with feminist ideals, it is clear that many feminists view it as way of using a body that has physically experienced different forms of oppression and transforming it into a tool to challenge those structures.

This is a feature of contemporary activism: the body as subject of and tool for activism.

Marching in the streets or taking part in a performance becomes a way of using these embodied experiences and channelling them into activism. Of course, this can be trying, and involves bringing up difficult or traumatic memories. For some feminists this may be too emotionally taxing. Importantly, many of the actions I took part in weaved in an ethic of care into rehearsals and after the performances themselves, as a way of helping participants process. For example, during the rehearsals of ‘¿Cuántas más?’ (See p. ??) the organisers, Trenzar, included a number of activities designed to build connections between participants. In pairs, we had to spend a full minute staring into our partner’s eyes and then describe them to the group. Another activity involved moving our bodies as one collective mass, to practice connection. These draw on the group’s background in theatre and performing arts, but also a

feminist ethics of care. This was not just focused on the time before the performance, but also after. After we carried out the performance, we returned to the space we had used to prepare for what was described as a moment of ‘healing’. Sitting in a circle, holding hands, all the participants (performers, the audio-visual team, and other volunteers) were invited to share our reflections on the performance, both positive and negative. Many had had difficult experiences in the performance, being shouted at by members of the public, and shared their feelings of frustration. Others spoke of feeling inspired and invigorated. By processing these emotions as a group, the performance highlighted to me how ‘poner la cuerpa’ is an embodied process, but also an emotional one.

Yet, *poner la cuerpa* needs an intersectional analysis. The bodies that are being put on the line are shaped by different markers including gender, race, ethnicity, class, age and ability. These factors impact who can take part in activism and how. In Peru the vast majority of feminist interventions take place in cities, and within that most actions are carried out in Lima. The issue of centralism in the Peruvian context has long been discussed¹³², including in the feminist movement¹³³. The majority of established feminist NGOs are based in the capital, some with satellite offices in other cities. There are a growing number of feminist collectives being set up outside of Lima, particularly in cities like Huancayo, Cusco and Arequipa. Nevertheless, most feminists are based in the capital, and therefore tend to be whiter and more middle-class – although not exclusively so.

The fact that a third of the population lives in the sprawling capital shapes the ways that activism is carried out. However, Lima has a complex geography that also affects who can

¹³² Martínez-Acacio, “‘El Perú No Es Lima Ni Se Parece a Lima’: La Cuestión Del Centralismo’.

¹³³ Vargas, ‘The Women’s Movement in Peru’.

take part in feminist interventions. Performances, for example, require hours of rehearsals, and many participants talked about journeys of nearly three hours involving multiple forms of transport just to travel to the rehearsals. Not only the time spent travelling, but also the free time to dedicate to activism is an exclusionary factor, meaning that the majority of participants are young, without children, and often students. Different types of bodies also shape how they can be used or put on the line. Spending hours marching, chanting, or learning choreography is not accessible to older or disabled activists.¹³⁴

These factors also impact the ways that violence and access to reproductive healthcare affect different bodies. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the history of reproductive rights in Peru is a complicated one, in which poor and racialised women suffered greatly as part of the programme of forced sterilisations. Similarly, women's experiences of gender-based violence are also impacted by racist hierarchies, as perpetuated by State authorities.¹³⁵ Along the same lines, although abortion is extremely common in Peru, the experience of abortion varies greatly. To repeat a slogan mentioned earlier in this chapter: 'surviving an abortion is a class privilege'. Not only does class impact access to abortion, but geography is a key factor too. Walking around cities in Peru, you quickly notice ubiquitous signs for clandestine abortion services: taped to lampposts or stuck on the pavement. Women in cities also have access to networks that can recommend private clinics which carry out abortions. For women living in rural areas, with already limited healthcare, clandestine abortions are more likely to be carried out in dangerous or unhygienic conditions, or not at all. In images of the *marea verde* sweeping across Latin America, we tend to see the faces of young, white or *mestiza* women in cities, which obscures the ways that abortion impacts marginalised bodies.

¹³⁴ Kern, *Feminist City*, 122.

¹³⁵ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 135.

Further, in putting their bodies on the line, activists put themselves at risk of backlash from the public or the police. Different bodies are impacted in different ways by this, the risk of violence is always present, as this chapter examined with the example of Maricarmen Gutierrez who was attacked by police while carrying out a topless protest. Activists who are visibly gender-nonconforming are at risk of police violence.¹³⁶ Beyond the immediate risk of physical violence, taking part in feminist activism also entails a risk of rejection by family and friends, which can have material consequences.

In analysing feminist activism, we need to consider the differences between the bodies on the line. The politics of representation and participation are further complicated in the case of forced sterilisations, something that will be analysed in chapter 7. However, these intersectionalities are also present in the feminist movement as a whole, not just in activism for justice for the victims of sterilisations. There are risks but also privileges inherent in being able to *poner la cuerpa*.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of the embodied in relation to performances, clothing, and quotidian practices. Bodies are everywhere in contemporary feminist activism in Peru and Latin America: on the streets, as a subject of campaigns for reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, and in everyday life. The use of bodies is not unique to feminism, but this is what makes *poner la cuerpa* an important concept, because it positions gender as a key factor in

¹³⁶ El Comercio, 'La lucha de las mujeres trans en tiempos de pandemia'.

activism. Strategies to reclaim the body through activism are important where autonomy is lacking in other areas. The strategies discussed in this chapter take individual experiences and convert them into collective movements via the body. The performance analysed in this article took aborting bodies and placed them in public space, confronting the public with an uncomfortable reality.

Poner la cuerpa, as a phenomenon, evokes the body as a site of feminist protest through which activists come to embody feminist theory. As the previous chapter examined, *poner la cuerpa* is also a form of visual politics in which activists wear symbols of feminism on their bodies, both offline but also in online images. The body is a site of oppression, where patriarchal forces attempt to control women by controlling their bodies through violent suffering. *Poner la cuerpa* is a way for activists to turn lived experience into lived theory, by embodying these principles through activism. activists reclaim their bodies as a contested site of oppression to reframe the terms of the debate as centred around something that takes place within the body. Hence, by embodying theory and activism, the body becomes both the subject and object of activism. Nevertheless, this is a complicated field, one which must negotiate the complex terrain of Peruvian reality. Activists face repression from the police and the state for challenging the patriarchal order of things. Further, these actions raise questions of representation, as the next chapter will explore.



Figure 7.1 Activists write the names of victims of forced sterilisations on pieces of fabric sewn together to create a giant Peruvian flag (Photo: author's own)

On 3 August 2019 a group of activists and victims gathered in central Lima to create a giant Peruvian flag. The action was entitled '*Antimonumento de la memoria: Si no están todas, no hay justicia*' (Memory antimonument: if they are not all here, there is no justice)¹. It took place on the Paseo de los Héroes Navales outside the Palacio de Justicia, the seat of the

¹ Somos 2074 y Muchas Más, '*Antimonumento de La Memoria: Si No Están Todas, No Hay Justicia*'.

Supreme Court of Peru. This is effectively a traffic island that sits sandwiched between the heavy traffic of one of the main roads in Lima, and above the central station of the mass-transit bus system. Surrounded by cars and buses in the centre of the capital, participants came together to write the names of victims of the forced sterilisations that took place in Peru in the 1990s. The names were written on pieces of red and white cloth, which were then stitched together to create a huge flag. Given the lack of justice and even awareness of the thousands of victims of forced sterilisations that took place in Peru in the 1990s, the act of writing their names onto a giant Peruvian flag while sitting outside the Palacio de Justicia is a symbolically powerful action.

This action was organised by the campaign '*Somos 2074 y muchas más*' (We are 2074 and many more), and in the above photo we can see activists wearing the red *polleras* (traditional skirts) that have become an icon of this group. As part of my fieldwork, I took part in this action, and it was the first time I was invited to put on the *pollera*. In the Peruvian context the *pollera* is a piece of clothing associated with indigenous women in the Andean highlands², and this is also where the vast majority of forced sterilisations took place. It is used in this campaign to represent these victims, but as a white, non-Peruvian, outsider, this act made me feel strange and uncomfortable. This process made me think about the politics of representation in the case of *Somos 2074*. Exploring this case enables us to examine the politics of representation in activism in the feminist movement more widely.

To comprehend the wider context of the feminist struggle for reproductive rights and bodily autonomy in Peru, we must consider the case of forced sterilisations that took place in the

² The term *pollera* can refer to a number of different traditional skirts across Latin America, for example the long *polleras* associated with traditional dances in Panama or the Colombian Caribbean, but in this chapter I am referring only to the knee length skirt associated with indigenous women living in the Andean region.

1990s. The absence of justice in this case reflects the structural inequalities in the country that are mirrored in the lack of access to abortion and other reproductive rights. Bodily autonomy is an issue where race, class and gender intersect, and the case of Peru is a clear example of this. Feminist understandings of the body in Peru are informed by the ways that female bodies have been treated by the state. Examining the case of forced sterilisations can also help us to understand the struggle for abortion rights. This chapter will examine the politics of representation in the case of *Somos 2074* and use this as a way of understanding the role of performance in the Peruvian feminist movement more generally. Activism and performance protest seeks to represent feminist issues through the use of symbols and visual politics. However, particularly in the case of forced sterilisations these symbols are not just visual media but are embedded in histories of inequality and exclusion. This chapter starts by outlining the campaign of forced sterilisations that took place in Peru between 1996 and 2001, including the role of the feminist movement. Then, it analyses the use of different symbols in the campaign's visual politics, in order to ask what the politics of representation in *Somos 2074* tells us about the feminist movement as a whole.

7.1 Background

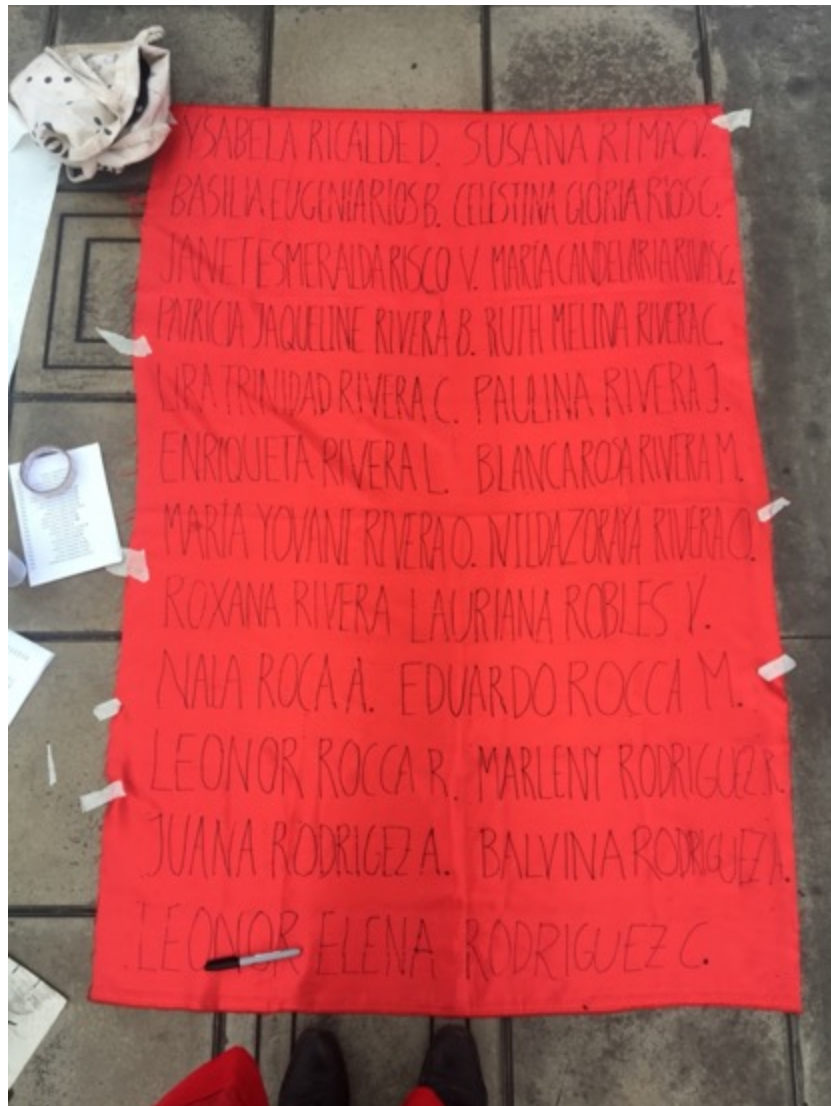


Figure 7.2 A red piece of cloth on which I wrote the names of sterilisation victims. This would then go on to form part of a giant Peruvian flag (photo: author's own)

During the *antimonumento* we were each assigned a section of names in alphabetical order from the official registry of victims (REVIESFO), which appears in the photo to the left of the fabric. As I wrote the names of victims on the cloth in black marker, I thought about the lives that each of these names represented and how they would have been irrevocably changed by sterilisation. During the 1990s, thousands of women and men were sterilised

without informed consent in Peru. It is difficult to state an exact number of people affected, as this includes those who were sterilised without fully informed consent – at a minimum 211,000 people were sterilised during the program, many of whom believed the procedure was reversible.³ Although most victims of this policy were women who underwent tubal ligation, a number of men also underwent vasectomies. Within the larger number of those who were sterilised without informed consent, at least 2091 women were forcibly sterilised through force, threat or intimidation.⁴ The vast majority of the victims of this program were indigenous Peruvians.⁵ Each individual name inscribed on the fabric represented both an individual life irrevocably changed, but also a part of the wider campaign of sterilisation. This section will examine the emergence of the sterilisations campaign and the role of the feminist movement in supporting and resisting the family planning programme.

The sterilisations took place as part of a national family planning programme implemented by the Fujimori government. There were two national family planning strategies during the 1990s: from 1992 to 1995 the *Programa Nacional de Atención a la Salud Reproductiva de la Familia* (National Programme for the Reproductive Health of the Family) and from 1996 to 2000 the *Programa Nacional de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar* (National Reproductive Health and Family Planning Programme, PNSRPF). It was during the latter programme that the campaign of forced and coercive sterilisations took place. The family planning programme offered a number of contraceptive methods, including for the first-time sterilisation either by tubal ligation for women or vasectomy for men. Sterilisation was not legal in Peru until 1995 when the National Population Law was modified to include it.⁶

³ Rendon, 'Sterilization Policy with Incomplete Information'.

