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“Un Violador en tu camino”- A Global Feminist Anthem: How the feminist movement in Latin America and notably Chile evolved to facilitate the rise of digital and performance activism in the face of ongoing inequality and women’s rights issues.

By

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**Dedication:**

To all the women who have been victims of femicide, experienced domestic violence, those who are still in abusive environments and those who are struggling quietly, know that your voices are heard no matter how silent, and that your lives are of immeasurable value.

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**Abstract**

The feminist movement emerged as a unified movement in Latin America in the 1960’s and 1970’s amidst ongoing political protests. The collaboration of feminist scholars and grass-roots leaders created a bridge to meet the needs of a diverse group of women, raise their consciousness, and educate them on their potential in order to lobby for increased rights. The women’s movement started with innovative events like communal kitchens and spread through the media of its time with pamphlets. Though the experience of Latin American women and the issues they faced were heterogenous, meetings held at conferences permitted these women to dialogue with each other and determine their common issues and solutions. As the movement progressed, it began to explicitly become more inclusive as it recognized the rights of racialized, queer and other disenfranchised women. Though the efforts of the progenitors of the Latin American Feminist movement have made many strides, there is much work to do as femicide and other types of violence against women are prevalent. To combat these issues presently, performance activism, as well as the use of digital media, have been effective tools. Namely, the feminist collective Lastesis has used the momentum of the already existing social movements and protests in Chile to implement performance activism and utilize social media to create a global protest movement. Though the thesis generally covers the entire region of Latin America, it emphasizes the history, context and contemporary experiences of Chile and Chileans. It also explores the history of the feminist movement in Latin America, the use of social media and performance activism to propel social movements by youth and feminist organizations and how the song by the Collective Lastesis, “Un Violador en tu camino”, rose to popularity. Since the protest song by Lastesis is relatively new, information and research about the movement is timely and consistently increasing. Case studies, media reports, and research from social media platforms directly have been the primary source of data for this thesis. The results of my research have revealed that the feminist movement in Latin America is dynamic, and that translating complex feminist theory into language that is accessible, both in production and in medium to the general public, has created a simplicity that allowed Lastesis to create a vehicle for change. The song can be adapted to various regions and individuals as the negative experiences of women and other marginalized groups are unfortunately universal. The work of Lastesis reveals the potential for social movements to reach a global audience and the benefits of mobilizing both offline and online.

**Introduction**

An increase in metro fares in Chile made the country's transport costs the most expensive in Latin America, triggering a protest in response to the general increase in economic and social inequalities in the country. Though the protest initially was led by students, it later developed into daily widespread demonstrations with participants from various demographics. One of these emerging protests, led by Lastesis, a Chilean Feminist Collective, gained international popularity when their protest song “Un Violador en Tu Camino” (“A Rapist in Your Path”, in English), whose themes center on sexual violence against women, went viral following their performance at the National Stadium in Santiago on the Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, November 25, 2020**.** The location of the protests is significant as it was the site of detainment and torture during Chile’s 17-year dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet.

The song “El Violador Eres Tu”, contains lyrics which critique the practice of victim blaming, and in turn places the blame onto abusers especially those in positions of power to reveal the contributions that the state, judicial system and authoritarian powers make towards systemic violence**.** Women dressed in black, wore red lipstick and a red or green scarf around their neck, were blindfolded, and collectively voiced their anger through a song and dance regarding the increase in violence against women and the low rates of conviction of crimes against them. In addition to the hymn, the lyrics are accompanied by choreography that portrays women squatting, in reference to the nude squatting that women and children are allegedly forced to do in police detention in Chile. Women in Chile have always been involved in politics, from rejecting the dictatorship historically to contemporarily fighting for better wages, a new constitution, and a more equitable society. The fight for equal rights in Latin America, and Chile specifically, is not new, nor has it been easy; however, women have worked together since their arrival to the region in the face of ongoing injustice based on one’s gender.

While women’s political presence or even the feminist movement has not always been explicit, they have always made efforts in the face of patriarchy to improve the quality of their lives regardless of their class, race or social context. Feminism emerged in Latin America officially in the 1960’s, primarily as a part of other communal issues but as a region where domestic violence and femicide is rampant, feminism “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes”, has gained increased importance, and feminist theory is disseminated in creative ways to the general public to create social change (“Feminism”). The history of women’s rights in the region has led to the unique context in which Latin American women find themselves and this diverse experience has paved the way for the current social movements.

### History of Feminism in Latin America

*Precolonial Latin America*

While most experiences of non-white women in the early 19th and 20th centuries are not written, their oral stories have been transmitted and remain embedded within local communities. The first examples of strong women in Latin American history stem from the accounts of Indigenous women in the Caribbean and Central America. Anacaona a Taino cacica (chief) from what is now Hispaniola is immortalized in history, because she chose to be executed rather than to be a concubine for a Spaniard. In Belizean and Honduran culture, Baraúnda, a Garifuna woman and the wife of the leader Satuyé is known for her resistance against colonialism. Today these women’s histories are preserved orally in “myth, songs, and proverbs, and contribute to the foundations of Latin American feminist thought” (Rivera Berruz, “Latin American Feminism”)

*Colonial Latin America*

Even though the feminist movement did not begin to emerge in Latin America until the 1800’s, the colonial period presented nonpoliticized efforts of women to improve their social commencing with the settling of Spanish women to the newly colonized Spanish America. Though Spanish America was also home to women of Indigenous and African origin, the ideals of femininity and social status that were dominant in the ‘new world’ were transmitted from the peninsular. While data is limited on the experiences of women during this time period, the records available reveal trends that give insight on women’s experience. The experience and co-interactions of Spanish, Indigenous and African women helped to create a foundational social stratosphere that delineates the experiences of Latin American women of various races and classes today.

In the early colonial period, from 1500 until 1620, the first female migrants left the peninsular, as wives of settlers or as single women desiring marriage to conquistadores in hopes of gaining opportunities that were not available to them in the peninsular. 1/6th of these women were registered as servants but found difficulty finding work as the large population of Indigenous women were able to do the same work for less compensation (Lavrin 322). A small percentage of these women registered as servants were said to be prostitutes and their atypical behaviour went against the strict behaviour expected of women causing a governor to petition to the Spanish crown to stop sending peninsular women to the colonies as “their conduct was scandalous and set a bad example to the younger ones” (Lavrin 323).

