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# Bodies-holding-bodies: The trembling of women's *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* and the feminist responses to the earthquakes in Mexico City

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## ABSTRACT

Territories are political and lived spaces, collectively enacted via everyday practices and human-nonhuman interactions. Indigenous and feminists' movements in *Abya Yala* (Latin America) are calling for plural understandings of territories, bodies, and Earth, as inseparable and co-constituted – *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*. We build on the relationality of territory to analyse the 1985 and 2017 earthquakes in Mexico, which dramatically transformed the lives of thousands of people, particularly precarious workers. Drawing on in-depth interviews with activists that participated in disaster response brigades, we focus on the experiences of the *Brigada Feminista* (Feminist Brigade), who metaphorically and physically held and continue to hold the bodies of marginalised women, disrupting the configuration of territories of violence to demand access to spaces and justice. They organised to protect women not only from the impacts of the earthquake, but from capitalist and patriarchal violence. Here, "*sororidad*" emerges as a form of collective action, the territorial practice of coming together to resist gendered violence and oppression, fighting for the survival and expansion of safer women territories. We contend that a relational politics of place in academia that challenges the separation of territories, bodies, and disasters needs to be foregrounded on listening, learning, and opening spaces to counter-hegemonic territorial propositions.

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## Introduction

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, during a webinar on "activism", as part of the series "Conversations about feminists' geographies in Latin America" (organised by the School of Gender Studies, Colombian National University), the *GeoBrujas* (Geography Witches)<sup>1</sup> collective discussed the historical tensions between activism and academia, focusing on feminist geographers. Their discussion highlighted the frequent extractive nature of research practices that capture and capitalise on the ideas and experiences of 'women'<sup>2</sup> activists, often sharing them as *outcomes* of academic inquiry, while erasing the grassroots collective *processes* through which these ideas emerge. Indeed, academia has often

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played an active role contributing to the violence and precarity<sup>3</sup> that the bodies of activists and women experience daily. As GeoBrujas saliently noted, we – researchers – regularly end up speaking on behalf of activists, becoming referents of concepts and theorisations produced by them. In listening to these concerns, we reflected on how our own research practices contribute to existing and emerging forms of epistemic violence enforced by colonial, racist, patriarchal, and capitalist systems (cf. Cruz Hernández 2016). We turn our gaze both inwards and outwards, moved by the experiences of women and activists during two high-intensity earthquakes that took place in Mexico, the 19<sup>th</sup> of September of 1985 and 2017, exactly 32 years apart.

We follow the invitation from Lorena Cabnal, an Indigenous Maya Q'eqchi'-Xinka activist and member of the *Tzk'at Red de Sanadoras Ancestrales del Feminismo Comunitario* (Tzk'at Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism) of “*poner el corazón en la palabra*” – speaking from the heart.<sup>4</sup> We aim to bring visibility and amplify the work of the *Brigada Feminista* (Feminist Brigade) in 2017, not as subjects of study, but as key and powerful political actors involved in the production of safer women territories that extend before, during, and after the earthquakes. We use a historical approach, listening to lived experiences of these earthquakes, to question the epistemic separation among disasters, women's bodies, and territories. This analysis is shaped by our own feminist reflexivity and political commitment to unlearn and dismantle epistemic forms of violence that feed into the racialised and classist exclusion and exploitation of certain women (see Rodríguez Castro 2021).

We draw inspiration from the collective processes of Indigenous communitarian feminists and decolonial activists in *Abya Yala* (Latin America), who emphasise the relationality between territories, bodies, and the Earth: *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2014; Cruz Hernández 2016; Zaragocín and Caretta 2021). Building on the impossibility of separating territory, body, and Earth/land struggles, we follow the lived experiences of activists and volunteers, as the Earth trembled through its core, shaking the lives of millions of people, creating waves of moving bodies and material flows. The earthquakes also exposed and exacerbated the daily violence experienced by precarious women workers (Poniatowska 1995; ProDESC et al. 2018; González-Ramírez et al. 2022).

The escalation of violence during the earthquakes is part of Mexico's colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal system, which has historically and systematically positioned racialised and impoverished women, as monolithic, ahistorical, and “disposable” (González-Ramírez et al. 2022; Wright 2006). In this system, the coloniality of gender emerges as a hierarchical and racially differentiated dichotomy, enforced to support colonial relations of power over gendered bodies, where Indigenous, Black, and *Campesina* women are dehumanised and reduced to labour and sex (Lugones 2010, 748, 2020, 33). As urban upper middle-class white-*mestiza* (mixed-race) women, geographers from Colombia and Mexico, migrants working and writing in English in Australia and in Germany, we have also benefited from this dominant matrix of power and Eurocentric forms of knowledge production embedded in colonial-epistemic violence (see Rodríguez Castro 2021, 68). The objectivisation and dehumanisation of certain women's labour and bodies is no accident, but central to the circulation and accumulation of capital and power in Mexico and along the Global North, including the places where we do research from, where we teach, where our research takes us, and where we present our work (Mbembe

2003; Wright 2006). Between 1985 and 2016, at least 52,210 girls and women in Mexico were victims of femicide (Berlanga Gayón 2014; SEGOB et al. 2017, 17).<sup>5</sup> The killing of women speaks to the politics of place and the territorialisation of state power and women's struggles (Harcourt and Escobar 2005; Mbembe 2003; Wright 2011). Before, during and after the earthquakes the writing of new spatial relations moves beyond the material shifts of the Earth, deeply embedded in forms of colonial violence.

We use the earthquakes as events that expose the complexity of ways in which bodies enable and constrain the configuration of territories of violence. The earthquakes in Mexico City left a dramatic death toll of 40,000 in 1985, and 369 in 2017. At least 61% of the 2017 casualties were identified as women, with many more injured (Allier Montaño 2018). Although these figures are still debated, they reveal disproportionate impacts on low-income women and migrant workers from rural areas in Mexico, as well as Central America and Asia (in 2017), as the earthquakes shook the everyday violence and oppression produced by relations of class, race, and gender (Alilovic 2018; Solís and Donají Núñez 2017; Wright 2006). Many domestic workers were at higher risk locations – at least 400 buildings and 30,000 houses collapsed in 1985, and 23 buildings (16 residential) in 2017 (Allier Montaño 2018, 14; Solís and Donají Núñez 2017). All this in the context of at least 47.5% of the women in Mexico engaging in unpaid work, including domestic work (data from 2014, Solís 2017, 88). Dominant divisions of labour worked to constrain the lives and mobilities of certain women placing them at higher risk locations, where many experienced exploitative labour conditions, working for long hours inside their or someone else's homes and in poorly constructed and maintained *maquiladoras* (export-processing factories). For instance, Mexico City's garment district, known as *San Antonio Abad*, was one of the worst affected areas by both earthquakes (Allier Montaño 2018).