⁴ Salas, 'Decreto para atender a víctimas de esterilizaciones forzadas es constitucional'.

⁵ Tamayo, 'Nada Personal: Reporte de Derechos Humanos Sobre La Aplicación de La Anticoncepción Quirúrgica En El Perú 1996-1998'.

⁶ Tamayo, 15.

However, as part of the 1992 to 1995 National Reproductive Health and Family Planning Programme there is evidence that sterilisations were carried out in cases of ‘reproductive risk’.⁷ When conducted safely and hygienically with informed consent, sterilisation is a common method of contraception in Peru and other Latin American countries. Some women actively sought out sterilisations through this programme.⁸ Of the Peruvian women who used a contraceptive method between 1995 and 1997, more than 36% used sterilisation.⁹ Nevertheless, this is not to say that it was an easy or popular choice, especially for indigenous women who saw it as their last option.¹⁰ Hundreds of thousands of sterilisations were carried out in a five-year period, and as some have argued the fact that so many sterilisations took place in such a short timeframe almost guaranteed that there would be mistakes, both in terms of consent and the procedure itself.¹¹ The programme of sterilisations, however, cannot be dismissed as merely flawed. Rather, the programme was a deliberate policy that sought to sterilise thousands of poor indigenous women without regard for their consent or health.¹²

The PNSRPF is part of a longer history of fertility control in Peru. As Necochea points out, ‘Peru [is] one of the most unjust countries in the Americas when it comes to the provision of family planning services’¹³. He argues that throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ruling elites have had different concerns about the population of Peru. Policies were enacted by governments across the political spectrum, as a top-down measure of controlling or improving the population to make it more productive and efficient. These concerns resulted

⁷ Tamayo, 16; Gianella Malca, ‘Los Médicos Peruanos y La Esterilizaciones Forzadas: La Historia Aún No Termina’.

⁸ Necochea López, ‘A History of the Medical Control of Fertility in Peru, 1895-1976’, 2.

⁹ Rendon, ‘Sterilization Policy with Incomplete Information’.

¹⁰ Stavig, ‘Feminist Assemblages’; Boesten, ‘Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?’

¹¹ Gianella Malca, ‘Los Médicos Peruanos y La Esterilizaciones Forzadas: La Historia Aún No Termina’, 89.

¹² Boesten, ‘Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?’

¹³ Necochea López, ‘A History of the Medical Control of Fertility in Peru, 1895-1976’, 4.

in the control and surveillance of women's bodies, specifically poor, indigenous and rural women.

The economic reforms of the 1990s, or the 'Fujishock' had the aim of achieving rapid economic growth, but this came at the cost of plunging hundreds of thousands of Peruvians into poverty. Many analyses of the forced sterilisations have focused on the neoliberal methods linked to the Fujimori government's plans for economic growth and population control as a means of achieving that goal. They argue that the PNSRPF was anti-natalist and put national economic growth above women's human rights.¹⁴ As was the case historically, women were deemed responsible for both the quantity and quality of reproduction and thus were the targets of policies to limit population growth.¹⁵ These policies also reflected the ways that indigenous women are seen as unable to make decisions about their own sexuality and fertility.¹⁶

The PNSRPF was not just about population control and economic growth. It was also framed using narratives about women's empowerment. Fujimori took advantage of these discourses throughout his time in power. He was the only sitting head of state to attend the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, making him appear to be a champion of women's rights on a global stage.¹⁷ As Chaparro-Buitrago argues, 'the expansion of women's rights stood as evidence of the democratic spirit of his government.'¹⁸ Yet, beneath this women-friendly sheen, thousands of indigenous women were sterilised. Fujimori's utilisation of

¹⁴ Ewig, 'La Economía Política de Las Esterilizaciones Forzadas En El Perú'.

¹⁵ Boesten, 'Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?'

¹⁶ Barrig, 'La Persistencia de La Memoria. Feminismo y Estado En Perú de Los Noventa'.

¹⁷ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*.

¹⁸ Chaparro-Buitrago, 'Masters of Their Own Destiny: Women's Rights and Forced Sterilizations in Peru', 141.

feminism made contesting these narratives particularly dangerous for feminists under Fujimori's regime.

Since 2011 there has been increasing awareness of the case, due to the return of *fujimorismo*¹⁹ as a powerful political force in Peru due to Keiko Fujimori's three (unsuccessful) presidential runs in 2011, 2016, and 2021 and her 'Popular Force' party becoming a significant influence in congress. The first iteration of *Somos 2074* emerged during protests against Keiko's first campaign in 2011. During the 'Fujimori never again' protests against her campaign, which defended her father's regime, feminists highlighted forced sterilisations as an example of the human rights violations committed during the 1990s.²⁰ In 2016, when she once again ran for president, the issue of sterilisation came to the fore.²¹ The very real possibility that the daughter of the former dictator – Alberto Fujimori is currently serving 25 years in prison for human rights violations – could become president²² created a political crisis.²³ The campaign *No a Keiko* (No to Keiko), organised by the human rights movement, organised huge protests.²⁴ *Somos 2074* was present in all of these marches, both to highlight the issue of sterilisations but also as an important reminder of the legacies of the dictatorship including human rights violations. At the same time as the crisis around the election, the case of the sterilisations was languishing in the prosecutors' office.²⁵ In response

¹⁹ *Fujimorismo* refers to the political ideology of both Alberto and now Keiko, it is characterised by its neoliberal economics and social conservatism, but also for its connections with corruption and anti-democratic practices in Peru.

²⁰ *Los movimientos contraatacan*, 'Perú'.

²¹ Eerten, 'Peru's History of Forced Sterilisation Overshadows Vote'.

²² BBC News, 'Peru Election'.

²³ Eventually Keiko Fujimori narrowly lost the 2016 election, receiving 49.88% of the total votes to Kuczynski's 50.12%. LR, 'El 100% de actas contabilizadas confirman a PPK como presidente electo'. In 2018 she was detained as part of the investigations into the Odebrecht corruption case in Peru, and was sentenced to 36 months of pre-trial detention, of which she served 13 months 'Peru's Opposition Leader Keiko Fujimori in Custody Again - BBC News'.

²⁴ No a Keiko, 'No a Keiko'.

²⁵ DEMUS, 'Estado Peruano deberá rendir cuentas a la CIDH por caso esterilización forzada'.

to this stalling, the campaign organised vigils outside the office every Tuesday.²⁶ *Somos 2074* has continued to make the case that the lack of justice for victims is directly related to *fujimorismo*. It has been a significant part of recent marches triggered by the ongoing political crisis, including the ‘*Que se vayan todos*’ (all of them must go) marches in 2019, and the 2020 marches protesting the ousting of then-president Martín Vizcarra (see p. 92).

The 2021 elections also brought the sterilisations to the fore. Feminists highlighted the case of forced sterilisations as part of campaigns against Keiko’s third presidential run against Pedro Castillo. Castillo is a schoolteacher and union leader from Cajamarca, who has framed his campaign around his poor, campesino identity. Forced sterilisations took on an even more symbolically powerful role in these elections, which have been framed as a stand-off between Limeño elites and the rural population. In the areas most affected by the internal armed conflict, and where the majority of sterilisations took place, people overwhelmingly voted for Pedro Castillo. When asked directly during her campaign, Fujimori denied that the sterilisations had taken place, instead saying that ‘it was a family planning programme’.²⁷ During these elections, the case of forced sterilisations and the campaign for justice and reparations for the victims came to reflect deep-seated political divisions in Peru.

The forced sterilisations will always be linked to the legacies of the Fujimori regime. They were not included in the remit of Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the grounds that they were not connected to the internal armed conflict, despite feminist appeals to include them.²⁸ Nevertheless, recently progress has been made towards including sterilisation victims in the category of victims of sexual violence during the conflict (see page

²⁶ Emilia Salazar, interview.

²⁷ Deutsche Welle, ‘Perú’.

²⁸ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*, 59.

262), and therefore make them eligible for reparations, is a step towards acknowledging the role of the regime.

The feminist movement played a complicated role in the case of forced sterilisations, one that has consequences affecting activists to this day. As mentioned in the previous section, Fujimori instrumentalised feminist and women's rights discourses to lend legitimacy to his regime, and specifically to the PNSRPF. He worked closely with feminist activists and advisors as part of this effort to appear progressive on a global stage.²⁹ Given the authoritarian nature of his regime, and the abuses that took place as part of the PNSRPF, feminist activists who worked with the government faced the challenge of how to denounce these violations while not losing the hard-won gains on reproductive healthcare and rights.

Fujimori tried to adopt a women-friendly stance on a global scale (see page 73). Some feminist groups saw this as an unmissable opportunity to significantly shape policy. This collaboration led to accusations that the feminist movement had been co-opted by the Fujimori government. Indeed, feminist organisations were involved in implementing the family planning strategy. It was not just the feminist movement that was co-opted by the Fujimori government, it also sought to control and manipulate the popular women's movement. As Bueno-Hansen points out, where feminists were able to exert a modicum of influence over government policy, 'Fujimori's populist engagement with women's organizations did not open channels for real participation or economic relief from extreme poverty.'³⁰

²⁹ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*.

³⁰ Bueno-Hansen, 44.

On the other hand, feminist groups were the beneficiaries of some of the international funding that the state received. The feminist NGO Movimiento Manuela Ramos, received some USAID funding given to Peru to create and carry out ‘an innovative and participatory program aimed at empowering and informing poor women’ known as ReproSalud.³¹ This program involved collaboration between ‘*promotoras*’ – facilitators trained by Manuela Ramos – and popular women’s organisations, as Boesten shows in her analysis of this program, ReproSalud was able to empower women to better manage their reproductive health.³² Despite this, feminists’ close relationship with the government through USAID funding meant that they were in a particularly difficult position when criticising forced sterilisations. They did not publicly denounce the government but were strongly opposed to changing government policy. Boesten makes the important point that the abuse of indigenous women was institutionalised before the program of forced sterilisations, therefore Manuela Ramos did not necessarily know about this specific abuse from its work with indigenous women.³³ Nevertheless, Manuela Ramos still faces a backlash for being ‘too close’ to the Fujimori administration. Although ‘Las Manuelas’ are always present in marches, and have their own feminist percussion group, there still exists a sense of icy unease towards this group. During a march to mark a year since the death of Ewyi Agreda this tension was palpable, and when I asked other feminist activists in attendance about this, I was told that the issue of their relationship with the Fujimori government had not been forgiven.

Although they did not all work as closely with the state as Manuela Ramos, feminist organisations in Peru supported the initial plans to expand reproductive healthcare and birth control. Many organisations saw this as an opportunity to make policy gains in other areas,

³¹ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 81.

³² Boesten, 103.

³³ Boesten, 100.

such as the quota law passed in 1997, this meant that they were hesitant to condemn the policy³⁴. Even when not directly working with the state, it put feminist organisations in a difficult position to negotiate which meant that there was a lack of a coordinated feminist opposition to the sterilisations at the time they were happening. Some critics even put it as ‘they didn’t do anything’.³⁵ However, this obfuscates the reality of the time. Journalist Giulia Tamayo was key in bringing public attention to the case through the report ‘Nada Personal’, published by the *Comité de América Latina y El Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujeres*.³⁶ The investigation was done with the support of feminist NGOs Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán and the Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres. Many feminist activists were directly involved in campaigning against this in the 1990s. In an interview with long-time activist Gina Chacón she recounted how after Tamayo’s report came out, a group of activists would go to the Palacio de Justicia every Thursday dressed in black, talking to passers-by to raise awareness, and demanding democracy and justice for the victims.³⁷ However, these actions have not been well recorded, as Gina put it ‘we spent six, eight years carrying out committed activism and yet it is not recorded anywhere ... many women, even in the feminist movement don’t know about it’. Gina recalled how many feminist actions in the late 1990s and early 2000s were not well recorded, or only recorded online on websites that no longer exist, meaning that many activists do not have a clear idea of what happened during this time. While looking at feminist archival material in the library at Flora Tristán, I also found that this period was not well documented. This may have contributed to the impression that the feminist movement as a whole did not produce a coordinated response.

³⁴ Bueno-Hansen, *Feminist and Human Rights Struggles in Peru*.

³⁵ Bueno-Hansen.

³⁶ Tamayo, ‘Nada Personal: Reporte de Derechos Humanos Sobre La Aplicación de La Anticoncepción Quirúrgica En El Perú 1996-1998’.

³⁷ Gina Chacón, interview.

Whereas, contemporary feminism can make use of the internet to document both online and offline forms of activism.

Another challenge the PNSRPF posed for feminists was that it expanded access to contraception, something that activists had long been campaigning for. The main opposition came from the Catholic Church. Indeed, it was only after winning the 1995 election by a landslide that Fujimori was able to override Catholic opposition and include voluntary sterilisation as a contraceptive measure.³⁸ Catholics were also behind some of the initial accusations of forced sterilisations, putting feminists in the position of trying to condemn these violations while not undermining broader demands for reproductive rights.³⁹ Stavig makes the important point that feminists were limited by a liberal framework of women's rights, which made them unable to present a coherent challenge to sterilisations without undermining their position on contraception.⁴⁰ Most feminist activists at the time were based in the capital, away from where most sterilisations were happening, and they also tended to be white and middle or upper class. Their arguments for reproductive rights used discourses that drew on their experiences as white women living in the capital. However, the role played by Manuela Ramos complicates this analysis: they trained indigenous women to work as *promotoras* as part of the ReproSalud program and these women carried out 'autodiagnósticos' – participatory community meetings in which women could discuss and 'self-diagnose' their own reproductive health issues. These meetings provided feminists in the capital essential data on indigenous women's experiences and perspectives on reproductive healthcare, including the longstanding abuses they had faced from healthcare

³⁸ Boesten, 'Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?', 6.

³⁹ Boesten, 'Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?'; Barrig, 'La Persistencia de La Memoria. Feminismo y Estado En Perú de Los Noventa'; Necochea López, 'A History of the Medical Control of Fertility in Peru, 1895-1976'; Stavig, 'Feminist Assemblages'.