Many women struggled within their new society as the men they married lacked adequate skills to provide for them or left them as widows and their daughters were subjected to be poverty-stricken descendants of conquistadors or first-generation settlers. Over time the demand for migrant women decreased as settlers became interested in criolla and mestiza women. Despite this, migrant women played a vital role in being transmitters of material, social and religious culture to the colonies as well as being models of femininity for other women to look up to and follow (Lavrin 323).

In the 16th century, marriage was emphasized in Spanish America as it was the familial structure and a tool to determine the legitimacy of one’s descendants. Moreover, the church and crown worked conjointly to promote marriage in order to ensure the being of the colonies post-conquest, to encourage settlement and maintain stability. Additionally, they worked together to eliminate polygamy amongst Indigenous tribes. While the crown’s interest was heavily influenced by their inclination for political gain, the church saw marriage as essential to being a good Christian. During this time interracial marriages were common in places like Mexico as well as extramarital relations, but marriage was not widely implemented despite its high estimation by the church and crown until the 18th century, when marriages became a networking tool.

Women’s socio-economic ascent was only available through the traditional lenses of marriage as they could gain access to a higher quality of life and resources to pass onto their children. It increased women’s value if they could support the hierarchy of the male dominated society by producing heirs or daughters to open their families to avenues of wealth through marriage. Networked marriages had a high social and moral value as daughters could now link their families to “bureaucrats, landowners or wealthy merchants, which would strengthen the position of their families” (Lavrin 326). In continuance of patrilineal inheritance, male heirs were invaluable as they could “preserve or improve the status of the family” (Lavrin 326). Women’s primary role in society at this point was the reinforcing of the masculine stratosphere through marriage or childbearing, revealing that their womanhood was only valuable as it benefited men.

The legal status of women was heavily influenced by ideologies from Spain, which viewed women as intrinsically weak and was “aimed at protecting women from their own frailty or potential abuse by men” (Lavrin 327). The laws that legislated these ideologies stemmed from medieval and Renaissance codes like “the Ordenamiento de Alcala (1386), the Ordenanzas de Castilla (1484), the Siete Partidas (1265), and the Laws of Toro (1505)”; however, some of these laws were reduced in Spanish America to afford women more opportunities to engage in business transactions and judicial processes (Lavrin 327). These laws intended to give women some social protection while maintaining the supremacy of men. From their births, women were objects of men’s control, through their father before marriage and their husband afterwards. Women could play a role in parenting as guardians while their husbands were alive, but in the case of death, women had to share their role with a co-guardian. Within marriage women needed their husband’s consent to engage in activities like “sales, purchases, [and] partnerships”, and if granted permission, had the liberty to act on their own (Lavrin 327). Property ownership for women existed through bienes parafernales (paraphernalia) and bienes gananciales (marital assets). Through bienes parafernales, women could control property owned before marriage and pass it on to their children according to their own will. Through bienes gananciales, all the property acquired throughout a marriage would be divided equally amongst the mother and her children after a father’s death.

Amongst upper-class Hispanic women, dowries were common and provided additional security for women. They gained popularity during the 17th and 18th century as a source of income for women after their husband’s death and as an investment for men. Encomienda’s, though designed to benefit men and to be legally owned by men, were only enacted through the New Laws in 1542, however, women were able to disregard these restrictions at times. In circumstances where male heirs were unavailable, daughters or wives could inherit the encomienda’s, and despite the crown creating legislation to force women to marry after inheriting an encomienda, this law was often ignored. As encomienda’s in the 17th century were a source of income for some women, they could be used as dowries to improve the social standing of women.

One of the greatest limitations faced by women of this time period was the inability to divorce their husbands as the Catholic Church did not approve of divorce unless the circumstances were extreme. Divorce could be granted if women could prove with witnesses and other forms of evidence, extreme cases of adultery, “long-term physical abuse, or abandonment of the home” (Lavrin 327). Due to difficulty in proving these circumstances, and the unwanted attention and social critique it produced, many women preferred to remain married instead of attempting to get a divorce.

The expectations of women during this period revealed a double standard as women were held to high ideals and were heavily burdened with responsibilities while men were able to take part in all aspects of society without constraint. As women were seen to be weak, irrational and emotional, they were to be protected through “seclusion, special parental and familial overseeing, and the refuge of religion” (Lavrin 331). Men and women inhabited two starkly contrasted spheres and their interactions with each other were limited. Women were expected to remain inside while outside was the man’s world. Since a woman’s reputation was based largely on her purity, men had a moral responsibility of protecting the honour of women within their household. Men were also held to a different standard; while adultery would be an unseemly offense for a woman to commit, men were able to have extra marital relations, take advantage of Indigenous, Casta or Enslaved women as they were seen as easily exploitable and less worthy of respect than upper class white women. Rape was common amongst non-white women, specifically Indigenous and Afro-descended women; it was justifiable and was rarely punished until moral canons were enacted.

Most women in the colonial period regardless of age or class were largely illiterate or informally educated with a basic education on Catholic principles with an emphasis on femininity and honour. Nuns and women from the elite class were able to gain a formal education during the early and middle colonial periods, however towards the end of the 18th century, public and private schools gained popularity for girls of all social classes.

Primarily, education for women was rarely academic and simply focused on preparing them to become wives and mothers. Women were expected to be religious, chaste before marriage, learn practical home skills and to avoid “dances, too many friendships, excessive spending on clothes for outings, and frivolous behaviour with young men” (Lavrin 337). However, the limitations on education were exceeded in the convent, where women were able to escape marriage and become educated. The convents were the main propagators of women’s education and released many great female authored literary works from individuals like Josefa de la Concepción del Castillo (1671—1742), whose works remain highly regarded in the genre of religious literature. Maria Ana de San Ignacio, a nun from In New Spain, with the help of her bishop was able to print her work. One of the most exceptional writers of this time, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, created a variety of plays, poetry and greatly advocated for women’s education. Her entry to the convent at aged 21 was based on the limited options she found in the 17th century society such as the obligation of marriage yet was able to be more productive and increase her intellectual ability within the convent.

