Feminist politics, drones and the fight against the "Femicide State" in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the ways in which social collectives in Mexico have been developing socio-digital networks (combining socio-material agencies and technologies such as the Internet and unmanned aerial vehicles [UVAs] commonly known as drones) to open new spaces of political participation and intervention in public spaces to confront violence against women in Mexico. The article seeks to arrive at a better understanding of the role that digital technologies play in promoting new forms of digital engagements, political action, and counter-culture strategies. It considers both the Internet and drones as pivotal instruments in a larger network of technologies through which social collectives seek to mobilize knowledge, create awareness, and contest power in order to combat violence against women in Mexico. By drawing on feminist technoscience literature, the article seeks to provide new insights into the literature on digital politics and to go beyond the "digital divide" by showing the networked feminist strategies operating within political participation, developing new understandings of contemporary civilian disputes over both aerial and digital environments as public spaces.

KEYWORDS

drones; collective action; femicide; socio-digital networking; counter-culture strategies; Mexico

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a latent problem in Mexico. According to statistics provided by the Mexican Federal Government and the United Nations Women in Mexico, between 1985 and 2014 there were 47,178 femicides (SEGOB, 2016). It is worrying that, particularly in the last four years, femicide cases have increased alarmingly. Unfortunately, these cases have not been investigated from a gender perspective. In fact, most of them remain either invisible or unpunished—or both. In an attempt to address this situation, social collectives have used new technologies and digital mediation strategies to intervene in urban and digital spaces to make visible the increasing violence against women in Mexico. This article investigates the collective project Rexiste—a group that is developing socio-digital networks in order to open new spaces for political participation and contestation.

This article will address some of the feminist political strategies that can be employed to fight violence against women. The central question the article seeks to answer is: how are virtual and face-to-face political participation and feminist collective action interconnected and performed as a means by which to fight violence against women in Mexico? The objective then is to analyze the role of specific new digital technologies, namely the Internet and drones, and the role they play in opening up new spaces of political participation and contestation in order to shape collective action in Mexico. The central hypothesis put forward is that the Internet and drones will play an increasing role as social and disruptive technologies in the public sphere. This role will allow for a specifically feminist intervention via the re-appropriation of images of material and digital protests, the development of transnational political platforms, virtual communities, and networked collective actions. At the same time, the Internet and drones will continue to provide unexpected social innovations by enabling the construction of new and alternative public realities and spaces, for example the aerial space that was until now reserved for governmental, military and commercial use only. These digital technologies are facilitating digital protests and mobilizations through the use of a drone as a politicized female fictional character along with counter-surveillance videos and photos to denounce violence against women.

The article thus seeks to contribute towards problematizing current understandings of various digital technologies as well as the images and visions they produce as autonomous and neutral artifacts in political processes. It will also prompt new understandings of the role that these new digital technologies and the hybrid spaces they occupy are playing in the articulation of female political participation and their contestation of mechanisms of power. The article will then discuss from a feminist technoscience perspective the politics of vision, drone mediation, and the specific strategies that can be employed to render violence against women visible, thus forcing the state to be accountable for these issues. In this context, "the politics of vision" refer to the feminist critique of objectivism as a means to analyze

the power relations at stake in administrating justice and protesting the violence against women. Similarly, by drone mediation I refer here to the dynamic interface between humans and machines that is able to dispute hegemonic power.

FEMINIST TECHNOSCIENCE STUDIES AND DIGITAL POLITICS

Contemporary feminist literature informs the debate surrounding the ways in which matter constantly shapes our world—often in unexpected ways. This fresh look at matter shows that materiality is always more than "simply" matter: it is an excess, a force, a vitality, relatedness, or difference that makes the active material self-creative, productive, and unpredictable (Coole & Frost, 2010). Feminist technoscience studies in particular stresses the importance of materiality in the performative configuration of realities (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Coole & Frost, 2010; Haraway, 2004; Hird, 2009; Suchman, 2007). These and other contributions can be used to mitigate the classic divisions between men/women, meaning/practice, agency/structure, human/machine, science/technology, discourse/materiality, and to explore the intersection of bodies, artifacts, gender, culture, and asymmetrical power relations.