⁴⁰ Stavig, 'Feminist Assemblages', 97.

workers.⁴¹ Therefore, despite being criticised for their role working with the government, Las Manueles were working more closely with poor, indigenous women – the majority of victims of sterilisations – than other feminist NGOs.

The role of the feminist movement in relation to the family planning program is, of course, more complicated than elite white women ignoring the realities of indigenous women or dictating their reproductive decisions. However, the lack of attention given to indigenous women's voices is something that is consistent between the 1990s and the present day. Until now, most victims of forced sterilisations and their families have not received justice. The sterilisations have had a long-term impact on victims and their families, not just in terms of physical and mental health effects but also interpersonal relationships, at work and throughout their whole lives.⁴²

As this chapter will examine, the complex power dynamics between the feminist movement and indigenous victims continues to shape the struggle for reproductive justice in diverse lived realities. This, of course, reflects the legacies of Peru's colonial and recent history. This case also underlines the challenges for feminist activists in negotiating their relationship with the state. Collaboration in this case carried the risk of co-optation. As this chapter will examine, the ways that contemporary feminists are fighting for justice for the victims of forced sterilisations is also affected by the relationship between the movement and the state, and the impact of history.

⁴¹ Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*, 83.

⁴² Ballón, *Memorias Del Caso Peruano de Esterilización Forzada*.

7.2 Seeking justice for victims of forced sterilisations: *Somos 2074 y Muchas Más*

Since the first reports of forced sterilisations in the 1990s, activists have sought justice for the victims of the practice, but with little success until very recently. Despite the attempts of feminists, the case was not included in Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Report (TRC) as it was not deemed to be a result of the internal armed conflict. As the previous section noted, since 2011 there has been a notable increase in feminist and human rights activism around the sterilisations, something that reached a crescendo in 2021. This shift has been tied to three successive presidential campaigns by Keiko Fujimori and her insistence on her father's innocence. During her 2016 presidential run, Keiko claimed that the accusations of forced sterilisations were a myth created to undermine fujimorismo, and that they were 'just' a family planning programme.⁴³ This section will first outline some of the different paths that activists have used to seek justice, in order to contextualise the work of *Somos 2074 y Muchas Más*.

In the 20 years since the end of the PNSRPF, thousands of victims are still awaiting justice. There are many groups representing victims of forced sterilisations; the national level group is the *Asociación de Mujeres Peruanas Afectadas por las Esterilizaciones Forzadas* (Association of Peruvian Women Affected by Forced Sterilizations, AMPAEF). There are also local victims' groups based around the country, the AMPAEF website lists associations based in Cusco, Huancabamba, Junín, Ayacucho, Cajamarca, Huancavelica, San Martín, and Lima. Feminist and human rights NGOs are also part of the struggle for justice. There is also the *Grupo de Seguimiento a las Reparaciones a Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas*

⁴³ La República, 'Keiko Fujimori llama "plan de planificación familiar" a esterilizaciones forzadas PLTC'.

(Monitoring Group for Reparations for Victims of Forced Sterilizations, GREF), which brings together victims' organisations, institutions, and professionals to campaign for justice and reparations for the victims.

As well as victims' groups and those pursuing legal avenues to justice, there are other campaigns that aim to keep the case in the public consciousness and support legal efforts. There are two online projects that collect testimonies and other evidence around the case, which both emerged after 2011. Proyecto La Madre⁴⁴ brings together the work of the blog Archivo PNSRPF⁴⁵ created by the artist and researcher Alejandra Ballón that existed from 2011 to 2014. It aims to create the most comprehensive digital archive on forced sterilisations and combine the archive with investigative journalism. This provides an essential information resource for researchers and activists. The second online project is 'Proyecto Quipu' which aims to 'to shine a light on the sterilisations, creating a collective memory archive of this case', it uses a free telephone line which allows victims to call and record their testimony.⁴⁶ These groups have all been key in keeping the legal progress of the case going, despite the attempts of defendants and their supporters to derail due process.

There have been some legal developments in the case. In 2003 an amicable settlement was reached in the case of Mamérita Mestanza, who, as a result of being forcibly sterilised, contracted an infection leading to her death in 1998. Despite further commitments that the Peruvian government agreed to, those commitments have failed to be implemented, including the investigation and sanction of those responsible, and the provision of justice to other

⁴⁴ La Madre, 'La Madre - Proyecto Que Explora Las Esterilizaciones Forzadas En El Perú.'

⁴⁵ Archivo PNSRPF, 'Archivo PNSRPF'.

⁴⁶ Quipu Project, 'The Quipu Project'.

victims.⁴⁷ In 2015 the *Registro de víctimas de esterilizaciones forzadas* (REVIESFO) was established.⁴⁸ Its aim ‘is to identify all the people who consider themselves affected by forced sterilisations and to guarantee their access to justice’.⁴⁹ As part of the work of the REVIESFO, victims can present their case at local branches of the Office of the Public Defender or at specific days organised by MINJUS in which representatives travel in order to receive testimonies. They then have to fill in a form and undergo a medical evaluation before their case can be added to the register. This gives them access to free legal assistance, health insurance and psychological care.⁵⁰ However, this top-down attempt at collective reparation and national conciliation does not sufficiently represent legal justice for victims, and activist groups have continued to push for a comprehensive judicial process.⁵¹

After years of trying to take this case to trial, the class action lawsuit brought by victims of forced sterilisations against ex-president Alberto Fujimori and ex-ministers Eduardo Yong Motta, Marino Costa Bauer and Alejandro Aguinaga was filed in April 2021⁵². Legal proceedings finally started in March 2022⁵³. The charges filed include five cases of serious injury followed by death, and a further charge of serious injury against 1,300 victim-survivors.⁵⁴ The case has faced a number of obstacles, including excuses of ill-health of the former president, and attempts to shelve the case entirely,⁵⁵ but also the failure of the Poder

⁴⁷ Corte Internacional de Derechos Humanos, ‘Perú, Caso 12.191 - María Mamerita Mestanza Chávez’; Vasquez Del Aguila, ‘Precarious Lives’.

⁴⁸ ‘Resumen Estadístico Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas - Portal Estadístico’.

⁴⁹ El Peruano, ‘Aprueban tercera etapa de implementación del Registro de Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas y modifican el Procedimiento para la inscripción en el REVIESFO producidas en el periodo 1995 - 2001-RESOLUCION MINISTERIAL-Nº 0157-2017-JUS’.

⁵⁰ ONAMIAP, ‘Todo Lo Que Debes Saber Sobre REVIESFO’.

⁵¹ ‘Mujeres Afectadas Por Esterilizaciones Forzadas Exigen a La Fiscalía Que Se Inicie Proceso Judicial – ONAMIAP’; DEMUS, ‘Demus’.

⁵² Gestión ‘Esterilizaciones Forzadas: Poder Judicial Admite Demanda de Las Víctimas Por Derecho a Reparaciones Integrales Nnde’.

⁵³ EFE, ‘Arranca el proceso penal por el caso de las esterilizaciones forzadas en Perú’.

⁵⁴ ‘Justicia Peruana Reanuda Audiencia Contra El Expresidente Alberto Fujimori Por Esterilizaciones Forzadas’.

⁵⁵ DEMUS, ‘TC rechaza archivar el caso esterilizaciones forzadas en el Poder Judicial’.

Judicial to provide translation and interpretation services for the victims, many of whom are Quechua-speaking.⁵⁶ Recently, there have been significant moves towards the possibility of reparations. In early 2021, Law No. 28592, which creates the ‘Plan Integral de Reparaciones’ (PIR) was modified so that the definition of victims includes victims of ‘sexual violence in its diverse forms’, hence including victims of forced sterilisations in the PIR⁵⁷. It remains to be seen if this trial will result in justice and reparations for the victims, especially as it takes place during a dangerous and polarised moment in Peruvian politics. There is a lack of political and judicial will to prosecute cases like these: the Manta y Vilca case of sexual violence perpetrated by the military during the Internal Armed Conflict has been ongoing in courts since 2016⁵⁸. The lack of justice in historical cases of violence targeting indigenous women is striking, and underlines the attitude of the Peruvian state towards them.

At the time that sterilisations were happening, feminists did not offer a coherent response. Since 2011, however, the sterilisation campaign has become a core issue for feminist militancy in Peru. As well as the groups previously outlined, the *Somos 2074* campaign initially emerged from independent feminist actions, before becoming a formalised campaign in 2016. The ‘2074’ in its name refers to the number of the victims in the initial case brought by the state prosecutor. The REVIESFO now lists a total of 5987 victims as of 2021,⁵⁹ hence the addition of ‘and many more’⁶⁰. The campaign is part of the GREF, but it is also part of the work of feminist NGO DEMUS. Its aim is to achieve a policy of integral reparations for

⁵⁶ DEMUS, ‘Víctimas de esterilización forzada, exigen pronta fecha para continuar audiencia contra responsables de crimen de lesa humanidad’.

⁵⁷ Ley No. 28592. ‘Ley que modifica los artículos 3 y 6 de la Ley 28592, Ley que Crea el Plan Integral de Reparaciones - PIR-LEY-Nº 31119’.

⁵⁸ Boesten, ‘Transformative Gender Justice’.

⁵⁹ Veliz, ‘Resumen Estadístico Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas’.

⁶⁰ Salas, ‘Decreto para atender a víctimas de esterilizaciones forzadas es constitucional’.

the victims of sterilisations.⁶¹ The campaign includes legal work, research and lobbying, but its most visible activity takes place through performances and interventions that aim to put the issue of the sterilisations on the public agenda and continue the campaign for justice.

The performances are a key example of feminists' use of artistic strategies to raise awareness and challenge public understandings of the forced sterilisations. It is not the first example of this: In 1999 the collective '*Aguaitones*', along with the NGO Flora Tristán carried out an intervention outside the Health Ministry which featured large paintings of scenes relating to the case, including one of a woman being sterilised with the caption '*¿what are they going to do to me? ¡carajo!*'⁶² The Archivo PNSRPF lists many examples of artistic interventions: including Claudia Coca's 2002 painting '*Ligadura*' (ligation – as in tubal ligation), or '*Mi cuerpo no es un campo de batalla*' (my body is not a battlefield) by artist and activist Natalia Iguñiz.⁶³ The artist and activist behind the Archivo, Alejandra Ballón, also created the campaign '*Alfombra Roja*' (red carpet) which aims to highlight issues of women's rights, including forced sterilisations. In the campaign, participants dressed in red lie on the ground to create a 'red carpet' of bodies. These examples all underline how *Somos 2074* is part of an ongoing use of art and performance to call for justice for the victims of forced sterilisations.

Somos 2074 became a key feminist force in 2016 during Keiko Fujimori's second presidential run. When the campaign started, it had the aim of raising awareness of the case of forced sterilisations and showing how it was intimately tied to the legacies of Fujimorismo. In an interview, Emilia from DEMUS put it simply: 'the issue of the

⁶¹ DEMUS, '*Somos 2074 y muchas más*'.

⁶² Los AGUAITONES, '*Proyecto de MUJER (Dictadura Fujimorista)*'.

⁶³ Archivo PNSRPF, '*ARTE*'.

sterilisations always comes out at the same time as Fujimorismo.’⁶⁴ One of the first versions took place during a protest organised to mark the anniversary of the *autogolpe* (self-coup) carried out by Fujimori on 5 April 1992⁶⁵. The issue of forced sterilisations is intimately tied to the legacy of and campaigns for justice linked to the Fujimori dictatorship. Since its beginnings *Somos 2074* has also been present in a number of marches linked to the legacy of the dictatorship and ongoing political crises in Peru, but they see this as intimately linked to the issue of sterilisations. In an interview with Lici Ramírez, an artist and activist who has worked with *Somos 2074* since 2016, she described the beginnings of the campaign and how she got involved. In this quote she explains how the campaign has always involved a struggle against Fujimorismo and corruption:

The idea has always been – in addition to the political struggle against what [the sterilisations] represented in the Fujimori era – to fight against the Judiciary and the corruption inside it, especially because of Fujimorista influences. You know? There was information that even Becerril⁶⁶ was using his influence in the Judiciary to cover up the truth. So, we intervened. We had to be constantly supporting the fight against corruption, because this same corruption is what prevents justice from coming to be⁶⁷

The issue of corruption cannot be separated from the fight for justice for the victims. This has been an ongoing part of the campaign: In 2019 and 2020 they took part in ‘*Que Se Vayan Todos*’ marches calling for the dissolution of congress because of widespread corruption. They were hugely visible as part of mass mobilisations provoked by the ousting of President

⁶⁴ Emilia Salazar, interview.

⁶⁵ ‘PASACALLE ¡5 DE ABRIL NUNCA MÁS!’

⁶⁶ Héctor Becerril, a Fujimorista congressman

⁶⁷ Lici Ramírez, interview.

Martín Vizcarra by congress in late 2020, and the third presidential run of Keiko Fujimori in 2021.

Somos 2074 is a key part of the wider Peruvian feminist movement. Many of the activists I met through other marches in Lima took part in actions organised by the campaign and being part of it almost felt like a rite of passage for feminist activists. Cecibel, a young activist and lawyer who works in the legal support team at Flora Tristán, described how she became involved with the campaign after hearing about the forced sterilisations during her law degree:

So, because of this I was looking up who is taking charge of these cases currently. I know that some of the women's cases have been taken by DEMUS, which is a feminist organisation. And DEMUS, what I like the most about them is that how they deal with this case is not just a legal strategy, but that they also have a group, well, a collective, *Somos 2074 y muchas más*, that is also called *Las empolleradas*, and all my life I wanted to participate in that. So, here at Flora I have a colleague called Machado, and one day she told me that she was part of *Las empolleradas*. So, I, never one to miss a trick, said I want to take part.⁶⁸

Somos 2074 is an iconic part of the feminist movement, and the case of forced sterilisation is well known by activists, making participation in the movement an important moment for activists. In our interview Cecibel also mentioned that it was the first time she took part in activism: 'you realise that it is really different from only chanting *arengas* or demanding

⁶⁸ Cecibel Jiménez Cuentas, interview.

things, or walking with your placard – which is totally valid – but activism conveys to you many more things, like how you can release your outrage in a totally different way, and that I really liked’.⁶⁹ Part of the appeal of *Somos 2074* to younger activists is clearly its use of activist strategies as a way of unleashing anger and frustration.

