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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Data activism: Feminicidio.net and the mapping of femi(ni)cide in Europe

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the study of femi(ni)cide (femicide/feminicide) has seen a surge in interest beyond Latin America and the Caribbean, accompanied by efforts to map feminist activism against femi(ni)cide, including data-driven initiatives. Although research on femi(ni)cide in Europe has gained more attention recently, comprehensive cartographies that account for how femi(ni)cide is being framed and addressed in Europe, including the mapping of femi(ni)cide data activism there, remain scarce. This article aims to bridge this gap by presenting a cartography of Geofeminicidio (Spain), the first comprehensive initiative to document femi(ni)cide in a European country, launched in 2010. Drawing on feminist epistemology of situated knowledges, biographical interview, and autoethnographic methodology, this paper traces the project's roots in Latin American knowledge and activism. Based on semi-structured interviews with the project's founder, Graciela Atencio, and complemented with analysis of other archival material, the article traces three major influences: personal lived experience, the ethics of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo human rights movement in Argentina, and the documentation of femi(ni)cides in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. This paper aims to contribute to regional and global debates on data activism related to femi(ni)cide.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

Data activism, or data-based activism, has been a topic of increasing interest in recent decades (see, for example, Gutiérrez, 2018; Milan & Gutiérrez, 2015; Milan & van der Velden, 2016; Renzi & Langlois, 2015). Miren Gutiérrez defines data activism as 'activism that utilizes the data infrastructure as an enabling method' (2018, p. 4). Data matters because it has the capacity to produce knowledge, shape perceived realities, generate affects, and trigger transformation (Renzi & Langlois, 2015, p. 1). Data activism, ultimately, is activism, and therefore its goal is to promote social movement and drive change, using technologically mediated means and data. Or, as Alessandra Renzi and Ganaele Langlois frame it, data activism 'attempts to wrestle the socio-technical power of data from the hands of dominant groups to promote social and economic justice' (2015, p. 3). As

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Stefania Milan and Lonneke van der Velden sum it up, data activism fosters ‘social change by engaging in data politics’ (2016, p. 58).

Lauren Klein and Catherine D’Ignazio have proposed the use of ‘data feminism’ to describe the type of data activism that combines feminist activism and feminist critical theory (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p. 3) to work through data’s double-edged power – on the one hand as *potestas*, enabling inequalities and exacerbating biases (see also Criado Perez, 2019), and on the other hand as *potentia*, offering the possibility of changing those oppressive systems of power in a more distributive way (pp. 8–9).<sup>1</sup> In their own words, data feminism is ‘a way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action, and by intersectional feminist thought’ (p. 8). Following this understanding, femi(ni)cide data activism refers to the form of feminist data activism or data feminism that focuses on the killings of women and girls by men that occur within the patriarchal apparatus or power hierarchies of sex/gender (Chenou & Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Collectif Féminicides Par Compagnons ou Ex, 2023; D’Ignazio, 2024).<sup>2</sup> Catherine D’Ignazio highlights some existing commonalities among femi(ni)cide data activists: they assume that data is never neutral and that data production is political; they use ‘digital technologies, but they follow in a predigital activist tradition of using media reports to monitor gender-related and racialized violence’ (2024, p. 11); and they are informed by feminism.<sup>3</sup> The objectives of femi(ni)cide data activism, while varying, typically centre on several key aims: making the phenomenon visible, raising social awareness, prompting institutional response and change, exposing gender-based data gaps, and developing data-driven advocacy and policy.

Femi(ni)cide data activism in Latin America and the Caribbean is rich, and as D’Ignazio rightfully identifies, ‘it is grassroots feminist data activists, predominantly from Latin America, who are at the forefront of data ethics in the service of justice’ (D’Ignazio, 2024, p. 6). It is little wonder that we see global recognition of and interest in projects mapping femi(ni)cide such as those of María Salgeiro in Mexico (2016) and Ni Una Menos in Argentina (2015). In recent years, the interest in addressing femi(ni)cide in the context of Europe has begun to grow, and it will undoubtedly continue to do so (Luján Pinelo, 2024, pp. 673–80; see also Weil et al., 2018; Dawson & Mobayed, 2023). However, cartographies that account for how femi(ni)cide is being framed and addressed in Europe, including the mapping of femi(ni)cide data activism in Europe, remain scarce. It is here that this article aims to contribute.

I am particularly committed to making visible the epistemic contributions of the global South, thus challenging Eurocentric narratives and the dominance of the global North in knowledge production. Not only do Latin American and Caribbean scholars and activists working on femi(ni)cide offer excellent precedents to critically learn from, but their work also demonstrates the radical relationship between academic knowledge and activism (Wright, 2011) – in particular, the role grassroots movements play in shaping femi(ni)cide data activism.<sup>4</sup> This paper will focus on narrating the genealogy of the Spain-based femi(ni)cide data activist project *Feminicidio.net*, which is deeply rooted in Latin American knowledge and activism.<sup>5</sup>

*Feminicidio.net* – launched on 25 November 2010—is a pioneering project in documenting and raising awareness about femi(ni)cide in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Conceived and developed by the Argentinian journalist and activist Graciela Atencio, it was born as an online platform intended to document and make visible ‘feminicide’ in Spain and twenty Latin

American countries.<sup>7</sup> It included awareness campaigns using visual design, journalistic and informative materials, online courses, and an interactive database: Geofeminicidio.<sup>8</sup> Geofeminicidio is an online database for quantitative, qualitative, and geo-referenced documentation of murders of women and feminicides.<sup>9</sup> The database contains more than 50 fields of information to be filled in for each case it documents – including information about the victim, the perpetrator, and the case itself, as well as internal information relevant to its registration. Using this information, the database automatically generates ten types of reports, graphs, and a map where murders and feminicides are represented – this map can filter information according to the number of cases, the type of feminicide, and territorial levels (e.g. municipalities or cities). Geofeminicidio makes part of the data available to the public, and it can be filtered according to the interest of those who browse the database. Geofeminicidio is the first database of its kind in the context of Europe (Atencio, 2017).