This paper aims to honour the efforts of solidarity networks who reclaimed territorial control over collapsed buildings while demanding the earthquake search and rescue of women workers. We centre our analysis on the *brigadas* (brigades) that emerged immediately after the earthquake in 2017, including the Brigada Feminista, human rights groups, *Brigada de Arquitectos* (Architecture Brigade), and the *Brigada de Electricistas* (Electrical Workers Brigade). Brigadas are groups of organised civil society that come together in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis. Although there is political contestation between and within brigades, they temporarily mobilised students, feminists, human right groups, academics, unionists to coordinate and support rescue efforts. Brigades have emerged from historical individual and collective experiences, including workers unions (e.g., Mexican Electrical Workers Union), central to Mexico's social movements and democratisation processes (Allier Montaño 2018; Poniatowska 1995).

We pay special attention to the Brigada Feminista whose political presence emerged as key when discussing the earthquakes with the other brigades. This brigade spontaneously responded, using social media – Facebook and WhatsApp – to aid and demand the earthquake rescue of trapped women. We are not interested in “studying” this brigade, instead we aim to understand how their grassroots mobilisation created safer women territories (see also Koopman 2011). Moments after the 2017 earthquake, the Brigada Feminista brought together feminist activists and volunteers to the sites of collapsed buildings. In the context of femicides and violence in Mexico, women's territorial control destabilised preconceptions of *how* and *who* should respond during disasters. Their presence ruptured the processes that shaped where and whose bodies were “worth”

rescuing. We argue that they metaphorically and physically held – and continue to hold – the bodies of women to emancipate the territories of violence produced by the state with social and material manifestations not only during the response, but afterwards, shaping recovery efforts. The Brigada Feminista enacted and embodied territories of care, resistance, and possibilities.

To develop this argument, we first draw on the onto-epistemological proposition of *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*, highlighting its contributions to feminists' geopolitics and decolonial thinkers, while focusing on the making of territory. Following this, we present the collective and grassroots notion of *sororidad* as a territorial concept, one that is being theorised by activists and groups of women through their everyday practices. Often defined as the political act of embodying someone else's struggles as your own (Cabnal 2019; Lagarde y de los Ríos 2010). We think with *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* and *sororidad* to examine the 1985 and 2017 earthquakes in Mexico. Although our empirical research focuses on the brigades that responded in 2017, conversations with activists and volunteers emphasised the relevance of understanding the context of the 1985 earthquake to comprehend what happened during the 2017 earthquake. The memory of how society organised and formed brigades in 1985 was vivid during the 2017 earthquake, compounded by the memory of precarious workers, trapped and abandoned by the state. We centre our analysis in two collapsed buildings in Mexico City, *Álvaro Obregón 286* and *Bolívar 168* (also referred to as *Chimalpopoca*), while also acknowledging the uneven response and acts of *sororidad* of Indigenous and *Campesina* communitarian feminists and communities resisting state violence in Mexico's rural areas and other territorialities (see González-Ramírez et al. 2022). We build on the territorial practice of *sororidad* to emphasise the relationality between the bodies of *compañeras* (women companion, partner, friend, colleague, and/or comrade, see Lugones and Rosezelle 1995) and their myriad practices of care and coming together to fight for the survival and expansion of safer women territories.

In contributing to the everyday efforts that oppose the violence experienced in the *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* of Indigenous, Black, transgender, queer, migrant women, and women with disabilities during and beyond disasters, we position women as heterogeneous and politically active agents of change. Our analysis exposes the territorial configurations of *sororidad* in unsettling colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal territories of violence. Finally, we reflect on the need for careful research practices grounded in *sororidad*, to actively challenge and resist the meanings and practices that sustain territories of violence, particularly in the context of disasters.

## Methodology

Our analysis draws on 11 in-depth interviews (seven individual and four group interviews) with 22 activists and volunteers from the Brigada Feminista, human rights groups, Brigada de Arquitectos, and the Brigada de Electricistas, recruited via the second author's engagement with networks of activists in Mexico City and snowball sampling. We obtained ethics clearance from the University of New South Wales. Face-to-face interviews in Mexico City were conducted by the second author in Spanish. The interviews took place in a "safe location" chosen by the interviewees, primarily in public spaces, including restaurants, classrooms, meeting in a corner and following their directions. Activists and volunteers

granted their verbal and informed consent before the interview. They shared their experiences during the earthquake, following their own stories and interests, and closing with their own reflections on the future. This involved sharing and listening to difficult stories and recalling emotional and distressing experiences (Davidson, Bondi, and Smith 2005), their wellbeing during these conversations was a priority, letting them lead the flow and length of the conversation, which ranged from thirty minutes to two hours and a half. Their narratives revealed the political relevance and presence of the Brigada Feminista during the response and recovery, which informed our focus and analysis. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed according to emerging themes using NVivo. These themes included the relationality between the earthquakes and material flows, participation, body and emotions, activated bodies and *sororidad*, gendered violence, militarisation of the response, neoliberal state, time and memory, and the role of academia. Quotes included here were translated to English by the authors. The identities of activists are concealed. We also consulted secondary data available in English and Spanish that directly discussed the earthquakes in relation to the identified themes, this included academic articles, official documents and reports, news media, and documentaries, which allowed us to directly contrast and examine dominant discursive narratives.

Our collaboration as co-authors emerged from the need to collectively listen and process the embodied emotions of these stories. A process through which we shifted the initial focus of the research on disaster response to the experiences of women and the role of the Brigada Feminista. We draw on the stories and presence of this brigade as central to the memory and revindication of women's territorial struggles within and beyond the earthquakes. In caring for the bodies and stories of these women, we listened to our own emotions, caring for our own bodies and wellbeing (Ratnam 2019). This involved slowing-down periods, in-depth reflections and discussions, carefully listening to each other, and placing the interests of activists and volunteers in sharing their stories at the heart of our analysis. We refuse to speak on behalf of the Brigada Feminista and the activists that shared their stories with us, also not sharing stories that could potentially expose them to risks (see Simpson 2007). We do not aim to position them as a unified and static group, acknowledging the potential harm of colonising and occupying their everyday struggles as they use their own voices and autonomy to share their own stories and grassroots theorisations. Our labour writing this article ripples from the earthquakes, deeply moved by the stories and memories we heard. We join the multiplicity of voices in the streets and social movements in Mexico that have and continue to express rage against gendered violence during and beyond the earthquakes, while seeking to honour the political power of *sororidad* (see Luchadoras 2020).

