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Putting Memories in Motion: Embroidered Handkerchiefs for the Dead and the Disappeared in Mexico[1]

Katia Olalde

Abstract

In this article, I inquire into the moving quality of a set of embroidered handkerchiefs commemorating the victims of the so-called war on drugs in Mexico. These handkerchiefs were stitched within the framework of the *Embroidering for Peace and Memory Initiative*, a collaborative project developed by a group of cultural activists in Mexico City in June 2011. I posit that the centrality of touch which characterizes hand embroidery together with the intimate contact between cloth and skin enabled the needleworkers either to nurture their affective bonds with their disappeared loved ones or to develop a sense of empathic connection with people they did not know. Finally, I propose to conceive these embroidered handkerchiefs as an expression of the nonviolent action of consolation, which José Guadalupe Sánchez Suárez understands as the endearing and bodily approach prompted by the loving connection arising in the face of an open expression of pain.

Keywords: embroidery • non-violence • memory • affect • combat against drug traffic

1 This article is a revised version of a previously published article: Katia Olalde, "Dar cuerpo y poner en movimiento a la memoria. Bordado y acción colectiva en las protestas contra los asesinatos y las desapariciones en México," in *Cuerpos memorables*, coord. Caroline Perrée and Ileana Diéguez (Mexico: Centre d'études mexicaines et centraméricaines CEMCA, 2018), 201-228. This first version was inspired in the paper "Embodied memory and digital media in the global protests against the 'War on Drugs' in Mexico," that I presented in June 5, 2018 at the International Congress : Memories in motion : transnational and migratory perspectives in memory processes. Third congress of Red Internacional de Investigación y Aprendizaje "Memoria y Narración". Romanska och klassiska institutionen- Stockholm University. I would like to thank Adriana Santoveña for reviewing this manuscript and for assisting me with the translation of the excerpts taken from the first version of the article.

Introduction

Between June 2011 and March 2020, volunteers in Mexico and abroad embroidered hundreds of handkerchiefs commemorating the victims of the so-called 'war on drugs' in Mexico.[1] Throughout almost a decade, these handkerchiefs were presented to a wider public in different formats. Most frequently, these embroideries were hung from clotheslines that were displayed in parks, public squares, museum galleries and cultural institutions. Furthermore, they were taken to rallies during which protesters would carry the clotheslines as banners (see fig. 1) while wearing a handkerchief on their backs (see fig. 2 and 3).

Fig. 1: Fuentes Rojas et al., *Marching along Paseo de la Reforma on the first anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa*, Guerrero. Photo: Katia Olalde, Mexico City, September 26, 2015.

Fig. 2: Fuentes Rojas et al., *Marching along Paseo de la Reforma on the first anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa*, Guerrero. Photo: Courtesy of the Fuentes Rojas Collective, Mexico City, September 26, 2015.

When displayed in parks or public squares, these clotheslines were used to demarcate the space where temporary embroidery workshops were set up (see fig. 4). The goal of these ephemeral public space interventions was to catch the passers-by's eye. Moreover, passers-by were encouraged to stitch along if they wanted to. The materials were provided by the organizers, and the texts were already transcribed on the handkerchiefs, so that the participants' only task was to embroider the words letter by letter

1 I establish March 2020 as the final date of this period because the collective that had kept this embroidery project ongoing since August 2011 had to interrupt its activities on March 23, 2020, when the national shutdown (Jornada Nacional de Sana Distancia) began in Mexico. The 'war on drugs' is a term commonly used to refer to the security strategy implemented by the then president Felipe Calderón shortly after he took office on December 1st, 2006. This strategy targeted drug cartels and involved deploying the military in different regions of Mexico and assigning policing tasks to soldiers. The execution of this strategy resulted in a surge of violence whose consequences have been reported by several Human Rights Organisations. See, for instance, Open Society Foundation, Undeniable Atrocities (New York: Open Society Foundation, 2016). The current president, Andres Manuel López Obrador, declared that the 'war on drugs' was officially over on January 30, 2019. However, according to Human Rights Watch, in Mexico "Human rights violations—including torture, enforced disappearances, abuses against migrants, extrajudicial killings, and attacks on independent journalists and human rights defenders—have continued under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who took office in December 2018. Impunity remains the norm. Reforms enacted in 2017 and 2018 have been slow and until now ineffective in addressing torture and impunity." Human Rights Watch, "Mexico events 2020," accessed April 4, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/mexico.

Fig. 3: *A member of Fuentes Rojas marching along Paseo de la Reforma on the first anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa*, Guerrero. The handkerchief on her back reads: "It was the State". Photo: Courtesy of Fuentes Rojas, Mexico City, September 26, 2015.

Fig. 4: *Embroidery session organized by Fuentes Rojas*. Coyoacán, Mexico City. Photo: Courtesy of Fuentes Rojas.

Fig. 5: *Embroideries completed by several hands (in process)*. Fuentes Rojas, 2012-2013. Photo: Katia Olalde, UAM-Xochimilco, Mexico City, September 30, 2013.

(see fig. 5). Both experienced needleworkers and amateur embroiderers were welcomed to take part in the stitching. The information about the cases came initially from a body count called Menos Días Aquí (Fewer Days Here—MDA). This body count was a participatory project launched in 2010. The project involved collecting every death report published by the Mexican Press on a weekly basis. The list was posted on the blog http://menosdiasaqui.blogspot.com/. The handkerchiefs embroidered during these ephemeral workshops resembled the plaques found in memorials for victims of wars and genocides (see fig. 6). These embroideries did not depict crime scenes or corpses. Rather, the only thing stitched on them was text. Most often, these texts described how the lifeless body was found or, in the case of disappearances, the circumstances in which the missing person was seen for the last time. Nonetheless, some of the embroideries conveyed loving messages addressed to the victims, as well as words of friendly support for the victims' relatives.

The name of this embroidery project was Iniciativa Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria: una víctima, un pañuelo (Embroidering for Peace and Memory Initiative: One victim, one handkerchief—hereafter EPI for its English initials). The EPI was developed in Mexico City between June and August 2011 by a group of civilians, journalists and cultural producers who joined forces to support the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity—hereafter MPJD). The MPJD was a social movement that brought together victims' relatives in April 2011, after the son of prominent journalist and poet Javier Sicilia was killed.

Fig. 6: *Embroideries completed by several hands on canvas cloth*. Fuentes Rojas, 2012-2013. Photo: Katia Olalde, UAM-Xochimilco, Mexico City, September 30, 2013.

At the time, neither the federal government nor the Mexican society at large recognized the dead and the disappeared as victims. Instead, the federal government launched a communication campaign promoting the idea that people hit by violence were mostly criminals (see for instance Todd J. Gillman. "Mexican AG: U.S. troops not needed," *The Dallas Morning News*, Februrary 25, 2009, 4A.). This encouraged the social stigmatization of victims and their families. In this context, the emergence of the MPJD allowed the relatives of the victims to claim and exercise their right to meet in broad daylight, publicly grief their losses, and speak about the harm they were being subjected to. During the rallies, caravans, dialogues, gatherings and public space interventions performed by the MPJD, the relatives of the victims managed to create temporary situations where their voices would be heard. In these encounters, the relatives and friends of those who had been murdered openly mourned their dead. Meanwhile, friends and relatives of the disappeared publicly expressed the pain and unbearable anguish caused by the uncertainty regarding the fate of their loved ones. Furthermore, within the context of these mobilizations, the claims for truth, justice and memory uttered by the victims' relatives were collectively acknowledged and eventually shaped as a matter of public concern. In this sense, the mobilizations organised by the MPJD configured what Hannah Arendt called 'spaces of appearance' (Olalde 2019b, 47-55).