Donna Haraway (1991) proposes the cyborg as a human-machine metaphor that transgresses binaries and renders visible the way in which nature and culture, and material and meaning, are interconnected. In her *Cyborg Manifesto*—which was written in the post-war, technoscientific context of anti-military and feminist nuclear activist protest networks—she states that the cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid between human and machine, a creature of reality, as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). For her, the machines of this century have rendered ambiguous the difference between the natural and the artificial, the mind and the body, and other distinctions that are normally applied to organisms and machines (Haraway, 1991, p. 152). Haraway suggests that the machine should not be animated, idolized and dominated. Rather, she argues that the machine is us, our processes, as well as an aspect of our personification (Haraway, 1991, p. 180).

Judith Butler (2010) stated that performativity describes a set of processes that produce ontological effects that work to bring into being certain realities (p. 147). In this regard, Karen Barad (2007) argues that performativity is a way to contest the excessive power given to language as a means by which to determine what is real (p. 133). Thus, according to Karen Barad, some discussions about performativity have failed to provide an adequate understanding of the relationship between scientific discourses and material practices. She further proposes the concept of agential realism with the precise objective of challenging the perspective that assumes separate entities exist in the observation of any given phenomenon. This she achieves via an integration of the mutual constitution of objects and agencies, yielding an understanding of the role of human and non-human practices, both material and discursive, and natural and non-natural phenomena. Agential realism is an epistemological and ontological framework that takes as its central concern the nature of materiality (Barad, 2001, p. 99). According to Barad (2001), matter is always agentive and this agency is not only an attribute of the actors

involved, but also a reconfiguration in a state of constant process (p. 137, p. 141). Thus, for Barad the agency of material agents such as technoscientific devices implies an entangled material discursive network of meaning making. Barad's ideas integrate the human constructs of gender, ethnicity, class, and other axes of difference into the framework of non-human agencies.

Conversely, Lucy Suchman (2007) suggests the concept of "situated action" as a way to re-conceptualize the interface between humans and non-humans, as well as their mutual constitution. Her proposal is to explicitly locate the configuration of social histories and individual biographies in people and artifacts, which in turn requires locating a more extensive network of agencies and specific configurations between human and non-human entities. Configurations refer here to relevant assumptions regarding humans, machines, and the relations between them, as well as to the practical consequences of particular human-machine assemblages (Suchman & Weber, 2016). By drawing on feminist technoscience studies, Suchman re-conceptualizes autonomy and responsibility as always enacted within, rather than as being separable from, particular human-machine configurations (Suchman & Weber, 2016). She does this by considering the implications of these re-conceptualizations via questions of responsibility in relation to automated/autonomous weapon systems, particularly military drones. However, whilst the feminist technoscientific project strives to go beyond binary categories—conceptualizing the inseparability of human-machine agencies in contemporary war fighting—Suchman also draws attention to the need to delineate human agency and responsibility within political, legal and ethical/moral regimes of accountability. This implies a definite need to situate every autonomous artifact in order to analyze its distributed agency with regard to human actors, but also to comprehend the imperatives of local dynamics and other cultural phenomena that give life to non-human agencies.