One of the last actions I took part in during fieldwork was a march that *Somos 2074* was present at, and it was an emotionally charged moment for me to march alongside activists who had become friends over the time I spent in Peru. They are one of the most high-profile interventions that Peruvian feminists carry out. The sterilisations are also an issue specific to Peru, making it more urgent and closer to home than other feminist issues that have a transnational focus, such as abortion. Unlike the *marea verde*, activism in the case of forced sterilisations integrates an analysis of racialised reproductive violence. The sterilisations show that many of the deep structural inequalities that run through Peruvian society are feminist issues. Activists also tie the issue of sterilisations to other feminist struggles, for example literally tying pañuelos verdes around their necks while taking part in *Somos 2074* actions.

The campaign is also organised in collaboration with AVEFLC (Asociación de Víctimas de las Esterilizaciones Forzadas de Lima y Callao) the victims’ association representing those who were sterilised in the capital. However, the vast majority of victims are not based in Lima, but rather in the rural highlands and Amazon region. The concentration of feminist activism in Lima is a well-known difficulty in Peru (see Chapter 4), something that has shifted in recent years with many new collectives being set up outside of the capital in cities

⁶⁹ Cecibel Jiménez Cuentas.

like Huancayo, Cusco, and Arequipa. Yet, most feminist activists are still young, urban, mestizo or white, and have the free time to take part in activism. Further, the implications of this centralism are starker in the case of activism around forced sterilisations, as it raises questions of who should be representing this issue. Although victims do take part in the actions, in many of the iconic images of the protests those pictured at the forefront are activists, rather than sterilisations victims. There cannot be comprehensive reproductive rights in Peru with justice for violations of those rights, and a recognition of the structures and inequalities that led to those harms, and there is a tension between the victims and representations of those victims. That is to ask which bodies are victimised and which bodies perform activism? This is not as straightforward as a simple division between activists and victims. Examining the actions carried out by *Somos 2074* is a way to explore the role of activism in the feminist movement, but also the questions of representation that it implies.

7.3 The symbolism of *Somos 2074 y muchas más*



Figure 7.3 Activists dressed in red *polleras* hold a giant flag while getting ready for a march

(Photo: author's own)

During preparations for an action carried out by *Somos 2074* I took this photo of participants carrying the giant Peruvian flag constructed during the *antimonumento* rolled up on their shoulders. The women pictured are a mixture of feminist activists and AVELFC members. The second woman from the right, holding a jacket, is from the AVEFLC, and the girl facing the camera is a younger feminist activist. The photo reflects the collaboration between young activists, NGOs and victims that this campaign entails. We were getting ready to take part in a march that was part of the '*Que se vayan todos*' protests that took place across Peru in throughout 2019 and 2020. The protests were calling for the dissolution of a deeply corrupt and unpopular Congress that was attempting to delay then President Vizcarra's proposal to move forward congressional elections after a protracted stand-off over reforms including

legislation on campaign financing.⁷⁰ The aim of *Somos 2074*'s presence in the march was both to support the general aim of the march, but also to keep the issue of sterilisations in the national consciousness and to demonstrate how it is linked to the current crisis.

We were rehearsing how to carry this huge flag in a way that would allow us to quickly unroll it after we entered the main square where the march was to start, making sure that the campaign could take up space physically and metaphorically in a wider movement. *Somos 2074* has long been present in national marches against corruption, and for human rights and democracy. Symbolically, this action attempted to highlight poor indigenous women as victims of sterilisations but make clear the link between those violations and the wider issues affecting Peruvian society including systemic corruption, an ineffective congress and gender violence. *Somos 2074*'s performances take on a number of different formats. This means they can be linked to current events, or symbolic dates. This section will examine the use of different symbols as a way of discussing the politics of representation at play in these actions. The first part discusses the representation of indigenous femininity through *polleras* and plaits. The second part will look at the juxtaposition of two symbols: the flag and the uterus and how these position sterilisation victims in relation to national identity.

7.3.1 *Polleras* and plaits: representing indigenous women

As mentioned, the majority of victims of forced sterilisations were poor, indigenous women living in rural areas in the Amazon or highlands. This has an impact on the character of activism calling for justice for these victims, as this movement mobilises the category of

⁷⁰ Tegel, 'Peru's President Wants Voters to Clean House. Will His Gamble Pay Off?'

indigenous women in different ways. *Somos 2074* uses dress as a way of representing indigenous women through the use of red *polleras* (traditional skirts) and plaited hair. However, this raises questions about the politics of representation and indigeneity in relation to *Somos 2074*'s actions.

In Peru, the question of who is – or is perceived as – indigenous is a complicated and shifting one. Unlike in Bolivia and Ecuador, countries with similar geographic and ethnic makeup, Peru does not include ethnicity in its census, although it does record maternal language. Similarly, the REVIESFO does not ask victims' ethnic identity, but instead notes location and maternal language. Language and location are particularly important markers of ethnicity in Peru. This is highlighted by the fact that many victims of sterilisation were not given information about the procedure in their maternal languages, but only in Spanish, meaning they could not fully understand, and therefore could not consent to sterilisation.

Since the mid-twentieth century the state has focused more on the category of *campesino* (peasant) rather than Indian, and Peruvians living in rural areas are more likely to refer to themselves as *campesinos* than *indígenas*.⁷¹ Further, while many Peruvians identify as mestizo rather than indigenous, they may be perceived as indigenous by others through language, dress or other cultural traits.⁷² The category of indigeneity therefore requires an intersectional analysis: gender, migration, language, location and other factors have an impact on who counts as indigenous. Radcliffe and Westwood contend that in Latin America 'race is regionalized and regions racialized.'⁷³ We can see this in the case of forced

⁷¹ Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*; Babb, *Women's Place in the Andes: Engaging Decolonial Feminist Anthropology*.

⁷² Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*.

⁷³ Radcliffe and Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America*.

sterilisations, where the majority took place in poor, rural regions of the country. Yet, as de la Cadena argues, the flexibility of mestizo and Indian identities is not as accessible to women: ‘within the regional and local confines of modern patriarchy, modernization has reinforced the Indianization of women’⁷⁴. So, although through work, migration, dress, and so on, nevertheless some indigenous people can become ‘culturally mestizo,’⁷⁵ as poor, rural women, the sterilisation programme therefore reinforced the marginalisation of their position as indigenous.

However, it is also important to consider what their position symbolises, and what this means in relation to *Somos 2074*. Indigenous women occupy a dual position in the national imaginary. As Babb argues, they are ‘the quintessential subjects of both national pride and everyday scorn and neglect in Peru.’⁷⁶ They are used as symbol of authenticity in Peru’s tourism industry appearing in marketing materials calling tourists to discover the ‘real’ Peru. Nevertheless, even when used as a symbol of authentic Peruvianess, indigenous women are not afforded the opportunity to speak for themselves. Under the PNSRPF, they were deprived of their rights and autonomy by a programme that characterised them as incompetent. Even when trying to access reproductive healthcare, they had to submit to the program’s ideas about their needs, rather than accessing it on their own terms. Indigenous women are therefore often categorised as voiceless in the political sphere, even when this is not true.

Somos 2074’s campaigning is complicated by this dynamic and the question of how – or whether – indigenous women get to speak for themselves. They are not part the national victims’ rights group AMPAEF, but rather a group that campaigns for justice on behalf of

⁷⁴ Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*, 343.

⁷⁵ Cadena, 343.

⁷⁶ Babb, *Women’s Place in the Andes: Engaging Decolonial Feminist Anthropology*, 21.

and alongside victims. The concept of ventriloquism is useful here. In Andrés Guerrero's work on nineteenth century Ecuador, he argues that the liberal discourse of the state creates a type of 'ventriloquism' in which indigenous people get to 'speak', but the discourses they use are handed down to them from liberal elites.⁷⁷ Peruvian feminist Maruja Barrig builds on this to argue that in the case of the PNSRPF, the program's 'liberal discourse' while claiming to be giving autonomy to indigenous women, actually constructed them as objects of manipulation, without free will or the capacity to express themselves.⁷⁸ This evokes Spivak's question 'can the subaltern speak?': who is really speaking through these performances, and who gets to decide on the logic and discourse used.⁷⁹

While it is organised in collaboration with victims groups and includes actions beyond the performances seen in the media, the rhetoric of the campaign is an explicitly feminist one. The campaign is financially supported by the feminist NGO DEMUS, and it has goals that go beyond justice for victims of sterilisations, including campaigning against the election of Keiko Fujimori, or an end to corruption. This is not to say that all victims disagree with the rhetoric of *Somos 2074*. They are not a monolithic group and many work closely with the campaign. The title of the campaign also provokes questions of representation: who are the 'we' in 'we are 2074 and many more'. As a way of examining these questions of representation, this section will discuss the use of two symbols of indigenous femininity as part of the performance: *polleras* and plaits. In the photo that appears at the start of this section (figure 7.3) the performers are all wearing white t-shirts, victims from the Lima group wear ones with 'AVEFLC' on them, and others have '*Somos 2074*' written across their chests. They also wear red *polleras*, and many have their hair in two plaits. These elements of

⁷⁷ Guerrero, 'The Construction of a Ventriloquist's Image'.

⁷⁸ Barrig, 'La Persistencia de La Memoria. Feminismo y Estado En Perú de Los Noventa', 234.

⁷⁹ Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

the performance have symbolic significance, but their meaning is shaped by who is wearing these symbols. These function as symbols of indigenous femininity, but also raise issues of representation.

When considering the issue of representation in the case of *Somos 2074* it is important to examine the processes through which the performances were conceived. They have evolved and changed since the campaign started. In the initial versions of the performance, which were more spontaneous and ‘DIY’, participants attached a paper cut-out with the printed image of a uterus to their bodies and wore their own clothes rather than the official t-shirts and *polleras* the campaign is now known for.⁸⁰ Initially participants wore knee-length skirts, but not *polleras*, as a way of representing the clothes most associated with indigenous women in the popular imaginary. The first iterations of the performance were organised spontaneously and so participants simply wore what was available to them. When talking about the emergence of the symbolism of the campaign, Lici described it as a ‘collective imaginary’ that emerged through spontaneous collaboration between activists:

What happened to me is that I met the other *compañeras* naturally because we were all marching together [in the 2016 No a Keiko protests]. It was a collective imaginary, the symbol of the pollera and the bleeding uterus ... From 2016 the potentialities of this action multiplied, in the marches that took place on the 5th of April 2016, we were 40 or 50 *empolleradas*, it was enormous! We still didn’t have a uniformity in the clothes, in the polleras. But from then on, I started meeting up [with the organisers of *Somos 2074*]⁸¹

⁸⁰ losmovimientoscontraatacan, ‘Perú’.

⁸¹ Lici Ramírez, interview.

However, the spontaneous nature of this ‘collective imaginary’ initially did not include victims or their representatives. After the organisers did speak to victims, the performance was changed. Speaking to Emilia Salazar from DEMUS, she recalled how ‘many *compañeras* told us ‘they’re not just skirts, they are *polleras*’. So, we decided to incorporate the symbol of the *pollera*, because it is much more than just a skirt.’⁸² Moving from skirts to *polleras* was a way of incorporating indigenous perspectives into the performance. However, the fact that it was done retrospectively and decided by the organisers in Lima reflects the unequal power dynamics at play. Despite the use of ‘*compañeras*’ to describe them – a common way that feminists refer to each other – they were not the ones to make the decision to change the performance.

Since then, the *polleras* have become such an integral part of the performance that the group is sometimes referred to as ‘*Las empolleradas*’. Some activists use the verb ‘*empollerarte*’⁸³ to refer to taking part in the action. This phrase evokes the verb ‘*empoderarte*’ – to empower oneself – suggesting that there is meant to be an element of self-empowerment in the action. The first time a friend asked me if I was going to put it on a *pollera* – ‘¿vas a empollerarte?’ – I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable with this idea, as a white, non-Peruvian woman, that I would put on this symbol of indigenous femininity. At this moment I was with a friend and fellow researcher from Chile, who was working on a project on theatre and memory, and as outsiders – of different kinds – we both felt the same tension. But the encouragement of others, and in order to support and participate in the action, we did put them on. Later, we

⁸² Emilia Salazar, interview.

⁸³ It would roughly translate as to put on a *pollera*, it is a reflexive verb meaning that it is an action done to oneself.

both discussed how strange it felt to wear them, and the symbolic implications of white outsiders putting on *polleras*.

Weismantel's exploration of the contexts in which indigenous women wear (or do not wear) *polleras* offers an important perspective on the meaning of putting on these skirts. She highlights how indigenous women differentiate between dressing '*de vestido*', as in conventional western dress, and '*de pollera*'⁸⁴. When they put on the *pollera* it becomes part of a performance, either metaphorically – in the case she cites of a girl whose employers wanted an 'Indian servant' – or literally, in the case of a woman who started wearing one after she joined a dance troupe who wore them⁸⁵. For women in the sierra, wearing a *pollera* is a choice that can result in harassment and discrimination, de la Cadena gives the example of the attempt made to ban *polleras* and plaits by the municipal authorities in Cusco on the basis of supposed contamination risks⁸⁶. On the other hand, within the modern tourist industry in Peru, some indigenous women have used indigenous dress as a way to make money from tourists who want to see 'authentic' indigenous women⁸⁷. Nevertheless, while the *pollera* can be taken off at the end of the day, the structures and historical inequalities that led to indigenous women being the majority of victims of forced sterilisations cannot.

Although the red *pollera* is the most iconic symbol of the campaign, some versions have used different colours and symbols to reflect current events. For example, Emilia described how 'in the 25 November march, which that year had the theme of 'we are all fighting against the deaths of women', that year we were all in black, the skirts, the t-shirts, with black flowers.

⁸⁴ Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos*, 113.

⁸⁵ Weismantel, 114.

⁸⁶ de la Cadena, 'The Political Tensions of Representations and Misrepresentations', 121.

⁸⁷ Babb, 'Theorizing Gender, Race, and Cultural Tourism in Latin America'; Ypeij, 'The Intersection of Gender and Ethnic Identities in the Cuzco-Machu Picchu Tourism Industry'.