The MPJD brought these spaces of appearance into existence by means of nonviolent actions of resistance—such as, for example, the silent walk and the hunger strike—inspired by the values of a number of spiritual traditions (Ameglio 2013, 22-23). Among these traditions, the *Satyagraha*, defined by Gandhi "as insistence on Truth and the force that is derived from such insistence" (Ravindra Varma 2001, 5), was of great importance. Thus, from the perspective of nonviolence, of which the MPJD's silent walk from Cuernavaca, Morelos to Mexico City in May 2011 is an illustrative example, the public expression of grief was not a sign of weakness, but rather a way of fostering and strengthening what Gandhi called the 'soul force' (Gandhi 1968, 108).

Arguing against the misconception of nonviolence as an expression of weakness, Gandhi remarked:

> If we continue to believe ourselves and let others believe, that we are weak and helpless and therefore offer passive resistance, our resistance would never make us strong, and at the earliest oppor-

> tunity we would give up passive resistance as a weapon of the weak. On the other hand, if we are Satyagrahis and offer Satyagraha believing ourselves to be strong, two clear consequences result from it. Fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger and stronger every day. With the increase in our strength, our Satyagraha too becomes more effective and we would never be casting about for an opportunity to give it up (M. K. Gandhi 1968, 100; see also Álvarez Gándara 2013, 34).

Within the spaces of appearance configured by the MPJD, hugging one another, listening to each other, remaining silent and walking together were all conceived as ways to put the nonviolent action of consolation into practice. José Guadalupe Sánchez Suárez described consolation (*el consuelo*) as a body to body, endearing approach triggered by the loving connection that springs from the open expression of pain:

> Against this temptation of violence, we oppose citizen and popular organization, the embodiment (placing us body to body, endearing approach) of communities replying, after every intervention of the victims: "You are not alone! We are not alone!" The experience of community that enables an alternative to War and violence is an exercise in listening and speaking, in accompanying one another in our solitudes (Consolation) and isolations caused by fear (Sánchez Suárez 2013, 72).[2]

In this article I explore the intimate connection that exists between cloth, the body, and memory in order to suggest that the centrality of touch in textile practices enables the crafters to foster and cherish affective bonds with someone who is absent, in the sense that it provides them with a flexible and tangible material that can be held, kept close and caressed. I argue that this capacity to foster affective bonds with someone who is absent or far away enabled some of the EPI's[3] embroiderers to convey their heartfelt support to the victims' relatives. Building upon this idea, I propose to conceive the EPI's handkerchiefs as tangible manifestations of the nonviolent action of consolation.

2 "Frente a esta tentación de la violencia, oponemos la organización ciudadana y popular, el acuerpamiento (ponernos cuerpo a cuerpo, acercamiento entrañable) de las comunidades que a cada intervención de las víctimas responden: '¡No estás sola! ¡No estamos solos!' La experiencia de comunidad que posibilita una vía alternativa a la Guerra y la violencia es un ejercicio de escucha y de habla, de acompañamiento de nuestras soledades (Consuelo) y aislamientos provocados por el miedo." Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes were translated by Adriana Santoveña and Olalde.

3 I use the acronym EPI as an umbrella term to refer to all the groups and individuals who, throughout the last decade, have embroidered handkerchiefs commemorating the victims of the war on drugs in Mexico.

My inquiry into the connection that exists between cloth and the body, the sense of touch and memory, pays attention to the ways in which protesters used their bodies to display these embroideries during rallies and public gatherings. Drawing on these observations, I posit that the ensuing variations involve different ways of putting memories in motion.

Now, from the standpoint of the dynamics of cultural remembrance, Ann Rigney notes:

> Although it has proven useful as a conceptual tool, the metaphor of 'memory site' can become misleading if it is interpreted to mean that collective remembrance becomes permanently tied down to particular figures, icons, or monuments. As the performative aspect of the term 'remembrance' suggests, collective memory is constantly 'in the works' and, like a swimmer, has to keep moving even just to stay afloat. To bring remembrance to conclusion is de facto already to forget (Rigney 2008, 345).

In Rigney's metaphor of the swimmer, movement has a creative quality insofar as keeping memory afloat involves its continuous reshaping. In light of this idea, my analysis aims to connect this creative quality of movement with the performative and process-based character of the EPI—in this regard, both the word 'initiative' and the present continuous of the verb 'embroidering' are worth noting. Alongside the studies on the dynamics of cultural remembrance, my approach focuses on processes, rather than products (Rigney 2008, 348). Therefore, I understand the EPI as a process that involves the recurrent performance of acts of remembrance. These acts of remembrance include the open embroidery sessions during which participants crafted what can be conceived as objects of memory, that is, embroidered handkerchiefs and handkerchief ensembles. Furthermore, these acts of remembrance include both the circulation of these objects of memory, and their recurrent use in other cultural practices and public protests.

When discussing the Palestinian testimonies comprised in *The Goldstone Report* (United Nations General Assembly, 2009), Rosanne Kennedy highlights the fact that, within her analysis, both possible definitions of the adjective *moving* are relevant: *moving as travel*, which describes something that is travelling or in movement, and *moving as affect*, which refers to something that "affects or touches" (Kennedy 2014, 53). In line with Kennedy's emphasis on the ability of the testimonies to travel and affect—or, in other words, to move around or move emotionally—, the starting point of this article is that, just as the Palestinian testimonies included in *The Goldstone Report*, the handkerchiefs commemorating the victims of the war on drugs in Mexico have the ability to move around and move emotionally, that is, to travel and to affect.

My analysis focuses on the activities that the Fuentes Rojas (Red Fountains) Collective[4] developed in Mexico City from the summer of 2011 until March 2020. In addition to these activities, I worked with two types of primary sources. The first includes a couple of handkerchiefs that I find illustrative of the affective charge invested in some of the EPI's embroideries. One of them was stitched by Leticia Hidalgo, in the northern state of Nuevo León, founder of the group Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (United Forces for our Disappeared in Nuevo León—FUNDENL). This handkerchief is addressed to her son, Roy Rivera Hidalgo, who was subjected to disappearance in January 2011. The other one was embroidered by Teresa Sordo, one of the founding members of the collective Bordamos por la paz Guadalajara (We Embroider for Peace Guadalajara), in the state of Jalisco. This collective was active from 2012 to 2014-15, and its importance resides both in its size and in the transnational networks it established. In 2013, they held an event during which they presented around 1,500 handkerchiefs embroidered both in Mexico and abroad. In her handkerchief, Sordo sends a message of support to Leticia Hidalgo. These primary sources also include a metal plaque and a handkerchief commemorating Nepomuceno Moreno, a member of the MPJD who was murdered in 2011. The second type of primary source that I worked with are the words of Hidalgo herself. These words include what she told me during an informal conversation we held in November 2013, as well as her written chronicle of the December 1st, 2012 protest—which she posted on her Facebook profile—and the text she prepared for the caption accompanying Sordo's handkerchief during the exhibition *Disobedient Objects* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in 2014.

"You call them collateral damages, we called them friends"[5]

On April 12, 2011, Mexican poet and journalist Javier Sicilia arrived at the Morelos City Hall to demand an inquiry into his son's murder, Juan Francisco, who had been kidnapped in the night of March 27 and found dead the following day. In addition to publicly stating his claim, Sicilia used a drill to install seven metal plaques on the façade of the building. The first one bore the name of his son, while the remaining six

4 Shortly after the weekly embroidery sessions began in Coyoacán, some of the the EPI's founders left the Initiative in order to join the MPJD. After this departure, the participants who kept the EPI ongoing changed their name to Fuentes Rojas Collective. This year (2021), the Fuentes Rojas Collective would have completed a decade of uninterrupted weekly embroidery sessions at the Jardín Centenario (Centenary Garden) in Coyoacán, Mexico City. However, and as I mentioned earlier, they were forced to interrupt their activities in March 2020, due to the social distancing measures established within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2021, two of the three remaining founding members of the collective left the group and their handkerchiefs were divided amongst them in equal parts. This is the reason why I refer to the actions of Fuentes Rojas in the past tense.