*Status of Indigenous Women*

The experience of Indigenous women was varied due to the great cultural diversity of different societies but certain groups like the Aztec and Inca revealed analyzable traits. The lives of Indigenous women during the colonial period were based on the intermingling of the traditional Indigenous values along with the customs from Spain. Traditionally, the Inca and Aztec societies were hierarchal with women subject to men, but the class of men determined the social status of women, as the wives of nobility had a higher standard of living than peasant women. Women held more political power prior to colonization than afterwards. The practice of polygamy was common among the higher classes and could be used as a means for lower class women to increase their social mobility as they could become the partners of Inca nobles and warriors. In both cultures, the religious role of women was highly esteemed, and the Inca Virgins of the Sun included women who dedicated their lives to sun worship and in Aztec society, girls served in the Telpochcalli and Calmec; however, unlike the Inca religious culture, Aztec women were able to get married as they grew older after their involvement in religious service. In both cultures, women acted as aides to male priests.

Within Inca societies, the system of inheritance was based on lineal purity, with the marriage of a sister necessary to preserve purity in lineage, as well as lordship being passed to the son of a sister if a chief had no heirs (Lavrin 345).

In Indigenous cultures, gender largely determined occupational roles. Women engaged in household duties, agricultural tasks, beverage and medicine preparation and market activities. Women contributed to raising tribute through weaving. Overall, the work of women was considered valuable and essential to the production cycle (Lavrin 345). In Aztec culture, virtues such as “fidelity, submission, endurance, and abstinence” were lauded and moral codes for women and men were strict with death being the consequence of adultery (Lavrin 346).

Indigenous women’s education prior to colonisation included practical skills such as “weaving, pottery making, and animal husbandry” (Lavrin 338). During the colonial period, this remained the same apart from convent style schools being introduced. Parents, however, were hesitant to send their daughters away as it would reduce their opportunity to gain skills for fiscal and marital benefits.

One of the greatest effects of colonialism in the life of Indigenous peoples include the uprooting of populations with increased migration. The female Indigenous population of Lima came from all over Peru and from countries like Chile and New Granada. This population, due to their youth, knew little of their origin and families as they migrated to work as servants in their childhood. This resulted in the off loss of their material culture.

The introduction of Europeans to Indigenous land in the Americas was one of force, that greatly transformed the cultural landscape. Indigenous women played a vital role in the protection of their territory as well as facilitating the conquest of the Americas. Indigenous women acted as martyrs, translators, allies and partners for conquistadors and played a primary role in shaping what is now Latin America.

*Status of Afro-Descended Enslaved Women*

During the colonial period, slaves were granted rights based on medieval Spanish law like the Siete Partidas, which gave the enslaved the right to marry, remain with their families and gain liberty “through purchase, testamentary award or appeal to the legal system” (Lavrin 350). These measures were often unexhausted as slaves did not have the education to gain redress, yet those who did, have made an indelible mark on history, sharing their experiences and revealing insight into the experiences of slaves.

The experience of enslaved women was one of extreme exploitation. Sexual abuse by masters was the norm, as well as its consequence in producing illegitimate children who were also enslaved. According to Mexican parish records, marriages amongst enslaved women and men or freed men were common with familial separation being frequent as well.

With Jesuit plantations, slaves were separated by sex to prevent the sin of cohabitation and women were supervised by older women until marriage to eliminate the chance of promiscuous contact with men (Lavrin 351). Marriage was supported and women were given bonuses for marriage and after giving birth to children. Slaves were able to get childcare as they worked in their various occupations. Female slaves were engaged in tasks such as household work, agricultural and mining activities, as well as street vending. Agricultural work consisted of work on sugar cane plantations, weeding fields and cutting cane, as well as providing service in sugar mills. Jesuits were also involved in employing slaves to work in difficult conditions such as obrajes, textile production sites.

Free mulatto and casta women, had a greater sense of freedom, mobility and societal standing due to their race as they could own land, run businesses, and lend money to each other. However, the idea of limpeza de sangre (blood purity) limited their potential to increase mobility and they shared in the collective struggle of non-white women.

The experience of women during the colonial period demonstrates how strongly their gender affected their lives as well as the impacts of the intersections of their class and race. While women’s opportunities were limited and their voices often unheard, there were still examples of strong women who subverted the positions expected of them. During the late colonial period, a shift of the expectations on the comportment of women, as well the attitudes toward them, allowed for their increased education, a space outside of the home and to slowly but surely have their value recognized in society.

**Feminism in Post-Colonial Latin America: El Feminismo Popular**

The oppression faced by women in Latin America at the beginning of its feminist movement and even currently was heterogeneous based on the race and class of the inhabitants of each country as well as their countries political and economic situation. The experiences of those from largely industrialized areas with high European populations like Chile, Uruguay and Argentina differed greatly from those from coastal regions like Brazil and the Caribbean Islands with larger African populations (Carr Campos 451). Political systems ranged from socialism found in nations like Cuba to the dictatorship of Chile.

The position of a woman based on her class in society frequently determined the type of activism that she would be involved in. Upper class women typically worked theoretically in spheres regarding gender studies and research. On the other hand, women of lower classes focused on grassroot work as community leaders with a priority in socio-political and structural change in order to create change. These two groups often remained in conflict between seeing the feminist movement as a patriarchal issue, or as a part of the greater class struggle. Other themes of disagreement included “arguments about "production" (capitalism vs. socialism) and "'reproduction”” (Carr Campos 451).

The feminist movement in Latin America started with an increased consciousness of the issues faced by women and their efforts to change them. Through collective movements, starting in 1980 with a group of feminist and grassroot organizations meeting in the Dominican Republic, women discussed ‘educación popular’ (community education) and determined common work strategies. From this diverse group and perspectives, they created two main objectives, “the liberation from the capitalist system that impedes the full realization of the human potential and the destruction of the patriarchal system that dominates the relationship between men and women in society and persists even after a change in the means of production” (Carr Campos 450).

In Mexico, feminists used their varied experiences and strategies to reach their goals. From the economic crisis of the 1970’s, workers and peasants worked together in solidarity in popular movements and demonstrations in support of those exploited and oppressed, which led to the feminist movement re-emerging. In many cases, the many feminist organizations created were born from already existing political movements and organizations.