### **Bodies and Earth making territories**

Masculine and Western imaginaries of territory foreground the separation between territory and the experiences of being and living with and in dynamic and complex places (Halvorsen 2018). Historically, dominant understandings of territory are tied to the configuration of the modern state, enforcing a hierarchical ordering of space, which marginalises and renders invisible other ways of engaging and understanding territory (Elden 2013; Jackman et al. 2020; Perez and Melo Zurita 2020). Yet, territories are both political

projects and lived spaces, built on everyday actions and practices that enable and constrain the possibilities and connection between bodies – human and nonhuman entities (Cruz Hernández 2016; Jackman et al. 2020; Smith, Swanson, and Gokariksel 2016).

Multiple territories emerge from specific historical and geographical contexts, as well as meanings and practices (Halvorsen 2018). Ancestral and present memories intersect, redefining events, stories, history, and tradition with new perspectives, leading to different imaginaries of territory (Serrano 2015). Challenging patriarchal and colonial understandings of territory, *feminist political geography* and *feminist geopolitics* have emphasised the agency of everyday experiences in shaping territory (Jackman et al. 2020; Koopman 2011; Wastl-Walter and Staeheli 2004). For example, Koopman (2011, 277) highlights the ways in which grassroots movements in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda use embodied strategies like running independent schools and shelters to create “not safe, but safer” territories, thus paying attention to the ways in which different bodies, spaces, practices, and knowledges construct territorial perspectives (Jackman et al. 2020; Hyndman 2001). Smith (Smith, Swanson, and Gokariksel 2016, 1511) has argued that “bodies not only *are* territory but also *make* territory”, connecting territory, body, and the production of individual and collective subjectivities. Bodies challenge state territorial control, actively creating and sustaining alternative territorial configurations, which are embodied and material, and vulnerable to the violence produced by state territorialisation practices (Smith, Swanson, and Gokariksel 2016). However, these bodies of work have been dominated by Anglophone academic perspectives, offering limited space to engage with alternative conceptualisations of territory produced in practice, outside of academia, by activists, collectives, and social movements in the Global South (Koopman 2011; Naylor et al. 2018).

Decolonial thinkers in Abya Yala have rejected Eurocentric understandings of territory, emphasising the coloniality of gender, and the intersections between gender, class, and race, centring on the plurality of Indigenous and Black counter-hegemonic and embodied territorial propositions (Heimer *this issue*; Naylor et al. 2018). There is an opening of the category of the body to highlight its multiplicity and the role of body parts in connecting individual and collective bodies to different territories (Cruz Hernández 2016; Zaragocín 2018). This relational understanding is grounded in Indigenous ontologies of space (Espinosa Miñoso et al. 2014) “... and decolonial understandings of the gendered body” (Zaragocín 2018, 204). Indeed, Indigenous communitarian feminists and activists in Abya Yala, argue that the body and the Earth, co-constitute territories, reconfigured as *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*:

“... we have been the custodians, we generate and regenerate the places where life is created, we argue that the struggles for the recovery and defence of our territories and land must go hand-in-hand with the struggle for the recovery of our territory-body because ‘historical and oppressive violence exists both, for our body territory and for our historical territory, the Earth’” (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2014, 16).

*Tierra*, in this onto-epistemological proposition, is used in relation to Mother Earth, land, as well as where life is created and recreated, “a meaningful place, built with affection, built with a history” (Cabnal 2010, 2013, 3). A pluriverse of worlds and territorialities (Haesbaert 2020). Territories are frequently conquered by invading and violating the bodies of racialised women (Zaragocín and Caretta 2021). The claim is on the body,

with violence that is systemic and often militarised (Rodríguez Castro 2020), tying the intimate and individual to the public, to state power (Cruz Hernández 2016). The objectification of the body emerges as an embodied manifestation of territorial power. Cabnal (2015) asserts that the body is a living and historical territory. As such, Indigenous territorial struggles start on the bodies, particularly women bodies, which extend to the survival of life – Indigenous worlds and beings (Haesbaert 2020, 296). Moreover, memories imprint in our bodies what is happening in the territory, where the healing of the body and the Earth is indivisible from defending territory (Cabnal 2015, 2018; Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2014; Dorronsoro 2013).

Earthquakes and other disaster events move bodies and matter, interrupting and transforming existing territorial configurations and power relations. The earthquakes in Mexico exposed the connection between the Earth's geological movements and the embodied politics of place – the intricate intimacies of the social and the biophysical (Gerlofs 2021; Yusoff 2018). It forces open the materialities and processes that transform everyday surfaces into unstable grounds, partially uncovering the unseen (Melo Zurita, Munro, and Houston 2018). The invisibilised gendered, racialised, and migrant bodies operating heavy machinery and toxic substances, working in overcrowded and poorly sustained places, are more exposed to the dangers of the moving Earth, carrying the burdens of capitalism (Gerlofs 2021; Yusoff 2018). As a human rights activist argued during an interview “*not all bodies experience a disaster in the same way*”. We cannot separate the geology of the earthquakes in Mexico City, a megalopolis growing on top of ancient lakes, and the history of political activism and social movements that led to democracy in 2000 and have increased the demands for the protection of women's rights (Gerlofs 2021). In the following sections we examine the interconnection between territory, body, and the Earth, focusing on the embodied violence and resistance experienced by precarious women workers and feminist activists during the 1985 and 2017 earthquakes. Our analysis highlights the relationality of these events, focusing on the territorial practices of *sororidad* that resist state violence, creating territories of possibility.

## Territories of violence

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1985 and 2017, high-intensity earthquakes disrupted and transformed Mexico's history. Thousands of people took to the streets, seeking to help. Civil society volunteers organised solidarity networks into brigades, subsequently leading the search and rescue efforts. The response involved organising rescue shelters, food donation centres; offering medical and emotional assistance; the removal of debris, cooking, and cleaning; supporting the assessment of buildings structural damages, disconnecting water and electricity services; and documenting human rights abuses (Allier Montaño 2018; Suárez Buendía 2018). Some of these activities have continued years after the earthquakes.