5 According to Lolita Bosch, during the first walk organised by Javier Sicilia in 2011 a young woman held a banner that read "Ustedes los llaman daños colaterales. Nosotros los llamábamos amigos". Lolita Bosch, Nuestra aparente rendición (México: Grijalbo, 2011), 15.

had the names of the other six people who had been murdered together with Juan Francisco during the early morning of March 28.

In early May, Sicilia led a walk from Cuernavaca to Mexico City. The journey took four days, during which other people whose relatives or friends had been murdered or subjected to disappearance joined the procession. The consolidation of some of the bonds of solidarity established during that first walk led to the founding of the MPJD. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, back in 2011 those who were being hit by the war-on-drugs-related violence were not recognized as victims—this in spite of the lobbying initiatives advanced by some groups of families and civilian organizations prior to the formation of the MPJD (Sánchez Valdés, Pérez Aguirre and Verástegui González 2018, 30; Olalde 2019b, 14-15). In the face of the government's indifference and disregard for the consequences of its security policy, the MPJD set up to encourage the recognition of a legal status for both direct and indirect victims. The enactment of the Ley General de Víctimas (General Victims' Law——GVL) and the creation of the Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas (Executive Commission for Victims Attention——CEAV) in 2013 and 2014, respectively, represent significant achievements regarding the legal recognition of the State's obligations towards victims. However, there is a considerable gap between the legal framework and the day-to-day practice.[6]

Within the framework of the MPJD's political struggle, fostering the social acknowledgment of the human costs of violence was a necessary step to make the State's obligation towards victims an issue of public debate. Thus, naming, listening and remembering were construed as suitable forms of nonviolent resistance to achieve that aim: naming those who had been murdered or subjected to disappearance; attentively listening to the relatives who had had the courage to openly tell their stories; and, finally, remembering all those murdered and disappeared, without discriminating between alleged innocents and criminals (Olalde 2015b, 66). The MPJD clearly conveyed the relevance of acts of remembrance in the following statement: "We call on civil society to rescue the memory of the victims of violence, to remember and demand justice by placing in every square or public space plaques bearing the names of the victims"[7] (Sicilia 2011, May 11).
In Mexico City, the MPJD's appeal was heard by a group of civilians, artists, researchers, journalists, cultural promoters, and social activists who initially signed their statements and open calls as Iniciativa Paremos las balas, pintemos las fuentes

6 See, for instance, the audit results summary of the Cuenta Pública 2018, performed by the Auditoria Superior de la Federación (ASF): Gobierno de México, "Revela ASF irregularidades y deficiencias en el desempeño de la CEAV durante 2018", March 1st, 2020, accessed March 31, 2021, https://www.gob.mx/ceav/prensa/180462.

7 "Convocamos a la sociedad civil a rescatar la memoria de las víctimas de la violencia, a no olvidar y exigir justicia colocando en cada plaza o espacio público placas con los nombres de las víctimas."

(Stop the Bullets, Paint the Fountains Initiative—hereafter SBI). This name referred to the interventions carried out by this group at the time. These interventions were performed in Mexico City and involved dyeing the water of a number of fountains in red (Avilés 2011, May 8). By doing so, the SBI sought to symbolize the blood pouring out of clandestine mass graves. In June of that same year, some members of the SBI started embroidering homicide cases on cloth handkerchiefs. Two months later (August 2011), the group began the weekly meetings of open embroidery workshops at the Jardín Centenario (Centenary Garden) in Coyoacán, Mexico City. The name given by the SBI to this new project was EPI (Embroidering for Peace and Memory Initiative).

After its debut halfway through 2011, the EPI gave rise to the organization of other embroidery groups both in Mexico and abroad. At first, the common goal of all of them was to finish as many handkerchiefs as possible in order to display them together at the Zócalo (Mexico City's main square) on December 1st, 2012, namely the last day of Calderón's tenure. The idea behind this *memorial ciudadano* (citizen memorial) was to give the figures a tangible and spatial dimension in order to exhibit before the public eye the huge number of murders and disappearances that took place during Felipe Calderón's administration (Olalde 2018b). In this way, the EPI also sought to counteract the bad news fatigue experienced by a significant number of the country's inhabitants. It is worth noting that on December 1st, 2012 a series of confrontations between protesters and police took place right in front of the place where the EPI's citizen memorial was being set up. As a result, the participants had to flee and the memorial was dismantled (see fig. 7) (Olalde 2019b, 228-233; Olalde 2018a, 294; Mandolessi and Olalde Spring 2021, 87-89; see also Turati 2012).

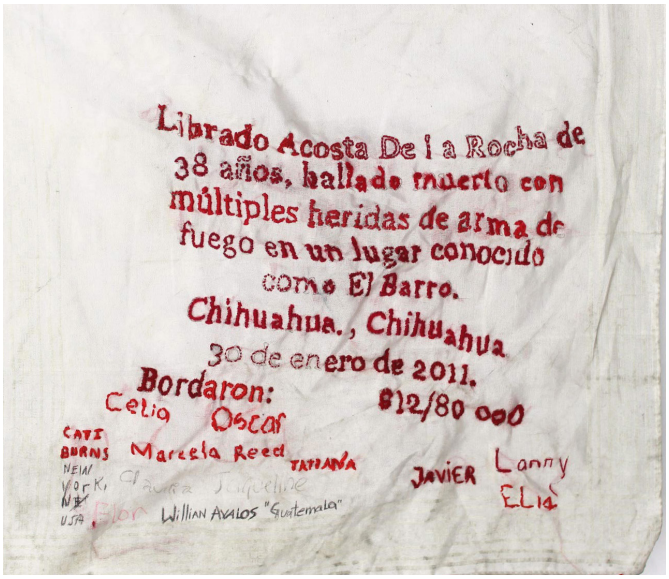

Fig. 7: This embroidery was one of the handkerchiefs that 'survived' the dismantling of the EPI's memorial on December 1, 2012. The piece holds the traces of its' hard journey. Embroidery completed by several hands (detail). Fuentes Rojas, 2012-2013. Photo: Katia Olalde.

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Whilst sharing a common goal, the different groups of EPI's participants adapted the action to their more specific needs and purposes. In northern Mexico, for instance, associations of disappeared persons' relatives refused to evoke spilled blood using

red-coloured thread—until that moment, only murder cases had been embroidered and therefore only red-coloured thread had been used. Instead, the relatives of the disappeared decided to stitch with green-coloured thread, thus evoking the hope of finding their loved ones alive. Ever since the relatives of the disappeared started using green-coloured thread, a colour code was established within the EPI: red for murder victims, green for disappeared persons and, later on, pink for feminicides. This diversity was also reflected on the texts inscribed on the handkerchiefs. The original idea was to embroider the description of a lifeless body or the account of a homicide in a neutral tone, that is to say, without making a judgement or giving an opinion regarding the victim's moral character. This search for neutrality came from a previous action initially called Cartas de paz (Letters of peace) and later Sobre vacío (Empty envelope) which served as an inspiration for the EPI. For this action, participants were encouraged to send an empty envelope to the former president Felipe Calerón on behalf of a murdered person (Harmodio 2011; Ciudadanos por la paz en México / Grupo París 2011). The information about the murder cases came from Menos Días Aquí. As time went by and the EPI spread, other texts were stitched on the handkerchiefs, such as the denunciation of an enforced disappearance, a slogan (see fig. 8), a loving message addressed to a victim (see fig. 9), or words of encouragement dedicated to the relatives of murdered or disappeared persons.