Since its inception, I have followed the progress of the Feminicidio.net project. Inspired by it, I co-founded a similar project in Germany in 2018: Feminizidmap.<sup>10</sup> During my previous research, I focused on femi(ni)cide in Europe, which gave me insight into the growing debate on this issue within that context. At the same time, I observed persistent trends that continue to promote colonial and Eurocentric narratives. These include denying the existence of the problem in Europe while recognizing it as a problem in the global South; assuming that, if femi(ni)cide occurs in Europe, it is only among migrant communities; and suggesting that Latin American and Caribbean approaches to addressing femi(ni)cide are interesting but only applicable to their own context – implying that Europe has little to learn from these approaches and thus must start from scratch and seek solutions elsewhere (Luján Pinelo, 2023).

Although interest in researching femi(ni)cide and the demand for reliable data have grown in Europe, the references that are taken more seriously and given greater legitimacy are still those produced by the global North – especially those produced in English-speaking regions. Hence, at some point I shared with Atencio (whom I met in 2006) my personal perception: that one of the factors limiting how seriously Feminicidio.net was taken by the global North was the issue of language, and for this reason it was understandable that Feminicidio.net has had greater recognition and impact in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, while it is true that the lingua franca in many spheres, such as academia, is English, using the language difference as a pretext for not engaging with work outside the Anglophone sphere is just an excuse not to recognize the existence of other knowledges. This is what my interest in writing this cartography in English stems from: I want to help Geofeminicidio break into the Anglophone world and not be relegated to the Spanish-speaking world alone. As these barriers break down, other genealogies become visible, other connections are acknowledged, and new informed conversations and solidarities can be established.<sup>11</sup>

While it is true that Geofeminicidio is not the product of just one person, it is also important to know and acknowledge that the story behind the creation of this database is primarily the story of Graciela Atencio. Geofeminicidio has inspired other projects, such as Feminicidio Uruguay (2015), Feminizidmap (2018), and Femicid.net (2019) (Collectif Féminicides Par Compagnons ou Ex, 2023); exploring the genealogy of the first project, then, can help us trace how these genealogies travel or die when they are rooted in other contexts. This cartography is informed by

a feminist epistemology of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988; Nelson, 1992), autoethnography (Bhavnani & Talcott, 2012; Denshire, 2014; Hernández García, 1999), and biographical interview (Muñiz Terra et al., 2018). It aims to be a testimony, one piece of a great puzzle which we will have to put together across time-space.

Taking advantage of my relationship with Atencio and the familiarity I have had with the project for over a decade, I asked to conduct a series of interviews with her, to which she kindly agreed. I explained to her beforehand the objectives of these interviews and the format I would use. In total, there were three interviews (between the end of May and the beginning of June 2020), each lasting approximately one hour, all conducted in Spanish; they took place on jitsi.org, and they were recorded. I transcribed them using the UTU Transcribe software from the University of Turku.<sup>12</sup> This cartography was developed not only based on these interviews but also by drawing on my own experience, by gathering and verifying data through emails, and by corroborating information with publications or other available interviews. I first produced a draft in Spanish so that Atencio could comment on the text and clarify information in it. After this I produced the English version using the help of translation tools.<sup>13</sup>

After this introduction, the text is divided into three sections that follow Atencio's nomadic path in Ciudad Juárez, Oaxaca, and Madrid – episodes that, in my opinion, inform different space-times of the genealogy of *Femicidio.net*. Within the section 'Madrid' I include two subsections, one focusing specifically on the database *Geofemicidio* and the second on the challenges that this database and the larger project face. Finally, I present my conclusions.

## Part I: Ciudad Juárez

Graciela Atencio is an Argentine journalist who, for personal reasons, moved to Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in early 2001.<sup>14</sup> During this period, she tried to leave journalism and ventured into the business field. But when the attempt failed, she had to return to what she does best: journalism. Up until that moment, her feminist or data activist consciousness had not been present; at the time she primarily identified herself as a social, cultural, and political journalist. One could say she was a feminist in the making. In 2002 she joined the general management of the newspaper *Norte* as an assistant editor.<sup>15</sup> In the same year, while giving a workshop on journalism, she learned about the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez through the book *Bones in the Desert* by Mexican journalist and writer Sergio González Rodríguez. Atencio recounts: 'I, living there [Ciudad Juárez], had not connected with that reality. I hadn't, honestly'. It was during this period that another reporter at the newspaper, Rosa Isela Pérez, shared information with her about the investigation she was conducting on murdered women in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>16</sup> The facts her colleague mentioned seemed almost unbelievable to her, but, driven by these two events, Atencio began to document and investigate the cases reported by both the book and her colleague. In this process, she experienced firsthand the censorship met with by those who investigated and reported on these murders of women, as she began to receive death threats and be surveilled (Atencio, 2003).<sup>17</sup>

After continuing with her journalistic line of investigation for some time, Atencio comments,