The embodied and place-based experiences during and after the earthquakes remain deeply ingrained in Mexico's collective memory and territorial configurations (Allier Montaño 2018). Just before the 2017 earthquake struck, the then President, Enrique Peña Nieto, raised the Mexican flag at the *Plaza de la Constitución* in Mexico City to commemorate the 1985 earthquake. A minute of silence marked the event to remember

the loss of lives. A few hours later, silence would also be needed by rescue brigades to hear any alive person trapped under the rubble.

For many who had experienced the devastating impacts of the 1985 earthquake, the trembling earth evoked fear and trauma, the inseparability of bodies and the Earth. Numerous collectives drew on their often-long-term networks and territorial relations to mobilise support. As explained by Patricia, a public school and university history teacher: *"At the time of the earthquake, these people were already working together ... they have networks that quickly activate to respond to the tragedy ... "*. Although mobile phone networks were down, access to WhatsApp and social media continued, becoming central platforms of connection. Activists shared calls for donations and assistance, while also documenting their lived and territorialised experiences of the earthquake.

The lack of official communication from government channels created an atmosphere of confusion, making social media the main source of (mis)information. As journalist Blanche Petrich recalls, in the documentary *El dolor y la esperanza* (The pain and the hope), the authorities were asking people to stay at home, arguing that the military would take care of everything. This was the same message she heard in 1985, when civil society response efforts exceeded state efforts and played an essential role in saving lives. Soon images of massive human chains removing debris populated the media, including those of volunteer rescuers, known as *Los Topos* (The Moles)<sup>6</sup> raising their fists to demand silence. As Oscar, a human rights lawyer, described:

*"One of the most striking scenes I have seen is when they raised the fist ... the silence. We made ourselves statues, it vibrated inside you, in your way of acting, because there was a person there, it was worth being there ... that silence shook your body. Once Los Topos said, 'there is life there', the joy felt amongst those that were present doesn't even compare with the feeling of the Mexican National soccer team winning ... Everyone shouted, '¡orale a chingarle!'—hey, let's get to work!"*

Rescue efforts involved collective action and coordination, the bodies of volunteers became deeply attuned to the trembling Earth's noises and silences. They worked together to detect the presence of trapped individuals, while trying to assess the extent of structural damage to secure their own safety. This was an extremely difficult task in the context of chaos, unstable debris, and recurrent aftershocks.

The 1985 earthquake triggered the transition from a reactive to a preventive model to disaster risk reduction, progressively recognised under the banner of "civil protection" (Ruiz-Rivera and Malgarejo-Rodríguez 2017). This led to the creation of a new Building Code in 1987, which was updated in 2004; however, institutional capacities and resources for its implementation have been unevenly distributed both between and within urban and rural areas, reducing the enforcement and compliance with civil protection measures (Ruiz-Rivera and Melgarejo-Rodríguez 2017). In 1985 and 2017, the response from state-led agencies and public servants, including the police and the military, privileged the interests of powerful state and private economic actors, territorialising a hierarchical ordering of space (Brigada Feminista 2017; Poniatowska 1995). At times, this involved working with civil society to save lives, specifically in wealthier neighbourhoods, as was the case in *Roma* and *La Condesa* in the centre of Mexico City, where hundreds of volunteers mobilised to help find people trapped under the rubble, with material flows of aid being offered in great abundance often to the point of food going to waste and aid

being mobilised by activists to other parts of the city. Contrastingly, neighbourhoods in the outskirts of the capital, flows of aid were less abundant, for many, government support has yet to arrive (see Lakhani 2017; Trotta 2017). Historical power relations manifest in place, reinforcing embodied territorial inequalities (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo 2014, 17).

In the *Colonia Obrera* (a.k.a. *La Obrera*), the garment district of *San Antonio Abad* (in 1985), and the buildings *Bolívar 168* and *Álvaro Obregón 286* (in 2017), saving the lives of precarious workers was not prioritised. *La Obrera* has historically been an artisanal and working-class neighbourhood, housing migrant workers and traders coming from rural areas in Mexico and other geographies. A neighbourhood subjected to weak and temporal state presence, low service provision, and increasing levels of insecurity, with a growing expansion of commercial developments (Mercado Revilla 2015). Trapped workers in *La Obrera* threatened the capitalist interests of those that enabled and were profiting from exploiting their labour. The bodies of precarious women, including racialised and “undocumented” domestic and industrial workers, were reconfigured as disposable, at times even framed by state agents as non-existent and/or imagined. In some instances, the police and military took control over collapsed buildings, restricting the access of brigades, civil society, and the press, while actively obstructing rescue efforts and concealing what was under the rubble (Saade and Mendoza 2017; Suárez Buendía 2018). These irregularities dramatically impacted workers that could have been rescued and lost their lives trapped inside collapsed buildings (ProDESC, PODER, and SERAPAZ 2018). Violence that is deeply connected to the classist and gendered history of precarious workers in *La Obrera*. Direct, structural, and systemic violences that took place before, during, and after the earthquake, and that temporarily escalated shaking the territorio-cuerpo-tierra. Indeed, state agents appeared to be more interested in assisting companies with the removal of industrial machinery and other supplies, expediting evacuation and debris clearance processes (Brigada Feminista 2017). As noted by Lucia, an anarchist feminist from the *Brigada Feminista* in *Bolívar 168*:

*“There are testimonies from compañeras that the military were taking fabrics ... machines, papers, documents out through the back door ... Bolívar 168 comes to be this system of fascist, misogynistic patriarchal corruption, which crushed a group of workers in every sense ... passing them to the plane of non-existence.”*

In this context, activists used their bodies to resist and open spaces for visibility and collective action. In controlling and restricting the mobilities and access to specific locations, state agents worked to conceal the presence of certain bodies, expediting what they termed as “cleaning” efforts, and obstructing access to information. This reduced opportunities for justice and accountability, while also privileging the interests of private and political elites (Saade and Mendoza 2017). In the words of Fernanda, from the *Brigada de Electricistas*:

*“Many of those bodies that were alive were crushed by heavy machinery ... there were workers in Bolívar 168 ... many people were working illegally, they found passports, many ‘undocumented’ ... migrants. They said they had to suspend rescue efforts because the company owners wanted to apply for the insurance ... The military took control of the area and were controlling access ... They were taking out bodies and said ‘no, no, it is not true that there were 100 workers’. They said that there were only 20 bodies rescued, there was never an exact figure ... The*

*government's response was, if there were more bodies, why are their families not claiming them? ... The same happened in Álvaro Obregón 286 ... They were hiding what 'we' as citizens were seeing ... They even made cold rooms to keep the bodies".*

Fernanda's account exposes the cruelty and complicity of the state in protecting private interests, and its role in dictating who may live and who may die – a necropolitics (see Mbembe 2003). The very same necropolitics that governs the capitalist exploitation of the territorio-cuerpo-tierra of precarious women workers has been historically challenged and resisted by networks of activists and social movements in Mexico (see, e.g., Aguilar García 2017).