In the era of algorithms, the digitization of traditional politics, and the rise of new forms of political and even material intervention, there is a pressing need to refer specifically to feminist literature that can give us the tools with which to re-think social movements, activism, and the use of digital technologies from non-privileged positions—i.e. from feminist visions, such as suggested by Anna Feigenbaum (2015). From virtual communities and political mobilization to digital protests and Big Data visual maps, digital technologies are transforming public engagement in political processes. Therefore, specialized literature that deals with digital politics and culture (Coleman & Freelon, 2015; Escobar, Hess, Licha, Sibley, Strathern & Sutz 1994; Hine, 2000; Marres, 2013; Shah, Purayil Sneha & Chattapadhyay 2015) faces challenges that call for further development: namely, breaking the divide between virtual and face-to-face politics, decentering the common focus on the Internet in the analysis of digital technologies and the different ways in which they alter public spaces, and also questioning the neutrality of technologies. Another open debate concerns the need to locate digital technologies, as the Internet does not operate in a social vacuum, but is constantly being (re-)configured by situated human and material agencies (Suchman, 2007).

Thus, politics in the digital arena are re-dimensioning social categories in order to think about collective action and political participation. In this context, a feminist reading can help avoid binaries. This is particularly relevant with regard to the key concepts of digital politics, as it transcends the digital divide between virtual and face-to-face politics. In this way, a feminist reading breaks the boundary between the different digital technologies and agencies, but also offers fresh perspectives from which to rethink categories of both politics and actors in the digital age. In view of these challenges, it is necessary to be aware of feminist technoscience studies literature that has shifted attention from the economic perspective and triumphalist visions of technology towards a more critical view of the new understandings, discursive and material practices, and agencies in social processes.

This article proposes a material analysis of new technology that allows us, on the one hand, to balance our focus between discourse and material phenomena whilst, on the other hand, complexifying the analysis of both actors and agencies that are deployed and interact in the process of materialization and meaning making, as well as in the performative configuration of realities (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2004; Suchman & Weber, 2016). This article explores assemblages, actors, agencies, materialities, and cultural phenomena that are connected through the Internet and the drone, acting together as mediators of collective action. In doing so, the article seeks to move beyond neutral or "black box" understandings of new digital technologies. Rather, the proposal here is to analyze the materiality of the Internet and drones, not only in terms of their design, advantages, risks and potential uses, but also in terms of the imaginaries they inspire, their distributed agency within feminist political strategies, and the new practices of engagement they enable, contesting power in specific dangerous political contexts for women.

DRONES AND COUNTER-DRONES

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are commonly known as drones—pilotless aircrafts operated by remote control or programmed to act autonomously by computers on the ground. Located at the intersection of civil, commercial, and government applications, UVAs have gained a global momentum. Drones are commonly known for their military uses. However, in recent years, civil and commercial applications have also been increasing. The politics of drones and the politics of autonomy and responsibility have become a specific focus of analysis within feminist technoscience studies (Sharkey & Suchman, 2013; Suchman & Weber, 2016). Although having a strong military genealogy, this ambivalent political object has now been re-appropriated by social collectives as a means by which to intervene in the public space, becoming a common practice in global scenarios. Drones play an increasing role as social and disruptive technologies in public spaces through the development of transnational platforms, virtual communities, and collective action networks that demand the right to "the view from above," thereby appropriating airspace as a public space (Messer & Reich, 2014).

However, each group engaging in such interventions does so via different innovative strategies (see Suarez, 2016). For example, Dronehackademy is appropriating drones to map counter-cartographies in Rio de Janeiro and denounce the displacement of local communities, aiming to make visible the violence of construction companies in the context of the city's hosting of the 2016 Olympic Games (De Soto, 2015). Another group—a feminist collective—is circulating abortion pills, using a drone as a way to challenge current abortion regulations in Poland. Meanwhile, the artist TEC performs interventions in the streets of São Paulo and plays with various visual perspectives offered by the drone as a method by which to appropriate urban spaces. Finally, the collective project Rexiste intervenes in the public space, not only performing a social appropriation of the drone, but also engaging in the creation of a fictional female political character in the struggle for change in Mexico: Droncita.