In Mexico, the purpose of many of these early organizations was to raise awareness through “grupos de conciencia”, as educated and middle-class women met to discuss their daily experiences as women in an environment that would not silence them. Though this setting allowed women to express themselves and to gain awareness on their oppression, these meetings did not reach the common people or have any direct impact on society. Through workshops, these women made contact “with workers' unions, grass-roots organizations, political parties, and isolated women struggling to survive” (Carr Campos 452). Through the technique of ‘educación popular’, the leaders of these organizations worked to “impart skills, discuss health and nutrition, assist in the formation of cooperatives, and most importantly, develop new leaders to coordinate and facilitate the workshops” (Carr Campos 452).

In 1979, another group in Mexico, the ‘Colectivo Feminista Coatlicue’ analyzed the issues they faced in order to acquire solutions. The four common issues they faced were a “lack of equal opportunity in education and at the workplace, the double shift (la doble jornada) at work and the home, imposed motherhood, and sexual aggression” (Carr Campos 452). In order to combat these issues, the Colectivo staged a public political campaign which featured media coverage by the press and radio. Some of their objectives included the rights for women to gain access to contraceptives, the ceasing of forced sterilization, legalized abortion and research on the causes of sterility (Carr Campos 452). These expectations created a lot of debate in the media, but resulted in the state reducing the punishment for abortions and increased consequences for sexual crimes. Abortion was not permitted by the state government, as education was proposed as an adequate alternative to reduce unwanted pregnancies.

However, the fight for equality did not stop there. In 1979, the Colectivo continued to lobby to have their voices heard and organized feminist conferences where participants rejected the idea of the influence of the church and the state on decisions regarding their bodies. After this a second conference was held, which was attended by political figures like the governor, justices of the state supreme court and secretary of state discussed the amendment to the State Penal Code in relation to sexual crimes and the need for shelters for abused women. These discussions were successful as shelters were created to house raped and abused women (the Centro de Apoyo a la Mujer) and laws were created to protect women in abusive relationships.

Organization and education continued to be the themes continuing to motivate the movement. Other leaders worked with women lower on the socioeconomic ladder to educate them in community organization, leadership and development. Tools like pamphlets were distributed at workshops by the Centro para Mujeres Comunicacion, Intercambio y Desarrollo Humanos en America Latina (CIDHAL) to peasant women detailing their role in the ‘peoples struggle’, as well as the issues they faced in participating in the movement and why their organization would be limited, owing to factors like exploitation by the rich and by men. The purpose of these pamphlets was to enlighten campesinas (peasant woman) as to the importance of their participation in order to change their lives.

In Nicaragua, women’s organizations became vital after the Sandinista Revolution as women began being trained as leaders in order to expand their horizons and propel their participation in the movement. Many women took up positions as “members of civic and defense units (Comites de Defensa Sandinista), labor unions, worker and peasant organizations, and women's associations” working to advance the cause of women throughout society (Carr Campos 455). After the Revolution, women started to become more involved in the workforce as state subsidized child-care programs came into existence. In 1981, the Asociacion de Mujeres de Nicaragua Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE) organization used this as an opportunity to enact new laws to ensure that both mothers and fathers had equal responsibilities in the household and regarding childcare duties.

In Chile, the 1970’s marked a political shift from a democracy to a dictatorship filled with human rights violations, economic issues and unemployment. Nevertheless, women were the first to demonstrate against the dictatorship, the first being on March 8th in celebration of International Women’s Day. Other organizations like the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos, an association led by the relatives of those who had disappeared and were detained, held demonstrations too. The work of women continued non-traditionally in solidarity through artwork like arpilleras, embroidered fabric that told stories on squares shared amongst Chileans locally and those exiled. Other efforts included the organization of communal kitchens, coops and skill workshops. These organizations and events allowed women to convene and establish their collective experience which eventually transitioned into the feminist movement. Organizing collectively in forums like community kitchens ensured survival both emotionally and physically. This allowed women to transition from an isolated existence to a collective experience and eventually a women’s movement with the motto “democracy in the country and in the home"(Carr Campos 461). One organization founded from the birth of the Chilean feminist movement was La Morada, a safe space for women that existed outside of the confines that society limited them to. In 1983, as the dictatorship fell, women continued to mobilize and continue their work for democracy and since then, exiles have been returning to Chile.

As political movements and feminism worked and works together to combat gender issues, feminism began to coexist with the common struggles in Latin America and was termed ‘El feminismo Popular’, a movement including the common people.

**The Emergence of Intersectionality**

While the feminist movement often claims to be for all women, it often represents and centres the experiences of white women. Intersectionality a termed coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw describes how “race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ with one another and overlap” (Coastan, “The Intersectionality Wars”). This has forced the feminist movement to be open to recognizing the experiences of disenfranchised women, especially those of lower classes and marginalized races, and to realize that not every woman’s experience is the same. This recognition has also taken place in Latin America as shifts have occurred to recognize the experiences of racialized women, namely Black and Indigenous women.

Racialized women in Latin America and the Caribbean have critiqued the dominant racist ideology present in feminism, which defines womanhood as a shared category while ignoring the distinct experiences of certain women based on their race, ethnicity, sexuality, or class. The realization of this discrepancy in the movement has allowed for Afro-descended women to analyze their history from a critical contemporary feminist lens, instead of a one-dimensional view. As enslaved women are often seen as victims, their stories of resistance are ignored. Acts like inducing abortions and wasting the master’s goods were ways in which women worked to prevent their children from being enslaved and engaged in marronage. This new method of analysis, “blackening feminism” has allowed for the intersection and relationship of racism and sexism to be comprehended so that the history of enslaved women can be contextualised.

Some contemporary efforts of black feminists have included the creation of terms to conceptualize their identities. Terms like ‘amefricanidad’ by Afro-Brazilian scholar Léila Gonsalez or ‘amefricanicity’ are alternatives to terms like Latinadad or Mestizaje that are often Eurocentric or non-inclusive of Indigenous and African aspects of Latin America. These new terms allow for racialized identities to be understood and analyzed while reflecting the diversity of the region.