Fig. 8: Embroidered handkerchiefs. Colectivo Bordamos por la Paz Guadalajara (Mexico, 2012-13). Photo: Alfredo Mendoza. The handkerchief on the left reads: "Your name is not a number." The handkerchief on the right reads: "YOUR WAR, OUR DEAD They are not numbers, they have names. We call them friends, brothers, sons, fathers, mothers."

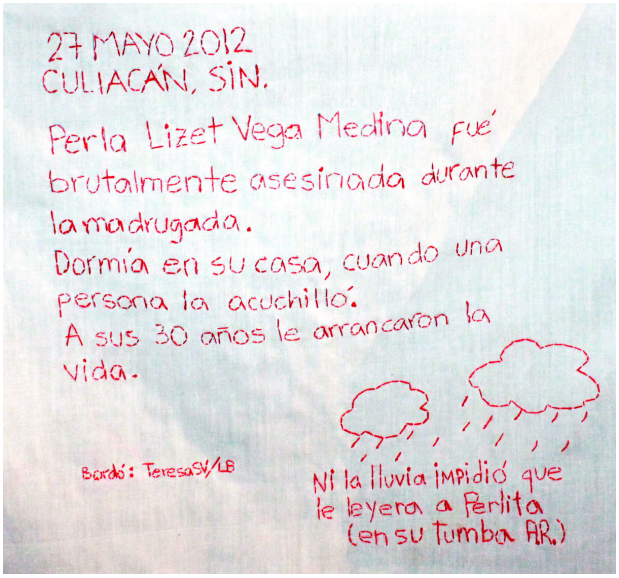

Fig. 9: Embroidered handkerchief (detail). Colectivo Bordamos por la Paz Guadalajara (Mexico, 2012-13). Photo: Alfredo Mendoza. The embroidered text reads: "May 27, Culiacán Sinaloa. Perla Lizeth Vega Medina was brutally murdered at dawn. She was sleeping at her house when someone stabbed her. Her life was taken from her when she was 30 years old. Not even the rain prevented me from reading to little Pearl (on her grave)."

Presenting the handkerchiefs in public, both indoors and outdoors, has been a constituent element of the EPI. This means that, during the open sessions organized from 2011 onwards in Mexico and the world, the EPI's embroiderers have met not just to carry out their activity in plain sight and to invite other people to join them, but also to show the completed handkerchiefs. What I wish to foreground here is that most of these public presentations—including, of course, the December 1st, 2012 display—have gathered embroideries from multiple places and countries. Some examples are the event *Memoria y verdad* (Memory and Truth) organized by the collecitve *Bordamos por la paz Guadalajara* (We Embroider for Peace Guadalarajara) (Laboratorio Arte y Variedades, Guadalajara, Jalisco, November 2-4, 2013), as well as the exhibitions *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad. Tres años* (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity. Three Years) (Museo Memoria y Tolerancia, Mexico City, March 28 to May 30, 2014); *La vida que se teje* (The Knitted Life) (*Museo Casa de la Memoria* Antioquía, Colombia, May 11 to June 10, 2016) and *Stitched Voices* (Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales, March 25 to May 13, 2017).

The cloth handkerchief as a token of affection[8]

Ever since the day we are born, our skin comes in contact with different kinds of cloth. We use cloth to warm and comfort us. However, some fabrics irritate our skin and make us feel upset. In other words, our contact with cloths triggers not only tactile sensations, but also feelings that affect our mental states. Furthermore, cloths become imbued with our bodily fluids and humours. This intimate connection might explain our immediate impulse to grasp cloths in order to feel their texture or smell them in the hope of finding the essence of the person they belonged to. In *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee describes a scene in which the father of a young man who has recently passed away visits the room where his son used to live:

> The first thing he does when [the landlady] has left is to turn back the covers of the bed. The sheets are fresh. He kneels and puts his nose to the pillow; but he can smell nothing but soap and sun. He opens the drawers. They have been emptied.
>
> He lifts the suitcase on to the bed. Neatly folded on top is a white cotton suit. He presses his forehead to it. Faintly the smell of his son comes to him. He breathes in deeply, again and again, thinking: his ghost, entering me (Coetzee 2004, 3-4).

8 Some of the paragraphs of this section are revisited versions of some excerpts taken from OLALDE, Una víctima, un pañuelo. *Bordado y acción colectiva contra la violencia en México* (México: RED Mexicana de Estudios de los Movimientos sociales, 2019), 139-41; 313-16.

In 2008, the Peruvian Team of Forensic Anthropology (EPAF) exhumed the remains of the victims of a massacre perpetrated by the Peruvian army in 1984 in Putis, a town located in the mountainous region of Ayacucho. After 26 years of being buried in a mass grave, most of the bodies were unrecognizable. Since Andean communities are quite skilled in the weaving of garments, the forensic surgeons decided to wash the clothes worn by the victims that were found in the mass graves and exhibit them in different locations of the region. In this way, the relatives would have the opportunity to recognize some of the fabrics.

Journalist Paola Ugaz, who was present during one of those public displays, related her experience in these words:

> Witnessing the heartbroken relatives walking in circles, trying to reconnect with their loved ones, lost 26 years ago, was one of the saddest moments I experienced with my colleague Marina García Burgos.
>
> Joining their thumbs and index fingers, the former inhabitants of Putis approached the clothes devotedly, trying to identify their lost loved one's fabric. At that moment we realised that there are no two identical fabrics in the Andean world, and so the relatives searched, among purses, jumpers, satchels and scarfs, the stitch that would allow them to say "At last!" (Ugaz, García Burgos y Vargas Llosa, "Discurso")[9]

Twenty persons were identified thanks to their relatives recognising these pieces of clothing.

During Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, in Chile (1973-1990), some of the mothers or wives of disappeared men made *arpilleras* picturing painful experiences they could not share at the time (Agosin 2008, 45)—*arpilleras* are images stitched with patchwork and appliqué techniques on a thick sackcloth originally used to make potato sacks (Bacic 2008, 20-21). In some of these pieces, the women used fragments of their disappeared relatives' clothes, while in others they included a very tiny bag on the left side where they could hide anonymous personal messages dedicated to the disappeared (Brault 2010, 68; Agosin 2008, 47). Roberta Bacic recalls a Chilean

9 "Ser testigos de la caminata en círculos de los acongojados familiares intentando volver a conectarse con su ser perdido hace ya 26 años [sic], fue uno de los momentos más tristes que viví junto a mi colega Marina García Burgos. Uniendo los dedos pulgar e índice, los ex pobladores de Putis se acercaban con devoción a las prendas buscando identificar el tejido del ser querido perdido. Allí nos dimos cuenta que en el mundo andino no hay un tejido igual, así que los familiares buscaban entre las chuspas, chompas, morrales y chalinas el punto que lo[s] h[iciera] decir '¡Al fin!'"

arpillerista once telling her that "[...] it is good to say what we feel on these clothes, they receive our tears and last longer than words because many times they do not believe us. And well, we caress the cloth because we cannot caress our missing [loved ones]."[10] (Bacic 2008, 22).

As do the Chilean *arpilleras*, the embroideries made by relatives of disappeared people in Mexico often include loving messages addressed to the missing. One example of this are the words Leticia Hidalgo embroidered for her son Roy Rivera Hidalgo, who was abducted from his home on January 11, 2011 by an armed group of men wearing vests belonging to the Escobedo local police (Hidalgo, June 15, 2012), and who remains disappeared since.