Several political and financial elites sought to capture (foreign and domestic) donations and relief funds for personal gain in the context of the upcoming 2018 Mexican General Election (Poole and Renique 2017; Saade and Mendoza 2017). Corruption was enabled in part by the lack of transparency and accountability over relief funds (Poole and Renique 2017). Meanwhile, recovery efforts remained centred on loans and market incentives, benefitting the interests of banks, construction companies, and real-estate sectors. Mariana, a university lecturer and member of the Brigada de Arquitectos, argued:

*"There wasn't any major investment from the Federal government. What they were doing was offering loans for the reconstruction ... why loans if people donated a lot of money ... there was overwhelming solidarity. We saw a state that was totally absent, not incapable or overwhelmed. The state was overwhelmed, it is because it didn't care. The military was only used as a containment mechanism ... literally to control people ... to enforce physical control over collapsed buildings, why, because people were self-organising. What they learned from 1985 is that people got organised to demand housing, services, and in both events the state said that 'nothing is collective'".*

Mariana's account questions the myth of an "overwhelmed state", often mentioned in interviews and on mainstream media. Instead arguing that the insufficient response was not an accident but a territorial strategy that served the interests of the capitalist state. A state that was not interested in participating, but on capitalising from the tragedy. State agents mainly worked to secure territorial control, seeking to maintain capital flows and accumulation. To facilitate this, the military were put in place to disrupt and de-territorialise organisational efforts, by physically impeding the bodies of victims, their families, and volunteers from encountering each other and staying in place (Poole and Renique 2017). Violence was used as a political tool to further isolate certain bodies, temporarily forcing the separation of bodies and the Earth to obstruct collective processes in defence of the territorio-cuerpo-tierra.

### **The feminicidal state**

As recalled by activists and volunteers, in 1985, numerous factories and workshops around the garment district in Mexico City collapsed after the 8.1 magnitude earthquake struck, leaving 1,326 (legal and illegal) factories and workshops inactive, 800 of these were destroyed, killing at least 600 *costureras* (seamstresses), and leaving about 7,000 women without jobs and/or income (Corona Cadena 2010, 75). As Pedro, an academic and volunteer who was involved in the emergency response in 1985 and 2017, recalled:

*"In 1985 ... in the case of the costureras compañeras from San Antonio Abad ... the owners of the factories were only interested in rescuing their machinery. They were looking for ways for the authorities to quickly declare that there were no more victims to rescue, to enable machinery to enter and rescue their machines. We know that some compañeras were still alive and were killed in this way."*

This created a collective outrage, as costureras in collaboration with other brigades and volunteers used their own bodies to block and resist, and to take control over the territorio-cuerpo-tierra. In the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake, the costureras mobilised on the streets with banners reading *"One costurera is worth more than all the machinery in the world"*. As recalled by Evangelina Corona Cadena (2010, 80), a costurera and one of the founders of the national union (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras de la Industria de la Costura, Confección y Vestidos, Similares y Conexos*), it was around the rubble that the costureras identified each other, sharing their lived experiences, and unionising their fight against oppression. Collectively demanding accountability, the protection of their rights, and better working conditions (Poniatowska 1995). The earthquake was deeply political, leading to a period popularly known as the "awakening of civil society" which was central to Mexico's democratic transition out of a 70-year one-party regime (Allier Montaño 2018). After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1993, small-scale factories located in central Mexico began disappearing. Larger-scale industrial zones of *maquiladoras* were established in United States-Mexico bordering towns (Alilovic 2018; Wright 2011).

Unsurprisingly, 32 years later, in 2017, when the 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck, the memories of 1985 were vividly present. A few blocks from San Antonio Abad, at the corner of *Bolívar* and *Chimalpopoca* streets, an old and dilapidated building, *Bolívar 168*, collapsed. *Bolívar 168* had been assessed as "high risk" and "needing demolition" after the 1985 earthquake, however, it continued to operate, housing a garment workshop, a toy importer, a gift marketer, a car safety company, and private offices (ProDESC, PODER, and SERAPAZ 2018; Turati 2017a). Its collapse revealed irregularities both in the compliance and enforcement of the building code's civil protection measures that could have saved lives. At least 15–21 people were killed inside *Bolívar 168*, predominantly women (Solís and Donají Núñez 2017; Turati 2017a). Rosa, a human rights activist, recounted:

*"We found ... irregularities in the victims' assistance from the authorities ... . We were accompanying those that lost a family member, we were just documenting, emphasising that disasters are also about human rights, because the response from the authorities was linked to the irregularities within this building ... . Apparently it was not registered and had been ruled unsafe since 1985, and needed to be demolished ... . It was built to support two floors and two more were built on top. A telecommunications antenna was also installed, which weighed four tons ... . The building was not designed to support this weight ... the Mexican Authorities who should have appropriately responded with the demolition ... did not do it."*

Several women killed in the collapse were identified as "undocumented" migrants from Central America and Taiwan, their bodies were invisibilised by capitalist relations and by the state, experiencing precarity in unsafe working spaces. Migrants escaping violence while navigating precarious migratory status. Not all bodies experience the same earthquake. Among volunteers, brigade members and neighbours, rumours of migrant women trapped in the basement spread. The lack of information about workers within the premises increased the tensions between State-led agencies and civil society (Chilango

2017). The police secured the area and restricted access to places and trapped bodies, also trying to take control over the tools (shovels, gloves, etc.) used by the brigades to support rescue efforts. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, the police left the premises claiming that there were no more trapped people and that heavy machinery was going to be used to “clean” the area. However, what had happened to the costureras in 1985 was imprinted in the collective memory of the territorio-cuerpo-tierra, shaping the actions of activists and volunteers who resisted and continued digging holes on the ground trying to access the basement to save lives. In response, the government deployed the grenadiers’ corps in the area, cordoning off the sites of collapse, escalating the violence (Suárez Buendía 2018). The state used technologies of territorialisation to control spaces and people. The processes of territorialisation enacted by the Brigada Feminista emerged as an alternative aimed at providing safety to volunteers and trapped people, while opening a space for the visibilisation of migrant women workers – a counter-territorialisation (cf. Heimer *this issue*).