Another topic that is often marginalized in feminist discourse is sexuality, however, homosexual organizations of mixed genders started to work alongside the feminist movement despite it being primarily heteronormative at the time. Through these discussions, Lesbian Feminism emerged with “the imperative to transform ideas and practices related to heteronormativity, lesbianism, and gender relations”, and specifically discusses the ways that heteronormativity intersects with sexuality, race, class and gender (Rivera Berruz, “Latin American Feminism”). Afro-descended Lesbian Feminists associate racism and sexism with heteronormativity as they believe it is intimately linked with the proliferation of racist and sexist ideals and believe that as feminists and lesbians the liberation of women is stemmed from a shift from the patriarchy.

While neoliberal feminism may centre on reproductive rights, the core issues for Indigenous feminists includes not only gendered violence but also territorial violence as is related to the colonizing and destruction of Indigenous land. For Indigenous women to gain equality, a collective understanding on violence is necessary as it is vital to the protection and preservation of cultural systems (Rivera Berruz, “Latin American Feminism”). Equity for Indigenous, Black and queer feminists is a political understanding of collective experiences of women and therefore require collective efforts to resolve their issues. Understanding the issues faced by specific classes and sects of women allows the movement to be more equitable and for the feminist movement to be a collective movement cognisant of the individual identities and struggles of all women.

**The Chilean Constitution**

To create a more seemingly open political system during the regime of President August Pinochet, the military was given the task of creating the “Constitution of Liberty” in 1980 in order to create a political system that would pave the way for formal civilian rule, and elections. This constitution was meant to be the foundation for a protected democracy that would support authoritarianism. The presidential system that this constitution created was a system that “restricted participation … [with] exclusive representation, tutelary power of the armed forces, and the untouchability of institutions in order to assure the regime's permanent authoritarian character'” (Ensalaco 410). The protected democracy was called a “national security state” by the democratic opposition as within it a president could “dissolve the lower house of the national Congress and assume sweeping emergency powers” and “the state would serve an 'integrative' national purpose, meaning that it would give pride of place to 'the permanent interests of society over and above the partial objectives [of] interest groups’” (Ensalaco 411).

Some of the authoritarian traits of the Pinochet government included the inhibition of political participation, the removal of the “democratic principles of separation of powers and popular sovereignty”, excessive military and police control, and control of the constitution to maintain the dictatorship (Ensalaco 412). The dictatorship also prohibited groups that advocated for any ideology “'based on [the concept of] class struggle', '…[promoting] violence', or even '…[doing] harm to the family’” (Ensalaco 413). These terms could be very vague and could be used to prohibit the mobilization of the women’s movement.

Because the military regime created the constitution to benefit their government, even their budget policy could be utilized to financially reward only the programs that were seen positively by the right. One great example of this was the government’s agency for women, Servicio Nacional de La Mujer, SERNAM being condemned from presenting at the UN’s conference for women as they believed the organization promoted “the views of radical feminists and violated the Chilean national interest” and thus their budget was reduced by 3.6 %.

These issues, among the need for parity and equity have led to the need to create a new constitution. Gender plays a large role in social disparity as women, despite increasingly becoming involved in paid work, do not share the domestic or childcare duties equally with men, emphasizing the idea of doble jornada (the double shift).

In response to sexual violence by police and immunity for crimes against women, the feminist collective Lastesis has incorporated performance activism into their protest. Women being involved politically and in the creation of a new constitution written by an equal number of men and women will allow for the experiences of women that are often confined to the private sphere to be in the public, and women’s issues will be recognized for the human rights issues that they are and not merely gendered issues.

**Lastesis -The Emergence of Global Protest Performance Movement**

*Performance and Digital Activism*

Performance and later digital activism have emerged since the 21st century in Latin America as an artistic expression and promulgation tool to create social and political change. These innovative protests allow for symbolic actions to be demonstrated non-violently and through surprise. These unconventional actions compel the audience to reflect on their beliefs and attitudes while informing them on important social issues (Singhal and Greiner 43). Performance can be defined as “artistic, cultural, or political events such as a theater play, a music concert, or a protest (events that are set apart from everyday life)” where societal behavior is seen as a theatre and actors manipulate it in order to create social commentary (Fuentes 11). In Spanish, performance art is coined ‘arte de accion’, with the word action stemming from the Latin ‘agere’ meaning “setting something in motion,” in contrast to “creating a static object or product” (Fuentes 13). This is significant as it reveals that performance art in Latin American protest is not intended to create a product that is stationary but to awaken and invigorate the population. In addition to the term ‘arte de accion’, the Spanish critic Martí Peran uses the term ‘arte del acontecimiento’ (event art) to describe “works in which media and agents engage with various communities” resulting in a product that exists “beyond the functional to the expressive” (Fuentes 13). The success of the protests led by Lastesis and the virality of their song “Un Violador en tu camino” are largely due to the mediums that they use as digital and performative activism garner the attention of the public, appeal to the media and inform and unify the population.

The work of performance art has been incorporated by feminist movements like the Argentinean created ‘Ni Una Menos’ (NUM) Movement. The movement utilized performance online and in real life to depict that maternal and domestic care primarily done by women, were not considered valuable or real work and worked to remove the idea that social roles belonged to specific genders. Their campaigns in 2016 carried the slogan “Con amor o sin amor, las tareas domésticas son trabajo (With or without love, housework is work)” (Fuentes 12). Another campaign enacted during the holiday season, a time in which women are known for increasing their labour, worked to encourage women to support one another with the statement “#EstamosParaNosotras (#WeWorkForOurselves)” (Fuentes 12). Allyship was shown through either wearing a black ribbon or placing one on one’s home and sharing images of this action to the NUM’s Facebook page. This example portrayed that once performance is used to critique a commonly accepted social ideology, such as work being gendered, performances can also continue the work of transforming the systems that support these ideologies. Performance activism allows people to understand the limitations and oppressive nature of many social constructs and consequently helps to create the environment for change.

In Chile, students continued a similar phenomenon of utilizing digital performance to engage in activism. They used social media and performance to reflect the effects of the Pinochet-era education system on their lives, including the consequences of its predatory lending system: violence by the state.

In June 2011, students dressed as zombies and with the sign “‘Yo morí debiendo’ (I died owing/in debt)” began to dance synchronously to Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’ at the Plaza de la Constitución, near the Government Palace in Santiago, Chile (Fuentes 67). The event was advertised on Facebook a week before it occurred and was attended by many. Those who attended recorded the event and shared it throughout social media to educate the public about the student’s mobilization.