"Droncita has only one objective: To change it all"

This work is based on a digital ethnography project in which I followed Droncita—the so-called little sister of the social collective Rexiste—in her struggles to effect change in Mexico. Ethnography is well known to be a sensorial and reflexive way of conducting research that can relay strongly on visual material in the form of images and photographs (McGranahan, 2014). Ethnography is neither a static nor a fixed practice (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007), and the dynamic nature of the method is expressed in the way ethnographers have begun to take into account the impact of digital culture in both ethnographic studies and social phenomena (Murthy, 2008; Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis & Tacci, 2015). Therefore, over the last three decades ethnographers have proposed new approaches specifically to address the theoretical challenges posed by globalization and digital culture. One of these new innovative methods is digital ethnography. This article is based on the results of a digital ethnography—understood here as a particular type of ethnographic practice that takes as its starting point the idea that digital media and technologies are part of the everyday (as well as the more spectacular) worlds that people inhabit (Pink et al., 2015). According to Dhiraj Murthy (2011), whilst this type of ethnography is mediated by digital technologies, it is not limited to digital spaces. This means that digital ethnography, unlike virtual ethnography, seeks to link digital spaces with actual spaces, with the intention to go beyond the digital divide by tracing continuities between such spaces.

Rexiste is a project for political experimentation and intervention in the public space. As such, Rexiste members do not define themselves as activists or artists. Rather, Rexiste is an "open idea that can be reappropriated, reproduced and reinvented" (Rexiste, 2013). They not only intervene in public spaces, but also in the very narrative of how political action is supposed to occur, and by whom. The practices of the Rexiste project illustrate the important role that digital technologies now have in generating new forms of intervention in urban and digital spaces through strategies of counter-culture.

In addition to being itself a personalized, specifically feminine actor in the struggle for change, Droncita provides counter-photos and videos that the collective uses to increase global awareness of femicide and violence against women, the disappearance of persons, human rights violations, and the criminalization of civilian protests, as well as to create visual narratives of counter-culture. Droncita has her own Twitter account and YouTube channel, where she disputes the official narratives of politicians. Through Droncita's Twitter account it becomes possible to map controversial topics in public debates in relation to violence against women.

By tracing the mobility of Droncita, reflecting distributed agencies and their networks, I hope to make visible the specific public and material practices used to mobilize discourses and resources in order to increase awareness of violence against women. The empirical sources were online interviews, screenshots of photos, participant virtual observation of web pages related to the social collective (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Rexiste's web page), note taking, and written texts on social networking sites.

Analytical strategies were deployed in two stages. Firstly, texts, notes, video, and photo records were collected, and subsequently coded, categorized, and explored with the software for qualitative analysis, ATLAS.ti. Secondly, to explore the materiality of discursive practices, artifact analysis was employed, not only to deconstruct the materiality of objects (drones, digital videos and photos) by focusing on their structures as well as the symbolic and textual elements relating them to their broader social contexts (Bechky, 2008; Reischauer, 2015; Stubbe, 2015), but also to explore the different meanings that they produce. Triangulation of the various techniques and sources of evidence was used to analyze the connections and tensions between the discursive and material practices under study.

Throughout the course of this research, I have followed the ethics debates and guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). As a matter of principle, I have applied the ethical principles of sociological research to this research and the digital spaces concerned. For example, in personal online communications, I informed the participants about the objectives of the research, asked them for their participatory consent, and protected their identities. All of the visual material used in this article has been created by Rexiste. When I asked permission to use their material (photos) for the purposes of research and for this article, they confirmed that all of their materials are licensed under the Creative Commons agreement and therefore were freely available, not only for research purposes, but for any purpose.

FEMICIDES AND FEMINIST POLITICS IN MEXICO

A femicide can be defined as the assassination of a woman motivated by hate, contempt, pleasure, or feelings of possession (Russell & Harmes, 2006). According to the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography, in 2015 alone, the leading cause of death of women from 15 to 29 years old was murder. However, violence against women is not the only factor behind the increasing femicides in Mexico: the country also faces several challenges in delivering justice to the victims of crime and especially in preventing crimes against women. These are related to various dimensions of gender inequality: Firstly, cases often remain unpunished. Secondly, only 15% of all cases are classified as femicides (Estrada, 2014). Thirdly, there is no official and reliable register of femicides in Mexico. Finally, the statistics that are out there have been manipulated by different public offices (Goche, 2013).