> Hang on ROY Hang on.
> Blood of my blood. Flesh of my flesh.
> Student at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at UANL
> Kidnapped on January 11, 2011.
> Son of my heart.
> I am still searching and waiting.
> COURAGE ROY.
> Your mom (Hidalgo 2011, embroidery).[11]

As one can glean from the handkerchief dedicated by Leticia Hidalgo to her son Roy, this embroidery also serves the purpose of holding and preserving the affective link with the missing person. Towards the end of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th, giving an embroidered handkerchief as a present to a friend or loved one was a very popular practice in Canada and the United States. In Hutterite communities, young women whose boyfriends belonged to other colonies used to embroider friendship handkerchiefs for them. These handkerchiefs were embroidered with names, initials, meaningful dates, poems, or loving messages (Cope 2001, March 12). When their boyfriends came to visit them, the young needleworkers would give them the handkerchiefs they had patiently embroidered as a token of the special bond between them. However, "if the relationship ended, the man was expected to return the handkerchief" (Shaughnessy 2013).

10 "[…] hace bien decir lo que nos pasa en estas telas, reciben nuestras lágrimas y duran más que las palabras ya que muchas veces no nos creen. Y bueno, acariciamos la tela ya que no podemos acariciar a nuestros ausentes".

11 "Aguanta ROY Aguanta. Sangre de mi sangre. Carne de mi carne. Estudiante de la Fac. de Filosofía y Letras de la UANL Secuestrado el 11 de Enero de 2011. Hijo de mi corazón. Te sigo Buscando y Esperando. FUERZA ROY. Tu mamá."

Just as the friendship handkerchiefs stitched by Hutterite young women, Hidalgo's embroidered handkerchief has a written loving message. The difference in Hidalgo's case is that the present offered to the missing loved one stays with the giver. The impossibility of completing the present—since the addressee cannot receive it—is precisely one of the peculiarities characterising handkerchiefs dedicated to disappeared persons, and also one that endows these objects of memory with a powerful affective and political load. The embroideries conveying heartfelt messages addressed to the disappeared tangibly represent the bond that the relatives continue to nurture with their missing loved ones. It is in this sense that the handkerchiefs can be viewed as tokens of affection. What I wish to foreground here is that these tokens of affection also tangibly represent the persistence of the relatives in their search, even when this means putting their own lives at risk—it is important to keep in mind that several fathers and mothers who were looking for their disappeared sons and daughters have been murdered.[12] I am therefore encouraged to suggest that the embroideries addressed to the disappeared can be conceived as expressions of the soul force (Gandhi 1968, 108) derived by the victims' relatives from their insistence on Truth. In this context, the word 'truth' might be conceived in the spiritual sense of the term—although not necessarily from the perspective of a particular religious faith. Furthermore, the word 'truth' could be understood as the 'truth of facts', thus referring to the knowledge about the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared person or to the identification of human remains—it is worth noting that this knowledge might not necessarily be intended or meet the requirements to function as evidence in a criminal process. Finally, the word 'truth' could be read in the legal sense of the term, and therefore be understood as referring to all the complexities surrounding the conceptualization of the 'right to truth' in international law, as well as to all the challenges involved in granting the effective exercise of this right in concrete situations.

12 Let us bring to mind, for instance, the murders of three members of the MPJD reported by Sicilia at the end of 2011: Daniel Leyva, Nepomuceno Moreno and Trinidad de la Cruz (See Víctor Ballinas, "Muertes civiles en el combate al crimen, 'daños colaterales': Galván," La Jornada, April 13, 2010, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/04/13/politica/005n1pol), as well as the homicides of Sandra Luz on May 12, 2014 and Cornelia Guerrero on January 15, 2016. The risks taken by those who join the Brigadas Nacionales de Búsqueda (National Search Brigades)— groups of people who walk through the fields and dig the ground searching for clandestine mass graves—are also illustrative of the determination and courage shown by the families of the disappeared. The killing of José Jesús Jiménez Gaona after the first Brigade was organized in the state of Veracruz shows how vulnerable the victims' relatives become when they decide to openly pursue their searches. Jiménez Gaona was searching for his daughter Jenny Isabel Jiménez Vázquez. He was member of the group Familiares en Búsqueda María Herrera, Poza Rica. See "Ejecutan a padre de la Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda en Veracruz, observador de actuaciones de la Fiscalía estatal," Sistema Integral de Información en Derechos Humanos. Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez A. C (SIDIDH-Centro Prodh), posted on June 24, 2016 at 9:00 am, accessed, April 4, 2021, http://centroprodh.org.mx/sididh_2_0_alfa/?p=45839.

Using one's body to put memories in motion

As I mentioned earlier, putting clotheslines together was the most common way of displaying the EPI's handkerchiefs. However, in Mexico City, the Fuentes Rojas Collective created an interesting variation of this arrangement, which consisted of joining the embroideries at the corners using either stitches or small safety pins. The result of this form of assemblage was a kind of board or canvas that Fuentes Rojas' members called *lienzos*. I consider these canvases to be a noteworthy form of assemblage because their alternation of handkerchiefs and empty spaces prevents the viewer from perceiving the ensemble as a single piece— compare the checkerboard effect of Fuentes Rojas's ensembles (fig. 6) with the unity of the clotheslines of Bordamos por la Paz Guadalajara (fig. 10). When surveying Fuentes Rojas' canvases, the gaze falls repeatedly into the void. These continuous interruptions somehow remind the viewer that the whole is constituted by single units. Perceiving Fuentes Rojas' canvases as a whole, demands, so to speak, more effort from the viewer. I therefore posit that the formal arrangement of these canvases can be understood as an eloquent concretion of the EPI's subtitle 'one victim, one handkerchief', insofar as it manages to spatially represent the estimates of victims while preserving the individuality of each piece of cloth and its corresponding case.

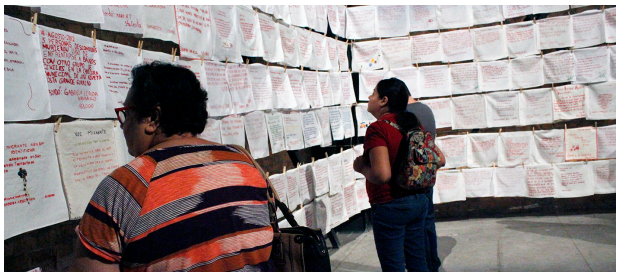

Fig. 10: Embroidered handkerchiefs displayed during the second memorial dedicated to the victims of war against organized crime Memoria y Verdad (Memory and Truth), organized by the collective Bordamos por la Paz Guadalajara, Laboratorio Arte y Variedades, Guadalajara, Mexico, November 1-3, 2013. Photo: Alfredo Mendoza

Fig. 11: Fuentes Rojas banner-like canvases in Coyoacán, Mexico City. Photo: Katia Olalde, November 19, 2017.

During marches, rallies and hunger strikes, these canvases were carried by protesters as if they were banners

(see fig. 1). Whilst the canvases are light and portable, this kind of assemblage has a disadvantage: it is extremely complicated to handle, since it lacks a rigid base to keep the handkerchiefs outstretched—during demonstrations, for instance, participants carrying the canvases must walk at the same rhythm and carry their hands at the same height. As long as the canvas is hung or carried by the protesters, everything is fine because the assemblage is coherent. However, the situation changes completely when the strings keeping the canvas outstretched and in a vertical position become untied or when the people holding the canvas let go of the strings (see fig. 11). When this happens, the cloth becomes wrinkled and what used to be an extended coherent assemblage becomes completely shapeless. Moreover, the canvas turns into a kind of puzzle that must be handled very carefully, or else the handkerchiefs will become entangled with the strings (Olalde 2020, paragraph 26). In other words, these assemblages are not integrated units by themselves, but rather temporary units created by the participants' careful efforts and coordinated movements.

Fig. 12: This is how Av. Juárez looked when I arrived around 14:30 pm. Photo: Alfredo Mendoza, Mexico City Centre, December 1st, 2012.