Fig. 1 “Yo Mori Debiendo”

Source: Wittern Bush, Daniella. “Yo Morí Debiendo.” *Springer Link*, Springer Link, Santiago, 26 Oct. 2019, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11557-9\_4.

Through both virtual and physical protests, students were able to mobilize in a way that transcended time. The student’s organization in combining street action with online activism allowed their movement to expand in unprecedented ways. These university and high school students, inspired by a previous set of secondary school mobilizations from the 2006 “Penguin Revolution”, spent 7 months from April to November working with traditional and non-traditional methods such as “kissins and flash mobs” to “counteract the negative media coverage that depicted their protests as violent and disruptive” (Fuentes 70). Unlike their parents’ generation led by Pinochet, these students labeled as the “fearless generation” were able to create a change in the system and have their education be free of charge (Fuentes 71). The ‘Thriller for Education’ event continued in Antofagasta where social media was used to invite participants to the protest, give insight into the dress, choreography and make-up necessary to perfect their looks and work cohesively while mobilizing.

Social media networks allowed students to mobilize in large groups and to coordinate effectively. While the prior protests in 2006 had access to certain digital tools like blogs, the emergence of platforms like Twitter and Facebook allowed students to have more means of communication, thus expanding their movement to a larger group of potential participants. Through synchronous movements (flash mob) and asynchronous collaboration (through social media), a collective emerged to counteract the acceptance of debt-governance, and its impacts and predatory power on students (Fuentes 45). By acting as zombies, the moving dead, they worked towards a future that they could live in.

*Lastesis*

Lastesis Collective is a feminist collective consisting of four women, Dafne Valdés, Paula Cometa, Sibila Sotomayor and Lea Cáceres, all from Valparaíso, Chile. They chose the name Lastesis because the premise of their work is the taking of feminist authors theses’ and staging them to share with the public (Rodríguez, “Las Chilenas Que Crearon 'Un Violador En Tu Camino’”). The feminist hymn “Un Violador en tu camino”, or “A rapist in your path” is based on more than a year of research that the women had done on rape statistics in Chile and was created in response to the femicide and other cases of gender-based violence, police brutality and increased oppression and inequality in the country. Some of their findings revealed that women detained from the ongoing protests had been manipulated by the police and state to discourage their involvement in further protests. The thesis adapted in the song is from the work of Argentinian-Brazilian anthropologist Rita Segato and her definition of rape “as a moralising and political act of domination” (Serafini 293). It was written alongside choreography to depict the abuse that women experience by police, such as the squatting that they are forced to do in police searches.

The song’s title “Un Violador en tu camino” is a direct reference and rebuke to the Chilean Carabineros’ (the national police force) police slogan, “A friend in your path” from the 1980’s to 90’s and some stanzas are a response to its lyrics as well (Rodríguez, “Las Chilenas Que Crearon 'Un Violador En Tu Camino’”). The police were known for their use of sexual abuse as a tactic against political dissidents despite claiming to protect women. In addition to being inspired by the “Ni Una Menos organization”, Lastesis has utilized the theatric techniques of Augosto Boal’s 1970’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’. Boal worked with artists and activists in order to present their radical leftist goals into performance. One aspect of the theatre of the oppressed is the utilization of either the participant’s body or the bodies of others “to construct images that express attitudes and emotions towards oppressions” (Herrera 50). In “Un Violador en tu camino” the blindfolded women with raised arms against their oppressor reflect the justice denied to women and exclaim who the oppressor is with the refrain, “El Violador Eres tú”. Their black blindfolds referenced Lady Justice and their green bandanas were worn in support of the legalization of abortion.

A group of people dancing

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Figure 2. “El Violador Eres Tu”

Source: Kaosenlared.net. *Pressenza International Press Agency*, Pressenza , Santiago, Nov. 2019, www.pressenza.com/2020/01/interview-with-sarah-plant-who-just-translate-un-violador-en-tu-camino-a-rapist-in-your-path/.

The first performance of the song on the 18th of November 2019 gained rapid visibility in the media and made it a relevant addition to the ongoing protests as it explored the treatment women faced by the police during these protests. Its next major performance on the 25th of November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women went viral as a video taken by a professor from the University of Chile was shared to social media. After becoming viral on social media, it quickly began to attract attention from major media outlets as the image of women in large groups singing and dancing at landmarks across the world had a huge visual effect. The performance mobilized its participants and informed its audiences with harsh critiques on violence and the structure of gender violence.

*The Performance*

The performance on the 25th of November occurred as Lastesis utilized social media to recreate the demonstration at the Plaza de Armas and other sites in Santiago most notably the national stadium, a site where Augusto Pinochet notoriously tortured and murdered innumerable political detainees. Via Instagram, participants were invited to come with lyrics memorized or printed, a translucent black blindfold and an outfit that they would wear on a night out. The performance occurred during a social explosion that led to increase authoritarian presence such as tanks on the street. However, despite this, women came together to perform the song that included themes such as the prejudice from the court towards victims of rape, the impunity of the instigators of femicide and police brutality. This performance was one of the many in 2019 that revealed the creativity and vitality of the revolutionary movement. While over a million people came together to fight for social and political change and initiate strikes, Lastesis utilized their song to relate to the communal struggle of the country.



Figure 3. Call to Action

Source: Lastesis. “Invitación.” *Instagram*, 23 Nov. 2019, www.instagram.com/p/B5Nl542FjmR/.

*Lyrical Analysis*

“Un Violador en tu camino” (Lastesis *Colectivo Las Tesis – Un Violador en tu camino*)

“1. El patriarcado es un juez “[[1]](#footnote-2)The patriarchy is a judge

2. Que nos juzga por nacer That judges us for being born

3.Y nuestro castigo and our punishment

4.Es la violencia que no ves is the violence you don’t see.

5.El patriarcado es un juez The patriarchy is a judge

6.Que nos juzga por nacer That judges us for being born

7.Y nuestro castigo and our punishment

8.Es la violencia que ya ves is the violence that… [has been] seen.