We also used the element of music, so we contracted a band to support us with a funeral march. We were trying to represent the dead women, we wanted to be 18 [performers] because in the official registry there are 18 dead women. We always try to use elements and change a bit to make it attract more participants.’⁸⁸ Recently, a version of the performance used different, longer red skirts inspired by the traditional Peruvian ‘*marinera norteña*’ dance. In this way the pollera becomes a flexible symbol that can be shaped to reflect different issues. As this chapter later explores, for those involved in the campaign see the case of sterilisations as directly linked to other forms gender violence, hence the expansion of the pollera as symbol. However, there is a tension between the indigenous women the pollera was initially chosen to represent and expanding that symbol to become a category representing all women.

In addition to the *pollera*, two plaits are the other part of the performance that signify indigenous femininity. Wearing long hair in one or two plaits is a practice associated with indigenous peoples across the Americas, and its meaning varies from culture to culture⁸⁹. Although it is not exclusively practiced by indigenous women, in Peru long hair worn in plaits is most closely associated with women. Indigenous women may wear their hair braided or style it in a more western style depending on where they live and work.⁹⁰ The tangible process of plaiting our hair before the performance became an important moment of bonding between participants. Before taking part in a march in early September 2019, I helped putting other participants hair into plaits, having spent a lot of time as a bored teenager learning to plait my own hair. This was a moment of intimacy with other activists, including leaders of victims’ groups and NGOs, as we chatted and touched each other’s hair. Yet, it provoked an

⁸⁸ Emilia Salazar, interview.

⁸⁹ ‘¿Por Qué Las Mujeres Indígenas Usan El Cabello Largo?’

⁹⁰ Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos*, 104.

uncomfortable feeling that we were attempting to make ourselves appear indigenous for the performance through our plaits and *polleras*.

Worn together *polleras* and plaits are often cited as a visual signifier of indigenous femininity: in film⁹¹, advertisements for tourism⁹² or in activism⁹³ and book covers⁹⁴. While they invoke the representation of indigenous women, it is not always in a positive way. Critics have pointed out that in much of Peruvian cinema indigenous women have been portrayed by white actresses who ‘put on *polleras* and plaits.’⁹⁵ Further, the controversial but popular character of ‘*La paisana Jacinta*’, created and performed by Jorge Benavides, is a racist depiction in which Benavides, a mestizo man, dresses up as an indigenous woman, by darkening his skin with make-up, and wearing a *pollera* and a plaited wig. The character was eventually banned from the media by a court in Cusco, after a lengthy legal battle brought by indigenous women, for threatening the identity of and generating false images of Andean women⁹⁶. These are various examples of what has been termed ‘brownface’ or the use of makeup ‘to darken one’s face and other exposed skin to imitate the skin tone of an ethnic or racial group’⁹⁷. As Weismantel observes, ‘when white women dress up as ‘cholitas’ in civic parades, the pinning on of false braids is an essential part of the costume – and the subject of much laughter and silliness.’⁹⁸ In the case of *Somos 2074* there is no use of dark make up, no one claims to be playing the role of an indigenous woman, and certainly the process of getting ready was not cause for laughter. Nevertheless, it raises the question of what it means

⁹¹ Delgado, ‘Trenzas y polleras en el cine peruano’.

⁹² Ypeij, ‘The Intersection of Gender and Ethnic Identities in the Cuzco-Machu Picchu Tourism Industry’.

⁹³ Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos*, 106.

⁹⁴ Ewig, *Second-Wave Neoliberalism*; Boesten, *Intersecting Inequalities : Women and Social Policy in Peru, 1990-2000*; Babb, *Women’s Place in the Andes: Engaging Decolonial Feminist Anthropology*.

⁹⁵ Delgado, ‘Trenzas y polleras en el cine peruano’.

⁹⁶ Mamani, ‘Cusco’.

⁹⁷ ‘Definition of Brownface | Dictionary.Com’.

⁹⁸ Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos*, 104.

for a group of mostly mestiza women from Lima to put on *polleras* and plaits and attempt to represent indigenous women, and who gets to decide on the character of these interventions.

There is a tension between those taking part and those being represented that I felt through the experience of taking part in these actions. While it is the case that some victims and a victims' group was present in these actions, it was the victims' group of Lima and Callao (AVEFLC), which represents a small portion of the total number. Of the victims registered in the REVIESFO up to March 2021, only 90 are from Lima, compared with 1643 registered in Cusco. The majority of sterilised women live in the sierra or the Amazon. Further, the participants in the march reflect feminist activists more generally: younger, mestiza or white, urban, middle-class. Given that the campaign is funded and supported by the NGO DEMUS, whose offices are in the capital, it is understandable that *Somos 2074*'s actions and campaigning would mostly take place in Lima. Nevertheless, this is not where most victims live, or place that they might easily travel to in order to take place part in such actions.

The question of representation and who is speaking for whom is key, but the answer(s) reveals its complexity. *Somos 2074* is an important feminist campaign that highlights the grave injustices faced by thousands of women and men across the country, the majority of whom were indigenous women. By seeking to represent these women through performance, it provokes questions of who is speaking for whom, and whether this perpetuates dynamics of exclusion. As this section mentioned, location and language are key signifiers of indigeneity in Peru, yet the majority of performances by *Somos 2074* take place in Lima and in Spanish, away from the rural areas where Quechua-speaking women were sterilised. However, this is also where the audience that the campaign is targeting are; one of its key aims is to keep the case in the media, which is also Lima-based and Spanish-speaking.

This dynamic does not only affect *Somos 2074*, but the way that forced sterilisations have been represented more broadly. If we look at the representation of sterilisations in international media, the victims who have a platform are generally not the most vulnerable. A number of articles feature interviews with Victoria Vigo, an important activist for sterilisation victims and the only living victim to receive any form of compensation. Yet – as she acknowledges – she was not a typical victim: ‘she is middle class, educated and speaks Spanish’ which made her more likely to succeed in her case⁹⁹. This tension did not come up in conversations with activists before, during or after these actions, although it did come up when I interviewed organisers¹⁰⁰.

The issue of representation is affected by histories of race and migration in Peru, it is not as straightforward as simply speaking over or on behalf of indigenous women. Many mestiza activists I spoke to did mention their indigenous roots as an important motivational factor for caring about this issue. Lima, through Peru’s long and complicated history of internal migration, is a diverse city and many of the young activists who live there have indigenous parents and grandparents. During marches that *Somos 2074* took part in, we would repeat the chant ‘we are the daughters of the [indigenous/campesina/Amazonian] women that you could not sterilise.’¹⁰¹ This chant builds on a different feminist chant popular across Latin America: we are the daughters of the witches that you could not burn. Each repetition of the chant would feature a different category of women affected: indigenous, campesina, Amazonian. They cite their connections to their ancestry as part of their motivation for taking part. In shouting these chants, they are highlighting their own ancestry and the legacies of internal

⁹⁹ BBC News, “‘I Was Sterilised against My Will’”.

¹⁰⁰ Emilia Salazar, interview.

¹⁰¹ *Somos las hijas de las indígenas, campesinas, amazónicas que no pudiste esterilizar*

migration rather than a direct genetic link. Although victims and their relatives do participate, most activists who have joined through feminist activism are not daughters of victims. Nevertheless, when they invoke their own heritage as a reason to participate, this chant reflects that motivation for taking part.

Somos 2074 reflects the dynamics that affect the feminist movement more broadly in Peru. The challenge for feminists is how to fight for justice for rural, indigenous women without speaking *for* victims. The use of *polleras* and plaits makes indigenous women a symbol, rather than the protagonists of a movement that is about them. Yet, *Somos 2074* is also about what the sterilisations represent, and how they are reflective of wider structures in Peruvian society. Participating in the actions is not necessarily about a direct link to the sterilisations. Speaking to Lici Ramírez, an artist whose indigenous parents migrated to the capital, she reflected on how activists relate to *Somos 2074*:

The interesting thing about *las empolleradas* is that it also created a strong sense of empathy with *las compañeras* [the victims] because [the sterilisations] are an act of violence, and that's why we say we are the daughters of the women that you couldn't sterilise, because we are daughters of that same violence. We are the generations that came after the women and men, and the LGBT+ community, that lived through so much violence in that period. We are also daughters of machista generations. The forced sterilisations are a type of abuse, a human rights violation that each one of us can identify with through other types of violence, that have happened to them, or their mothers, sisters, or someone close to them.

She draws a direct link between the violence of the sterilisations to other systemic types of violence as a reason for participating. This mirrors the idea of a continuum of gender-based violence that Boesten develops in relation to gender violence during the Internal Armed Conflict: ‘the experience of gender-based violence, then, runs along a continuum from cat-calling to emotional, physical, and sexual violence in homes, communities, and workplaces, and to rape and femicide in war and peace-time.’¹⁰² *Somos 2074* makes clear the link between the racist and patriarchal structures that lead to the sterilisations and the violence that women face in their daily lives.

The use of polleras and plaits highlights the tensions between representing victims and representing wider structures. In this way the visual politics of the campaign convert indigenous women into a symbol of gender and racialised violence. This reveals some of the difficulties of using activism to represent complex issues. As the next section examines, the campaign has evolved over time as it has negotiated these tensions.

¹⁰² Boesten, ‘Peace for Whom?’, 163.

7.3.2 Blood, uteruses, flags: forced sterilisations and nationhood



Figure 7.4 Activists and victims stand outside the Palacio de Justicia, with a giant flag laid out in front of them (Photo: author's own)

In the final part of the *antimonumento*, after the flag had been constructed out of the individual pieces of fabric, we lay it out on the pavement outside the Palacio de Justicia in order to take official photos recording the action. In the centre, above the white part of the flag, stand members of the Lima victims' organisation. They are surrounded by younger feminist activists wearing red *polleras* with fabric uteruses pinned to them, standing above the red parts of the flag. The women in the centre hold up signs reading 'there is only one truth' and 'the forced sterilisations are not myths nor errors; they are crimes against humanity'.

This image contains two key symbols used in the performance: white and red, the colours of the Peruvian flag, and uteruses pinned to the participants' bodies. Both symbols evoke the places where sterilisations are situated, geographically and within the body. This representation symbolically ties together the nation and the violation of indigenous bodies. Given that the campaign also focuses on how the case of forced sterilisations is linked to ongoing crises in Peruvian politics, through the use of these symbols it highlights how the same structures and inequalities that lead to the sterilisations also shape the political crisis. By examining the use of the uterus and the flag as symbols, this section analyses how *Somos 2074* links the case of forced sterilisation and its victims who were almost all indigenous women, to ideas of national identity and what it means to be Peruvian.

The uterus is a central symbol in *Somos 2074* as the majority of victims of forced sterilisation were women. The uterus evokes the site of reproduction, and how the victims' reproductive autonomy was taken away from them. For feminists, as a question of reproductive justice, the sterilisations are directly linked to other issues like abortion and access to contraception. However, the uterus as symbol has been a contentious part of the performance, reflecting generational tensions between victims and younger activists, and the role of male victims.

The centrality of the uterus puts the focus on the women who make up the majority of sterilisation victims. There are a small minority of male victims, and their role in the campaign is complicated. Out of the 5967 sterilisations registered in the REVIESFO, only 90 are vasectomies. There may be factors preventing men from coming forward to register their case, such as shame and ideas about masculine virility. Given that over 200,000 people were sterilised without informed consent during the PNSRPF, there may be many more male

victims who have remained silent¹⁰³. Nevertheless, they make up a small minority of the total of officially registered victims.

The participation of men in actions by *Somos 2074* is a difficult one, considering it aims to represent all victims. I noticed during the process of writing out the names of victims in black marker on the pieces of fabric destined to make up the giant Peruvian flag that there were several men's names on the list. At the march that took place on the 5th of September 2019, only '*mujeres y disidencias*' were invited to take part, so men were not allowed to hold the flag¹⁰⁴. During this march a male protestor, not a victim but someone who was taking part in the wider march, came up to the group and tried to join in with the holding of the flag but was quickly told that he was not allowed to take part in the action. He had mistaken our flag with the giant flag of the human rights movement, and apparently simply wanted to help, but was not aware of the significance of the march. I asked Emilia, coordinator of *Somos 2074*, about this, and she said it was down to three factors: the safety of the women, many of whom are also victims of gender violence, the need to maintain space for women victims – 'sometimes what happens is that [men] take over the space and they talk and talk and talk', and finally, the fact that male victims don't actually turn up to participate.¹⁰⁵ Although the protest has faced criticism for not including men, so far none of the male victims on the register has wanted to take part.

Feminists have long noted how policies around reproduction have been about controlling women's bodies. Earlier in the twentieth century, many Latin American countries sought to

¹⁰³ Rendon, 'Sterilization Policy with Incomplete Information'.

¹⁰⁴ Emilia Salazar, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Emilia Salazar.

increase their populations through pro-natalist policies banning abortion and contraception.¹⁰⁶ These policies were not applied universally; they sought to increase ‘desirable’ reproduction, that is to say in the whiter parts of the population. Indigenous populations were targeted with anti-natalist policies, indigenous women in particular were characterised as having too many children. Both pro- and anti-natalist policies were framed in economic terms, with indigenous reproduction being a drain on resources, but whiter children a resource for economic growth. Gago’s concept of ‘expanded extractivism’ is useful here for understanding how women’s bodies are seen as fuelling the economy through their reproductive labour.¹⁰⁷ The inverse of this applies to the case of sterilisations, in which indigenous women’s ‘excessive’ reproduction was seen by the state as a drain on the economy and contributing to poverty, and therefore something that needed to be corrected via sterilisation.¹⁰⁸

As this chapter has described, the initial versions of the performance were carried out spontaneously by a smaller group of feminist activists. In initial versions participants attached a paper cut-out with the printed image of a uterus to their bodies. However, the spontaneous process of creation meant that victim’s perspectives were not initially included. In these early performances participants held up their skirts to reveal red paint daubed down their thighs to represent blood and the violence of the procedures that some women underwent. However, this evolved in response to criticisms and feedback from victims’ groups. The use of the blood in particular was controversial as victims felt it did not accurately represent their experiences and rendered them a spectacle. Women who were sterilised underwent tubal ligations, a surgical procedure in which the fallopian tubes are permanently blocked. In many cases this procedure was violent, hence the use of blood in early versions of the performance.