As a result of this situation, the Mexican Government has received several recommendations from international human rights organizations concerning the urgent need to classify cases with greater accuracy, as well as to provide better access to justice for the victims, and to promote public policies with a gendered perspective to combat these types of crimes occurring in the first place—including the eradication of the impunity enjoyed by some perpetrators (Goche, 2015; SEGOB, 2016). The feminist scholar Marcela Lagarde (2008) extends the breadth of the femicide concept in the Mexican context to encompass the alarming and increasing number of femicides—particularly the ones in Ciudad Juarez (Chihuahua in Northern Mexico) in the 1990s (p. 210). She suggests focusing, not only on the crimes themselves, but also on the socio-political context of the distribution of justice. According to Lagarde (2008), in order for femicide to exist, there must be a concurrence of silence, omission, negligence, and partial or total collusion of the authorities otherwise responsible for preventing and eradicating these crimes (p. 216).

According to the Mexican National Citizen Observatory of Femicide (OCNF)—a citizens group founded on the principles of human rights with a gender perspective that seeks to provide the victims of violence, femicides, and other rights violations with greater access to justice—the classification of femicide is important for the administration of justice. Currently, of the 32 states that comprise Mexico, all of them except one have incorporated femicide classifications and regulations into their legal structures. However, there are cultural, administrative and gendered obstacles at work in administrating justice to the victims. Firstly, the fact that the femicide classification is incorporated in regulatory frameworks does not necessarily imply that it has been put into practice by local officials and experts. There are, for example, a lack of research protocols and problems with the interpretation of the law (Goche, 2015). Secondly, there are also certain parties that do not want to provide accurate information about the actual numbers of femicide cases, creating coordination problems with other law enforcement agencies (Goche, 2013). Thirdly, the criminals themselves are often allowed to rationalize their crimes, as many of the murders are committed by former partners and crimes thus become classified as crimes of passion or domestic violence, hence leading to a tendency to criminalize the victim and justify the criminal. In this context, the OCNF proposes

an administration of justice based on the principles of autonomy and objectivity—i.e. bolstering the idea that these crimes exist on their own without depending on other criminal practices (Estrada, 2014, p. 30). They also propose that achieving equality in the law from a gendered perspective requires the creation of different regulations when crimes against women are concerned.

The organized civil society, particularly women and human rights organizations, have played a determining role in the legal improvements to prosecute violence against women in Mexico. Additionally, the families of the victims have made visible the complexity of the problem, specifically the different dimensions attached to them and the failures of public institutions in administrating justice. For instance, along with Droncita, the Rexiste project has participated in several interventions and public demonstrations aimed at raising global awareness of femicides and violence against women in Mexico. However, this collective project is reluctant to define itself as activist, artistic, or even feminist in nature. Avoiding such categorization, they reflect on the ways in which patriarchal culture influences and organizes collective action. This reflection has been constructed as a two-way process: firstly, a process of understanding the power relations and understanding what needs to be transformed and, secondly, situating and discussing that transformation and self-criticism inside the collective project on the basis of daily activities. In this sense, Rexiste has also been a space of constant reflection, criticism, and debate regarding feminism in all its manifestations.

"Femicide State": Rendering gender violence public

One of the major protests in the fight against gender-based violence in Mexico was held on April 24, 2016. Social networking sites have been playing an important role in shaping new ways of calling for collective action, the organization of protests and the mobilization of civil society, feminist organizations, and collectives. For instance, from her Twitter account, Droncita invited the public to the protest, which according to data from the organizers drew 10,000 participants from 40 different cities across Mexico.

Image 1. Droncita: "All together to the street"

Source: Rexiste's image without copy right under Creative Commons license.