[Pre-Coro] [Pre- Chorus]

9. Es femicidio It’s femicide.

10.Impunidad para mi asesino Impunity for [my murderer]

11.Es la desaparición It’s disappearance

12.Es la violación It’s rape

[Coro]  
13.Y la culpa no era mía, ni donde estaba, ni cómo vestía

And the fault wasn’t mine, not where I was, …[or] how I dressed  
14.Y la culpa no era mía, ni donde estaba, ni cómo vestía

And the fault wasn’t mine, not where I was, …[or]how I dressed  
15.Y la culpa no era mía, ni donde estaba, ni cómo vestía

And the fault wasn’t mine, not where I was, …[or] how I dressed  
16.Y la culpa no era mía, ni donde estaba, … ni cómo vestía

And the fault wasn’t mine, not where I was, …[or] how I dressed

[Pos-Coro] [Post-Chorus]

17.El violador eras tú The rapist [was] you  
18.El violador eres tú The rapist is you

Ad

[Pre-Coro] [Pre-Chorus]

19.Son los pacos It’s the cops  
20.Los jueces The judges  
21.El Estado The state  
22. El Presidente The president

[Coro] [Chorus]

23. El Estado opresor es un macho violador The oppressive state is a rapist

24. El Estado opresor es un macho violador The oppressive state is a rapist

[Pos-Coro]

25.El violador eras tú *(Paco[[2]](#footnote-3) culiao)* The rapist [was] you  
26.El violador eres tú *(Paco culiao)* The rapist is you

Ad  
[Verso 2] [Verse 2]  
27.Duerme tranquila, niña inocente Sleep calmly, innocent girl,  
28.Sin preocuparte del bandolero Without worrying about the bandit  
29.Que por tu sueños dulce y sonriente [For] over your dreams smiling and sweet,  
30.Vela tu amante carabinero … [Your loving cop] watches

[Pos-Coro] [Post-Chorus]

31.El violador eres tú *(Paco culiao)* The rapist is you  
32.El violador eres tú *(Paco culiao)* The rapist is you  
33.El violador eres tú *(Paco culiao)* The rapist is you  
34.El violador eres tú *(Paco culiao)*” The rapist is you”

The title itself is a parody of the Chilean Carabineros’s slogan “Un amigo en tu camino” and draws on much of their lyrics while critiquing their oppressive tactics through the lyrics and the choreography of the feminist anthem. The song consists of two stanzas, a pre-chorus, two choruses and a post chorus. Lines one to eight start off as the women march along with an electronic beat. These lyrics personify the state as the patriarchy and the police as systemic perpetuators of sexual violence and general brutality. These first lines demonstrate the punishment women receive for simply being born “el patriarcado es un juez / que nos juzga por nacer” (Lastesis 1, 2). It also highlights the invisibility of sexual violence despite it being a universal experience with the lines “es la violencia que no ves/es la violencia que ya ves” (Lastesis 4,8)

In the first pre-chorus as the lyrics are sung, the participants do three squats and raise their hands above their heads to imitate the humiliation women are forced to endure during arrest after being “stripped naked for body cavity searches” (Herrera 46). In response to the victim blaming ideology that is so prevalent, the chorus “y la culpa no era mía, ni donde estaba, ni cómo vestía” is sung four times to emphasize that no matter where a woman is, or what she is wearing, she is never to be blamed for sexual violence against her (Lastesis 13-16). The fault is placed onto who is and has been the source of violence, it is “*…*los pacos/los jueces/el estado / el presidente”those in largely male dominated positions (Lastesis 19-22). The judges are critiqued because of the inefficacy of the judicial statement, wherein only 8% of rape trials result in a conviction, and due to the common overlooking of complaint and deaths from the police and military (Rodríguez, “Las Chilenas Que Crearon 'Un Violador En Tu Camino’”). The president is also blamed, as Chile’s current president is known for his sexist attitudes towards women concerning abortion and the misogynistic jokes he has made about rape (T13).

The state is once again personified as a macho rapist in the second chorus. The second stanza parodies a stanza from the anthem of the Chilean police which states “duerme tranquila niña inocente/ sin preocuparte del bandolero/ que por tu sueño dulce y sonriente vela tu amante carabinero” (Lastesis 27-30). This is ironic for the police to state considering that they are often the “bandit” that is harming young innocent women. The song ends with the chorus “El Violador eres tu”, as the women point forward.

The lyrics of the song translate the theory of Rita Segato, “that violence against women will be ended once male power structures are dismantled”, in simplistic terms to the public. The movements, like the women raising their arms in identifying the oppressors and their pointing, often at institutions of power, places the blame onto those who contribute to systemic violence against women.

*Re-Enactments*

On November 29th, 2019, women and dissenters were called to adapt the song, including its lyrics and music as well as its choreography for a global demonstration. They called not only women to participate but also those who were marginalized by society including “blacks, queers and nonbinary individuals” in order to highlight the importance of intersectionality and the differences one may face due to their race and sexuality (Drove).

Some factors in Chile that contribute to the prejudice an individual may face include being of African descent, being Indigenous, being an immigrant, and being a woman. Two groups of women that largely fall into these groups are Haitian and Indigenous women. Many Haitian immigrants face discrimination and struggle to gain jobs, and as immigrants they also lack access to basic services often due to language barriers. Their poverty leads them to increased vulnerability. Women in Chile are at high risk of being affected by domestic violence as “80% of domestic violence victims are women” (Colmenares). As migrants, Haitian women are also “likely to be victims of trafficking or physical and sexual abuse during and after their migratory journey”; however, many of these issues affect Chilean women too (Colmenares).

Two notable cases that reveal the structural issues faced by Haitian and Indigenous women by the state are demonstrated in the cases of Vitha Malbranche, a migrant, and Gabriela Blas, an Aymara shepherd. Vita Malbranche was on a trip with her six-month old son, from Santiago, Chile to Brazil to meet with her brother. After suffering what appeared to be an anxiety attack on the bus, she was arrested and admitted to a psychiatric hospital where her son was removed from her. Throughout all of this, she was unable to communicate as she was not fluent in Spanish and was forcibly separated from her son when placed in psychiatric care. Due to cultural ignorance and intolerance, Malbranche was treated repressively and given an undue punishment. Similarly, in the case of Gabriela Blas, who after going to search for her missing llamas realized her son was missing, was arrested and charged for his murder. While awaiting trial she spent three years in custody, three of those months in complete isolation. Despite many NGO’s appealing for a presidential pardon, her claim was rejected, and she was sentenced to six years in prison. While imprisoned, her eldest daughter who was in state care, was given up for adoption internationally, despite her mother opposing it.