Fig. 13: The only trace of the EPI's memorial that remained in place around 14:30 pm was the banner of Bordando por la paz Nuevo León (We Embroider for Peace Nuevo León). Shortly after the picture was taken, the banner also disappeared. Photo: Alfredo Mendoza

In the previous section, I referred to the handkerchiefs as tokens symbolizing or bearing the affective bond between the person who offers them and the person who receives them. As part of an assemblage, the handkerchiefs act as vehicles of political expression. It must be noted, however, that these two functions are not mutually exclusive. Treasuring the handkerchief as a token bearing and preserving an affective bond and, at the same time, to be willing to take it outside to participate in a demonstration or public protest is already an act of bravery, insofar as it involves compromising the physical integrity of this object/token of memory.

On December 1st, 2012, the disturbances that occurred in Mexico City's historic centre while the embroidery collectives assembled the memorial on Avenida Juárez caused the loss of dozens of embroideries. During an exchange with Leticia Hidalgo in Guadalajara on November 2013, she told me that the members of Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (United Forces for our Disappeared in Nuevo León——FUNDENL) returned to Monterrey without a single handkerchief (see fig. 12 and 13). On the recollection of these events that Hidalgo posted on Facebook, she mentioned the strong affective connection she had established with her sons' handkerchief. Furthermore, Hidalgo's words are also illustrative of the meanings with which the EPI's embroideries are infused:

> Everything was confusion and chaos, the noise of shattering crystals of doors and windows, shouts, exploding Molotov cocktails, black smoke coming out from the ventilation windows of the Bank next to us, the Bank alarm, police, ambulance, and firefighter sirens, all together at the same time. [...]
>
> Some time passed, I do not know how much, when a group of women embroiderers arrived with bunches of entangled handkerchiefs. I did not even want to get close; those were our dead, our disappeared, violated again, torn apart, trampled and some of them stained with blood as if they had been killed again. [...]
>
> At last we got far, very far, empty, with nothing, without handkerchiefs and sad, but nobody would say anything about it. I felt as if my child had been taken away from me again in the midst of violence, and now again, I was not able to rescue him, I was sad, very sad.
>
> Even though we were already far away from the chaos, the chaos was not going away from me, I felt it so close, in my eyes, in my ears, in my heart. I do not know when I will take it [the chaos] off my eyes, off my senses, off my heart.
>
> COURAGE ROY!
> EMBROIDERER FOR PEACE.
> MRS. IRMA LETICIA HIDALGO REA (Letty Roy Rivera December 5, 2012)[13] [...]

13 "Todo era confusión y caos, el ruido de los cristales de las puertas y ventanas cercanas quebrándose, gritos, explosiones de bombas molotov, el humo negro que salía de las ventilas del Banco de al lado, la alarma del mismo sonando, las sirenas de las patrullas, de las ambulancias y de los bomberos, todo al mismo tiempo. [...] Pasó algún tiempo, no sé cuánto, cuando un grupo de bordadoras llegó con montones de pañuelos enrollados entre sí, Yo no

During our conversation in 2013, Hidalgo told me that thanks to the joint efforts of those who rescued the embroideries on December 1st and to previously established collaboration networks, these handkerchiefs dedicated to the disappeared were able to return home within some weeks (Olalde 2019b, 245).

Using a white handkerchief as a political expression is not new. Let us picture the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in 1977—still in times of the civilian-military dictatorship in Argentina—, waving their white handkerchiefs during the homage to San Martín, attended by Cyrus Vance, the then U.S. Secretary of State (Vázquez 2002, April 7). Now—even though it is not exactly the same garment—think of that Iranian woman who in 2017 uncovered her head in plain daylight and started waving the white scarf that she had been wearing, an action that momentarily transgressed the law forcing Iranian women to use a *hijab* in public spaces (Shakib 2018 and Mullen 2018).

Unlike the *hijab* of Iranian women and the handkerchiefs of the mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the embroideries for peace in Mexico are not fastened on the head nor waved while being held by a corner. When worn over the body, they are laid out over the chest or back; and when held with the hands, they are displayed in a vertical position (see fig. 1, fig. 2 and fig. 6). One could thus say that the EPI's handkerchiefs behave as garments that can be held and worn as long as they do not lose their resemblance to the plaques seen in victims' memorials. This resemblance involves the requirement that texts stitched on the handkerchiefs be entirely visible and legible.

Let us now consider this: embroidery is an activity that can be interrupted and resumed at will at different times and places; the materials used are light and easy to transport; it is a technique that does not require precise drying times, like painting, or kilning times, like ceramics, nor does it imply dirtying one's hands (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2005, 48; Olalde 2018b; Olalde 2019b, 345; Olalde 2020, paragraph 24). During the embroidery sessions organised by Fuentes Rojas and other collectives, participants were not obliged to embroider a complete handkerchief, especially since they joined the action during a brief period of time. This kind of collaboration resulted in the creation of a relay scheme whereby the handkerchiefs were completed by several hands. The evidence of this collective involvement in the handkerchiefs can be seen, for instance, in the different stitches, in the change of thread colour and

me quise acercar, eran nuestros muertos nuestros desaparecidos otra vez violentados, tirados, pisoteados y algunos manchados de sangre como si hubieran muerto otra vez. […] Por fin llegamos lejos, muy lejos, vacíos, sin nada, sin pañuelos y tristes pero, nadie decía nada al respecto. Yo, sentía como si me hubieran arrebatado a mi niño otra vez en medio de la violencia y cómo tampoco ahora lo pude rescatar, estaba triste muy triste. / Aunque ya estábamos lejos del caos, el caos no se alejaba de mí, lo sentía aquí tan cerca, en mis ojos, en mis oídos, en mi corazón. No sé hasta cuándo me lo voy a quitar de mis ojos, de mis sentidos, de mi corazón. ¡FUERZA ROY! BORDADORA POR LA PAZ. SRA. IRMA LETICIA HIDALGO REA. […]"

thickness, and in the signatures which participants drew freehand on the lower left corner of the handkerchiefs before they left (see fig. 7).

The flexibility and portability of embroidery enabled a kind of collective action where participants do not necessarily meet in the same place at the same time, but it is rather the results of their coordinated actions that converge on a same object. Thus, the relay-embroidered handkerchiefs bring together, in one single piece, the outcome of the work done separately by a plurality of participants. Similarly, the clotheslines bring together handkerchiefs completed by different people and groups in a multiplicity of moments, places and countries. In this respect, collectively stitched embroideries and handkerchief assemblages can be seen as conveying something in the lines of: "These people were killed or subjected to disappearance. We who embroider these handkerchiefs do not (necessarily) know each other, but we did share our concern for these people, whom we did not know either" (Olalde 2018b; Olalde 2020, paragraph 25).

The EPI's handkerchiefs are the physical concretion of the acts of remembrance performed by their crafters. Every time these handkerchiefs are displayed, they participate in a new act of remembrance which infuses them with a breath of life. The creative quality of movement in the memory-making process is also illustrated by the possibility of presenting the handkerchiefs individually or putting them together in a variety of ways. As I have argued elsewhere (Olalde 2019b, 193-266), I perceive an analogy between the banner-like canvases and the relationships established amongst participants. I find this analogy useful to understand the articulation processes through which a plurality of people manages to act co-ordinately to support a common cause (Mandolessi and Olalde 2021, 90). The banner-like canvases are fragile and unstable. Similarly, the articulation processes are contingent and temporary. The banner-like canvases require a coordinated physical effort from the protesters who carry them. Likewise, acting together to support a common cause demands constant dialogue and compromise. In other words, the banner-like canvases are illustrative (on a small scale) of the two key concepts that, according to Chantal Mouffe, are necessary to grasp the concept of the political, namely *antagonism* and *hegemony* which, broadly speaking, refer to disarticulation and rearticulation processes (see Mouffe 2005 and Olalde 2015b). These articulation phases could also be understood as identification processes through which a sense of a temporary and contingent 'we' is configured. This is the 'we' I referred to at the end of the previous paragraph.