In Bolívar 168 and other collapsed buildings, human rights activists documented that the police took and shared photos of the dead bodies of victims using mobile phone chats for identification purposes. This inhumane process revictimised both the victim and their relatives. As Rosa note:

*“Something we noticed through our documentation and support work, was the poor handling of bodies . . . in some cases using photos shared on mobile phones . . . a chat for deceased people, a super re-victimising treatment. They [the police] asked people to identify bodies using the phone, saying that if not the bodies would be taken away . . . this unworthy treatment towards the deceased persons and the indirect victims, their families . . . . The state is not technically trained or sensitised, and an entire system of impunity is in place that allows human rights violations.”*

The lack of sensitivity over killed workers, speaks to the efforts of the state and private actors to alienate certain bodies from particular places, obstructing opportunities for justice, accountability, and reparation.

Similarly, *Álvaro Obregón 286*, an office building that collapsed and killed at least 49 people. Three additional floors were built under irregular circumstances increasing the building’s structural instability – one of the disasters before the earthquake (ProDESC, PODER, and SERAPAZ 2018). Many of the people inside worked on a temporary basis and without contracts. Turati (2017b) revealed that government officials were restricting the entry of some rescue brigades, concealing bodies that were pulled from the rubble and not reported in official information points. Some rescue volunteers contend that they saw bodies being suspiciously sneaked out of the premises (Turati 2017b). Relatives of the victims claimed that they were ignored and rendered invisible by state agents. Official information channels were closed after the 21<sup>st</sup> of September when a list of survivors was shared. Similar technologies of violence mobilised in Bolívar 168 were implemented here, the treatment of the bodies of workers – alive and dead – was deplorable (Turati 2017c). On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September police agents asked the relatives of victims to sign a confidentiality agreement to access official information. This prevented them from sharing information to the press and on social media (Turati 2017b). The police sought to use silence to violently take control over the victim’s bodies and their families. Bodies as

sites of territorial struggles. This was rejected by the families and confrontations between civil society and the government, including the police, escalated.

While securitisation of sites and people was enacted by the state and its agencies, the long-term alliance between the largest national news network in the country, Televisa, and the state was activated. An extension of the technologies of violence that aimed to control the narrative, was the story of “Frida Sofía”, a 12-year-old girl that was supposedly trapped alive inside a school. The story was later confirmed to be a complete fabrication, a media spectacle between Televisa and state-led agencies, which served the purpose of increasing rating numbers and distracting the public from what was happening in other collapsed buildings (Villamil 2017). For two days international and national audiences tuned it to follow the story, until information about the farce was leaked. The cruelty of capitalising from the real and imagined tragedies of women’s bodies. Among activists, the term “Frida Sofía” subsequently became used as a symbol for misinformation (Muñoz 2017). This was not only used as a distraction but also as a technology to shift the attention away from particular places and bodies, as well as influence the flows of support from volunteers.

The capitalist state relies on technologies of power – discourses, military, and policies (e.g., “state of emergency”) – to dehumanise and alienate women’s bodies from their territories. In this complex entanglement, the trembling Earth exposes and intensifies the violence experienced in the territorio-cuerpo-tierra. In the following section we turn our attention to the existent and emergent territories of *sororidad*, where activists placed their bodies at the frontline to demand the continuation of rescue efforts and access to military controlled areas, while making visible state violence.

## Territories of *sororidad*

Lagarde y de los Ríos in the conversation “Walking towards *sororidad*” organised by *El Colegio de México A.C.*, (March 2021), defines *sororidad* as a political construction, a way of doing, an ethics of feminist practice that seeks to transform conflictive and unequal relationships among women. At times *sororidad* emerges as a form of alter-geopolitics, the feminist practice of activated bodies, moving bodies, coming together to build “alternative nonviolent securities” (Koopman 2011, 277), as shown by the Brigada Feminista in the post-earthquake response. However, *sororidad* goes beyond this, as a political and reflexive act that requires listening and fighting for other women’s struggles as your own. This involves contributing with specific actions (the act of being *sororo*) to collectively eliminate gendered injustices and social oppression (Cabnal 2019; Lagarde and de Los Ríos 2010). It takes elements of the friendship between women to propose an alliance, an existential and political pact where we (women) know, understand, and recognise each other as similar and different, “body to body, subjectivity to subjectivity” (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2006, 125).

Although *sororidad* is rooted in reciprocity and mutual support for the empowerment of all women, it does not assume a false notion of “common oppression” or “egalitarian unity” of women as critiqued by Black and LatinX activists in relation to the notion of *sisterhood*, and their experiences with racism within the feminist movement in the United States (see hooks 1986; Lorde 1984; Lugones and Rosezelle 1995). Instead, it forges a pact that has a clear and temporal shared agenda and objectives, one that needs to be agreed

and renewed, adding and creating new connections, as Lagarde y de los Ríos explains “by agreeing on the active political encounter, we weave immense networks that make up a great mantle that already covers the Earth” (2006, 126). As a territorial practice, *sororidad* requires unpacking the spatial configurations of women’s struggles and identifying forms of political alliance and resistance. This involves an ethics of care and solidarity that is committed to confronting and dismantling women’s uneven power relations embedded in spatialised, racialised, elitist, and heteronormative inequalities (Lagarde and de Los Ríos 2006). In being situated and relational, *sororidad* shares the collective struggle for the emancipation of women’s *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* from the colonial relations of domination facilitated and enforced by the capitalist-patriarchal state (Cabnal 2019; Zaragocín and Caretta 2021). Hence, working to build a collective memory and opportunities for justice and reparation, as Cabnal (2018) notes “recovering the joy without losing indignation”.