I came to the conclusion that the approach and the vision were incomplete, that it was not useful for me to understand the horror from a purely police or criminological point of view, in an orthodox or traditional criminological sense

, and so she sought help from sociology. That is how she identified sociologist Julia Monárrez Frago, who was already studying feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, and whom she contacted and interviewed (Monárrez Frago, 2003).<sup>18</sup> Atencio describes:

When I interviewed her, a whole new world opened to me (...) It became very clear to me (...) The problem with feminicide was that it wasn't embodied, it didn't have a *corpus*. What I mean is that, if you go to any database, what an aseptic database has are homicides (...) and they weren't disaggregated by sex. [So] what needed to be done was to strengthen and support the databases and work on the conceptualization. [During the interview] I found out that she was working on her thesis, elaborating her own category, and developing the concept. And that's when it became clear to me that what needed to be developed, or what needed to be explored about feminicide, was a definition (...) A definition precise and broad enough to give it power, to include in a database all the ways in which women are murdered, and that these categorizations would be useful not only for criminology, but also for justice, education, journalism, etc. And then, of course, I realized (...) that what I was lacking was reading.

Atencio argues that, although by that time she had already read authors such as Kate Millet, Simone de Beauvoir, and Virginia Woolf, until then she did not consider herself a feminist. It was thanks to being confronted with feminicide and to interviews with researchers like Monárrez Frago that she began to dust off what she calls her 'unconscious feminism'. Monárrez Frago mentioned several authors to her, such as Marcela Lagarde, Diana Russell, Jill Radford, Jane Caputi, and Deborah Cameron, all of whom she immediately started reading. These readings, says Atencio, 'completely changed my mind and I said, "This is about something else", and, "This is about feminism".' So she experienced two side-by-side transformations: 'I became a feminist with the term "feminicide" (...) I followed two parallel paths (...) on the one hand, reading the classic feminicide theorists – because later more emerged and now there are many people who study feminicide – and then reading the classic theorists of feminist theory'.

Atencio points out that from the beginning she understood that feminicide was a global issue and that, while the case of Ciudad Juárez was paradigmatic because several factors converged (such as imperialism, colonialism, structural exclusion, inequality, violence, border geography, etc.), feminicide was unique neither to Ciudad Juárez nor to Mexico. From her initial interviews and readings, she says, it was clear to her that

it was necessary to work on, or develop, a database from a journalistic and statistical perspective, and develop the conceptualization; that the term 'feminicide' had to be shared with the rest of society through journalism. In other words, we could no longer avoid using that term to talk about the murders of women (...) To say the murder of a woman is not the same thing as to say feminicide.

From that point on, she continued investigating and reporting on the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, while also becoming more familiar with feminism. This experience would change her life forever. She also acknowledges that, during her time in Ciudad Juárez,

I fell in love with Julia Monárrez's mind (...) Of the theorists, [she is] not only one of those who most influenced me but also one of my favorites for her coherence, for her

commitment, for never losing sight of what she denounced. Because, although she did science (because she is very rigorous as a sociologist), behind what she did there was, or is, a denunciation, and that will remain in history, in the historical memory of the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez (. . .) I think Julia Monárrez is one of the fundamental theorists of femicide. I have disseminated her theory. And I believe that one of the great contributions she has made has been the systematization, the sociological conceptualization, and then placing it in a database.

Although moving away from Mexico was not in her plans, Atencio had to leave Ciudad Juárez ‘abruptly due to death threats’ in September 2003. She first moved to Spain for almost three years but later wanted to return to Mexico. Between 1997 and 2000, she had lived in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico. The good memories of that period in her life motivated her to return in November 2005 and try her luck again in that city.

## Part II: Oaxaca

During spring break in 2006, I was accepted for a brief volunteer position at the Women’s Institute of Oaxaca (IMO).<sup>19</sup> I was assigned to work under the supervision of Graciela Atencio, who had joined the institute in February of that year. In April 2006, the report *Violencia feminicida en 10 entidades de la República Mexicana* (Femicidal Violence in 10 States of the Mexican Republic) was published by the Special Commission to Investigate and Monitor Femicide in the Republic (see Lagarde, 2006).<sup>20</sup> This report was the first rigorous investigation aimed at mapping this phenomenon in Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Part of the work I was assigned was to review this report, and this is how I came to know and truly understand what femicide referred to.

During this time, Atencio was also teaching a course she had designed titled ‘La República de las Mujeres’ (The Republic of Women). Aimed at NGOs, public servants, activists, and women from civil society, it consisted of an introduction to the history of feminism in the West. I had the opportunity to attend some of the first sessions, but I was not able to complete the course because I had to return to my university studies. Nevertheless, despite the brevity of this introduction, my time at the IMO was key in my life story, as it was then that my interest in feminism and femicide was born (undoubtedly influenced by Atencio). Moreover, Atencio’s course also had a broader impact on the community of women in Oaxaca. For example, it was the seed that led to the formation of the collective Las Lilas, now known as Colectiva Feminista Mujeres Lilas (Lilac Women Feminist Collective). They have been advocating for the integration of a gender perspective across various government sectors and actively campaigning against violence against women, including femicide.<sup>22</sup>

On 14 June 2006, a long-standing political conflict in the city of Oaxaca intensified and changed the dynamics of the city; the conflict would last many months and impact the lives of many of its residents in various ways (Bolos & Estrada Saavedra, 2010; Martínez Vázquez, 2006). Due to issues related to this political climate, Atencio had to leave Oaxaca unexpectedly in December 2006 and moved back to Madrid, Spain (see Jarquín Edgar, 2006). Many of us who met her at the IMO or during her course kept in touch with her, and over time we learned about the projects she and her colleagues were working on, such as the association Otro Tiempo (2009) and later Femicidio.net (2010).