The protest began in the main square of Ecatepec (20 km from Mexico City), which is the municipality that currently ranks highest for female deaths presumed to be murder in Mexico (SEGOB, 2016). The protest took place from 12:00 to 18:00. To draw attention to the complicity of the state in the omission of justice from a gendered perspective, various feminist collectives gathered and painted a monumental tag in enormous white letters with the phrase "Femicide State." From high above, Droncita took pictures of the letters as a symbolic act in the public space, making visible otherwise hidden narratives of impunity and lack of judicial inquiry in cases of femicide. In addition, Droncita posted aerial videos of the protest to her Twitter account. The photos were uploaded on social networking accounts with phrases such as "We Want Us Alive" and "Violet Spring" as an allusion to the Arab Spring. Additionally, there were posts letting the Mexican president know that he is also part of the femicide state. Moreover, a hash tag was created in social media with the same inscription #EstadoFeminicida (FemicideState) as a digital political inscription.

Image 2. Femicide State

Source: Rexiste's image without copy right under Creative Commons license.

After the monumental tag on the square in Ecatepec, the protest proceeded to the Revolution Monument in Mexico City. There, workshops took place using stencils. The demonstrators both dressed and painted stencils in purple as a symbolic act to occupy the public space and (re-)claim historical and symbolical practices of feminist activists.[1]

Image 3. Stencils workshops at the revolution monument

Source: Rexiste's image without copy right under Creative Commons license.

The protest then continued along the Revolution Avenue (one of the most important avenues in Mexico City) and ended at a symbolic place called El Angel de la Independencia (The Angel of Independence), where a manifesto against the Femicide State was read. Photos and videos were then circulated via social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) to make visible unpunished cases of femicide in the country.

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Image 4. Droncita: "From Ecatepec to the Angel, with our dreams we fly until the sky"

Droncita @droncita · 24 Apr 2016
De Ecatepec al Ángel, con estos sueños volamos hasta las nubes #24A #VivasNosQueremos #PrimaveraVioleta
Másde131, Revolution News, estereotipas and 5 others

↩   ⟲ 58   ♥ 33   •••

Source: Rexiste's image without copy right under Creative Commons license.

Barad (2007) states that "apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering" (p. 148). Similarly, the Rexiste project shows that it is a material discursive network of meaning making that explains the feminist mobilization and creation of hybrid spaces (both urban and digital). These include, for example, software, drones, social networking platforms, tablets, and computers.

Rexiste appropriates the drone as a socio-digital disruptive technology with which to promote networks of heterogeneous actors, but also to develop networks of solidarity with other social and feminist collectives. This appropriation represents both an innovative intervention in public spaces and an innovative form of protest. It also reveals the need to decentralize the common focus on the Internet in the analysis of digital technologies and to open the debate to include material performativity. Barad (2007) suggests this can be achieved by making visible the human and non-human, and material and discursive agencies implicated in performing collective interventions in hybrid spaces (both digital and non-digital). Together, Rexiste and Droncita are enacting feminist political practices that ask us to reflect upon political categories of power contestation, such as the politics of vision and drone mediation.

The politics of vision: Drone mediation and digital politics

Haraway (1998) highlights the power of vision for avoiding binary oppositions, but also for questioning the power of seeing whilst not being seen—to represent whilst escaping representation (p. 677). The author proposes a feminist account of the body that metaphorically re-emphasizes vision, including technological mediation beyond objectivism (Haraway, 1998, p. 678). According to Haraway, feminism is about location and situated knowledge, and thus about critical vision. In this context, the drone vision is not an objective vision at all; rather, it is a situated claim of vision as a counter-culture strategy to render visible the power relations and mechanisms of the femicide state. Rexiste, along with Droncita, are thus appropriating this strategy to challenge the politics of vision in Mexico by proposing counter-visual narratives. In this context, Droncita can be read as the cyborg of our times; an illegitimate offspring of militarism (Haraway, 2004, p. 10), shaping human and machinic agencies whilst also combining narrative fictions and as yet partial and situated visions that make visible and enable power relations by allowing the extension of vision and embodiment through technological mediation. Droncita signifies images by offering a view from above in order to render visible power relations, but she also offers a view from below—and beyond—in order to reveal femicide and the lack of juridical administration. She thus claims and materializes the social appropriation of a formerly military technology to denounce abuses of power and violence against women in Mexico. The images captured by the drone are also instruments of counter-power, as they enable visual narratives that challenge media and governmental criminalization of both protesters and victims of gendered violence.