*Bodies-holding-bodies* during the earthquake were acts of *sororidad*, the coming together of networks of long-term and emerging collectives who occupied state territories of violence to protect women. The earthquake temporarily shook and exceeded the divide within and among certain groups, opening space for collective action to politically and actively care with/for marginalised women workers. In this necropolitics, these acts involved brigade activists putting their own lives in danger to defend the lives of those fighting to survive under the rubble. *Bodies-holding-bodies* is a historical territorial practice that affects generations of women and materialises in *sororidad*, a political act, a way of doing (Cabnal 2019; Lagarde and de Los Ríos 2010). In the context of the earthquake, *sororidad* is about “holding” as a legacy of presence and resistance. Holding such a legacy is a struggle as the mainstream narrative during disasters are dominated by masculine acts of rescue and response. During the 2017 earthquake, imagery of the police, firefighters, and dogs, including videos of hundreds of people and uniformed men singing the national anthem around collapsed buildings populated the media. The acts of women, seniors, and many others from civil society participating in the emergency response were largely excluded from the public discourse. Some alternative media outlets shared photos of women activists, which revindicated their active presence in the response (e.g., Ureste and Aroche 2017). As Ana, from the *Brigada Feminista*, observed:

*“Most of the images that I remember are of military men, brigade men. There were some women, but I remember them more institutional, in uniform ... I mean, we are not only demanding ending violence towards women ... we are also demanding the stop to the invisibilisation of women’s presences in these spaces ... I will not forget a cover photo ... a woman with a helmet raising her arm, and that is extraordinary. It speaks to us symbolically in the imaginary that we also reconstruct, that we were also in that space. We are not only in the role of the sick woman ... we were in this space, and we entered as equals.”*

Women were not only victims, but agents of resistance and change, caring and fighting for ways of living that would enable them to thrive, heal, and rebuild in the aftermath of the earthquake. Understanding the territories of *sororidad* requires acknowledging that class, gendered, and racialised struggles are interconnected and inseparable from the violent configuration of the bodies of certain women as territories that need to be conquered (Aguilar García 2017; Lugones 2020). Territories of *sororidad* are collectively

enacted to dismantle gender oppression and safeguard the survival and expansion of safer women territories (Cruz Hernández 2020). Indeed, as Indigenous and feminist activists reveal, surviving and existing within these highly violent contexts is an act of resistance every day, and all the time.

### **Brigada Feminista in Bolívar 168**

Feminisms in Mexico are historical and diverse. Different collectives include the *Costureras*, *Las Zapatistas*, Indigenous Communitarian Feminists, *Las Madres*, *Marea Verde*, *Bloque Negro*, among others (Luchadoras 2020). The arrival of feminists and emergence of the Brigada Feminista was partly linked to the proximity of Bolívar 168 to *Punto Gozadera*, a feminist restaurant-bar, where activists meet and organise political and cultural debates, workshops, and parties. As Ana recalls:

*"It is a self-governed space, a space of sororidad, of political activism where activated women come together. We say, 'where shall we meet?' and we know, 'at la Gozadera'. It is a point of encounter for all of us . . . a safe space, where we . . . are all allies . . . that is the Gozadera, a queer, feminist and transfeminist space."*

As a point of encounter, Punto Gozadera, translates to a point of joy, created as an autonomous and differentiated territory where colonial and patriarchal configurations of space are collectively discussed, resisted and transformed. The women gathering in Punto Gozadera collectively use embodied, affective, and cultural practices to hold each other and mobilise societal change (López Castañeda 2019). Aware of the precarity and high risks faced by women working in the nearby industrialised area, after the 2017 earthquake some of these activists mobilised and shared on social media images of what was happening nearby, including Bolívar 168. These images activated the bodies of other women who physically arrived and/or virtually assisted to coordinate support. As recalled by Ana, a feminist activist:

*"Suddenly the Feminist Brigade was formed. They were the compañeras from La Gozadera who came out to help . . . In 85, the centre was an area where many women died inside factories . . . So, they went to Bolívar 168 to help. They were chopping, picking up remains and rescuing trapped women . . . They also began finding documents. We wanted to know who the women working there were and under what conditions they were working."*

Sororidad was experienced in the form of *acuerpar*, defined by Cabnal (2019) as the individual and political act of outrage, embodying someone else's struggles as your own. This is also a territorial embodiment, an intention to transgress demarcations of power, to extend the rights of women, to transform violent territories to be safe in solidarity. In this *acuerpar*, Lucia, from the Brigada Feminista, had been beaten a few days before as she used her body to protect one compañera and her baby from a violent partner. They were attempting to press charges at a police station when the earthquake struck. Collectively, these women work to expose and resist the injustices experienced by the bodies of precarious and migrant women, as Lucia elucidated:

*"These bodies are not imagined, they are real, in sororidad those bodies extend to us, what happens to the other's body happens to my body. Violence, precarity and marginalisation are real."*

The gendered exclusion and representations of the disaster response were enforced not only by state agents but by masculine solidarity bodies, many of whom enforced gendered roles that restricted and controlled the participation of women. The Brigada Feminista, disrupted this narrative and reclaimed the public presence of women, enacting different spatialities. Bodies-holding-bodies is a radical territorial practice centred on defending women's lives – the material manifestation of body-body as acts of resistance. However, this was predominately framed by mainstream media and state actors as an obstacle to the military efforts, supposedly directed to the protection of women, as Lucia recollected:

*"The soldiers surrounded them, the police beat them up and chased them, they destroyed the camp, the backpacks were lost, a lot of evidence was lost ... And then, the virtual persecution began, the rape and death threats, they had to besiege the place to ensure feminists had no access ... Far beyond an earthquake, the capitalist system ... sustains itself from ... the lives and bodies of women. Nobody seems to care, and for those of us who care, we are ... persecuted as state terrorists, we are harassed and violated ... I saw compañeras come out with shattered hands, cold dead and hungry because we know that there were women who needed us, not because we were heroines, but because we were there for our sisters."*

Lucia's testimony exposes the risks and the relevance of acts of sororidad in transforming and resisting the violence enforced by the feminicidal state. By uncovering structural and systemic violences, activists turn their experiences into shared political struggles. An individual body has a limit, which is transgressed by the collective (Cruz Hernández 2020; Koopman 2011). Bolívar 168 is now a parking lot, where people mourn the lives of women who were killed, not by the earthquake, but by the violence of the state and private actors. The area is surrounded by murals, one has the same message read in the banner held by the costureras in 1985: *"One costurera is worth more than all the machinery in the world"*.

## Disasters and sororidad – concluding thoughts

The 1985 and 2017 earthquakes in Mexico emerged as flashpoints of territorial contestation, highlighting the complex ways in which bodies emerge as sites of struggle during disasters. Placing territories, bodies, and the Earth, as inseparable and co-constituted – *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*. Waves of seismic activity unearth and rearrange the spatial relations produced and sustained by the capitalist state, shifting human and nonhuman flows within and beyond the ground. At times, and in particular places, the trembling Earth disrupts the invisibility of everyday violences, intensifying existing inequalities (Phillips and Jenkins 2016; Rezwana and Pain 2021). This is unevenly experienced in geographic locations where women face higher risks to their bodies. Our analysis emphasises the role played by the state in the production of territories of violence historically and during post-disaster moments, enforced to maximise capital flows for political and financial elites. In approaching territory beyond lines and boundaries, the notion of *territorio-cuerpo-tierra* offers analytical space to understand the ways in which certain socio-material orderings emerge, endure, or are disrupted through meanings and practices that are rooted in the body, and embedded within the liveliness of the Earth. As Ursula Le Guin (1986) elucidates *"We are volcanoes. When we women offer our experience as truth, as human truth, all the maps change. There are new mountains."* Indeed, the sharing of women stories creates

emancipatory possibilities, moving bodies to individually and collectively *acuerpar* with indignation and action the injustices and shared struggles of other women (Cabnal 2015; Heimer 2022). A process that is situated and geographically grounded in spaces and territories of *sororidad*, of bodies-holding-bodies.