### Part III: Madrid

Graciela Atencio had previously lived in Spain, so during 2003–2005 she toured the country denouncing the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, which also helped her weave networks with Spanish feminist movements. She mentions that when she returned to Spain at the end of 2006, the political storm she had lived through in Oaxaca had left her somewhat unsettled, so she decided to take some time to process that experience and plan her next steps. Initially, she worked in the advertising department of an entertainment magazine, but her time investigating and denouncing cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez had already marked her life. Over time, the memory and trauma of those cases became ‘something very big and obsessive’; above all, the fact that the cases she had investigated remained unsolved made her feel guilty.<sup>23</sup> She decided that she somehow had to deal with that feeling, and her choice was to do it through social and data activism.

Upon her return, she was also aware ‘that here [in Spain] there was also femicide’. It was clear to her that femicide was a global phenomenon and that there was no society in which it did not exist, because ‘there is no single society globally that can be safe from patriarchy, [and] femicide manifests itself in the patriarchal system’. In this way, she felt that one way to move towards justice would be through promoting the recognition of the crime of femicide, and for that reason she decided to ‘establish a project that would raise awareness globally, in Spanish, from Spain’. When I asked why she chose the name *Femicidio.net*, she replied: ‘It was clear to me that making the word visible as a name was the best way to place the concept of femicide at the center of feminist political activism’.

In 2009, Graciela Atencio, Agustina Daguerre García, Nerea García, Elena Laporta Hernández, and Rosario Marcos established the association *Otro Tiempo*, in which they would incorporate the project *Femicidio.net* and, within it, the database *Geofemicidio*.<sup>24</sup> Although *Geofemicidio* in particular ‘is based on the femicide database of Ciudad Juárez, [and thus is] a continuation of the historical memory of the women of Ciudad Juárez’, Atencio identifies this as just one of the three main influences that led her to conceive the importance of data for the construction of memory and access to justice, and which would drive her to develop *Geofemicidio*; the other two were the movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and her own family experience.

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo began a social movement in response to the Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1983) that had great impact and gained national and international recognition. This movement, which began in 1977 and persists today, emerged from the demand by mothers for information about, and the safe return of, their children who had been detained and disappeared by the Argentinian state. After the dictatorship, these mothers played an important role in the fight for human rights, especially in promoting the recognition of disappearances as crimes against humanity. Atencio, born in 1968, acknowledges that her Argentinian identity was formed in this context and that ‘what I learned from the Argentinian dictatorship (...) is the tenacity that the relatives of the disappeared had in reconstructing the historical memory of all those dead’. She recognizes that it was through her psychoanalyst Laura Bonaparte (a member of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, part of the faction called the ‘founding line’) that she inherited the ethical perspective of human rights. Counting and documenting

the cases of disappearance was important for their recognition, for the act of searching, and for the processes of accessing justice.<sup>25</sup> Along these lines, Atencio recalls asking Bonaparte: 'How did you document the cases at the beginning?' To which Bonaparte replied: 'With paper and pencil'. Then she added, 'Memory has to be written, but first memory is here [pointing to her temple]'.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of Ciudad Juárez, the only person at that time, according to Atencio, who took data collection seriously and understood its importance was Monárrez Fragoso, the academic and activist she had interviewed there.<sup>27</sup> Monárrez Fragoso argued that 'a classification of femicide was necessary to determine its specificity and to streamline political agendas to combat violence against girls and women' (Monárrez Fragoso, 2009, p. 40). Upon returning to Spain after her experience in Ciudad Juárez, it became clear to Atencio that a global database needed to be developed, one that 'will enable Europe to have comparative data with other continents and countries from other continents, using Spain as a reference'. This would also help 'to highlight other forms of violence that remain invisible'. Here, Atencio is referring to other types of femicide, such as feminicides related to prostitution, family feminicides (such as those committed by sons against mothers), or non-intimate feminicides 'that are linked to misogyny or (...) sexual assaults'.

For her, this database had to be interactive, and one of its purposes should be journalistic. Between her first interview with Monárrez Fragoso (in September 2003) and her return to Madrid in 2006, many things had happened and much had progressed in the study of femi(ni)cide; for example, in Mexico, the work of the Special Commission to Investigate and Monitor Femicide in the Republic had already been published, in which, as Atencio points out, it was made evident that 'there were no reliable statistics on feminicides'. Also, new projects documenting femi(ni)cides based in civil society had gradually started to emerge.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, she acknowledges that 'when I saw that happening in Latin America, it was clear to me that here [in Spain] we had to set up the same thing'.

The third influence corresponds to her own biography, a realization Atencio arrived at many years later, even after our initial interviews. Upon deeper reflection, she concluded: 'in life, one must face what one fervently wishes to avoid'. The first time she encountered the phenomenon of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, she was, in fact, confronting something deeply familiar. During her early childhood, the 'ghost of femicide', as she calls it, lingered in the air – an invisible sense she could perceive but not name. 'It was the fear that my father might kill my mother'. Thus, according to Atencio, the issue of femicide has left an indelible mark on her life. Over the years, addressing this phenomenon has become a way for her to reflect on and confront her own past. That is why the *Femicidio.net* project is so personal to her; it is intertwined with her life story, and that is why she remains committed to it with no intention of abandoning it.