¹⁰⁶ Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 102.

¹⁰⁷ Gago, *Feminist International*, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Boesten, ‘Free Choice or Poverty Alleviation?’

Subsequently the blood was removed from the performance. Talking to Diana, an activist from Cusco, she recalled how the victims there felt about the use of blood by activists:

In the case of Cusco, the *compañeras* who were victims of the violence of the forced sterilisations asked us not to put red on our legs because it was very, very painful for them to remember this experience. For them it was very intense, and they also asked us not to put on the uteruses, because before we would go out with the uteruses and with the stained legs and all that.

I imagine that probably for some victims it would be intense and difficult to see it converted into a symbol?

Yes, for them it was intense. Some of the victims said we won't march if the girls dress like that. So now when we march there are no longer the uteruses and the blood and all that¹⁰⁹

She refers to victims as '*compañeras*' and activists as 'girls' (*chicas*), showing a generational divide between younger activists and victims, who have different approaches to the fight for justice. The fact that blood was removed from the performance after victims' feedback reflects some of the tensions between performance and representation. The impulse of activism to create a spectacle that is visually impactful was at odds with how victims wanted to represent themselves. That victims' voices were listened to is significant, as they should be at the heart of this movement, but they were consulted after the performances had started,

¹⁰⁹ Diana Rivas Gutiérrez, interview.

rather than being included in the process. This is in part because initial performances were spontaneous, in the current versions, participants take part in workshops and hear from victims or their representatives as part of the training. The actions have evolved to be more inclusive after processes of reflection. Nevertheless, there still exists a tension between victims' self-perception and the artistic and activist desire to shock.

Although Diana mentioned removing the uterus from actions in Cusco, this has not been the case in Lima. In the last two years, *Somos 2074* has added a pañuelo printed with an image of a uterus and the name of the campaign. On a practical level, these are more durable than paper, but they also echo the pañuelo verde of the campaign for legal abortion, which also draws on the symbolism of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (see Chapter 5). This explicitly places *Somos 2074*'s actions within a transnational feminist ecosystem around reproductive justice. For feminist activists, the connections between the sterilisations and lack of access to safe abortions is clear. Cristina, a young activist from Lima, reflected on how the sterilisations reflect the relationship between women's bodies and the State:

It is interesting how we can connect with each other in other ways. What we are trying to do is transmit what these women felt in that moment. The impotence and pain that comes from the State deciding about women's bodies in general. So, at times it is a bit draining. We have also had conversations with the survivors themselves from various places, sometimes they even come from rural areas, and they tell us about their experiences. It is like a violation of the body by the State¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Cristina Medrano, interview.

Similarly to other activists, Cristina draws a line between the sterilisations and other violations, but in this case, she is specifically talking about State control of women's bodies, and the lack of bodily autonomy. This links directly to the campaign for legal abortion, and the right to decide over one's own reproduction. Catholic and conservative groups have used the sterilisations as a way of arguing against wider access to reproductive healthcare.

Therefore, it is essential that feminists make clear the link between sterilisations and reproductive rights more widely. Many victims and the AMPAEF frame their demands for justice around family and motherhood, that their ability to have children was taken away. This is not at odds with campaigns for legal abortion, which heavily feature the phrase 'la maternidad será deseada o no será' (maternity will be desired, or it will not be at all). But given the tensions between activists and victims over the use of the uterus as symbol, this connection is not necessarily explicit to all.

The uterus is a contentious symbol that reveals the tension between victim's experiences of sterilisation, and how this fits into wider feminist understandings of reproductive injustice.

As part of the feminist movement *Somos 2074*'s aim is to seek to address the structures that lead to the sterilisations, which include a broader perspective on reproductive autonomy.

However, for victims the experience of sterilisation is a deeply personal one, with immediate and painful repercussions that have still not been addressed.

The other symbol that *Somos 2074* includes in its visual language in the Peruvian flag. The performance features the colours white and red. Red suggests blood, literally as in the early versions of the performance, and figuratively in the later versions, white often implies innocence or purity. Colours have strong symbolic meanings depending on their context and are used by activists to communicate a strong visual message. However, as figure 7.4 makes

clear, the main purpose of the combination of white shirts and red *polleras* is to evoke the colours of the Peruvian national flag. The flag flying above the Palacio de Justicia makes this connection even more literal. The flag made during the *antimonumento* is a recent addition to the repertoire of *Somos 2074*. The *antimonumento* was initially planned for the day before Peru's Independence Day holiday (*Fiestas Patrias*)¹¹¹. This day is significant as not only does it celebrate the nation's independence, but also it is a time when the flag is highly visible: it is mandated by law that all buildings display the national flag from the 27th to 30th July.¹¹² The creation of this flag aimed to tie together the issue of sterilisations and questions of patriotism and national identity, thus underlining the indifference of the State on a day of national importance. As a tangible record of victims' names, it inscribes them into a symbol of the nation while also highlighting how these victims have been abandoned by the state: both through the sterilisations themselves, and the subsequent lack of justice.

This action builds on a history of uses of the flag by activists and artists in Peru. It has been reimagined by artists as a way of exploring their relationship to the nation. For example, Japanese-Peruvian artist Eduardo Tokeshi created several versions of the flag in his 2001 series '*Banderas*' (flags). He frames this as a way of reconciling his own Japanese-Peruvian identity after the fall of Alberto Fujimori and the subsequent backlash against the Japanese community. In an interview he described this difficult relationship as 'country, you weigh me down, you disgust me so much, but I don't have any other home.'¹¹³ This and other pieces using the flag use its symbolism as a way to explore who belongs and who counts as part of the nation.

¹¹¹ The event was initially scheduled for the 27th of July, however, in 2019 Lima was the host of the Panamerican games, and on the 27th of July several streets across Lima were closed for the marathon, making travelling to the centre almost impossible, so the event was postponed to the 3rd of August.

¹¹² Ley No. 15253.

¹¹³ Gómez-Barris, 'Against the Grain: Cultural Politics After Peru's Troubled Times'.

The flag was also used by pro-democracy campaigns against the Fujimori regime in the 1990s. '*Lava la bandera*' (wash the flag) was a public intervention that used the symbolism of the flag to challenge the state.¹¹⁴ Members of the public were invited to bring a flag and wash it in public squares across the country, and the action was also carried out by communities in the diaspora. Through washing the flag collectively, citizens participated in reclaiming their country from the hands of corruption. The flag created by *Somos 2074* echoes the participatory nature of *Lava la bandera*, as its construction was (and is) a collective process: writing the names, sewing the pieces of fabric together, and in recent iterations embroidering the names with red thread. Both actions focus on reappropriating a symbol of the nation through a collective action. Not only that, but they also do this through activities that are perceived as stereotypically feminine: washing and sewing. Sewing has been used by feminist and human rights activists across Latin America, most notably the *arpilleras* created by activists in Chile during Pinochet's regime.¹¹⁵ These feminine actions to renew and repair the flag are typically realised through something popularly associated with more 'masculine' activities such as the military or sport, most notably football. These actions therefore re-imagine the flag not as a symbol of a masculinised 'patria', but rather as a living object and testament to the victims subject to a form of violence that targeted them for their femininity. By doing so, this newly created flag inscribes the victims as full citizens of Peru, in the face of a state that sought and seeks to exclude them.

Peruvian flags also featured in the protests that swept the country in late 2020, tied around the shoulders of protestors, but also in the form of the football kit of the national team. Protestors

¹¹⁴ Vich, 'Desobediencia Simbólica'.

¹¹⁵ Adams, *Art against Dictatorship: Making and Exporting Arpilleras under Pinochet* / Jacqueline Adams.

used these symbols of the nation to highlight that their criticism and anger was not anti-Peruvian, but anti-corruption. An often-heard slogan in these protests was ‘Peru I love you, that’s why I defend you’. Until recently the football kit was closely associated with these protests. However, throughout her 2021 presidential campaign Keiko Fujimori was seen wearing the kit at rallies. A number of members of the Peruvian national team took to Twitter to implore the public to ‘put on the shirt’ (*ponte la camiseta*) and not to vote for ‘communism’. Fujimori and her supporters consistently accused left-wing candidate Pedro Castillo of being a communist. In response Castillo criticised Fujimori for ‘dirtying’ the kit by using it in her campaign.¹¹⁶ Flags are appropriated by political movements of all kinds making claims to represent the nation; therefore, we should consider them in the context of their use. For example, during the 1980s the insurgent group Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA) created their own version of the flag with Túpac Amaru’s face on, this version became well known and associated with the fear the group inflicted on civilians. This resulted in confusion July 2010 when someone hung a different flag from their house for Fiestas Patrias with an illustration of Tupac Amaru by artist Cherman, resulting in a neighbour calling the police thinking it was the MRTA flag.¹¹⁷ The national flag is a clearly contentious issue that is subject to symbolic and literal policing, but also one that will always invoke ideas about the nation and who is a full citizen.

Somos 2074’s use of the flag underlines the role of the state in the forced sterilisations, and the lack of justice for the victims. In the photo at the start of this section, victims stand in front of the Palacio de Justicia, the seat of Peru’s Supreme Court, with the flag laid out in front of them. This action made very visible the institutions responsible in this case. With the

¹¹⁶ Reuters, ‘La Camiseta de La Selección de Fútbol de Perú Se Mete En La Campaña Electoral’.

¹¹⁷ Drinot, ‘The Meaning of Alan García’, 187–88.

continued role that *fujimorismo* plays in Peruvian politics, *Somos 2074* serves as an important reminder of the gross human rights violations that took place during the Fujimori regime, and the threat that Keiko's political career represents to democracy. Further, it renders explicit the neglect of indigenous communities and women by the state.

The campaign continues to evolve and change. In recent iterations of *Somos 2074* the flag has taken on a new role, in creating an action that is more accessible and inclusive. This was in response to criticisms of the campaign by victims, as Emilia recalled:

[We faced] these criticisms from the beginning of the campaign, and they [the victims] had every right to make them. They told us that maybe they didn't want to appear in photos. Which is understandable, and so because of this [...] we have been in the process of changing it [the campaign] so that they can be part of it too.

The creation of the flag through sewing is a collaborative activity that not only allows victims to take part, but also fosters connections between activists and victims: 'It's a thing that we thought was pretty cool, because you create ties, you know? You create bridges with them, because while you're sewing you can talk to them, laugh with them, and so you create a connection.' It is also a way of being more inviting to all victims, as Emilia put it 'todas y todos', that is to say women and men.

Since 2020, *Somos 2074* has started the initiative called '*Bordado por la memoria*' (embroidery for memory), in which activists and victims come together to embroider the names onto the flag, over the writing that we did during the *antimonumento*. The flag has been sent all over the country, bringing the action directly to the victims across the country:

in Huancavelica, Ayacucho, Chumbivilcas and other areas.¹¹⁸ For example, in August 2021, in Vilcashuamán, the women from the victims' organisation there came together to personally embroider their own names on the flag.¹¹⁹ The *Bordado por la memoria* initiative shows how *Somos 2074* has undergone a process of reflection and evolution since its inception. Through collaboration with victims, it has come to show the possibilities that activism holds for feminism.

This action also allows *Somos 2074* to explore the connections between the sterilisations and the Internal Armed Conflict in a new way. A version of this action also took place at *El ojo que llora* (The eye that cries), a sculpture that serves as a monument to the victims of the Internal Armed Conflict.¹²⁰ The sculpture – by artist Lika Mutal – features a granite block from which water drops continually flow, surrounded by small stones bearing the names of victims. It is surrounded by grassy banks, where during the *Bordado por la memoria* activists sat to embroider the names. There is a clear parallel here between the two processes of inscription, as Drinot writes, in relation to *El ojo que llora*, 'the monument serves not simply to remember the past but more importantly to inscribe literally into the most basic stuff of Peruvian territoriality (its pebbles) the names of those who were erased from it by the violence'¹²¹. In the same way, during the *bordado* participants inscribe the names into a symbol of Peruvian nationality, in doing so at *El ojo que llora* they also inscribe themselves as victims of the violence of the Internal Armed Conflict, despite not being included in the TRC. If the inscription of names in *El ojo que llora*, 'should be seen not as a recording of

¹¹⁸ La República, 'Cusco'.

¹¹⁹ Somos 2074 y Muchas Más, 'Las Mujeres de Organización de Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas Virgen Del Carmen de Vilcashuamán Se Reunieron Para Bordar Sus Nombres En La Bandera Del Perú Como Símbolo de La Memoria Colectiva y Lograr Justicia'.

¹²⁰ Somos 2074 y Muchas Más, '#BanderaDeLaMemoria'.

¹²¹ Drinot, 'For Whom the Eye Cries', 17.

their death but as their coming into being as actually existing, if dead, Peruvians' the embroidery of names onto the flag marks another process of 'coming into being.'¹²² In forcibly sterilising them, the State marked them as lesser citizens, whose bodily autonomy could be violated for the 'good of the nation' and its economy. We could argue that this marked the victims as what Butler refers to as 'abjected bodies', that fall outside of the regulatory norms governing bodies.¹²³ These abjected bodies do not matter, that is to say they are not 'lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving', by embroidering their names into a symbol of the nation, the actions of *Somos 2074* can 'force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter.'¹²⁴ That is to say who counts as a victim of the violence that Peru suffered between 1980 and 2000, and therefore who counts as a citizen worthy of justice.

The combination of the symbols of the uterus with the flag underscores the ways that indigenous women were targeted by the state. It underlines the structures of exclusion that led to this: patriarchy and racism. The juxtaposition of these symbols links together violations of the bodies of the victims and the body of the nation. It ties together bodily autonomy with the fight against corruption and anti-democratic processes. Rather than solely campaigning for justice for victims, *Somos 2074* also makes the point that the exclusionary structures that resulted in these violations and prop up corruption in politics, are the same ones. The politics that sees indigenous bodies as a site to be controlled and even violated, is the same politics that continues to exploit and undermine democracy.

¹²² Drinot, 18.

¹²³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 16.

¹²⁴ Butler, 16.