The experience of these women reveals that discrimination occurs on many levels often due to race, gender and even poverty. From a state level, government interventions often utilize force, and violate human rights, interns those it considers insane and imprisons those who they believe are guilty of losing their children. Instead of protecting and supporting these women, their race and class are factors that the state uses to deem their lives as unimportant. When these women can become the face of the performance it allows for their unique stories to be told and for their experiences to be recognized.

Since “Un Violador en tu camino” has gone viral throughout the Latin American diaspora, resonating with an audience nationally and internationally, it has been modified to reflect the social and political condition of the region. Through grassroot organizations, individuals or groups have created local versions of the anthem. Because of how much engagement the topic received on platforms like Twitter, “this performance affected and influenced many feminist organizations in the world”, and “the song was translated in many languages” (Rodriguez et al. 10). The lyrics and choreography are easy to learn making participation and adaptation feasible. Each re-enactment creates unity by involving no distinction between artist and participant since Lastesis does not have any control on its interpretation or who can perform it.

Due to its simplicity, the variants have been adapted to different languages and social contexts, including sign-language and adaptations of the performance to include those with varying physical abilities, as many people in wheelchairs have also taken part in the performances.

In the Petorca region in Chile, the song was transformed locally to undertake the issue of water rights, which were being exploited by the state in order to increase the profit of crops. Also, in Chile, Lastesis Senior, a group of women over 40 came together in January of 2020 to ensure that the performance would be intergenerational and later registered a new political party, the Partido Alternativa Feminista, the Feminist Alternative Party, with a primary aim of encouraging women to participate in the referendum for the new constitution (BBC News Mundo).

Outside of Chile the song was appropriated in over 200 locations. In Turkey where the rate of domestic violence has doubled since 2012, it was performed and broken up by police. This consequently resulted in more demonstrations across the country and even in parliament by female politicians. In Cyprus, the line “And the fault wasn’t mine, not where I was, not how I dressed”, was relevant as the court system continuously denied rape victims justice and utilized sexism and victim blaming when judging rape cases (Day and Holborow 20). Specifically, a 19-year-old who reported her rape was charged with being guilty of public mischief after asking police to investigate her case. She faced intense interrogation without a lawyer and because one of the rapists had consensual sex with her the night prior, the police believed she was “asking for it” and described her as a “whore” (Day and Holborow 20).

In the U.S, it was retweeted in solidarity by New York State Representative Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez. In December of 2019, in Los Angeles at the County Museum of Art, it was performed for over an hour. In January 2020, it was performed at the Manhattan Criminal Court to protest the grotesque acts of Harvey Weinstein and was moved to the Trump Tower where protestors sang in English and Spanish (Serafini 292). Performance art is often used as a tool of social justice and political action, especially in the United States, as feminist performance art stemmed from guerilla theatre and the feminist movement which emerged from universities in the 1960’s and 70’s (Serafini 292).

Similar protests continued in iconic locations like “Zócalo Square in Mexico City, the Eiffel Tower in Paris…, the steps of Madrid’s Reina Sofia Museum, San Francisco, Bogotá, Montreal, New Delhi, Thessaloniki, Porto Alegre and Istanbul” (Borba et al. 1)

Due to the universality of the lyrics and choreography, the content was able to appeal to women globally. The success of the song is also due to its ability to be easily reproduced and transformed into various contexts, languages, and social media platforms. Throughout the world it is unfortunately common for figures or organizations of authorities like police, the government, and the judicial system to trample on the rights of women, enact a legal system where they can be abused systematically without consequence, and blame the victims of sexual abuse instead of the perpetuators of sexual violence. Solidarity and political change go hand in hand, and performance activism and digital activism are tools that can allow communication to occur amidst repression, bias in the media, and by governments, through resisting and organizing creatively.

**Conclusion**

Women’s rights have always been an issue, and the second-class treatment of women was evident even in Colonial Latin America. While it could be said that white women, especially those of a higher class received greater privileges than other races and classes of women, all women had their potential limited in the male dominated society. Women like Sor Juana and countless other nameless women who chose to rise above their limitations and subvert the system, helped to pioneer the movement to what it is today.

The social, cultural, and political diversity of Latin America has characterized the unique struggles that each woman faces. However, through communal discourse, women have shared their experiences and come up with common strategies to have their voices heard and improve the quality of their lives.

Innovation and collaboration have been the primary methods of mobilization and have successfully helped to educate women and organize them in a variety of spheres. As feminist scholars and grass-roots leaders worked together to unify women of all classes, from the campesinas to those who were highly educated, the foundation of the movement began to solidify. As women began to unite and the voices of the marginalized were heard, progress was made, and many governments enacted laws to protect women and to support the victims of domestic violence. While the efforts of these women were helpful, femicide and domestic violence is still prevalent in Latin America, and feminist movements have had to collaborate with various organizations to come up with unique solutions to combat these issues. Because the issues facing women exist amidst other social inequalities, the feminist movement has often collaborated with organizations and political movements that denounce capitalism as many feminists believe that capitalism and the patriarchy go hand in hand. Performance and digital media have been contemporary tools of activism that help to unify and inform a population while critiquing systemic inequalities. In combining these two mediums, Lastesis has translated feminist theory to the public and worked within ongoing protests in Chile to exemplify that women’s rights issues are not a gendered issue but a human’s rights issue. As the nature of their translation is simplistic, “Un Violador en tu camino”, it has been translated into a variety of languages and been adapted in a variety of performance styles to engage with the issues of femicide and domestic violence, issues that transcend borders, languages, and cultures. Digital and performance activism are mechanisms that can be useful in creating change in atmospheres that are repressive. If they are used responsibly, they can spark revolutions and create a more equitable society. In times of isolation, social inequality is still present, however, solidarity and mobilization are still possible, and the work of Lastesis reveals the potential for social movements to reach a global audience through mobilizing both offline and online.

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1. The English Translation is from the article Merelli “Learn the Lyrics and Dance Steps for the Chilean Feminist Anthem Spreading around the World.” With my annotations for clarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. “Paco culiao” is slur used negatively towards cops and is included in some performances of the song. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)