Collective participation in the embroidering of one handkerchief is also evident in the polyphony of registered voices. Through the texts embroidered on the hand-

kerchiefs, people who do not know or did not meet the victims have sought to establish a kind of explicit connexion with them or their relatives. This can be seen, for instance, on the handkerchief dedicated by Teresa Sordo to Roy Rivera Hidalgo, the young student from Monterrey who is disappeared since 2011 and whom I mentioned in a previous section. The words stitched by Teresa Sordo on this embroidery correspond to three different voices: Ricky's, Roy's brother—"I do not know of you, how you are, how you are being treated... but I hope that wherever you are you receive this kiss I send you"—; Leticia Hidalgo's, both young men's mother—"Crying is allowed, but giving up, never. If we do not search our sons, nobody else will" —; and Sordo's, who sends the three of them a solidary message—"You are in our memory and in our hearts. With all my love, my Letty... Courage, Roy!"[14] One could thus say that, just like Hutterite young women offered their boyfriends friendship handkerchiefs as a token of love and commitment to one another, Teresa Sordo offered this handkerchief to Leticia Hidalgo as a token of her appreciation and solidary support. It is worth noting that when Leticia Hidalgo received Teresa Sordo's gift, the two women did not know each other personally.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, Sicilia's first public space intervention consisted in installing seven metal plaques on the façade of the Morelos City Hall. The handkerchiefs reproduce the same design scheme of the plaques found in memorial sites dedicated to victims of wars and genocides. Most often, these plaques are made of stone or solid metal, and are attached to the floor, a stele or a wall. Transferring the design scheme from the plaques to a piece of cloth, which is a flexible, light and portable surface, enabled the EPI's sites of memory to move from one place to another. This shift from a hard and fixed support to a light and portable one could be understood as a shift of what Aby Warburg conceived as *Bilderfahrzeuge* (image vehicles). According to Warburg, Flemish tapestries functioned as vehicles that enabled images created in Flanders to be freed from the walls and reach the beholders who walked through the stately residence of the Medici, where the tapestries were hung. As Warburg himself explained:

> Just one example illustrates how forcefully and extensively these image-vehicles imported from the North penetrated the Italian palazzo: around 1475 the walls of the stately residence of the Medici were decorated with some 250 continuous meters of Flemish tapestry depicting life from ancient times and the present, lending it the longed-for sheen of courtly and princely splendour (Warburg 2009, 282).

14 "No sé qué será de ti, cómo estás, cómo te traten... pero ojalá y hasta donde estás te llegue este beso que te mando"; "Se vale llorar, pero rendirse jamás. Si nosotras no buscamos a nuestros hijos, nadie más lo hará", "Están en nuestra memoria y en nuestros corazones. Con todo mi cariño, mi Letty... ¡Fuerza, Roy!"

In this same vein, it could be said that the EPI's handkerchiefs are the vehicles that have enabled the acts of remembrance they convey to reach and touch multiple audiences around the world. By doing so, these travelling handkerchiefs have also enabled new acts of remembrance. A glance at the journey of the handkerchief Teresa Sordo embroidered for Roy Rivera Hidalgo, his brother Ricky and Leticia Hidalgo is illustrative in this respect. In 2014 this embroidery travelled to London to be part of the exhibition *Disobedient Objects*, presented at the Victoria and Albert Museum from July 26, 2014 until February 1st, 2015. The handkerchief was presented to the public inside a showcase and was accompanied by the following text:

> It gives him a name
> It yells to the world that Roy was kidnapped
> And is still missing,
> In an absurd war in Mexico
> And it also tells the world that Roy
> has a family who loves him
> and will never stop until they have found him
> That there will be no peace until there is justice
> and no justice without memory.
> Your mother, Letty Hidalgo
>
> — Irma Leticia Hidalgo

Fig. 14: Leticia Hidalgo holding the handkerchief embroidered by Teresa Sordo. Photo: Maria de Vecchi Gerli. This picture was posted on Facebook by Letty Roy Rivera on September 21, 2016.

In 2016, when Hidalgo travelled to London to recover the handkerchief, she stood in front of the Museum's façade, dressed in black, and wearing a t-shirt which read "¿Dónde están?" (Where are they?). She then displayed the handkerchief vertically at the height of her chest by holding both its upper corners with her hands. Her gesture was photographed and the picture uploaded to Hidalgo's Facebook (see Fig. 14).

If we conceive a murder or disappearance case as a motif, then we could consider the two examples I will now turn to as the tangible manifestation of the journey made by a same motif from one fixed support, to a moving vehicle. In November 2012, at the feet of the Estela de Luz on Paseo de la Reforma, in Mexico City, the MPJD installed

Fig. 15: Plaque installed by the MPJD at the foot of the Estela de Luz in Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City. Photo: Katia Olalde. The plaque reads: I become fearless when we walk all together. "Here we are, looking for solidarity, consolation and respect. If I die in this war, do not feel [bad] or say anything more than that I died because I was fighting for my son. A glimpse of a fire is already visible, a light in the path… We must go forward, not back." Nepomuceno Moreno Nuñez. Murdered on November 28, 2011 in Hermosillo Sonora. In memory of the more than 70 thousand dead and 20 thousand disappeared resulting from a war that Mexican people did not ask for. 2006-2012. Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad.

Fig. 16: Handkerchiefs embroidered within the framework of the activities organized by by Bordando por la paz Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco and Fuentes Rojas collective in Mexico City. The handkerchief on the bottom left corner is dedicated to Nepomuceno Moreno. The embroidered text reads: "Nepomuceno Moreno. A father who, while searching for his disappeared son Mario, found death, [when he was] murdered in Hermosillo, Sonora, 28/11/2011". Although some of these handkerchiefs belonged to Bordamos por la paz Guadalajara, Fuentes Rojas rescued them during the riots that took place on December 1st, and displayed them the day after. This picture was taken in the Jardín Centenario, in Coyoacán. Mexico City, on December 2, 2012. One could conceive all these handkerchiefs as survivors of the December 1st riots. Photo: Katia Olalde.

a metal plaque commemorating Nepomuceno Moreno—a father who was searching for his disappeared son and who was murdered on November 28, 2011 in Hermosillo, Sonora (see Fig. 15). This plaque is attached to the floor of the square and thus illustrates the occurrence of this motif on a fixed support. The reoccurrence of this motif on a moving vehicle is illustrated by the handkerchief that María Herrera (a former member of the MPJD who, to this day, keeps searching for her four disappeared sons) and María Hope embroidered to commemorate Nepomuceno (see Fig. 16). On December 2, 2012, I photographed this handkerchief at the Jardín Centenario in Coyoacán, Mexico City. Nepomuceno's embroidery was one of the dozens of handkerchiefs rescued during the confrontations that took place at the city centre the day before. I would therefore suggest that Nepomuceno's handkerchief was one of the objects of memory that survived the December 1st confrontations, but that also underwent an uneven journey involving a plurality of actors and contexts.