These three influences – the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's documentation practice and ethics of human rights, Monárrez Fragoso's database on femicide in Ciudad Juárez, and her personal experience – made it clear to Atencio that, on the one hand, states bear responsibility in cases of femi(ni)cides, and, on the other hand, these crimes must be addressed within a human rights framework. These aspects dovetail with Marcela Lagarde's (2008) line of work in which she defines femicide as a human rights violation for which both society and the state share responsibility (see Luján Pinelo, 2024; Lusvardi, 2023).

## Geofeminicidio

Femicidio.net was launched on 25 November 2010, including the database Geofeminicidio, which began to document cases that occurred in 2010 (Atencio & El equipo de Femicidio.net, 2015, p. 215).<sup>29</sup> When asked about the process of developing the database, Atencio explained that

first, I took Julia Monárrez's database as a model, and I started to study statistics, I started to see what was available in Europe (...) [T]he fact that it is not mandatory [for states] to send the data seems like a joke to me.

She is referring to the European Statistical Office (Eurostat), which is the European Union entity in charge of collecting data from the member states and using this information to develop statistics and data in different areas at the European Union level. In addition to having a budget for its operation, Eurostat is treated as an important and serious source of information, hence Atencio's criticism:

'I find it shameful that countries are not obliged to send information on homicides. [Additionally], the breakdown they have is extremely basic. We cannot continue with such basic statistics in Europe, when now we have the ability to do, with the new technologies (...) a lot of extremely interesting cross-checks, which would allow us to really lower the rates (...) of feminicides we have'.<sup>30</sup>

Atencio acknowledges that she adopted the structure of Monárrez Fragoso's database: for example, the four fields relating to the victim, the perpetrator, the murder scene, and observations. Regarding the information columns, she worked with Monárrez Fragoso's proposals and applied them to specific cases in Spain. For this experimental stage, Atencio used journalistic notes and legal cases, and studied how the Spanish state documented the data – in this case, the Ministerio de Igualdad para los Casos de Violencia en el Ámbito de la Pareja (Ministry of Equality for Cases of Partner Violence). During this period of experimentation, she noticed two things: on the one hand, the amount of information accessible solely through newspapers was vast, and on the other hand, the number of cases in Spain was very low.<sup>31</sup> In her opinion, the changes and adaptations she made to Monárrez Fragoso's database were few but significant. For example, she did not use the type of femicide identified by Monárrez Fragoso as 'femicide related to stigmatized occupations'; instead, she developed the typology of 'femicide due to prostitution' and included 'serial sexual femicide', a typology that Monárrez Fragoso had removed from her database. One of the dilemmas Atencio faced was whether to record the site where the victim was murdered or the site where the body was found. She decided on the latter. This decision was relevant because it set the criterion for determining the georeferencing of the cases.

Atencio acknowledged that during her preparatory research she found no similar database projects on femi(ni)cide in Europe.<sup>32</sup> She also discovered that public data was very poor in Europe – as in the aforementioned case of Eurostat, which only recorded homicides. In the case of Spain, after the approval of Organic Law 1/2004, only cases of homicide in the context of intimate partner or ex-partner relationships were registered, these numbers are usually called 'official data'.<sup>33</sup> These cases of homicide could be framed in the category of intimate femicide, which usually represents an important percentage of total feminicides –

about 50% of all femicide cases (Atencio, 2015, p. 32; Russell & Caputi, 1990, pp. 34–37).

Geofeminicidio is an online quantitative and qualitative database that records all deaths of women committed by men, taking ‘as a starting point the previous classification work of academics who have researched femicide/femicide’ (Atencio & El equipo de Feminicidio.net, 2015, p. 225).<sup>34</sup> Although the database was designed with the idea of covering several countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain, the launch only included data for Spain: ‘We will move to the second stage of the documentation project when we can strengthen alliances with Latin American civil society organizations interested in using the same paradigm of denunciation, analysis, and recording of the historical memory of women murdered for gender reasons’ (Atencio & El equipo de Feminicidio.net, 2015, p. 218).<sup>35</sup>

Regarding Geofeminicidio’s sources of information, Atencio notes that the team collects information ‘from everything published about each case’, including data available in the official government database, which is ‘public-official (. . .). But, in parallel, there is the information published in the press. The press here [in Spain] is very detailed, and there are good media outlets that provide complementary information that the state databases do not include’. In some cases, they also use information available from other sources, such as television programmes.<sup>36</sup> However, Atencio acknowledges that it is difficult to obtain information on cases that fall outside the scope of the Organic Law 1/2004, which is why they would like ‘to reach an agreement with the state to access classified information and in this way maintain the database, as we believe it could be very interesting to cross-check certain indicators – this would dispel many myths’.

Atencio points out that the

value of our database is that we build social historical memory (. . .) Historical memory cannot be constructed without the accounts of witnesses and without the accounts of those who observe and read, and those who have some connection to the case.

Hence, she adds, although ‘data is obtained from various sources, we must not overlook – from the point of view of journalism as information science – the information that appears in newspapers, because in a good report or a good chronicle, if the genre is well developed, you can find information that does not appear in the police report, the judicial process, or the data held by public organizations’. Although journalistic data is not considered scientific data, it is relevant for the construction of scientific knowledge. Atencio continues, asserting that

‘if you only have that information [from public organizations], you are going to end up neglecting all the issues related to constructivist social anthropology, which is the account given by witnesses, the account given by relatives, the account given by acquaintances of someone who is dead – and cannot defend themselves – and, in light of that, it is essential to build a database in which the journalistic aspect must be taken into account’.<sup>37</sup>

The database is a living tool that is constantly changing and being updated because, even if a case is recorded, the chronology of that case is left open until a sentence has been determined or the data can no longer be updated. In Atencio’s words,

It is always advisable to follow up from the moment the woman is murdered and is entered in the database, and a historical and chronological follow-up is done of the evolution of the case in the journalistic narrative, [the] police narrative, [and] the narrative of the justice system.