7.4 The politics of representation

According to the organisers of the campaign, one of the aims of *Somos 2074* is to make the sterilisations visible on a national level: ‘we wanted the topic of forced sterilisations to be not just an occasional issue, but something that was constantly on the public agenda’¹²⁵. In order to be able to pressure officials to move the trial forward, and campaign against consistent delays to the campaign, *Somos 2074* aims to be visually striking and media-friendly to keep the issue visible. As this chapter has shown, this is a complex task that involves navigating the politics of representing the victims of forced sterilisations. While the campaign is carried out in collaboration with victims and victims’ groups, in considering the politics of representation in *Somos 2074*, we need to think about what is rendered *invisible* as well as visible.

Spivak’s question of ‘can the subaltern speak?’ is clearly relevant in addressing the politics of representation in *Somos 2074*. The question asks not just can the subaltern speak, but also will they be heard in a way that will effect meaningful change. The indigenous women who were victims of forced sterilisation are clearly subalterns in the sense that Spivak discusses, especially since concealed victims are not seen to have geopolitical determinations. However, this is complicated in Peru, given the question of who counts as indigenous. As discussed earlier, there are many factors that shape the category of indigenous in Peru, in particular location, language and gender. Many activists identify as indigenous and see this as a reason for taking part. Yet, they are mostly Spanish speaking and living in Lima. While this does not make them less indigenous – particularly considering how rural-urban migration and a lack of

¹²⁵ Emilia Salazar, interview.

language education have separated many indigenous people from these – it does affect their position within society. According to the REVIESFO, the vast majority of victims were Quechua-speaking and living in rural areas. Therefore, there is a difference between their relationship to indigeneity.

Returning to the tensions over the use of the uterus and blood as a symbol, there have been occasions where *Somos 2074* has spoken over the voices of indigenous victims. As Boesten points out, indigenous women's position in society has often meant that at least at a national level they have had to make their claims through urban activists and NGOs¹²⁶. Victims' groups rely on *Somos 2074*'s ability to keep their case in the media and in the public agenda in order to push the trial forward, but they have not been consistently included in the 'collaborative imaginary' that shapes the campaign's actions. This is affected by the nature of the feminist movement in Peru: it continues to be concentrated in Lima and to a lesser extent other urban areas, but with much less influence in rural areas. The feminist movement is a diverse one, made up of individual activists, collectives, NGOs, researchers and others. Nevertheless, it is a movement with a complex history of exclusion and co-optation. The challenge for feminists is not just the fight for justice for sterilisations, but also in creating and strengthening a feminist movement across all of Peru.

Thinking about visual politics, the idea of the subaltern being heard is also a question of being *seen*. The national level victims' organisation AMPAEF does receive media coverage in newspapers, but it is not as engaged with social media. Whereas *Somos 2074* is highly active on social media, posting photos and informative graphics on its profiles across

¹²⁶ Boesten, 'Peace for Whom?', 172.

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as appearing in the news. Further, it has a distinctive visual identity that is easily recognisable through its use of colours and symbols.

As this chapter has examined, the visual politics of the campaign has shifted over time, in more recent versions the focus has shifted to be more inclusive of the victims. The '*bordado por la memoria*' actions are a clear example of this, in the photos taken of these events the victims are centred, rather than activists. However, the campaign continues to use some of its earlier visual language including photos and illustrations of activists with uteruses and blood in its social media content. This shows that there is a tension between the instinct of visual politics to be shocking and attention-grabbing, and the desires of victims.

Franco, considering of how Spivak's question might be applied in Latin America, argues that subaltern silence should not just be read as voicelessness, there is an 'the unacknowledged conflict between secrecy and the impulse to speak.'¹²⁷ That is to say, by withholding information about their experiences, indigenous women retain some control over how they are represented. The victims do not have a duty to speak publicly about what happened to them, and they may not want to continually be associated with the sterilisations. Moreover, for many, there is shame associated with being sterilised. For those who do speak, it shows they must know their conditions, but doing so poses serious risks such as violent backlash from conservative groups. In September 2021, while members of AMPAEF carried out a protest outside the Judiciary they were violently attacked by members of 'La Resistencia', a far-right extremist group with links to *fujimorismo*.

¹²⁷ Franco, 'Moving on from Subalternity', 217.

Not only this, but as I noted earlier marching for hours puts strain on the body, making it an activity that older activists are not always able to take part in. The majority of victims of sterilisations are now in their fifties and sixties, and not all able to spend hours marching and yelling. Younger, able-bodied activists are more able to take on this aspect of campaigning. At the 5th of September march, as we walked along the protest route some of the older members of the group left early, as they got cold and tired. It was physically exhausting carrying and lifting the flag, chanting, and shouting, and bearing the cold from not wearing enough layers as the night drew on. At the end of the night, we had to roll up the flag and carry it back to the offices where it is stored. I remember my feet aching and my shoes being covered in dirt from hours of marching.

Younger activists are more able and willing to take the risks involved in speaking out and putting their bodies on the line. This makes *Somos 2074* an embodied practice, as activists put their bodies in the line in the campaign for justice. Feminist activists in Peru have also faced violent backlash from conservative groups and the police. The role of the body is central in contemporary activism, and this is also true of *Somos 2074*. Speaking to Nancy, an activist and artist, about her involvement with the campaign she framed her participation as a bodily responsibility:

I took a decision, I said right, I am a woman, I have this body, [...] that is half mestizo, half indigenous. I said, from now on I am going to start appearing. You have to appear; you have to do performances in the street, and I am going to take on this responsibility¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Nancy Viza, interview.

She cites her gender and her background ('half mestizo, half indigenous') as a reason to *poner la cuerpa*, despite the risks involved: 'it is a total public exposition of our bodies and our lives'.¹²⁹ Making oneself visible ('you have to appear') is a risk, but one worth taking in order to fight against intersecting structures of oppression.

For the feminist activists I spoke to the connection between the sterilisations and their own lives is clear, and therefore worth the risks involved. The symbols of the flag, uterus and polleras together create an image that make explicit the 'connection between the modes of differential exploitation of feminized bodies.'¹³⁰ The fact that these inequalities persist in addition to the lack of justice for victims is what creates space for *Somos 2074* to protest: 'This tension between increasing gender equality on the one hand and persistent patriarchal attitudes in some institutions and sectors on the other hand is what allows for impunity from punishment for sexual violence to persist, but it also allows for protest, in Peru and indeed throughout Latin America'¹³¹. *Somos 2074* targets this tension between historical and contemporary inequalities specifically by tying the sterilisations to current struggles for reproductive justice.

This idea that the sterilisations are connected to systemic injustices is at the centre of *Somos 2074*. It is part of the wider feminist movement in Peru, so takes a more explicitly feminist stance on sterilisations, connecting it to other issues like abortion, sex education, access to reproductive healthcare, but also corruption, racism, and capitalism. For example, many activists wear the green scarves of the campaign for legal abortion that was started in

¹²⁹ Nancy Viza.

¹³⁰ Gago, *Feminist International*, 103.

¹³¹ Boesten, 'Peace for Whom?', 168.

Argentina, while taking part in actions by *Somos 2074*. This ties together the issue of sterilisations and the lack of access to free, safe, and legal abortion in Peru. These are both issue of reproductive autonomy, and the lack of justice for sterilisations is shaped by the same structures that prevent women from safely accessing legal abortions. However, in making wider connections runs the risk of detaching the message from the victims themselves. For victims who are seeking justice and reparations, the issues of corruption and capitalism may not seem as urgent as their own immediate lack of financial support or healthcare, even if they are fundamentally connected. For *Somos 2074*, in making these connections it makes the argument that the systemic issues of misogyny, racism and classic inequality that led to the sterilisations need to be addressed as part of justice for the victims.

To paraphrase Spivak, in the case of *Somos 2074*, the question of ‘can the victims speak?’ is relevant, but not the only question. We must also consider visibility: can the victims be seen? And if so, do they want to be seen? And by whom? The thousands of victims of sterilisation are not a monolithic group. Many do appear in public actions organised by *Somos 2074*, and by AMPAEF, but they have different approach to the struggle for justice. Some choose not to speak out at all. Speaking and appearing entails a risk, activists can take the ‘risk’ of controversial representation. Activists are speaking for the victims, but they are also subalterns speaking out against the wider structures that led to sterilisations, and also affect *them*.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the challenges of the politics of representation in *Somos 2074*, through its use of symbols and performance in the struggle for justice for victims of forced

sterilisation. The visual and embodied politics of the campaign draw on ideas of nationhood, reproduction and indigeneity, prompting questions about who belongs in Peru, but also who belongs in the feminist movement. Using the lens of visual and embodied politics this chapter has shown how performance actions like this campaign also prompt questions of which bodies *matter*: who gets to participate, and who is seen.

On the one hand the actions analysed seek to be to be visually striking and garner attention both online and offline, something *Somos 2074* does using symbols (the pollera and the flag) and colours. However, this impulse exists in tension with the duty of feminists not to perpetuate harm against the victims that is seeking to represent. The development of this campaign over time shows the mistakes that have been made but also the possibilities of visual and embodied politics to be truly inclusive by turning a feminist gaze on the case of forced sterilisations and demonstrating how these are directly linked to feminist issues of abortion and reproduction.



Figure 8.1 Activists holding and waving a giant Peruvian flag during September 2019 ‘Que Se Vayan Todos’ protests, 5th September 2019 (Photo: author’s own)

In the introduction I referred to a quote by the Miguel López, asking ‘what does it mean to produce images in the land of misogyny?’¹. Here I would like to return to and reframe that question, what does it mean to use images to analyse activism in the ‘land of misogyny’? Throughout this thesis I have used images and performances as a way of exploring the themes discussed. Some these images were photos I took, whereas others were created by others: activists, photographers, illustrators. Given that this thesis focuses on the role of the

¹ López, ‘Natalia Iguiniz’, 49.

visual and the embodied, it would have been impossible to communicate this without images. The use of photos that I took in the field allowed me to continuously reflect on the embodied aspects of this research.

The photograph above, for example, while blurry and unfocused, reminds me of the sensations I felt at the time: a rush adrenaline, cold, exhaustion, excitement, frustration. Yet, despite capturing nearly 1000 images (digital and analogue photos, screenshots) in the process of researching this thesis, I am also reminded of what remains invisible: what I did not or could not capture visually. The above photograph does not reveal the scale of the protest, or what it was fighting for. Nor does it capture the ways the feminist activists had to fight to take up space. Nevertheless, focusing on both the visible and the invisible has enabled me to understand the ways that feminist activism takes place both online and offline, as both a performative and actual strategy. In order to succeed in a world that is both physical and digital, this approach is key for contemporary feminism. Through this approach, this thesis has analysed the role of artistic and creative activist strategies, or 'activism', through the lens of visual and embodied politics.

This thesis has argued that visual and embodied politics are central to understanding the contemporary feminist movement, not just as tools used by activists but also as a lens to understand activist methodologies. Faced with a difficult political context, one that is actively hostile to feminist goals, and anything related to 'gender', feminists have sought out alternative channels for activism. This is combined with a shift away from institutional feminist approaches in the 1990s and 2000s. In Peru, institutional and political channels are limited in what they can achieve by the ongoing political crisis. Young activists are frustrated by corruption, ineffective politicians, and endless cycles of elections. This is not unique to

feminists: the 'generación del bicentenario' took to the streets in November and December of 2020 to demand change. However, feminists make up a core part of contemporary civil society, drawing on the space generated by Ni Una Menos marches to make their claims heard. They can also draw on the strength of the pre-existing movement. Although young activists are looking for alternative channels, they have not turned their backs on NGOs. Many movements are supported by financial or logistical support from NGOs like Flora Tristán and DEMUS.

Visual and embodied politics includes strategies under the umbrella of activism, but they expand the category. Using visual and embodied politics as a lens helps us to focus not just on the artistic nature of performance protest, but also the ways that it is embodied by activists. It also helps us to consider the way that activism exists in the world: both online and offline, in performances, marches, protests, social media posts and activists' everyday lives. Considering these as a whole enables us to see the meaning of activism in activists' lives and the ways that activism continues to maintain the movement - as well as its impact on the public sphere.

This thesis makes an important contribution to the literature on protest and performance: the framework of visual and embodied politics that I have developed builds on the work of scholars like Taylor, and Serafini. Diana Taylor demonstrates how performance can be used as a way analysing feminist politics. Her approach to performance applies not only to actual performances, but to the 'spectacle' of digital media². This thesis has analysed the role of protest, performance and digital media in the feminist movement in Peru, not as separate

² Taylor, *¡Presente!*.

elements but through the lens of visual and embodied politics. As Taylor also argues, performance as a frame centres the body not only as a tool used by activists, but also a space for knowledge building³. Through the processes of creating, executing and reflecting on performances and other actions, activists in Peru theorise from the body. The idea of '*poner la cuerpa*' analysed in Chapter 5 underscores the ways that bodies bring together individual and collective experiences, that are transformed through performance.

This thesis draws on the work of scholars like Taylor and Serafini who argue that analyses of activism should not simply focus on questions of impact or efficacy but also the embodied experience of it for participants as well as audiences⁴. Actions that build solidarity within the movement are essential in the face of hostility towards progressive politics and political change. Feminists in Peru face an uphill battle to create meaningful legal and policy change on issues like abortion, therefore maintaining the strength of the movement and keeping these issues in the public sphere is key for the long-term strength of the movement. This is also a way for activists to be involved with and draw on the strength of transnational movements in other Latin American countries - and to use this as a way to put pressure on society.

In its analysis of the physical and digital in activism, this thesis has developed the idea of the 'in-between' in relation to performance as a transformative space. This builds on Turner's 'liminality' in performance, as a space outside of daily reality in which we can build knowledge and construct movements⁵. Through performance, activists negotiate issues of representation, coloniality, and gender through their bodies and the symbols they represent. For example, chapter 7 shows how the development of *Somos 2074*'s actions was a process

³ Taylor, *Performance*.

⁴ Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*; Serafini, *Performance Action*.