Before moving on, I would like to point out that the fact that a considerable number of the Fuentes Rojas embroideries were stitched on canvas cloth instead of handkerchiefs is indicative of the connection between the handkerchiefs and the plaques (Olalde 2019b, 130). I am inclined to suggest that the Fuentes Rojas em-

broideries made on canvas cloth can be understood as a particular type of image vehicle in which both plaques and handkerchiefs resonate. The relevance of this combination is that it entails both the meanings and the affective load with which these two types of support have been historically and culturally infused. Regarding the plaques, there is a strong connection to the victims' memorials and monuments. However, the solid metal or the stone that the plaques are usually made of are hard and cold (Mandolessi and Olalde 2021, 89).[15] The handkerchiefs, on the contrary, are warm, malleable, and soft. These features foster an intimate connection between the handkerchiefs and the body. I would therefore posit that the contribution of the plaques resides in their connection to the public space and to the national narratives whereby a society makes sense of its past, construes its present and envisions its future. On the other hand, the contribution of the handkerchiefs would be their tactile quality, as well as their ability to embody affective bonds and to provide the mourners with a tangible object they can hold dear and close.

Embroidering handkerchiefs as a form of nonviolent action

Unlike feminist critics, who as Mary Wollstonecraft conceived embroidery as a way to keep women confined within their homes and their attention centred in trifles (Wollstonecraft 1792, ch. XII; Olalde 2019a, 10), the EPI supporters conceived the temporality, stillness and attention to detail characterising handmade embroidery, as well as the bodily posture it involves—the torso bent over the needlework and eyes looking down—, as a favourable arrangement to nurture states of calm, empathy and openness to others (Fuentes Rojas Paremos las Balas 2012, September 10; Gargallo 2014, 61). In a country, where disposing of unburied bodies and amputated limbs on the street or on highways had become a common practice (Diéguez 2016, 29), the embroiderers went out to stitch in the streets in order to encourage participants to interact with one another, following community-inspired arrangements distinguished by their artlessness, stability, warmth and strong affective character (Olalde 2018a, 198; Olalde 2018b; Olalde 2021).

Besides fostering proximity and friendliness, the EPI supporters—still gathered at the time as Iniciativa Paremos las Balas, Pintemos las Fuentes (SBI)—sought to "promote the articulation of society from within society itself. [With the aim of] self-organising to exercise its rights and becoming an agent of change, in a democratic

15 During an informal exchange with Alejandro Vélez Salas (co-founder and editor in chief of the citizen journalism platform, Nuestra Aparente Rendición, http://www.nuestraaparenterendicion.com/) in 2016, he told me that one victim's father had explained to him that he would never agree that his child's name be inscribed on a cold and solid metal plaque. However, this same father embraced the idea of stitching a handkerchief in order to commemorate his child.

and libertarian sense" (Fuentes Rojas Paremos las Balas 2011, April 29).[16] This was informed by Fuentes Rojas on a public manifesto endorsing Sicilia's call to a national march that would take place on May 8, 2011, when the protesters walking from Cuernavaca—a walk that I mentioned at the very beginning of this article—were expected to arrive in Mexico City to conclude with a rally at the Zócalo. The "common will to establish new forms of egalitarian collective action" (Stavrides 2014, 231) is a characteristic shared by the EPI with other "squares occupation movements" that took place between 2011 and 2013 (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2011 [in Stavrides 2014, 231])— let us remember, for instance, the Tahrir square, in Egypt; Syntagma, in Greece; Rossio, in Portugal; Parque Gezi, in Turkey; 15M at the Puerta del Sol, in Spain; or Occupy Wall Street, in the United States (Fernández-Savater et al. 2016, 119)—and so are: "[...] cross-cutting inclusivity as a key principle, the absence of leaders or clear programs, the refusal to be subordinated to particular ideological references or previously configured organizations, the rejection of representation, the practical rejection of a neoliberalism that has expanded to affect every aspect of our lives, the importance of the role of emotions and affect, [...]" (Fernández-Savater et al. 2016, 119).

However, regarding the scale of occupation, its length, and the "volume" of affective atmosphere, the EPI has certain peculiarities. The open-air embroidery sessions were not massive and did not cover the squares in their entirety; they were only a few hours long and they were periodical (same place, day and time). Although participants certainly met in these ephemeral workshops to act jointly (Butler 2011), embroidery, as a bodily activity, was rather subtle. This is why the physical contact energy established by participants remained modulated by an attitude of withdrawal inducing a focus on the needlework. During these sessions, people did not scream or waive flags (Stavrides 2014, 238); neither did they utter the words of the accounts they were embroidering, situation that forced spectators to approach the handkerchiefs if they wanted to read the inscriptions.

In previous essays, I claimed that the EPI was part of a series of collaborative projects that refused to represent violence and, instead, opted to mobilise and move the audience or participants through actions privileging writing, silent reading and manual labours (Olalde 2015a, 83; Olalde 2015b, 71; Olalde 2019b, 32). What I want to posit here is that, within the EPI, the temporality, stillness and attention to detail characterising hand embroidery, as well as the bodily posture it involves, were not seen as factors that would reproduce gender differences (Torres-Septién 2001; Parker 2010; Gonzalbo 2010, 64) and discourage the participation of women in

16 "propici[ar] la articulación de la sociedad, desde la sociedad misma. [Con la intención de] que se auto organi[zara] en ejercicio de sus derechos y se constituy[era] como actor de cambio, en sentido democrático y libertario."

political life (Wollstonecraft 1792, ch. XII), but rather as attributes of a kind of nonviolent action that would confront the spectacularity of what Ileana Diéguez called the 'necrotheatre':

> In the theatres of death or necrotheatre, the scene not only takes shape by means of the exposed body remains. It is produced by a whole spectacular construction of the act of killing itself, intended to produce instructive effects. […] This necrotheatre is connected to the aim of setting the spectacular evidence of suffering before the eyes, the terrifying scene of a power discourse that annihilates the human body alive and post mortem with instructive purposes. The scene to be shown is configured in the manner of a 'still life' in which the arrangement of the parts defines a discourse: a scene that acts as a punitive memento mori (Diéguez 2016, 136-37).[17]

Faced with the terrifying *mises en scène* of "the act of killing intended to produce instructive effects", the movement that kept the EPI afloat throughout almost a decade was discreet, meticulous and tender. Therefore, I propose to conceive these movement's features as concrete expressions of nonviolence.

Some final words

The EPI's handkerchiefs and the banner-like ensembles are tangible concretions of a number of acts of remembrance that involve the body and the sense of touch. When protesters carry the banner-like ensembles during rallies, they also hold these clothes in their hands. Handcrafting, wearing, hand-holding and holding dear are all expressions of the moving quality of these handkerchiefs and of their connection with the sense of touch and the body.

Together, this connection and the moving quality of the EPI's handkerchiefs encourage participants to conceive the harm and the losses caused by killings and disappearances as a concrete reality that has affected thousands of people who, just as each one of the EPI's participants, are made of flesh and bone.

17 "En los teatros de la muerte o necroteatro, lo escénico toma forma no sólo por los restos corporales expuestos. Se produce por toda una construcción espectacular del acto mismo de dar la muerte, buscando producir efectos aleccionadores. […] Este necroteatro está vinculado al propósito de poner ante los ojos la evidencia espectacular del sufrimiento, la escena aterradora de un discurso de poder que aniquila el cuerpo humano en vida y post mortem con propósitos aleccionadores. La escena a mostrar es configurada a la manera de una 'naturaleza muerta' donde las disposiciones de las partes definen el discurso: una escena que actúa como punitivo memento mori."

To conclude I would like to pose some ideas for further consideration. First, that the time, the attention and the calm employed in embroidering may be seen as an analogy of the silent presence of those who acknowledge and accompany the mourners. Second, that encouraging spectators to read the texts inscribed on the handkerchiefs by themselves may be interpreted as an invitation to listen. And third, that taking a handkerchief in one's hands, carrying it on the chest or on the back, or offering it as a present can be conceived as forms of a body to body and "endearing approach" (Sánchez Suárez 2013, 72) in which closeness does not derive from co-presence, but rather from the contact between bodies and fabrics. If these ideas stand, then participating in the EPI could be conceived as a way to put the nonviolent action of consolation in practice, both locally and globally.

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