## Challenges

From the first time I visited Graciela Atencio in Madrid in the spring of 2011, I have witnessed the amount of work and time she has dedicated to the Femicidio.net project. At the time of that visit, she had decided to devote her full time to the project, and I was amazed by her determination to push forward such a far-reaching initiative with so few financial and human resources. Funding for this subject was very limited, as it still is, since the topic was far from being a priority in feminist agendas. Atencio notes,

The difficulties I faced in giving shape to this project and keeping it alive have been tremendous. From conflicts or issues with colleagues with whom we initially set up the project, to the lack of funds, because this project has hardly received any public funding. There's no way to justify in a funding application the importance of a database like this.

Apart from the financial challenge, she acknowledges that

what we need from the observatories is to create femicide indicators because (...) it's not that they don't exist—that information is there, but it needs to be methodologically classified at a statistical level. This is something we've needed for a long time and was one of the first things I noticed when (...) I headed the creation of the database.

Added to this is the 'problem of statistical studies (...) that are not relational or have little relational analysis'. For Atencio, it is unacceptable that in an era of technological advancements and artificial intelligence, these tools are not reflected in feminist data science. In her words: 'How can it be that we have such basic statistics and [that] all the indicators of all types of violence cannot be measured? Because femicide encompasses all types of violence and is a continuum'.

Finally, she also acknowledges that research on femi(ni)cide in Europe cannot start from scratch or only recognize the English-speaking genealogy; it would be 'an academic mistake to start from scratch (...) without recognizing authors like Julia Monárrez, Marcela Lagarde, and Rita Laura Segato'.<sup>38</sup> We need to recognize, too, that in Latin America and the Caribbean there has already been 'a development of statistics, theory, and categories' for at least two decades.

## Conclusions

Given my interest in tracing genealogies, during the interviews I asked Atencio if Femicidio.net had been contacted by Femicide Across Europe, a European project that began in 2013 and that has among its objectives the production of comparative data on 'femicides' in Europe. The researchers in that project recount having met with representatives of European observatories in Brussels in 2015. Atencio does not recall having participated in that meeting.<sup>39</sup> Considering that Geofemicidio has been operating since 2010 and that it has systematized a research methodology, it is heir to a fertile genealogy of theoretical-methodological thinking on femi(ni)cide, so I would assert that any serious documentation project, particularly in Europe, should take this background

seriously, establish dialogue, create networks, learn from and with them, and, as Atencio mentioned, not try to start from scratch without taking seriously the valuable experience that precedes us.

From its origins, the study of femi(ni)cide has involved a constant dialogue between activism and academia (Wright, 2011). Within academia, we have seen that the issue is not specific to one discipline and requires transdisciplinary work. Meanwhile, it has also become evident that the issue must be addressed from a multisectoral perspective, involving both the state and civil society. Atencio has expressed the opinion on several occasions, including during our interviews, that not being part of academia has meant not being considered in academic debates. Academia is a space of power where, in theory, knowledge considered scientific and reliable is constructed. However, as has been discussed within and outside some sectors of academia, there are other forms of knowledge, in this case femi(ni)cide data activism, also worthy of consideration that are generated at the margins or borders of academia (Do Mar Pereira, 2017). Thus, as a researcher in the academic field who has dynamically integrated activism with my research on femi(ni)cide, I feel a moral responsibility to establish platforms for dialogue that avoid various types of extractivism and contribute collectively to constructing solutions to the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide, which concerns us all.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Geofeminicidio and Feminicidio.net are based in Spain might lead us to think that their genealogy is based in the Spanish experience; however, this project was designed by an Argentinian activist and journalist, whose experiences aligned with other stories in Latin America and the Caribbean. The fact that Geofeminicidio and Feminicidio.net exist in Spain, then, is only one part of the story.<sup>41</sup> Atencio's biographical interview shows how femi(ni)cide data activism is shaped by the radical entanglement of personal lived experiences with social events and struggles. From Atencio's narrative, we can trace how the data activist project of Feminicidio.net emerged from the conjuncture of Atencio's personal trajectory and other collective struggles such as the human rights movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the activists responding to the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez. Through this cartography, we can trace how the politics of counting killings of women inspired by Monárrez Fragozo has travelled and transformed in different contexts. Mapping this genealogy is crucial for understanding the inherited methodologies and political commitments, as well as for identifying differences and divergences in other projects inspired by Feminicidio.net, like Feminizidmap in Germany. It also provides a foundation for sustaining an international dialogue on femi(ni)cide, data activism, and the epistemic contributions of the global South.