However, the impact of Rexiste's interventions is not just found in images that offer an alternative view, but also in the textual and mediated practices of the political inscriptions of social networking sites and in diverse digital formats. The point is not just to see from above and to intervene in the aerial space as a public space, but also to attain a broader perspective—a differently embodied perspective mediating between humans and non-humans. The re-signification of vision as a strategy of counter-culture then works as a new way for feminist politics to make the state accountable for certain events. This is also a great innovation in collective action and social protest, not least as the government has no frame of reference for how to react to this kind of intervention in the public space (Rexiste, personal communication, December 5, 2017).

In order to analyze these strategies of counter-power we have to think about the technology that gives life to Droncita—not only in terms of its design, but also in terms of its advantages and risks as a socio-digital technology. Whilst it is true that social movements do create counter-power strategies, it is also necessary not to fall into triumphalist visions of digital technologies. Rexiste places the need to render gender power relations visible center stage, not only in terms of violence, but also in the context of a feminist appropriation of the social space. It is a symbolic act to render the domination of social relations and violence visible and, most importantly, to denounce the complicity of state actors in those power relations. In fact, the same appropriation of urban and digital space by this group also serve—through

visual, textual and symbolic narratives—to make visible asymmetric gender relations, the abuse of authority and impunity, and the social imaginary concerning the dominant gender in the use of digital technologies and in the polemical and fictional character struggling for social change. It is thus not coincidental that Droncita is personified as a female-machine concerned with boosting socio-political changes in Mexico.

Droncita is not simply a counter-drone in the struggle for change; she also conducts digital politics on Twitter with polemical inscriptions on social networking sites. She connects online and virtual species, making visible the distributed human and non-human and the interfaces between humans and machines (Suchman, 2007). For instance, the inscription Femicide State that was captured in a political intervention was then converted into a #FemicideState hash tag in digital protests to denounce the complicity of the Mexican State in cases of femicide with the picture and the political inscription on Twitter "EPN [Enrique Peña Nieto, current Mexican president] we only want to remind you that you are part of the #FemicideState." This hash tag, just as others in the Latin America region, were then connected and converted into political subjects (Gutierrez, 2016) that created and maintained heated discussions about violence against women in digital spaces in the region. Moreover, the hash tags "#VivasNosQueremos" (We Want Us Alive), "#EstadoFeminicida" (Femicide State), "#24A" (April 24), "#Miprimeracoso" (My First Harassment) and "#NiUnaMenos" (No One Less) were easily connected with other latent violence issues against women in La Paz (Bolivia) with phrases such as "A state that blames female victims is a Femicide State." In Argentina, the hash tag "#NiUnaMenos" became a trending topic after several national strikes and massive protests that had been taking place from the summer of 2015 to October 2016 to render visible cases of rape and violence against women. In Guatemala 37 girls were killed in a fire at an overcrowded government-run youth shelter (Aljazeera, 2017). The blaze allegedly started when the residents set matrasses alight to protest against rape, mistreatment and bad conditions at the shelter. Subsequently, on Twitter the hash tags #EstadoFeminicida, #Justicia, and #LasNiñasdeGuatemala circulated together on social networking sites.