⁵ Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*.

of transformation, as activists reflected on the politics of representing and including indigenous women. Similarly, the concept of the 'in-between' draws from Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands, or *nepantla*, in its analysis of the ways that contemporary activism takes place in the space between the digital and the physical⁶. Chapter 5 traces how a specific feminist performance moved between the online and offline, and highlighting the importance of these 'digital borderlands' to feminist performance.

The key issues for feminists in Peru these days are gender violence, the legalisation of abortion, and justice for victims of forced sterilisation. This thesis has explored how these issues are represented through visual and embodied politics. These are all issues that are located in the body, and activists put their bodies on the line for them. In the case of abortion this involves taking an issue that is hidden away in the private sphere or in private clinics and making it a public issue: in public space but also as an issue of public health. Many activists have undergone abortions - abortion is rife in Peru, so most people know someone who has had one (whether they admit it or not). It is also an issue that is present in public space through leaflets and stickers advertising predatory illegal abortion services. Through performances feminists highlight the diverse ways the lack of access to abortion affects women and girls - removing it from the anti-abortion frame of the foetus and the rights of the unborn. While there is a push for legalisation in the case of rape, progress is slow.

Chapter 6 explored the idea of '*poner la cuerpa*' - putting the (feminine) body on the line. This is a key way of understanding both embodied and visual politics - clearly the body is an embodied phenomenon, but it is also a visual one: the sight of the body as symbol in public

⁶ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

space, the body turned into a visual act through performance. Feminists use visual and embodied politics to keep the fight going through performances but also through embodied actions like wearing the pañuelo verde. Activists will wear the pañuelo verde to other marches in order to link the struggle for abortion to other fights - for example against a corrupt congress. They also wear it in their everyday life, on wrists or tied to a bag as a way of signalling to other activists and people the importance of the campaign. This also places the Peruvian fight in transnational context and links it to other successful campaigns - thereby highlighting the tide of abortion rights activism sweeping the continent.

Performances are a way of releasing emotions like fear, frustration and anger that arise from the embodied experience of facing violence in everyday life. Violence pervades almost all aspects of the feminist experience: whether protesting against it in marches, embodying it through performance but also hearing about it or discussing it both online and offline. This makes it key to understandings of what it means to be a feminist. Visual and embodied politics also keep networks of solidarity and support going as activists risk their bodies together - creating an embodied solidarity.

Sometimes performances face practical limitations like access to public space – usually activists need permission for more elaborate actions that otherwise would be shut down by authorities - time for rehearsals, costumes, funding etc. Overcoming these issues requires activists to work together and with organisations who have the financial and political power to help. Taking part in these revealed the networks behind feminist art activism - it is not something that happens spontaneously - although it cultivates that illusion.

As this thesis has argued, we cannot ignore the role of the digital when it comes to contemporary feminist activism. The digital has become more and more part of daily life - although in unequal ways. Although it is essential to consider the role of the digital, we should avoid being deterministic about the impact of technology, and instead analyse it in context. We should not analyse digital feminist politics as an isolated concept - it takes place online, offline and in the 'in-between'. One of the things this thesis has argued in particular is how to trace feminist activism as it moves from the online to offline and back again. In the process of crossing and recrossing these borders, actions are transformed. In chapter 5 I argued that the visual is key to understanding digital feminism. Symbols and visually distinctive actions are able to move across borders - both technological and geographical, creating a strong feminist identity and carrying messages. The digital is part of daily life for young activists in urban areas - as smartphones have become much more accessible in the last 10 years and are key to organising: using social media, WhatsApp etc. to recruit participants and transmit messages.

However, there are negative impacts to the digital. Feminist activists are at risk of trolling and harassment. In Peru this also intersects with the practice of '*terruqueo*'. Right wing activists are more and more active online - compared with predictions of the progressive power of the internet. Twitter is the most hostile environment for feminists. However, this also reveals the ways that activist practices negotiate privacy online - some may post more publicly on certain platforms but use other media to have a more personal platform - or use things like the 'close friends' feature. Privacy is not binary or black and white.

Further the politics of representation are complicated online - as Chapter 7 examined - in the case of activism for historical reproductive rights violations - feminists have to balance their

own racialised histories and the politics of representation. This is further complicated by the online: when we consider who has access to technology, and who is 'technologically literate' or a 'digital native' compared with who is being represented, there is clear gap. Do these victims know how they are being represented online? Do they get a say in this?

This thesis has also argued that the digital is embodied - how we engage with online media has a physical and emotional impact. Through the use of smartphones, activists are able to be both online and offline at the same time, for example capturing photos while taking part in a march as in the image at the beginning of this chapter. This can also mean reading about gender violence while going about one's everyday routine, meaning that it seeps into all aspects of life, not just activist activities.

Finally, in terms of the digital this thesis has made methodological contributions by taking an approach that combines digital and in-person ethnography, integrating both into each other. This enabled me to set out a more complex understanding of the role of the digital and how it shapes and is shaped by contemporary feminist activist practices. This is key for analyses of new feminist activism: it is not possible to understand one without the other. Although digital ethnography provides key insights, it misses a lot of what happens outside of the digital realm.

Feminist activists relationship with mainstream politics, that is to say the state and government organisations has always been complex. The legacy of the 1990s looms heavily. During the 1990s many feminists who worked with the state found their work 'co-opted' by the administration, and feminism was used to cloak the regime in an air of legitimacy. Not only feminists but the popular women's movement and NGOs who worked with the state

were also affected. For example, Manuela Ramos worked closely with the government to deliver public health projects, but this was tarnished by the revelation of the forced sterilizations that were being carried out at the same time. Given this, contemporary feminists are cautious of working closely with the state.

This happened in parallel with a move away from or disillusionment with NGOization that happened in the 1990s and 2000s in the feminist movement - not just in Peru. Contemporary feminists feel frustration with the limitations of this approach - or the limited gains in this period. However, NGOs still play an important role, as they have access to resources – financial or logistical - that individual activists or collectives do not have. NGOs are more able to get access to international funding from development organisations. By working closely with other feminist groups, they have an important role to play. For example, many of the performances organised by Trenzar - a feminist theatre collective - benefited from help from Flora Tristán and Amnesty International.

The legacy of Ni Una Menos in Peru is a complicated one. As chapter 4 set out, divisions between the organisers and other feminist activists over who the movement ‘belonged’ to caused it to fracture, perhaps irrecoverably. Unlike Ni Una Menos in Argentina, the Peruvian movement has so far not been converted into a mass movement under this name. However, the fragmentation of the movement is not exclusive to the case of Ni Una Menos, but one that all Peruvian feminists must address. Peru is a divided country, socially, geographically, racially, and politically with an extremely powerful conservative movement. Feminists must aim to be inclusive and understanding of Peru’s political reality, without turning the movement in on itself. Visual and embodied politics offers a way of doing this, by creating an affective space for activism.

The ongoing, protracted political crisis in Peru since at least 2016 has also meant that activists have felt frustration with targeting the state to achieve change. Within this context it has been impossible to pass much legislation especially anti-corruption legislation. Given the anti-gender, and conservative influence in Peruvian politics, that dominates congress it is almost impossible to imagine feminist legislation making its way through the legislature or being implemented well. There have been some policy developments including compensation for relatives of femicide victims. Feminists have managed to keep certain things on the agenda - candidates were asked about their stance on abortion in recent elections – and there is growing support for abortion in the case of rape. These are significant achievements given the context.

However, since the 2021 elections, the political landscape does not seem to have improved. Although there was some hope with the election of leftist Castillo and the roles given to progressive politicians in his cabinet. Since then there have been four Cabinet shifts, including wild swings between extremes, including switching from a conservative pro-life women's minister to a long-term feminist activist within a matter of weeks. Perhaps there is the possibility of creating change from within, but it seems more and more likely that this will not be the case. The shift towards a more radical, decolonial feminist activism also contributes to the frustration with the state. Issues like indigenous and environmental justice are increasingly important for feminists. Castillo promised some progress on these issues, but in practice change has been non-existent. Feminists are choosing to act in society to change the culture and put pressures on the state.

8.1 Limitations and future research on visual and embodied politics

This research does not claim to be a definitive account of feminism in Peru. Feminist activism in Peru is diverse and there is an increasing number of movements and collectives outside of the capital. I met with activists in Cusco and Huancayo - however I did not get to travel to cities like Arequipa or Ayacucho where there are also new feminist collectives. Further there were more feminist collectives in Lima - especially those based out of the centre. I spoke to some of these like the group '*Pazos*' based in Villa El Salvador. I was in part limited by only having six months to spend in the field. Further it would have been impossible to create a definitive portrait of the feminist movement in Peru or speak to every single activist, and the movement is constantly evolving. However, it is important to acknowledge the important work of feminists outside of the capital.

I chose to focus my interviews and participation on young activists and those less experienced - a bottom-up approach, rather than targeting feminist institutions. Although I did speak to a few people from these or young activist working within them. Also, it was harder to get in contact with or track down more 'elite' feminists. It would have been useful to have more contributions from institutions to compare and contrast. I had also planned to return to Peru in July of 2020 to carry out follow up interviews and research. However due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic this was impossible. Further, Peru was one of the worst affected countries worldwide, with the highest death rate per capita creating a so-called 'lost generation' of orphans. Feminists carried out important activist work during this time, however I felt a disconnect between the work I had done in 2019 and asking follow up questions during a time when the country was being ravaged by the virus.

While this thesis focuses on art, I chose to focus on performance art and feminist visual media, rather than street art. Although there is a lot of important work on street art as a form of activism in Latin America⁷, it was beyond the scope of this thesis. Feminists have used street art and graffiti, for example in the case of Perrahabl@ in the 2000s (see page 106). However, in the research for this thesis it did not appear as a key factor.

Finally, there have been major political shifts since 2019, even in the space of just under three years there has been a pandemic, and at least four different presidents in Peru, several major protest movements, congressional elections, and many shifts in cabinets. While the current crisis is in some ways not a change from the situation in 2019, it has been a challenge to track these changes from afar and understand what impact it is having on the feminist movement itself.

The work in this thesis could be developed in a number of ways. One direction would be to carry out a transnational comparison between different feminist movements in Latin America in order to see how these politics are constructed locally but also how these ideas move across borders. As this thesis has argued, contemporary feminist movements in Latin America draw on transnational feminist networks sharing ideas, songs, and performances. Tracing the ways these ideas move across borders and are transformed would contribute to our understanding of the nature of feminism in Latin America today.

During the research for this thesis, the links between the feminist movement and the LGBT+ movement in Peru were very clear: many feminists are also LGBT+ and involved in both

⁷ Ryan, 'Political Street Art in Social Mobilization : A Tale of Two Protests in Argentina'; Morrison, 'Public Art Replacement on the Mapocho River'.

activisms. However, at times there are tensions between these two movements as a whole, and their respective goals and strategies. Further work could explore this relationship, and how they are both affected by the powerful conservative movement in Peru and its attacks on 'gender ideology'.

Another direction for further study would be to compare across time, by working with activists from previous generations to uncover links between the visual and embodied politics of today and the past. In interviews with older activists, they mentioned the use of such strategies, but a deeper examination of this combining interviews and archival work could also shine light on the contribution of present movements but also the ways that younger activists draw on the work of previous generations. Visual and embodied politics are not new phenomena, so understanding them in historical perspective could reveal the ways it is indeed novel.

8.2 Contribution to the literature

This thesis has contributed to the literature on the feminist movement in Peru. While there is a growing literature on feminist movements across Latin America and the role of new feminist movements, so far there has not been much work on the movement in Peru. The Peruvian case is important as it provides an example of a feminist movement in a hostile case, but one that keeps going. It is not as massive as those in Chile or Argentina, but within the movement there is the strength to keep struggling even in the face of hostile opposition. To fully understand the emergence of new feminist movements in Latin America, we also need to study smaller, less influential feminist movements. Further Peru is an example of

how feminist movements work without political openings - compared to the leftist movements in Chile and Argentina for example.

It is also an important example of how feminists work in the face of anti-genderism, which is particularly strong in Peru. ‘Con mis Hijos no Te Metas’ started in Peru and has been exported to other countries like Uruguay, Colombia and Guatemala. Anti-gender and conservative movements are also strong in congress affecting the possibilities for feminists or their political allies. New feminisms are inspiring, but they also face greater backlash than they did ten years ago.

This thesis contributes to the study of the struggle for justice for victims of forced sterilization, how this relates to the contemporary feminist movement and how these two struggles are intertwined: bodily autonomy, the role of the state, the need for an intersectional approach, and the anti-gender backlash to progressive politics. How do feminist movements address issues of historical memory and the past, but also deal with the complex politics of race, class, and geography within and without of the feminist movement itself.

Beyond the case of Peru, this thesis contributes to the literature on contemporary feminist activism in Latin America. In particular, it places social media activism – a factor acknowledged by many as significant in the development of new feminisms – in its offline context, in order to show how it exists in both spaces, as well as between. This understanding shows us how the internet has precipitated a shift towards the visual in feminist activism, but also the ways that it draws on the knowledge and tactics of previous generations. In this way this thesis also contributes to the ongoing debates on feminist generations in Latin America. The contemporary feminist movement in Peru does not

represent a total break with previous generations, but it does have key differences. New feminisms – in the plural – are younger and more diverse, and less focused on engaging with policy change in the ways that previous generations did. This is in part due to disillusionment with NGOisation, but also reflective of the impact of Peru's political crisis on feminism's goals. The turn towards visual and embodied politics is a direct result of this.

This thesis also contributes to the literatures on performance protest, activism, and other creative practices within activism. I have approached these through the lens of visual and embodied politics. However, the literature on these practices within the feminist movement is less established. There is work on Las Tesis, but what this thesis contributes is an ethnography of performance protest. The methodological approach of the thesis is one of its main contributions. Combining digital and in person methods I was able to paint a portrait of a movement and the use of artistic and creative strategies in a deeper way. There are ethnographies of performance protest⁸ and digital ethnographies of social movements⁹, but the unique contribution of this thesis is the ethnographic approach to visual and embodied politics in the feminist movement. It also shows that these practices are not just for external audiences but also contribute to maintaining and strengthening the movement itself. Visual and embodied politics allow us to understand the role of feminist performance protest, artistic and creative strategies in a fragmented digital age.

⁸ Serafini, *Performance Action*.

⁹ Barassi, *Activism on the Web*.

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