As I mentioned to Atencio at some point, it is true that she and I do not agree with regard to certain controversial points in current feminist debates. As she responded to me, we will not always agree, nor will we ever stop questioning and re-examining our own opinions, nor will we be free from others' scrutiny. These disagreements are far from erasing our history of friendship-mentorship or the genealogies we have traced, nor have they closed off our willingness to engage in discussion and dialogue – at least not so far. I recognize the passion and conviction that Atencio brings to her ideas and her work, and the fact that she does not seek to align with trends or what is politically correct. Instead, she often goes against the current while simultaneously setting new trends. Ultimately, this cartography is only one part of what constitutes the becoming of Feminicidio.net, an important piece, but one that undoubtedly needs to continue being told from various

voices and perspectives. *Femicidio.net*, in turn, remains a project with great potential, and knowing and understanding it can help us continue to reflect on the work of femi(ni)cide data activism.

## Notes

1. Klein and D'Ignazio do not use this Foucauldian differentiation of types of power, but I believe it is useful in this case (see Braidotti, 2011, p. 4).
2. I use 'femi(ni)cide' as an abbreviation of 'femicide/femicide' except when employing the framing used specifically by a given person or author. On the rationale for the term 'femi(ni)cide', see Luján Pinelo (2024, p. 668).
3. D'Ignazio does not list this as such, but she included femi(ni)cide data activism within data feminism. Although D'Ignazio frames data feminism in a specific way, it is true that most femi(ni)cide activism is informed by feminist agendas that may differ but are feminisms at the end of the day.
4. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for their comment pointing in this direction.
5. See <https://femicidio.net/>.
6. Atencio points out that the choice of date was not random: 'I chose to have us appear on social media for the first time on that day as a symbol of a project framed within the feminist genealogy: the commemoration of November 25th (...) Femicide is at the center of the fight against male sexist violence'. All quotations of Atencio that are not cited as coming from a particular text are part of the interview material that has served as the basis for this article. The original quotes are in Spanish, and the translations into English are my own. Further details on this will be provided at the end of this section where I speak about methodology.
7. Nowadays Atencio does not use the term 'Ibero-America' because she considers it colonialist, but she acknowledges that it was the term she initially used in the project. Even so, 'Latin America' remains a contested name (see, for example, Gargallo, 2014).
8. Due to budget constraints, Geofemicidio has been undergoing maintenance for the past two years. It is expected to be back online soon: <https://geo.femicidio.net/>.
9. Atencio emphasizes that 'every femicide is a murder of women, but not every murder of women is a femicide'. See also Russell and Harnes (2001, p. 15).
10. See <https://feminizidmap.org/>.
11. A Spanish version will also be available.
12. Fidel Luján Cortés helped me edit the transcriptions in Spanish.
13. I anonymized the data before entering the text to be translated. The tools I used were Copilot, Deepseek, and DeepL. The text was later edited by Matthew Gleeson.
14. A border city in the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico.
15. <https://nortedechihuahua.mx>.
16. The investigative series 'Mujeres desaparecidas: El drama de nuestras familias' (Missing women: The drama of our families) was awarded a press prize in 2003 by UNIFEM. During the writing of this article, I searched for this publication but was unable to access it. I only found a press release about it (see Cimac Noticias, 2003).
17. In 2003 Atencio was also a contributor-correspondent for the newspaper *La Jornada* in Ciudad Juárez.
18. By that time Monárrez Fragozo had already carried out projects on femicide in Ciudad Juárez and was working on the research for her doctoral dissertation, which later was published under the title *Trama de una injusticia: Femicidio sexual sistémico en Ciudad Juárez* (Plot of an Injustice: Systemic Sexual Femicide in Ciudad Juarez) (2009).
19. In Spanish: Instituto de la Mujer Oaxaqueña.
20. In Spanish: Comisión Especial para Conocer y Dar Seguimiento a las Investigaciones Relacionadas con los Femicidios en la República.

21. One of the relevant points of this investigation was that, contrary to what was believed, Chihuahua (the state where Ciudad Juárez is located) was not the state with the highest rate of femicide in the Mexican Republic; in fact, it ranked sixth in homicides of women and girls.
22. See <https://colectivomujereslilas.blogspot.com>. Atencio has maintained an active relationship and exchange with members of this collective.
23. Atencio acknowledges this guilt as inherited from her Christian tradition. She bases this analysis on her reading of *The Question of German Guilt* by Karl Jaspers (1946), where Jaspers distinguishes four types of guilt: criminal, moral, political, and metaphysical. For Atencio, moral and metaphysical guilt were what led her to create *Femicidio.net*. Beyond the individual responsibility of the perpetrator (criminal guilt), she says, 'I found it extremely interesting to analyze what relates to citizen responsibility concerning these types of guilt [and femicide]. Moral guilt, in the context of femicides, has to do with what acts, through omission, we as a society allow to happen. I'm referring to social indifference towards femicides or the lack of action by society to demand that the state address the urgent need to eradicate sexist violence'. On the other hand, metaphysical guilt has to do with the failure to act in the face of a crime one witnesses. Atencio explains that it 'has to do with the responsibility of the individual intertwined with the experiences of others'. In her case, 'the investigation of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and my sense of powerlessness, or frustration, over not having been able to contribute even a tiny grain of sand in the effort to apprehend the perpetrators' is what led her to ask herself, 'What was I supposed to do after that? After the international outcry, after demanding justice, which was never served, after documenting what some of those victims and their families had endured. So, the result of that is perhaps what I became afterward – I wanted, in some way, through the act of assuming that moral and metaphysical guilt, to create a project like the one I'm working on now'.
24. In personal correspondence (2009), Atencio shared: 'The Lilas of Oaxaca – that's where *Otro Tiempo* began for me. And that's where it will continue. There I learned the meaning of solidarity and generosity. There I became convinced that it's worth fighting against injustices. There I discovered that poetry is in the air. There I decided to write. There I decided to strengthen this feminist, humanist, loving journey – this love for my human condition'.
25. Atencio says that the mothers documented, for example, information about the disappeared, the dates they had gone missing, the locations, 'the concentration camps, the tortures they had endured', and the details of the state personnel involved in their disappearances and torture, among other things.
26. Atencio's interpretation is that Bonaparte was telling her that 'what we had to have was a strong political will to build that memory; and that memory is made collectively, not individually'.
27. Monárrez Fragoso (2009, pp. 90–91) was the first researcher to develop a geo-referenced database to systematically document femicides in Ciudad Juárez.
28. For example, the association *Consortio in Oaxaca* states that 'together with several civil society organizations, we have been documenting femicide in Oaxaca since 2004' (*Las Consortias*, n.d.).
29. In our interview, Atencio mentioned that, according to their data, since 2010 the number of femicides in Spain has decreased by 20–25%. This decrease has also been reported by Bosch-Fiol and Ferrer-Perez (2019, p. 189).
30. In May 2024, the European Parliament and Council of the European Union adopted the Directive 2024/1385, on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Article 44, on data collection and research, aims to address this point that Atencio criticizes.
31. The amount of information is relevant because having a database with many fields is of little use if there is no information to fill them with. As for the low number of cases, it is clear that with fewer cases, the possibility of dedicating more time to investigating each case is greater. When there are many cases, it becomes more difficult, due to time constraints and human capacity, to conduct a detailed follow-up on each one.
32. In 2005, the Centre for Women Against Violence in Bologna (*Casa delle donne per non subire violenza di Bologna*) began documenting 'news information related to the