The collective memory of what happened in the 1985 earthquake triggered the mobilisations and countless manifestations of solidarity that took place in 2017 across Mexico (and internationally). These efforts brought together activists and their long-term networks, who defied the state's call to "stay home" as they mobilised towards places of collective action to reclaim territorial control over certain areas to save lives. The objectification of women bodies was resisted and contested physically and online, as civil society groups and brigades organised and mobilised material and assistance flows. In the words of Vivir Quintana's song *Canción sin miedo*<sup>7</sup> (Song without fear):

*"Let the Earth tremble to its core — Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra.*

*To the sororo roar of love — Al sororo rugir del amor"*

We emphasise the agency of activists who subverted this violence, using their own bodies and networks to rescue trapped women, document human-rights abuses, and share information on social media and independent media outlets. Importantly, however, the state has historically enforced a necropolitics, "sacrificing" the lives of precarious women in certain geographical areas, many of whom were killed under the rubble by the negligence of the state. Women working without documents in precarious buildings and conditions, had previously experienced the separation from other territories as they migrated, as well as a forced de-territorialisation aimed at separating their bodies from the context of violence where they were found. This separation of bodies-territories emerges as a territorial strategy by the state, which works to erase the connections and agencies of certain bodies from the places where they live, work, and resist. A forced separation from the Earth. Understanding what was happening to trapped women is essential for the pursuit of justice, as well as for the collective memory of the earthquakes and gendered violence in Mexico, opening space for alternative (and subordinated) spatial configurations.

The struggles of women in the 1985 and 2017 earthquakes, as well as the ongoing fight against femicide in Mexico, underlines the systemic ways in which certain bodies are constructed by elite actors as "disposable" to secure and sustain the means of production and asymmetries of power (Wright 2011). Historically, gendered violence in Mexico is inseparable from the violence women experienced during these earthquakes. The state, discursively and materially, informs territorial configurations where the bodies of women are at the service of men and capital. The fabricated Frida Sofía story – the young girl and damsel in distress – emerges as a poignant example of dominant constructions of women in disaster contexts, as victims waiting to be rescued by men (Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2007, 138). Women who do not adhere to these imaginaries, such as with the Brigada Feminista, are met with heightened state and patriarchal violence.

Bodies-holding-bodies is about the *cuerpo* – the material body – and *acuerpar*, the ways in which what happens to certain bodies extends to other bodies. Activists emphasised the importance of sharing their stories and revindicating their presence in the disaster response. However, we must acknowledge the contradictions of writing this

paper while using electronic devices, transport systems, and wearing clothes that at some point and to some extent were manufactured in maquiladoras in Mexico and in other so-called “low-cost” countries, being complicit to this violence, which might also extend to “you” our readers. Indeed, as we have shown, the disaster is not the earthquake, but patriarchal, racist and colonial capitalism, exploiting both the earthquakes and the bodies of women for the accumulation of capital, one that we need to commit and work every day to disrupt and dismantle (see also Squires and Hartman 2006). We seek to contribute to the collective memory of the earthquakes in Mexico, positioning and reflecting from where we are writing and working to join the pact of sororidad. In placing women at the centre as active agents of change, we highlight the territorial manifestations and configurations of sororidad in unsettling state territories of violence. We engage with Lucia’s provocation:

*“When someone asks me ‘what happened to you?’, when you ask me ‘how are you?’, well, our home crumbled and fell, that’s what happened to us. What happened to me? that I am sad, and **what happened to you? that it seems like nothing has happened, what happened to you before the earthquake that desensitised you in every way?** Don’t worry about me, I’m fine in every way . . . I understood that the earthquake had moved us more than it moved the buildings, the floor, the humanity ‘we’ used to claim and said we had inside . . . the capital system does not stop.”*

Lucia’s question of *what happened to you* is ever more important, considering the current context of a global pandemic and multiple other disasters occurring simultaneously. It speaks to the ways in which the current capitalist model enforces a separation of our bodies, from the Earth, and from the bodies of other women. In line with Lucia’s provocation, communitarian Indigenous women in Abya Yala (Cabnal 2018, 2019) are calling us to collectively heal our territorio-cuerpo-tierra. This involves listening and learning from the costureras and the Brigada Feminista and their relational politics of place. As academics we also make territory through our daily practices within and beyond academia and have a role to play in working collectively to subvert the meanings and practices that separate us from our own bodies, from the places where we work and do research, and from the Earth.

## Notes

1. GeoBrujas are a community of women geographers in Mexico who seek to disrupt the divide between academia and activism, offering counter-cartographic perspectives on the bodies and territories of women.
2. *Woman* as a constructed category that encompasses anyone that identifies as such, including cis, queer, and transgender women.
3. “The word *precarious* derives from *pray* and means to be held through the favour of another, or dependent on the will of another, which is how precarious acquires the sense of risky, dangerous, and uncertain” (Ahmed 2017, 129). “When we say something is precarious, we usually mean it is in a precarious position . . . That position – of living on the edge – is what is generalised when we speak of precarious populations (see Butler 2015 [quoted in Ahmed 2017]). Living on the edge: a life lived as a fragile thread that keeps unravelling; when life becomes an effort to hold on to what keeps unravelling” (Ahmed 2017, 238).
4. Virtual forum “Defence of the web of life from our territory-body-earth”, organised by GeoBrujas (August 2020).

5. Femicide as the “violent misogynist acts against women . . . [which] culminate in the murder of girls and women. Femicide . . . occurs because the authorities who are ommissive, negligent or acting in collusion with the assailants perpetrate institutional violence against women by blocking their access to justice and thereby contributing to impunity” (Lagarde and de Los Ríos 2010, xxiii).
6. A brigade which specialised on rescuing trapped individuals since the 1985 earthquake.
7. Song *Canción sin miedo* available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuk3ghnHkWA>.

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