Contemporary literature on political participation and social movements is calling for a transcendence of the "digital divide" (off/online) between urban and digital spaces. The idea is to analyze the practices of social collectives in order to trace their interconnections by exploring the ways in which digital technologies are inseparable from our materiality, activities, technologies, and daily practices (Postill, 2012; Shah et al., 2015). However, who the specific actors are who make this continuum possible and transcend the division of spaces, and by which mechanisms they can connect spaces—i.e., who the mediators are—remains unexplored. From a feminist technoscience perspective, the Rexiste case shows us that the different actors, agencies, materialities and cultural phenomena are all interconnected via the Internet. Droncita mediates these collective actions by connecting digital and physical spaces. From her Twitter account and YouTube channel, Droncita calls for mobilizations to make issues related to gender-based violence public, and further enacts political inscriptions that are then converted into

hash tags with images of political interventions. Droncita then mediates these two spaces by activating a feminist relational politics.

As feminist technoscience literature suggests and Rexiste demonstrates, there is a material network of meaning making comprised of various hybrid entanglements, for instance between digital and non-digital spaces, and between discursive and material practices with distributed agencies amongst humans and machines. The drone thus shapes feminist political protest in Mexico, the mediations and counter-strategies of which are performative—part fiction and part reality.

CONCLUSIONS

This article addressed gender-based violence and the feminist politics mobilized to fight against it in a contemporary Mexican context. The primary objective of this article was to analyze the role of specific new digital technologies (the Internet and drones) in opening up new spaces of political participation and contestation in order to shape collective action in Mexico. Through analysis of the collective project Rexiste, the article made visible feminist political strategies that dispute current power structures. Specifically, there were three areas that the article centered as new categories in feminist politics in the digital era. The first one concerns the politics of vision as a counter-culture strategy—specifically its critical feminist view. The second concerns the strategies employed to make violence against women visible through innovative political interventions, performances, and new embodiment strategies, specifically utilizing the distributed agencies existing between Rexiste and Droncita in political interventions. These interventions tackled the central governmental political actor: to point the finger of blame at the State and to make it accountable for the femicides in Mexico. Lastly, the Rexiste project shows how Droncita mediates across divides, for example, across discursive and material practices. She is also the primary mediator between interventions in social, aerial, and digital spaces, as well as between embodiment and the long-distance view from above—between a fictional character and the power relations that are rendered visible; between expert knowledge and lay knowledge; between human and machinic agencies. Rexiste also evidenced the mediation strategies that exist between urban and digital spaces by exploring continuities in political mottos such as #Femicidestate. These strategies were converted into a political subject that not only keeps the issue alive, but also connects with other political subjects as the sum-product of Latin American feminisms.

By appropriating a drone as a means by which to create an apparatus of counter-visibility as well as a digital female character in the struggle for change, Rexiste not only denounce the violence per se, but also render visible the complicities and failures of the Mexican State in the application of justice—a dynamic that makes the state itself complicit in the events. This is a problem that extends to other countries in Latin America. In doing this, Droncita and her socio-material networks render visible the entanglements of gender, science, technology, and justice, thereby shaping a feminist politics against gender violence.

By addressing the issues surrounding digital politics, contemporary feminist technoscience literature promotes a more integrated analysis that seeks to transcend binaries—the virtual versus face-to-face politics, or between different media technologies. Feminist technoscience literature informs these discussions by stressing not only the discursive, but also the material performativities distributed between humans and non-human actors that lead to new forms of intervention in social spaces. Thus, feminist technoscience literature highlights the role of mediators in hybrid spaces, specifically the actors that connect spaces and through which translation processes occur. Finally, it allows for an analysis of social movements and the use of technologies beyond the merely determinist and triumphalist to also analyze the power relations at work—especially in terms of gender relations and state accountability. This will require the future agenda to continue to render visible and analyze other divisions related to gender, class, and ethnicity that are reproduced by new digital technologies and their politics.

ENDNOTES

[1] Such as the feminist suffrage movement.

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