homicides of women for gender reasons' (Spinelli, 2013, p. 34). The use of the term 'femicide', however, became popular in the Italian feminist movement following the debates in Latin America and the Caribbean around 2008, just after the publication in Italian of the book *FEMINICIDIO: De la denuncia social al reconocimiento jurídico internacional* (FEMINICIDE: From Social Denunciation to International Legal Recognition) (Spinelli, 2013, p. 35).

33. Since the implementation of the Organic Law 1/2004, of December 28, on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-Based Violence (in the original: Ley Orgánica de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género), Spain has documented cases of gender-based violence – narrowly understood to mean female victims of violence by male partners or former partners. However, in recent years, criticism of this narrow definition has grown, and attempts at reform have been made. Currently, the National Institute of Statistics of Spain publishes an annual report titled *Statistics on Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence* (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], n.d.).
34. For the variety of types of femi(ni)cide and murders, see Atencio and Laporta (2012).
35. In 2014, there was an attempt to establish a collaboration with La Casa del Encuentro in Argentina to include that country in the database.
36. For example, Atencio recounts a femicide case where the couple met on a television show, so Geofemicidio's documentation team had to go back and watch previous programs to gather part of the information.
37. This methodology is also already present in the research by Monárrez Fragoso (2009).
38. Atencio is referring here, specifically, to Segato's 2006 work *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez* (The Writing on the Bodies of the Murdered Women of Ciudad Juárez).
39. The report *Femicide across Europe* makes reference to the 'femicide' observatories they invited, but in the case of Spain and Portugal they do not name the groups or projects they are referring to or provide information that could help identify them. Thus, it cannot be determined whether Femicidio.net was one of the projects in Spain that the researchers invited (Weil et al., 2018, p. 10).
40. On the subject of extractivism, see, for example, Grosfoguel (2016).
41. It is interesting that after almost two decades of research on femi(ni)cide in Spain there is little research into this phenomenon during the Franco period. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this issue.

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## Author contributions

CRedit: **Aleida Luján-Pinelo:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares a personal relationship with the individual interviewed for this article. The author has previously been mentored by the interviewed and volunteered with the project discussed in the paper. These relationships are disclosed both here and in the body of the paper, as part of the methodology and in the interest of transparency. However, the comments the interviewed provided were not based on content or editorial direction, but more on precision and narrative clarity.

## Notes on contributor

*Aleida Luján-Pinelo* is a Mexican interdisciplinary researcher with degrees in philosophy, gender studies, and law. Her work integrates relational theories—including epistemologies of the South, new materialism, and posthumanism—to analyse complex social challenges and co-create transformative practices. For over a decade, she has researched on femi(ni)cide in European contexts, an engagement that led her to co-found Feminizidmap—a database documenting femi(ni)cides in Germany. Her broader research encompasses feminist (legal) philosophy, critical pedagogies, critical data studies, social justice, and waste studies. She is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Tampere, working on the ERC project 'WasteMatters.'

## Consent to participate

The author affirms that informed consent was obtained from the interviewee, Graciela Atencio, prior to conducting the interviews. Given the author's longstanding relationship with Atencio and familiarity with the project, the purpose and format of the interviews were clearly explained in advance. Atencio voluntarily agreed to participate in a series of three recorded interviews conducted via Jitsi between May and June 2020. Atencio was also given the opportunity to review and comment on the initial draft of the text in Spanish to ensure accuracy and clarity, and she also reviewed the final English version of the text. Her comments were not based on content or editorial direction, but more on precision and narrative clarity.

## Ethical approval

This research did not require formal ethical approval, as it involved a voluntary interview with an adult participant who provided informed consent. The participant was fully informed about the purpose, format, and use of the interviews and paper, and was given the opportunity to review and comment on the resulting text. All procedures followed ethical standards for research involving human subjects, including respect for privacy, transparency, and voluntary participation.

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